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Issue 55

WALES UNDERGROUND

Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

News In Brief

- The BCA has announced that the referendum to change several parts of its constitution was successful and there was also a good turnout for voting
- The next NAMHO conference will be held in the Forest of Dean in June 2018
- The 'Heads of the Valleys' road works rumble on, but there have been a few delays and Ogof Capel has yet to suffer temporary closure
- CCC still has a little money earmarked for cave safety work such as replacing worn fixed aids. CCC member clubs can submit ideas for consideration.

Spectacular new entrance to Ogof Draenen on Access Land

Rumours of the discovery of an astounding new entrance dropping directly into Ogof Draenen have been building during the autumn in caving circles and on social media. The October meeting of the cave management group, the PDCMG, made no mention of this development, but it is hard to imagine that they could have been unaware that it is a fact. With a few new faces being elected on to the PDCMG this year, how the group handles this situation with their landowner remains to be seen. But this is a golden opportunity to end decades of contention and usher in an era of co-operation with surveys and other knowledge and expertise more freely shared, and all cavers being made welcome to experience and to extend the system's furthest reaches.

This new entrance, called Twll Du (Black Hole), was discovered in the Pwll Du area over a year ago by climbing up to the top of some substantial avens associated with a major fault line inside the cave. At 390m altitude, it is thought to be the highest of the various Ogof Draenen entrances discovered so far. We understand that bracken roots were found dangling down for several feet in the air from a narrow roof that was just soil. This thin layer was all that separated the cave from daylight.

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Photo credits

John Stevens
Richard Dewsnap
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Stuart France

Only one metre after dropping through a small hole in the grass is a rigid ladder fixed to bedrock that gives access to a wide ledge below. Just beyond some large jammed boulders comes a second fixed ladder which drops to a viewpoint over a massive chamber again directly below. The immediate vertical drop is bypassed by a rope traverse around a corner and along ledges to reach an easy descent over rubble to a balcony where a small stream spills over the edge of a free-hanging 12 metre pitch. This can be descended using SRT to join the known cave at 360m altitude only a matter of minutes after leaving the surface. Walking-size passages with occasional stooping and short crawls quickly lead onward into familiar parts of Ogof Draenen.

Stuart France, CCC Access/Conservation Officer

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Training News

I have planned and run several workshops over the past few years. These have always included regular SRT workshops which have generally been well attended.

However, the last SRT course, based in North Wales during September, was attended by just two people despite six bookings. Two trainers travelled from South Wales just to run the day.

I am happy to put on more events, but CCC clubs need to let me know what they want!

Other subjects have included photography, surveying and bat walk/talks.

So please get in contact and I will make the arrangements.

Richard Hill, *CCC training Officer*

2017 DIARY

1-4th December

A Golden Age of British Cave Exploration. Royal Geographical Society, London

2018 DIARY

9-11th March

Southern CHECC
SWCC HQ
Penwyllt

Sunday 11th March

CCC AGM 12.00, South Wales
Location to be decided later

Sunday 6th May

Columns Open Day, OFD2

1st-4th June

NAMHO conference
Parkend, Forest of Dean

Cavers, Caving Clubs and Young People

A significant number of young people are introduced to caving because their parents or friends go caving. Together with those who join university clubs, these form the main source of new recruits to caving.

Sport Wales have guidelines for dealing with child protection issues but it is down to the National Governing Bodies of individual sports that set the standards applicable to them. Unlike Cambrian Caving Council, many of the other organisations within Sport Wales are dealing with significant numbers of young people. They will have paid professional staff plus the time and resources to deal with child protection issues. This will involve, for example, deciding which staff or volunteers have roles requiring background checks.

Some children get their first exposure to underground activities via outdoor education centres and school visits. These really lie outside this discussion as the providers will have been checked and cleared. The same is true for caver training sessions that are organised and run by caving professionals with CIC or LCMLA qualifications.

Most caving clubs view dealing with under-18s as problematic because of the need to consider safeguarding and child protection concerns and this is exacerbated if the club owns accommodation. The majority of clubs specify a minimum age of 18 years, and the ones which do allow younger members insist on direct parental supervision above and below ground to mitigate any child protection issues.

In the case of caving club huts, most have rules which forbid any under-18s staying overnight although this rule is occasionally relaxed in the case of parents who are members of the club (i.e. not visitors) and have taken their child with them – but the onus is again on parents to provide protection. Where a facility does see significant numbers of young people, for example the SWCC hut at Penwyllt, then there is a need to understand and deal with child protection issues. This will involve having a well-documented system to deal with any complaints and under-18 welfare issues.

The caving community is rather different from most other sport and outdoors activity organisations as it is entirely run by volunteers backed with quite meagre resources. However, there is still a need to understand and deal with child protection issues even though the number of young people involved is quite small. Much caving activity is done on an informal basis with a small group of cavers (often from different clubs) going off on a trip together. This is very different to competitive sport clubs which offer regular formal training sessions and fixtures which are advertised well in advance. Caving clubs generally offer some official trips that people sign up for, perhaps to develop wider experience amongst their newer members, but these do not run on a regular basis. Caving, being weather and volunteer dependent, is never likely to run on schedules other than a weekly or fortnightly gathering at a local pub!

A child on an underground trip will probably be accompanied by a parent, but there will likely be others in the group who are unrelated to them. Most people moderate their language and banter to avoid issues when young children are present, striving to make the experience both interesting and educational. As noted above, club huts pose more difficult problems: there is a wider mix of people, alcohol is likely to be consumed, some high jinx can be expected along with unguarded language. So it is better if there are separate family areas where children can be accommodated – as is the case at Penwyllt. It is then up to parents to use them to ensure their child's safety.

Everyone in the caving community has a duty to be watchful when any children are present and to remember that positive experiences will likely bring young people into the sport and help to assure its future. Caving clubs that accept under-18s need to understand their safeguarding duty, and CCC will shortly circulate some guidelines to raise awareness.

Dave Tyson, *Acting CCC Secretary*

Surface Exploration in the Dan-yr-Ogof Area

From 1945, after the war, exciting cave discoveries were made in the Upper Swansea Valley including OFD and Pwll Dwfn. Dan-yr-Ogof, opened as an attraction in 1912, however, proved more difficult to extend. The start of the Long Crawl was its limit in 1937, then the cave closed for legal reasons to all visitors until 1964. Needless to say, cavers were not idle during the lost decades and their efforts turned instead to 'surface digs' in the dry valleys above and beyond the known part of DYO. The practice went unchallenged and developed into something of a local caving tradition although permission should still have been obtained from landowners of each era.

The Long Crawl and the downward chimney into Gerard Platten Hall and enormous passages beyond, were passed in April 1966. The Great North Road (GNR) was discovered in September that year. A special issue of BCRA [Transactions](#) in 1977 about DYO generally discusses two comparable dye tests taking place in 1970. The test from Waun Figen Felen to the resurgence took 24 hours while the other test from the more distant Sinc y Giedd via a 'postulated unknown series' and Cribarth took only 36 hours, suggesting massive open passages along this subterranean route of perhaps 6kms.

The bulk of DYO resides in the S-beds of limestone. The highest avens reach the D-bed above and the lowest passages lie above the K-bed. Connecting the surface to DYO vertically is unlikely because the rock thickness above the known cave is 100 metres or so of unfavourable strata. The middle S-beds rise gently to the north and they outcrop between the Pwll Dwfn dry valley and Twyn Walter, so there remains potential for surface discoveries in that general area well beyond DYO's footprint. Modern lithostratigraphical nomenclature is available from the British Geological Survey [website](#).



Times have changed and the current landowners, Welsh Water which was formed in 1989, have just renewed a management agreement with the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority covering the recreational usage of their land. CCC's July [Newsletter](#) reported on the BBNPA grilling over many old surface digs in the DYO area so that walkers or livestock cannot fall into them, and this work was funded by WW under the management agreement.

It has become apparent recently that digging to find new caves is an ongoing activity as some new holes have appeared. Neither the BBNPA nor WW have been asked for landowner consent. The photos above and right show one of these near Disgwylfa, about 3m long with a cross-section of about 1x1m, that currently ends at a small sump in the D-beds. It may need to lose significant height to reach the S-beds and thus prospects of big passages.



The landowner's perspective is simply that a large hole and spoil heap has appeared unannounced, so the BBNPA would like to hear from those responsible and asks that contact is also made prior to any future explorations commencing.

The Park Authority emphasises that it is not 'anti-caving' and primarily wants to ensure that digs are consented, have a clear scientific or public interest purpose, are managed accountably, and made safe afterwards. As a matter of good practice when an exploration is to be abandoned, its spoil heap should be returned into the excavation because the landowner remains liable for any consented digs.

This management approach is consistent with the sorts of permissions that the Park Authority issues for other activities on land that it owns or manages and it would encourage other landowners to do the same. Reasons why it is essential to have prior landowner consent for digging projects include:

- The land is owned, therefore the landowner must be in agreement, and this is also a matter of courtesy.
- Landowners may need to get official approval for visitor's projects when land is scheduled, such as an SSSI.
- Designated Access Land under the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 does not create public rights to dig out new caves, so engineering work like this needs consent.
- Landowners may need ministerial consent under Section 38 of the Commons (Wales) Act 2006 for restricted works such as digging or using concrete on Common Land.



The photo above shows a recent natural collapse in the River Giedd bank near the Pwll-y-Cig stream confluence, but this hole has been enlarged by cavers hoping to find ongoing open passages. It has been grilled over to prevent accidental entry. This hole is close to the D-S limestone boundary, the nearby sink takes most of the Giedd water in normal weather, so it makes a reasonable prospect. Indeed the nearby Sinc y Giedd flood sinks and the Pwll Dewi Sant pothole both rapidly drop 20-30 metres through speleogenic limestone, but frustratingly with no way on yet into the 'postulated unknown series'.

Pwll Dewi Sant (photos overleaf) was discovered when the bottom of a shakehole fell away between one week and the next. It later slumped in but has re-opened itself again in 2017 exposing now rusty old scaffolding. A fraction of the River Giedd is captured at a small sink nearby and it can be heard and now seen below the scaffolding at the bottom of the PDS shakehole. A special issue of the SWCC [Newsletter](#) No.106 (1990) discusses the exploration prospects of the whole area.

Surface Exploration in the Dan-yr-Ogof Area (continued from page 3)



The Upper Swansea Valley is a part of the [Fforest Fawr](#) UNESCO Global Geopark, a region of 300 square miles encompassing the entire western half of the Brecon Beacons National Park. Since 2005 the Geopark programme has been highlighting the area's distinctive natural and cultural heritage, with a view to bringing more money into a part of Wales that has suffered economically in recent decades. The BBNPA has created [caves](#) and [caving](#) sections for its website.



As well as the area's speleology, its wider geology and indeed industrial archaeology are of considerably more than just local significance. The legacies of the area's limestone, gritstone and rottenstone quarrying will surely be familiar to all local cavers: abandoned workings, spoil heaps, kilns and tram roads abound. Features such as these add a wealth of interesting detail to a landscape of extraordinary karstic elements around which many of the conservation designations such as SSSI, National Nature Reserve and Landscape of Outstanding Historic Interest have been wrapped.

Stuart France, *CCC Access/Conservation Officer*

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Cambrian Cave Register assists archaeological work in Dyfed

The first phase of Dyfed Archaeological Trust's 'Caves in south-west Wales' project was completed in mid-September except for final editing of the report to its funders, Cadw. The evidence for caves as an archaeological resource was reviewed to adequately identify their archaeological significance and potential for the purpose of recommending statutory protection as Scheduled Monuments. This comprised an audit of the Dyfed Historic Environment Record (HER) with the objective of significantly enhancing the HER and improving the representation of caves as an archaeological resource within south-west Wales. Using archaeological publications, cave literature, and an extract of caves recorded in the Cambrian Cave Registry, the number of records relating to caves in the HER has increased from 74 to 468. These records represent 403 individual caves of varying archaeological significance and potential, of which only 13 are Scheduled Monuments.

It is intended that the results of this report should be disseminated to stakeholders with the aim of establishing a discursive working group ahead of the second phase of the project, field assessment and subsequent scheduling recommendations, which it is hoped will proceed in Spring 2018.

Collaborative working is to be encouraged and, in particular, should include input and support from local cavers and the Cambrian Caving Council.

Martin Laverty, *CCC Cave Registrar*

[Based on a private email from Menna Bell (Dyfed Archaeological Trust)]

Change of CCC Secretary

Rob Jones, who was elected to serve as CCC secretary at the 2017 AGM has had to step down due to health problems. To provide continuity and deal with the forthcoming Sport Wales paperwork Dave Tyson has reluctantly agreed to take on the role for the remainder of 2017 but will cease involvement at the end of the year. The CCC committee would welcome applications from cavers who would be willing to step into this important role and I would be willing to help with the transition.

Dave Tyson, *acting CCC Secretary*

The Cambrian Caving Council

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Please send news items, short articles and newsworthy photographs for the next issue to Dave Tyson by **31st December**