

CAMBRIAN CAVING COUNCIL CYNGOR OGEFEYDD CYMREIG

Affiliated to the British Caving Association

Draft Minutes of the Annual General meeting held by Zoom on 21st March 2021 at 1800hrs

Present

Martyn Farr (MF)	Chairman	*	CDG
Rachel Smith			Gagendor
Allan Richardson (AR)	Secretary	*	SWCC
Roy Fellows (RF)	Legal/Insurance	*	CMT
Stuart France (SF)	Access/Conservation	*	CSS
Steve Holding (SH)		*	SMT
Richard Hill (RH)	Training Officer	*	Gagendor
John Sheehy (JH)	Webmaster	*	Gwent
Mike Moore (MM)		*	SCMC
Vince Allkins (VA)	E & T		
Tony Haigh (TH)		*	NWCC
Linda Wickham (LW)		*	Croydon
Nick de Gare Pitt (NP)		*	Brynmawr
Martin Laverty (ML)	Cave Registry		
Peter Cloughton (PC)			NAMHO Observer
Spencer Drew (SD)		*	Morgannwg
Emma Scheck (ES)		*	WCMS
Dan Thorne (DT)		*	SMWCRT
Peter Burgess (PB)			WCMS Observer
Oliver Burrows (OB)		*	PUG

* Club representatives, the meeting was quorate with 15 out of 46 member Clubs/Organisations present.

1. Chairman's opening remarks

The Chairman welcomed everyone to our first ever Zoom AGM.

2. Apologies for absence

Apologies for absence were received from:

Gloucester Speleological Society
Welsh Mines Society
PDCMG

3. Minutes of the 2020 AGM

(a) Accuracy

AR opened a discussion on the minutes of the 2020 AGM. SH requested his name was removed from the apologies for the 2020 AGM. The Minutes were voted on and accepted as an accurate record. Proposed VA, seconded by LW, passed nem con.

(b) Matters arising

Two letters have been received and have been sent out to all addressees, both senders were happy as long as the letters formed part of the AGM documentation. The letters are in AOB. There were no questions or comments re the letters.

4. Applications for Membership

None received.

5. Officers' reports

The Chairman's report was read out. The rest, having been published on the website, were taken as read, with questions to the officers as necessary. As a reminder to all, these reports are available for download on the CCC website ahead of each AGM, and will not be sent out separately to CCC members.

5(a) Chairman's Report to March 2021

It's been a very difficult year for everyone, and not least for our sport. Thinking back, our AGM in Betws-y-Coed last year now seems so distant. Understandably at the outbreak of the pandemic there were few of us in attendance, but little could any of us have imagined what the future had in store. Restrictions in every aspect of our lives since have meant that caving activities virtually ceased.

I thank cavers generally for their responsible approach to activities this past year. This has ensured that our rescue teams have not been asked to put themselves at risk in underground incidents: to my knowledge the only call-outs have been to a couple of unfortunate canines who clearly had not read the COVID guidelines!

Our officers have continued to work behind the scenes on behalf of Cambrian cavers, particularly in areas such as access and training. Their aim as always is to ensure that cavers will continue to experience positive and wide-ranging opportunities in the sport. As the vaccination program progresses and travel restrictions ease, life, including caving, will hopefully soon take on a degree of normality. We would ask all Cambrian clubs to remind their members to resume activities in a responsible way and ensure that access arrangements are respected. In particular, it is worth noting, for example, the mines access arrangements overseen by CAL (Cave Access Limited) which are perhaps less well known and used than those generally followed in caving. Perhaps club secretaries could re-publish reminders to this effect for their members.

Looking to the future I hope to see underground activity return to its former levels as soon as safely possible. On a personal note I feel that it is time to make way for new blood so I will be standing down as chairman to allow this to happen. I am happy to step aside with immediate effect but will continue in the short term if no nominations are made this year. However, I will not be standing again at next year's AGM.

Martyn Farr

No questions to the Chairman.

5(b) Secretary's Report to the 2021 AGM

A very quiet year due to the Pandemic. Other than chasing up email addresses for some of the Cambrian Clubs, little else has happened.

I am willing to stand again for the next year.

R Allan Richardson

No questions to the Secretary.

5(c) Treasurer's Report for the Year ending 31/12/20

The audited end of year accounts can be seen to show a decrease in funds of £687.98 with the current funds available standing at £5,524.69. I am pretty sure in the light of current BCA policies that we will be able to recover all the 2020 expenditure of £1,097.67 from BCA once that year's grant has been applied for.

It can be seen that the CCC donation to South and Mid-Wales Cave Rescue Team constituted almost half of 2020 expenses. The question was raised at the time about the other Welsh rescue teams as well as whether discussions should take place with BCA regarding some form of ongoing support from them for all rescue teams, as I believe happened in the past. This would inevitably become confusing with them being charitable institutions, about which I know little. Obviously CCC funds would not be sufficient to cover that outlay permanently but if we were assured of re-imbursement from BCA, it would not be a problem.

Obviously, activities last year were severely limited by Covid restrictions and continue to be so at present. All being well there will be a flurry of caving activity sooner rather than later and new projects to support financially.

I again need to thank Ian Adams very much for kindly completing the audit very promptly. I would be willing to carry on in the job but again would not mind at all if someone else is keen to take over.

Mary Rogers

Cambrian Caving Council
Accounts
Year Ended 31 December 2020

Income and Expenditure Account

	2020		2019	
	£	£	£	£
<u>Income</u>				
BCA Grant	409.69		1,227.38	
Donations	0.00		0.00	
Total Income		409.69		1,227.38
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Travel and Accommodation	282.10		15.20	
Equipment and Techniques	250.00		0.00	
Training Events	0.00		177.95	
Room Hire	40.00		65.00	
Print, Postage and Stationery	12.57		0.00	
Conservation and Access	13.00		151.54	
Donation	500.00		0.00	
Total Expenditure		1,097.67		409.69
Excess of Income over Expenditure		-687.98		817.69
<u>Balance Sheet</u>				
Bank Account (NS&I) - (Transferred to Current A.C)	0.00		0.00	
Unpresented Cheques	0.00		0.00	
Barclays Current Account	5,524.69		6,212.67	
		5,524.69		6,212.67
Reserves at 31st December 2019	6,212.67		5,394.98	
less : Expenditure over Income	-687.98		817.69	
		5,524.69		6,212.67

(Signed) Mary Rogers Treasurer 03-Mar-21

Honorary Scrutineer's Report

I have examined the above Income & Expenditure Account for the year ended 31st December 2020 and the balance sheet as at that date. In my opinion they are in accordance with the council's accounting records and explanations provided.

(Signed) Ian L Adams FFA FFTA AIAB (For Abacus Accountants) Date: 05-Mar 2021

No questions to the Treasurer.

5(d) Access and Conservation Officer's Report to February 2021

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

It has been a quiet year for caving because of the Coronavirus pandemic; the first lockdown beginning in late March just after our 2020 AGM and a third one now underway in Wales since late December 2020 that may be relaxed somewhat for outdoors recreation after the review in mid-March 2021. So, hopefully, some good news by the time of this year's Cambrian AGM.

I have attended a number of meetings, both real and virtual, over the past year to pursue caving interests as the epidemic and the responses to it have unfolded. I have signed up Cambrian as a member of the Welsh Sports Association (WSA) which is a professionally-run representative body for all sports. WSA have been responsive, helpful and have run a useful series of video meetings at which public health and government officials have presented their views.

There has been massive negative impact on outdoors education and professionals working in that sector who have been largely out of work now for almost a year. I have attended some meetings of the Outdoors Alliance Wales and monitor their forum. OAW is an ad hoc group that brings together mainly outdoors providers, lobbying on their behalf; Gethin Thomas been closely involved with this group to represent professional cave leaders rather than myself, and I am very grateful for his engagement with this.

There have been no Cambrian newsletters in the past year for the reason that recreational caving activities have, for the most part, been on hold and there was little else but general political and medical news mainly national in scope. I am happy to continue in the role of news editor when more normal times return and there is sufficient interesting material to publish.

John Sheehy has taken over the role of Cambrian webmaster from me and the handover has gone smoothly. I would like to thank him for investing the time to learn the productions tools so as to maintain the current website and to extend it. He and I have produced a regular Covid info-page which is unfortunately more about the negative impact of the pandemic on caving and cancelled events than good news stories. We gave up trying to echo the official restrictions on sport and travel because they changed so often; they were inconsistent across all the Home Nations leading to widespread public confusion; and the sheer volume and length of the complex interpretations put on them by the gov.wales website is not easy to summarise.

'CROW CAVING' JUDICIAL REVIEW

This started on 9th April 2020 with a pre-action formal letter from specialist solicitors to the Welsh Government as potential defendant. David Rose as BCA CROW Liaison Officer is the complainant, not myself, and legal costs are underwritten by BCA. I am, however, involved as I had applied to join the WG's Access Reform Advisory Group (ARAG) working group on land access reform and I was turned down on the specific grounds that the government held that the CROW Act did not apply to caving. The very purpose of these reforms is to widen the scope of the CROW Act to allow a wider range of activities where these are currently excluded and create other public goods.

According to their minutes, the decision was made by ARAG on 22nd January 2020 and then kept secret until 24th February when I was told in a letter from WG. There is only a 3 month period to launch Judicial Review proceedings after an impugned government decision – and a month of it

was lost either due the government's inefficiency in sharing their decision with me reasonably quickly, or in the alternative due to withholding it.

We claim that a government decision (to exclude caving from the reform programme) was made on the basis of an incorrect interpretation of statute (that the CROW act does not apply to caving in their view). It was also illogical in that if caving was excluded then at least it should have been considered by the ARAG expert groups whether it was practical to bring it within the scope of CROW. NRW and Defra soon joined the JR case as Interested Parties.

NRW in its written response to the 2017 Public Consultation on land access reform said that a court case would be the best way to settle the 'CROW Caving' question. Also, about that time, at a private meeting between CCC and BCA and NRW, their internal solicitor went so far as to suggest various ways for landing NRW in court so as to decide the CROW question. So, when the opportunity arose through the legislative reform programme, it was rather a surprise to find NRW and WG trying very hard to stop the case on procedural grounds by offering the defence that no 'justiciable' decision had been made. Justiciable means that class of decisions which are amenable to a judicial review. It was an unusual and highly technical legal argument designed to prevent the substantive CROW question from ever being considered by the court. Essentially, they were saying their decision to exclude caving, as set out in WG's letter to me, was not actually a decision, or at least was not the kind of decision that a court could review.

The first step in Judicial Review proceedings is to 'apply for permission' for a full hearing. This filtering process is generally done as a paper exercise, not at a court hearing, and permission was refused on that basis by the first judge on 19th August. We then applied for a court hearing which took place by video link in the autumn in front a different judge. It was very disappointing after over an hour of debate that this Judge too refused to let our case go to trial. He did so by reading out a prepared statement from what appeared to be a computer screen out of view of the camera to his left. So what had been said in court that day could not have had any bearing on the outcome. Our legal team considered this to be very unfair and they offered to take the permission case to the Appeal Court at their own expense. This was dealt with as another paper exercise in February by Lord Justice Edis whose speciality apparently is criminal cases.

We were very fortunate in this regard as it is clear from his judgment that he had read all the accompanying papers critically and had come to tentative conclusions as to the potential inaccuracy or unreliability of some of the statements made therein, and to the extent of the Minister's own involvement, or an impermissible delegation to her officials, who in turn delegated it to a steering group. LJ Edis said "it is arguable that the exclusion of caving from the reform process either did involve justiciable decisions of the Welsh Government [Ministers] or that it ought to have done." So permission was granted for our case to proceed at a full hearing back in the Administrative Court. LJ Edis also suggested re-working our case so as to turn the spotlight on the Minister's and her civil servant's actions and inactions, and doing discovery work to find out who knew what when, etc.

So in summary, it has taken 10 months and an eye-watering sum of national caving money to reach the stage that we should have been at from the very outset had NRW and WG been genuinely willing to embrace an amicable legal resolution of the "CROW Caving" question instead of having to be dragged into court. Each side will now prepare their respective papers on this new basis and the case is likely to be heard later this year. Given that we are now in quite a strong position, the

government may try to resolve this with an out-of-court settlement that is acceptable to cavers rather than to air everything in open court.

NATIONAL ACCESS FORUM FOR WALES

NRW has convened a couple of NAFW meetings via Microsoft Teams in the past year. I have stopped attending NRW meetings although I do read their email and documents which are circulated to a mailing list of over 100 people involved in outdoors recreation. There seems little point engaging with NRW now that NRW has pulled out of convening cave management committees and has been assisting the government to obstruct the Judicial Review. Much of the subject matter of NAFW meetings currently is the reform programme from which the government and NRW have excluded caving as a matter of principle which reflects their own interpretation of the CROW Act. The national forum does not develop policy nor votes on anything other than its membership applications. It is not a forum in the sense of having any debate, and in my experience, it is more of a symposium where delegates' papers are read or as a platform on which NRW can promote its own work and its own policies.

External bodies can also present general reviews of their own areas of interest at NAFW. Some who have addressed the meeting include the YHA, National Trust, Canal and River Trust, angling bodies, paddling bodies, and so forth. I gave a talk on caving a couple of years ago and this was the meeting at which NRW stated in public that they had no issues with caving from a conservation viewpoint and conservation is not the reason for their position on the CROW Act.

NRW MINES ACCESS SCHEME

This is still operating although mine visits have, of course, been reduced in 2020. There are some new NRW staff involved who are helpful and engaged with the historic environment. I took them on a visit around Bryneglwyys over the summer and they are keen to see more disused mines. A risk assessment is outstanding for Hendre Ddu mine, and I have now got written permission to drive in the forest to take gear to site when Covid regulations allow me to do it. I welcome interest from anyone interested in exploring this mine and writing a report.

It will help if a few more people would register their interest in visiting the mines (via the caveaccess.co.uk website) even if being able to visit the mines is limited at the present time. This helps demonstrate to NRW that the scheme is attracting interest. Registration and access to the mines on Welsh Government and NRW land is free and you only need to give your name, email address, club name if you are in one, and your BCA number for insurance purposes.

BRITISH CAVING ASSOCIATION

Allan Richardson and I have shared the pleasure of attending BCA meetings on behalf of Cambrian, and Allan has now become BCA Secretary in addition to his role as Cambrian secretary. This follows a lot of resignations and appointments at BCA from 2018 to the present. BCA is now on its fourth chairman and fourth secretary in that period. The treasurer role has been stable since Howard Jones took over, but it means the other two of the three BCA Executive team have practically no

experience in BCA matters while Howard has just 2-3 years. Let's hope this proves advantageous as it sets the scene for a fresh start with all new ideas.

One area with massive improvement is IT, with a new modern BCA website, electronic voting, and investment in Zoom for holding virtual national meetings saving £thousands per year on travel expenses. David Rose has also done a great job on producing attractive newsletters.

As Allan has to attend all BCA meetings in his new role, we can no longer share the job of representing Cambrian. This has been made easier since the advent of Zoom. John Sheehy has agreed to help with our representation and I am inducting him into the ways of the BCA.

MLCMAC

The committee, in its original form, has been in limbo since NRW withdrew from its direct involvement with caving for all practical purposes which has yet to be confirmed in writing. The MLCMAC website no longer exists but its content is available in the 'Cave Info' section of the chelseaspelaeo.org website. The permit system is in abeyance and the group is relying on visitors' common sense, goodwill and responsibility which of course is what the previous permit based system also had to rely on when intent (permit) turned into action (visit).

The way forward is for NRW to confirm it has no interest in managing the caves on the Craig-y-Cilau national nature reserve nor anywhere else and wishes for cavers to take the responsibility. The cavers on the old MLCMAC would then contact the landowner to set up new arrangements and assume NRW's former cave access management role. Assuming this all goes well, then new people from the caving community would be invited to join the new group to run it.

OFDCAC

As with MLCMAC, NRW has pulled out. A new committee has been formed which is largely composed of SWCC members, and that club also administers the keys and a permit system. This is backed up with a written agreement between NRW as the landowner of the Top Entrance and tenant at Cwm Dwr. SWCC itself owns the land with the other lower entrance.

DYOCAC

The show cave has had a disastrous financial year due to Covid, but access for cavers has been maintained but with a limit of one group per day to keep people apart. As a leader myself, I only took one group into the cave during 2020. We are very grateful to the show

cave owner for allowing some recreational access particularly set against the grim situation for touristic visits.

PDCMG

The group has not met, not even by video, since November 2018 (the latest minutes on their website) when it was decided to make a review of access and entrance policies. A report was to be

prepared, made available to cavers and interested parties, then have an EGM to debate it. It was envisaged all this would take only a few months, but nothing has emerged. The group is now saying that this subject matter is too sensitive to discuss by video and the EGM will have to wait until the pandemic is over and then take place face-to-face. Very recently the group has been canvassing opinion on a physical committee meeting in the summer, if practical, at which the idea of the long-delayed EGM could be discussed.

I am sorry to have to report that another padlock has been removed from the gate in the summer of 2020. The hasp on the gate was also cut off so that a new lock cannot be fitted. The damaged gate is the group's spare gate that was fitted in 2010 when the original gate was stolen along with the gate on Drws Cefn at that time. The group considers it is impractical to repair the damaged gate during the pandemic, and it is stock proof if left in the closed position.

A465 DUALLING OF THE CLYDACH GORGE

These geotechnically-troubled road works have also been set back further by Coronavirus. The project is over 2 years late and £100m over budget. On a positive note, the new suspension bridge has come into use at the new Brynmawr junction. It is not possible yet to leave the A465 at Brynmawr after coming up the Clydach Gorge which should be borne in mind for caving trips. The central part of the gorge remains a building site with Ogof Capel still closed.

The Welsh Government website has not been updated with any progress for the Clydach Gorge section since February 2020. The Costain website has no news either since November 2019. A legal dispute between these parties went to arbitration and was settled after appeals in the WG's favour at a cost of £45m to Costain which has severely impacted its finances and work capacity. Costain have slowed down in response. A year ago the WG was saying mid-2021 for completion while Costain said end-2021, but that was before Covid struck and the massive legal bill. I feel it will now complete in 2022 at the earliest.

OGOF GOFAN AND CASTLEMARTIN RANGE WEST

Cambrian's access scheme has been used lightly in 2020 with a few summer visits, but otherwise there has been little caving activity here. The AGM for firing range recreational users did not take place due to Covid and given the lack of activity it was not felt useful to convene one by video.

BAT COUNTERS

At a personal level, I managed to retrieve my Lesser Horseshoe bat counters from the Llangattock caves and Ogof Draenen after last Spring's lockdown and an article on this research was published in the BCRA CREGJ issue 111 in September. See: https://www.linnetop.co.uk/creg/creg_j111.pdf

Five loggers were run simultaneously in five difference cave entrances (Aggy, Ogof Cnwc, OCAF, Draenen – Nunnery, Draenen – Drws Cefn) to compare winter bat activity levels expressed as flights per hour past the sensor. One interesting finding is that the OCAF gate prevents most bat access, as evidenced by the very low bat activity there, compared to similar nearby large cave systems. Another discovery is the synchronisation of the rises and falls in bat flight activity across these caves. It is likely weather related and thus the availability of flying insects for the bats to feed on. The question remains: how do the bats get to know?

The data loggers have been in place again for the current winter, but with bigger batteries which should last beyond the coming Spring when I expect to be able to retrieve data again. I intend to develop some circuits tuned to other bat species observed in my local caves for next winter.

GOING FORWARD

I am willing to stand in the same role again. If there is anyone willing and able to do this job or to look after a specific aspect of it as Gethin and John have been doing, then I would be happy to discuss this with you and thus create more of a team approach.

In normal times it does require going to some mid-week meetings across Wales, and now to online meetings during the day, so it best suits someone whose job or lifestyle is flexible and takes them around Wales. There is also responding to email, and being aware of developments in the caving and political events in the wider world, and maintaining useful contacts.

Stuart France

SF reported to the meeting that the CROW case is ongoing and that the case is awaiting a report from the Welsh Government. Also, the CAL disused mine access system is working well. There is a request from CAL for more individuals to sign up via its website (caveaccess.co.uk). There is a new Historic Environment Officer for NRW and they are interested in the underground Historic Environment.

No questions to the Conservation and Access Officer

5(e) Training Officer's Report to March 2021

Obviously the last 12 months has not been great. CCC have run no training events. I am in the process of organising a few events for 2021 in the hope that things will open up.

Events planned are:

- Geology walk above Llangattock
- Geology walk above OFD
- Bat evening talk/walk in the summer
- Bat tour/search in the autumn
- Cave photography workshop
- Allan Richardson is planning a cave surveying weekend at SWCC

As far as Training at BCA level is concerned Training Committee is being discussed at Exec and Council level. Training Committee represents all recreational caving and currently for the first time in over 20 years we have regional training officer in all regions and all regions are planning events. This means that the role of Training Officer may be changed to an administrator role rather than an instructor role. Training Committee has had several on-line meetings over the last 12 months,

sometimes heated, but no real progress has been made. Regionally things are moving, so my personal feelings are that CCC and other regions are in a good place for training but I am not sure where TC will be in the future.

I am happy to stand again unless someone else wants the position.

Rich Hill

No questions to the Training Officer.

5(f) Equipment and Techniques Officer's Report to March 2021

Due to obvious reasons regarding the Covid pandemic, a quiet year. The main points, equipment-wise is again dominated with bolting. There is now a new resin approved and as we have no stocks of the Fisher cartridges we will continue with the latest type. We still have a stock of the "BP" type hangars.

I still intend to run a bolting course at Penwyllt when conditions allow and may have to run two courses.

A bolting project is being considered in the Forest of Dean and the Cambrian Caving Council will assist with supplies or practical help if requested to do so.

There has been concerns regarding the Covid virus transmitted on sports equipment but existing precautions with all other equipment and surfaces need to be adhered to where practical.

I am happy to stand again as the E & T Officer.

Vince Allkins

VA also reported to the meeting that there has been a request for bolt placements in Pwll Dwfn and the Sky Hook pitch in OFD. RH said, for information, there was now a liaison group between Training, E&T and QMC.

No questions to the E & T Officer

5(g) Legal and Insurance Officers Report to March 2021

My position has been mooted before and I feel that there is a consensus on the 'Insurance' aspect being superfluous as any inquiries on this would simply be referred to BCA. It has been suggested that mine exploration should form part of my remit, to this I readily agree and feel that it would be a feather in the cap of CCC to be the first regional council to implement this.

My issue is with the new term as suggested 'Legal and Mines Officer' as it has implications of some kind of remit over all mines, including those at work. My solution is move the word 'legal' to the

end and define the position as 'Mine Exploration and Legal Officer'. This not too much of a mouthful and is correct in that working mines do allow visitors.

I also feel that mine exploration as an activity in its own right has grown tremendously in the past few decades. As such the implications of this should be taken on board by all caving bodies. The 'Legal' also sits well with this as the legal implications of abandoned mines are far more complex than those of caves, and I do pride myself with having a good understanding.

Roy Fellows

No questions to the Legal and Insurance Officer

5(h) Cambrian Cave Registry - Registrar's Report to March 2021

The Cambrian Cave Register has continued to change and grow despite this year's problems with access to the countryside. This is thanks to:

- When Covid-19 restrictions were applied at Local Authority (LA) level, an option to search (or list all) at that level was introduced. This, or the plain map showing LA boundaries, showed every LA in Wales to have at least one site listed
- The re-hosting of the Caves of North Wales website on the Cambrian Caving Council webspace: this encouraged cross checking of entries, adding a number to the Register and updating others
- Work for a forthcoming special seventy fifth anniversary edition of the South Wales Caving Club Newsletter has brought attention to a lot of site entries from the Llŵchwr in the west to Pant Mawr in the east
- Work on site location checking for cave rescue use has begun with the updating of the Catalogue of Speleological Sites for the OFD and Pant Mawr area first prepared for the CCW in 1999
- Unsolicited, but very welcome, contributions from the I'r De o Ddraenen Project, among others
- Attempting to attribute references to as many sites as possible

Prompted and greatly assisted by the above, photos of entrances and, in some cases, passages, have begun to be introduced. This has been supported by the many photographers involved, but of special note is that the two previous Registrars have been the most prolific contributors.

It is also now possible to obtain a Google Plus Code or a what3words id for a site, an option which introduces yet more choice of mapping and satellite imagery.

I am aware of many imperfections in the present data and its presentation and have ideas for improvements but will not detail these now as experience has shown that unplanned events tend to determine progress rather than notional plans. I thank all my correspondents for their help and look forward to continuing as Cave Registrar should that be agreed.

Martin Laverty

ML reported to the meeting that it had been a fairly busy year, with the result that he was going to put in a request for more webspace, this needs looking at. SF noted that it had been a very good year for finding time for research and development. There is a need to check with BCA about the future of their IT services. SH thinks that BCA Web Services have been withdrawn from clubs already, but he was not aware of the aim to remove them from Regional Caving Councils. Needs checking. There is now a dot-Wales domain, and SF has registered caving.wales for CCC's future use. SF and JS will discuss moving CCC website to this new domain.

No questions to the Cave Registrar.

5(i) Webmaster Report to March 2021

I volunteered to help with the webmaster role at last year's AGM and after an intensive zoom handover in early July, I assumed responsibility for updating the website. Whilst the pandemic has meant our caving activities were curtailed throughout year, the website has required regular updating trying to keep up to date with the Welsh Government's ever- changing, tightening and relaxing of restrictions! That said it has accelerated my progress along the learning curve.

I am happy to continue in the role going forward.

John Sheehy

JS reported that he understood BCA had allocated CCC more webspace allocation as part of their move to a new server. This should meet the additional space requirement flagged by the Cave Registrar. He would confirm the allocation and current utilisation with BCA.

No questions to the Webmaster.

5(j) Newsletter Editor

Unfortunately, with the pandemic and the first lockdown starting a week after the last AGM and low levels of activity thereafter there have been no newsletters produced this year.

Stuart France

6. Other Cambrian Representative Reports

6(a) FODCCAG

Our unique access agreement with Forestry England was renewed, only to temporarily cease due to Covid 19 on March 27th. This was renewed again on the 1st Sept, subject to all participants following the Government guidelines in force at the time of caving.

At Xmas the farmer of the land on which Wet Sink is found, reported to Paul Taylor, our Chairman, the sewage outflow was running into Dry Sink, the master cave and may have been running for some time. He reported this to Welsh Water, who seemed to be unaware of it! Welsh Water then sprung into action, as did we – on our part, mainly due to Craig Cameron, a daily watch on the sewage outfall, and a record of daily rainfall was instigated, together with videos of the outfall flowing into Dry Sink.

At a site meeting on the 9th of March, with a senior WW person, responsible for Mid-Wales, an interchange of information took place – it seems they had been very busy behind the scenes and were well aware they had been watched by us! We learnt that in view of the shortcomings found by WW at the Joyford Mill site, they have re-designed the whole protocol for how they operate their sewage in Mid-Wales. Hopefully this will be a permanent improvement. On their part, they appreciate Wet Sink is the 10th longest cave in the country, with blind fish and ancient bones in it, but did not know the outfall of the cave is in the River Wye!

John Hine, Hon. Sec. FoDCCAG.

6(b) Welsh Mines Society

Unsurprisingly, due to the pandemic, there is little to report from the last year. 40th Anniversary celebrations had to be put on hold and no Field Meets were held. Weekend Field Meets in 2021 are unlikely to happen although it is hoped to have a couple of one day Meets with one of the days aimed at belatedly acknowledging 40 years of WMS. These plans are still in their infancy – who knows what the year will bring!

Next weekend, 28th March, the Spring Indoor Meet will be held virtually. A broad selection of interesting talks and presentations have been confirmed with everyone looking forward to another ‘Mini-NAMHO’.

Despite the lack of outdoor activity, or maybe because of, there has been no lack of articles for the Newsletter, the Editor has reported that he has almost enough articles for the Autumn Newsletter already!

Neil Culross, Chairman

6(c) NWCRO - Report submitted by NWCC

Only one thing to report really from NWCC and that is an access agreement is now in place with the North Wales Wildlife Trust for the caves at Minera. At the moment access is not possible because of Covid restrictions, but as restrictions begin to be relaxed, we will be open for visitors again. Anyone requiring access should contact me in the first instance.

Tony Haigh

6(d) SMWCRT

2020 saw SMWCRT involved in 10 Rescue incidents, an increase on last year despite lockdowns. There was a higher proportion of Rescues involving working with other agencies.

Date	Location	Details
11/1/20	Ogof Ffynnon Ddu	Overdue Cwm Dwr to OFD1 WSG 2 females, 3 males had a slower trip than they expected due to increased water levels. 10 members deployed, duration 30 minutes.
28/1/20	Cystanog Mines	Assist Police in Missing person search A Warden was called by Brecon & Western Beacons MR Teams to assist with a search for a 55 year old man that had been reported missing in the Carmarthen area. SMWCRT searched 11 adits and shafts at Cystanog on the outskirts of Carmarthen that had been identified as possible locations. Nothing was found. 9 members deployed, 4 on standby, duration 5.5hours.
8/2/20	Daren Cilau	Lost/Overdue on through trip Daren Cilau to Ogof Cnwc A party of Kent & Birmingham University students (3 males and 2 females) was on a through trip from Daren Cilau to Ogof Cnwc. They were overdue by the time they reached Antler Passage and decided to stop and wait as they had a slow-moving Diabetic in the party. SMWCRT sent in teams who searched from both directions and escorted the party out slowly via Ogof Cnwc. This rescue took place during Storm Ciara and conditions on the surface were appalling. 20 members deployed, 10 on standby, duration 6.5 hours.
22/3/20	Tre'r Ddol area Ceredigion	Assist Police in Historic missing person search SMWCRT assisted the police in a mines search which was conducted around the village of Tre'r Ddol, concentrating on a 1 km radius of the male person's home. 3 main mines and 22 features were identified to search. 13 members deployed, 4 on standby. Duration 11.5 hours.
29/5/20	Bwlch y Clawdd (above Ton Pentre)	Three sheep stuck SMWCRT were called by the RSPCA to extract a sheep from a rift (Fire & Rescue had not able to help). After trying for 7.5 hours the team members were not able to extract sheep as rift too tight and too deep (9m below surface). A second sheep was found by the farmer in a different rift – it was successfully rescued. A third sheep was found in lake and it too was successfully rescued. Small team of 5 deployed for 10 hrs 6 mins.

Date	Location	Details
5/7/20	Clwydyfag wr Merthyr Tydfil	Assist Fire Service and CBMRT - Dog fallen down mineshaft A black Spaniel, Louis, had fallen into a mineshaft near Merthyr Tydfil. The Fire & Rescue Service had called Central Beacons MRT who transferred the incident to us at 20:28. The dog was successfully rescued from an 8 metres shaft. 5 team members attended with 1 team member providing remote coordination, duration 3 hours.
27/7/20	Blackrock, Clydach	Assist Police as cars left overnight near cave A member of the public reported that cavers' cars were still parked in the same place the following morning near Craig y Ffynnon. The Police were contacted to trace the owners. Our enquiries established they were cave divers who had dived into Daren Cilau from Pwll y Cwm and planned to remain in the cave until 29/07/20. Police stood down. 2 members involved, duration 1.5 hours.
29/7/20	Varteg, Blaenavon	Animal Rescue A dog fell into narrow rift on Mynydd Varteg Fawr, West of Blaenavon and Varteg. Longtown MRT attended and called for assistance from SMWCRT. A Team member was able to descend and reach the dog in order to rig for hauling. A successful outcome as the dog was brought to the surface. 5 members deployed, 4 on standby, duration 4 hours. Very good joint working relationship with LMRT.
11/8/20	Dan Yr Ogof	Overdue A gate failure at the entrance to DYO left 2 CSS cavers stuck on the inside of the gate. 19 members deployed, 1 on standby, duration 2 hours.
24/10/20	Cwm Dwr 2	Assist police as abandoned tents were near cave entrance A member of the public reported to the police that she had seen the gate to Cwm Dwr 2 open and nearby in the quarry were abandoned tents. Police asked SMWCRT to search the entrance with officers present as there were reports of sensitive data near to the tents. Nothing found. 1 member involved, 4 on standby, duration 1.1 hours.

Over the last year SMWCRT have remained rescue ready, and have continued training to keep up to date with the challenges of COVID 19.

DT reported to the meeting that it had been quite a busy year, as busy as usual, though less incidents in the latter half of the year.

6(e) GCRG

No report submitted.

6(f) OFDCMC

No report submitted.

6(g) DYOCAP

Dan yr Ogof is currently closed due to the Covid-19 situation. The decision to re-open to cavers will be made in consultation with the show cave management when circumstances permit.

Jem Rowland (DYOCAP Secretary)

6(h) PDCMG

For PDCMG a short report, we are provisionally planning our next meeting for June 2021, as secretary I'm still waiting for some members to reply to my e-mail. We have not met in lockdown, as like many caving clubs and organisations, in mid 2020 we were assuming a return to normality later in the year (Sept 2020) so delayed our plans until then; from September 2020 until now we have returned to various forms of lockdown preventing travel of the caves, face to face meetings. We are hoping that by planning our meeting in June, the PDCMG officers who need to travel to and go into Ogof Draenen to collect data for their reports (E.g. Permit Secretary, Fixed Aids Officer, Conservation) will have had a chance to do so, as we all hope we will be out of travel restrictions long enough to visit the cave.

6(i) Cambrian Mines Trust (CMT)

No report submitted.

6(j) SC&MC

No report submitted.

6(k) MLCMAC

This organisation no longer exists as such, access to the caves is being maintained using the existing access system.

6(l) NWCC

No report submitted.

7. BCA Matters

Nothing to add from SF or AR.

8. Election of Officers

Chairman	Martyn Farr	Prop AR 2 nd VA	elected
Secretary	Allan Richardson	Prop VA 2 nd SF	elected
Treasurer	Mary Rogers	Prop SD 2 nd ES	elected
Conservation	Stuart France	Prop VA 2 nd RF	elected
Training	Richard Hill	Prop DT 2 nd SD	elected
Equipment	Vince Allkins	Prop RH 2 nd DT	elected
Legal and Insurance	Roy Fellows	Prop AR 2 nd RH	elected
Registry	Martin Laverty	Prop SF 2 nd SD	elected
Website	John Sheehy	Co-opted by the Executive	
Newsletter	John Sheehy	Co-opted by the Executive	

9. AOB

a. RH, Gethin and Juliet Parker Bowles asked to add Cambrian to OAW Wales. There were no objections to this going ahead. Action RH

b. SF noted that the website needs a ‘useful links page’. Action SF/JS

c. PC, speaking as NAMHO Conservation Officer, noted that some mines in Wales need reviewing for their archaeology and some assistance would be very helpful. The meeting was in favour of this and he was asked to get in touch with Cambrian. Action PC

d. JS reported that CavefestUK are planning to hold a Cavefest event in the coming August Bank Holiday, once again, based at Crickhowell Rugby Club. They are looking for volunteer cave guides to help with the event. Please contact info@cavefestuk.co.uk if you or your club would be willing to help in any way.

e. There was a discussion of some future CCC officer title to embrace any or all of Legal / Insurance / Mine Exploration. A lot of mine exploration goes on in Wales due to the high number of old mine sites. It was felt that some form of mine representation within CCC level would be useful. There was some discussion on the name for an Officer with the following title being agreed: Recreational Mine Exploration Officer. It was agreed to co-opt Roy Fellows for this new Mines role to run alongside his current role of Legal and Insurance Officer.

However, our legal and insurance matters covered by BCA by virtue of CCC being one of its regional bodies. So it was agreed to consider amending the CCC constitution in 2022 and that SF and AR should develop a proposed new wording that drops the Legal and Insurance Officer role and add a Mine Exploration Officer role, plus any other reforms that are now felt necessary. These changes would, after proper notice to CCC members, be put to the 2022 AGM. If approved there

then the Mine Exploration Officer would become elected post with voting rights for which RF would be expected to stand and the Legal / Insurance Officer role would disappear. RF was happy with these transitional arrangements. **Action RF/SF/AR**

f. NAMHO conference. SH reported that it is going ahead in Shropshire on the 2nd to 5th July 2021.

g. SF raised the issue that CCC's constitution allow individual cavers to join CCC, but they do not have a vote. Currently CCC does not have any individuals as members. It was noted that BCA's CIM/DIM/Club/Body multi-level membership structure and two-house voting system was not an exemplar model for CCC to copy. It was suggested that unaligned individuals could join one of CCC's member bodies that reflected their interests in order to become represented within CCC and to remove the redundant individual member category. SF/AM to consider this further and create a solution for it within a set of proposed constitutional reforms at the 2022 AGM. **Action SF/AR**

h. Dormant clubs/bodies. SF suggested that CCC needs an obligatory member re-registration system to prune defunct or disinterested member clubs/bodies from whom we hear nothing yet remain on our books which adds to administrative overheads and increases the quorum needed to transact official business at meetings for no obvious democratic benefit. SF/AR to consider reforms to the CCC constitution, such as a new requirement to affirm membership and provide updated contact details etc every 3 years. The Executive will bring proposals to the 2022 AGM. **Action SF/AR**

i. RH supported by Gethin Thomas and Juliet Parker-Smith asked to add Cambrian to Outdoor Action Wales (OAW), this was agreed. **Action RH**

j. Peter Cloughton, who is the NAMHO Conservation Officer, raised the issue that some mines need reviewing re their archaeological content. He would appreciate it if anyone who would like to help get in touch with him. His contact details are on the NAMHO website.

k. The following two letters have been received by the Secretary along with the request that they are published in the MGM Minutes. They are copied below in their entirety.

Item 1

Response to minutes of 2020 Conservation and Access Report

We would like to respond to the item that was minute in the 2020 AGM minutes that stated that our club (club X) was pursuing a vendetta against another club. I would like to start off by stating that this is false for reasons that I will go into below.

Firstly, I need to correct you when you say the club attracted existing club members by recounting what actually happened and why the split occurred. A number of new people, all of whom had limited caving experience, regardless of what you may have been told, applied to join the club. They were accepted and proceeded to become active members of the club. Unfortunately, it became clear that one of this group was promoting unsafe and generally unacceptable practices with very large groups entering OCAF and crossing conservation tapes. A lot of these transgressions resulted

in photographs being posted on social media and so came to the attention of the club's committee. A meeting of concerned parties was held and it was agreed that the new members required guidance rather than censure and a further meeting was arranged with the intention of asking the club chairman to intervene and offer this guidance. I am unaware if this ever happened but I suspect not. At a later date, the group's leader requested the use of the OCAF key but was refused by the key holder who had seen the social media posts. This resulted in many toys being thrown out of a pram, many unfounded accusations made against club members and all the new members leaving the club. A new club, Club Y, was set up and our chairman did indeed join this club but he remained a member and chairman of Club X until the AGM when it was felt by many that he had divided loyalties and after a new chairman was elected, he no longer participated in club activities or meetings.

I do know that the behaviour of some of Club Y's members was raised by some of the Club X members, but it was clear that nothing could or would be done and we, as a club, let things lie. As time went on, it was apparent to some of the individual club members, one of whom had personal experience with Club Y before joining Club X, that various dubious practices were still being undertaken and encouraged by the same character that had stomped off to form a new club previously and raised this with other parties. This was the source of the small number of complaints followed by the freedom of information request to determine if any action had been taken as it was not apparent that any had. There has been an element of 'winding up' but again, this has been undertaken by individuals and when it became known to the club committee, the individuals were asked to desist. The Christmas Day post was unfortunate, and I made this clear to the moderators that this was an individual's perspective not the club's. The Christmas Day post was in response to the fact that Club Y had experienced a split in a similar vein to the earlier split from Club X. I would not like to go into detail of what has been heard but it appears that our previous concerns had been justified and the individual in question has left the new club. Since then, as far as we are aware, there have been no further complaints raised or 'winding up' episodes.

So, I would reiterate that there is no vendetta being pursued by Club X and any complaints made were really in response to an individual's actions, not Club Y's. We would rather that

both clubs continued to exist and that a more friendly relationship can be created. One of our club members did in early 2020 reach out to Club Y to start the process of reconciliation and a meeting was planned. Unfortunately, the COVID pandemic interrupted these plans and no further interactions have been possible. Hopefully, we can restart the process in the near future.

There have been no further episodes of 'winding up' and as a club, we had hoped that this chapter in the club's story had been finished.

So, to conclude, I hope that this sets the record straight and we would like this to be recorded against the 2020 minutes to show both sides of the story.

Kind Regards,
'Club X' Committee.

Item 2

Letter from David Cooke BCA IT Working Group Convenor (2012 – 2020)

Mr Allan Richardson

The Secretary

Cambrian Caving Council 18th March 2021

Dear Allan,

Ahead of the 2021 Cambrian AGM I've just read through the 2020 AGM Draft Minutes. I found the following paragraph, about me, in section 7 BCA Matters by Stuart France which has caused me great distress on top of an episode that has already caused me a great deal of distress.

“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.”

I refute these allegations. Throughout this sorry episode BCA failed to provide any support to resolve the differences between The BCA Secretary, BCA Webmaster and I, BCA's IT Working Group Convenor at the time. Arbitration was proposed but rejected. Subsequently the BCA Executive did initiate a third party investigation, which I was in favour of but that was squashed by my detractors. This was bad for BCA then and is bad for BCA going

forward when it listens to those who shout the loudest rather than getting to the truth of the matter.

My response at the time to the BCA Secretary is Appendix 1 of the Jan 2020 Minutes, available from the BCA website <https://british-caving.org.uk/about-bca/bca-council/official-documents/> . I would encourage your members to read it since it is the only public document, to date, that puts my side of the argument.

The allegation that I blocked online ballots is ludicrous. I along with Bob Mehew ran BCA's first online ballot in 2017, votes were accepted by email. I then ran the second online ballot in 2019 with Gary Douthwaite's (the newly elected BCA Webmaster) help both of us developing the necessary software together, votes were placed using an online form. I'm totally in favour of online ballots. It is not unreasonable to say that I did more than any other single person to enable online voting for BCA. What I objected to was the proposal to disenfranchise the third of the membership who hadn't supplied email addresses by not posting them ballot papers.

The allegations that I blocked “BCA officers to be allowed to communicate with BCA members by email” or that I “refused to provide the membership and email database to the BCA Secretary” is totally false.

The BCA Secretary never asked me for a list of emails to communicate with the members. If he had I would have given him free access to the admin page within BCA Online that exported a list of members email addresses to a spreadsheet ready for use by mailing list software. These same

routines were used by the Ballot Sending Officer to email out the voting ballots. In general there was no need for the Secretary to run mailshots himself since, being somewhat technical, I ran them but if he wanted to, he could have.

The master membership database is held by the Membership Administrator, the BCA Online database is a copy. For the full set of data the BCA Secretary could also have asked the Membership Administrator.

At the Oct 2019 BCA Council meeting the BCA Secretary was offered a copy of the BCA Online database, which he refused.

If you study the Minutes of the Jan 2020 BCA Council meeting where this matter came to a head you see there is no mention of me blocking the Secretary from running ballots or emailing the members as is falsely alleged in Stuart France's report.

What the BCA Secretary did ask for, on the BCA Webmaster's behalf was direct access to the BCA Online database for some unspecified software redevelopment. As BCA's IT Working Group Convenor it was my responsibility to look after the integrity of the database.

As every professional software developer knows you do not develop software against the live database, you develop it against a test copy. The risk of accidentally corrupting the live data is far too high. This was my first reason for denying write access to the database.

Secondly the BCA Webmaster, despite repeated requests, refused to say what changes he intended to make. I had serious doubts that the Webmaster sufficiently understood the

workings of the database to alter it without breaking the functionality of it. This was my second reason for denying write access to the database.

I had given the BCA Webmaster all the information and access that he needed to do his job. He had the password giving full access and control of the british-caving.org.uk website the same week as being elected. Before his election I had made him aware of the public BCA Online GitHub repository which contains all the source code, design notes and database schema.

In the BCA's Webmasters resignation statement (April 2020) he gave, for the first time, a bullet point description of his aims. This included "A new, user friendly members area (to replace what is now BCA Online)". He never intended to keep BCA Online and as such he never needed write access to it. So why cause the sacking of a BCA Officer over it?

Can you please ensure this letter is put before the Cambrian 2021 AGM and that it is written into the permanent record.

Yours sincerely

David Cooke BCA
IT Working Group Convenor (2012 – 2020)

10. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be on Sunday 20th March 2022. There was some discussion about a physical venue versus using Zoom as some people do not want to travel far for a meeting whilst others wish to make a weekend of it which could include organised or informal underground trips. It was agreed that a hybrid model would suit both sides in this discussion: a physical venue that has a good Broadband connection or 4G signal over which the physical meeting could be shared online using Zoom. RF will find a suitable venue in Mid-Wales and SF will provide a digital projector, webcam and PC to broadcast the AGM over Zoom to remote participants. **Action RF/SF**