

CAMBRIAN CAVING COUNCIL
CYNGOR OGOFEYDD CYMREIG
Affiliated to the British Caving Association

Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at GCRG Depot, Cinderford
March 10th 2013

Present

Bernie Woodley	Chairman	SWCC
Mike McCombe	Secretary	
Brendan Marris	Cave Registrar	Dudley CC
Elsie Little	Conservation Officer	
Joe Duxbury		Gloucester SS
Robin Weare	Treasurer	Hades CC
Stuart France		Chelsea SS
Andy Lewington	Equipment Officer	Gagendor CC
Chris Crowley		Croydon CC
John Hine		FoDCCAG
Maurice Febry		
Barry Hill	Webmaster	Hereford CC
Owen Clarke	Legal & Insurance Officer	Cwmbran CC
Paul Taylor		RFDC
Chris Gibbs		
Dave Linton		Welsh Mines Society

There are currently 50 member-clubs, making the quorum for this meeting 10.

1. Chairman's opening remarks

Paul Taylor welcomed everyone on behalf of GCRG and explained housekeeping arrangements. The Chairman welcomed everybody to the meeting

2. Apologies for Absence

Apologies were received from Cadley Hill Caving Club, Richard Hill, Shropshire Scouts, Garimpieros and Morgannwg Caving Club,

3. Minutes of the 2012 Annual General Meeting

The minutes of the 2012 AGM were agreed as an accurate record of the meeting. Stuart proposed and Robin seconded the motion.

Matters arising – Report on Broken Stal – Joe asked whether broken stal had been dated. Robin said that there are no results yet.

Joe also asked about aligning between Snowdonia Active and Gwydyr Forest group – Elsie reported that although there seems to be no formal alignment between them, the relationship seems to be harmonious at present.

Stuart asked about compiling fixed aids list. Discuss later.

4. Applications for Membership

The Secretary reported that there had been no new applications for membership.

5. Officers' Reports

5a Chairman's Report

[See written report below]

My main role this year has been that of supporting Cambrian officers by liaising on some of their individual projects. They will be reporting on their progress themselves and I have no intention of stealing their thunder.

I would like to praise the dedication of all the officers of the Cambrian Caving Council, in particular those who have had to overcome personal difficulties of late. They have my full respect and I am proud to be part of such a team. Thank you all.

5b Secretary's Report

[See written report below]

As I read my report to last year's meeting seeking inspiration in what to cover this time, I am struck by how little has changed...

Membership administration continues to be difficult due to our indirect relationship with BCA-affiliated clubs so I'm particularly grateful to those secretaries and membership administrators who respond promptly to my requests for information. BCA's stated objective of giving regional councils online access to membership data sadly remains no more than an objective and no tangible progress has been made.

Funding from Sport Wales for the grant schemes that I have been administering is in an uncertain state. Although it is agreed that they will continue to support both schemes, actual figures have yet to be decided. This has had a serious impact on the Expedition Grant Scheme because it has not been possible to hold the Expedition Panel meeting and will not be possible to do so before at least one of the Caving expeditions departs. As the scheme does not allow the grant to be made retrospectively, it will not be possible to make grants to the expeditions concerned.

The sports Safety Grant is in a similar state and the next cycle of applications cannot start until finance is agreed.

I have been Cambrian's representative on BCA Council again for the past year. The most notable item has been the increasingly acrimonious topic of the BCA Anchor-Placement Policy which has spilled over from the E&T Committee into Council and remains unresolved, though a degree of regional flexibility seems an unavoidable ingredient. We will no doubt discuss this later on the agenda.

Whilst I'm willing to stand again for re-election this year, I have made a firm decision that this is to be my last year as Secretary as I feel it's only fair to give someone else a chance in this very enjoyable and undemanding task.

Mike McCombe
March 2013

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Some discussion of Anchor placement policy. Mike explained some of the historical background and summarised the past year's events. It was agreed that one size doesn't fit all. The Committee will discuss a way forward.

5c Treasurer's Report

[See written report below]

The accounts for the year ended 31st December 2012 are attached. They show a surplus of £39.06 and reserves increased to £5,718.14.

Expenditure in the year, recoverable through the funding arrangement with BCA, paid for the materials used for the reopening of Ogor Nant Rhin, Llanelly Quarry Pot and Seymour's Swallet, for taping in Otter Hole and for the administrative expenses of the access controlling bodies as well as our own.

The Sports Council for Wales has continued to support us with grants of £600 for training and £1,750 for Cave Rescue. They also directly contribute financial assistance for expeditions.

Using the SCW grants we were able to contribute to the cave rescue teams and fund a training conference, first aid training and a paperless surveying course.

We are grateful to BCA for offering to assist with the funding of the training conference had it been necessary.

It has been confirmed that a further grant of £600 will be received from SCW in 2013. This grant is dedicated to the support to training activities.

Robin Weare
February 2013

There were no questions.

5d Conservation & Access Officer's Report

[See written report below]

The major change in Wales that involves our partner conservation bodies fusing together into a single body is going ahead but the mechanisms for any changes of governance are as yet unclear beyond that the lead body will be the Environment Agency rather than the FC or CCW. Information will be passed on as it is known.

There is also a move nationally through Britain to explore attitudes to commercial caving in our caves and it is hoped that some national consensus will come about to guide our local access bodies.

It is also important we continue to watch for Shale Gas Exploration and harvesting in case of potential risks to caves and mines in our area. Most likely to be at risk according to my current knowledge is the Vale of Glamorgan.

As regards the on-going negotiations with the Forestry Commission to arrange a transfer of access controls for mines and caves in their areas this is still not concluded. In actuality agreement is generally made but the last copy of the licence sent to us only permitted at one section professionally lead groups and did not fully endorse recreational caving as at other sections. This is presumed to be only a typing error but these things seem to take an inordinate time to conclude.

As soon as the licence is signed it is intended to set up a suitable system with the local clubs in mid/north Wales to run the access under our remit as the signatories to the agreement. We anticipate involving all the major users of the sites in this as it will clearly be impractical to do the day to day running from our heartland in the south.

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I am happy to report that relationships with the contractors carrying out the dualling of the A465 are good. As regards the section down the Gorge we are due to meet with them again in April to explore the results of their ground radar study and the implications of any changes in the proposed line of the development.

As regards the contractors operating around Carno Adit our discussions were most hopeful but the stumbling block in that case turned out to be the Environment Agency and the arguments they put forward were extremely forceful. Unfortunately we were unable to agree on access but I still have hope that we may be able to obtain access for scientific study, including exploration as to whether an alternative entrance can be established.

Elsewhere too there have been access difficulties. Notable among these is the valley of Greenbridge Cave and Ogof y Garreg Wen where local relationships have drastically broken down. The controversy involves the respective owners, the local adventure centre, the bat group and to some extent CCW. At present discussions continue but I have agreed with the owner that we will put a lock on Greenbridge to ensure his wishes are followed. Both owners are happy for us to use the sites as normal.

Our South Wales based outdoor pursuits centres have also encountered arguments about access to mines in the Ystradfellte area that have normally been available to all. I hope we will be able in time to assist them overcome the difficulties. It appears the difficulties may originate in the concept of liability and insurance and it is also possible recreational cavers will also be effected if the matter is not resolved.

Additional leaders have been accepted for Ogof Capel.

So far the matter of the Drws Cefn entrance to Ogof Draenen has not been resolved. Investigation of the bats and their needs is on-going. Until this has been resolved the closure of the entrance cannot be done. The owners have reported being quite happy with the current state of affairs.

Finally on a more positive note I have had reports of several dead bats from Craig ar Ffynnon. The reporters suspected White Nose Syndrome but Peter Smith has looked, has sent one for analysis and the result came back negative. No White Nose but he suspects our unusual climate changes recently has caused some juvenile bats to be caught out and to die. In the Forest of Dean too we are assured the bat mortality has been unconnected to White Nose Syndrome.

Elsie Little,
March 2013

Stuart raised misuse of bat survey to force closure of Drws Cefn. CCW had told Stuart that no scientific work is in progress. Elsie said she had been assured that a bat hibernation study is pending but is probably held up by CCW/EA/FCW merger. In the Forest, FoDCCAG insists on being the coordinating body for all bat work underground in order to maintain relationships with landowners.

Maurice reported stress to Greater Horseshoe bats in Lords Hill Woods due to poor summer and cold winter. Population dropped from 100 to about 65. Remainder very under-weight.

Access to caves in Hepste valley remains sensitive. Interested parties are asked to stay away for the moment.

Dave Linton asked about keys for Forestry Commission sites. Elsie will appoint key-holders and publish access rules.

Stuart noted that cavers had made major habitat contribution to bats. Can't we make some positive news about this? Maurice replied that FoDCCAG had done exactly this with Natural England and had been very well-received. He advised against allowing the Bat Groups completely take over and suggested cavers need to join bat groups and take a more active role. Elsie urged caution in drawing attention to cave sites with bats.

5e Training Officer's Report

[See written report below]

This year has been successful with the running of the Cambrian Caving Conference in May 2012 which was mainly organised before I came to post by Robin, Mike and Bernie.

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There was a surveying workshop run in November which was oversubscribed again and I am sure we will try and put on another course sometime this year. Thanks to CSG for this.

For the first time in a while a training weekend is planned in North Wales on the 20th and 21st April. Surface SRT sessions will be run on the Saturday followed by underground sessions on the Sunday.

I have made initial contact with Alan Bowring with a view to running a surface walk in the local area aimed at cavers looking at the geology/hydrology of the region.

I have represented the region at Training, the latest has been postponed until 26th March so if there is anything the committee would like me to bring up then please let me know.

I am happy to stand for another year unless anyone else has a desire to take over.

Rich Hill

Dave Linton asked about SRT Course. Mike reported that take-up is slow.

5f Equipment Officer's Report
[See written report below]

Just in case no one reads beyond this point – I will be standing down as Equipment Officer at the AGM so if there is anyone out there who would like to take over please get in touch if you would like some information on what is involved.

Current projects include testing of: anchors in N Wales slate, ropes and maillons.

Resin anchors

The original DMM resin Eco anchor was replaced with the Peco anchor, but quality control was found to be lacking. A replacement was found, manufactured by Bolt products. No Peco or Bolt anchors have been placed in the Cambrian region under the BCA scheme.

Currently there are no BCA registered anchor installers in the Cambrian region, and no scheme in place to train anyone. The BCA anchor scheme is currently under discussion.

The E and T committee

Following a meeting in March 2012 representatives from CNCC and DCA resigned due to disagreements regarding the anchor placement scheme. The E and T committee is still active and it is to be hoped that at some stage all the regional councils will have representatives on the committee.

The next BCA E and T committee meeting is on 14 April 2013.

A Lewington 6.3.2013.

5g Legal & Insurance Officer's Report [See written report below]

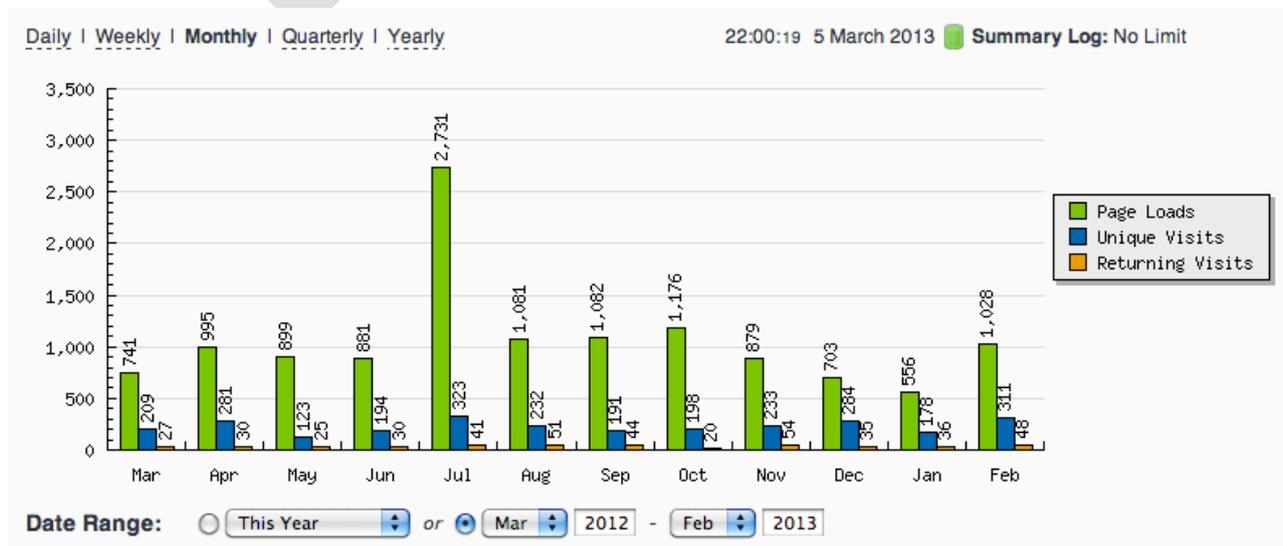
The Legal and Insurance Report to Cambrian Caving Council remains the same as it has been for the last ten years.

I rely on the good work done by David Judson, the Legal and Insurance Officer for BCA. I have had no requests for assistance from members of Cambrian during the last year.

Owen Clarke
March 2013

5h Cave Registrar's Report [See written report below]

Over the last 12 months there have been 12,752 pageviews.
We are now averaging 1,000 pageviews per month.



The number of records in the registry continues to grow. Over the last 12 months 240 new records have been added to the database and more photos of entrances have been uploaded.

Current records 1795
Records with photos 864

I would like to thank those people who have supplied data for entries or made suggestions for corrections. Particular thanks go to Rhys Williams for his input and photos of cave entrances.

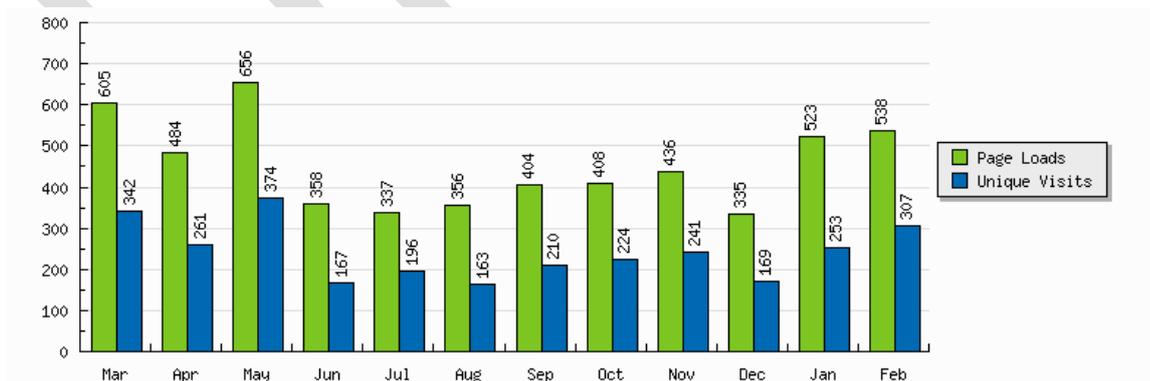
Brendan Marris
Cambrian Cave Registrar
5th March 2013

5i Webmaster's Report [See written report below]

Not a lot to report this year, I have done a few updates as various clubs have contacted me with their new club contact details. Plus the Newsletters have been uploaded as soon as I receive them, plus the odd bit of latest cave access has been updated as soon as I'm aware of anything new.

In January 2013, we moved the CCC website from Fasthosts to the BCA's own mini server with minimal downtime, although we did experience a few issues with linking to the Cave Registry, but Cookie got this sorted very quickly.

Sites visits have remained steady throughout the year, with the Cave Registry, Cave Access and the Publications pages being the most popular pages visited. Below is a graph showing monthly page loads and visitors from Mar 2012 to Feb 2013



If I'm re-elected as Webmaster for another year, I will have a look at upgrading the website to give it more of a fresh look.

Barry Hill
March 2013

5j Newsletter Editor's Report [See written report below]

Newsletters have appeared quarterly as planned. All are circulated to our member clubs and are then made available to download from the CCC website. Notes on those matters which arise between newsletters have been circulated to our member clubs.

As ever, I remain grateful to those who have responded to my requests for material and especially so to those who have provided material without prompting.

Robin Weare
February 2013

6 Other Cambrian Representatives' Reports

6a FoDCCAG

[See written report below]

Our annual meeting with Daniel Howells (Deputy Gaveller) was held in February 2013 when our annual Management License/Access Agreement for 2013 was signed.

Conservation

Most of the Greater and Lesser Horseshoe bat hibernation sites (SSSI sites) within the Special Area of Conservation (SAC) for the Dean were monitored during the winter (but excluding Buckshaft Iron Mine SSSI and Perseverance Iron Mine (not SSSI)). In addition, iron mines at Noxon Park, Lords Wood and Lady Park Wood were also monitored for hibernating bats, as were disused railway tunnels at Miery Stock and Bradley Hill.

There have been no sightings of bats with White Nose Syndrome in the Dean. There has been no further news concerning the possibility of Noxon Park Iron Mines becoming another SSSI site for hibernating bats,

Access

During the year, a surface access agreement was signed with Lydney Park Estate for access to part of the estate (to access the iron mine workings covered by our access agreement with the Forestry Commission). Twelve trips per year have been allocated, to include local cavers, the Bat Group and cavers from outside the Dean. All permits are issued via the FODCCAG Permit Officer and the allocation has been used up for the year. The new allocation will start in May 2013 when we will have our next meeting with LPE. There are a few points to discuss over the access agreement and other areas of interest.

Discussions are still proceeding with Clearwell Caves who want FODCC&AG to administer the access to Wigpool Iron Mine (SSSI site for hibernating bats). This will not affect the access that GSS and RFDCC have with Clearwell Caves.

Access to Robin Hood Iron Mine Shaft has been (temporarily) withdrawn by the FC, due to the damage and ground instability at the shaft collar.

There is still no access to the northern part of Devil's Chapel, due to the landowner being very upset over the designation of SSSI status being granted by Natural England without consultation.

We are working with FC and NE on the security of Lady Park Wood non-intervention site, reference external fence security and iron mine security. Due to a number of incidents where police awareness stickers have been put on caving car windows, the FC and FODCCAG have instigated a car parking badge, to be placed in the car window when parked on FC land. The police have a copy of this badge their ID purposes. Cavers applying for permits will be issued with a badge if required by the Permit Officer.

Permits

28 permits were issued between 16th March 2012 and 15th February 2013:

Scouts	0
Caving Clubs	8
Bat Groups	5
Cave Diving	3
Lydney Park Estate	12

6b Welsh Mines Society Report

Society “trundles on” with mostly surface visits. A mining history conference is to be held at Aberystwyth. Proceedings of the last conference are available from John Hine for purchase.

6c NWCRO

No report received.

6d SMWCRT

No report received.

6e GCRG

2014 will be GCRG’s 50th birthday so there will be a celebration event. Rescues included well-shaft.

GCRG participated in snail-beach and did a very successful rescue. They have now undertaken refurbishment of the depot so that it is sometimes warmer inside than out! A huge improvement...

Training event last weekend was attended by 52 people with many others also involved. Levels of enthusiasm are very high.

6f OFD Management Committee Report

The problems with the access road and discharge from the quarry continue. Meetings have been held with Tarmac and discussions are ongoing.

Fixed aids have all been checked during the year and replaced as necessary. There has been some retaping and calcite cleaning in Column Hall and concern regarding footprint damage elsewhere.

It seems likely that the more liberal access arrangements in OFD I have resulted in less use of OFD II & Cwmdwr. Compared with 2011 visitor numbers to those parts of the cave are down by more than 300 but with around 450 extra visitors to OFD I the steady increase over the past few years has continued.

It was necessary to close top entrance for a short period in January in order to deal with unstable rocks in the entrance series. The work was completed and the entrance reopened as planned.

Robin Weare
February 2013

6g Dan yr Ogof Cave Advisory Committee Report

The highlight of the past year was the party held to celebrate the centenary of the Morgan Brothers first exploration of the cave. Many old friends were there and a good time was had by all. Caver numbers have generally been lower than usual, no doubt largely because of very wet summer.

In the last couple of days the showcave management have imposed two significant changes to the access conditions. The first is a 12 month moratorium on digging and bolt-climbing in the cave and the second is to limit individual visitors to one trip per week – except for pre-booked trips and agreed project work. It is hoped that this will help clear some of the backlog of surveying and conservation work and ease wear and tear on the cave.

6h Mynydd Llangatwg Cave Management / Advisory Committee

There has been only one meeting in the whole year and there's not been much happening. There have been instances of graffiti in the mud in Agen Allwedd and, in Craig a Ffynnon there has been graffiti and damage to the lock. There is now phone line through Ogor Cnwc so now lines through both entrances.

The meeting was puzzled why graffiti has become an issue, particularly as it seems to be by 'serious' cavers in sites distant from entrances. Dave Linton noted issues with mine artefacts being interfered with. Elsie noted that graffiti has become a real problem nationwide.

7 BCA Matters

Robin reported an improvement in cashflow due to a change in the process for settling Regional Council claims.

8 Election of Officers

The following officers were elected to serve until the next AGM:-

Chairman – Bernie proposed Robin, seconded Owen
Secretary – Mike proposed Robin, seconded Bernie
Treasurer – Robin proposed Maurice seconded Stuart
Conservation Officer – Elsie proposed Mike, seconded Barry
Training Officer – Rich proposed Robin, seconded Andy
Equipment Officer – Vacant
Legal & Insurance Officer – Owen Clarke Prop Bernie, seconded Robin
Webmaster – Barry – proposed Bernie, seconded Robin
Newsletter Editor – Robin proposed Dave, seconded Stuart
Cave Registrar – Brendan proposed Robin, seconded Bernie

9 Any other business

John Hine went to the AGM of Ceredigion Mine Group in Aberystwyth to sort out any potential problems between interested parties (bats, CCW, local history groups etc.) John represented Cambrian and found it very useful. Funding stopped a couple of years ago but the organisation still functions.

Access to Cwmystwyth is progressing very slowly.

The FoDCCAG AGM is to be held on Thursday 14th March at the GCRG deport.

10 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed to hold next year's AGM on Sunday 9th March 2014 at Hirwaun Village Hall.

The meeting closed at 13:03