

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

**Minutes of the Annual General Meeting held at
 Betws-y-Coed Memorial Hall
 March 15th 2015**

Present

Martyn Farr (MF)	Chairman	*	Cave Diving Group
Dave Tyson (DT)	Secretary/Newsletter	*	Wirral Caving Group
Mike Leahy (ML)		*	United Cavers Exploration Team
Ian Adams (IA)	Treasurer		United Cavers Exploration Team
Guy Chapman (GC)			United Cavers Exploration Team
Les Williams (LW)		*	Wessex Cave Club
Dominic Aves (DA)			Deep Dark Dirty Wet Holes Caving Club
Vince Alkins (VA)	Equipment Officer		
Peter Burgess (PB)		*	Wealden Cave & Mine Society
Richard Hill (RH)	Training Officer		Gagendor Caving Club
Roy Fellows (RF)			Shropshire Caving & Mining Club
Stuart France (SF)	Access/Conservation	*	Garimpeiros Caving Club
Dan Thorne (DTh)		*	Chelsea Speleological Society
Will Kilner (WK)		*	Gagendor Caving Club
Steve Holding (SH)		*	Shropshire Mines Trust
Peter Cloughton (PC)			NAMHO (observer)
Mike Moore (MM)		*	Shropshire Caving & Mining Club
Mike Klimaszewski (MK)		*	North Wales Caving Club
Bernie Woodley (BW)		*	South Wales Caving Club
Briony Harvey (BHa)		*	Aditnow/NWCRO
Rupert Jones (RJ)			Aditnow
Martin Lavery (MLa)	Cave Registry		Garimpeiros Caving Club
Barry Hill (BH)	Webmaster	*	Hereford Caving Club
Olly Burrows (OB)		*	Parys Underground Group
Dave Linton (DL)		*	Welsh Mines Society
Fleur Loveridge (FL)		*	Oxford University Cave Club
Peter Talling (PT)		*	University of Bristol Speleological Society

* Club representatives. The meeting was quorate with 18 out of 50 member clubs present.

1. Chairperson's Opening Remarks

MF - The chairman welcomed everyone to the meeting in Betws-y-Coed and stated that this was the second time the Cambrian AGM had been held in North Wales. Moving around the regions had to be a good thing for caving generally as it brought in new faces and may foster better links with mining bodies as well as cavers.

2. Apologies for Absence

DT - Apologies for absence were received from John Hine (RFoDCC), Kat Hawkins (NWCRO), Fraser Stephens (Legal & Insurance Officer), Ali Garman (PDCMG), Nick Carter (GCC), Joe Duxbury (GSS) and Judith Calford (Morgannwg).

MF - Can people go round the table introducing themselves and who they represent to help match faces to names.

3. Minutes of the 2014 AGM

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DT - The secretary reported that he had received an objection from Kat Hawkins, secretary of NWCRO regarding the statement made by Ian Adams in part 6c of the 2014 minutes and asked that it was noted that Ian was not a member of NWCRO and not eligible to speak on their behalf. The secretary suggested that the comment made by Ian be removed.

DL - objected to this as he believed that the minutes reflected what was said at the meeting and should stand. The minutes of the meeting had been written by Sue Goodhead from an audio transcript and subsequently there had been several amendments made to the draft version. There were arguments that the minutes should reflect what was said and not what's right or wrong in the wider world and that maybe the minutes should be accepted and the matter dealt with as matters arising.

BW - The tape still existed and he remembers the discussion details.

IA - stated he had mentioned three incidents at the meeting in a light hearted manner as there weren't any NWCRO representatives at the meeting but he wasn't, and never had been, a member of NWCRO and he apologised if this was thought to be the case.

BHa - representing NWCRO, suggested that a line be added to the minutes stating that Ian was not a member of NWCRO. The secretary agreed to do this if the meeting was agreeable,

DL - still objected on a point of accuracy.

MF - suggested that this was noted but we needed to move on. Nobody had any objections to the rest of the minutes. There were no matters arising.

SF proposed and **LW** seconded acceptance with the change. Voting: 7 for, 1 against, 10 abstentions,

4. Proposed amendment of Constitution

DT - tabled the two proposed changes to the CCC constitution agreed by the committee.

The first change is to the guiding principals and this is really a change to the wording in view of the fact that it is possible that CRoW might apply to caving in the future, while still respecting the rights of owners and tenants of property. If CRoW is shown not to apply to caving it doesn't change the overall meaning, we are still respecting the landowners and tenants rights.

The second change for the officers, council elections and quorum was actually brought up because Martin Laverty, when he took over from Brendan Marris as maintainer of the Cambrian Cave registry, wasn't a member of a club. This wasn't a problem when he was co-opted, but if he came up for re-election then he would have to be a member of a Cambrian club and the obvious thing would be to allow him as an associate member. However, I had an email from Mike McCombe pointing out that the constitution is a bit ambiguous, an associate member would be a direct insured member of the BCA, but they cannot assign a regional council on their application. It appears that the whole section on associate membership is not particularly useful. Martin is now a member of a Cambrian club and so the problem no longer arises. I propose that we strike that amendment and discount it.

MLa - It may be an issue in the future though.

DT - In order to allow that it would need changes to other sections of the constitution.

LW - Why don't we remit that up to the council within the next year for them to come back with proper proposals dealing with all sections of the constitution that need changing.

DT - So your proposing that Les.

LW - I propose that. **DT** - I am quite happy to second.

This was accepted by the meeting without a vote after a long discussion on the issue of representation on regional councils. **DT** - mentioned the 'two house' system used by the BCA and expressed concern that the DIMS might be able to overrule the clubs despite representing a much smaller number of members. Several others picked up this issue, but it was noted that there had been no problems so far with the system. **SH** - noted the DIM interpretation was wrong and the individual voting class included CIM members as well so they couldn't skew it. **LW** - outlined the arrangements in the other regional councils; the CSCC and CNCC restricted their membership purely to clubs while DCA and Devon allowed individuals and weighted the voting in favour of the clubs. After further discussion looking at the issue of associate members it was decided that the executive should have a long look at the whole issue of representation and decide what

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changes which were needed.

DT - With regard to the first motion; do people have any comments?

RF - What I have to say hinges partially on Dr, Claughton's paper where there is a difference between mines and caves. Putting to one side the conservation issues, there are legal implications. The meaning of caves within the Cambrian Constitution is already predefined to include mines and caving to encompass mine exploring etc. This means that the existing clause in the constitution:

"That the owners and tenants of property containing caves have the right to grant or withhold access" will apply to mines as well as caves. The legal position is primarily a mine belongs to the mineral owner and not necessarily the land owner. The actual rights of the mineral owner depend on the wording in the contract, but mineral owner may have rights to lay roads to the mine, dump spoil etc. so primarily the ownership of the mine lies with the mineral owner. The land owner generally has authority to enter the mine for inspection purposes and can grant this authority to others. Often the landowner and the mineral owner will be the same entity, but this is not always the case. The existing wording of the constitution as it is may be invalid from a legal point of view, in that it may attempt to confer rights on people who may not actually have them. I think it is a good guiding principle to say "appropriate permissions should be sought" which is a catch all for permissions being sought where ever they reside.

DT - I think the amendment would cover that.

PC - I am only an observer here, but I feel you need to go back to the constitution and separate caves from mines. Avoid having this all embracing term 'caves' to include mines as they are, as Roy has pointed out, legally quite different as well as having different conservation issues.

DT - That could be looked at during the review of the constitution.

PB - We do have an item in the constitution to safeguard both mining and caving clubs.

SH - This is going to progress along some lines nationally with BCA because a decision has been made to follow through the poll that people wish to see the interpretation of the CRoW act changed. At BCA I have raised the point that really when in discussions with DEFRA etc. at the moment we have gone out of the way to mention mines and this is a deliberate policy to some extent. At the last meeting DEFRA, Natural England etc. think anyone going underground into caves is crazy and they just cannot comprehend the idea of going into mines. So it's just deemed easier not to mention mines in the discussion, but if it progresses then the issue of mines will have to be tackled as the legislation is different with mines. At present the discussion is with DEFRA, Natural England etc. on changing the CRoW interpretation is not gaining much ground and I am skeptical of success. But if changes start to happen with regard to CRoW then it will need constitutional changes with the BCA. The proposed change here reflects what has got to happen in the BCA where the same phase exists. The whole idea of the insurance etc. is to give landowners confidence that we are not going to be a problem and abide by their wishes. If CRoW goes through as far as caving is concerned, the landowner may not want people to cave on his land but if it now applies then his word doesn't matter any longer. The BCA will need to push through the constitutional changes which will need a 70% yes vote in both houses – larger than the initial vote to pursue the application of CRoW to caving. More than 30% of the BCA's membership is interested in going into mines as opposed to caves and the suspicion is that in the poll that took place this year most of the people who put their interest as being primarily mine exploration either voted against or didn't vote at all. There was not a lot of attention given to try and steer the view of people interested in mine exploration.

LW - Mines are covered by some very specific legislation which supersedes CRoW and will require primary legislation to change. Currently all is being looked for is a re-interpretation of existing legislation. Mines can never come under Crow without primary legislation.

DL - The BCA referendum does not say 'caving', it said 'access to underground'.

LW - It was left suitably vague to allow a response from people interested in seeing the organisation moving in that direction.

OB - There is no mention of CRoW in this amendment and in our personal case the mine we access is not on CRoW land and I expect that the mine owner, if he saw that he might lose any rights, might stop our access. We don't have a formal access agreement, as they will not give us one, so they could turn around tomorrow and say no more activity underground.

LW - How long have you had that agreement? **OB** - 15 Years.

LW - That's also true of most of the caves on the Mendip hills. There are no written agreements, everything

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is verbal and it's with the landowner. We, as the underground community, absolutely rely on the goodwill of the landowner.

DL - This amendment wouldn't affect your scenario – it doesn't affect the mines at all as you still need the landowners or mineral rights owner's permission. On the basis that CRoW doesn't apply here.

OB - Yes, but there is no mention of CRoW in the amended clause

SH - The constitution states that the landowners or tenants should give their consent and with a mine it's still applicable. It doesn't affect it; there is no consensus to gain additional access to mines.

OB - It might be clarified if the amendment said caves

RF - There is a point that a contract doesn't necessarily need to be in writing and the agreement you have could be seen to be contractually binding. You have had 15 years of going in there and the mineral owner knows you go in; they don't stop you from going in. I would say a court would see that as a contractual arrangement.

SF - With regard to the constitutional changes we need to bomb proof them as much as possible in terms of future legislation. The CRoW act may not be with us for ever and it may be subsumed into future legislation. Returning to the club members and DIM members, the BCA may change its structure and the balance between DIMS and CIMS may change over time. The constitution needs to have flexibility and scope in a changing world which is what the changes to clause 4.2 are trying to do.

We are going to respect the rights of owners and tenants etc. such as the law allows them to. The CRoW act took away some of their rights to exclude the public from their land and they can not stop walkers on their land except on a limited number of days. We need the situation where we can move with whatever legal interpretations change in the years ahead while upholding respect for the landowners rights as they stand at that time.

DL - There are no urgent issues depending on this time? **DT** - No. **DL** - In that case considering what Roy said would it be better again to consider the actual wording of the clause in the executive. **DT** – and do a split with the caves and mines? **DL** – if that is thought necessary, yes. But one of my concerns would be that to separate them so much that the cavers get what they want and the mine historians and explorers lose out. We wouldn't want that!

LW - I have just been playing with some words and I think it's nearly right and a small change would make it so. If you strike out 'containing caves' it doesn't change the meaning to grant or withhold access and if you include the words 'mineral rights' after property so it reads as: "That any rights held by the owners or tenants of property or mineral rights to grant or withhold access be respected".

This allows landowners even without caves to give you rights to go on their land. I suggest it's a simple fix which ticks all the boxes.

SF - Effectively changing the words 'containing caves' to 'or mineral rights'

DT - That sounds fine

RF - I think it would be a wise decision to pass this amendment as an interim measure and give the issue further thought in the future. A step in the right direction is going to be a good idea as the existing clause, in my opinion, is ultra vires.

LW - The new proposal is to replace the first sentence of guiding principle 4.2 with:

"That any rights held by the owners and tenants of property or mineral rights to grant or withhold access be respected"

LW proposed and **MM** seconded. Voting: 14 for, 3 against, 1 abstention - 70% needed 77% achieved

5. Applications for Membership

DT - reported he had two applications for membership: Buckfastleigh Caving club actually talked to Robin Weare last year but for some reason it just didn't go ahead and Deep, Dark, Dirty Wet Holes Caving Club who are also members of the BCA have applied to join Cambrian Caving Council.

DL - Do they have anyone to represent them?

DT - Deep Dark Dirty Wet Holes does.

DL - Where's your centre of operations?

DA - Wrexham.

?? - Whereabouts' are Buckfastleigh?

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DT - They are down South in Devon, they were on the list passed to me by Robin, but I couldn't find any reference looking back to where they had been accepted so I got in contact with Geoff Domett,

?? - So they have an interest in caving in South Wales?

LW - I think they have an interest in caving anywhere.

DT - any objections to their being admitted? (No objections)

RF - (belatedly) Can Cambrian Mines Trust could join the Council?

SF - Does he need proposing?

DT proposed **SF** seconded. (No objections)

?? - Does he get a vote from now on?

DT - No, there has to be a years standing for voting eligibility.

6. Officers Reports

6.a Chairman's Report

MF - It's been a very challenging year and there's a lot going on and as everybody knows there is so much change afoot it's difficult to keep abreast of it. I have to say I think what's been achieved in the last 12 months is quite outstanding and our officers will duly report on their areas in a moment. But take the cave registry, for example, we have an excellent IT man in charge and it has come on leaps and bounds. You can see from our wonderful set of newsletters that they are very professional and in this day and age when we are meeting bodies and organisations outside our narrow little area of activity to win friends and influence people. Having a professional production you can put in people's hands speaks volumes and raises our profile in the world generally. When it comes to legal and insurance matters it's probably going to get even more complex and that leads me on to access and conservation because access, I firmly believe, precedes conservation in this instance. We are all conservationists at heart with respect to our mining friends as well, I have seen the work that Stuart's done and the progress in that area has been absolutely phenomenal. I'm not going to forget the bread & butter people in the organisation: Dave; Ian; our training officer, Rich and our equipment/fixed aids officer, Vince. Everybody's had a busy year. I am going to wind up on that and move on to the next report, but I think there is a lot going on and for me it's been quite an eye-opener.

DL - we have a couple of clubs in North Wales which shall we say are somewhat insular. What efforts, if any, are being made to bring them into the fold?

IA - I'll answer that for you if you like. Pary's underground group where coming...

OB - Pary's Underground Group are here!

IA - GOES have been approached, but I don't think they have been responsive.

DT - I haven't heard anything from them. I have mailed Gaz (Gareth Davies) a few times but haven't had any response. I wonder if the mail ends up in a black hole.

DL - He doesn't respond to emails from anybody. I really think that some personal contact might be the way forward and it would be very useful if they could get involved. There is another club as well...

IA - Grosvenor declined to come, North Wales Caving Club is here and AditNow are here.

DT - Grosvenor are busy working on the telephone system in the Milwr today.

DL - To be honest GOES and Grosvenor are the two clubs I am thinking of today.

ML - They seem to be quite happy where they are and that's the problem. They are quite happy doing what they are doing and trying to get them on board is a nightmare.

DL - It does make access difficult for other people. I know individuals in both organisations and I can get trips with them now. That's not my complaint; I am just more concerned particularly as they are both mining sites of interest to the wider mining history community, the Milwr tunnel in particular.

IA - We would particularly like Grosvenor here and it's a shame they are not. **DL** - OK, that's all then,

ML - We do keep at them, but they don't want to seem to come on board unfortunately.

SF - Is there any project we could involve them in to open up a mining dialog?

IA - They are very niche in their own sites.

DL - Both of them have very few active members and I get the impression that certainly with GOES that their active membership is declining slowly.

DT - That's what Gareth has told me for GOES at NAHMO last year.

DL - I am personally worried with the Great Orme that we will lose access if GOES folds. Sanctioned access to the Great Orme shafts would be difficult

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LW - can I just point out that you have as a tool within this organisation; the ability to direct funding to targeted projects with those organisations which means you can come bearing gifts. BCA will fund projects. I have been thinking in the past about Roy's stuff with Cwmystwyth. If you have a target project then BCA can fund it but it has to come through this council.

SF - I went on the Grosvenor trip on the NAMHO weekend and a very interesting trip it was and they were extremely friendly and I am sworn to silence on what I saw, I hadn't really thought in terms of money for a project, but something by which we could a more open relationship with them and offer them some help or ask them to come and help us in some way.

LW - But to come bearing gifts is a way of opening the door.

6.b Secretary's Report

DT - A printed copy of the report is provided. This was written a little while ago and so sadly I have to report that the Overseas Expedition Funding for this year basically won't happen Sport Wales have a serious funding issue and declined to fund the WSA with respect to the Overseas Expeditions. Tony Donovan was hoping to get some funding for work in Malaysia - I am sorry it's not going to happen. We may get some funding for next year, but who knows... I have no idea if the cave rescue organisations will be funded this year - I was told by Paul Dancey in the autumn that this might be the last funding they got. Other than that the rest of the written report stands.

6.c Treasurer's Report

IA - Just to follow on from what Dave was saying. I am a member of another board which deals with the Welsh government and funding and in the year coming there are 4 million pounds worth of cuts across the board. The only things which are ring-fenced are NHS and student loan grants. So the cuts are not likely to be reversed in the coming 12 months, regardless of which party gets power at the election - devolution is likely to continue together with more cuts in the following years. I would be pessimistic rather than optimistic of getting any more funds in the future. Cambrian Caving Council - the accounts, there is nothing really interesting to report. You have a copy of the printed accounts and these are similar to the previous year. The auditor was Graham Mullan who audited last years accounts and he passed the accounts. He made a quick comment on it that we might want to look at putting money into a deposit account that attracts some interest. Now we did have some funds with National Savings & Investments Account, but there are no on-line statements and it required a letter from two executive officers just to get a balance. It was giving us a very small amount of interest and so we moved it into the current account so it was transparent. Graham suggested I might want to look at a deposit account with a bank. Barclay's community accounts are now treated as business accounts and attract no interest whatsoever so until and unless they do we will leave everything in the current account. If a suitable account came up we can look at changing this, but we are talking about pennies interest rather than pounds. As far as the year is concerned not all of the Cambrian Caving Council officers availed themselves of the opportunity to take advantage of all the expenses that they are entitled to. I cannot speak for previous years as I wasn't the treasurer then but it obviously helped and created a small surplus of £204. As Dave has mentioned the Sport Wales have already advised that in future years the funding is likely to be cut and so we may well find that financing projects in the future may be difficult. That said we do have funds in the bank as per the figures. Any questions?

?? - Just intrigued as to the Barclay's compensation.

IA - We had some issue with changing the officers from the old executive to the new one. It's extremely difficult as we all live in different parts of the country and too be blunt Barclay's made a hash of it. Our secretary managed to negotiate some compensation.

DL - Bearing in mind as Les has suggested that we spend some money what would you consider to be the minimum you would like the reserves to be.

IA - We have to be careful about diminishing funds. Any organisation or business that uses its reserves from year on year will eventually run out of funds. We can always take money from the reserves for projects providing we don't subsist on it day-day so I think we have to look on each project on its own merits.

DL - I was just wondering what level you would be comfortable with.

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IA – Well, if we look at the total expenditure for the year its £2900 so I would not want the reserve to go below £3000.

LW - If all the work you that you do by the regional council falls under the remit of the BCA's funding document then you it will be granted back unless the BCA change their funding criterion.

IA - I accept that.

LW - So the money in your bank is really a cash float to run day to day operations plus any money to spend outside the BCA remit.

IA - Well at lot of money we get from Sport Wales we give to the Cave Rescue Organisations, so if we did that out of our own bank account and not subsidised by Sport Wales we would run out. So this is something we would have to look at on a year to year basis. If we can't get the money off Sport Wales then we cannot give it to the Cave Rescue Organisations. Does that mean we should give nothing to the CRO's – I am not advocating that at all, but I am just saying if we keep doing it we will run out of money. Sport Wales didn't say we weren't going to get any money next year, we may get a reduced amount – it may be reduced to zero :-)

DT - As I mentioned in my report Sports Wales have changed their year end to April.. By now we would normally know whether the application put in the autumn had been successful. We asked for £500 rather the £600 asked for last year.

RH - I asked the BCA training committee about supporting our training regime if the grant didn't come though and they said they would.

IA - I would propose that the accounts are passed.

ML - Seconded

There were no objections to the accounts being a true record.

6.d Access and Conservation officers report

Welsh Government

SF - Outlined the changes in the Welsh Government with the push to be more inclusive, promote well-being and green policies. These would filter down government entities like the NRW. The latter organisation was now two years old but still had a lot of work to do integrating information on SSSI's from the old CCW into the new organisation. The NRW seems to be more formal in its approach than the CCW was so that permission will have to be sought in advance by the landowner before digging on SSSI's. NRW were asked to write an article for the newsletter on the status of the SSSI's, but couldn't get official clearance in time and so I wrote an article. Anyone who has been naughty by digging in an SSSI without permission will be relieved to know that there is a two year limit for bringing prosecutions.

DL - Are NRW equally tough on landowners blocking cave entrances?

SF - I think they will be. At the same time we need to be more careful.

Regional Politics

At a local level there are three national parks. The Brecon Beacons Park contains the bulk of the caves and there is currently a document circulating asking for input on the 10 year plan. The national parks have access forums and we need to be represented on these to put our point of view.

LW - could the 'well being' buzz word not be used to promote recreational caving as an exercise activity in the outdoors?

SF - Absolutely! The horse riding people at the last National Access Forum tabled scientific research on the health benefits of riding in the form of leaflets and booklets. The timing was perfect as the theme for the meeting was health and well being. NRW were also pushing walking on the Pembroke Coastal Path. We could do similar to promote underground activity for fitness and health.

RF - Caving involves a lot of thrutching and twisting and so you get a lot more muscle groups exercised.

LW - Maybe get the commercial caving sector to push this idea

SF - The BMC have been very active and have written to MPs and pushed access for climbing on cliffs to be enshrined in law. They managed to get a Welsh Minister involved at an event. We need to keep involved with the BMC, ramblers and similar groups to get freer access.

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SF - The Clydach Gorge roadworks have started. A survey has been done before the work and this will have to be repeated afterward. Prof. John Gunn is the consultant speleologist. There is some concern about damage as some caves are near the surface.

FL - It is possible to use smaller plant where working near sensitive areas and I do offer to help Elsie some time ago as I work professionally in this capacity. I might be of use in this area.

SF - It would be worth you contacting John Gunn as Costains have had a meeting with him and they are intending to tackle that section first.

Mines and Mine History

SF - The NRW agreement has been signed, the BCA insurance is in place and some risk assessments have been done. Work still needs to be done on the mechanism for permitting access, but is likely to be an emailed permit allowing access to all mines in the agreement against a BCA Insurance number. Welsh Water will be watching how the agreement works and we may be able to use it to push for other landowner agreements.

IA - This is a good reason for Grosvenor CC to be here...

LW - Firstly your risk assessments, unless they are fairly vague, they are going to contain specific risks. Is that going to involve specific mitigation as well?

SF - Yes, for example don't trip over timber and fall down a deep hole at the side etc.

LW - So it won't be very specific – like a loose rock 300 yard on the right etc.

DT - It's a two page document with lists risks and the mitigation. Its mainly generic with a bit of tailoring to specific areas.

LW - Nothing that NRW is going to use to say don't go down that bit etc.

DT - I don't think so. It notes that Parc is for experienced mine explorers only. There is a separate explorers guide which outlines a brief history, collapses which have occurred in the past and a trip summary which mentions areas which are problematic.

LW - If people ignore the advice in the risk assessment will that jeopardize access?

DT - I don't think so, but you might die.

SF - Insurance was a sticking point in getting this agreement completed as NRW were unhappy about the BCA cover. It took a bit of effort to get reinstate the original BCA agreement by threatening to public ditch the whole scheme. At this point they added the extra requirement for risk assessments.

?? - Cave Access Limited - are there contact details for them? Could they be contacted with regard to adding other mines etc?

SF - It's Dave, Roy and I who are the directors. But it's just a dormant company which holds licenses. Once we have the risk assessments in place we will get the website in shape and that will have details and photos of each mine. I imagine people with email to get an individual permit and will log there trip so we have usage statistics to feed back to NRW.

LW - Could this be altered to give a club a permit as it would avoid individuals having to do it.

SF - We could look at this outside the meaning. We have to be careful to stay onside with the NRW who we know are officious. The agreement only runs for 1 year initially, we had hoped for 3 years. The insurance was a bit problem and if the BCA had a big claim against their insurance from another region than that might impact on this agreement as they are both reliant on the same policy. We need to uphold all the requirements of that contract and make a success of it and then we may be able add other sites to it.

PC - Going back to your risk assessments these are for life and limb, has anyone looked at the environmental and archaeological risks?

SF - That's a good question Peter and I would like you to come back with your ideas as a response to this report. The BCA has re-constituted the Conservation & Access committee and a final draft of a minimal impact code going to council, but this is mainly cave orientated and its probably better to produce a parallel one for mining. This hasn't been done in BCA yet.

DL - Minllyn Slate quarry is not all on FC land, the main part is not FC, but the landowner is quite happy for people to go in. Temple Mine, I thought there was an existing agreement. Bryneglwys Quarry occupies a large area and the information Elsie had just referred to one entrance. And finally Rhiwbach is used by mine centres. Is there going to be an access agreement of some sort?

SF - In Rhiwbach there is a lot of gear put in by commercial companies and I believe that Elsie was of the opinion that Cambrian would manage the agreement and be in control. The commercial access would be

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come subject to the agreement we were holding. I have had discussions with Gethin and it looks like we will run the agreement for cavers and mine explorers on an amateur basis and the outdoor pursuits people will run their own as they have alternative insurance.

RF - I have spoken to Miles Moulding and they will approach NRW for a separate agreement when the existing one runs out.

DL - is there any problem running access in parallel?

SF - No, there is plenty of room in Rhiwbach to accommodate several groups together. Greenbridge may be more of a problem and we may have to avoid times when outdoors are present.

SH - I appreciate we still need a bit of time to get risk assessments etc in place, but I am assuming the information will be out quickly and we need to demonstrate to NRW good use in this year and not hold back.

SF - Yes, and then send trip reports so the use is documented. It would also be good for NRW to have qualitative data on what people found interesting and general feedback. We only have Parc and Cae Coch at present, but maybe in a year's time we could add Aberllyn to the list.

RH - Just picking up on that point from the BMC's experience at Range West there was a policy that climbers and surfers could access to it if they attended the briefings but that was limited to 30 per group per day. The previous range officer said it's not being used and so the number was cut to 30 in total. It is quite important to use it or lose it.

SF - We need to uphold the rules which have been negotiated with NRW and make sensible use of it.

OB - There is nothing in the agreement which stops individuals putting bolts in.

SF - We have to uphold BCA's conservation code. We as a company don't want to have to start placing bolts. There are bolts placed by other in these mine – we know nothing of the history of these bolts. It's not our role to provide hardware.

OB - If I need to place a rope for protection up where the pipes were can then go ahead without infringing the license?

SF - no, I don't think it can. For modification to the mines we need the landowner or mineral owner's explicit consent for bolts, digs etc. If you think bolts etc are needed write a proposal for Vince and then it will get fed through to the landowner.

DT - We wouldn't want to put bolts in as that then makes us liable for defects. In the caving community for example the CNCC have trained installed and the bolts are covered by insurance. They are regularly inspected and replaced if necessary.

SH - Mines are quite different to caves and mine explorers regularly leave ropes in place. So there is historically a very different culture and practice for mine explorers.

DT - We have to produce a formal risk assessment, how people interpret that is down to them – we have to cover our backs. There is a 12mm rope down from level 2 to 3. I would use it, but other people have to use their own judgment.

Ogof Govan & Castlemartin Range West

SF - An agreement has been reached with Range West to allow people who have gone on a briefing session to look for caves etc. Any which are found would need to need an inspection first by archaeologists and scientists while they are still pristine. I will provide more information to interested parties after the meeting. CCC doesn't have formal conservation guidelines for any of the caves. DCA are leading the way in this area and we really need to catch up. Maybe form a small conservation sub-committee which can assess caves and produce documentation.

Little Neath pollution

SF - Little Neath River cave has had a history of pollution over several years and I have spent a lot of time this year investigating the problem and liaising with NRW. The pollution is deliberate. I have been through the system and looked at containers lodged in various place. One of these contained a little engine oil and there was a 40 gallon drum which contained hydraulic fluid which the NRW will have to recover. A smaller 5l oil container had an emulsion of water and red diesel and this could be related one of the incidents. I am convinced that it is a deliberate action as the entrance is obscure and a person would need to know exactly where it is. People aren't going to drive miles down a dead-end road, walk across a farmer's field and find a small hole at the side of the river to dispose of waste. I am asking for ideas and information about previous

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incidents. Maybe Bernie could fill us in on that.

BW - Elsie was always looking at those and I know the family involved at the farm there. We have asked for their help in the past to see if there have been any strange characters wandering about. We never have been able to get to the bottom of this – I don't believe its coming from the farm.

SF - Surveillance is a possible option. I cannot comprehend what is going on here.

Cave Management Committee's

SF - we need our cave management committees because it's a huge effort to run caves in terms of landowner's, conservation etc and it cannot be done without teamwork and that is the role the committees are fulfilling. The OFD one and Mynydd Llangatw are NRW committees as NRW is the owner in one case and the leaseholder in the other. SWCC is the landowner of OFD1. The two landowners work in partnership and there is a unified access system for the whole lot and it works well. The DYO situation is concerning that a new, unlocked, gate with a notice had been put up. This says that the gate would be shut if there is a second entrance somewhere else. The reason given is business insurance would not cover the show-cave if there was an unlocked entrance somewhere else. If there was another entrance then that would need to be gated at the surface administered by the DYO committee and that should reassure the landowner.

There was a general discussion on the issues of keeping the owner of DYO on-side even if individuals decided to dig entrances from other areas where they have landowner permission.

SF - This brings us on to PDCMG. People have to have reasonable access otherwise they take gates off. Lock chopping at Penmachno has cost Gethin & Miles 6 padlocks this year. If there are systems which will provide adequate conservation protection and at the same time grant people reasonable access then surely both sides in the access-conservation debate can compromise in the middle. Have a system which provides the level of conservation which is adequate to meet the concerns of those who see the risks and at the same time provide reasonable access to those who wish to explore.

?? - You hope that to be the case. But it won't stop people acting unreasonably.

SF - But they haven't taken the gates off on Tunnel cave etc.

?? - They have taken the gates off Cwmorthin.

SF - I think the Cwmorthin and Rhiwbach situations are more complex as there are commercial interests as well. There may be trouble makers involved rather than people seeking access. We need to give negotiation a chance and I'll leave it at that, 2015 needs to see completion of the Ogof Govan/Castlemartin arrangements, the NRW project, carry on with the Welsh Water access and make a start on conservation plans following the route Derbyshire have taken.

FL - Thank-you Stuart for your hard work on Conservation and Access over the last year. I am slightly disappointed by the tone you have taken with PDCMG. I have a report to give later so I will pick up on one factual matter which is your report says that the landowner now wishes it closed having been persuaded that caving is harmful to bats and that is not correct at all. There is a correction in my report.

SF - We will take your report, but you did have bat recorders and things in there.

FL - That was to support the ongoing process to support a license to submit to NRW to define the legal process before anything can be done like fitting a gate. So people went in and used explosives there in a bat sensitive area without any consent and we have to make a proper legal process so that was why the bat monitors were there.

SF - Is it still your intention to block it for access? **FL** - That is what the landowner has asked for.

SF - Is it more the case that you have asked the landowner to ask for that as the last time I spoke to Peter Jones some years ago, he said he would go along with anything democratically decided by the committee

FL - Last time I spoke to him he was very annoyed about abuse at that entrance.

IA - is it on CRoW land? **FL** - it is on CRoW land. **IA** - Would it be legal to block it?

FL - it's not going to be blocked for bats. We are collecting ecological data.

IA - is it lawful to alter a natural feature on CRoW land?

?? - It wasn't on CRoW land at that time.

FL - The landowner was upset at the abuse he has received.

There was a general discussion on the history and problems with the Drws Cefn entrance and Dave Linton thought that Stuart's statement in the paper dealing with PDCMG was unhelpful. It was thought that going

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over the old history was unhelpful and it was better to take another look in the future.

MF – Well I would like to propose a vote of thanks for the phenomenal amount of work Stewart done.

LW – I was mandated by my club to formally thank Stuart, In particular for the agreement with the NRW.

6.e Training Officers Report

RH – As you can see from the first line of my report it has been a bit of frustrating year. I have managed to organise two or three SRT workshops and over the last couple of years they have always been well supported – in fact oversubscribed in South Wales. The cave survey ones, although I have nothing to do with them, they have always been very successful. This year it's partially been politics with various conservation type bat groups and other frustrations have been trying getting enough people to attend to make workshops happen. So although I am happy to carry on organising SRT workshops, as it's easy to do, it would be nice if other people suggested what they actually wanted for workshops or else I just won't bother trying as it really is frustrating.

DL – I would be definitely interested in a bat training course as there are quite a few bats in mines.

There was a general discussion regarding training with suggestions about liaising with other groups like John who runs expedition skills workshops or the CHECC training officer. **LW** noted that the BCA training community fails to give away its training grant each year. **RH** pointed out there is no reason a club couldn't apply to the BCA for a grant for their own SRT workshop rather than coming to the organised training sessions. **DT** asked if the event yesterday had sufficient attendees and **RH** replied that 4 people out of 10 had dropped out at the last minute which was disappointing. Previously a small fee was charged, but this session was free and so maybe people didn't have the same level of commitment. In future it seems a charge would be the best way of getting people to commit to attending and there were suggestions of a refundable deposit on attendance. Given that the cost of running a workshop with 3 CIC's would be around a £1000 a course fee of £25 seems very reasonable and people may then appreciate the value better. Advertising the courses was also important using regional newsletters and making sure club members saw them.

6.f Equipment and Techniques Officers Report

VA – In general this year has been dominated by bolts and by that I mean hangers. We have been using the Bolt Products hanger which is the BCA approved hanger made of stainless steel and we have approved installers trained up to fit them. Any caver can contact their regional council and we can install bolts provided we have appropriate permissions. They are only tested in limestone or concrete at present. Gethin Thomas, the N. Wales approved installer, has been doing some studies with a selection of different hangers in slate and his raw data is available on-line:

www.training-underground.co.uk and he did get funding from the BCA to do this work. We have been doing some testing in S. Wales with KMR resin as we think there have been issues with air bubbles forming in the applicator leading to incorrect mixing of resin and hardener. Also we are testing Fisher resin which has a different style of cartridge and is styrene free. The second round of testing will be on the 18th – 19th April and people would be welcome to give us a hand at Penwyllt quarry, S. Wales.

SH – I did have some talks with Bob Mehew on the resin issue. As a chemist I can think of ways of testing, what I can't think of is ways of mimicking the bad mixing. If people can come up with a way of doing this then I might be able to think of ways of analysing it. Styrene is not nice, but chances are the other resins are as nasty, but don't smell as bad.

There was some general discussion about the importance of the styrene component in bonding to the stainless steel of the hangers and the BCA had to move away from Hilti resin after it went styrene free. The mixing of the resins occurs in the nozzle, the newer cartridges are transparent so you can see any air bubbles. There is a colour change on mixing and the first 30-40 ml is expelled before applying to the hole. **FL** – If it were deemed helpful for testing the mixing etc I could offer student projects etc to get 'free labour' for testing and pull tests out of blocks would be close enough for examining behaviour - Just get in touch. **DL** –

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Is there any prospect of testing for other materials, we have now gone on to slate, but what about mines and all sorts of sedimentary rocks – we can provide plenty of opportunity and ideal locations. **DT** -There have been some bolt resin failures in Aberllyn. **SF** - Is there any research on the effect of water and dampness on resins? **VA** - That's what we are doing now – the next batch of holes will be flooded with water and then we will go in with the resin.

Research has been done with under water placement and subsequent testing. The testing will be with the new resin. Some discussion on factors which might have a bearing on the resin: pH and the presence of salts etc. In metal mines, corrosion and electrolytic action may be an issue. Galvanized bolts were mentioned, but are not really available as everyone now uses stainless. A question was raised about drop testing, rather than static pull tests but it was reported that the BMC who use the same anchors had done extensive tests with dynamic loads at different angles. There was further discussion about other bolt types like thunderbolts which are reported to be dangerous as the head shears off. Other comment on bolt replacement and registered installers is in the paper.

6.g Legal and Insurance Officers Report

DT – A printed copy of the report is provided. Fraser is stuck in India with a sick child and will be stepping down from the post at this AGM.

6.h Cambrian Cave Registry

MLa - I have updated the cave register and changed its format a bit. I am open to suggestions as to what else could be done to it. One thing not mentioned in the report is mines. At the moment mines are only included where they link into cave systems. There has been a long term suggestion that mines should be included in the registry – that's metalliferous mines, not coal mines. I've got some data and I could do that, but if I do I am minded to have it as a separate register. What I would like is some feedback from some of the mining people on your ideas – not here but outside the meeting...

6.i Website

BH - I will keep this nice and short. As far I am aware the web-site hasn't had any downtime. There is definitely a lot more traffic, last year it averaged about 500 page loads/month, this year we are up to 600 page loads/month. I added a few more pictures to make it look prettier, other than that I hope it's OK. Hopefully people can find what they want from it, the main intention is to be informative.

6.j Newsletter Editor

DT - I will also keep this brief, the usual problems with the newsletter are finding enough articles. You either have too many (which is very, very rare) or too few. I have had to hold over stuff from the last newsletter to the next one on the bolt testing in slate mines. On the whole it seems to be reasonably well accepted and I have had positive comments from other organisations. At the end of the day it is entirely down to peoples contributions so the main plea is to keep them coming. The next issue will be due out mid-April and I am looking for contributions for the end of this month.

DB - I would object to the rather sensationalist and misleading headline 'Referendum on the right to go caving' in issue 43. There was no referendum on the right to go caving – there was a referendum on BCA policy.

DT - Well, I didn't write the article, it was written by Stuart France!

DB - I suspected that! It's a bit sensational and a bit misleading and if somebody outside who doesn't know what's going on its likely to lead to misunderstanding. It's not like your writing for "The Sun"

DT - I'll take on board your points.

7. Other Cambrian Representative Reports

7.a FODCCAG

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DT - No report. As noted before John apologised for his absence.

7.b Welsh Mines Society

Dave Linton provided a report.

7.c NWCRO

Kat Hawkins has provided a report

7.d SMWCRT

Jen Hill has provided a report

7.e DYOCAP

Jem Roland has provided a report

7.f PDCMG

FL - provided a report and apologised for not sending it in advance due to pressure of work. Some of what I am going to say has been touched on before. Essentially I am saying that with respect to access we have good relations with the landowner, this is despite some individuals doing their best to disrupt this by using Drws Cefn without permission. Unfortunately this runs the risk of issues with the landowner relations and potentially making access less favourable in the future and not more favourable. On the original entrance we used to have a combination lock, but after the original trouble over this we had to move to a lock and key. We are trying to go back to a combination again but every time the landowner catches someone blatantly going against the access agreement it makes it harder to suggest that cavers are trustworthy despite our best efforts. We have talked a little bit about Drws Cefn already, just to reiterate, the reasons the landowner doesn't want anyone to use it is not to do with bats, it's his general regard for conservation. The fact is that it was opened up without his consent and that he then received a certain amount of intimidation from those involved afterwards.

WK - What is the landowners understanding of the conservation issues within the cave?

FL - The land is owned by a company called Pwll Du Conversation Limited so part of the key is in the title and its basically a company that exists solely for local people to have brought the land off the Coal Board in the first place together. He is interested in conservation in the broadest sense, so he is interested in conservation with respect to bats, conservation with respect to the cave environment etc.

SF - Can I ask a quick question on that? How is it that if closing Drws Cefn is a good thing for cave conservation why don't we close all caves?

FL - Well you could say that possible position, every people cave they cause damage, but we need to draw a line somewhere about what we are prepared in pursuit of the things that we are personally interested in. The disagreement about this particular location is coming from people drawing lines in different places.

SF - Will's question is what is the landowners perceived risk associated with this entrance that makes it special as distinct from any other caves entrance? What is driving the landowner on conservation grounds to want it closed?

FL - He is interested in conservation generally and one of the things to do with conservation of that caves is there are a lot of fragile things in that cave which become a lot more accessible through that entrance.

SF - There are a lot of fragile things in OFD, Dan-y-Ogof, Ogof Capel and all the rest. There is nothing which is special about that entrance and its curtilage compared to any other major cave in S. Wales.

FL - What is special about Ogof Dranaen is the fact that it has been discovered relatively recently so there is the opportunity to do something different.

SF - Well there are other places which have been discovered recently; the extensions to Llygad Lluchwr have been beautifully conserved without a gate and I just can't see what the drivers are for this...

There are pretty things in that part of the cave, there are pretty things in lots of caves, but they are well off

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the beaten track – most people would be unaware of their existence.

?? – It is very clear that there are two very diverse opinions and what makes it slightly more complicated for this is one diverse opinion is one of the officers of this organisation. So we can't in a sense say send the executive to arbitrate between them. Somehow you have to get a neutral party involved somewhere along the line. I know nothing about the issue but at the end of the day I come back and say we have an access body and they have to be persuaded to change, we cannot put the thumbscrews on them. Possibly the officers of this council need to get someone else involved to try and negotiate. There is no point in trying to go to and fro in a discussion like this, there are two diverse opinions and you have to find a different mechanism to go with. As far as I am concerned until some mechanism is found then they are the access body and you go with that.

RH - Could be go to the BCA conservation and access body?

IA - Would your group submit to that?

FL - I think I could talk to Andrew Hinde

IA - would we? **MF** - Yes

IA - It seems a reasonable compromise at this stage.

?? - Are any of the cave management committees on this list accountable to anyone?

?? - No, only themselves.

SH - I do think the answer is to go to the BCA conservation officer, the only qualification I would put to that is you may have to accept him delegating it to someone because he has a lot on his plate.

DT - That's a good idea Steve

?? - Both sides would have to request the BCA to get involved. The BCA cannot interfere without a request from both sides as it's in their constitution.

FL - Probably what I have to do is talk about it at our committee meeting because there is a lot of controversy in our group. Its very difficult to make decisions outside of a meeting, that's why I talk about a letter in my report which I have only given to Dave today, because with the timing when it arrived it couldn't be discussed for a response until our last meeting in December. Personally I am happy with Andrew Hinde, but it should be put on the agenda for June. Our meeting will be a week after the BCA meeting.

LW - I suggest Cambrian caving Council put a request to BCA C&A committee to intervene in this than Pwll Du would have to agree to this as well. That could happen after June if Pwll Du was in agreement.

SF - can we have a commitment that the entrance won't be blocked prior to the BCA involvement.

FL - that I cannot do that. I cannot agree to something as substantial as that, but nothing may happen in this timescale.

?? - I think we need to be seen to be trying otherwise we are just going round it circles.

FI - See paper document for other comments on caver trip numbers, conservation etc.

LW (for SH) This council refers the matter of negotiation on Ogof Dranaen between PDCMG and the Cambrian Caving Council to the BCA's C&A committee.

SH Proposed **PT** Seconded. Voting: all in favour

8. BCA Matters

LW - Perhaps you should mention the BCA's AGM weekend at this point which is being held in the Forest of Dean.

DT - It's mentioned in the newsletter

9. Election of Officers

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

Position	Nominee	proposer	seconded
Chairman	Martyn Farr	Les Williams	Mike Leahy

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Position	Nominee	proposer	seconded
Secretary	Dave Tyson	Martyn Farr	Richard Hill
Treasurer	Ian Adams	Les Williams	Dave Tyson
Conservation/Access	Stuart France	Martyn Farr	Dan Thorne
Training Officer	Richard Hill	Dan Thorne	Will Kilner
Equipment Officer	Vince Allkins	Richard Hill	Will Kilner
Legal & Insurance	Roy Fellows	Dave Tyson	Martyn Farr
Cave Registry	Martin Laverty	Stuart France	Les Williams

Barry Hill agreed to continue as CCC webmaster and Dave Tyson agreed to continue as newsletter editor. These two posts are co-opts by the committee.

9 Any Other Business

PC - Something I was going to raise after the conservation report, but didn't have time. I have tabled an article of the effects of mines as archeology which I have raised because of the issues related to mining is quite different to caving and there needs to be more focus on the archeology of mines compared to caves. Some of that is related to moves afoot in England-with the move to looking toward statutory protection of the subterranean archaeology without reference to the surface. At the moment the statutory protection of archeology relates to the surface and it then continues to the underground elements. There are moves afoot to put in place statutory protection purely based on the subterranean areas. This is the title page of a draft report which has gone to English Heritage by John Barnet one of the archaeological officers with the Peak District National park and a keen and very knowledgeable person working in the subterranean environment. It provides an opportunity for people like yourselves who have got the speleological techniques to get to these site and we need a body of people who are knowledgeable on the archeology and can actually get there as you are not going to find English Heritage environment protection officers going underground and looking at these sites. They are reliant on people in the voluntary sector with the appropriate skills. So there is going to be a greater focus on mine exploration, people with speleological techniques and archaeologists. Before that happens we need to come to terms with the fact that archaeological requirements for mines are quite different to caves. With the newsletter editors permission I would like to actually publish this piece in the newsletter.

LW - Is this also something which should be flagged up with the BCA C&A committee?

PC - This is the next move, I am not the NAMHO C&A rep

SH - The NAMHO AGM is next week

RF - Scheduled ancient monument protection does extent to the underground world.

PC - But that's only the case if the surface is scheduled at present. What's going to happen is you could have a farmer's field with nothing in it whatsoever, but underneath it there could be a medieval mine in which case that underground element is going to be scheduled in its own right. This will become the new frontier of archaeology, much like marine archaeology over the last few decades where the divers, the only people who could access it, have become the archaeological surveys.

SH - The only thing is, from the explorer's point of view, if you are looking at scheduling stuff underground you are going to suffer from access controls. The latest being in Shropshire with Llanymynech being gated. This is used by a lot of people and that's because of its bronze age, but it's used by many people and CADW want to gate it. So its all very well going along this route then some stuff will be gated and locked off and you won't be allowed in because you might damage it.

There was a general discussion on whether this is going to cause a problem. Certainly there is a need to take care with archaeological remains in much the same way as formations and floors are protected in caves. Care will have to be taken not to drill bolt holes where there are pick marks for example. Les pointed out Peter's comments that we are going to be the experts and so the statutory bodies are going to be dependent on the advice of mine explorers as the level of protection required. From the caving perspective

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there has been very little restriction placed on caves because they have been scheduled as SSSI's in the past.

There was a discussion about the Silica Mines in S. Wales and whether Cave Access Limited would look to taking them on. **RF** - reported on then situation in detail and was setting up a new company to deal with the ownership. Natural Amenities Limited will be an ordinary company limited by share capital, CMT is an associate company owning 50% and the other 50% is owned by me. Hopefully by Tuesday I will be able to sort out the transfer details with the vendor, Bennet Forestry Syndicate, with a view to be completed by Easter. The mine involved is the main one out of the group.

Dave Linton reported that the Mid-Wales Mine Forum, where we discuss anything related to mines in Ceredigion and over the border in Powys will be on the Saturday 28th March 2015 at the Halfway Inn in Pïsgah between Aberystwyth and Devil's Bridge. All welcome.

10 Date of Next Meeting

It was agreed to hold next year's AGM on Sunday 13th March 2016 at a location in Mid-Wales (Venue TBD, but Rhyaedar or near Cwmystwyth suggested) at 12.00 noon.

The meeting finished at 16.30 – after 4 hours

Cambrian Caving Council
Accounts
Year Ended 31st December 2014

Income & Expenditure Account

Income

Subscriptions	£24.00	
Bank Interest	£13.36	
Keys	£20.00	
BCA Grant	£583.63	
Barclays Compensation	£125.00	
Sports Wales Grant	£750.00	
Sports Wales Grant (Safety)	£1,600.00	
Total Income		£3,115.99

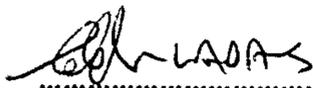
Expenditure

Travel & Accomodation	£154.50	
Equipment & Techniques	£537.88	
Training Events	£312.60	
Room Hire	£42.00	
Books	£67.99	
Print, Postage & Stationery	£151.63	
Grants to Cave Rescue	£1,600.00	
FoDCCAG Grant (admin)	£45.00	
Total Expenditure		£2,911.60

Excess of Income over Expenditure **£204.39**

Balance Sheet

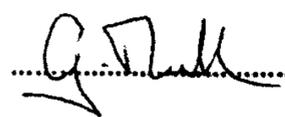
Bank Account (NS&I) - (Transferred to current A/C)	£0.00	
Unpresented Cheques	-£132.73	
Barclays Current Account	£5,724.24	
		£5,591.51
Reserves at 31st December 2013	£5,970.75	
Less : Paid up debtor (BCA Grant)	-£583.63	
Excess Income over Expenditure	£204.39	
		£5,591.51


..... Ian Adams (Treasurer)

Date: 22/1/15

Honorary Scrutineer's Report

I have examined the above Income & Expenditure Account for the Year ended 31st December 2014 and the balance sheet as at that date. In my opinion they are in accordance with the Council's accounting records and explanations provided.


..... G J Mullan (Honorary Scrutineer)

Date: 24/1/15

Cambrian Caving Council AGM 2015

Secretary's Report

The secretaries post has seen quite a few challenges over the past year and no doubt these will continue. The application for the Sport Wales National Governing Body membership has been submitted, but since Sport Wales have changed their year end to April we will not know the result till then. Membership provides a small fund for training and also allows CCC to claim the Sports Safety Grant(SSG) from the Welsh Sports Association. The latter also fund the Overseas Expedition Grant(OEG) which has provided funding for many international caving trips in the past.

Sadly, further cuts in the funding to Sport Wales/WSA may mean that the SSG and OEG may no longer be available. I think we were quite lucky in 2014 that both grants were issued, albeit with a delay and less money. Both the Welsh Cave Rescue organisations benefitted from a grant of £800 each via the SSG and Robin Weare's expedition to Oromia in October received the requested funding. I have asked the WSA about the expedition grants for 2015/2016 and have been told that clubs/individuals should apply using the forms on the WSA website by 13th March 2015, but will then have to wait see if funding is provided.

I have attended a couple of meetings with representatives from the BMC, Ramblers Wales and the BCU to discuss access policies in the light of the proposed Welsh Assembly green paper. Sadly this was shelved but is likely to re-surface after the elections. Natural Resources Wales are leading a campaign to encourage outdoor exercise and are promoting the coastal paths etc. as an aid to a healthier lifestyle.

I have also attended the BCA council meetings as CCC rep.

Collecting information on member clubs and membership figures for the Sport Wales paperwork takes some time. The BCA do their best to provide some information but there are often anomalies to resolve. A lot of work goes into keeping contact lists up to date as many clubs don't provide secretaries email addresses on their websites for fear of spam and often these are out of date anyway.

Dave Tyson

Cambrian Caving Council – Treasurer’s Report (15th March 2015)

The accounts for the year reflect a rather typical year with a small excess of income over expenditure increasing the funds of the CCC by £204.39

There are a few points to note;

- 1) The accounts were scrutinised (essentially audited) by Mr Graham Mullen of UBSS (who has also done so in the previous years) and found to be in order.
- 2) Not all CCC officers availed themselves of the opportunity to recover expenses and those that did, in the main, understated their claims. Rather unlike UK politicians, this is a stark contrast to “expense claims” and has aided the CCC in staying financially ahead.
- 3) During the year it was decided to close the NS&I savings account. Although this yielded a small amount of interest, the interest was so low it was considered that, the inability to even be advised of the balance without advanced written notice of two signatures (leaving aside the inaccessibility of the funds) did not merit its existence. The account was therefore closed and the gross funds were transferred the current account.
- 4) The scrutiniser/auditor suggested that the CCC might pursue a Barclays bank deposit account (the CCC account being with Barclays). Upon enquiry, however, the bank advised that community accounts were essentially business accounts and they were unable to offer a deposit account which attracted interest.
- 5) Sports Wales, who provide us with the greatest amount of grant(s) for cave rescue and safety advised that they were no longer able to sustain the same level of grants due to government funding cuts. Nevertheless, our Secretary, Mr Dave Tyson, was able to secure grants in the full amount this year. The forthcoming year(s) remain very speculative and Sport Wales have been unable to confirm the amount of available grant (and will not do so until the forthcoming claim is submitted). We can, however, expect a reduced subsidy with imminent effect.

Everything else being as per previous years, I would propose that the accounts be accepted.

Ian Adams
(Treasurer CCC)

Cambrian Caving Council Training Officer Report 2015

It has been a frustrating year as workshops we have managed to organise have been poorly attended with the exception of the SRT workshops.

The cave photography workshop was advertised a couple of times but didn't happen due to a lack of numbers.

The bat walk/talk did happen but was poorly attended. A follow up trip in hibernation time has been held up due to politics within the bat groups but will hopefully happen next winter.

The Cave Survey workshop is hopefully going to be run through SWCC later this year.

The SRT workshop in Langorse was well attended with several instructors giving their time to teach a variety of techniques. There is a second one planned for yesterday! In North Wales which has been oversubscribed, indeed the Langorse one was not advertised as it was only open to those that had missed out previously.

I am happy to stand as Training Officer for another year unless someone else wishes to take over. It would be good if people let me know what workshops they would like to be organised with the exception of SRT and surveying which are always popular but does mean the same people giving up their time.

Cambrian Caving Council Equipment & Techniques officer annual report.

Yet again the year has been largely dominated by bolts.

There has been extensive testing by Gethin Thomas with a large array of different type of anchors installed, exercised and pulled, all in slate. The results (raw data) can be found at www.train4underground.co.uk. This stage of the testing has been funded by the BCA. Thanks to Gethin and his team for all the hard work and in sharing the information.

There has also been another test programme in South Wales. Testing an alternative resin which bonds the current BCA Bolt products “P” anchors currently used throughout the UK within the BCA bolt placement scheme. Council have been concerned with possible air bubbles within both resin cartridge chambers and the styrene content of the current make of resin.

The first stage has been completed with the results and a report published in the latest, to date, Cambrian Caving Council newsletter. Due to weather conditions the last stage of this programme is still outstanding but we have now set a date for the 18/19th April 2015 at Penwyllt party quarry. Anyone is welcome to join us.

BCA Equipment & Techniques “Fixed Aids Policy Document” has almost certainly died a death. I think probably just as well as this seems to put too much liability onto the installer or the regional/access bodies and next to no responsibility upon the end users.

The BCA E&T committee have been researching other bolts, particularly with an emphasis on conservation and ease of replacement in the event of extractions.

The Cambrian currently has 5 BCA approved bolt installers and all our certificates are in date. These are:

Paul Taylor and Dave Appling both in the Forest of Dean.

Gethin Thomas and Dewi loyd in North Wales

Vince Allkins. South Wales.

I as an assessor am working on either a bolt installation demonstration and possibly an induction course with a view to train up more installers if there is the interest in the coming year.

I am willing to stand as E&T officer next year if elected.

Vince Allkins.

Cambrian Council Equipment and Techniques Officer.

March 2015

Cambrian Caving Council AGM 2015
Legal & Insurance Officer's Report

The legal issue this year has surrounded the forestry mines access agreement with NRW, which has been mostly handled by the Conservation/Access Officer. To shield members of the Caving Council from the various liabilities that such an agreement creates, the agreement is between NRW and Cave Access Ltd, a company limited by guarantee specifically for this purpose. It is anticipated that the company will have no significant accounting transactions and therefore be dormant with a low statutory burden.

When negotiating the agreement with NRW, the BCA clarified matters relating to the scope of BCA insurance, which NRW eventually accepted.

CCC Cave Registrars Report for 2015 AGM

On being unexpectedly recruited as Cambrian Cave Registrar, the outgoing registrar gave me a Microsoft Access database and very brief instructions as to how it had been used to create a file to update an SQL database on the CCR website via a third party. The Cambrian webmaster provided me with full access to the relevant part of the CCR website. There was nothing else handed over, so I have revised the data in line with my own interpretation of the rationale for a cave registry. In line with this I have:

- Revised and, where necessary, corrected the classification of sites
- Removed duplicated sites
- Added new sites which I either knew of or was informed about
- Revised and, where necessary, corrected the content about sites
- Added (but not necessarily populated) a depth field for sites
- Separated out hydrological details
- Begun to standardise the bibliographic references, and link to online sources where available
- Begun to classify the different types of access control applicable to sites
- Modified the web search interface to search just on cave name, which now covers alternative names and spellings
- Added a map interface to display key content
- Refreshed the 'Underground Wales' web page
- Reported on developments in the 'Wales Underground' newsletter
- Updated the data available online several times.

I have implemented the above from a database maintained in plain text XML using open-source software rather than using commercial software. I have also loaded all the data, together with official maps delimiting areas covered by particular access, conservation, or other bodies, into QGIS (a Geographical Information System), which greatly simplified tasks such as determining whether sites were within SSSI's, and counting sites in CRoW-designated land.

If elected to continue as Registrar I would intend to continue the above and look at:

- separating the access details out as the responsibility of the Access Officer
- expanding the coverage of surveys, including possibly displaying thumbnails and/or scanned surveys online (cf cavemaps.org for Northern England)

- giving online access to view 3D survey viewing (DYO, OFD, LNRC, Draenen all have data which might be used)
- adding photos of cave entrances (a capability partly built in to the system which the previous registrar apparently intended to use, but not implemented)
- Be open to suggestions for any other improvements

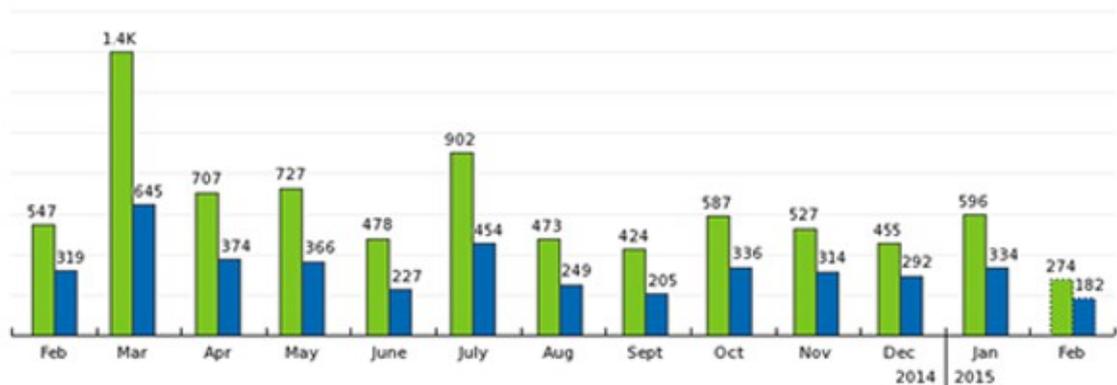
Martin Lavery

CCC 2015 Webmasters Report

Since the last AGM, the website has been updated with some caving related pictures to try and make it more pleasing to look at as well as making any information easier to find. During 2013-14 our average monthly page views was approx 500 per month, this past 12 months has seen a increase in traffic, as we are now at just over 600 page views per month (February 2015 fingers will be low as this report is dated 10th February, so not complete month included in figures below).

By far the most visited page in the Newsletter one, followed by Cave Access and Latest News.

Website has been updated as and when information has been received from our officers, as well as Newsletters made available to download asap after production.



	Page Views	Unique Visits	First Time Visits	Returning Visits
Total	8,097	4,297	3,088	1,209
Average	623	331	238	94

Returning Visits - Based purely on a cookie, if this person is returning to your website for another visit an hour or more later

First Time Visits - Based purely on a cookie, if this person has no cookie then this is considered their first time at your website.

Unique Visitor - Based purely on a cookie, this is the total of the returning visits and first time visits - all your visitors.

Page Views- The number of times your page has been visited.

Barry Hill (CCC Webmaster)

10th February 2015

CCC Conservation & Access Officer's Report March 2014 to March 2015

WELSH GOVERNMENT

The Green Paper on improving leisure access in the countryside has been postponed to at least 2016. The Minister realised late in the day that it was top-heavy with too many sporting interests, some competing for the same territory – like fishing versus water-sports. CCC has since met with the British Mountaineering Council who will now lead a small group seeking a positive result in coming years focused only on pedestrian land-based recreation like rock climbing, rambling and caving which have little or no impact on other sports and landowner interests.

The Welsh Government is developing radical and potentially game-changing pieces of big legislation. The Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Bill, the Environment (Wales) Bill, and the Planning (Wales) Bill will address some of the most crucial issues facing society into the medium and long-term. These include climate change, loss of species, and encouraging ways of living sustainably. The WFG Bill will enable all public bodies – from health boards to local authorities – to carry out their work in an environmentally responsible and sustainable way and to influence others to do so.

Natural Resources Wales, which combines the former CCW with the Forestry Commission Wales and the Environment Agency Wales, is two years old next month. The new NRW is committed to promoting healthy living, sports and physical activity. NRW has drafted an Outdoor Recreation and Access Strategy document for 2014-20. Recreation investment is continuing, such as on mountain bike trails and promoting walking in the countryside and near home too in community woodland. The benefits are seen in terms of tourism and health via outdoor recreation, education about the natural world, and generating a sense of responsibility and care.

There is another side to NRW. They are far more formal to deal with than the former CCW was. This has been demonstrated by a year-old investigation into a cave dig on an SSSI which had not been formally consented by NRW, although the landowners had given permission. It seems NRW's intention is to demonstrate their future intent and make an example of the individual concerned. This could bring a prosecution rather than dispose of the matter in some less extreme way like an enforcement notice. Making sites untouchable should help with the preservation of existing scientific assets, but not in delivering anything new. The approach that CCW took previously was such that cave discovery was welcomed as an essential step in opening up additional areas in which to carry out new scientific research.

We need to factor in this potentially serious strategic change in outlook by the new statutory conservation body running alongside government greening. In the past year I met with NRW staff several times, talking about SSSI cave management generally, educating cavers about SSSIs, and making SSSI documents easily available online.

I also attended the National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW) meetings which are run by NRW as a consultative committee established under the CRoW Act to liaise with all sport governing bodies on access issues.

REGIONAL POLITICS

CCC has recently received the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority (BBNPA) consultation on their National Park Management Plan for 2015-20. There is very little about caving in its 100 pages. Dave Tyson will be responding on our behalf.

Each National Park is required by the CRoW Act to hold Local Access Forums, akin to NAFW but with a regional focus. BBNPA LAF members are selected by the Park staff on the basis of interests, knowledge and connections. But caving is mentioned only twice in LAF minutes during the past seven years when our interests were represented throughout by Bernie Woodley who continued to attend LAF meetings during 2014 after leaving council. We were unaware of all this until recently. As there has been no contact with Bernie, there has also been no opportunity to brief or receive feedback.

The other Welsh national parks, Pembrokeshire Coast and Snowdonia, will also have LAFs but caving opportunities in these regions are far smaller than in the Brecon Beacons. CCC has never had any contact with these other LAFs, it seems, but perhaps we should find local cavers to monitor or try to join such groups.

The A465 dual carriageway project gained approval at Public Inquiry for the sensitive Clydach Gorge section and work has begun. This project was mentioned as a cause for concern at the CCC AGM back in 1995, i.e. twenty years ago. A conservation audit with extensive photography and mapping has been carried out by Dr Peter Smith and John Stevens, both local cavers who possess the right professional skills. The principal consultant speleologist is the well-known caver Prof John Gunn. It is reassuring that this level of supervision and technical input is in place and that the main contractor, Costains, will have to demonstrate at the completion of the road works that the caves are undamaged by comparing them with the audit. Access to the gorge, e.g. Ogof Capel, will be disrupted while the area is a building site. I have a dialogue open with Costains on behalf of CCC and I am being kept informed.

CCC NEWSLETTER

Our council newsletter has been made more attractive and readable this past year not only for cavers' benefit but also for distribution to the third parties with whom we deal. The importance of having good publications in various media to underline our credibility, grab attention, and communicate ideas is quite obvious at meetings such as NAFW, and when dealing with staff in external organisations.

Horse riding representatives offered beautifully produced flyers and a detailed booklet at the November NAFW meeting containing scientific research into the health benefits of horse riding, with absolutely perfect timing to fit the health and well-being national politics explained on the page above. The BMC has an attractively printed climbing access manifesto which was sent to every MP, with the aim of getting promises into political party manifestos ahead of the May general election. Whilst our budget does not match that of these other big National Governing Bodies, there are practical and affordable ways to raise our game and we need to use them.

The newsletter is one of these, and its four issues this year have been a team effort in terms of the written material contributed and the production effort. One club supplied an article in the form of a club history and profile which was much appreciated. Some contributions from other clubs that showcase caving activities and exemplify good practice would be most welcome as special features in future issues.

MINES AND MINE HISTORY

I have attended some mine history meetings and made new contacts during the year. These have proved invaluable in advancing the NRW Mines Access Agreement envisioned by Elsie Little to an operational system. The pace of progress has been painfully slow at times, chasing to get replies to emails or calls, then to get papers signed off, put into envelopes and delivered to us. But we are about there now.

We have set up a new company Cave Access Ltd (CAL) which has full commercial powers but will be operated on a not-for-profit, no remuneration, and no charge for permits basis, ideally without handling any money at all. The directors are myself, Roy Fellows and Dave Tyson. We have legal responsibilities as company officers that could land us in a criminal court or on the end of a civil action – health and safety being the most important one – so we must retain control of operational matters. Having said that, we are open to all ideas and suggestions coming from anyone.

The Welsh Government and NRW and CAL have signed and dated two contracts for mines access which run initially for one year. We await the hardcopy from their solicitors. CAL are also waiting for BCA to confirm the insurance as an access body. CAL must also supply the NRW land agent with Risk Assessments for each mine on the permitted site list before it can invite cavers and mine explorers to visit them. Here is the initial site list:

Gwrych Castle Mines	Abergele
Parc Lead Mine	Gwydyr Forest
Cae Coch Sulphur Mine	Gwydyr Forest
Rhiwbach Slate Quarry	Penmachno
Bryneglwys Quarry	Abergynolwyn
Hendre Ddu Slate Quarry	Aberllefenni
Henfwich Pryse Estate Sheep Walk	Nant-y-Moch, Ceredigion
Minllyn Slate Quarry	Dinas Mawddwy
Allt y Crib	Tal-y-Bont, Ceredigion
*Temple Mine	Rheidol Valley
Draethen Lead Mines	Draethen, Caerphilly

*Owned by NRW. All other sites owned by WG.

All documents should be in the correct place by the CCC AGM weekend so we can make the first official trips into the Parc Lead Mine and Rhiwbach Slate Mine then.

OGOF CARNO

CAL is likely the best platform for restoring access into Ogof Carno which begins as an adit owned by Welsh Water plc. I had an informal meeting with WW management about this and they want to talk again later when the NRW mines access system is seen to be a success and we have obtained a supportive recommendation from NRW. Welsh Water is a big landowner and they have some other interesting but currently forbidden sites such as a natural limestone tunnel with over 1km of diveable passage, which is ongoing. The water company is very focused on health and safety matters which will need to be fully addressed in any new access agreement.

GREENBRIDGE CAVE AND CARMARTHENSHIRE KARST

Access has been negotiated and cave keys obtained to Greenbridge Cave. Visitors should contact me for them. It is a little visited area but has huge potential with a beach resurgence with the volume of the DYO outflow but no direct cave access there. Greenbridge Cave itself is further inland and while small is significant with a very long and tight on-going lead. Slightly further inland again I have negotiated access with a neighbouring farmer who is quite enthusiastic about cave digging or prospecting. All his land is good limestone, it has some interesting karst features, and all unscheduled. If you are interested in this area for an exploration project then please contact me.

OGOF GOVAN AND CASTLEMARTIN RANGE WEST

Access into Ogof Govan on Range East has always been slightly controversial in that the original explorers appear to have handed over cave management to the curator of Haverfordwest Museum with the consent of the firing range management of that era. Needless to say such an arrangement did not work, and people just went to the cave without museum consent. The landowner is now a MOD agency called the Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) and they are understandably not too happy about the lack of communication, the YouTube videos, and large photos in the Daily Mail. But the good news is that they are keen to enable a well-managed legal access system not only for Ogof Govan but also for prospecting any new caves on Range West which is a live firing area for tanks and aircraft, some navy operations, special forces training with personnel from our own country and allies.

A meeting took place in March 2015 between myself and two army officers, two staff from NRW and two from the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park at the range office. We have agreed an interim system for Ogof Govan which is that cavers will contact me to have an informal conversation about the terms and conditions of access, and I will then pass them on to the park staff who will authorise visits on a one-off basis.

Range West may contain unexploded ordnance, from recent to very old. Cavers wishing to explore for caves must attend a safety briefing and obtain a personal photo pass. This is handed back to the range office at the end of each visit on the range, and a report of any cave discoveries needs to be filed. The pass is for your own use, not for family and friends or your dog. New caves found must not be entered until archaeologists and cave scientists have had opportunity to assess them and given clearance. Placing bolts and hammering in metal ground anchor bars is not allowed on safety grounds because these could break into shrapnel which can be accelerated to fly several kilometres beyond the range boundary if hit by the explosive in shells. This is not an agreement either just to go walking on what is otherwise a forbidden karst landscape. The National Park offers guided walks on certain dates each year for those who simply want that kind of relaxed coastal day. If you are interested in using the cave prospecting agreement then please call me first for a discussion of the T&Cs.

I expect that over the course of the coming year we will obtain a final written legal access agreement from DIO covering use of Range West and Range East, and that will replace the interim access permission methods that are described above.

LITTLE NEATH RIVER CAVE, BRIDGE CAVE, PWLL-Y-RHYD, ETC

Another serious diesel pollution incident was reported to me in September 2014. This is the latest in a series going back to April 2008 at least. A further report received in December 2014 is thought to be due to a development of the September incident rather than a fresh incident.

I attended the scene, along with NRW officers. The strongest smell of fuel was in the small entrance passage where the water sinks from the main river. The Nedd Fechan river itself was not polluted, and neither were any of the downstream caves which I checked. There are no historic reports of the downstream caves ever being polluted. From this we concluded that diesel was likely poured into the LNRC entrance on such occasions, and it is wondrous that previous investigations did not figure this out.

I removed several intact and near empty oil containers from Pwll-y-Rhyd. There is also an old 100-gallon oil drum stuck in the cave roof there, which is also empty and intact, to be removed by NRW contractors in due course. None of these containers has leaked. One of the 5-litre engine oil cans that I took off site, and a modern plastic one at that, had red diesel residues inside matching the smell in the cave. I went into LNRC in February 2015 and found there are still waxy deposits and scum on static pools although the fuel smell has gone. So caving is now about back to normal.



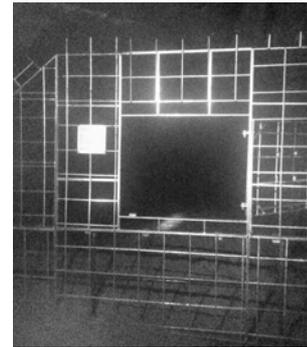
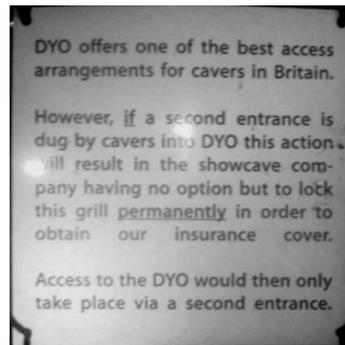
We could be dealing with a linked series of nature crimes at LNRC, and in any crime investigation one considers motive, means and opportunity. Motive is usually money, passion or power. This cannot be money, so it must be passion and power. Passion covers a wide spectrum of emotions including exclusion, frustration, envy and revenge. Power would include enjoying affecting cave access, the thrill of getting away with something that is unrecognized as a crime, and the attention each incident generates. This apparently absurd series of attacks thus makes complete sense to somebody whom I fear is a caver with appropriate means, opportunity and unusual personality. There are other interpretations, but this one is my best shot. We must all be vigilant and mindful of the fact that cavers enjoy exceptionally good relations with the landowner at Blaen Nedd Isaf farm who is having to put up with these roughly annual pollution incidents and the subsequent inquiries by NRW.

CAVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

I am very grateful for the efforts of many others in managing our biggest and best caves. It is a massive contribution by so many people to look after them so well.

The arrangements at OFD and new access system into OFD1 following SWCC's land purchase are working well. Further east, the MLCMAC has also had a quiet year with nothing more to contend with than a few fallen boulders coming from various cliffs above cave entrances or footpaths. OFDCMC and MLCMAC are NRW committees and we are grateful to Richard Preece and his professional staff in Abergavenny for their leadership with cave management over many years. We also give Richard Preece our best wishes for the future on leaving NRW in March.

The new DYO committee is now running smoothly although the cave landowner is understandably concerned about activity in 2014 with regard to upland cave digs. A new grille and a notice about cave access have appeared recently at the DYO lakes.



PDCMG's self-belief remains inversely proportional to their comprehension of what caving is all about. They are still intent on closing the Drws Cefn entrance as soon as they have official 'bat consent' on the grounds that the landowner now wishes it closed having been persuaded by them that caving is harmful to bats. This is not a view shared by CCC officers and a letter was written to PDCMG accordingly. Some bat data loggers placed by PDCMG were stolen during the past year, but there have been no more lock/gate thefts. Drws Cefn is on CRoW Access Land and given the pro-CRoW referendum result in BCA, I feel that it is pity that no fresh attempt was made to compromise, such as fitting a gate like the one at the first entrance. The group is said to be bracing itself for the inevitable backlash that closing Drws Cefn may imply. Let's hope that PDCMG's political talent does not run to closing the whole of Ogof Draenen.

LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

I have had an interesting first year in this role and it has taken up a lot more of my time and broadened my understanding in ways that I did not imagine at the outset. I could have said more in this report, but it is long enough already, so apologies if I have missed out a topic of greater interest to you.

The 2015 focus has been on better access and this effort should be continued. But a greater effort needs to go into cave conservation from here onwards, which is far more complex to plan and deliver successfully. We need to study the Derbyshire Caving Association's flagship methods, then begin to catch up. It is not something to attempt alone. We will need a whole team for advancing this, and thus unity amongst ourselves, along with winning the hearts and minds of others to uphold our aims.

I would like to thank my fellow officers on our Council for their support, the wider help and encouragement, and I am willing to be nominated in this role for a further year.

Stuart France

Welsh Mines Society

The Society continues its usual activities having had one indoor meet and two field meets (Cwmystwyth/Vale of Rheidol and Dolaucothi/Strata Florida) during 2014. Individual members have pursued their own projects during the year. Currently the Society has 160 members; this number has been relatively constant over the last decade.

In addition to its usual two newsletters, during the last year the Society published the third volume in the series Welsh Mines and Mining, this being Metal Mining in Mid Wales 1822 ?1921 by the late George Hall. The proceedings of the 2014 NAMHO Conference are in preparation by the Society and it is intended they will be published in May 2015 in time for the 2015 NAMHO Conference.

The Society has concerns with regard to the conservation of mine sites, particularly underground. In many ways mines and their artefacts are even more fragile than caves, for instance structures are generally in a state of decay and climbing on them, even when not actually dangerous, accelerates their degradation. In addition, the movement of artefacts, such as taking rails from one location to use them as anchors for SRT elsewhere, removes them from their historical context. Whilst it is recognised that mines can provide a challenging and adventurous underground environment, it is suggested that they should be considered primarily as historical monuments and that every effort be made to preserve their archaeological record. The Society would recommend that the Council promote this aspect of mine exploration to its constituent bodies.

As announced in its Autumn 2014 newsletter, the Society's editor Dave Linton will be standing down at the end of 2015, by which time he will have performed this role for 10 years. In addition he will no longer act as the Society's representative to CCC and NANHO after the end of 2015.

Dave Linton
Editor, Welsh Mines Society



1st March 2015

Annual Report for the Cambrian Caving Council's AGM.

2014 has been a busier than usual year for NWCRO with the primary incident being a mine diving fatality at Cambrian Mine / Aber Las Mine. This was a multi-agency incident with assistance being provided by CDG cave divers from across the UK – primarily from CRO, UWFRA and DCRO with attendance by further divers from SMWCRT and Mendip CRO. A total of 18 NWCRO team members attended and the body was recovered about 10 hours following the initial call-out.

NWCRO also assisted with 2 animal recovery incidents (1 sheep and 2 cows) during 2014 and were called to assist in recovering some goods from a quarry. Team members also attended incidents at Bounce Below at the Llechwedd complex (unconscious male) and at Cyneiniog Mine (male mine explorer unable to exit mine) but were ultimately not required to go underground.

As usual we will run a mix of mid-week evening training events and full-day events. Full day training events are planned for:

Sunday 19th April – cave in northeast Wales

Sunday 17th May – surface day at Plas y Brenin (concentrating on aspects such as communications, first aid and stretcher hauling) followed by AGM

Sunday 9th August – water session; floating stretcher

Sunday 15th November – mine in west

For more information please contact our Training Officer on training@northwalescro.org.uk or look at the website.

Kat Hawkins
Secretary
North Wales Cave Rescue Organisation (NWCRO)

South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team

Registered Charity No. 1016463

20th February 2015



Annual Report for the Cambrian Caving Council's AGM.

2014 has been our quietest year on record, with only one recorded incident:

On the 22nd April a party of nine cavers from Leeds University were reported to be overdue from their trip into Agen Allwedd. Before a search team had been dispatched, two members of the missing party exited the cave, informing the rescue team that the party had become severely lost and the remaining seven cavers could be found in Biza Passage. After 18 hours and involving 22 team members, the overdue party were escorted from the cave via Southern Stream Passage.

We have a busy training programme planned this year. As well as our 5 major practice sessions, listed below, we will also be running a number of training evenings. Please take a look on our website for full details.

- 22nd March Practice – Surface Search Llangynidr
- 24th – 26th April Advanced First Aid Course
- 15th – 17th May Practice – Mid Wales
- 3rd October Practice - Agen Allwedd
- 5th December Practice – Ogof Ffynnon Ddu
- 16th January 2016 Practice – Workshop, Penwyllt

Jen Hill

Secretary

South & Mid Wales Cave Rescue Team

PDCMG Report to the CCC AGM Sunday 15th March 2015

Since the last CCC AGM there have been two PDCMG meetings, one in June and one in November.

In respect of access, we continue to have good relations with the landowner. This is despite some individuals in our community doing their best to disrupt this key relationship by making obvious use of Drws Cefn. Blatant breaching of access agreements only runs the risk of making access conditions less favourable in the future, not more favourable. It is in no one's interest to annoy the landowners in this situation.

During ongoing discussions with the landowner about these issues, he has reiterated clearly his desire to see the closure of Drws Cefn. This is not related specifically to the proposition that caving is harmful to bats as has been suggested, but reflects two factors: 1) the landowner's deep regard for conservation in the general sense and 2) the fact that the entrance was dug without his consent and the intimidation he received from the diggers and their associates following its opening. However, no closure can be made without completion of the necessary ecological licencing paperwork, and this is currently ongoing. Further ecological survey work has been carried out within the cave as part of the licencing process. This has been hindered by the disappearance of two bat loggers from the Drws Cefn entrance. Despite pleas for their return, nothing has been forthcoming.

We are aware that not all of the officers of the CCC agree with the decisions taken by the PDCMG with respect to Drws Cefn, especially given their letter on the subject received last year. At the last PDCMG meeting it was commented that the CCC are operating very close to the limit of their constitutional remit in this respect. Nonetheless, we have written in response to the CCC and addressed the points they raise.

The PDCMG has also had extensive discussions in relation to the recent CRoW debates and the BCA poll held at the end of last year. At the November meetings some very useful discussions were held with NRW regarding both SSSI status, and the potential for use of Section 26 should the law regarding CRoW be re-interpreted more favourably with respect to caving. It was agreed that the group and NRW would engage in further fact finding regarding the use of Section 26 so that any decisions regarding potential applications could be discussed at the next meeting this coming June.

On other matters, caver numbers remain relatively steady with respect to the longer term position. It is likely that some of the fixed aids will be replaced as part of the next inspection cycle and some work has been carried out on the entrance scaffold. Ecological surveys for stygobites continue by Lee Knight et al., with only the War of the Worlds streamways remaining to be sampled. We are also in the process of reviewing our conservation plan and considering whether any more formal cave monitoring programmes should be carried out.

F Loveridge,

Hon Sec, 15th March 2015.

Dan yr Ogof CAP Report for 2015 CCC AGM.

The Dan yr Ogof Panel is operating smoothly and effectively. There have been some personnel changes over the past year and the website has been updated to reflect those changes. The entrapment dump has recently been reviewed in consultation with SMWCRT and is currently being replenished and refurbished. Active conservation measures and other projects are continuing. At the insistence of Dan yr Ogof's insurance company, a closeable barrier has been installed at Lake 2 purely to safeguard the showcave in the unlikely event of a second entrance being opened beyond the lakes. Until such time, the barrier remains unlocked and access arrangements are unchanged.

Mine Workings as Archaeology

Recently an important point was raised in the Welsh Mines Society Newsletter Newsletter, (71.2, p. 3) regarding the conservation of mines as defined in the Cambrian Caving Council (CCC) constitution. To group mines with caves in terms of access and conservation, as has been done by CCC and no doubt by other caving bodies within the British Caving Association (BCA), is to confuse matters by linking together two very different environments.

Mines are not the same as caves. There are very different procedures and permissions required for accessing mines, and conservation has to take into account the unique subterranean archaeology of mining.

The mines themselves are archaeological features - they are man-made structures, the fabric of which holds the key to their construction, and deposits deep within their workings contain archaeological evidence - unlike caves, where archaeological deposits are generally confined to shallow levels linked to habitation. Perhaps the only common feature between a cave and a mine (including underground quarries) is the method of access, using speleological techniques. Once in a deeper cave, below any habitation deposits, and provided the 'caver' does not damage cave formations (speleothems) and environmental deposits, the structure is pretty resilient. In contrast, a mine is vulnerable to damage to both its structure and the deposits (including artefacts) within it at any level.

Care has to be taken in mines in the placing of anchor points (bolts) as, by drilling into the structure, damage is being caused possibly to irreplaceable features such as tool marks. Any digging within a mine has to record the deposits being disturbed, although the level of recording might be variable depending on factors such as the nature of the dig, its location and the date of the mine. Ephemeral features such as timbers also need recording before they are lost through the actions of man or by natural decay.

Exploring mines is a legitimate activity and can take the 'caver' into new, hidden landscapes - but care has to be taken not to destroy the features which make up that subterranean landscape.