

## **2024 Annual General Meeting of the Cambrian Caving Council**

To be held at 1200 noon on Sunday 10th March in the Visitor Centre at the Rheidol Power Station, Cwm Rheidol, near Aberystwyth, SY23 3NB. Venue information:

<https://www.statkraft.co.uk/about-statkraft-uk/where-we-operate/Locations/rheidol-visitor-centre/>

You can also attend this meeting via Zoom. To obtain the meeting link, please email: [secretary@cambiancavingcouncil.org.uk](mailto:secretary@cambiancavingcouncil.org.uk)

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### **OFFICERS' REPORTS**

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#### **CCC Secretary's Report for the year March 2023 to February 2024**

Another quiet year with nothing of note to report.

I am also the BCA Secretary and have attended most of the meetings as the Cambrian Rep.

I am willing to stand again for the position of Cambrian Secretary.

Allan Richardson

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#### **CCC Treasurer's Report for the year ending 31st December 2023**

The CCC audited accounts for 2023 show an increase in funds of £195.31 leaving the CCC bank balance as of 31/12/2023 at £6398.68.

Our BCA grant for 2022 was greater than that for 2021, with a small profit again from seven popular training courses. The main expenditure item was towards fixed aids for OFD.

Many thanks again to Richard Hill and John Sheehy for their help, and to Ian Adams again for prompt auditing.

*Signed* Maury Rogers 15.2.24

**Cambrian Caving Council  
Accounts  
Year Ended 31 December 2023**

**Income and Expenditure Account**

	2023		2022	
<u>Income</u>	£	£	£	£
BCA Grant	529.79		181.03	
Training Events	1,920.00		2,435.00	
Keys	50.00		70.00	
<b>Total Income</b>		2,499.79		2,686.03
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Training Events	1,878.60		2,414.60	
Equipment and Techniques	266.37		50.98	
Conservation and Access	142.33		458.41	
Print, Postage and Stationery	17.18		0.00	
<b>Total Expenditure</b>		2,304.48		2,923.99
<b>Excess of Income over Expenditure</b>		195.31		(237.96)

**Balance Sheet**

Barclays Current Account	6,398.68		6,203.37	
		6,398.68		6,203.37
Reserves at 31st December 2023 and 2022	6,203.37		6,441.33	
Add : Surplus income over expenditure	195.31		(237.96)	
		6,398.68		6,203.37

**(Signed) Mary Rogers      Treasurer      Date : 05-02-2024**

**Honorary Scrutineer's Report**

The above accounts of Cambrian Caving Council showing a surplus of £195.31 and capital of £6,398.68 have been prepared by us from the books, records, information and explanations provided to us by the above and we certify that the same is in accordance therewith

**(Signed) Ian L Adams FFA FFTA AIAB (For Abacus Accountants)      Date: 07-02-2022**

## **CCC Conservation & Access Officer's Report for the year March 2023 to February 2024**

### **COVID**

The problem is still widespread but in less dangerous forms, so during the past year a lot of normality has returned to caving activities and to life in general with Covid no longer much in the news now.

### **NATURAL RESOURCES WALES**

There has been little contact with NRW over the past year. NRW continues to email agendas and supporting documents for its National Access Forum for Wales meetings which I read but find there is little or nothing relevant to caving amongst it. NAFW is a non-statutory committee created and chaired by NRW to discuss open access matters at national level. In practice it is not a discussion

forum at all and acts mainly as a platform for NRW to burnish its credentials and relate its own activities and ideas.

So long as NRW holds to its cherished position that caving is not an open-air recreation, to impute that caving has no statutory access rights, there seems little point to engaging further with NRW on the matter of open-air recreation. So I have not attended, nor do I plan to attend, any NAFW meetings. I have told them so. NRW's response was to threaten myself, our chairman and secretary, with termination of CCC's membership of NAFW for lack of recent attendance at meetings. We have not replied to this empty threat because NRW does not have the power to admit or expel NAFW members. It would require a majority vote amongst the existing NAFW members - which includes bodies like the YHA, National Trust, National Park Authority and Local Authority reps, Open Spaces Society (OSS), other outdoors groups like the Ramblers, BMC and equestrians. Such organisations would not line up to expel another national sports representative body of which NRW simply wished to rid itself.

The Dartmoor Camping judicial review case against its local National Park Authority, where a large landowner attempted to outlaw camping on Dartmoor, was lost by the NPA at the first hearing which effectively banned camping on the Dartmoor Commons. The OSS took over the legal case, appealed and won. This was very useful for caving as the Court of Appeal ruled that being enclosed inside a tent for hours, using a sleeping bag etc, was still a valid form of open-air recreation and that 'being enclosed' does not convert open-air recreation into the opposite. Thus the NRW/Defra position that caving is not open-air recreation because cavers are to some extent enclosed was overturned. The judges also ruled unanimously that being asleep during the course of recreational activities does not convert recreation into non-recreation whether the person is asleep inside a tent or anywhere else.

The late-breaking news is that the landowner has succeeded in obtaining leave to appeal to the Supreme Court. So it seems sometime during 2024 we will get the ultimate legal answer the mighty questions of what 'open-air' means and whether sleeping in the course of an activity is 'recreational'.

### **CAVING JUDICIAL REVIEW CASE**

The case ended two years ago with a compromise where the Welsh Government would look again at cave access rights following a written submission from BCA. WG did a review and decided to take no action to improve cave access due to lack of resources, now not being the right time, and so on. BCA seems to have returned to the idea of lobbying MPs etc about access, with no obvious results.

The caving case was never heard in court, so had no outcome, unlike the Dartmoor case related above. But it is interesting to witness the power struggle that the Dartmoor case is revealing. The Dartmoor NPA went to Defra (of all people!) to ask for legal and financial support to protect recreation, but it was the OSS which stepped in and won the 2023 Court of Appeal case. Obviously the outcome of the upcoming Supreme Court case during 2024 about Dartmoor camping rights will also have a direct bearing on the interpretation of legislation in the CROW-caving context. It also demonstrates the lengths and costs to which BCA might have had to go to in its own attempts to obtain a clear legal ruling on open-air recreation in the face of such resolute opposition to an 'unwanted' activity.

My position now is that we should just sit and wait for the time when the likes of NRW acknowledge that we have a right to exist and to carry out recreational caving *pari passu* other outdoors activities.

### **CAVE ACCESS LTD**

The CAL mine scheme is not currently running, but we have submitted a fresh application to NRW concerning a new permissive access system for all the original mines plus a few new ones. This was

well-received at the 'officer level' in NRW. I am told informally that the mine access scheme will be renewed and the paperwork is currently with NRW's legal department. They have not agreed to every site that we requested, and some of those agreed on will have seasonal restrictions due to various wildlife concerns. The detail is yet to emerge.

### **BRITISH CAVING ASSOCIATION**

I leave it to Allan Richardson to report on BCA in his dual role as secretary for BCA and CCC.

### **UNESCO DESIGNATED AREAS**

Cambrian has been invited to join the management group for the UNESCO Geopark in South Wales which operates under the auspices of the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. It generally holds two meetings per year which I have attended. Its UNESCO charter comes up for renewal each 4 years and that process is underway now. The land area covered is roughly the entire NPA west of a line from Merthyr to Brecon including the main beacons summits, and of course OFD and DYO etc. They plan to extend it southwards by about 10% in terms of land area to bring in parts of the Rhondda and Powys with coal mining heritage.

The 2021 Slate Landscape of Northwest Wales UNESCO World Heritage Site (as distinct from a UNESCO Geopark) comprises a number of old slate mines in North Wales of interest to cavers and explorers such as Bryneglwys. If this WHS has a management committee at all then caving is not, to my knowledge, represented on it. Likewise the 1999 Blaenavon World Heritage Site which overlays much of Ogof Draenen.

### **MLCMAC**

The Mynydd Llangattock caves continue to be run by MLCMAC now acting as a CCC subcommittee. Several new club keys were issued for the £10 fee in the past year. No operational issues have been reported other than padlocks requiring cleaning and the replacement of cave logbooks. The latter are now spiral bound volumes of pre-printed forms on 'plastic paper' along with tough waterproof pencils.

There have been no further meetings with the landowners (Beaufort Estate) in the past 12 months. They have taken on the task of drafting a new cave access agreement following the withdrawal of NRW from direct involvement in managing cave access generally. We are awaiting proposals but in the meanwhile the Estate seems to be happy with the approach that Cambrian has been taking.

### **OFD**

SWCC is continuing with its post-covid system for cavers to apply in advance for a code to open a key safe to get a cave key for a particular date. This has been working well. See SWCC website.

### **DYO**

The £5 per visit charge system for cavers towards conservation and access also seems to be working well too. The system depends on the goodwill of the cave owners and nominated cave leaders taking in groups of BCA-insured cavers (or the equivalent) that request access.

The online telemetry project to send near live rainfall and cave river depth data to a public webpage (viewable on a smartphone etc) was tested at a concept level last summer, then returned indoors for further development over the winter following a massive flood event in the cave during September which likely damaged the equipment at Pot Sump by submerging it under excess pressure. I have

not been back in the cave to look due to the persistently wet autumn. A new sensor with a greater depth range will be installed in the cave during the spring of 2024 with the online results feed shortly after. Once proven, this software and the circuits will be made open-source and could be cloned for use in other active-river caves to advise intending cavers as to current and recent rain and river levels.

### **OGOF DRAENEN**

I attended PDCMG's meetings over the past year. The group is trying to become a limited company along the lines of the long-standing Charterhouse Caving Company on Mendip to overcome the problem of finding trustees willing to act under its present access terms. The new company would need a new agreement in its own name with the present landowner of the one gated entrance. This landowner has already rejected the idea of the PDCMG managing any other cave entrances on their land, and refused access to carry out bat surveys, and has not agreed either to access from their gated entrance for the training of caving instructors.

There has been no progress with the Grade 5 survey publication nor its coverage. One of the main contributors to the survey, Arthur Millet, passed away in February 2023. His Will has recently been published in which he gifts his averred 80% share in the copyright of the survey to a family member. It is understood (by me) that John Stevens owns the rest. The PDCMG replaced John Stevens as its survey officer last summer and the new officer has said he intends to create a new Grade 5 survey *ab initio* using modern rapid technology to put an end to the suppression of the earlier Grade 5 survey.

### **OGOF GOFAN / CASTLEMARTIN RANGE WEST**

There have been light but steady visits to this small but spectacular cave over the past year with good feedback from visiting groups. Book visits to Ogof Gofan through me please. Also call the Range's answerphone on 01646 662367 on the day before your visit to confirm the route to the cave will be open. This link also provides the expected firing schedule for the next couple of months:  
<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/castlemartin-firing-notice--2/>

A different system applies for access to Range West to explore for new caves. You need to attend a briefing meeting **at the range and in person** to get onto their annual permission list which enables you to acquire a day badge on the date of your visit from the guard room subject to various T&Cs. The dates for the 2024 briefing meetings are on the Events page of the CCC website.

I attended the recreational users' AGM held at Castlemartin Range in the autumn. This is a key event to strengthen relations with landowner personnel and interested parties like the PCNPA and their Ranger. It is obvious they all appreciate user groups making the effort to maintain direct contact.

### **NAME CHANGE FOR CCC AND NEW CONSTITUTION**

This past year CCC has been working hard on a new modern constitution and rebranding itself as Caving Wales / Ogofa Cymru to make its purpose as a national sport representative body clear to other bodies with whom we need to interact – ranging in scale from MoD to local landowners. Most outsiders have no idea what “Cambrian” means nor the organisation's *raison d'être* with some of them thinking we are just another small caving club. The present constitution, last modified in 2015, largely dates from the 1960s: the world has moved on, our role has evolved, and we need to reflect that.

I am putting forward motions at the 2024 AGM to bring in these changes. We ran a consultation over the last summer and autumn which drew only helpful comments on the draft. We have taken all that feedback on board in the final version of the new constitution proposal which has been circulating.

## **GOING FORWARD**

I am willing to stand again in the same role.

Stuart France  
CCC Conservation and Access Officer  
16th February 2024

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## **CCC Training Officer's for the 2024 AGM**

The last year has seen the usual workshops: several SRT workshops, geology walks, photography and surveying.

All have run successfully with some being oversubscribed.

SRT workshops are planned for April, June and July 2024 and I am trying to get volunteers to front other workshops.

I am happy to stand again.

As an aside, although CCC have 3 SRT kits, Gagendor club provide much of the rope and rigging kit for the SRT workshops and I wonder if a donation could be given to them. It is my club! I don't want CCC to buy this kit as it would not be worthwhile.

Rich Hill

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## **CCC Cave Registrar's Report for the year ending 31st December 2023**

The last year has been reasonably quiet for the CCR.

There have been around 25 new entries and a few amendments to data. Several mapping sources have had to be changed as old links ceased to work. No major discoveries (or surveys) have been notified. There has been no input at all from north Wales, or in relation to mines.

Several regular correspondents have continued to help and I am happy to have been able to welcome several new (and young!) ones: my thanks to all.

I am willing to continue as Registrar.

Martin Laverty

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## **CCC Information Officer's for the 2024 AGM**

A relatively quiet year again, with routine changes being made to the website throughout the year to publicise training courses, geological walks and other newsworthy events.

I have added a new web page to set out the topos for the newly installed hangers in OFD and have made updates to references to Covid and where there have been changes to access arrangements for certain caves.

I have also co-ordinated mailshots to member clubs using the Cambrian account to bring the availability of training courses to member clubs' attention.

I am happy to continue in the role in 2024.

John Sheehy

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## **CCC Recreational Mine Exploration Officer's Report for the year ending 31st December 2023**

I have to report no activity in the last year relative to my position with CCC, however I obviously get correspondence relative to Cwmystwyth and Dinas.

I am happy to continue in this position.

Roy Fellows

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