

February 2019

Issue 59

WALE UNDERGROUND

News in Brief

- **Ogof Capel and Ogof Gelynnen in the Clydach Gorge will remain closed until the summer of 2019 due to critical road-works.**
- **Fly Tipping —members of Brynmawr Caving Club in partnership with Monmouth Borough Council and Costain helped remove a large amount of fly-tipped material from Clydach gorge. This included mattresses, bags of rubbish and a prosthetic foot. The good work was reported in the local press and on-line.**

Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

Editorial - by Nick De-Gare Pitt - Newsletter Editor

Welcome to issue 59, it has been 50 years since the council was first formed back in 1969, this also happens to be the year I was born!

Since its formation the council has promoted and protected the interests of caves and cavers across the region. With the ever-changing world of caving, the CCC has had to adapt to ensure the interests of cavers are protected into the future.

If anyone has any news or articles that they would like to be included in future newsletters, please contact me - newslettereditor@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk

Here's to the next 50 years of protecting our caves.

Our Cave Registry Officer, Martin Laverty, has kindly written the following brief history of the last 50 years.

From Cave Tourists to Explorers and Back?

As far as I am aware, there is no evidence for substantial human incursions into caves in Wales (as happened tens of thousands of years ago in France and Spain) until the late eighteenth century. It was then that Porth yr Ogof became well enough known to spawn local guides for those with the interest and means to make walking or riding tours of the country. Quite a few books attest to this, Michael Faraday, in 1819, being perhaps the most distinguished tourist to light a candle and follow a guide illuminated by a burning 'a roll of old sacking' into the 'bowels of the mountain'. Thomas Jenkins of Llandeilo pioneered cave exploration and surveying in Wales at Cil yr Ychen, Llygad Llchwyr and Carreg Cennen between 1823 and 1855, but his feats did not become widely known for another century. Cave tourism then seems to have gone into eclipse for a century until cave exploration flickered into life with the Morgan brothers on their land at Dan yr Ogof in 1912, and cave exploration by outsiders started in the Little Neath and Mellte valleys in 1936, and at Dan yr Ogof the following year.

On a recent visit to the National Museum of Wales in Cardiff to view the three-inch-thick block of record forms typed up in black (for caves) and red (for mines) that was the concrete form of the Cambrian Cave Register, I was surprised to find T.A.M. Braithwaite's original survey notes for Porth yr Ogof: they are in a format which would be familiar to mine surveyors. After the war, monumental efforts went into surveying Ogof Ffynnon Ddu, probably with similar methods.

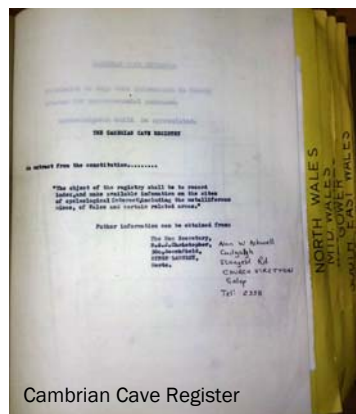
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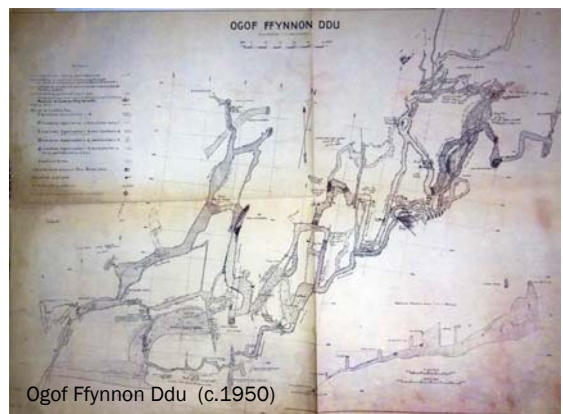
Photo credits

Martin Laverty
Stuart France
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Cambrian Cave Register



Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (c.1950)

From Cave Tourists to Explorers and Back?

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However, I also recently came across the original survey notes from 9th September 1952 by Peter Harvey (PIWH), his wife (PEJH), and Jack Myers (JOM) for Town Drain and White Lady, on pre-printed forms in a format not too dissimilar to what cave surveyors continue to use, even if electronic devices may now substitute for earlier devices.

①	α°	Dft	Hft	Wft
①	226°	18		
②	185°	43		
③	154°	25		
④	91°	19	6	15
⑤	186°	10	8	2
⑥	94°	31.4	8	3
⑦	94°	42.9	6-9	3-
⑧	92°	38	6-3	3
⑨	170°	51	5	4
⑩	161°	14	7	3

Town Drain Survey Notes

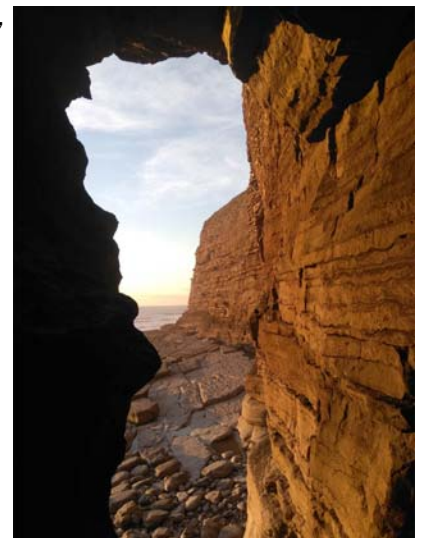
The Cambrian Caving Council was formally set up in 1969, three years after the first Cambrian Caving Registry, at a time when major additions were being made to inventory of caves in Wales, notably in DYO, OFD, and the Little Neath River Cave. North Wales contributed a major addition in 1973 with Ogof Hesp Alyn, and then the south back took the limelight with Otter Hole in 1974 and Ogof Craig a Ffynnon in 1976, followed by Daren Cilau in 1985, Carno Adit in 1999, and Ogof Draenen in 1994. The last 25 years have yielded less and been less widely reported – Ogof Tarddiad Rhymney, Ogof Ap Robert and Ogof Fawr have all been extended past a kilometre each without fanfare. Two caves over the one-km mark, Ogof yr Ardd and T1 (the Hepste cave found in 2010 but blocked within a year), have yet to be surveyed, and another cave's survey is known to have been extended past one kilometre (more information on this should be available soon).

Reporting of finds now seems to be more patchy than in the past, certainly less than in most of Britain's other caving regions. Why is this? Is it secrecy, selfishness, or something else? Is it down to more instant access to progress reports on social media—both more focussed and ephemeral than the old printed newsletters?

I suspect it is mostly down to cavers' fears of repercussions from risk-averse authorities, both sides finding it hard to engage with the other. Let us hope that events such as Cavefest will help to bridge this gap rather than reflect a move back towards caving as tourism over exploration in Wales.

Exploration news

However, the Registry is still pleased to receive reports of previously unreported sites and two individuals have stood out here in recent years: Phil Knight in West Wales, and Mark Hampson in Wales south of the Beacons. Phil dug into Ogof Marros in 2014, reviving interest in an area where subterranean passages were first marked on maps some 250 years ago, but has also recorded new caves (and mines) elsewhere in West Wales. Mark found an entrance about 5 miles south of Cardiff which even locals seem unaware of, and has also been investigating the limestones south of Bridgend where the Schwyll (or Great Well of Glamorgan) has long enticed divers, and the St Brides island of Carboniferous limestone set amid traces of Triassic desert wadis has intrigued palaeontologists. The surrounding coastal limestones have attracted climbers to their cliffs, and sea kayakers have braved some of the sea caves which have access from the beach limited in time by narrow tidal windows. Now Mark, with Chris Taylor, has added a new cave above the limit of all but the highest and stormiest seas. It may only be some 30m long, but Ogof Hwyl Traeth is a cave of solutional origin owing nothing to wave action, and it is in the lower part of the Jurassic sequence. So, this is the first non-sea cave to be recognised in Jurassic limestone in Wales (England has some in Mendip and the North York Moors; Scotland, some in Applecross).



Footnote: Keith Jones reported his explorations of the 'Sea Caves of Dunraven' in 1985. My belated finding of page 40 of ISCA CC Journal VIII clearly shows that Mark and Chris rediscovered his 'Cave Fourteen', but he didn't call attention to its significance.

Cavefest 2019

After the success of Cavefest 2018 which raised £100 for SMWCRT the date and venue for the next event has been announced. The event will be held in Crickhowell over the weekend of 23rd to 26th August 2019—further details are listed below.

CavefestUK presents

Cavefest 2019

South Wales Crickhowell

23rd - 26th August

Live music, On site bar, washroom, toilets and shower block available. Plenty of family fun things to do including a treasure hunt, guided walks, paragliding and shooting.

REGISTER ONLINE NOW

www.cavefestuk.co.uk

Poster Maker

2019 CCC SRT Workshops

Two training workshops have been organised for 2019, both workshops will be held at Llangorse Multi Activity Centre LD3 7UH, the dates for the workshops are:

Saturday 9th March 2019

Saturday 16th November 2019

Places are limited and will be allocated on a first come basis. For more information and to book a place please contact the CCC Training Officer— details below.

Richard Hill

CCC Training Officer

trainingofficer@cambridgancavingcouncil.org.uk



Cambrian Caving Council AGM 2019

The 2019 CCC AGM will take place on Sunday 17th March at 13:00hrs. The venue for the AGM is Snailbeach Village Hall, Snailbeach, Shrewsbury SY5 0NS.

The AGM agenda and officers reports will be available to download from the CCC homepage.

Shropshire Caving & Mining Club who have arranged the venue will also be offering trips to anyone who wants to make a weekend of it.

Mine Trips

Potential mine visits over the weekend:

- Longer SRT trips on the Saturday
- Shorter walk-in trips on Sunday morning
- Surface tours around the Snailbeach mine site
- Snailbeach mines buildings and Day level tour

Underground visits will be constrained by bats if they are still hibernating in the mine. Places will also be limited, so anyone interested should contact Steve Holding directly at steve.holding3@virginmedia.com

Allan Richardson

CCC Secretary

2019 Diary

- ⇒ **March 9th** - CCC SRT Workshop, Llangorse Multi Activity Centre.
- ⇒ **March 16th** - SMWCRT rescue practice OFD
- ⇒ **March 17th** - Cambrian Caving Council AGM, Snailbeach, Shropshire (about 10 miles south-west of Shrewsbury)
- ⇒ **June 9th** - British Caving Association AGM, Ribblesdale.
- ⇒ **4th-8th July** - NAHMO 2019 Conference, Cwmystwyth
- ⇒ **August 23-26th** - CavefestUK, Crickhowell
- ⇒ **November 16th** - CCC SRT Workshop, Llangorse Multi Activity Centre.

Please contact the newsletter editor if you have an event coming up and wish to have it included in the next diary.

Ogof Draenen Entrances and Bats

The Twll Du entrance of Ogof Draenen became wide open to the sky during the autumn of 2017. In just a few seconds bats could easily pass in through it to reach the shelter of the main cave system 30 metres below the surface. Indeed, cavers reaching that lower area of the cave from elsewhere underground saw hibernating bats while passing along the main access routes like Midwinter Chambers.

A bat counter, deployed for three weeks at Gone In The Years (GITY) in the main cave last February recorded 181 bat calls of which 75% were between 4pm-4am. There were also some bat droppings seen on top of modern plastic cave conservation tape. While clearly indicative of bat colonisation of the big dry passages underneath Twll Du, this result was thought inconclusive as to the origin of these cave bats.

Following the breakdown of negotiations between CCC and Cadw about the future of the Twll Du entrance in May 2018, Dr Peter Smith, who is a local bat consultant, and I decided to do an evening bat emergence survey at Twll Du in the late summer. This work was carried out for two hours on 11th September. Our observations were one Myotis bat leaving the cave at 20:27h, and two Lesser Horseshoe bats entering the cave at 20:36h and 21:23h not to be seen again.

All of this was recorded by two separate data loggers with microphones positioned a few metres below ground level within the cave entrance.

We did the same kind of dusk emergence bat survey on 23rd October at the Nunnery entrance using three bat loggers and with help from another professional ecologist. Bat activity was first detected inside the cave after sunset and a bat soon emerged, and a bat returned underground more than an hour later in darkness.

The bat logger was left running unattended inside the Nunnery between 29th October and 11th November 2018 with encouraging results, so this was done again from 28th November 2018 to 4th January 2019. A caver counter was put nearby so that any ultrasonics in the hours when cavers were present could be discarded. The filtered data is purely the bat calls. Unlike the GITY experiment almost a year earlier, these results are highly convincing in terms of the timing profile because there is a lot of nocturnal activity here, over 1000 bat calls, as seen in the timing chart, as well as the sightings of bats in Nunnery Passage in two consecutive winters.

Freedom of Information requests for the commercial bat survey of Twll Du were initially refused both by Cadw and NRW, but Cadw eventually released a redacted version. This refers to three nearby entrances: Twll Du, The Nunnery and ■■■■■.

So ■■■■■ implies Drws Cefn. The survey did not include the Nunnery and simply compared the high bat activity at ■■■■■ with three negative results obtained during 90-minute dusk surveys late-April and early-May 2018. Many winter bats would likely have already left by then for summer roosts. The ecologist's report of 16th May concluded that there were no bats using Twll Du and that it would be fine from a bat law perspective to seal up this cave entrance.

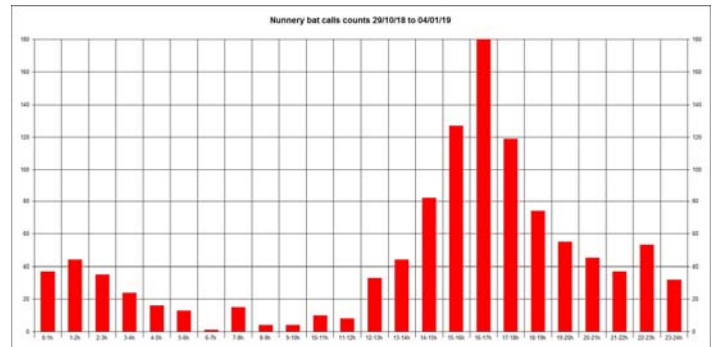


Chart above – Nunnery bat call activity grouped by hour of the day

No further bat research was carried out for Cadw until 30th September when a final survey at Twll Du was done, again from the outside only and no bats were seen.

Unfortunately, the earlier assumption of non-use by bats had already been proven wrong on 11th September. This positive result was presented to those involved in concreting the cave entrance several times in the week of 1st October when building contractor's equipment was seen arriving on site in preparation for that work. A police investigation into an alleged bat roost disturbance then followed.

The CPS decided in February 2019 that no further action is to be taken due to insufficient evidence. They are unable to say beyond reasonable doubt whether there is a roost present at that particular part of the cave, and a defence would exist that numerous appropriate steps were taken to mitigate against species disturbance.

What can we draw from this? A grey area exists where sightings of small numbers of bats accessing a cave habitat may not evidence a roost within. It is unclear too at what threshold of individual bat observations some contemplated action might be considered detrimental to the species. The modern legal term 'resting place of a protected species' implies having proof of actual resting rather than bats seen arriving at or leaving from or flying around within a potential habitat for that place to obtain statutory protection. If resting means stationary then all of the research described here, focusing as it did only on bats in flight, was doomed before it began.

Stuart France, CCC Conservation-Access Officer

Henfwlch Mine Breakthrough

A recent dig in the Henfwlch Mine at Nant y Moch has broken through into an enormous stope. Christened "Waterfall Stope" after its two flow decorated waterfalls, it adds enormous interest to an already interesting and easy to explore mine.

I originally reached the stope back in 1994, my initials there to be seen, by abseiling down a very wet winze, the source of one of the waterfalls. In those days the light of the puny Oldham cap lamp was such that I didn't appreciate the scale of the place.

Now its easily accessible nature has led to a fuller exploration and the discovery of a small kibble in near perfect condition.

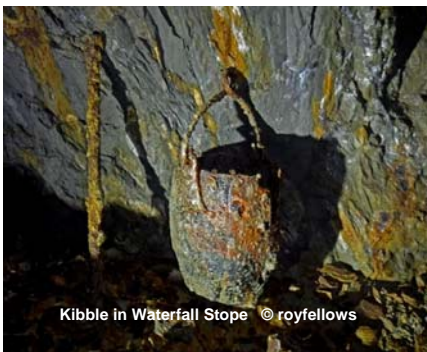
Originally the mine was just a long adit leading to a fall. This was passed by my digging out of a winze in 1996 which led to a stope with an ore barrow in perfect condition and some other artefacts, but I was unable to reach Waterfall Stope from there until the recent dig.

Exploration is easy, but cowstails and belay belt are advised for the descent of a rubble slope leading down from the dig. There is also a traverse fitted to reach a bank of deads at the back where the kibble can be seen.

Visitors are reminded that access to the mine falls under the CAL agreement which includes a clause forbidding artefact removal. All the mine artefacts are Welsh Government property and their removal is theft. Unfortunately the mine has suffered losses in the past, so it is now being closely monitored and security marking of property is underway.

By Roy Fellows

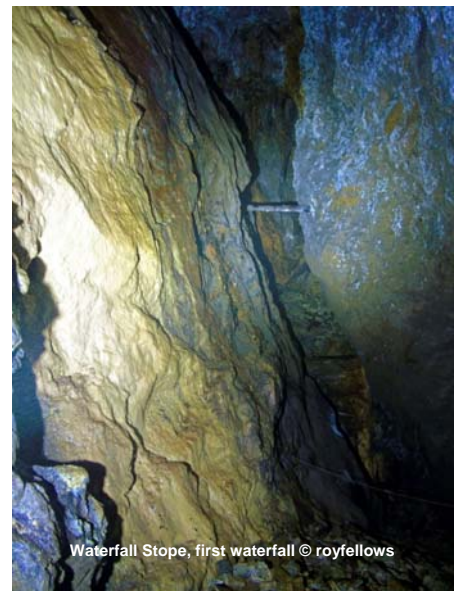
CAL Director



Kibble in Waterfall Stope © royfellows



2018 Dig © royfellows



Waterfall Stope, first waterfall © royfellows

Bat Conservation Laws

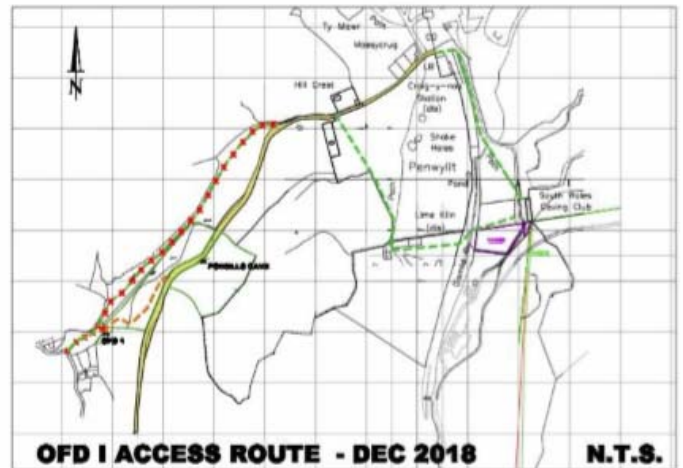
Section 9 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 makes it an offence to kill or injure a protected species (which includes all bats) or to possess one (dead or alive). It is also an offence to damage, destroy or obstruct access to a place used by a protected species for shelter or protection. Disturbing protected species while in places of refuge is also an offence, but the word 'disturbing' is not defined.

The Conservation of Habitats and Species Regulations 2017 was developed for reasons of EU harmonization and to deal with various loopholes and ambiguities in earlier legislation. Section 43 makes it an offence to deliberately capture, injure or kill or disturb a protected species, to take or destroy their eggs, or to damage or destroy a breeding site or resting place of such an animal. Disturb is defined as impairing their ability to survive, to breed or reproduce, or to rear and nurture their young, or to hibernate or migrate if applicable to that animal. This later legislation adds to rather than replaces the 1981 Act.

Access Route to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu I

Due to some tensions with a local land owner, please use the following route. If you are walking from the SWCC HQ: take the road down the hill, past the start of The Pant footpath on your right, and after about another 350m, just past Powell's Cave, a metal gate (pictured opposite) has been installed on your right. You can then descend across SWCC-owned land to the cave entrance. There is no clearly defined path on this route but there are orange tape markers on trees to show the way, - - - - on map opposite.

You should **not** use the garden of the cottage at Y Grithig to get to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu I (Bottom Entrance). In addition, you should no longer use the previous route to the cave via the footpath (known locally as The Pant, **x x x x** on map) which starts 150m or so past the houses as you go down the hill. Access to the cave entrance from the bottom of The Pant is no longer possible as you would be on private land which cavers do not have permission to cross. You should not park or change in the bottom lay-by or in the road leading past Y Grithig as there is no longer access via this route either.



Castlemartin Range West

The dates for the 2019 Castlemartin Range meetings, to obtain a permit to enter Range West for cave exploration purposes, are:

- Thursday 7th March 2019 18:00
- Saturday 9th March 2019 10:00
- Thursday 18th April 2019 18:00
- Friday 19th April 2019 10:00
- Thursday 23rd April 2019 18:00
- Saturday 25th May 2019 10:00
- Thursday 8th August 2019 18:00

By contrast, entry into Ogof Gofan, which is in Range East and accessible from the coast path when there are no military operations, has to be booked through the CCC Conservation / Access Officer. Generally there is no firing after 5pm or at weekends. PDF permits will be issued by email.

Stuart France

CCC Conservation-Access Officer

The Cambrian Caving Council

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Please send news items, short articles and newsworthy photographs for the next issue to the editor by **14th April 2019**