

January 2018

Issue 56

W A L E S U N D E R G R O U N D

News In Brief

- **BCA has issued a statement :** "that BCA holds the opinion that the CRoW Act already permits access for recreational caving"
- **Following the opening of a new entrance into Ogor Draenen, CCC has issued a statement on "Large Cave Systems in Wales" to address multiple entrances, conservation, availability of accurate cave surveys, and gaining prior consent for works**
- **BCA is back to square one on cave instructor training as part of the company group selected to operate its certification scheme became insolvent, but no BCA money has been lost**
- **CCC has met with Sport Wales and is working on grant support for caving clubs, such as to pay for basic caving gear needed to introduce people to the sport.**

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Photo credits

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Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

Remedial Work in Cwmystwyth Mines

Cwmystwyth Lead Mine is one of the most significant sites in Mid-Wales and has been popular with mine explorers over many years. After mining ceased the ownership of the land and mines eventually passed to the Crown Estate and in 2013 the whole site was acquired from them by Cambrian Mines Trust (CMT).

Time has taken its toll on certain parts of the mine and starting in 2016 Roy Fellows, a CMT director, together with some volunteers, have been repairing some of the damage in the main access level, Lefel Fawr. The mine is a Scheduled Monument and so consent from Cadw was needed before work could start.

The work was broken into two phases: the underpinning of a huge stull above the incline skip-way which was showing signs of weakness, followed by replacement of a plastic tube which was inserted years ago in an unstable area where the level cuts a lode.

A route to the left off the main roadway was the scene of a serious rock-fall some time ago and this blocked direct access to the skip-way which leads to the workings below. The only remaining direct route being through the aforementioned plastic tube. This was very

tight and awkward, and so it was felt desirable to improve access.

It was obvious that significant support was needed to the stull mentioned above to prevent collapses and a temporary prop was fitted, before building up concrete and blockwork to support the failing timberwork. A pack-wall was built to hide the repair work and this harmonises with original work done by the old miners. Some 64 hours of effort and around £200 worth of materials were used to complete this remedial work.

Replacement of the plastic tube proved to be a more difficult and expensive task. The tube was fitted to allow access to the ladders and skip-way following a collapse in 2004. However, the width of the lode at this point meant that heavy steelwork was needed to provide safeguard against further collapses.

It was decided to use 90x100mm RSJs costing £850 and these were cut and welded before delivery to the site. Shropshire Caving and Mining Club members moved the steelwork into the working area.

Several problems remained unsolved: a large boulder of dubious stability



Before: Stull timber with a temporary prop



After: Finished repair with pack-wall support

(Continued on page 2)

Remedial Work in Cwmystwyth Mines (continued from page 1)

was holding back a lot of rock and it had to be concreted in before continuing with the clearance of the rock fall and pack-walling to stabilise the area. Once the steels were fitted there was another issue with a length of hanging timber which appeared to be holding back a lot of loose material and impeded the installation of one of the RSJ spans. Judicious work with a chainsaw allowed the steel work to be completed and this now supports the timber.

Further pack-walling had to be done in sections with concrete added in places to ensure future stability. Once this phase was completed, further mucking out has cleared the floor so that water can drain freely. All the work is now done and access to the mine through this route is considerably easier than it had been and it is likely to remain so for the future. It took a lot of hard work, some of which was quite unpleasant at times, but the final result has been well worth the effort.

Roy Fellows, *Cambrian Mines Trust*



Before: Looking outbye to the second old tube



After: Looking inbye to the new steel roadway

Access Protocol for Ogof y Ci

The landowners of Ogof y Ci request that cavers ask at Llwynsilanws Farm before approaching the cave and that visits are only made during the daytime. So no trips here in the evening please. This interesting linear river cave, within the Nant y Glais Gorge SSSI, and passages approaching 1km in overall length, is located on private land at OS grid reference SO 039105.

There is a small parking area 150m before the farm. To access the cave, walk through the farmyard. At the NE end of the farmyard is a relatively new large barn. The path squeezes between this barn and a fence to reach a stile with a footpath leading down to the cave entrance.

Richard Hill, *CCC Training Officer*

2018 DIARY

Friday-Sunday 9-11th March
Southern CHECC
SWCC HQ, Penwyllt, SA9 1GQ

Sunday 11th March
CCC AGM 12.00, Tretower Village Hall, Tretower,
Near Crickhowell, NP8 1RF

Easter Monday 2nd April, and
Bank Holiday Mondays 7th & 28th May
Columns Open Days at OFD2

Sunday 15th April
SRT / Vertical Skills Training Day, Llangorse Wall
Contact Richard Hill to reserve a place

Friday-Monday 1st-4th June
NAMHO conference, Parkend, Forest of Dean,
GL15 4JA

CCC AGM 2018

The CCC Annual General Meeting will be held at 12 noon on Sunday 11th March at the Tretower Village Hall, Tretower, NP8 1RF. Please park near the castle. The agenda and reports will be circulated by email to member clubs and also will be available to download from the CCC website. Only a limited number of paper copies will be provided at the meeting.

Allan Richardson, *Acting CCC Secretary*

New CCC newsletter editor wanted

After four years and sixteen newsletters, I will be stepping down from the post and this is my last newsletter. As the editor is a co-opted post, CCC executive invites expressions of interest. The next CCC newsletter is due in April 2018.

Dave Tyson, *Retiring CCC Newsletter Editor*

The Historic Environment and Caving in Wales - Part One

This article expands on the guidance in issue 44 of February 2015, about statutory conservation protection, which began as follows:

"New caves are not the only things to be discovered high in the hills and down in the dales. Our recent and distant ancestors may also have lived there, and reminders of their lives may sometimes remain. These can now be of archaeological interest and worth preserving. The Ancient Monuments and Archaeological Areas Act 1979 creates Scheduling Monuments (SMs), and makes it an offence to damage them knowingly."

This 2015 article went on mainly to discuss SSSIs with which cavers are by now quite familiar. However, recent problems with a fourth entrance into Ogor Draenen, which is an illegal excavation within a Scheduled Monument site, shows that caver awareness of historic environments is weak. This results from a lack of caver education, publicity and information about what is protected, and no meaningful dialogue with Cadw, the government body that looks after the historic environment in Wales. Note "Cadw" is the Welsh verb for "to keep".

Scheduled Monuments extend below the surface to the centre of the earth. So Scheduled Monument Consent is required for any excavation within a cave that lies in a scheduled area. However, Cadw are aware that most caving systems extend far below any archaeological remains and will therefore be minded to grant consent using the new fast-track system as long as it can be demonstrated that no features of historic significance will be impacted by cave exploration activities.

Some important developments since 2015 and new online resources:

1) The 1979 Act has been modified by the Historic Environment (Wales) Act 2016 which makes it an offence to damage a monument **unknowingly**. The Wales Act also provides Cadw with powers to issue a "Stop Notice" lasting 28 days, as it has. The law in England still operates on the **knowingly** basis, as set out in the 1979 Act.

2) The Welsh Government has developed GIS web technology with an online mapping portal called Cof Cymru which has given access to scheduled monument documents on a reasonably reliable basis since 2017. However, this tool remains "a work in progress" and sometimes it does not work properly. For instance it might omit the monument boundaries normally drawn with red lines, and its satellite view may produce only a blue background rather than a Google Earth style of image. See cadw.gov.wales/historicenvironment/recordsv1/cof-cymru/?lang=en

3) The County Archaeological Trusts, who did have online search portals in 2015, have much improved them and even developed apps for use on mobile phones. Their service as it stood three years ago was creditable and now is even better. "Archwilio" is the Welsh verb for "to explore". See www.archwilio.org.uk/arch/

4) The Royal Commission for Ancient and Historical Monuments in Wales (RCAHMW) website has also undergone further improvement beyond their wide-ranging and very competent version of it in 2015. "Coflein" is an invented word in Welsh meaning "a memory line or cord". The RCAHMW website is found at www.coflein.gov.uk

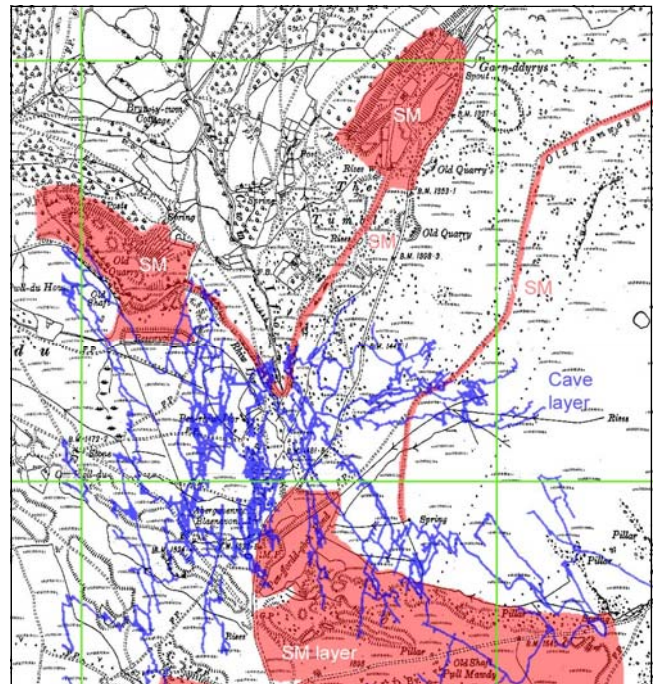
Entering "Pwll Du" (Black Pit or Pool) as a search term on Cadw's Cof Cymru website returns thousands of hits all over Wales, while searching on "Blaenavon" returns nothing. Archwilio stops after the first 500 "Pwll Du" hits, but if you then zoom the map on Blaenavon you will see about 20 red blobs that are sites of historic interest near to our particular "Pwll Du". Scheduled Monument boundaries will also appear when the Archwilio satellite view is zoomed sufficiently.

Coflein does the best search of them all: focusing on only 64 hits for "Pwll Du", mainly in the Blaenavon area. Scanning down that hits list,



there are several entries for "Hill's Tramroad" some of which indicate photos are available. Coflein is a good source of aerial photos, such as the one of Pwll Du above which is copyright and is reproduced here with the permission of RCAHMW. An option to use obsolete OS maps as the base layer on such government websites and USA-style open licensing for government photos would promote both education and information sharing online.

The image below shows part of the 70kms Ogor Draenen cave system using an out-of-copyright 6" OS map as its base layer; the modern OS kilometre national grid is drawn in green on top; then the Scheduled Monuments have red shading; and finally the cave passages are in blue - all put together with Photoshop.



The Last Sandwich and Yellow Van digs are inside Scheduled Monument areas, albeit at some depth under expanses of open moorland around Keepers Pond. As there is no signage in this area advising visitors of its protected status nor explaining that 'monuments' encompass more than just historic buildings and commemorative structures, it is evident that caver awareness needs to be built by some other means. So this article will be continued in the April newsletter for a discussion of scheduled monument landscapes across Wales that are close to known caves or mines or in land areas with significant caving potential.

Stuart France, CCC Access and Conservation Officer

Poachers Cave Fish - Species Identified

Natural Resources Wales has contacted CCC after viewing the video mentioned in the April 2017 newsletter article about the aquatic life inside Poachers Cave. The species of fish seen in the published photos has now been identified.

The fish in the video are bullhead, *Cottus gobio*. This is a different family to either loaches or catfish. Bullheads are the only species of their family in the UK and are common in much of Britain except for Scotland and North West Wales. For more information, visit:

<https://www.arkive.org/bullhead/cottus-gobio/>

NRW agrees with the opinion of the cavers that these fish have probably found themselves washed into the cave system at some stage and were then unable to escape. One of the fish looked as though she may be pregnant so it is possible that spawning also occurs underground. The fish do not look like a long-term cave-adapted population however. What is quite interesting is that a cave population of a related species was recently found in North America where bullheads are called sculpins. For their report, see: <https://baldeaglegrotto.weebly.com/sculpin.html>

I have also heard of cave trout in South Wales and the possibility of finding stone loaches in a cave system also seems to be plausible. Whether any of these are long-term populations is moot however.

Tristan Harris-Ellis, *NRW Senior Freshwater Ecologist*



NAMHO Annual Conferences

This year's 2018 National Association of Mining History Organisations conference will be held in the Forest of Dean at the Dean Field Studies Centre, Parkend near Lydney, Gloucestershire GL15 4JA over the weekend of 1st-3rd June. The theme of this conference will be "Mines, Mining & Miners of the Forest of Dean" and it will include the usual programme of lectures, surface walks and underground trips. Further details and booking arrangements will be posted on the conference website in due course at:

<https://www.namho2018.info/>

Next year's conference will be at Llanafan in Ceredigion. The Cambrian Mines Trust, in association with Dr Peter Claughton who is organising the lecture programme, will be hosting the NAMHO conference and field meet of 2019. The five-day event will take place over the weekend of Thursday 4th July until Monday 8th July. The theme of next year's conference will be "Mine exploration as a research tool - applications in mining history, geology and archaeology".

Dave Tyson, *CCC Newsletter Editor*

Number Crunching at Llygad Lluchwr 2

Following significant damage to a few stalactites in the Llygad Lluchwr 2 cave extensions in the autumn of 2016, it was decided to install a covert caver counter again to establish the patterns of visitor activity. This equipment was left unattended and the data was collected 15 months later in January 2018. The results show 19 groups made visits over 15 months surveyed, implying 40-80 cavers. Most of the visits were done on Saturdays, with weekends accounting for 60% of the groups found in the cave. Nobody was detected in the cave between 11pm and 11am over this period. The vast majority of trips took place from 11am to 4pm. This is the same pattern as previous surveys, suggesting that visitors are mainly sport cavers. No further damage was noticed on my visits.

Stuart France, *CCC Access and Conservation Officer*

CCC welcomes contributions about wildlife and heritage from conservation organisations. Cavers can make a difference by reporting unusual fauna and flora or objects inside caves and at cave entrances. Sometimes a chance observation can lead to a significant discovery or insight into the past. Reports can be made directly to conservation organisations, but please tell CCC as well so knowledge can be shared via this Newsletter.

Dave Tyson, *CCC Newsletter Editor*

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Please send news items, short articles and newsworthy photographs for the next issue to the editor by **31st March 2018**