

July 2015

Issue 46

WALES UNDERGROUND

Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

News In Brief

- EuroSpeleo 2016 is being held in the UK. The event will take place at the Dalesbridge Centre in Yorkshire. See <http://www.eurospeleo.uk>
- Welsh Sports Association announces funding for Sports Safety Grants for 2015/2016
- Abersychan residents have reported that the nearby Nant Ffrwd river now sinks underground leaving the lower river bed dry. A late addition to the Cambrian Cave Registry shows this was first reported to The Royal Society in 1756. See CCR entry 2015-13.
- Work continues on the Clydach Gorge dual carriageway with the demolition of the Drum and Monkey pub, the well known caving landmark (seen in the photo below) and several houses. A new footpath around the edge of the former pub site still allows access to Ogof Capel etc.



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Photo credits

Stuart France

Dave Tyson

Laura Kelly

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RETURN OF THE GREEN PAPER ON ACCESS

The Welsh Government (WG) has just published a Green Paper on 'Improving opportunities to access the outdoors for responsible recreation' and is seeking feedback and opinions to be lodged by 2nd October 2015. The document can be accessed online at:

<http://gov.wales/consultations/environmentandcountryside/improving-opportunities-to-access-the-outdoors/?lang=en>

This is a second attempt by WG to try and simplify and extend access to land for recreational purposes. The previous attempt started in 2013 and after some progress got bogged down in problems with dealing with access to open water. The imminent elections effectively killed off the green paper as reported in the July 2014 CCC Newsletter, but it was clear that the topic would re-surface and with the publication of the above document the subject is once again open for discussion.

The main driving force for better recreational access is to promote healthier lifestyles, better social cohesion and a reduced burden on local authorities and landowners who have to manage paths etc. There is also the potential to increase income from tourism, activity businesses, country accommodation and sustenance.

While the document mentions walking, cycling, rock climbing, horse riding and access to water, it fails to mention anything related to caving or mine exploring. This should be a serious concern for the caving community as the principality has a very significant number of speleological sites, especially in South Wales, and a lot of significant mining sites in Mid and North Wales. It is clear that the caving community needs make its voice heard and present caving as a sport which improves fitness, friendship and can create new scientific knowledge. It also offers the possibility for an average person to explore and make discoveries, either on



their own or as part of a team – something which other sports cannot offer.

Cambrian Caving Council will send a formal response to the WG document, however it is important that all cavers and caving clubs with an interest in seeing improved access in Wales express their views. Please download and read through the document and then provide feedback by 2nd October. Caving and Mine Exploring receive very little press and are largely unknown outside our community and so this is a big chance to raise awareness in the upper levels of government.

Given that fitness and health are now seen as critical to the future well-being of the population, we need to be ranked up alongside walking and rock climbing as raising fitness levels and consequently improving health. Any publicity for our sport from the WG and associated bodies may help raise the profile of underground exploration and bring a welcome boost of new members.

Dave Tyson
CCC Secretary

Training News

It is hoped to organise an SRT training day and a Bat Awareness session in the next couple of months. Details will be posted on the CCC website and advertised on the ukCaving Forum when firm arrangements are known.

Richard Hill
CCC Training Officer

'Cave Dig' Guidance

Stuart France, CCC Conservation/Access Officer, invites ideas and material via email for a digging guidance leaflet specific to Wales. This is envisaged as a 4-page A4 document, done in a similar style to this newsletter, to be available as hardcopy and a download and maybe a PowerPoint version too.



Currently the only caving region which has this kind of leaflet is Derbyshire. The link to theirs and other sources of cave conservation advice can be found in the February CCC newsletter. The BCA also hopes to issue a new Cave Conservation Code and Exploration Guidelines in time for this year's Hidden Earth conference.

2015 DIARY

August 30th
OFD Columns open day

September 20th
NWCRO training day

September 25-27th
Hidden Earth, Mendip

October 3rd
SMWCRT training day

2016 DIARY

August 13-20th
EuroSpeleo 2016 Conference,
Dalesbridge Centre, Yorkshire

LITTLE NEATH RIVER CAVE

Following the diesel pollution incident in the late summer of 2014, visits into the cave have been logged with a caver counter, and hydrocarbon levels in the cave air have been recorded. Reports received from visiting groups confirm that no smell of diesel remains, and a visit made in July noted that insect larvae and small shrimp-like animals were alive and healthy again in the river pools.

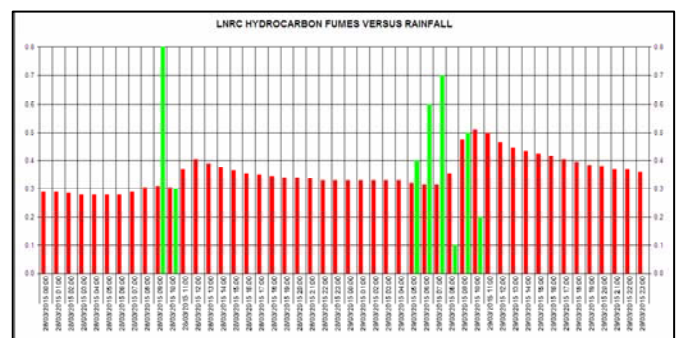
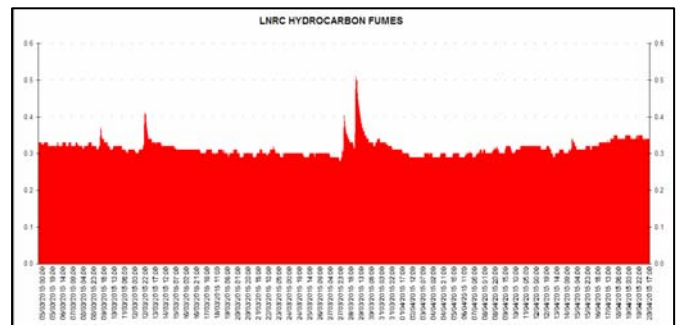
This is thought to be the first time that cave visitor levels have been monitored here, and it turns out that not many groups visit this cave, especially in winter when water levels in the entrance series and temperatures might be adverse. The counter records groups of cavers passing, not the number of individuals, so one might multiply by four to get an estimate of the footfall from these group numbers.

Month (2015)	Groups	Weekday	Groups
January	0	Monday	0
February	0	Tuesday	3
March	1	Wednesday	2
April	6	Thursday	3
May	2	Friday	0
June	7	Saturday	2
July	n/a	Sunday	6

The Tuesday-Thursday groups entered and left between 10am-5pm except for one group that left about 6pm. This pattern, together with no visits being made in six months on Mondays or Fridays, is suggestive of some kind of occasional

organised activity rather than club cavers who would likely come during an evening mid-week. Overall, the cave was visited only between 9am and 10pm across the six months studied, and all the evening activity happened on Sundays.

The cave gas analysis is surprisingly more sensitive than was ever imagined, and it is thought that this research breaks new ground. The first chart reveals the digital chatter on the sensor fluctuating one unit up and down most of the time, but there are also a few typical flood-pulse shaped features on the gas levels. For example, on the 9th and 13th March and again on 28-29th March there are sudden rises followed by more gradual declines, but almost all of the time the hydrocarbon gas levels are very low and remain fairly steady.



The small spikes might correspond to heavy rainfall then flood pulses bringing rotting organic material into the cave or churning up some tiny buried residues of the diesel spillage, releasing new air-borne hydrocarbons into the cave. The only hourly rainfall data available right now is from a site 30 miles away, but the correspondence is clear in the second chart. Alternatively, the temperature and humidity variations inside the cave could be the source of the blips seen on the gas readings. Either way, the cause of such tiny spikes is definitely not another pollution incident as that would send the gas instrument way off the top of the Y-scale used in these charts, and the effects, as we have already experienced, would be long-lasting.

Stuart France, CCC Conservation/Access Officer

CAVE ACCESS LIMITED: AN UPDATE

The access agreement between Cave Access Limited and Natural Resources Wales has now been in operation for just over three months and the CAL directors thought it worthwhile to give a short report on the operation of the scheme and some problems which have arisen.

Following a safety inspection and risk assessment, an inaugural trip into Parc Mine in the Gwydyr Forest took place on Saturday 14th March. The interim CAL website went live on 7th April and a trickle of people have started registering for permits. The access agreement lists eleven sites, however it was not possible to get all these surveyed from the start and so work was concentrated on what were considered to be the most important. Agreement was reached over access to Rhiwbach Slate Mine as many people had expressed an interest in visiting it. The mine is gated and the current combination can be obtained by emailing CAL. Cae Coch Sulphur Mine has also been popular and has in the past seen scientific research on extremeophile bacteria. There is renewed interest in this area and groups from Bangor University have visited recently. Three Mid-Wales sites: Temple Mine, Henfwlch Mine and Talybont Mine have also seen new visitors.

To date over 25 individuals have registered for access and we hope the number will continue to increase over the summer holidays. A fair number of reports have been received and some helpful comments have been used to update the CAL documents. It is particularly useful that science is being done at the Cae Coch site as that may help convince NRW and other landowners to allow CAL to have access to additional sites.

Sadly there are problems with one site: Draethen Lead Mines are out of bounds for the immediate future. A few bats have been seen flying around the mine entrances by a local bat group and as a consequence the local NRW staff are concerned about disturbance and imposed a ban. A meeting was held in June to try and resolve the situation

with the NRW land agent suggesting that CAL propose a research project and select an advisory group to inspect the mines and make recommendations on controlling access. The team to do this work will be Dr Peter Smith (ecology consultant), John Stevens (cave surveyor) and Stuart France (data logging) and a methods statement has been submitted to NRW. CAL hopes that NRW can be persuaded that the modest levels of access by cavers and mine explorers who are following the agreed conservation codes will pose little risk to any bats in these mines.

Bats are present in the Gwydyr Mines too, but numbers are low and the local NRW staff see less of an issue. CAL will try to install some counters to monitor access in order to allay any concerns about over-use by visitors.

To improve the relations between NRW and cavers in general, CCC has been invited to talks in August with Tim Jones, NRW's Deputy Director of Operations in North/Mid Wales. Tim gained caving experience during his time living in South Wales and we see this as helping our cause.

Please keep sending feedback to CAL, and if you have not yet registered and want to visit the sites in the agreement then please make the effort to join the scheme by sending a simple email with your name, your BCA number and club name (if any) to:

permits@caveaccess.co.uk

Then let us know when you visit sites and please report any concerns. Check the CAL website for updates at:

<http://www.caveaccess.co.uk>

Dave Tyson/Stuart France/Roy Fellows
CAL Directors



'Snottites' on the walls in Cae Coch
- soft formations with a rubbery texture



New conservation taping in Cae Coch
- protecting areas from being walked over

UNDERGROUND ARCHAEOLOGY: THE NEW FRONTIER

The underground aspects of mining and quarrying are set to be the new archaeological frontier. A report being prepared for Historic England, *The Subterranean Industrial Legacy* (Barnatt, pending), will provide the setting for a move to designate subterranean features for statutory protection. In doing so it emphasises the role that expertise within the voluntary sector might play and how they will be essential for the assessment of the archaeological assets. At present, archaeologists with experience of mining and quarrying, particularly its underground archaeology, are relatively small in number; there is, however, an increasing awareness amongst mine explorers of the value of underground archaeology. Work by Barnatt, Timberlake, Waterhouse and others, is influencing established mine explorers such that they now take account of the archaeology if not actively investigating the evidence, as is the case with, for example, Lakin and others (2011) or Stewart (2014).

If the resources for archaeological assessment underground are to be available to the professional, contract sector, who are generally restricted as to if and where they can work in a subterranean environment, the voluntary sector will have to be involved. NAMHO (the National Association of Mining History Organisations), as the co-ordinating body for the mining history / mine exploration community, is in a strong position to lead these advances,

facilitating the training required and ensuring that underground archaeology is effective both for the protection of key assets and for ensuring that further research and investigation is carried out. As such, underground archaeology will be an integral part of the Association's plans for the conservation and protection of mining and quarrying heritage.

Dr Peter Claughton
NAMHO Conservation Officer

References

- Barnatt, J. pending *The Subterranean Industrial Legacy: Significance, Designation and Management*, draft report for Historic England
- Lakin, B., Noble, G. and Treseder, G. 2011 'Stopping methods in the St Just mines before mechanised drilling', in P. Claughton and C. Mills (eds) *Mining Perspectives*, Truro: Cornwall County Council.
- Stewart, R. J. 2014 'Firesetting in West Devon – an initial discussion', in *50 years of Mine Exploration: Proceedings of the 2011 NAMHO Conference, Preston Montford, Shropshire*. Shropshire Caving and Mining Club, pp. 111-14.

BCA Online Launched

Over the past years the BCA has struggled to communicate directly with its members both to spread ideas and to gain feedback. This was due in part to a lack of email addresses for members and concerns that people thought that they would be spammed. After the paper ballot on the CRoW issue, efforts were made to update the email addresses of the membership so that future communication could be done electronically to avoid the expense of postage. It was felt that members would like to be able to control the type of information sent to them.

To this end, the BCA has launched an online service so members can update their profile and opt to receive electronic publications etc. To join this scheme, visit the main BCA website below and then click on the [BCA Online](http://www.british-caving.org.uk) link.

<http://www.british-caving.org.uk>

Click on the [Request Login Details](#) button and enter your email address to submit your request for your username and a password. Once you have these you can then update your preferences online. It is recommended you opt to 'allow other BCA mail' as you will then receive the BCA newsletter electronically in future.

Dave Tyson
CCC Secretary

The Cambrian Caving Council

Chairman	Martyn Farr chairman@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Secretary/Newsletter	Dave Tyson secretary@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Treasurer	Ian Adams treasurer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Access/Conservation	Stuart France conservationofficer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Training	Richard Hill trainingofficer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Equipment/Fixed Aids	Vince Allkins equipmentofficer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Cave Registrar	Martin Laverty registrar@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Legal/Insurance	Roy Fellows legalandinsurance@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk
Webmaster	Barry Hill webmaster@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

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