

February 2015

Issue 44

# WALES UNDERGROUND

## News In Brief

- **BCA Referendum result**—62% of cavers voted for negotiating on legal rights to go caving on CRoW Act 'Access Land'
- **Special provisions in the CRoW Act** will protect sensitive sites like OFD and Agen Allwedd where permit systems would continue to operate as now
- **Clydach Gorge dualling** begins with an area near Ogorf Capel. The main contractors are meeting with cavers in February.

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## Photo credits

Stuart France  
Malcolm Dalziel-Job  
Bob Mehew

Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

## FORESTRY MINES ACCESS AGREEMENT SIGNED

Two contracts have just been signed by a new company called Cave Access Ltd (CAL) to provide access for cavers and mine explorers into eleven sites on former Forestry Commission Wales and on former Countryside Council for Wales land for one year.

If these arrangements run smoothly then the agreements will be extended for a longer period and additional sites can then be considered. A twelfth site was dropped due to an impending land sale by the government.

CAL is envisaged as a dormant and not-for-profit company with no shareholders, no paid staff, and running independently of Cambrian Caving Council. It serves to provide legal protection to the people who will issue access permits. CAL will not be charging for permits to use the sites it manages. Insurance is via the British Caving Association's policy which covers amateur underground activities only.

The nature of the risks that the landowners wished to transfer to the scheme organisers made it impossible for the Cambrian Caving Council itself or its officers to sign up to such a serious legal undertaking personally.

We are required to write Risk Assessments and Management Plans before the permit system can go operational. This will be done

in stages with priority being given to the sites shown in the un-shaded rows in the table here.

Gwrych Castle Mines	Abergele
<b>Parc Lead Mine</b>	<b>Gwydyr Forest</b>
Cae Coch Sulphur Mine	Gwydyr Forest
<b>Rhiwbach Slate Quarry</b>	<b>Penmachno</b>
<b>Bryneglwys Quarry</b>	<b>Abergynolwyn</b>
Hendre Ddu Slate Quarry	Aberllefenni
Henfwch Pryse Estate Sheep Walk	Nant-y-Mochn, Ceredigion
M inllyn Slate Quarry	Dinas Mawddwy
Allt y Crib	Tal-y-Bont, Ceredigion
Temple Mine	Rheidol Valley
<b>Draethen Lead Mines</b>	<b>Draethen, Caerphilly</b>

This ground-breaking deal completed by the current council officers comes at the end of a long and bumpy negotiation that was begun by the late Elsie Little. The new access company has the three directors listed below at present. We would appreciate a little more patience from potential underground visitors while we get new systems up and running in what we believe will become a lasting tribute to Elsie's vision and initiative, as well as being a model approach which suits the 21st century legal environment.

Roy Fellows, Stuart France, Dave Tyson  
Cave Access Ltd



The sea view from The Window in Ogorf Govan, and some of the pretty formations inside this special cave

## OGOF GOFAN AND CASTLEMARTIN FIRING RANGE

Agreement has been reached in principle with the Defence Infrastructure Organisation for legal access into Ogorf Govan. The details of this are still being worked out in meetings.

A former officer in charge of the army base stopped all caving activities some time after the initial discoveries of the late 1960s. So the ad hoc cave visits made since that time have all been unauthorized by the landowner (DIO). We are grateful to the new Colonel and to the National Park staff for their positive approach. Keep an eye on the CCC website for updates on access here as this is a changing situation.

CCC has also obtained 'prospecting rights' to look for new caves, perhaps to find another

Ogorf Govan, on Range West which has miles of limestone sea cliffs completely closed off to the public since the 1930s. Cavers must attend a Range Briefing session each year to obtain safety training to recognize and understand the risks of unexploded ordnance that may be on or in the ground. This training is provided free but the courses run only on certain dates in each spring. If cavers find any new caves on Range West then additional permission to enter them will be needed because of potential SSSI and archaeological issues, as there were at Ogorf Govan in the initial years after its discovery. See the CCC website for details of this system.

Stuart France  
CCC Conservation/Access Officer

## CCC AGM Weekend

The Cambrian Caving Council Annual General Meeting will be held at the Memorial Hall, Mill Street, Betws-y-Coed LL24 0BB at 12.30pm on Sun 15<sup>th</sup> March 2015. There is very limited parking at the venue but there is a large car park a short distance away near the station. It would be wise to car-share as this car park can be busy.

Visits into various local mines are available the day before. Contact myself for further details of these.

*Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary*

## Joint BCRC/BCA Event

After the success of last year's BCA Fun Weekend/AGM in the Yorkshire Dales, BCA is combining with the British Cave Rescue Council to host the 2015 BCA Party/AGM and BCRC Conference.

The event takes place over the weekend of 12-14 June at the Dean Field Studies Centre, Parkfield, near Lydney, Gloucestershire. More details will be available on the BCA website.

This year's BCRC Conference is being organised jointly by Gloucestershire Cave Rescue Group and the Midlands Cave

Rescue Organisation. Preparations are now well underway with lectures, workshops and a multi-team cave rescue training exercise being planned, followed by an evening of entertainment in the nearby Clearwell Caves.

We would like to see input from all cave rescue teams and look forward to receiving offers of lectures and workshops. Please contact Paul Taylor or myself.

*Pete Turier*

## SRT Training News

An SRT training session will take place in North Wales on Saturday 14th March 2015, the day before the CCC AGM in Betws-y-Coed. The venue has yet to be decided and further information will be posted on the CCC website.

It is also hoped to run a cave surveying course and a bat walk/talk in the near future too.

*Richard Hill, CCC Training Officer*

## Changes to the ukCaving Forum

Tim and Jane Allen are the new owners of ukCaving.com and have big plans for the future.

We recognise that ukCaving.com needed to be under caver ownership to reach its full potential and therefore decided to take it on. The ukCaving forum is an integral part of the caving community now, and we hope our plans will improve both users' and viewers' experience, and freshen up the atmosphere of the forum.

Future plans include new topics, a fresh look, more photographs and an emphasis on news and trip reports. We are keen to involve caving's national and regional

bodies on the forum and hope to be able to offer a specific area for news and announcements for them.

We hope to encourage wider participation and plan to give out prizes for best posts, etc. Longer term we hope to fund ukCaving grants for UK caving projects.

Some of our ideas can already be seen on the website but others will take a while to realise.

Please join us at ukCaving.com

*Tim Allen*

## 2015 DIARY

### March 1

GCRC Training Day  
Wigmore Mine, Forest of Dean

### March 14

SRT Training Day, North Wales  
Mine Trips, Betws-y-Coed Area

### March 15, 12.30pm

CCC AGM, Memorial Hall  
Mill Street, Betws-y-Coed

### May 22-25

NAMHO Conference  
Nenthead

### June 12-14

Joint BCRC/BCA Event  
Dean Field Studies Centre

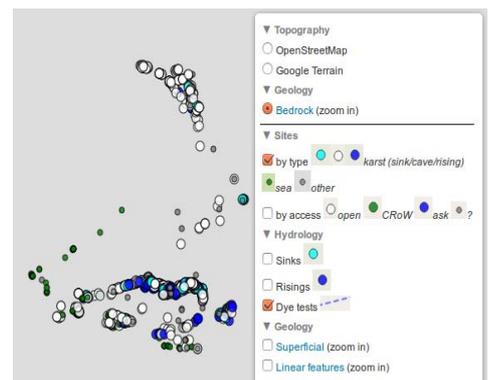
## Cambrian Cave Registry Update

The Cambrian Cave Register has now been substantially updated, and is capable of faster and more regular update than before. Some changes have been made to the search interface which now accepts common alternative names. For example, OFD 2 and Ogof Nos Hir will both find Top Entrance. A map interface has also been added. The screenshot here shows an overlay of colour-coded site features. The mapping can be zoomed from showing sites on a national scale to hydrological and geological features at a local level.

The Registry has also been the first to supply data on cave locations to Mountain Rescue's Geo-Portal development to assist in their search and rescue operations.

Thanks to those who have supplied the data, comments, and corrections to me at registrar@cambrincavingcouncil.org.uk

*Martin Laverty, CCC Cave Registrar*



## Discovering Caves and the Law on Conservation

New caves are not the only things to be discovered high in the hills and down in the dales. Our recent and distant ancestors may also have lived there, and reminders of their lives may sometimes remain. These can now be of archaeological interest and worth preserving. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 creates Scheduling Ancient Monuments (SAMs), and makes it an offence to damage them knowingly.

There is also wildlife on the surface and sometimes in caves, in the form of animals, birds, plants, insects, fungi, etc. There may also be geological features of scientific interest. These can be scheduled and thus protected by the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. In Wales, the public body now responsible for designating land as Sites of Special Scientific Interest (SSSIs) is Natural Resources Wales (NRW) which merged the former Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) with the FCW and EAW in April 2013.

Archaeologically protected sites in Wales are indexed on the Archwilio website which is run jointly by the county archaeological trusts. This website provides an easy way to determine if there are archaeological features in a particular area. You can zoom and pan an OS map or aerial photo of the area you are interested in, and all heritage sites show as coloured pins. Clicking on a pin, will show the full details of the site including research papers and photos. Another useful website is Coflein run by the Royal Commission on the Ancient and Historical Monuments of Wales.

NRW is almost two years old and has its own website where the simplest possible search for "SSSI" returns only 11 hits (at the time of writing). Official SSSI documents, maps and information about all 1000+ SSSIs covering 12% of the land area of Wales reside on the old CCW website at [ccgc.gov.uk](http://ccgc.gov.uk) and these two websites are largely unlinked in terms of SSSI information.

One could be forgiven for thinking that a SSSI site would be a compact special-looking area, but this is often not the case. The SSSI containing Dan-yr-Ogof, called Mynydd Du SSSI, runs from DYO nearly to Llygad Llŵchwr over a vast vague upland area of 67 square kilometres. There does not appear to be any master SSSI list online, but there is a list of Welsh SSSI names grouped by county where a click on the SSSI name will list its documents. The [ccgc.gov.uk](http://ccgc.gov.uk) site seems to be in a state of flux right now, and I have found that sometimes it works and sometimes it doesn't.

Each SSSI has four key documents. The Citation defines the scientific interest; the Map shows the scheduled area boundary; a list of Operations Likely to Damage the Special Interest (the OLDSI); and the Site Management Statement (SMS) which sets out NRW's conservation plans. You can also ask NRW for these.

Landowners are notified by NRW that their land is to become an SSSI. It is always the landowner's (not the visitor's) responsibility to inform NRW of any operation on the OLDSI list before such is undertaken so as to obtain NRW's consent to it. Usually permission is given because the OLDSI list is not prohibitive and it may not apply uniformly across the whole area of each SSSI. Cavers working with and through landowners is thus essential.

In the past, CCW was flexible in its approach to running SSSIs, and NRW too permitted a cave dinner party (photo below) in a

SSSI cave on a National Nature Reserve in 2014. CCW has permitted a terrorist film to be made inside an SSSI cave for which much blank ammunition was fired. CCW also accepted that some rock modifications were likely as cavers look for new passages, but that discoveries would open up new areas which may be scientifically important. To this end, a system of light-touch regulation for cave exploration ran for many years, so light that some people did not even notice it there.



NRW is now becoming more formal, however, and they involved the police in an ongoing investigation into a surface dig on an SSSI about nine months ago. It seems they wish to bring about a prosecution rather than deal with this case in a less extreme way—like an enforcement notice and issuing strict guidance. This new approach is unlikely to gain them as much trust and help from cavers and country communities.

Conservation law is too big a topic for one newsletter page. CCC will publish detailed written guidance later in this year. But in the meanwhile, you can download some general SSSI guidance on the DCA and Natural England websites, aimed at cavers and landowners respectively. NRW was asked to write an article to fill this page but were unable to respond in time. The information presented here instead is taken from various sources and is not to be construed as legal advice.

*Stuart France,*  
CCC Conservation / Access Officer

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### ONLINE SSSI RESOURCES FOR CAVERS IN WALES

[cofiadurcahcymru.org.uk/arch](http://cofiadurcahcymru.org.uk/arch) (Archwilio sites and maps)

[coflein.gov.uk](http://coflein.gov.uk) (RCAHMW sites and maps)

[ccgc.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/special-landscapes--sites/sites-search-results.aspx](http://ccgc.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/special-landscapes--sites/sites-search-results.aspx) (SSSIs grouped by county and documents)

[magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx](http://magic.defra.gov.uk/MagicMap.aspx) (SSSI maps for UK)

[publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/2501049](http://publications.naturalengland.org.uk/file/2501049) (Natural England's SSSI guidance booklet for landowners)

[thedca.org.uk/conservation/cave-digging-in-sssi-s](http://thedca.org.uk/conservation/cave-digging-in-sssi-s) (the DCA's guidance leaflet on cave digging in Derbyshire)

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## Anchor Testing in South Wales

The BCA Equipment and Techniques Committee have previously discussed testing anchors in various limestone beds across the UK, and more recently testing a new type of resin.

An offer from Vince Allkins to use the Penwyllt Quarry behind the SWCC hut was accepted and so over the weekend of 29-30 November 2014 some 40 Bolt Product anchors were placed and tested by Vince and myself. The permission from the South Wales Caving Club to use the Penwyllt quarry for testing these and other anchors is gratefully acknowledged.



The main objectives of this work was to demonstrate that the new choice of resin was suitable and also to see how rock behaved when extracting the anchors and whether the resin could withstand wet conditions. The adequacy of the anchor is based on a criterion that 95% of the anchors tested should require a force to extract them in the axial mode in excess of 15kN. In the event, the measured value was 29kN. This is better than in previous BCA test results using both the DMM Eco and Bolt Product anchors.

The recent results also indicate that the mode of failure is quite complex, involving an initial rupture of the metal-resin bond followed by the loosened anchor then twisting out of the resin. This points to a significant safety feature in that if the resin-metal bond does fail then significant strength will remain which is due to the mechanical interface. This would also have to be overcome for the anchor then to fail catastrophically.

One embarrassing discovery was that with the two of us sharing the various jobs on that day, on one occasion neither of us properly cleaned out one particular hole which resulted in a fairly low peak force of only 10kN being required to extract that anchor. This error is unlikely to occur underground because most anchor locations are out over a pitch where only one person at a time is likely to be working on them. Hence the error of assuming that the other person had cleaned out the hole is less likely to occur.

Another observation we made was that the degree of spalling of the rock surface around the anchors on extraction was sufficient to prevent around 50% of the bolt locations from being

re-used with a replacement anchor. This potentially will become a significant issue in a century or so time when contemporary anchors will have to be replaced. The committee will have to consider this observation and work is already in hand to research into other extraction methods that might reduce this anchor sustainability problem to manageable proportions.

The evaluation work is not quite complete since we have yet to test the new resin in flooded holes to confirm that it can withstand wet conditions.

*Bob Mehew, BCA*

## Overseas Expedition Grants 2015/16

Overseas expedition grants are provided to fund Welsh members of expeditions, including those involving caving. It is not clear yet whether the Welsh Sports Association will be able to offer grants this year, but they have noted that the deadline for applications is 13th March 2015. More details and application forms are on the WSA website at [welshsports.org.uk](http://welshsports.org.uk)

*Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary*

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

## The Cambrian Caving Council

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