

Caving Wales - Annual General Meeting

At Craig y Nos Country Park on Sun 16th March 2025 at 1300h
<https://www.breconbeacons.org/discover/easier-access/attractions/craig-y-nos-country-park>

The meeting will be held in person in the Hibbert Room and by Zoom.
Please contact your club or group secretary to obtain the Zoom link.
In case of any difficulty please contact access@caving.wales

Agenda

1. Attendance List

2. Apologies for absence
John Sheehy

3. Chair's Welcome

4. Minutes of the 2024 AGM

- 4.1 Accuracy
- 4.2 Matters arising not otherwise to be covered

5. Applications for membership

None received

6. Officers' Reports

6.1 Chairman Adrian Fawcett

6.2 Secretary - Allan Richardson

Again a quiet year with nothing to report other than routine matters. I have attended most of the BCA meetings as the Caving Wales representative. I am willing to stand again for the position of Caving Wales Secretary.

6.3 Treasurer - Mary Rogers

Ogofau Cymru / Caving Wales Treasurer's Report for the year ending 31st December 2024

The Ogofau Cymru / Caving Wales audited accounts for 2024 show a deficit of £1,195.07 reducing the OC/CW bank balance as of 31 December 2024 to £5,203.61.

The deficit is generally attributable to an increase in spending on fixed aids in various underground locations, improving access to Ogor Tardiadd Pwll Du and the agreed reimbursement to FoDCCAG towards the purchase of land around Wet Sink. Most of these, excluding the latter, we should be able to claim back from BCA, thus restoring our bank balance.

Many thanks again to Richard and John for their great help, and Ian Adams for efficient auditing.

**Ogofau Cymru/ Caving Wales
(formerly Cambrian Caving Council)
Accounts
Year Ended 31 December 2024**

Income and Expenditure Account

	2024		2023	
	£	£	£	£
<u>Income</u>				
BCA Grant	425.88		529.79	
Training Events	1,200.00		1,920.00	
Compensation (Barclays)	60.00		0.00	
Keys	60.00		50.00	
Total Income		1,745.88		2,499.79
<u>Expenditure</u>				
Training Events	1,248.40		1,878.60	
Equipment and Techniques	784.83		266.37	
Conservation and Access	571.59		142.33	
FoDCCAG	281.00		0.00	
Print, Postage and Stationery	55.13		17.18	
Total Expenditure		2,940.95		2,304.48
Net Income (Expenditure) for the Year		(1,195.07)		195.31

Balance Sheet

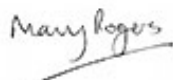
Barclays Current Account	5,203.61	5,203.61	6,398.68	6,398.68
Reserves at 31st December 2024 and 2023	6,398.68		6,203.37	
Net Income (Expenditure) for the Year	(1,195.07)		195.31	
Total Reserves		5,203.61		6,398.68

(Signed) Mary Rogers Treasurer Date : 06-02-2025

Honorary Scrutineer's Report

The above accounts of Ogofau Cymru / Caving Wales showing a net expenditure of £1,195.07 and capital of £5,203.61 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: 10-02-2025



13 February 2025

6.4 Conservation and Access Officer - Stuart France

My report covers March 2024 to February 2025. The March 2024 AGM passed constitutional changes to modernize the former Cambrian Caving Council so as to reflect its wider contemporary roles and offering to cavers in the present era including the change of name to Caving Wales / Ogofa Cymru (CW/OC) which is cast in the modern style of "Sport Country" / "Chwaraeon Gwlad" which also helps my role when contacts now more readily understand that CW is a sport representative body rather than some kind of forum or the Cambrian Caving Club.

COVID

The problem is still widespread but in less dangerous forms than previously. The recent variants are descendants from Omicron (2021) with symptoms including a cough, congestion, runny nose, diarrhea, fever or chills, shortness of breath, loss of taste or smell, skin rashes and immune system reactions. Self-isolation remains its usual management with caving activities not much impacted.

NATURAL RESOURCES WALES

There has been limited contact with NRW over the past year. NRW continues to email agendas and supporting documents to me concerning its National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW) meetings which relate to operation of the CRoW Act and other statutory access. I read them but there is nothing relevant to caving because NRW claims that the right-to-roam does not apply to caving, and NAFW is all about the operation of recreation as of right. In respect of caving, NRW has and continues to act contrary to all three aims of its forum, which are:

1. To help improve the quality and extent of access to the countryside and coast of Wales, and extend the opportunities for enjoyment and responsible outdoor recreation to all, with regard to environmental sustainability and education and the context of the climate and nature emergencies (*when NRW along with WG opposed statutory caving access in the High Court*)
2. To work together as a stakeholder network, fostering understanding, and sharing information and good practice; to support the realisation of benefits of outdoor recreation and access in Wales (*when NRW revoked the mine access scheme after 7 years of successful operation*)
3. To support NRW in its aim of more people participating in, and benefitting from, outdoor recreation more often (*when NRW is trying to reduce opportunities for caving*)

We need to discuss NAFW at this AGM because NRW has now threatened twice in writing to throw Caving Wales off this forum for non-attendance. Personally, I am not prepared to waste any more of my own weekday time and travel attending NAFWs, but anyone else is welcome to take this on.

NRW treats caving as an indoors hobby because cave passages by definition tend to be enclosed. However, a Court of Appeal panel of three senior judges in the Dartmoor Camping Judicial Review brought by the Open Spaces Society unanimously ruled that being enclosed inside a tent, or being asleep inside a tent or indeed anywhere else, is still "open-air recreation" when it is part of a recreational experience conducted outside of the built environment. The judges were critical of those taking turns of phrase used by legislation too literally and so were disregarding their generality.

The plaintiff is appealing this result to the Supreme Court where, if the CA judgment is upheld in the coming months or years, then drawing the obvious analogy between being enclosed by a tent and by a cave in the context of recreation invalidates NRW's narrative and shows the lengths to which people or organisations on a personal or corporate mission will stretch semantics to misrepresent what is generally understood and was intended by legislation. The camping case also confirms the BCA's Judicial Review had good prospects but it lacked sufficient finance and confidence to see it through, unlike www.oss.org.uk whose legal experience and contacts have been built up during 160 years.

NRW will be joining up the Mynydd Llangattock and the Mynydd Llangynidr SSSIs and adding extra areas near Merthyr to create a 'mega-SSSI'. A consultation amongst interested parties is underway but a source in the Bannau Brecheiniog (former Brecon Beacons) National Park has said this is "already a done deal". NRW chose PDCMG as its conduit for disseminating its consultation documents to the caving community despite this group not having any locus for the enlarged SSSI and I have since provided a link to a zip file containing all of that material on the ukCaving forum. In these you will find that cave discovery and caving in general is to be placed under stricter controls.

Negotiations with NRW to create a new mine explorer scheme faltered in July 2024 since when NRW has not replied to correspondence from Cave Access Ltd (CAL) which operated the old access scheme which NRW summarily revoked in 2022. July coincided with the announcement of about 250 staff redundancies in NRW by the end of September, plus closure or scaling back of recreational facilities.

NRW is also involved in Ogof Tarddiad Pwll Du, or to be more precise use of the permissive path to its entrance, as explained below. This follows the disclosure to NRW of the Ogof Draenen connection during February 2024, and in turn to the wider caving community and PDCMG later last year.

UNESCO GEOPARK

I have attended all but one of the management group meetings for the Fforest Fawr Geopark which operates under the auspices of the Bannau Brycheiniog (former Brecon Beacons) National Park Authority. There have been more than the usual number of meetings in 2024 because of the need to renew its charter. This has been successful giving another four years of UNESCO support. Its original land area is roughly the entire NPA west of a line from Merthyr to Brecon which includes OFD and DYO etc. An application is in development to expand its official area by almost 10%, i.e. the limit that UNESCO allows as a 'one-off'. The aim is to attach some of the adjoining former coalfield areas between the A465 and the southern boundary line of the national park.

The raison d'être of a Geopark is more cultural than geological which reflects UNESCO's purpose. So although many people involved in our one are geology professionals, or with personal interests like myself, the local authorities are also stakeholders too who see the Geopark as a means of bringing visitors and thus income into their areas and fostering a stronger 'sense of place' within communities.

MLCMAC

Caving at Mynydd Llangattock continues to be observed by the MLCMAC advisory committee. This group has been given support by CW since NRW essentially wound it up. Its purpose had been to advise NRW as the legal Occupier of the Craig-y-Cilau national nature reserve under a lease from the Beaufort Estate which delegated control of the caves to NRW's predecessor body. Their lease expired over 20 years ago and, according to my sources, NRW finds itself unable to renew. Therefore control of the caves reverted back to the Beaufort Estate long ago. Thus NRW has no role here other than as the statutory conservation body whose domain in that regard is the whole of Wales.

The chairman of CW and I have met with the land agents leaving them with the task of setting out how the estate now wishes to manage the caves and what information and advice they may need from cavers to assist them. The estate is aware that CW is not managing the caves nor directing the MLCMAC which remains free to make its own recommendations and find new members from cavers able and willing to volunteer time or ideas. The role of CW is providing MLCMAC with access to BCA and other funds, internet, banking and other services enabling it to continue without NRW hosting it.

We still await written proposals from the estate but in the meanwhile it is clear they are content with the status quo under which the former permit system has been dropped in favour of some practical adjustments to the inherited cave access rules and cave key distribution system. The informal access permission is that the estate welcomes bona fide amateur cavers for 'responsible' caving activities on its land. Responsible in this context means not damaging cave formations or causing disturbance to roosting bats, and not altering cave entrances or interfering with the local wildlife. For the full set of NRW consultative SSSI documents see: <https://linetop.co.uk/CW/NewSSSI.zip>

FoDCCAG

Last year saw some amazing announcements and presentations about extensive cave discoveries in the Forest and the completion of the land purchase around Wet Sink by a new limited company (FoDCCAG Ltd) on behalf of the conservation-access group. The modest asking price and legal costs and conservation materials have largely been grant aided by the BCA Cave Conservation Emergency Fund mainly due to the efforts of Jenny Potts, plus additional contributions from BCA and CW.

The access arrangements for non-FoDCCAG clubs are to apply in advance for a key which is collected on the day from an agreed place. CW sees this system as unnecessarily restrictive and unequal towards other clubs' members. We requested evidence that the group is constitutionally founded, holds bona fide AGMs, elections and so forth, which are necessary to be a BCA and CW group member, thus giving them access to BCA insurance. Nothing has been forthcoming.

OGOF DRAENEN

PDCMG has put its plans to become a limited company on hold following the announcement of a connection with Ogof Tarddiad Pwll Du last May. The one-entrance one-landowner locked-entrance concept ended long ago with various alternative unlocked entrances located on public access land. The novelty of OTPD is having a different landowner who has welcomed bona fide amateur cavers generally as his guests to use a permitted path to reach the unlocked OTPD entrance for 'responsible' caving activities, i.e. the usual approach taken by small farmers and larger estates. By contrast the PDCMG 'trustees' have acquired management rights from their landowner via a written contract. Converting an informal trust into a limited company would promote them to a new level of 'occupier'.

The open entrances at Drws Cefn and the Nunnery remain in use. These are both on Urban Common land to which a statutory right of public access exists for taking "air and exercise". Neither are SSSIs or Scheduled Monuments. NRW does not dispute that going caving is "air and exercise", which is the term used by Section 193 of the Law of Property Act 1925 permitting recreation, but NRW then argues that the word "land" as applied to "air and exercise" excludes "caves" which is beyond comprehension considering how broadly "land" is defined in 3-D terms by Section 205 of the very same Act.

There is a voluntary logbook at the OTPD entrance for safety reasons to narrow the search should a group be reported as missing and to obtain some statistics on footfall should advice ever be needed.

NRW has engaged with the new landowner by writing a strong letter last June. This letter noted that CW would be receiving a letter too advising it on "appropriate actions ... to ensure [legal] compliance". Our new landowner has since written to me saying he is still content for caver access to continue along the permissive path route to reach the caves for responsible caving activities.

NRW did write to CW last November. Amongst other matters that email rehearsed NRW's complaint and said matters they discussed with the landowner are now closed. NRW then alleged that a written agreement exists between the landowner and CW whereby CW manages the land on an equal basis with the actual landowner, making CW into another Occupier of this land. We believe CW obtained this incorrect impression from PDCMG. Since SSSI controls operate at the landowner level, turning CW into a joint Occupier would be a necessary first step in future enforcement action, or the threat of it, if the 'landowner' obtaining consent (for caving) from NRW and adhered to any and all constraints.

CW wrote to NRW in December to correct their misunderstanding of the situation and re-state that all we have done is obtain a welcome for bona fide cavers as his visitors to use the permitted path to go caving. The legal definition of an Occupier was created by case law in the 1960s. In summary, it is someone who has sufficient control over land to become liable to persons being on that land in the context of the Occupiers' Liability Act 1957 - such as the landowners themselves or a tenant farmer, or via a land management contract, rights conveyed to a third party by a property deed, etc.

The second step is to find something over which to conflict with the alleged 'occupier'. NRW is trying to make a case that caver access along the woodland path should be restricted because the SSSI Citation for the woodland as a whole mentions Brittle Bladder Fern. The other two plant species it mentions are Ash trees and a flower that does not grow in woodland. None of these are rare or endangered being well distributed across the entire northern hemisphere. In fact all paths in this little visited private woodland were made by sheep and badgers who are still the most common visitors. The woodland paths have existed at least since before the 1980s, being seen in their present form by myself and other cavers during that era. I have told NRW that if they make a decision to disregard the legal definition of Occupier to suit an anti-caving narrative which is not founded on genuinely necessary conservation measures then it will likely result in another Judicial Review.

Given the legal context and NRW's course of conduct, I have the support of our executive to limit interaction with NRW concerning the above. The last meeting of the MLCMAC also voted unanimously not to have NRW staff present at its committee meetings for the time being.

OGOF GOFAN / CASTLEMARTIN RANGE WEST

Light but steady visits to this small but spectacular cave have continued over the past year with good feedback from visiting groups. Arrange visits to Ogor Gofan through me please and I will request the firing range management to issue you with a PDF permit giving you exclusive access to the cave for up to four people for one day. Allow 2 weeks notice for setting this up please if you can. You can see what dates are definitely not available for public access due to live firing exercises on the Range at: www.gov.uk/government/publications/castlemartin-firing-notice--2/

Also call the Range's answerphone on 01646 662367 on the day before your visit to confirm the footpath to the cave will be open and that the firing schedule has not changed at the last moment.

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 2025 briefing meetings are on the CW website.

I attended the recreational users' AGM held at Castlemartin Range once again. This is a key event to strengthen relations with landowner personnel and interested parties like the PCNPA and their local Ranger. All concerned reported being very happy with the present cave access arrangements.

LOOKING AHEAD

I am willing to stand again but as I have been in this job for 10 years perhaps someone else should consider taking over the role or some aspects of it. I am willing to provide support. As well as the obvious conservation and access provision remit implied by the job-title, it does mean attending real meetings across Wales, trying to build constructive relationships, keeping abreast of developments in the caving and wider world, staying on top of email and being responsive to cavers.

Sadly, I have also to say that commercial experience and a grip on all relevant legislation has become a necessity in dealing with increasingly imaginative opposition to going caving itself or the facilitation of caving. The standard tactic of government organisations now is to stretch legal semantics beyond all reason to construct a legislative framework around an unstated control and limitation agenda.

In contrast, my experience of landowners has been consistently good, and we are fortunate to have such generous and supportive private hosts, for which I sincerely thank them all.

6.5 Training Officer - Richard Hill

Training events continue to be well supported for SRT and Geology walks. This spring we are charging a small fee for the Geology walks - because BBNPA are charging us - and still we are getting cavers signing up. The next set of SRT workshops will see a small increase in price just because Llangorse climbing centre have increased their admission fees.

Unfortunately NRW refused a permit for us to run a Bat Walk this winter and I have struggled to find someone willing to run a photography workshop. I will endeavour to remedy this and try and organise one for later in the year and maybe see if there is interest in a surveying workshop.

I am willing to stand again but also happy if someone else wants to take over.

6.6 Equipment and Techniques Officer - Vince Allkins

6.7 Cave Registrar - Martin Laverty

I have made one major addition to the Registry this year: a compilation of all the data I could find on water tracing in relation to the karst. The tests can be listed at: http://www.caving.wales/registry/hydrology/hyd_list.php

or viewed from a link on a relevant individual site, or shown on the map by going to Map overlays > Wales > Geomorphology > Hydrology. The data is surely incomplete: additions and corrections will be welcome.

Although around 50 new sites have been logged, almost all come from the review of hydrological literature for the addition noted above. There have been almost no new discoveries or explorations reported this year apart from the connection of Ogof Tarddiad Pwll Du to Ogof Draenen.

The combined and extended Llangatwg and Llangynidr SSSIs - Mynyddoedd Llangynidr a Llangatwg, Cefn yr Ystrad a Chomin Merthyr (clearly no room for any English name, mandatory or not) - now appears on Data Map Wales, as reflected on <http://caving.wales/registry/CCRM.htm> by going to Map overlays > Wales > Conservation. This new designation covers somewhere around 50 sites.

The Registry, in various forms, will be sixty years old in November and has had at least seven Registrars, sometimes with additional regional assistants. I have now been Registrar for over a decade and am happy to continue but would welcome discussion with anyone who might have ideas for improving, or even aspire to take over, this resource.

6.8 Information Officer - John Sheehy

I have made a number of routine changes to the website throughout the year to publicise training courses, geological walks and other newsworthy events. A number of corrections were made to the email forwarders for member clubs and committee members.

The pages for the Mynydd Llangatwg Cave Management / Advisory Committee (MLCMAC) have been expanded to host the new and updated cave access rules for Ogof Craig a Ffynnon, Agen Allwedd and Ogof Capel. The topos page has also been updated to incorporate more guides for OFD and has been expanded to include guides for Tunnel Cave, Pwll Dwfn and also Adrian Fawcett's topo guide.

I am happy to continue in the role in 2025.

6.9 Recreational Mine Exploration Officer – Roy Fellows

There has been no activity relative to my office as Recreational Mine Exploration Officer.

7) Reports from Other Groups

7.1 FoDCCAG

7.2 Welsh Mines Society

7.3 NWCRO

7.4 SMWCRT

In 2024 SMWCRT was involved in 7 rescue incidents as listed overleaf.

		<p>brought the dog to the surface.</p> <p>8 TM deployed 4 on Standby</p>
31/08/2024	Daren Cilau	<p>Two brothers were overdue on a trip in Daren Cilau. On contacting their Mother who made the callout, they had just exited the Cave. Team stood down. One of the shortest callouts – 13 minutes.</p> <p>1 TM deployed 2 on Standby</p>
13/10/2024	Cwmystwyth Mine	<p>Rescuers were called to an incident at the Cwmystwyth Mines area. The person was cold and wet and in danger of hypothermia being unable to climb down to exit the mine. Team members reached the casualty and after rigging a rope and encouraging the casualty, they were able to lower them to the floor. Casualty walked out, accompanied by Team members. Good EE coverage at the entrance is a new development.</p> <p>7 TM deployed 4 on Standby</p>
29/12/2024	Agen Allwedd	<p>Incident transferred via SARCALL from LONGMRT, to whom it had been assigned in error by DPP. 3 male cavers attempting Grand Circle round trip had not exited by their callout time. While preliminary investigations were taking place, and before any Team members had been deployed, new information came through that the cavers had now safely exited the cave. They had been unable to find their way through Biza Passage, the suspicion being that the passage was sumped as a result of a severe flood event that had occurred a few weeks previously ('Storm Bert'). They were forced to return via Southern Stream Passage, hence becoming overdue.</p> <p>0 TM deployed.....0 on Standby</p>

BCRC now ask Teams to record their training hours as well as Rescue incidents on their new platform and I regularly update this site as Rescues occur. In 2021 we totalled 2070 training hours; in 2022 - 2351 hrs, in 2023 - 2409 hrs and in 2024 - 2648 hrs (see our Training Officer's report for the details).

Sue Goodhead
Secretary SMWCRT

7.5 GCRG

7.6 OFDCAG

OFDCAG continues to meet twice a year with occasional NRW input. Over the last year positive discussions between OFDCAG and SWCC have seen the exit at Lowe's Chain in OFD1 made safer with the installation of metal steps and a number of popular SRT routes have been improved by the installation of resin anchors under the BCA Resin Anchor Scheme. This is an ongoing program with more sites being considered on the grounds of conservation. All the above works have the approval of the NRW.

Allan Richardson
Secretary OFDCAG

7.7 DYOCAP

The Dan-yr-Ogof Cave Advisory Panel continues to manage caver access beyond the showcave, to the satisfaction of both the showcave management and the caving community. The past year has seen a welcome influx of Warden permit applications from young, enthusiastic cavers and these continue to do more than their share of escorting visiting cavers into the cave. In September 2024 a successful rescue practice was held in DYO by SMWCRT and lessons learned from that, especially in regard to underground communication, will be useful in the future.

Tony Baker
DYO CAP Chair and Wardens' Sec.

7.8 PDCMG

7.9 CMT

7.10 MLCMAC

7.11 Ogof Marros

7.12 Member clubs are welcome to contribute reports.

8) BCA Matters

9) Election of Officers

Chairman
Secretary
Treasurer
C&A Officer
E&T Officer
Training Officer
Recreational Mines Exploration Officer
Cave Registrar
P&I

10) AOB

11) Date and Location of next Caving Wales AGM