

May 2014

Issue 41

# WALES UNDERGROUND

The Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

## Access news in brief:

- New Cambrian team to prioritise access agreements
- Cambrian joining BMC lobbying group to encourage publication of the Green Paper on better Countryside Access in Wales
- Cambrian unreservedly opposed the A465 Clydach Gorge dual carriageway at Public Inquiry
- The NRW underground access agreement as amended is back with NRW for their approval
- Cambrian may need to set up a non-profit company to operate such access agreements safely

## Inside this issue:

Overseas Expedition	2
Forest of Dean News	2
European Speleological Federation News	2
Access and Conservation (continued)	3
Valé George Hall	4
CCC Officers List	4

Photo credits:  
John Stevens  
Dave Tyson  
Stuart France

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## ACCESS AND CONSERVATION

There are a significant number of new faces on Cambrian Caving Council this year with five first-timers elected at the March AGM. Besides myself based in South Wales as Conservation Officer, Martyn Farr is now Chairman and needs no introduction. Fraser Stephens from Brynmawr Caving Club joins as Legal & Insurance Officer. He is an experienced charity professional having worked with Oxfam, MSF and Save The Children, and on the legal side of smaller charities too.

The North Wales team is Dave Tyson, Secretary of Wirral Caving Club, who is the new CCC Secretary and Ian Adams, Secretary of UCET, who is now our Treasurer. Dave has an IT background and Ian is an accountant. Both clubs are active in the North Wales mining scene as well as caving up in the north generally.

The Cambrian Committee is completed by Richard Hill undertaking sterling work with training; Vince Allkins continuing with equipment and fixed aids, representing us on the BCA E&T committee; Brendan Marris running the Cambrian cave registry; and not forgetting our web manager Barry Hill.

The guiding principle shared by the new team is to prioritise access. Indeed, Cambrian's own constitution says that access should be maintained and improved whenever the opportunity presents itself whilst encouraging cave conservation. This is similar to the way in which the equivalent BCA documents are phrased.



Parc Lead Mine in the Gwydyr Forest will be on the initial list of NRW sites in the agreement pioneered by Elsie Little

But there is a body of opinion that feels conservation has become the tail wagging the caving dog. Widely trodden floors in OFD 2 are cited as an example of troubles resulting from new access routes, but in reality this is an example (albeit quite understandable) of a management issue from decades ago in not placing tapes nor any other conservation measures besides a gate to prevent such damage. In recent years a counter-example is Llygad Lluchwr 2 which has ungated access. This was taped before becoming widely known, and so there has been relatively little untoward there.

If we do not have any access then there is no need to think about cave conservation. In the absence of straightforward access all we will have is cave preservation where nobody gets to go anywhere and nothing new gets discovered.

*continued on page 3*

## TRAINING NEWS

### Photography workshop

Saturday 7th June 2014 led by Brendan Marris. Six places. Book direct with Brendan.



### Bat Walk and Talk

Saturday 14th June 2014 led by Monmouthshire Bat Group. Twelve places. Meet at 20:30 for a 20:45 start at Pendarren House in Llangenny near Crickhowell, NP8 1HE. A walk follows a short indoors session, finishing about 22:00. Bring good outdoor clothing for the weather, a torch and, if you own one, a bat detector (some

will be made available). There is no fee, but any donations to South Wales Bat Hospital will be gratefully received. Book your place with Richard Hill.

### Cave Surveying Workshop

Autumn date to be decided. Book this with Richard Hill.

*Email addresses for Brendan and Richard are on page 4.*



Mineral stained flowstone, Parys mine



Copper stained flowstone, Parys mine



Copper salt crystals, Parys mine

## Overseas Expedition Grants

I am sorry to have to report that there have been significant delays in the processing of the Overseas Expedition Grants for 2014/1015. Paul Dancey (Welsh Sport Association) has reported that Sport Wales has not yet confirmed the level of funding offered to the WSA to support its program and a decision is unlikely before May.

It seems likely that funding will be cut and this may have a significant impact on the WSA proposed program for 2014/2015 with the WSA board being forced to drop some elements if funding is cut drastically. It is possible that the

Overseas Expedition and/or Safety Grants may be severely cut or dropped completely. Until the funding level is known the WSA cannot convene the panel to decide the existing grant requests and since funding has to be approved in advance of expeditions departure, the longer the delay, the more chance that expeditions will lose funding.

We will just have to wait for Sport Wales to sort out the funding level and, in turn, the WSA to decide how their funds will be split.

*Dave Tyson, Secretary*

## Forest of Dean News

### Bixhead Stone Mine (NGR SO 5995 1095)

Evaluation work is set to be undertaken at the beginning of March 2014 by the quarry owners to undertake the removal of a quantity of stone from within the underground workings. Cavers are instructed not to visit the underground workings or to make use of the quarry walls for abseiling or climbing. This is as per a directive received by FoDCCAG (Forest of Dean Cave Conservation and Access Group) from the Deputy Gaveler, Bank House, Coleford, 14/02/2014.

If this work proves to be feasible, and financially viable, then long term extraction of stone

will be the next stage and the restrictions for visits by cavers will be extended for the duration. If you have any questions or queries relating to this matter please send them to us at: [enquiries@fodccag.co.uk](mailto:enquiries@fodccag.co.uk).

*Paul Taylor, Chairman, FoDCCAG*

### Forest of Dean Caving Symposium Cancelled

This event at Parkend on June 27-29th has unfortunately had to be cancelled.

*Robin Weare*

## 2014 DIARY

### Saturday 17 May

Cave Rescue Practice, OFD  
[www.smwrcrt.org](http://www.smwrcrt.org)

### Saturday 7 June

Photography Workshop, Wales  
contact Brendan Marris

### Saturday 14 June

Bat Walk and Talk, Llangenny  
contact Richard Hill

### July 25-27

NAMHO Conference, Bangor  
[www.namho.org/bangor2014/](http://www.namho.org/bangor2014/)

### August 22-24

EuroSpeleo Forum, Romania  
[www.speleoevent.ro](http://www.speleoevent.ro)

### Autumn

Cave Surveying Workshop, Wales  
contact Richard Hill

## European Speleological Federation News

The European Speleological Federation (FSE) and its European Cave Protection Commission (ECPC) have announced the launching of the 2014 EuroSpeleo Protection Label. The deadline for applications is 31st May 2014. The application form will be posted shortly on the FSE website: <http://eurospeleo.eu/en/commissions-en/cave-protection/ecpc-activities/eurospeleo-protection-label.html>

The aim of the EuroSpeleo Protection Label is to encourage active cave protection in speleo clubs, committees, national commissions etc, all over Europe and to share this knowledge throughout Europe.

The FSE/ECPC would like to recognize quality projects among the speleological community which are helping to find better solutions for cave protection by awarding them with the EuroSpeleo Protection Label.

This award should also provide some financial support to allow continuation of the important work that has been carried out by the award-winning clubs, committees and commissions, because we all must seek to preserve our speleological heritage for future generations.

This year FSE has decided to make an award for the **best two** projects submitted, as follows:

The **First Prize** winner will be awarded the EuroSpeleo Protection Label, 500 euro cash, and caving equipment prize from the list below.

The **Second Prize** winner will receive a caving equipment prize from the list below.

Competition entrants should state their first and second choice of equipment prize, either 500m Beal rope or 565 Euro of AV gear or a Scurion lamp, which are subject to availability.

## ACCESS AND CONSERVATION continued from page 1

Caving has been left behind in the Welsh Government review of the operation of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW) in Wales. We have some catching up to do, and it has been left late in the day. Other national bodies like the British Mountaineering Council are well ahead of cavers in seeking wider definitions of CROW "Access Land" to suit rock climbing interests (see [www.thebmc.co.uk/openwales](http://www.thebmc.co.uk/openwales)) and the BMC has lobbied the Welsh Sport Minister at Gogarth, a 500ft sea cliff on Anglesey, since the coast is climbers' main access improvement target. The government Green Paper on access has not yet appeared, which is a worrying sign.

Dave Tyson and Stuart France have met the BMC's Wales Access Officer, based at Plas-y-Brenin, for guidance and to enrol Cambrian in a lobby group led by the BMC to encourage the appearance of a favourable Green Paper.

An interesting and thoughtful article by Tim Allen on how the CROW Act is and could be operated and interpreted appeared in the current issue of *Descent*. This follows up on an article at the end of 2013 looking at the proportion of caves in Yorkshire which are on CROW Access Land and the impact any change in CROW Act interpretation would have. A CROW thread has started up on the UKcaving forum too recently, and readers might like to follow up these information sources and read the discussion.

The new Cambrian members from North Wales, along with almost everyone active there, are very keen to see the underground access agreement begun by the late Elsie Little with the former Forestry Commission Wales, which is now part of Natural Resources Wales, brought to fruition. Since attending Cambrian AGMs in South Wales and the Forest of Dean since the 1980s, I cannot recollect North Wales ever having been represented. It is intended to hold the next Cambrian AGM in North Wales, again a first, I believe, and then take it to different regions in Wales plus the Forest of Dean to bring about a fairer geographic pattern for all those wishing to attend it.

Soon after starting as the Cambrian Access/Conservation Officer, I learned that the draft FCW access agreement was unworkable and unworkable as it stood in March 2014. It was in the form of a lengthy, onerous and legalistic contract – the very opposite of a gentlemen's agreement. I have now re-drafted it to inject

more realism to reflect what cavers can actually deliver to further NRW's aims, and to take administrative effort off their hands, but it is still a weighty formal contract.

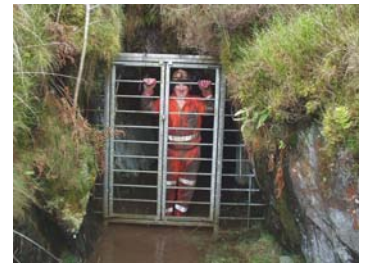
Cambrian should receive a response from NRW in May to our redraft sent to them on 7 April – only four weeks after the Cambrian AGM. Having prepared the ground with NRW's land agent, it is anticipated that NRW will accept this revised contract, but that significant risks will remain within it. Cambrian is considering placing all access agreements inside a 'legal wrapper' to minimize personal liability.

This wrapper could be a non-profit company limited by guarantee which is a similar legal device to that used by the BMC, Charterhouse Caving Company, Cambrian Mines Trust, Welsh Mines Preservation Society, Mountain Bothies Association, and other clubs who run property or events like winch meets. This limits operator liability in the event that insurance fails to cover the eventualities. How Cambrian member clubs can participate in an underground access management company, should they not wish to distance themselves fully from whatever liability will nevertheless remain, is an open question and I would like to receive ideas please during May from member clubs.

You might think there is little risk of things going so badly wrong as to be sued. But in the present climate opportunistic claimants are a commodity for some legal firms, and courts will bend over backwards to assist them. The summons is only the start of a long and unpleasant process that is very costly in money and stress even if you win outright or just end up goring your opponent significantly. So we must recognize and manage our risks as an access control body, and not stick our heads in the sand concerning civil law as practiced today.

The NRW access contract has involved me in holding meetings, much research and negotiation since the March AGM. Besides the NRW land agent, I have also met with Outdoor Education Providers (OEPs) in North Wales who use a few mines for professionally-led visits, and with some mining history bodies in Ceredigion, and discussions with key people in organisations that operate inside limited-guarantee companies on how best to do that.

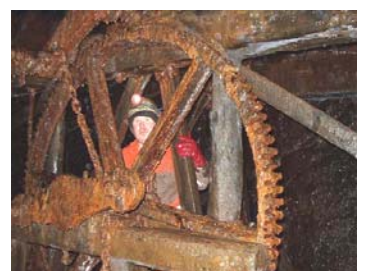
*continued overleaf*



Most disused mines are secured against accidental access to prevent accidents to the public and farm livestock. This is a legal duty under the 1990 Environmental Protection Act, not just to be a nuisance to cavers and mine explorers.

Cambrian will endeavour to create new access agreements with landowners to allow responsible sport and research activity to take place at sites like these.

**"You might think there is little risk of things going so badly wrong as to be sued, but Cambrian may place all access agreements inside a not-for-profit company to limit personal liability"**



Old mines often contain the machinery of a bygone era, of interest to cavers as well as mining history society members



## The Cambrian Caving Council

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## George Hall - Welsh Mines Society

Welsh Mines Society (WMS) President George Hall, a well-known and respected figure in mining circles and the Honorary President of the Welsh Mines Society, died in July 2013 at the age of 89. His papers have been retained for research and are in the process of being collated. This is likely to take some time and a decision on a final home has yet to be made, but the intention is to keep the collection together. It is planned to digitize most of the collection; this includes the plans, many of which are quite frail, and professional advice is being sought on photographing or scanning them. When this work is finished it is hoped the collection will be made available online and for research. It would be appreciated if requests for specific items of material from the collection are not made until the above work is finished.

As a related activity, WMS intend to edit and publish George's draft M.Phil. dissertation "Metal Mining in mid-Wales 1822-1921" in their series "Welsh Mines and Mining".

*Dave Linton, Welsh Mines Society*

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Please send news items, short articles, and interesting or newsworthy photos for the next issue to Dave Tyson by 27th June 2014

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## ACCESS AND CONSERVATION continued from page 3

The dozen or so underground sites on NRW's initial list to be authorized for caver access now includes Parc Lead Mine in the Gwydyr Forest, the Rhiwbach slate mine at Penmachno along with a couple of other smaller mines in the north. In mid-Wales there are some large and interesting slate mines included near to Corris and Abergynolwyn. The most southerly site will be the Roman Lead Mines at Draethen. This site list is a schedule to the main contract so that it can easily be extended later.

All of these sites will need assessment visits to create site management plans for each location then agreed with NRW. We will need to make inspections from time to time also and to keep written records. Help with work on the ground is needed please, in a sort of adopt-a-cave-or-mine-in-our-area scheme. Cavers and OEPs must develop understanding and trust since the latter may leave the few sites that they regularly visit rigged with their own ropes and other private equipment for their clients' use.

I know clubs will be disappointed with the ongoing delay with formalising access, but this is because the contract that I inherited was definitely not 'almost on the point of signing' as some people thought. But in the long run things should turn out for the best since we should now create a proper legal

framework for operating access control, and it will be an appropriate system for all of Cambrian's future access agreements.

NRW work consumed almost all my efforts over the first six weeks in this new post and I hope that the NRW jigsaw will be almost organized, if not all the little pieces locked together, in a few months time when there will be another Cambrian Newsletter.

Another matter I have dealt with at short notice is Section 2 of the A465 dualling road scheme, which is the Clydach Gorge section. This went to Public Inquiry. Some late-breaking Alternative Proposals (APs) emerged at that, the most significant of which was AP5 which basically is a proposal not to dual the gorge at all. Under AP5 the section from Gilwern Saleyard to Brynmawr would remain 3-lane, as it is now. On your behalf, I sent a letter setting out a case of why AP5 should be adopted on conservation and cost grounds, and also undermining the evidence base for the RP (the government's Recommended Proposal) which is for a full dual carriageway here.

Regarding other landowners, I am trying to open a dialogue with Welsh Water, where a paper licence application for Ogof Carno access was said to have been submitted during 2013 by former Cambrian officers.

But there is no paperwork at all in the files that I have inherited nor any trail of negotiations. Nothing has seemingly ever been documented either for other sites at which Cambrian has had an interest, including Green Bridge Cave and Ogof Capel and some digs on forestry land. So there is catching up to do across the board, not just with CROW.

The council will endeavour in the coming months to obtain the best possible outcomes for all of these sites so that cavers and mine explorers can more freely pursue their respective interests.

All of the Cambrian officers would like to receive feedback, aspirations and inspirations from member clubs and individual cavers. For me, my ccc@linetop.co.uk email address is best, but since access and conservation issues can be complex it might be better to speak or meet up.

The best time to reach me at home is 8-10pm on 01874 730527 or try 07740 871845. Both of these numbers take messages, so leave clear details if you would like me to call you back at a more convenient time.

*Stuart France, Conservation Officer*