

July 2017

Issue 54

WALE UNDERGROUND

News In Brief

- The recent BCA AGM agreed to ballot members on changes to its Constitution to allow CRoW campaigning etc.
- Work continues on the portal in Cwmystwyth mine with new steelwork ready to be installed in the coming weeks
- Further disruption planned to the Clydach Gorge as the work on dualling the A465 road continues.
- 'New to Caving' website launched to help newcomers find help and guidance:

www.newtocaving.com

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Photo credits

Stuart France

Dave Tyson

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NEW COUNTRYSIDE ACCESS LEGISLATION

The Welsh Government appears to be committed to improving recreational access and has published another consultation document, WG31811, "Taking Forward Wales' Sustainable Management of Natural Resources". This covers a range of topics including, Agriculture, Water, Wildlife, Marine and Fisheries, but it also has a section on 'Access to the Outdoors'. See:

<http://tinyurl.com/ybqlra9n>

The previous consultation document, WG25568, 'a Green paper on outdoor access' was published in October 2015 and elicited suggestions for improving outdoor access. CCC and a few caving clubs submitted responses and then had to wait over a 16 months for a conclusion to be published. That report did not contain a single word on caving or mine-exploring, but did have a lot to say about cycling. This is probably due to the cycling organisations providing a pro-forma feedback letter which many thousands of cyclists submitted. Any feedback from caving organisations was quietly ignored as it was lost in the noise. It is clear that the WG prefer quantity over quality and so a valuable lesson has been learned – we need to submit many responses if underground exploration is to gain any recognition!

A key section in the document is chapter 4: 'Access to the outdoors' which outlines proposals and suggests some changes: It mentions establishing NRW as the responsible authority on mediating user access agreements. Given the NRW's stance on various issues they may be seen as being unacceptable to the caving community.

Catrin Dellar, the WG's lead officer is quoted as saying at NAFW about public



responses "numbers matter but we also drill down into content". She also said there was no timetable, but the Minister would be making a speech in October.

Hence there is everything to gain for pushing the case for better access for caving/mine-exploring and this is probably the last time we have to raise our profile to the Welsh Government and its associated organisations

The consultation specifies responses to be submitted by the 13th September 2017 and CCC would like as many cavers and mine-explorers to respond.

CCC will hold a meeting to discuss strategy (see back page) and will then provide guidance on what to say in your response, but the onus is on individual cavers to make an effort to submit a response and also persuade your club secretary to submit one on behalf of your club.

.Dave Tyson, CCC Newsletter Editor

BBNPA grilles Pwll Dwfn and nearby historic cave digs



The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority has placed a metal grille over the entrance to Pwll Dwfn on the grounds of public safety, as pictured. This cave was discovered in 1947 and there have been no accidents here, nor at any other open hole on the Black Mountain in 70 years. Accidental entry is impossible since Pwll Dwfn begins with a squeeze going down for a few feet into a horizontal passage. Those equipped with a helmet, lamp and caving gear can then walk on towards larger vertical drops, the cave feeling much like a Yorkshire pothole in character.

All the obvious 'cave digs' in the dry valley between Pwll Dwfn and the bridleway connecting Dan-yr-Ogof Show Caves to the River Giedd have also been grilled in this way by the NPA. Some of these other holes also date from just after WW2, when Pwll Dwfn was the major discovery, attempting to uncover other significant caves that also came up to the surface.

The recent grilling exercise follows complaints about the perceived risk attached to about ten open holes on this 100 sq kms mountain, most of them about one metre square in area, and all are geographically related to, though not joined with, the major cave systems beneath. Meetings between the NPA and CCC have been held over the past year or so. It was also claimed that the Duke of Edinburgh charity had also complained that open holes on this mountain posed a risk to participants on their walking expeditions, but the charity has denied making any such comments. The participation statement of the British Mountaineering

Council says that "*climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement*".

Caves are a normal feature of limestone areas. All hill-walkers entering limestone areas should therefore study the local OS map which may reveal significant natural or man-made voids along with land features like cliffs and quarry faces, uneven surfaces or steep ground. Care commensurate with the character of an area is always needed. Those organising visits by others should always provide safety briefings and professionally-led groups must also comply with H&S legislation.

Cavers wishing to visit Pwll Dwfn or the various 'digs' can easily lift up any new grille to slip underneath. May I also remind everyone that attempts to discover new caves need permission from the landowner who in turn might need to obtain conservation clearance from NRW if their land has SSSI status. It should also be self-evident that any new holes will need covering over or fencing to prevent accidental entry.

Stuart France, *CCC Access / Conservation Officer*

2017 DIARY

23rd September & 25th November

SMWCRT practice session
location TBA

29th September—1st October

Hidden Earth Conference
Churchill Academy, Mendip

21st October

BCRA Cave Science Symposium/AGM
Leeds

1st-4th December

British Caving Discoveries Weekend,
RGS, London

Training News

The next SRT training session will be held at Plas-y-Brenin, North Wales on 24th September. There are still places left at present so please get in touch with me if you want to reserve a place.

Clubs are reminded that the BCA offers grants for training and these can be used to provide a 'club SRT training day' at a suitable venue.

Richard Hill, *CCC Training Officer*

BCA Minimal Impact Leaflet

I now have some more printed copies of the BCA Minimal Impact Caving Guidelines and so any clubs or individuals who want copies for themselves or to distribute to others should contact me. They are also available on the BCA website if you want to print your own copy.

Stuart France,

CCC Access / Conservation Officer

Significant changes in the Alyn Gorge sinkhole

In the April 2016 newsletter we reported that a swallow hole that opened up at the back of one of the 'leete' caves in the Alyn Gorge. Subsequently the entrance was gated to prevent accidents, however caver access was permitted outside the bat hibernation period from October – April. In the past few weeks several groups have visited the cave examine changes that might have occurred during the winter storms and it seems that the system is still very active.

It is thought that a sinkhole in the nearby riverbed has allowed water to flow via a conduit deep below the cave floor, eroding and removing sediment and causing a progressive collapse with the formation of a shaft and underground chamber. The initial collapse was noticed early in spring 2016 and irregular monitoring has shown that changes are still happening. The River Alyn near the cave is generally dry in the summer months with a reduced water flow sinking upstream rather than flowing on the surface. During winter the river flows strongly and a different set of sinkholes, including one connected to the cave take a proportion of the flow with the remainder sinking further downstream or forming the surface flow,

The fate of water entering the chamber is not known, it may end up in the Milwr Tunnel some 500' below or in other as yet unidentified subterranean passages. The flow rates into the new sinkhole are sufficient to fill the chamber to the roof as evidenced by fresh deposits of mud and there is enough turbulence to suspend a large proportion of the eroded sediments which then deposit as the flow decreases and the chamber drains. On the East side of the chamber the top of some slabs have a smooth and uniform 2.5cm mud coating, while on the West side there is a fairly clean rift which might form part of the flow ingress.

Compared to last year there has been a considerable loss of the slumped sediment at the base of the shaft and the lower section is now completely vertical with a ladder being needed for descent. There is still a significant volume of sediment left, but this is likely to wash away if flooding continues. There has been small increase in the size of the chamber itself due to sediment erosion at the walls of the chamber and the now unsupported blocks breaking away along crack lines. The depth of the chamber has slightly increased due to gradual movement of the jumble of loose blocks downwards as sediment is disappears. At present the ceiling of the chamber seems to be stable and so the upper floor of the cave and access grille are unlikely to be at risk unless the chamber continues to widen.

It is hoped that a recent survey done by a member of UCET will provide a baseline for monitoring future changes and, with permission from NRW, dye testing to determine the destination of the water flow.

Dave Tyson, CCC Newsletter Editor



One of the nearby sinkholes in the river bed



Looking towards the chamber from the shaft base



South East side of chamber (2m range pole)

OPEN MEETING ON THE WELSH GOVERNMENT'S CONSULTATION ON NEW LEGISLATION TO IMPROVE OUTDOOR RECREATION OPPORTUNITIES

11am Sunday 23rd July

Tretower Village Hall

NP8 1RF / Grid Ref SO 186213

Everyone welcome. Hot drinks provided but bring your own lunch. To give an idea of numbers, please drop an email to Stuart France at ccc@linetop.co.uk if you plan to attend.

For more information on this topic, please search online for "ukcaving wales recreational access"

NAMHO 2018

NAMHO 2018 will be held on the 1st weekend in June, based at Parkend in the Royal Forest of Dean.

Registration will be on the Friday 1st June, with the possibility of both surface walks & underground trips in the afternoon, Saturday, Sunday & Monday.

Lectures will be held on both Saturday & Sunday.

At the moment, the suggested theme is 'The Royal Forest of Dean'

John Hine, *RFDCC*

Newsletter Articles Wanted

It would be helpful to have some contributions to this newsletter from CCC Member clubs. Don't be shy, drop a few lines on your current projects and explorations to me so others are aware of your successes (or failures!)

Dave Tyson, *CCC Newsletter Editor*

The Cambrian Caving Council

Chairman Martyn Farr
chair@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Secretary Rob Jones
secretary@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Treasurer Mathew Terry
treasurer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Access/Conservation Stuart France
conservationofficer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Training Richard Hill
trainingofficer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Equipment Vince Allkins
equipmentofficer@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Cave Registrar Martin Laverty
registrar@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Legal/Insurance Roy Fellows
legalandinsurance@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Webmaster Barry Hill
webmaster@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Newsletter Dave Tyson
newsletter@cambridriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Please send news items, short articles, and newsworthy photographs for the next issue to Dave Tyson by **30th September 2017**