

October 2018

Issue 58

WALE S

UNDERGROUND

Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

Rescue News

- SMWCRT are proud to have assisted in the Thailand Rescue of 12 boys and their football coach. The team provided both equipment and expertise via the British Cave Rescue Council's coordinated response.
- A first test of the SARCALL text message callout system resulted in a high response rate from team members. Team members not receiving texts should email their contact info to sarcall_updates@smwcr.org
- A sheep was retrieved after 20 days stuck down a deep natural shakehole on the Black Mountain. It was hauled up in a bulldozer bag, checked by farmers on the team, fed and sent on its way. The hole has since been covered to prevent a repeat.



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Photo credits

SMWCRT
Stuart France
Jeff Mapps
Darren Postlans

Cadw concretes Twll Du despite bats

Twll Du was an illegally-made excavation within the curtilage of the Hill's Tramroad scheduled monument and is the fourth entrance to Ogof Draenen. At 70kms, it is the longest cave in Wales, of international importance, and containing passages over one million years old. A further practical problem with Twll Du was its position nearby a public footpath. So it is a very sad situation that one of the most dramatic cave entrances ever to be discovered in Wales, with spectacular drops into the huge cave system beneath, has been destroyed because it should never have been created.

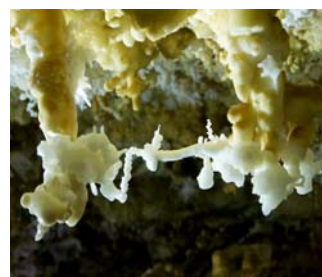
Despite efforts by Cambrian Caving Council, Cadw resolutely refused to countenance any kind of compromise agreement that would have provided security, bat habitats, managed caver access and ongoing protection for the monument, with building costs being borne by the caving community. Instead, the cave entrance has been sealed up in early October with tons of publicly-funded reinforced concrete.

While the Twll Du entrance was open to the sky at various times, the local wildlife did adopt it as a new habitat. Two species of bats which are European Protected Species have been identified within the cave near the Twll Du entrance and proved to be using that entrance in mid-September 2018 by bat professional Dr Peter Smith and myself. Cadw says it commissioned regular bat surveys of its own during 2018 none of which found bats using the Twll Du entrance. Cadw stated it had put all necessary permissions and funding into place, but no details would be given to the public. NRW told us they were unable to find any Bat Licence being issued to authorise destruction of a bat habitat. However, a licence would not be needed if it could be shown the bat habitat was hypothetical and had never been used as a roost or resting place.

The Brecon Beacons National Park Authority closed the public footpath along part of the former tramroad on an emergency basis "for reasons of public safety due to repair work being undertaken on the path". This repair work was to concrete Twll Du between 1st-5th October. The NPA said that they were acting on a request from the Coal Authority who were undertaking work on behalf of Pwlldu Conservation Ltd (PCL) and funded by Cadw. The NPA added that they assume Cadw had a hand in drawing up the contractual documents between the Coal Authority and PCL.

Gwent Police were called on 999 when contractors refused to stop work after being handed evidence of bats using Twll Du recently. A police investigation has started.

Stuart France, CCC Conservation-Access Officer



Welsh Minister Drops Access Reforms

Minister for the Environment, Hannah Blythyn, has published the results of last year's Welsh Government public consultation on Sustainable Management of Natural Resources (SMNR). She said that "there were strong but differing views on how best to reform access legislation. We therefore believe that now is not the right time for substantive reform. But we are committed to exploring selected aspects of change where there was greater consensus, including on some of the administrative arrangements and multi-use paths. We will continue to facilitate further discussions through established groups such as the National Access Forum." The Minister's statement and summary of the public consultation responses are at:

<https://gov.wales/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2018/smnrsummaryresponses/?lang=en>

A total of 923 'individual responses' were received from individuals and organisations, the vast majority of which focused on access for leisure which is Chapter Four of the consultation. The other chapters covered a plethora of unrelated countryside issues ranging from dog behaviour and throwing litter from cars to forestry and commercial fishing. The consultation also attracted several thousands of 'campaign responses' where people completed website template forms.

Of the 40 questions in the consultation, only three related to land access. Underlying these three somewhat abstract access questions are 18 specific proposals ranging from livestock on paths to the shared use of public footpaths by cyclists and walkers. The WG's analysis splits the public responses into 'unique individual responses' and template-based 'campaign responses'.

As to the WG proposals themselves: the individual responses were 2-to-1 in favour of the proposals taken as a whole, while the campaign responses (where cyclists contributed the most) were 7-to-1 in favour. The cycling-liberalisation proposals attracted 10 times as much interest as non-cycling proposals. Cavers sent a total of only 31 responses which included CCC's. Needless to say, none of the government proposals would have had much direct benefit for better cave access.

As to the broader questions: "Will the government proposals deliver consistency of opportunity, effective safeguards, better identified publicly accessible areas, clarification of public rights and responsibilities" the individual responses totalled 30% Yes, 68% No, and 2% Not Sure. In other words, the public are clear that this jumble of proposals, while worthy causes individually, will not bring about a systemic change. The yes-no split among the campaign responses to the broad questions is not revealed.

Translating the Minister's remarks into plain English, they add up to nothing more than allowing cyclists and equestrians to use selected public footpaths after approval at national or local level, plus some reduction in administrative burdens for Local Authorities and National Parks.

John Watkins, the Welsh Government official who managed the public consultation, has said that he hopes to produce an autumn statement setting out the future scope of the WG's ambitions, adding with unusual frankness for a civil servant that there was now only "glacial momentum". This is hardly surprising when two-thirds of respondents think the proposals, taken as a whole, do not add up to much of a deal.

Stuart France, *CCC Conservation-Access Officer*






A465 Dual Carriageway

The summer of 2018 has proved to be far more favourable than the preceding winter for the A465 Section 2 Project. Good progress has been made with many milestones achieved, most notably the flyover at Glanbaiden, the re-opening of the entry slip-road from Gilwern onto the A465, and the new Gateway Arch Bridge over the Brynmawr exit. This links with the minor road leading to Whitewalls and the Llan-gattock caves (green arrows in the photo below). The old route via the bridge on Intermediate Road by the High School in Brynmawr (red X on the photo) is due for demolition soon.



A number of footbridges have been installed during 2018. The one at Blackrock, near to the old Drum & Monkey public house, is now open and is providing access to Devil's Bridge and caves in the Clydach gorge such as Ogof Capel. The Pant Glas bridge near to the Saleyard junction, and most recently Clydach footbridge have been built and will open later in 2018 or next spring. The final footbridge at Pont Harri Isaac is currently programmed for installation later in 2018.

In addition to this, good progress has been made in removing the thousands of tonnes of rock from the gorge, which will enable us to begin constructing the eastbound section of the split-level carriageway. Earthworks east of Saleyard continue to progress well with the construction there of the eastbound carriageway and earth bund.

	facebook.com/A465Section2
	twitter.com/A465_Section2
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	https://beta.gov.wales/a465-gilwern-brynmawr
	Sign up for email alerts http://a465.info/emailsSignup

The project Visitor Centre is open to the public each Wednesday afternoon. This is at the A465 Section2 Project Office, Ty Gwyn Road, Twyn Wenallt, Gilwern, NP7 0BQ. For more information please follow the links above or contact me at jeff.mapps@costain.com

Jeff Mapps, *Public Liaison Officer, Costain Group plc*



After months of planning and organising, CaveFest UK finally came to South Wales. The event, held in Crickhowell and hosted by Gwent Caving Club over the bank holiday weekend of the 25th August, was to be an opportunity for cavers across the UK to get together and explore some of the finest underground spaces Wales has to offer, as well as a few local caves and mines for those who wanted a bit more!

The event kicked off on Friday afternoon with a meet and greet in the marquee for registration and camping arrangements, followed by an evening of drinking and chin-wagging!



Saturday saw trips in Eglwys Faen and Ogof Clogwyn for the beginners, and in Agen Allwedd, Ogof Cnwcc, Otter Hole, Daren Cilau, Ogof Pen Eryr, Channer's Dig and Dan Yr Ogof for more experienced cavers, all led by local clubs from the area. So special thanks to Chelsea SS and RFDCC for providing leaders for these events. The trips into Noxon Park Mines and Wigpool Iron Mine were run by members of GCC and RFDCC. GCC's resident gunslinger also ran a clay pigeon shooting session for people who wanted a bit of surface activity. The weather took a turn for the worse in the afternoon, so GCC's resident paraglider had to call off tandem flights over Fochriw due to high winds and rain. That didn't stop the evening's entertainment though, and a disco was put on in the marquee with many of our supporters in attendance.

Sunday was a little brighter and saw trips into Ogof Draenen and Ogof Craig a Ffynnon, with an additional trip into Agen Allwedd. A special trip was also arranged on the Sunday to a freemine in the Forest of Dean. This trip, led by a member of the RFDCC, was to experience a working coal mine and take in the sights of the surface workings. After all this, everyone that was left after the weekend's activities gathered in the marquee for a quiz and a few beverages, then later to enjoy a coal fire to wind down and relax.

CaveFest UK is scheduled next year in the spring time in the Derbyshire area, with sights on Alderley Edge and local caves to name but a few. Stay tuned to our Facebook events page and website at:

<https://www.facebook.com/cavefestuk/>
<https://www.cavefestuk.co.uk/>

Darren Postians, *CaveFest UK*

Landowner explores Ogof Gofan

The landowner here is keen to know that the cave access scheme meets all conservation legal requirements. So I was accompanied on a cave visit during August by the DIO's lead officer Richard Brooks who is their Principal for Safety, Health, Environmental Protection and Sustainability. The Defence Infrastructure Organisation (DIO) is a part of the Ministry of Defence where Richard has responsibility for compliance on British military land worldwide.



As there were just the two of us there, we used a combination of ladder and SRT which makes for double the excitement on the cliffs. Fully satisfied with both the present access system and condition of the cave, Richard was stunned like most first-time visitors are by the beautiful cave formations and the outstanding coastal scenery nearby.

A future article is planned for MoD's Sanctuary magazine which highlights good conservation practice and projects at military locations. A previous article about Ogof Gofan is in issue 46, and all the back issues are available online here:

www.gov.uk/government/publications/sanctuary

Stuart France, *CCC Conservation-Access Officer*

Car Winched Out Of 'Sinkhole'

TV and the other media widely reported a three-metre deep collapse opening up suddenly at the Craig-y-Nos castle car park in August. It swallowed half a car that was left teetering over the brink. At first assumed to be write-off, the car was later winched out for repair. Lying horizontal also buried within this hole is the one-metre diameter reinforced concrete chimney of the former hospital's heating/incineration plant.



Cavers were asked to investigate because the new hole is in line with an underground culvert taking the Hospital Cave resurgence water to the River Tawe nearby. The passage was followed as far as a serious roof collapse at a junction with yet another underground drain.

A 'cave survey' has been made to relate this roof collapse to the surface hole to assist the present castle owners to plan remedial work. The depth of the roof collapse is at 6 metres which shows the car park level has been raised substantially in the past. It is not going to be an easy job because of the old chimney and a line of modern trunking for telephone and fibre-optic cables that also crosses in the new hole. Further underground exploration of the nearby drains is in planning.

Stuart France, *CCC Conservation-Access Officer*

Nigel John Rogers (1953-2018)

The sudden death of Nig Rogers on 3rd August has deprived Welsh caving of an active explorer for over 40 years and an ardent proponent of free access to caves. His funeral was attended by the majority of CCC officials, together with other cavers from SWCC, CSS, and Garimpeiros, including the son of a Cardiff University contemporary. Besides many cave digs, large parts of Ogof Carno and Draenen owe their discovery to him, and Ogof y Garimpeiros records for posterity the club he founded.

Martin Laverty, *CCC Cave Registrar*

Cadw Cave Scheduling Project

Cadw intends to schedule more caves in West Wales as monuments to provide them with stronger legal protection. This was disclosed to Martin Laverty in connection with a heritage records assessment visit to Ogof Gofan by Dyfed Archaeology Trust (DAT) staff during 2017. The three areas Cadw is now interested in are Castlemartin Range, Caldey Island and Carreg Cennen Castle. I have taken DAT staff on a coastal walk on the Range looking at various sea and cliff caves while Martin Laverty and Phil Knight have joined DAT on another recce around and below the magnificent lofty setting of Carreg Cennen Castle.

Stuart France, *CCC Conservation-Access Officer*

Changes at Natural Resources Wales

NRW's chair, Diane McCrea, resigned on 19 July following a third refusal by the Auditor General for Wales, Huw Vaughan Thomas, to sign off NRW's accounts without qualification. Mr Thomas said he found no evidence NRW was selling off publicly-owned timber at its true market value, and he considered some timber contracts "were not entered into lawfully", according to BBC Wales News.

The BBC also quotes Lee Water, AM for Llanelli, saying in the Senate that "This organisation does appear to be out of control". Diane McCrae had attended NRW's National Access Forum for Wales (NAFW) meeting recently "to refresh NRW's stakeholder engagement" but then showed no further interest in caving after learning of the relatively small numbers who actually explore underground Wales compared to some other outdoor activities.

Lesley Griffiths AM, the Welsh Government's minister who has the ultimate responsibility for NRW, is seeking a new Chair for NRW and five new Board Members this autumn who will be "implementing the changes necessary to have a delivery organisation with strong governance. To help with this, a senior member of Welsh Government staff will be seconded to NRW."

A government minister is expected to attend at the next NAFW meeting in Cardiff on 6th November where CCC has been invited to give a presentation to the delegates about caving generally. Suggestions are invited from cavers at large as to what I might say in 20 minutes to the minister, NRW staff, and other delegates ranging from sports organisations, The National Trust, national parks, local authorities etc — a wide range of influential parties.

Stuart France, *CCC Conservation-Access Officer*

BCA Caver Training Events 2018

There have been some changes at BCA Training Committee and a push to try and develop more workshops nationally. While DCA and CCC have regularly put on workshops for many years, mainly for SRT but other topics too, the other regions have not been quite as active. With this in mind the current BCA Training Officer has put together a series of workshops. These are open to all BCA members not just those affiliated to the region which is hosting them.

DATE	COURSE TITLE	HOST REGION
14th Oct	Introduction to SRT	Derbyshire
10th Oct	Introduction to SRT	Cheddar
17th Nov	Weather and Cave Flooding	Derbyshire
24th Nov	SRT Pitch Rigging	Derbyshire
25th Nov	SRT Self Rescue	Derbyshire
1st Dec	SRT pitch Rigging	Yorkshire
8th Dec	SRT intermediate	South Wales
9th Dec	Underground Navigation	In planning
In planning	Cave Development / Geology	In planning

For further information please contact Nigel Atkins directly at nigel@pennineorganisation.com

Richard Hill, *CCC Training Officer*

The Cambrian Caving Council

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Please send news items, short articles and newsworthy photographs for the **January** issue to the editor by **Christmas**