

The 2020 Annual General Meeting of the Cambrian Caving Council
will be held on Sunday 15th March from 1pm at
Betws-y-Coed Memorial Hall, Mill Street, Betws-y-Coed, LL24 OBB

AGENDA

1. Chairman's Welcome
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the 2019 AGM
 - a) Accuracy
 - b) Matters arising
4. Applications for Membership
5. Officer's Reports
 - a) Chairman
 - b) Secretary
 - c) Treasurer
 - d) Conservation & Access Officer
 - e) Training Officer
 - f) Equipment & Techniques Officer
 - g) Legal & Insurance Officer
 - h) Cave Registrar
6. Reports from other groups including:
 - a) FODCCAG
 - b) Welsh Mines Society
 - c) NWCRO
 - d) SMWCRT
 - e) GCRG
 - f) OFDCMC
 - g) DYOCAP
 - h) PDCMG
7. BCA Matters
8. Election of CCC Officers and co-option of Newsletter Editor and Webmaster
9. AOB
10. Date and Location of next CCC Annual General Meeting March

If you are able to send a representative for your club to the 2019 AGM please indicate their intention to attend by e-mailing me at: secretary@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Many thanks

Allan Richardson

Annual General Meeting 2020 Reports Pack

Secretary's Report

It has been a quiet year, mostly answering queries from various organisations and individuals. The main activity has been a long running discussion with Sport Wales about our status. The background is that Sport Wales has been supporting caving in Wales over a period of many years, though recently this has reduced to a small yearly grant to Cambrian Caving Council, for which - up until this year - the only requirements to access this money was to submit our AGM minutes and accounts.

This year it changed, Sport Wales started asking for details of how we are supervising young people in caving, to the extent that they wanted someone from each member club to be Level One Safeguarding qualified, in the following years the level of qualification would be increased. They also wanted the Cambrian Caving Council to 'police' its member clubs concerning their implementation of Sport Wales' new safeguarding policy.

Whilst nobody would condone any abuse of children or vulnerable people, we felt that we were unable to become a supervisory body, as apart from anything else our Constitution does not allow it. Initially it was pointed out to Sport Wales that, as a part of BCA, CCC is also signed up to the BCA Child Protection Policy which we thought was enough. The BCA's Child Protection Officer was consulted too, and offered to get involved, but all to no avail.

This difference in views resulted in a number of amicable phone discussions with various Sport Wales officials where I pointed out that we were not like a football club, for example, which would have junior teams with coaches etc. This also cut no ice, and so CCC executive decided that we should disaffiliate from Sport Wales. I said our discussions were amicable, but we simply did not fit into their "one size fits all" policy. Should our or even their safeguarding position change, the door has been left open for us to get involved again with Sport Wales.

I am willing to stand again for the post of Secretary.

R. Allan Richardson

Treasurer's Report

<u>Income</u>	£	<u>Expenditure</u>	
BCA Grant 2018 (received in 2019)	588.00	Travel	15.20
BCA Grant 2019	639.38	Training Events	177.95
Total Income	1227.38	Room Hire	65.00
Less Expenditure	-409.69	Conservation & Access	151.54
Surplus for the year	817.69	Total Expenditure	409.69
<u>Balance Sheet</u>		<u>Assets represented by:</u>	
Current account at 31/12/2018	5394.98	Barclays Current Account	6212.67
Petty cash at 31/12/2018	0.00	Petty cash at 31/12/2019	0.00
Add surplus for the year 2019	817.69	Total	6212.67
Reserves at 31/12/2019	6212.67		

Apparently a quiet year caving as no projects requested funding from Cambrian, which seems disappointing but may be a sign of the times. The end of year accounts show an increase in funds of £817.69 last year. The funds held by the council stand at £6212.67 as at 1/1/2020.

It is probably fortuitous that demands on me have been few due to my limited I.T. skills, which will probably continue. In view of this I would not mind if someone else is interested in taking over my role, but I will be willing to stand again if necessary.

Mary Rogers

Conservation & Access Officer's Report

WELSH GOVERNMENT REFUSES TO DISCUSS CROW CAVING

The Welsh Government's 2017 public consultation on improving recreational access to the outdoors (and many other matters) rekindled their 2015 consultation which had no outcomes. Cambrian's formal response to the 2017 consultation, with its covering letter, are at:

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/2017publicconsultation.pdf>

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/consultationresponse.pdf>

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/nrwletter-170910.pdf>

After practically killing it all off in autumn 2018, the Deputy Minister for the Environment, Hannah Blythyn AM, surprised everyone on 4th April 2019 with a Cabinet Statement stating that land access reforms to enhance leisure access in Wales would go ahead after all:

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/cabinetstatement-190404.pdf>

The access reform plans are being developed by an Access Reform Advisory Group (ARAG) comprising WG and NRW staff, Welsh Local Government Association, Wales Rights of Way Managers Working Group, National Park and AONB representatives. All these people work in public sector bodies. NRW is represented on ARAG by Jont Bulbeck, their Manger for Recreation, Access, Communities and Strategic Funding who has made his views on "CROW Caving" particularly plain numerous times in meetings I have attended. No sports bodies or landowners or activity providers or educationalists are represented on ARAG. Scant information about progress with the reform programme and ARAG's minutes are available at:

<https://gov.wales/access-reform-programme>

After drilling down a couple of levels from this page you will find a summary for the January 2020 meeting where the decision to discard caving was taken:

<https://gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2020-02/access-reform-programme-steering-group-meeting-january-22.pdf>

I met the Deputy Minister and put questions and our needs to her at the National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW) which she attended in April 2019 coinciding with the Cabinet Statement giving the green light. I followed up with a letter to the Deputy Minister in May 2019 setting out our wishes again. My letter and her reply are at:

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/ministerletter-190423.pdf>

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/ministerreply-190513.pdf>

The recreational access reform agenda has since been split into three Policy Areas:

P1) Uncontroversial matters like dog control in the outdoors and throwing litter out of cars

P2) Reforms that need further work and consultation delegated to three Expert Groups which will report back by the end of 2020 and deliver final recommendations by mid-2021.

P3) Difficult reforms that may take years to resolve. This concerns only the shared access to rivers and open water which is being discussed by a NAFW sub-group, not any Expert Group.

Policy Area 2 is being handed down to three new Expert Groups to recommend any changes:

A1) Widening the usage of Open Access / CRoW Land

A2) Greater flexibility with the use of public paths on CRoW and non-CRoW land

A3) Communicating the new access rights and information to the public.

I was told by the WG's lead officer when they presented a progress report at the September 2019 NAFW meeting that cave access would fall into P2 and so it would be discussed by the Expert Group for A1. Therefore I sent in the application form to join EG1, and quite some time went into formulating this, and then I was turned down by WG/ARAG. Here is my EG application, the WG refusal letter - but with an invitation to contribute in a limited way, and my follow up letter to the WG agreeing to participate in EG1 when the topic of caving came up.

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/expertgroupapplication.doc>

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/wgletter-191218.pdf>

<http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/expertgroupfollowupletter.pdf>

To be fair, only three seats were available on each Expert Group for sports representatives. The chosen few are cycling and horse riding, which have representatives on all three EGs, and in the case of horse riding this is by the same person three times over. The Ramblers are represented only on EG2 and EG3 by different people. BMC (mountaineering) is represented on EG1 only. These sports representatives are supposed to represent sports other than their own, but clearly that is not happening. I do not have any EG minutes and they are not on the WG website. Chosen groups like The Ramblers and BMC do have copies but are unsure if they "are allowed by WG" to disclose them to other sports bodies like ourselves. So I know nothing about the inner workings of the Expert Groups nor what has been discussed or decided.

It appears that NRW got caving pushed off the access reform table at the ARAG meeting on 22nd January 2020. The reason given to me centres on NRW's semantic objection to "CROW Caving" which is simply their own opinion that caving is not an open-air recreation. I was notified of this outcome a month later in a WG letter sent by email at 2pm on 24th February 2020. This was 2 hours after a meeting of the Outdoor Alliance had finished that day. See: <http://cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/wg/wgletter-200224.pdf>

As it happens, NRW is represented in the Outdoor Alliance by Alison Roberts, their Specialist Adviser for Responsible Recreation. The hot topic currently on OA is, of course, the WG access reform programme. All those attending its last meeting were sports body representatives.

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES (NRW)

NRW convenes three meetings per year of its National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW). I attended all of them in 2019. They usually take place in Bangor, Builth Wells and Cardiff in March, July and November respectively but they were shuffled in 2019 also with the first meeting postponed to April to allow the Deputy Minister to attend and announce the WG Access Reform Programme, as noted above, which has since dominated the NAFW meetings. Following the recent WG rejection letter, see WG item above, I decided not to attend the March 2020 NAFW meeting in Bangor and so I welcome our 2020 AGM's views on how to proceed.

NRW's interest in caving, or at least close contact, seems to have ended with an organisational restructure resulting in smaller staff and budgets. OFD cave management, at an executive level, has been handed over to SWCC who have set up a new advisory group in which a few other clubs are represented. Allan Richardson attends these meetings on behalf of CCC.

The Mynydd Llangattock cave management committee is no longer meeting in its usual format which was chaired by NRW staff and took place in their Abergavenny offices. There was only one meeting in 2019 and it was held at Whitewalls where only cavers who had been part of the former MLCMAC were present. A new group is being formed which is independent of NRW. Cavers with an active caving interest in Llangattock who are willing and able to contribute may apply. Potential ways forward are in discussion, hoping to keep things informal. I am a full caving member of this group rather than attending it to represent CCC or any club.

BRITISH CAVING ASSOCIATION (BCA)

Allan Richardson and I have shared the pleasure of attending BCA's fascinating council meetings of which there are normally four per year. One of these follows the BCA AGM which moves around the country while the other three are held in the Midlands. In 2019 the BCA AGM was held in the Yorkshire Dales and Allan attended for CCC. This proved a lively affair with motions being passed to scrap the two-house voting system in favour of a simpler and more democratic one-caver-one-vote system. This required the "house of clubs and various other bodies" voting by a majority of over 70% to abolish itself. The first count showed a majority of only 69% but then one "other body" delegate claimed he had misunderstood the motion. It was then re-counted and the 70% threshold was narrowly obtained. Unsurprisingly, the "house of cavers" voted in droves to abolish the "other bodies" house. This then went to a national ballot where it was affirmed: the whole saga is explained in detail on the BCA website.

The BCA AGM also voted for more use of the internet such as online ballots and for BCA officers to be allowed to communicate with BCA members by email. I am serious. This innovation has been blocked by one individual in a key BCA role who refused to provide the membership and email database to the BCA secretary. Council at its October 2019 meeting

ordered him to hand it over and he then did not comply. The matter came back to the January 2020 Council meeting in which he was offered the choice of complying, resigning or being removed. As the first two options were refused, the result was his dismissal and by a clear majority. It is sad when someone who has put much time and effort into BCA has left because of an unwillingness in some quarters to accept a democratically chosen direction of travel.

CAVEFEST

The Crickhowell event held over the August Bank Holiday 2019 weekend was a great success and it was accompanied by hot sunny weather which had otherwise been in short supply. Originally an initiative of the Gwent Caving Club, the event will return to Mendip in 2020 under new management. Once again it will be supported by CCC, and now too by the BCA.

CCC NEWSLETTER

Our newsletter now has a publication schedule where it appears three times per year. In 2019 we had issues in February, July and December. Nick de Gare Pitt did not stand again for the editor role at our March 2019 AGM held in Snailbeach, Shropshire. We decided not to co-opt anyone so I have put together the two subsequent editions. As editors know, it is harder to obtain stories than it is to format them as printed pages, so future contributions about Welsh caving and newsworthy photos sent as Word files and jpg images will be much appreciated.

It would be good if someone took on this newsletter production role as I would prefer to focus on Access and Conservation. Really we need someone to help who is familiar with a publishing package like Microsoft Publisher along with a photo-editing program like Photoshop Elements. Microsoft Word, although vital for preparing the text of articles and circulating drafts, is not up to the job of creating a small and attractive magazine.

I have been criticized in the past by some for publishing 'political articles' but every edition of the CCC newsletter is read by the CCC executive and obtains approval prior to its release. So any potential editor should not think this role provides a platform for any kind of crusade or partisan views as the other CCC executive members will not let that happen.

CCC WEBSITE

Nick also left the post of CCC webmaster. We did not co-opt anyone so I took it on temporarily. The old website had become somewhat dated and it suffered from too many small pieces breaking up the flow. This was no fault of the people maintaining it but more the series of random items they were presented with as updates. So I developed a new modern-looking website which aims to set out CCC's purpose and aims more clearly, plus vital information for cavers and non-caving readers. I have resisted having a News section as this requires fairly intense maintenance and the limited choice of material which could be seen as biased. However, a new Events page has been added recently which promotes mainly caving and training events in Wales that are available to all cavers. I will also write up the WG access reform saga as a further new page so as to collect up all the document links into one place.

This present website is built with Xara Web Designer Premium 10. Nobody writes websites these days in raw HTML. To maintain or extend the new CCC website with Xara is fairly easy to do even if you have never heard of Xara. This is not a leading-edge app but it does the job well enough without the need to acquire expert knowledge or invest one's time to become a guru. Anyone interested in our webmaster role can be provided with Xara and given some support and training. Please bear in mind, as with newsletter editor, this is a production job and not a means to rewrite what our executive wishes to communicate to its constituency and beyond.

CAVE ACCESS LTD

The CAL directors remain the same people: Dave Tyson, Roy Fellows and myself. It has been a quiet year with no surprise events. We are disappointed that the number of people registering with the CAL scheme to access the WG and NRW mines legally has fallen, as have the trip reports. Registration and filing of reports are done by email. Details are at: <http://caveaccess.co.uk/>

We have made no progress with the Draethen Lead Mines in 2019. NRW will simply not respond to emails or other approaches about approving caver access at their local officer level which is a requirement of the CAL scheme for each mine. I last wrote to them in mid-February and have been assured this time by someone higher up the organisation that I will get a reply.

I can see no valid reason why cavers cannot have seasonal access to the Draethen mines, say from May to October, as this will not harm the hibernating bats that seem so to concern NRW staff locally. In the summer the bats roost at Ruperra Castle nearby.

I am sorry to say that a certain club in South Wales seems to be engaged in a vendetta against another South Wales club. Club X is long-established while Club Y is fairly new. It attracted some of Club X's members, including their chairman. I am mentioning this here because Club X made a written complaint to NRW about Club Y visiting the Draethen mines for which, as explained above, there is no access permission in place despite much effort to get it in place.

Club X followed that up with a Freedom of Information Act request to NRW asking NRW to explain what investigation they did into Club Y and any action taken. Club X has also made a series of complaints concerning Club Y to us, to Costain plc, BCA and the local cave rescue team. One of Club X's members posted defamatory material on the ukCaving forum concerning a member of Club Y at the odd time of lunchtime on Christmas Day 2019. Even stranger, this was soon "liked" by another activist in Club X unoccupied with seasonal festivities. The offensive posting, and later the whole thread, were removed by the ukCaving moderators and the author of this material has been barred from making direct forum postings.

Whilst I am not going to condone unauthorised mine access, I worry that the motive of Club X, viewed in the context of their complaint spectrum, may be more to damage Club Y than to protect the natural world. I was also not pleased to find myself criticized too in that Christmas posting (along with the CCC chairman) for joining Club Y which we did in order to provide broader experience and leadership to a relatively new and expanding club. This imbroglio has now reached the point where I feel CCC should write to Club X to request that they cease and desist from commentary on Club Y and its members.

I apologise to my colleagues for including this item within the CAL section, but the link with Draethen lead mines makes it as convenient a place as any to air this unseemly matter.

A465 DUALLING OF THE CLYDACH GORGE

Costain have gone rather quiet of late. All I have heard from Jeff Mapps, their local PR officer, is that "Entrances and access to the caves [in the Clydach Gorge] will be continue to be closed for the foreseeable future. This is to ensure the safety of members of the public as critical work in the immediate vicinity of the caves progresses. I will email to advise in advance of when they are again open for use."

The first weekend closure of 2020 is from 28th February to 2nd March as the rate of progress has fallen away. This road works 'go-slow' follows a legal dispute between Costain and the Welsh Government as to where blame lies for the budget over-run and timescale slippage. It seems to have been settled by Costain paying the bill and the Welsh Government accepting delayed completion, hence the rarity now of expensive weekend, overnight working and traffic-light-managed single lanes in operation on some weekdays which cause long tail-backs.

WG says on its website that the completion date is now end-2020 while a December 2019 press statement by Costain concerning its falling share price and poor progress with various projects suggested mid-2021. So do not expect any of the closed caves to re-open any time soon.

OGOF GOFAN AND CASTLEMARTIN RANGE WEST

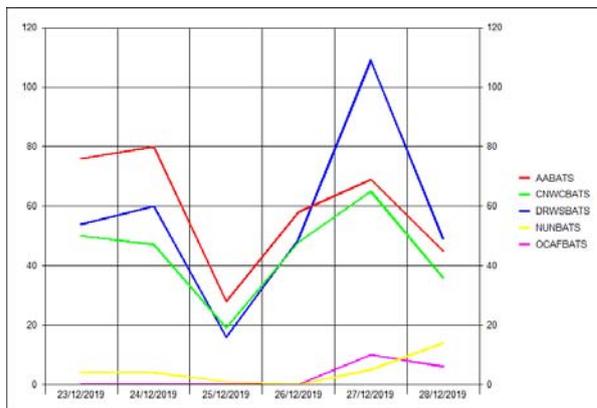
I have kept communications active and relations cordial for another year between CCC and the landowners here (DIO/MOD) plus the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park staff and NRW local staff. The present access scheme where cavers apply through me for a one-day permit covering up to four people for the exclusive use of Ogot Gofan is working reasonably well. Please do not abuse this and thus stretch the landowner's goodwill by arranging several back-to-back trips involving multiple groups of 4 different people all on the same day. The cave is small, delicate and vulnerable so the group size limit is there for good reasons.

I would also ask Ogot Gofan visitors to turn up on the actual day that they booked and is shown on their permit, not the weekend before or after if the weather isn't perfect as someone else might have booked it then which would lead to a clash and the potential over-use of the cave.

Anyone wanting to go exploring for new caves on the Range West coastal margin area can attend Range Briefing meetings as listed in our December newsletter. Permits are personal and everyone in any group must have their own. It does not include taking your dog with you or just going onto Range West for beach activities or having a picnic etc. All terms and conditions are explained at the briefing meetings along with the necessity not to touch any old ordnance found on the ground as it might explode and kill you, this being the main part of the ranges used for live firing of anything from bullets to anti-tank weapons.

OGOF DRAENEN

The EGM called for at the biannual meeting in November 2018 to review the PDCMG's entrance policy has still not taken place nor is there any date for one. I have heard that some private meetings have taken place between various individuals to try to draft a motion to be debated at such a meeting. Progress can only be described as glacial.



Meanwhile my caver and bat loggers, also agreed in November 2018, have produced interesting data to inform future entrance discussions, particularly when compared to similar experiments being run in parallel at Llangattock. Christmas Day was a bright cold day in the middle of an otherwise damp and mild period. The chart shows that all the bats across all five cave entrances did not fancy the cold Christmas Day weather and so remained inside their respective caves.

I am willing to stand again in this role again, but as I said a year ago, if there is anyone willing and able to do this job, or even a part of it, then I would be happy to discuss with you. It does require going to some mid-week meetings across Wales and so it suits someone whose job or lifestyle takes them around Wales anyway.

Stuart France

Legal Officer Report

There have been no matters for me to deal with during the past year. I am happy to stand again in this role.

Roy Fellows

CCC Training Officer Report

This year there have been a lot of conversations at Training Committee level. I have attended more meetings this year than the last five put together. There has been no effect on what is happening in Wales so far, but with the change in funding from Sports Wales it is good that we are involved with things at BCA level.

There has been only one SRT workshop this year just because of timings (one the weekend before the 2019 CCC AGM and one the weekend after this 2020 AGM). The SRT one that ran in November 2019 was very over-subscribed and we had several CICs and trainee CICs giving their time to run the day at Langorse Wall. South Wales has also seen CSG workshops happening and these have been well supported too. Although I am aware of them, Allan has helped set these up with CSG members.

If anyone has training needs, please get in touch. I am happy to stand again.

Richard Hill

Equipment and Techniques Officer Report

It has been a very quiet year regarding Equipment and Techniques issues. There have been no reported problems regarding loose or defective anchors this year. The columns pitch in OFD has now been bolted with BP twist anchors, but of course this pitch is only accessible on columns open days.

CCC sent 30 of our BP anchors to DCA as their stock levels were low and these were needed for immediate use. We still have enough left here at the moment for routine purposes in Wales.

There continues to be a supply problem for the IC anchors in all but the CNCC area. I am not sure who are approved installers for the IC anchor outside the CNCC area either. There will be an installer course for the BP type of anchor in the Spring of 2020 to train up new approved installers for Wales. This event is likely to be at the South Wales Caving Club.

I am happy to continue in the role as the Equipment and Techniques Officer if elected.

Vince Allkins

Cave Registrar Report

I have little to report on for the Cambrian Cave Registry over the past year over what I have contributed to the Wales Underground newsletter. A number of sites have been added (mainly near the coast), some entries corrected, and one site significantly updated after a delay - which I hope will not set a precedent - of some fifteen years.

There is a new overlay available on the online map which suggests the outcrop of limestone rather better than the conventional geological maps (it is based on the Parent Material Carbonate Content classification for soils, so represents lithology rather than stratigraphy). I have added more line surveys to the individual site entries over the year, and plan to add these combined as a new layer to the main map. There are also more literature references for sites (the formatting of which is something I plan to tidy up).

I would like to thank those correspondents who alerted me to new sites over the year, or otherwise helped to keep me and the CCR up to date. I am always open to your news and views, and look forward to more.

Martin Laverty