

CAMBRIAN CAVING COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER April 2013

Editorial

For many years we have been fortunate to work with the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) as the controller of the nature reserves which contain some of our major cave systems. CCW ceased to exist on 31st March when their functions were taken over by National Resources Wales. They have always been approachable and helpful and have had a hugely positive influence on caving in the region. Farewell CCW and thank you.

No thanks, though, to the persons who attacked the Agen Allwedd gate and stole the locks at Ogof Draenen; incurring significant expense for the respectable part of the caving community.

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

Greenbridge Cave and Ogof Dydd Byraf

Cambrian Caving Council now controls access to Greenbridge Cave, near Pendine, on behalf of the owner but, because of problems between local persons I would ask that anyone who intends to visit the cave rings me to arrange for a key and to have an update on the current situation. We also have permission to visit Ogof Dydd Byraf, further up the valley but the same proviso about ringing for an update does also apply.

Elsie Little, Conservation & Access Officer

Ogof Tardiadd Rhymney

Thanks to Ruth Revell for reporting that her recent visit only got as far as the entrance before she beat a hasty retreat as there were huge rocks coming down from the quarry above. As the party was leaving an even bigger rock fall was heard.

If you go there – take care.

It's worth a reminder that during evenings and weekends the access road is gated just beyond the old Severn Valley hut at Trefil.

Cavers Walk

Our Training Officer has arranged a walk in the Cribarth area looking at geology, hydrology etc. on 15th September. It will be led by Alan Bowring of the Fforest Fawr Geopark – which means it will be good and greatly informative. More details next time but for now put a note in the diary.

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Cambrian SRT Training in North Wales

Cambrian has put on several SRT workshops in South Wales but recently we managed to organise one for North Wales. Two instructors travelled from South Wales to work alongside two from North Wales with ten trainees.

We managed to get permission to use an outside high ropes course for the Saturday which allowed numerous ropes to be hung out in the sunshine for the ten course members to go up and down all day long.

There were a lot of new techniques taught to those who have used a mixture of climbing and caving techniques to explore the mines of North Wales. This is justified in an area where there are few truly vertical pitches and very little ascending takes place as most mines allow a higher entrance to be used with abseils down to a lower entrance.

However this was a SRT workshop and the plan was to teach SRT! The Saturday went really well and eight of the participants agreed to join a trip to Cwmorthin on the Sunday. The weather was not as good as Saturday so the short walk up the hill was damp.

Dena and Gethin and most of the course members knew the mine well, but most had not been on any of the contrived but exciting pitches before. It was all new to me and Dan so once Gethin and Dena had told us where we were to work we had a bit of an explore while the course members got to grips with sorting their SRT kits out.

There are many fixed ropes in the mine and we were to use one which was rigged with a very high traverse line - meaning that we had to adjust our cowstails to use it. A few hours passed going up and down and putting into practice what had been learned on Saturday. People were beginning to flag and so after a stop for lunch those that knew the mine well offered to take those that didn't for a tour.

I for one was really grateful, the scale of the whole place is incredible, huge chambers, huge inclines, old carts, miners' artefacts and little modern additions such as waterwheels for lighting and tyroleans made for an enjoyable couple of hours.

Richard Hill, Training Officer

Some comments from the course participants:

To some people mine exploration, caving and pot holing are names for the darker side of leisure activities spent underground, such as by our small course group, or just another enjoyable working day for our excellent instructors. But to understand what 'mine exploration' really means and to experience the thrill of exploration underground, we needed to sign up for a course such as our weekend organised by Cambrian CC, where we met other members, who brought their own stories, skills, experiences and enthusiasm that made for a most interesting weekend.

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So we turned up for the SRT course at Rhos-y-Gwaliau (outside Bala) as a mixed bunch, ranging from novices such as ourselves to 'old hands'. I was taken aback to be greeted by a cheery 'I know you' from Richard (the course leader). I was clearly baffled, until he reminded me that I had considered buying his open boat some years ago! Intros over, we all headed off to the Get Wet High Ropes Course, where many of us were told to discard our treasured gear, forget what we'd learnt ('don't use that Whillans harness') and get into SRT mode which enabled us to experience the discomfort of the hunchback of Notre Dame, while learning the intricacies of Petzl ascenders, barrel knots rather than figure of eights, the frustration of poor co-ordination, soft and hard locks, and to avoid 'clutch and plummet.' My figure of eight stayed well out of sight in my sack along with my other climbing gear – by the end of day one, I was convinced that the SRT kit for cavers is far better suited for the darker side.

Over to Cwmorthin slate mine on Sunday for a taste of the real thing ... familiar territory for many of the group, but not for us. The secure barred iron entrance gate to the mine was locked behind us as we set off into the darkness to our designated practice area. First, we had to remember how to re-assemble the kit on the SRT harness in the correct order. Extra clothing meant nothing fitted properly. Then, it was announced we had to adjust our cow's tails as it was difficult to reach the safety line on some parts of the traverse – so our tails were extended/swapped/discarded. Traverse completed (who looked down to the floor 30 metres below?), we abseiled from the narrow ledge and split into sub-groups for a while, with more ascending and descending practice. This time passed enjoyably – co-ordination improved, hunch backs were accepted and jammers jammed at the right time. Great! Later, we were rewarded with a trip to the caban, a scramble up a tunnel, a visit to the waterwheel, switched on the lights, signed the visitor book, paddled in the water, slogged back up the incline to our dumped kit, and regrettably we headed back out through the gate into the warm late afternoon sunshine. A great day out (in?), up and down, made complete by a nice paned* and chat in Blaenau at the house of one of our group members.

*cup of tea [Ed.]

Many thanks for a great weekend. You chaps certainly taught me a few good lessons!! I have since tried a cavers SRT harness and am still slow ascending but am a lot better than when I used my work harness. Strange that the harness I have is recommended for all types of access work including SRT. Hope to see you in a mine or cave sometime.

I thoroughly enjoyed myself and learnt even more than I'd expected. The combination of Saturday at the high ropes course followed by Sunday underground in Cwmorthin worked perfectly and gave me the confidence to tackle heights that previously I would have avoided. I felt that all the instructors' teaching methods were spot-on, taking the time to explain the reasoning behind techniques, which makes them so much easier to understand and remember. And to top it all, what a nice bunch of people to spend the weekend with!

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Thanks very much to the Cambrian Caving Council for putting on an excellent SRT workshop weekend. I really enjoyed the course and the instructors were very professional and informative. I had no experience in SRT and they had us juggling up ropes in no time! The first day learning basic SRT techniques at the high ropes course was really good and we were lucky enough to get nice sunny weather. The second day, spent in Cwmorthin Slate Mine was equally as good and it gave us a good opportunity to put all our newly acquired skills to the test! Thanks for putting on such a good weekend I would recommend it to anybody that would like to know more about SRT!

Bat White Nose Syndrome

This is just a reminder, that White Nose Syndrome (WNS) is a fatal disease to bats and is still a real risk to both bats and our caving in the UK. In North America it has decimated populations of bats which seem to succumb during winter. It has now been shown that the fungus *Geomyces destructans*, which causes WNS, can live in cave soil for months, even after bat populations have been wiped out.

It remains very important that everyone visiting caves does everything possible not to introduce this fungus accidentally from caves abroad, either from USA **or** from mainland Europe, where the fungus has also been detected. It is possible that bats in Mainland Europe *may* have some immunity to WNS. The fungus has not been detected here in the UK; if found it is likely to impact significantly on caving activities as well as having a devastating impact on bats.

If entering any cave / mine outside the UK, please ensure that ALL kit, including boots, overalls, gloves, belt, helmet, lights, kit bags and ropes, etc., is carefully washed and cleaned, preferably **prior** to returning to the UK. All kit should also be sprayed with a disinfectant containing a fungicide before further use. Some suitable products are listed on the Bat Conservation Trust's Frequently Asked Questions [web page](#).

If anyone sees a suspect bat, dead or alive, with white fungus around the nose or face, in the UK during its hibernation:

- Report urgently details of location to the Bat Conservation Trust and to their Local Bat Group.
- Wash and decontaminate all clothing and kit used prior to **any** further caving.
- Ask your local Caving Club to circulate their members so further visits to that site are postponed until a sample can be taken, and the 'all clear' given.

David Priddis
Chairman, Gloucestershire Bat Group

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Conservation at Llygad Llŵchwr II

Direct surface access into this extension of the main cave beyond the sumps was achieved in early 2011. An electronic counter was installed in the dry upper series in March 2011 whilst taping and other conservation measures were undertaken. It was subsequently read in December 2011 and February 2013, its batteries capable of lasting over 2 years. On each of these visits to collect data the cave was inspected and found to be in near pristine condition, and the fears that the site would be over-run with groups visiting the nearby main cave have not been realized. Visitor levels remain low. In March-December 2011 the cave was visited on only 25 days, and in all of 2012 it was only visited on 19 days.

The counter has an internal 20 second timer, so it records one count when first triggered and then goes dormant until there has been 20 seconds of no further activity. The same group or individual might trigger it several times while spending time taking photos. The raw counts therefore represent an activity index, not individuals or group numbers. However the counts are logged against a particular hour and date, in fact as timestamps to the second, so it possible to guess if more than one group was present on the same day (rare) and also see the time of day and day of week distribution of events of long periods of time such as a year. Visits are so rare that on any day when there was any activity recorded it can be assumed there was only one group there, and this can be checked by the hourly distribution. On that basis there were about 25 groups in 2011 from March onwards and 19 groups in all of 2012. If the average group size is around 3 then the usage level is 50-75 cavers per year.

The counter evidence makes it clear that the cave is not being used by commercial groups coming midweek after a visit primarily to enter Llygad Llŵchwr 1, the main cave. In Llygad Llŵchwr 2, much of the caver activity takes place at weekends and in the afternoons or evenings.

However, Tuesdays were the busiest weekday, and plenty of events were recorded in the middle of the day from 11am-2pm. A Tuesdays-only query on the database shows that most Tuesday visitors came in the evening, so unlikely to be commercial use. Similarly, the database can be queried to discover on which days the 11am-2pm visitors tend to come (it is weekends).

In the period March 2012 to February 2013 Sundays were the most popular day, followed by Wednesdays, and no counts were recorded before 11am on any day. An All-Wednesdays-by-hour-of-day query shows these visitors came mainly in the evenings, and an All-11am-2pm-by-day-of-week query shows the mid-day visitors came mainly at weekends.

The logbook shows far fewer visits than the counter recorded, and this may be due to the book being out of sight, or pencils broken, or down to personal choice.

Stuart France

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Agen Allwedd Gate

On Saturday 6th April a group broke into Agen Allwedd by cutting the hasp off the gate. It looked as if a power tool had been used, and although not the only attempt at a forced entry in recent years, certainly the most determined. It is not thought there was any damage done to the cave itself other than a few chalk marks and some cairns for navigation.

The identity of the group is unknown, although it is suspected that they are not from the local area. Cavers should perhaps be extra vigilant in case these people have plans to visit any other gated caves. The police are investigating the incident.

The gate had to be removed for repairs and has now been refitted but currently there are some problems with it, preventing it from being closed and opened from the inside. Hopefully this will be resolved very shortly, but in the meantime it is even more important than usual to leave call-out arrangements in case you inadvertently get locked in!

Adrian Fawcett
MLCMAC Secretary

Pwll Du News

It is with great sadness that I must report recent incidents regarding the lock at Ogof Draenen. Twice in February and once in the build-up to Easter the padlock on the cave gate was removed by persons unknown and replaced with a different lock. In each case the PDCMG were rapidly able to rectify the situation, but not without some wasted trips for some visiting cavers. As there have been no signs of forced entry it sadly appears that disruption has been instigated by a caver(s) with access to the key. Given the special padlocks used on the cave gate cost £90 each, this means that the PDCMG has entailed additional costs of £270. This will ultimately have to be recouped from caving clubs. Reluctantly, as these costs mounted it was considered appropriate to inform the police of the disruption, which they are currently investigated on behalf of ourselves and the landowner.

In better news the Pwll Du Adventure Centre, which is located above the cave, is now open for business again. Peter and Ann Jones, who live in the adjacent farm and are also landowners for Ogof Draenen, have recently finished renovating the Centre. I had a sneak preview tour as the finishing touches were being put to the modernisation and the facilities look great. The Centre sleeps 24 and is designed to suit large groups or extended families. In the main the Centre will be let for sole use, but last minute bunk by bunk accommodation may also be booked if there is availability. At £17 per person per night the rates are above a normal caving club weekend, but the facilities and situation would suit special events. Further details may be found at <http://www.pwllduadventurecentre.co.uk/>.

Fleur Loveridge, PDCMG Secretary.

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Ogof Cnwc

Stuart France has produced an interesting comparison of the results from the caver counter in Ogof Cnwc with the entries in the log book.

The log book shows 37 trips by a total of 97 cavers in 2012 and 9 of those trips were through trips.

The caver counter also recorded 22 extra parties leaving Cnwc which are assumed to have been through trips from the Daren end.

Unsurprisingly, most of the counter hits occurred between the hours of 10am and 8pm and over 75% of visits were at weekends.

Update on access rules at Dan Yr Ogof

The DYOCAC showcaves have introduced some change in access conditions at DYOCAC. This covers frequency of trips and includes a 1 year moratorium on digging.

Please see details below from the showcave:-

It is always going to be a difficult task to balance the needs of exploration with conservation of the cave as a whole, but digging causes much more wear and tear than anything else.

The Company has decided to impose the following additional access conditions, and hopes for your support over this matter:-

- 1. A limit from now on of one trip per week per person, except for work on specific projects agreed by DYOCAC, and wardens leading guest parties organised via the DYOCAC Secretary.**
- 2. There will be a 12-month moratorium on all digging, and any related digging equipment e.g. all heavy equipment including scaffold poles, drills etc., etc., No digging equipment of any kind may be taken into the cave except for use in maintaining approved fixed aids.**

During the period of the moratorium, conservation work and surveying will take place.

Brendan Marris
Secretary DYOCAC

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Caves and Karst of the Yorkshire Dales

This major new book from BCRA, edited by Tony Waltham and David Lowe, was published in March 2013 with a cover price of **£25**. There is a special introductory price of **£20** until 30 June 2013. Delivery in the UK is included in this price. [Further Information](#).

To order online, [click here](#) to make a payment of £20 to the **BCRA bookshop** account. You can pay online by credit or debit card

BCA/BCRA Party Weekend

New for 2013 BCA has joined together with BCRA to host a **Party Weekend** based at the **Rotary Centre, Castleton**.

Taking place over the weekend of 14-16 June 2013, the weekend combines a late bar, hog roast, band and disco with some introductory cave science workshops and the BCA AGM. The venue is suitably remote and has plenty of on-site bunkroom accommodation, as well as space for tents. Importantly the bar will be run by cavers and all profits from the weekend will go to the Ghar Parau Foundation. All BCA members are encouraged to attend. For enquiries or bookings for either the accommodation or the workshops, please contact the BCA Secretary, Damian Weare, at secretary@british-caving.org.uk.

Further details plus a provisional programme of events can be downloaded from <http://tinyurl.com/BCA-Party>

NAMHO Conference in Aberystwyth

The next NAMHO conference, is to be based in Aberystwyth from 28th June - 1st July 2013. Full details [here](#)

Fforest Fawr Geopark Festival

The full programme for the 2013 festival is now available on the Geopark [website](#) and includes several walks in areas of interest to cavers. The Festival is 16 days of walks, talks and other events between Saturday 25th May and Sunday 9th June and has to be well worth checking out.

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Buzz Magazine goes to OFD

A visit by some of their staff resulted in a [double page spread](#) in the Feb Issue, with pictures. They do seem to have enjoyed themselves.

Otter Hole DVD

Paul Taylor's excellent hour-long film on Otter Hole is now available on DVD.

This is not the original Sid Perou film from the 80s, but a new one following Dave 'Sparky' Parker, one of the original Otter diggers, on his first ever trip to the Hall of Thirty (aged 73) in 2010. The trip took 12.5 hours and all who accompanied Dave will remember it for the rest of their lives.

The film was premiered to a sell-out crowd at the Palace Cinema in Cinderford and it won 3rd prize in the Napoli Film Festival.

Copies are available from Paul Taylor priced at £12.00 each plus P & P (which will be around £1.50 within the UK). A proportion of the proceeds will go to the Gloucester Cave Rescue Group. More details [here](#)

Welsh Mines and Mining

The second issue of Welsh Mines and Mining has now been published. The volume contains the proceedings of the Welsh Mines Society Conference at Machynlleth in October 2010. The order form is at http://www.welshmines.org/wms/publ/02_flier.pdf

Details of other publications (including back numbers of Newsletters on line) can be found on the Welsh Mines Society website at <http://www.welshmines.org/>

North Wales CRO

In April NWCRO held a succesful full day underground practice at Grand Turk at Minera. There was a good team turn out enabling a full casualty extraction from the cave. This included a stretcher carry along the stooping stream way, a drag though the low crawl and haul up the pitch.

The next practice will a surface orientated day at Plas y Brenin on the 19th May. This will concenrate on aspects such as communications, first aid and stretcher hauling. The day will be followed by the AGM at 5pm.

NWCRO has recently signed up for BT's free on-line donation service. For more information see the team's [website](#)

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Diary

May 2	GCRG AGM 7.30pm	Cinderford
May 5	Columns Open Day	OFD
May 8 – 20	Euro Speleo Forum	Millau, France
May 10	MLCMAC Meeting	Abergavenny
May 19	NWCRO Techniques Meet & AGM	Plas y Brenin
May 23	GCRG Wardens Training	Cinderford
May 25		
– Jun 9	Fforest Fawr Geopark Festival	Various Locations
May 26	Columns Open Day	OFD
June 2	GCRG Training Day	Wigpool Mine
June 8	Pwll Ddu CMG Meeting	TBC
June 15/16	BCA Cave Science Event & AGM	Castleton, Derbys
June 28	NAMHO Conference	Aberystwyth

Cambrian Caving Council Officers

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