

July 2016

Issue 50

WALES UNDERGROUND

News In Brief

- Work has started on the Newtown bypass joining the A483 – A489 which should ease holdups on Journeys to mid-Wales mines.
- There are post-Eurospeleo 2016 camps at Penyllit and Whitewalls from 20th-27th August for delegates wishing to visit sites in South Wales. Booking for these is via the Eurospeleo website.
- The Sports Policy Branch of the Welsh Government have produced a working document 'Getting Wales Moving' outlining proposals to increase physical activity for better physical and mental health.
- Work continues on dualling the A465 'Heads of Valleys' road with more traffic disruption forecast for the start of August. Bat surveys are underway for the planning of the Marthyr to Hirwaun section.

Inside this Issue

Training News 2

Update on WG Green 2
Paper

Cave Access Limited 2
News

Update on repair work in 3
mid-Wales Mines

Daren Cilau ladder pitch 4
refurbishment

Ogof Carno negotiations 4
to restart

Photo credits

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Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

Update on gating the sink hole in the Alyn Gorge

The last issue of the newsletter reported that a sink hole had opened at the back of one of the small 'leete' caves in the Alyn Gorge. Denbighshire County Council (DCC) along with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) wanted to grille and gate the entrance to prevent more accidents and to protect hibernating bats. CCC had discussions with both parties and agreed that the gate would be secured by a 'Derbyshire Key' style of lock.

The gate has now been installed by the DCC contractors and is secure. It will be padlocked during the bat hibernation season, end-September to end-April, but the rest of the time it will just be secured by a recessed captive bolt arrangement. The bolt head has a raised lump on one point so a modified 17mm socket is needed to turn it. It is necessary to reach through the gate to access the bolt and the gate opens inward against self-closing spring.



View of grille and gate from inside cave



Detail of a modified 17mm socket

DCC and NRW have agreed to allow CCC to survey the sink hole and the chamber which has opened below it. It is hoped this work should be completed in August and the survey will be published on the CCC website. Cavers are welcome to inspect the cave during the summer months, but any developmental work, including digging, will require a permit from DCC/NRW.

The Alyn Gorge is an SSSI from both a biological and geological perspective and the caves and mines form an important part of the geomorphology of the area. They also provide winter roosts for several bat species, and we hope to work with NRW to resolve any issues associated with digging.

Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary

Training News

CCC ran a SRT workshop on Saturday 25th June at the Langorse Wall with eleven people being taught by four instructors. There were two people who learned about various rescue techniques, two people who learned about rigging, and seven who improved their basic SRT techniques. The day was successful for all, with the instructors enjoying the opportunity to test their teaching skills. We have had positive feedback from participants like the letter below.

Richard Hill, CCC Training Officer

Hi Rich,

Both Linda and myself learnt a great deal last Saturday. We came away with a HUGE sense of achievement and really enjoyed ourselves, Linda actually prusiked which is something she has never done before! I was able to remove the rope from the Croll at the top of the pitch, something I have always struggled to do. Dan suggested using a Pantin when Linda did her last prusik. She did really well, I then used it to prusik and I'm sure it helped with removal of the rope from the Croll at the top of the pitch. For most of the day we were instructed by Jen, she has the patience of an angel!! She was most helpful and passed her expertise onto Linda and myself. Please pass our most grateful thanks and regards to both Jen and Dan, and without all of your help we would be totally without any SRT skills whatsoever. All in all we had a great day, the venue was great too, thanks very much.

Kind regards, Allen and Linda

Update on the WG Green Paper

A year ago I reported that the Welsh Government had published a Green Paper on 'Improving opportunities to access the outdoors for responsible recreation' and asked that cavers and clubs expressed their views. CCC sent a formal response and I know of at least two clubs that sent responses. The deadline for responding was 2nd October 2015 and a summary of the responses was promised. The Welsh Government has finally published their document summarising all comments received:

<http://gov.wales/docs/desh/consultation/160324-access-outdoor-recreation-cons-summary-en.pdf>

The time taken for the document to appear reflects the large number of communications arriving: almost 6000. Many of the responses came from the cycling community whose national organisation offered their members a generic template that individuals could download and submit. There was also interest in improving access to water for paddlers and better access for horse riders.

Sadly there is no mention of caving or potholing in the report. Wales has a significant number of caves and mines, with many being nationally important. I feel that the caving community did not provide enough feedback to this consultation so the few voices that spoke out were lost in the sheer volume of other contributions. If caving is to achieve a higher profile then cavers as a whole must become more assertive and engage with government.

Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary

2016 DIARY

August 13-20th

EuroSpeleo 2016 Conference,
Dalesbridge Centre, Yorkshire

August 28th

Columns Open Day, OFD

September 24th

SRT training session, Plas-y-Brenin

October 1st

Joint SMWCRT/SWSARA,
Rescue practice

2017 DIARY

March 12th

CCC AGM 12.00,
GCRG HQ, Cinderford

Cave Access Limited News

The number of people registering for access seems to have dropped a little compared to last year. There was a flurry of registrations at the start of the year, but that has now tailed off.

Users of the agreement are reminded that registration lasts for a year and it is necessary to confirm your BCA number on an annual basis so that CAL complies with the terms of its agreement with NRW.

The number of trips logged is also down compared to last year, although Rhiwbach is still extremely popular! With the completion of the work in Talybont, this is likely to prove more popular and it is highly recommended.

The impasse over the Draethen Lead Mines is over a year old. Despite us providing professional bat surveys this year in an attempt to de-conflict this situation, months later we still await any substantive response from NRW, but will keep pressing them for a system to provide us with recreational access.

Hafna Lead Mine in the Gwydyr Forest has been examined and a risk assessment submitted to NRW. We are hopeful that this interesting site will be added to the CAL portfolio before the year is out. We also hope to resolve some issues with our licence regarding commercial groups.

Dave Tyson, Cave Access Limited

Update on repair work in Mid-Wales mines

The Cambrian Mines Trust have now completed the first phase of the underground works in Cwmystwyth and secured the route to the skipway by preventing the collapse of the stull above it due to timbers rotting and sagging. This area was incorrectly described as "the portal" in Newsletter 47. The timberwork there is now supported on a block wall backed by concrete and is hidden behind a packwall facing. Old rails have been used to consolidate the failing timbers supports which retain a large quantity of deads. The next phase here, the replacement of the second plastic drum in Lefel Fawr with a steel roadway, will be going ahead soon.

Other work in Mid-Wales includes the re-opening of the Hen Barc adit at the South Cwmystwyth Mine, the one seen south of the river near the cattle grid coming from Devils Bridge. Some work has already been done and it is expected that the main phase of work will start shortly.



New supports for sagging timbers in Cwmystwyth

At Talybont the shaft down to the deep adit has been stripped of rotten timber and refurbished with concrete and steel mesh. The work has taken a year and used a considerable amount of materials that included four steel lintels, 100 square feet of 5mm galvanised mesh, six bags of cement, and numerous bolts and fittings.



Refurbished shaft in Talybont

The route to the Engine Shaft at Frongoch and to the adjacent workings is now open again by way of a 'sociable' sandbagged winze with a ladder.

Planned work in this mine involves fitting a catwalk over the first flooded stope, attempting to dig into Wemyss, and a digging project up in the 14 fathom level reached by the ladders fitted in 2014.

Will visitors to any of these mines please avoid interfering with any tools or materials left in the mines.

Roy Fellows, CCC Legal & Insurance Officer



Sandbagging on route to Frongoch Engine Shaft

Ogof Carno negotiations set to restart



Carno Adit (grilled) with the new A470 running above

Welsh Water's local land agent was contacted in 2014 to invite discussions with CCC on renewing caving access. But at the time the road closures and re-engineering works to dual the A465 section at Ebbw Vale were ongoing. That section is now about complete. After discussions this year with other contacts of mine inside WW, I think than an approach to their external relations team, placing my request within the context of the Welsh Government "2016 Year of Adventure" initiative, might be more productive and I would like to begin this process during September.

I have read Part Five of Clive Gardener's caving history book, and Brynmawr Caving Club have just handed me scans of their original digging permission letter from WW and some other interesting historic documents, but what I am still lacking is digital photos of the cave itself and in the tunnel, and exploration stories from the 1980-90s in caving club journals. Please will readers help me out!

Stuart France, CCC Access/Conservation Officer



York Caving Club at the old adit entrance in 2010

Daren Cilau Ladder Pitch Refurbishment

Apart from cave divers, everyone who visits the further reaches of Daren Cilau must make use of the 20 metre ladder in Preliminary Passage. This was installed about 25 years ago and, being made from 10mm stainless steel, will last for many more years. The same cannot be said about some of the fixtures and fittings. For example, the maillons supporting the ladder at the halfway ledge were badly rusted, as were the fixings for the lifeline and hauling line pulleys. The ropes themselves here were also overdue for renewal.

With funding from Cambrian Caving Council, refurbishment works have now been carried out at the 20m ladder, with new ropes, stainless bolts and stainless maillons installed there. The hauling line system has also been improved so that it is now possible to pull up tackle sacks from a standing position set back from the edge of the drop. There has always been a concern that some of the boulders at the pitch head are not actually very stable!

Further work is still required to remove some of the old rusted metalwork from the cave, and it is hoped this will all be completed during the summer.

Adrian Fawcett

The Cambrian Caving Council

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Please send news items, short articles, club profiles and newsworthy photographs for the next issue to Dave Tyson by **30th September 2016**