

## Corona Virus Crisis - last updated on Thursday 26th March 2020

Our nation is now entering a rapidly deteriorating critical situation not only in terms of public health outcomes but also in terms of how this novel virus epidemic will affect us all as individuals, our family and friends, our neighbours and communities, our employers and colleagues, and mission-critical organisations like the NHS. We must all now show courage, determination, responsibility, consideration, and play our part fully to help with resolving this global medical and economic crisis.

### **It is now time to put caving on hold**

If there was any doubt remaining last week, then every caver by now should realise that it really is time “to put caving on hold”, to paraphrase how the [BMC](#) has recommended a shutdown of rock climbing and hill walking activities only a couple of days ago.

### **THE PAST WEEK**

The text of this page as it used to be on Thursday 19th March is available [here](#) for comparison. Below is our take on what has happened since then.

Last Saturday 21st March saw the return of sunshine in abundance after a grim start to the year 2020 with storms, record levels of rain and extensive flooding and its aftermath in February. Clear blue skies also coincided with the government decision to close down schools due to the epidemic. People then took to the outdoors in their droves making it “the busiest in living memory” according to the Snowdonia National Park Authority and with the other two Wales NPAs reporting record levels of use. This made a nonsense of the existing social-distancing advice as many found this impossible to do at busy locations.

The UK government has also been finalising its 300+ page *Coronavirus Act 2020* this week, expected to be signed into law today. The Welsh Government made a short Statutory Instrument entitled *The Health Protection (Coronavirus: Closure of Leisure Businesses, Footpaths and Access Land) (Wales) Regulations 2020* which allows National Parks, Local Authorities, NRW and the National Trust to close footpaths and land for 6 months where it is considered that “*large numbers of people congregating or being in close proximity to each other, or the use of which otherwise poses a high risk to the incidence or spread of infection in its area with the coronavirus.*”

They must publish their lists of closed countryside areas on their respective websites. The frequent repetition of the word ‘please’ by politicians a week or more ago is now being replaced with compulsion as the Coronavirus Act becomes law. So we expect legal steps to be used, perhaps very soon, to shut down the road system to traffic which is not pre-authorised so the police can enforce the ‘home lockdown’ for some weeks, if not months, simply by banning private cars from the roads.

In terms of the impact of the Statutory Instruments on Welsh caving or walking, the BBNPA has closed 34 areas as of today. These are listed on their [website](#) and include Pwll Du, the Waterfalls Area and Carmarthen Fans. There are no corresponding online maps so it remains confusing as to what “Pen y Fan: Storey Arms Car Park” might mean. Does this mean one specific car park while all alternative parking and the mountain mass itself remains open? Similarly “Sugar Loaf car parks BBNPA” is so specific that it implies all the other car parks and the hill itself remain open for instance to those arriving on foot or using a layby somewhere else for parking

Messages from central government this past week have been evolving and seem to be confused at times concerning going to work, shopping, and recreation. This follows Monday's government directive that citizens should stay at home as much as possible and avoid close contact with anyone outside their household to save people's lives and protect our NHS. Today's message from the BBNPA website, is that you are allowed to leave your home to exercise once a day, but this should be done close to your home, and also in the following exceptional circumstances:

- To shop for "basic necessities", as infrequently as possible
- For medical reasons, to provide care, or to help a vulnerable person
- Travelling to and from work, but only if it is "absolutely necessary".

Businesses have become equally confused. Some have closed while others remain open either fully or partly. Some employees feel under pressure to attend work when they perceive risks. The advice from ministers and their officials is ambiguous:

- "People can go to work if they can't do their work at home" – Matt Hancock MP
- "The government advice is that work can continue so long as people keep over 2m apart" – BBC Radio
- "Only workers critical to the economy should go to work" – Michael Gove MP
- "Stay away from as many people as possible" – Chief Medical Officer, Scotland.

### **CAVING ISN'T SAVING**

When someone gets Coronavirus, if they pass it on to fewer than one other person (on average) then the virus will eventually disappear. If they pass it on to more than one other person then it will eventually affect everyone. So the affected people must be quarantined until their disease runs its course to stop them spreading it.

If people have not got the disease (or believe so) then they must avoid catching it. Therefore they too must also isolate themselves to minimise their chance of becoming infected (or spreading it when they are a carrier).

Either way, what is needed is an isolation programme until the national crisis is clearly under control and visibly reducing in its impact. It is up to all of us to do this, and to do it well.

Clearly not everyone who is apparently disease-free can self-isolate simultaneously because that would bring the whole world to a standstill, soon denying people access to essential resources like food and medicine and treatments. Ultimately it would collapse society and its systems as we know them - which is the very thing we are trying to preserve along with saving many individual lives. **Caving isn't saving.**

The government's present response is therefore a compromise, but we believe it is the correct and logical response to where we find ourselves right now and so we urge you all to give their measures your full support.