

October 2014

Issue 43

# WALES UNDERGROUND

## News In Brief

- **SUPPORTING CROW ACCESS:** BCA is to ballot its members, Natural England is now talking to BCA but Natural Resources Wales has yet to engage
- **Welsh Government solicitors skewer forestry mines access**
- **Cambrian Cave Registry gets major improvements in search technology and content detail**
- **Cave photography, surveying and bat studies courses are all available during this Autumn**

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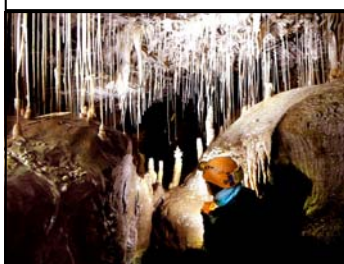
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## Photo credits

Stuart France  
Richard Hill  
Mark Tringham  
Ian Adams

**The Welsh Government has given the green light to the A465 dual carriageway in the Clydach Gorge. Main contractor Costain already has clear plans to protect caves like Ogof Capel and any new finds.**



The Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofydd

## REFERENDUM ON THE RIGHT TO GO CAVING

BCA Council decided at its meeting on 11 October to ballot all its 6000+ members by post before Christmas with the question “Should BCA campaign for the CRoW Act to apply to going underground?” to be decided by a simple majority. No statements for or against will be sent out with voting slips and members must do their own research.

In order to support a legal right to go caving on CRoW Access Land, BCA will have to change or remove item 4.6 of its Constitution.

This follows formal QC Advice received in August that the CRoW Act 2000 almost certainly does apply to going caving on ‘Access Land’, and then a meeting between Natural England and BCA in September. NE does not yet accept the QC’s opinion, but they are willing to continue talking, and this gives them the time to think through the implications.

Natural Resources Wales has been given the same paperwork but has yet to make any response other than an informal one that “getting an organisation the size of the present NRW to make any kind of decision on

something as complex as CRoW would be slow and difficult”. So NRW might get swept along by the decisions taken in England.

Statutory Conservation Bodies (i.e. NE and NRW) can issue Directives under S.26 of the CRoW Act to restrict access at very sensitive sites, but must follow Statutory Guidance to do so. NRW did not answer if they have set out Statutory Guidance procedures or not. But they have, and we obtained it all from a source in England. S.26 has never yet been used in Wales for conservation reasons.

In Wales, the only major caves on CRoW Access Land with access restricted seem to be Drws Cefn, Ogof Craig a’r Ffynnon, Ogof Cnw, Agen Allwedd, OFD2, Pant Mawr Pot and Tunnel Top. Their access groups have been consulted and are providing feedback for the next BCA C&A meeting in November.

In the Forest of Dean, the CRoW Act does not apply in the usual way because the major caves/mines are on Crown land with a long and a complicated history, too deep to delve into here, so nothing much will change there.

## NRW FORESTRY MINES ACCESS AGREEMENT

Face-to-face discussions in April 2014, then a follow-up meeting with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) estates staff in July, resulted in contract terms agreed by all concerned with matters on the ground and also underneath it. This agreement was expected to progress to signing quite quickly, making any temporary mines access system, mentioned in the July newsletter, an unnecessary interim measure.

However in October, NRW’s solicitors have responded to this ‘final’ version, and are rowing backwards on the July accord. We can accept minor reversals, but NRW are now challenging the BCA Insurance Policy as not sufficient to mitigate NRW’s perceived risks.

So we now have to persuade NRW to think again, or re-align BCA’s policy with NRW’s appetite for risk, neither of which seem easy.

## LITTLE NEATH RIVER CAVE POLLUTION CASE

Another ‘diesel spillage’ has been discovered in early September 2014. These have happened about once a year since 2008.

A site meeting with NRW happened in mid-October, after some significant floods and the fuel smell had then gone. Two big oil drums were found washed into Pwll y Rhyd, but these have been in there for far too long to be the cause of the recent LNRC incident. Plans are being made to remove them before they can corrode and any harmful contents leak.

Future pollution should be reported to the NRW environment hot-line (0800 80 70 60) without delay, and also inform me please. I would also welcome first-hand accounts of the LNRC and other environmental issues.

Stuart France, Conservation/Access Officer



## Training News

The SRT training day that ran in July was put on for those that had missed out on the previous course. Several participants received tuition ranging from total novices to experienced cave divers who wanted a bit more knowledge to enable them to haul their kit more effectively. Thanks to the CICs that gave up their time for the successful day. A couple of comments from the participants:

*Hi Dave,*

*I would like to thank CCC for the ropes course with Richard Hill at Langorse on Saturday that was provided for Colin Blanchard and me. An excellent day. Richard sorted out the trainees by experience and aims, and the two instructors we had - Dan and Lisa - did us proud. Excellent instruction and a very good facility, too. If only it was in North Wales...*

*Mike Craig*

*Secretary, Grosvenor Caving Club*

*Hi Dave,*

*Just to add my thanks also to yourself and your instructors. I thoroughly enjoyed the*



*day and am looking forward to doing a bit more. If you have any snaps of us I'd love to see them!*

*Best Regards*

*Colin*

## Upcoming Events

Brendan Marris is running a cave photography workshop on December 13th in South Wales. Please book directly with: [Brendan.m@btinternet.com](mailto:Brendan.m@btinternet.com)

A cave survey workshop and another bat walk are also planned for the autumn, but dates still to be confirmed. The details will appear on the CCC website.

*Richard Hill, Training Officer*

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chwaraeoncymsu

## 2014 DIARY

### November 21-23

13<sup>th</sup> CHECC Student Forum  
Gilwern, South Wales

### December 13

Cave Photography Workshop South Wales  
Contact Brendan Marris

### Autumn 2014

Advanced Cave Surveying Workshop  
Contact Richard Hill

## 2015 DIARY

### March 15

CCC AGM, Betws-y-Coed

### May 22-25

NAMHO Conference  
Nenthead

## Access to Rhyd Alyn Mine

Sometime during August the padlock to Rhyd Alyn Mine near Cilcain was vandalised. This mine needs to be kept securely locked under the terms of the access agreement negotiated with the landowner. Removal of the lock risks the access to the mine being lost by the permanent sealing of the entrance.

NWCC have now replaced the lock and issued new keys. A system of nominated

key-holders is operated to ensure as unrestricted access as possible to the mine by clubs, individuals and organisations who are covered by the BCA insurance scheme.

Details of gaining access and existing key-holders can be obtained by emailing: [secretary@northwalescavingclub.org.uk](mailto:secretary@northwalescavingclub.org.uk)

*Tony Smith, NWCC*

## Expedition Grants News

Robin Weare was successful in his bid for a WSA grant for the 2014 caving expedition to Oromia. The other caving expedition to Krubera withdrew their application due to political instability in that area.

At present there is no information as to whether there will be any expedition grants awarded by the WSA for 2015 due to funding cut-backs by Sport Wales. Updates on the situation will be posted on the CCC website.

*Dave Tyson, Secretary*



*Robin Weare and Andy Clark with their government issue armed guard after leaving Holga Ganda Alla 1 on the 2013 expedition*

## The Cave of Life Unknown

Many years ago a small group of four friends on a sunny summer's evening, wandered along the dry bank of a stream. A stream which lay home to several hidden caves, caves that we did not know.

I was chatting excitedly to my friends about the possibility of maybe, just maybe, finding a cave along the rough, limestone torn banks we were walking along. So new to caving were we that our kit comprised only on a head lamp each and a short rope to tie around an ankle if the need arose to pull one of us out of a difficult hole. So new in fact, that none of us had even been in a "real" cave before but we were all excited at the prospect.

Then my eye caught a glimpse of what could only be a cave and I yelled excitedly - "look, there's a cave". We all stumbled in the dry stream bed as we made for the entrance which, at first glance, appeared to be quite large - large enough anyway, to walk in. As I have now come to learn, the entrance was deceptive and it quickly reduced to nothing more than a flat out crawl - this meant that only two of us would be brave enough to enter.

Of course it was wet and muddy, and the crawl in our summer clothes was quickly regretted, but the reward was astonishing: a three-to-four foot tall water torn passage, the likes of which neither myself nor my friend had ever seen before. We made our way down, although were dared not venture more than a hail's distance from the entrance for fear of dangers unknown, but was

this was to prove a distance far enough for us to find it?

There, motionless on the rocky floor was a life-form the likes of which I do not believe has been seen by any person on this planet ever before. It was small with what appeared to be tentacles and shone like moonlit silver in our head-lamps. It was beautiful and yet terrifying and I gazed at it in awe wondering if it was, indeed, still alive. It did not move, not even a flinch and we believed it to be dead. We dared not touch it but we were captured by its aura and it held us fast for a moment of eternity.

We took a photograph of the life-form beside my side and then another close up shot of the entity itself and we quickly left the cave to report our discovery.

We were encouraged to send a copy of the photograph to a department of Chester University who in turn sent it onto a specialised centre in Liverpool. When the telephone rang (in the "old" days the telephones were connected to wires in your home) it was the centre in Liverpool asking where the entity was - we had left it in situ in the cave. The centre implored us to return to the cave and place the entity in a sealed jar of pure alcohol, then recover it from the cave to send it on to them. This we did the following day and the day after that, the life-form (which we had now determined was dead) was on its way to Liverpool, courtesy of the Royal Mail.

A week later I received another call advising that "Liverpool" could not identify the entity and that they had, in turn, sent it to an Oxford University specialist.



Sadly, that was the last I saw or heard about the entity. I waited for weeks and heard nothing. I telephoned Chester but could not locate who had the life-form in Liverpool nor could I trace who had it in Oxford - back then (in the "old" days) there were no internet search engines, no miracle answers, and no easy way to find a telephone number.

The Directory Enquiries service then was actually answered by a human, but they wanted you to give them the name and address of the person whom you were trying to call—information that I did not have.

I still wonder what that entity was and where it is located now.

*Ian Adams, Treasurer*

## The Cambrian Cave Registry

The Cambrian Cave Registry was initiated in 1966 to "record, index and make available information on the sites of speleological interest and the metalliferous mines of Wales and of certain related areas". It was to be made available in two forms: "typed, loose-leaf master copies, to be tucked away in Libraries" (the National Museum of Wales still has a copy, I believe); and

"via a postal information service will be provided by a punched-card index". It comprised a mixture of bibliographic references and field observations, the NGR, location description, and access information.

It developed extensively during the 1970s and 1980s, but then fell into a state of neglect and faltering restarts

until a concentrated effort began in 2004 to transfer the existing hard copy Registry to a computerised database. This "turned out to be extremely time consuming with almost all the 1200 entries having to be manually copied". In addition to the existing Registry data, a considerable number of additional sites were

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## The Cambrian Caving Council

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Equipment/Fixed Aids	Vince Allkins <a href="mailto:equipmentofficer@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk">equipmentofficer@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk</a>
Cave Registrar	Martin Laverty <a href="mailto:registrar@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk">registrar@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk</a>
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Webmaster	Barry Hill <a href="mailto:webmaster@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk">webmaster@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk</a>

## Will Smith UK Mine/Cave Diving

One of the founding members of the UK Mine/Cave diving & exploration group, Will Smith, has sadly died whilst exploring a dry section of Aber Las Slate Mine on 23rd August 2014. He and other members of the group were regular visitors to the mine and, after diving through a sump, he was exploring a dry passage when he experienced breathing difficulties and collapsed.

Emergency services called out NWCRO who in turn requested help from Clapham CRO to co-ordinate calling out rescue divers from around the UK. In total 8 rescue organisations were involved in recovering his body from the mine.

Friends have paid tribute to his enthusiasm, his inspiration to others and love of the great outdoors. An inquest will be opened by the North Wales Coroner.

*Dave Tyson*

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Please send news items, short articles, club profiles and newsworthy photos for the next issue to Dave Tyson by 30th December

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## The Cambrian Cave Registry

*continued from page 3*

added from guidebooks and other cave data research projects, especially the Brecon Beacons National Park Black Mountain Survey Project which provided a map-based register of caves and digs, mostly with entrance photographs, for several years.

Covering eight areas [Black Mountain; Central Beacons; Eastern Beacons; North Wales; Gower; West Wales; Southeast Wales; and Mid Wales (with an excursion into the Marches of Shropshire and Herefordshire)], there were around 1400 entries by July 2008 when "Underground Wales" first went online, rising to 1877 (although not all of them published) by July 2014.

The online interface up to now has been limited to a search by name showing a very variable amount of information, sometimes with copious history, description, and references, but not infrequently bare of all but a name and (occasionally incorrect) NGR. I am currently checking the information helped by the use of a Geographic Information System which can take advantage of

spatial information in datasets from bodies such as the National Resources Wales, British Geological Survey, Statistics Office, and the Ordnance Survey, amongst other providers, to cross check data such location, and to check (and count) whether sites are included within the boundaries of, for example, SSSI's.

Unfortunately I could find no vector digitised boundary data to help provide information on the number of sites within designated Open Access areas for the CRoW debate, but I can overlay sites on the raster map data that is available. This showed up another problem: no fewer than 59 separate categories of classification! Admittedly, some of them were typos, but I have changed to what I consider a more useful, and usable, system using two classifications: by morphology, into Cave; Pothole; Sea Cave; Rock Shelter; Doline; Other; and by hydrology: Sink; Rising; Active. Categories indicating type of access control and inclusion in an SSSI, GCR area, archaeological site are also being added, which should also help with the CCC's management tasks.

So, look out for expanded, corrected, content and probably a new, perhaps map-based, interface coming up before too long. And please don't be shy: I will be happy to answer any questions and accept any help in making the Registry a useful and up-to-date resource. So why not follow the example of several people already and send me the ideas, photos or information that you would like to see, or correct, at:

[registrar@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk](mailto:registrar@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk)

*Martin Laverty, Cave Registrar*

### References:

Christopher, N.S.J. (1971) Cave Registries. Cambridge Underground 1971 pp 13-14 [[cucc.survex.com/jnl/1971/cregs.htm](http://cucc.survex.com/jnl/1971/cregs.htm)]

Underground Wales - Cambrian Cave Registry - A Database of the Caves of Wales  
[[www.cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/cave\\_registry.html](http://www.cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/cave_registry.html)]