

# CAMBRIAN CAVING COUNCIL

## NEWSLETTER April 2010

### Editorial

We have some money to spend and need your help. We recently ran a well received SRT training event and would like to hold another later in the year. We are also thinking of sponsoring some surveying training during 2010.

We'd love to do more and that may include assisting with club based events. If your club wants to plan something we'd like to know if we can help. We'd also like ideas for events we can run ourselves. Events (whether club or CCC organised) must be within Wales and either aimed at caver training or introducing newcomers to the sport.

If you have ideas or can help us to spend some money contact Mike McCombe [e-mail](#)

Robin Weare [e-mail](#)  
Newsletter Editor

### Cave Survey Training?

After the very successful SRT training days, Cambrian Caving Council is hoping to sponsor a training event on cave surveying later in the year. The content and format of the event can be tailored to suit the attendees and might include:

- Cave surveying with tape, compass and clino - various levels possible here from raw beginner to masterclass.
- Digital surveying - e.g. DistoX and PocketTopo - getting started; making the transition from traditional instruments.
- Turning the measurements into a finished survey

It would be useful if anyone who might be interested in attending could contact Mike McCombe ([secretary@cambridgavingcouncil.org.uk](mailto:secretary@cambridgavingcouncil.org.uk) or 01291 652957) so that we can get a preliminary idea of numbers, dates and topics to cover.

### Cambrian Cave Registry

Approximately 500 additional cave records are currently being worked into the database. As part of the addition of the new records extra fields are being added to make compatible with GIS and online mapping such as Google Maps and Open Source mapping from Ordnance Survey. This will allow us to display output from the registry in online maps which will help develop the registry further.

Photos of 450 entrances have been indexed to be included into the database. Brendan Marris, our registrar, plans for these to be viewable online with the cave records.

He also plans to build in an online feedback facility for people to propose revisions and additions to the registry.

The extended Cave Registry dataset can now be viewed as a [Google Earth document](#)

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## Ogof Draenen Access

After a period of uncertainty regarding future access to Ogof Draenen the PDCMG has confirmed that ongoing access to the cave has been secured. However, the conditions attached to this access are that it is by the original entrance to the cave only. Any further attempts to open or otherwise use other entrances to the cave on the land owned by PwllDu Conservation Limited will result in termination of the current access agreement. They therefore ask all cavers to respect the terms of access to the cave.

At the landowners request the PDCMG have returned to using a key and not a combination to open the padlock. This means you will now need to apply by post for a key. Please send a letter on Club headed note paper requesting a key for a trip detailing when you want the key. Enclose a stamped Jiffy type envelope with the address for return and a deposit cheque for £10 made payable to PDCMG (Pwll Ddu Cave Management Group). The cheque will be destroyed on return of key. As Jiffy bags are more than 5mm thick you will need to use postage for large packages currently 61p per stamp 1st class.

Requests to be sent to Sue Mabbett, PDCMG Permit Secretary, 2, Garth Close, Morganstown, Cardiff, CF15 8LF

## Green Canal By-Pass

*When I'd been asked about this two weekends running I made some enquiries to which our Secretary responded. [Editor]*

If you carry on past the pile of lifejackets at the start of the Green Canal, towards Hanger Passage, then double back you reach via a stoop through boulders the start of Productus Passage. This is a high-level route above the Green Canal with a few side passages of interest. One of these emerges above the Abyss at roof-level and another contains an interesting-looking perched sump. After a couple of attempts at siphoning the sump it was dived by Joel Corrigan who reports that it ends in a mud choke after only a couple of body lengths. The route from Hanger Passage into Productus was engineered by Richard Frost, who installed the traverse line to aid access to the perched sump. This is not an official Fixed Aid and may be removed without notice. However, the route is on wide ledges and the line is mostly of psychological rather than practical benefit.

The traverse line was installed as a digger's aid and is likely to be removed. The route down at the far end is an abseil. The route is fairly new as until the boulders between it and the start of Hanger Passage were removed there was an awkward climb up. You can now use it as a dry bypass to the Green Canal - assuming you're willing to take an abseil rope, harness and descender through the Long Crawl. It probably makes sense if you're going beyond The Rising 'cos you'll have these anyway and it allows you to stay dry.

Mike McCombe

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Dan yr Ogof is now featured on the [South Wales Cave Project](#) website. This includes a fully interactive survey of the cave with information on the hydrology, surface features, history and lots and lots of pictures.

### **Paul Esser – Porth yr Ogof**

On the 13th February 1971 Paul Esser died in a tragic accident whilst diving in the submerged upper section of the Porth yr Ogof cave system near Ystradfellte. Attempts were made to recover the body over a number of weekends but these were hampered by the weather conditions and the equipment of the time. As a result it was not possible to recover Paul. Since it was the request of his family that no further lives be put at risk to recover Paul, he has remained in the cave since that time. The family recently contacted the South and Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team with regards to the possibility of recovering Paul's remains for burial with his parents. A highly experienced cave diver who is part of the Cave Diving Group visited the site where Paul lay and deduced it would now be possible to remove the remains from the cave. This decision reflects the advances made in cave diving equipment and techniques during the last four decades. In the early 1970's the core techniques and equipment were very much in development. In addition the type and design of cylinders and regulators available seriously limited the time available for dives. Great progress has been made in the equipment, techniques and experience of cave divers since the time of the accident, although cave diving by its very nature remains a dangerous activity. On the 22nd April 2010, two highly experienced cave divers prepared Paul's remains for removal from the cave. Later in the evening, when the area was quiet, Paul's remains were discreetly removed from the cave in the presence of a few members of the family. He will now lie in peace with his parents.

### **South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team**

As well as a number of personnel changes (See the [address list](#)) this year's AGM had huge implications for the Team in terms of Branding.

With the recent dissolution of the Gwent Cave Rescue Team, they became responsible for the area previously covered by them. Since the Teams area of responsibility now stretches from the Severn Estuary in the East to the Pembrokeshire Coast in the West and as far North as Machynlleth, it was felt the inclusion of West Brecon in the title was now misleading. In fact, one committee member was asked in a council meeting in Powys "If you represent the West Brecon Cave Rescue Team, who covers the east side of the town?"

The committee had previously discussed a range of possible names and having settled on their preferred choice, proposed to the AGM that we formally change the name to The South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team.

The result is - Same Team, slightly modified line up, a name that more accurately conveys what they do and where they do it and a [smart new website](#).

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## Explosives in Gwydir Forest Mines

On Friday, 15th January 2010, the *Independent* ran a story in which it was claimed that "A huge cache of abandoned dynamite [had] been discovered in one of the deepest mines in the North Wales forest." The article went on to apparently quote one Robin Murray, a "local fireman and cave rescue specialist" who it claimed had said "There have been incidents in the past where some [explosives] have gone off ... They are highly susceptible to radio signals and sparks because as they decompose they become highly unstable. If this lot went up it would certainly cause a hell of a big hole in the ground."

The story was picked up by the *Western Mail* on 16th January, the words "as they decompose they become highly unstable" in the *Independent* article having been changed to "the sticks are highly volatile because they are so decomposed", which is rather a change of emphasis. The *Western Mail* version also mentions St David's gold mine at Bontddu, although the reason for its inclusion is not entirely clear as there is no suggestion that explosives remain there.

As far as it is possible to tell, the story was started by an incautious comment to a journalist who was writing about the history of the Gwydir mines. The *North Wales Weekly News* had a rather more measured article on 21st January in which Murray was reported as saying "Recent coverage of the dynamite find has been blown out of proportion, pardon the pun. Even if the dynamite sticks were to explode they would be no risk to people on the surface as they are located about 200 metres underground and there is a good chance most of the glycerin [*sic*] has seeped out of them by now."

## Otter Hole

At the start of each new Otter Hole season a trip into the cave is set up to allow existing and prospective new leaders to have the opportunity to go into the cave and check things over, refresh route knowledge and to give the new leaders a chance to pick up tips and information from those with many years service under their belts.

The 2010 Season is set as a year for conservation work within the cave with all the visiting parties being asked to make time within their trips for some re-taping or stal washing so the main plan for the day was to ferry equipment to the further reaches so pressure washers, scrubbing brushes, tape, stakes and a poly pond liner for a new and larger water collection point were split up between the various groups as they set off for the entrance.

With the trip arranged around a between tides cycle those coming in last were a little surprised to still see some from the first wave waiting at the sump with only the "eye hole" open when an easy passage through the lower arch should have been available.

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After waiting for an hour the level had only dropped about 200mm and the lower arch did not reveal itself. Seven of the underground party did take the option of swimming across the sump pool and then making the awkward climb up and through the eye hole.

Those who were not so hardy and not wishing to get a total soaking decided that discretion was the better part of valour, passed on their respective loads and headed back to the entrance, collecting various items of rubbish along the way.

Happily, the sump had opened by the time the intrepid party was ready to leave.

Work on the surface saw the path cleared of undergrowth and branches and the excavation of a route beneath a newly fallen tree. A bit of fettling got the hose pipe running again at the wash off point and anyone who wants to retain their mud pack next year will now be able to use a mirror to ensure an even spread.

Work is also underway to re equip the cave with a new phone link that will run from the existing Rescue Dump beyond the Traverses to Choke 1 and then out to the entrance. This is going to be using the existing cable which has already been checked out and found to be working. The new phone boxes have been made and the exterior joints undertaken and it is hoped that the balance of the work will be completed in the very near future.

The very few dates still available for 2010 will be found by following the links on the [RFDCC website](#).

### **Caver visits to Cambrian Caves**

**Otter Hole**, which is open only in the summer months and operates a strict leader only system of pre booked trips, had a total of 161 visitors in 36 parties.

These numbers included 10 warden only trips, six of them short solo visits to check the crawls. There were 26 visitor trips with 143 people. In 2008 there were 24 trips and 131 visitors.

2009 was actually a much better year with only 3 trips cancelled for bad weather, and 4 failing to pass the sump. There were 7 trips cancelled by the group which is a great shame as other clubs failed to get trips this year. In 2008 14 trips were cancelled for bad weather and 5 by the group.

Visits to **Ogof Craig a Ffynnon** were a little down this year with trips by 194 cavers in 54 parties (232 cavers in 59 parties). This still represents a considerable increase over the recent past with only 30 trips recorded in 2006 and another 30 in 2007.

I don't have numbers for **Daren Cilau** but there were 27 trips into the **Ogof Cnwc** entrance with an estimated 102 cavers (the log book was very muddy). About half the trips were through trips to Daren Cilau including one with no less than 13 members of RFDCC in the party.

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There were 117 trips recorded in the **Ogof Draenen** log book, a total of 352 cavers. The increased traffic (up from 84 trips & 321 cavers) may reflect the recent controversy.

**Agen Allwedd** recorded 91 trips and 315 cavers (104 trips by 340 cavers).

**Ogof Ffynnon Ddu** recorded a small increase in 2009. There were visits by 2586 cavers in 2009 and this compares with 2507 in 2008. This, like 2008, was the highest recorded total since 1999. **Cwmdwr** was actually down with 260 cavers in 68 parties (317-76). There were 135 trips into **OFD I** by a total of 599 cavers (141 trips 500 cavers) and **Top entrance** attracted 1727 cavers in 477 parties (1690 cavers 449 parties). There were only 12 trips to **OFD III**.

On a par with OFD are the caves most visited by outdoor groups. Log books are not maintained but I do have some figures courtesy of Stuart France and the cave counters located in Eglwys Faen and on the path to Ogof Clogwyn. The counter in **Eglwys Faen** records groups rather than individuals and indicates around 250 groups in 2009.

About 2000 individuals were recorded on the caver path to **Ogof Clogwyn** but those figures don't include others who may have approached from different directions.

The data from both these caves indicates that the majority of trips were midweek and around lunchtime.

To put it into a league table the positions for 2009 were

1. OFD – Top Entrance	1727 cavers	477 parties
2. OFD I	599 cavers	135 parties
3. Dan yr Ogof	388 cavers	100 parties
4. Ogof Draenen	352 cavers	117 parties
5. Agen Allwedd	340 cavers	104 parties
6. Cwmdwr	260 cavers	68 parties
7. Daren Cilau	n/k	n/k
8. Craig a Ffynnon	194 cavers	54 parties
9. Otter Hole	161 cavers	36 parties
10. Ogof Cnwc	102 cavers	27 parties

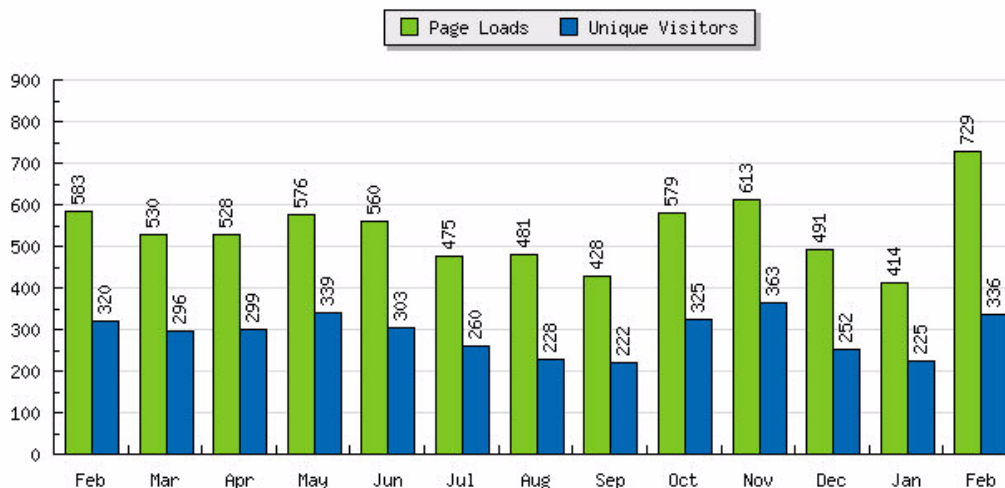
### **Mynydd Llangatwg CMAC**

The next meeting of MLCMAC will be on Friday 14th May 2010. Anybody interested in attending as an observer, or having any issue they want discussed by the committee, including applications for annual keys, please contact the Secretary, Adrian Fawcett.

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## CCC Website

Cambrian Caving Council [Website](#) statistics from Feb 2009 – Feb 2010



That's a total of 3,768 visits in the year – up from 3,340 in 2008-09

## Welsh Mines Access Update

This report attempts to summarise access problems associated with research and recreational use of mines and underground slate quarries in north and mid-Wales. Other activities of the Welsh Mines Society (mainly historical research findings) are detailed in the Society's Newsletter which is published in the spring and autumn of each year.

Note that this report should not be considered definitive as in most cases it is based on second-hand and/or inferred information from a wide variety of sources

*Dave Linton, Welsh Mines Society*

### General

In general, there are no formal access arrangements for the majority of mid- and north Wales mines and entry is without the landowner's approval. Notable exceptions to this are Cwmorthin (see below) and the Parys Mountain and Great Orme copper mines (which are controlled by their own local groups with access on a guided party basis).

A number of mines and underground slate quarries are used by outdoor activity centres, some of which have made exclusive access arrangements with the landowner concerned. In the case of the exclusive access cases, with the current exception of Pandora, it is sometimes possible for trips to be arranged through the individual activity centres, which generally provide a leader for such trips. However, such arrangements are very informal and usually depend on personal contacts.

Access issue developments over the last year are discussed below.

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### **Braich Goch slate quarry** SH748078

*Underground slate workings, part of which is in use as the 'King Arthur's Labyrinth' underground tourist attraction near Corris. The workings connect with the Gaerwen underground slate quarry and contain many interesting artefacts including a timbered incline down a tip and an air (ex-steam) winch.*

This is now in use as a commercial visitor attraction (providing guided underground historical mine tours) by Corris Mine Explorers. The operator has cleared litter and non-historical graffiti from the quarry and preserved artefacts from damage. Supervised access has been granted to recreational groups on occasion.

### **Cwmorthin slate quarry** SH681459

*Extensive underground slate quarry providing underground trips of both sporting and historical interest.*

There have been reports in *Descent* that the floor 2 adit 'smoke flue' has again collapsed. This is not the case and the route continues to be available as an alternative/emergency exit.

In old vein chamber 8 east a block of slate appears to be peeling away from the pillar directly over the steps between floor A and floor C. Unfortunately, these steps are on part of the 'round trip' through the quarry and are well used by visitors to the quarry. The Friends of Cwmorthin recommend that people do not pass through this chamber.

Negotiations continue between the 'Friends of Cwmorthin' landowners and other parties concerning access and continuing works to ensure stability of entrances etc.

### **Gwynfynydd gold mine** SH736282

*Gold mine, provides interesting underground trip with many artefacts from various phases of operation in situ.*

The planning application (NP5/60/6J) to build a holiday complex on the site plus demolition of most of the existing mine buildings and landscaping of surface industrial features has been withdrawn by the developer. The application (NP5/60/6H) for a two storey side extension to Ty Mawr (the mine manager's house) and change of its use from dwelling to two holiday units has been refused. The existing mine buildings are now much degraded due to vandalism.

### **Maenofferen slate quarry** SH708465

*Extensive underground and (working) surface slate quarry associated with the Llechwedd working quarry and tourist attraction and the Votty (Foty) and Bowydd quarries. The underground part has many important historical features such as the power inclines and machine-bored tunnels. The quarry was in use until recently and consequently many of the historical remains are in comparatively good condition. It is understood that the mill buildings are listed.*

The deterioration of the condition of the surface buildings due to weather and vandalism, and extensive pillaging for scrap continues.



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There have been significant ground movements on the side of Votty pit below the Maenofferen mills area. Large cracks have opened in and around the road leading to the mills. The floor of Cooke's level (Maenofferen floor B) collapsed into Votty chambers in places and there have been subsequent falls in Cooke's which have now closed the western reaches of this level.

### **Milwr Tunnel and associated mines**

*The Olwyn Goch shaft gives access to the 10 mile drainage tunnel, extensive lead workings and a large underground limestone quarry. The outflow from the tunnel is used (in part) for industrial water supply.*

The entrance to the level which connects with the Olwyn Goch shaft (which is the main access point to the explorable section of the Milwr Tunnel and associated mines) has been plugged with concrete and backfilled with hardcore by the Grosvenor Caving Club. GCC, who control access for recreational purposes, continue in negotiations with United Utilities and are hopeful of re-establishing authorised access, but their recent action apparently follows unauthorised access by a group that had forced entry.

### **Diary**

May 2 <sup>nd</sup>	OFD Columns Open Day
May 6 <sup>th</sup>	GCRG Annual General Meeting
May 14 <sup>th</sup>	Mynnydd Llangatwg CMAC meeting
May 20 <sup>th</sup>	NWCRO Rescue Practice
May 22 <sup>nd</sup>	SMWCRT Rescue Practice, Daren Cilau
May 30 <sup>th</sup>	OFD Columns Open Day
June 4 <sup>th</sup> – 6 <sup>th</sup>	NAMHO Conference, Coalpit Heath, Bristol
June 6 <sup>th</sup>	GCRG Rescue Practice
June 17 <sup>th</sup>	NWCRO Rescue Practice
June 19 <sup>th</sup>	SMWCRT Rescue Practice, Mid Wales Mines
July 15 <sup>th</sup>	NWCRO Rescue Practice

### **Cambrian Caving Council Officers**

**Chair** Bernie Woodley [e-mail](#)  
**Secretary** Mike McCombe [e-mail](#)  
**Treasurer** Robin Weare [e-mail](#)  
**Conservation Officer** Elsie Little [e-mail](#)  
**Training Officer** currently vacant  
**Equipment Officer** Andy Lewington [e-mail](#)  
**Legal & Insurance Officer** Owen Clarke [e-mail](#)  
**Registrar** Brendan Marris [e-mail](#)  
**Webmaster** Barry Hill [e-mail](#)  
**Newsletter Editor** Robin Weare [e-mail](#)