

December 2019

Issue 61

WALES UNDERGROUND

NEWS IN BRIEF

- The Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Cave Management Committee has been wound up following the withdrawal of Natural Resources Wales from direct involvement with caving. SWCC will have executive control in future and a separate advisory committee involving other clubs is being formed.
- The Mynydd Llangattock CMC is also on the brink. NRW has not formally pulled out but the nature of its relationship with cavers has changed. This CMC is not club based, and its individual caver members are looking to recruit new supporters with ideas for a future that is independent of NRW.
- The bi-annual PDCMG meeting in November did not take place. The EGM to discuss its Ogof Draenen entrances policy voted for back in November 2018 has not yet taken place. Chris Seal, the representative from Chelsea Speleological Society, is tasked with drafting the EGM proposals. Some kind of meeting in February is expected.

Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofa Cymreig

WELSH OPEN ACCESS REFORMS TIMETABLE ANNOUNCED

The Welsh Government has published its route map for implementing improved open access and wider footpath usage following the public consultation exercises of recent years. Simon Pickering, WG's Head of Landscape and Outdoor Recreation, attending the National Access Forum for Wales on 5th November, said:

"WG is taking forward a programme of access reforms in line with its priorities for the economy, environment and health. The long-term approach to the access agenda is to promote responsible recreation to maximise its many benefits, while seeking to manage conflict and reduce burdens and complexity."

Group 1 reforms are considered uncontroversial and cover such things as litter and dogs on leads near livestock. These will be taken forward quickly by the WG's own access team.

Group 2 contains some reforms that need further work to find straightforward compromises and solutions. This will be done by three expert groups (EGs) to be set up by Christmas. I will apply to join the expert group considering wider open access land usage. The other two EGs will be looking at more flexibility in the use of footpaths (such as to allow cyclists on to them) and communicating access rights more effectively (perhaps by developing a written code of conduct).

The EGs will each meet four times during 2020 resulting in Policy Intent Documents (PIDs). The main steering group, known as the Access Reform Advisory Group (ARAG), will transform the PIDs into an Access Reform Report by the end of 2020 and finalise it by mid-2021. It is then up to Ministers and WG drafting teams to turn this report into legislation.

Group 3 concerns the shared use of rivers and open water. This is a troubled topic where compromises and practical implementations may be hard to find. It is envisaged these discussions will take far longer than Group 2 with any solution coming later than 2021.

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Cave access comes under Reform 11 of the consultation: reducing the restrictions associated with open access land. As the CROW Act already applies to caving on access land, except in the minds of those who consider caving not to be 'open-air recreation', there is no caving prohibition that needs to be removed. It only needs a clear statement of the included activities that is not amenable to semantic challenge.

Photo left: Pwll Dwfn, a 100-metre deep pothole on Access Land.

NRW's objection to caving on urban commons is a claim that caves are not parts of the commons in which they exist. A couple of solutions would be to alter the 1925 Act so that it states the legal 3-dimensional definition of land in that Act applies to leisure locations equally as everything else concerning land, or to clarify historic access rights within a revision of the CROW Act.

Photo right: Entering Daren Cilau, a 26kms cave on Urban Common.



Expert Groups will have only 6-9 members who must also represent stakeholders such as public sector bodies and landowners, so it is not certain that caving will get a seat at this table. Each member, however, is expected to represent multiple interests rather than just one organisation or activity or to promote personal views. EG members have to sign a statement to the effect that they have a positive outlook and will support reforms for introducing wider leisure access rights in principle and attend all the meetings!

No matter who represents us, cavers will need to set out their case for universally accepted cave access rights. This involves developing a risk assessment for 'CROW Caving' as it applies to Wales and management plans like keeping certain cave gates so any concerns about conservation issues or intensive use are allayed. Anyone wishing to help with this should get in touch.

Stuart France, CCC Access and Conservation Officer

Photo and artwork credits

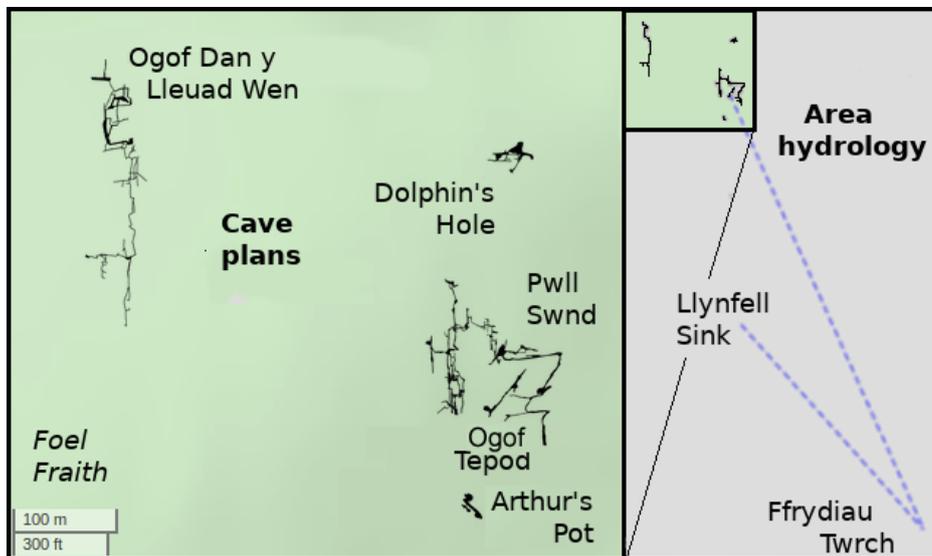
Stuart France
Martyn Farr
Martin Laverty
Paul Tarrant

Open Secrets and Documenting Discoveries

Two recent updates to the Cambrian Cave Register raise the question of if, and when, explorers should reveal their finds.

One cave was found, explored, and reported to the registrar, but subsequent enquiries found that it had been discovered, explored, and surveyed some two years before. Each group had assigned a name to the cave (a more prosaic CCR id is 2019-11). Were the second set of explorers lucky to have the excitement of their 'discovery', or were they, and any others who may have had an interest, deceived in some way and their discovery devalued? There was no inherent secrecy here but different evaluations both of the importance of the find and of keeping the CCR as up to date as possible (albeit discreetly when necessary).

The second cave was Ogof Dan y Lleud Wen, Cave Under the White Moon, OS grid ref SN 75801 18645, extended to more than double its previous length and passing the arbitrary kilometre which some see as significant. A line survey had been made during the initial exploration but without the detail needed to draw it up. Interest then waned, participants' interests and availability changed, so only a few trips followed with a few more people added to those who knew of 'the cave which must not be mentioned'.



The plan shown opposite overlays the 1990s extent of the cave in blue on top of the line survey which shows everything including the extensions found from 2004 onwards. The map above shows the relative position and size of DYLW with neighbouring caves.

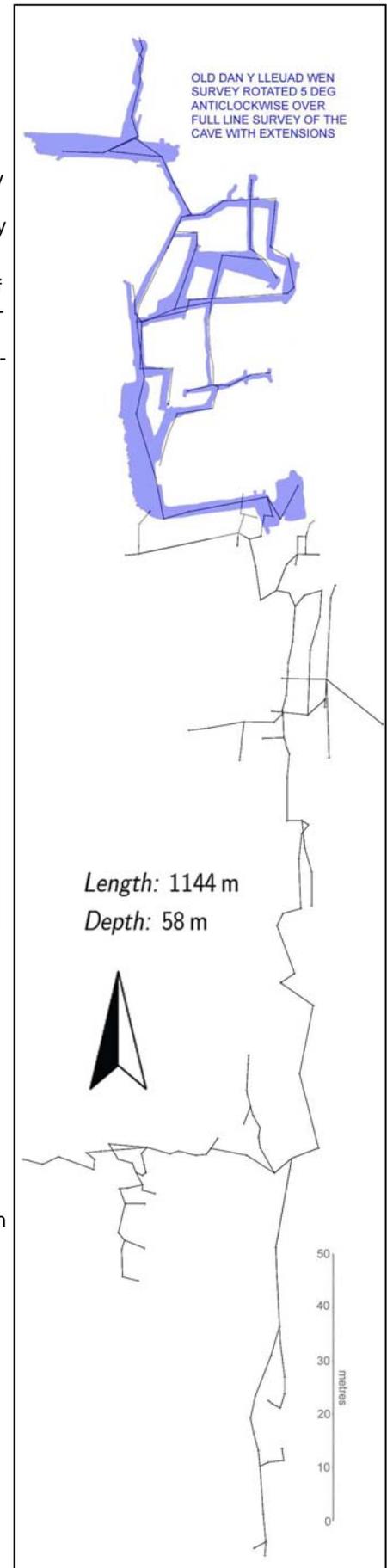
Why not? There is no simple answer, but club rivalries, personal disagreements and conflicting attitudes to what caving is about - driven by the problems at Carno and then Draenen - were surely involved. There was no effort to hide the extension: it just wasn't to be talked about.

That was fifteen years ago, rather debunking the idea that cavers can't keep a secret! It might be mentioned that someone on the ukCaving forum in 2007 tried to get the location of the cave (topic 4371). Nig's rather disingenuous answer was that the enquirer should enjoy the opportunity to indulge in the area's wild freedom and discover the entrance as a preliminary to exploring the cave itself, rather than expect to be spoon-fed. This reply was not very well received, but the lack of identification for the cave that 'seemed to go nowhere' shows how little known this cave and the area beyond it still are.

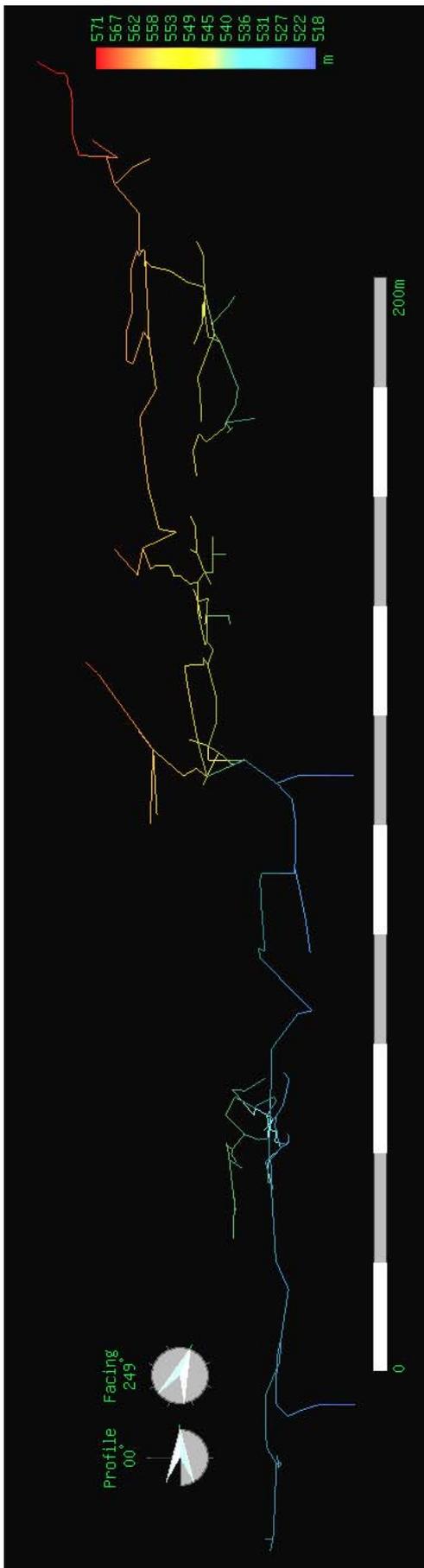
Related matters were brought up by an English rescue team earlier this year where they pondered the creation of a database of digs (topic 25158). The SMWCRT is also contemplating a project to confirm some sites, having had problems during their practices.

As always, CCR additions, corrections, and anything else (even survey data!) which might help to improve the database will be most welcome.

Martin Laverty, registrar@cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk



The Discovery of Ogot Dan y Lleud Wen



Ogot Dan y Lleud Wen (DYLW) was discovered on the Black Mountain in 1991 after Mark Withers had dug open a small shakehole at an altitude of 575m on the north side of Foel Fraith. This was well documented at that time once he had joined Isca Caving Club. Isca helped with subsequent explorations along with local cavers who had met the discovery with great interest. By mid-1993 the cave survey was 450m in length. Nig Rogers then started looking in another direction in the cave, assisted by his two Garimpeiro mates at the time, Dai Hopkins and Jeff Bain.

A good draught was detected at a very bouldery area of breakdown off the large Canyon Passage. This choke proved impenetrable so, in time, it was given a hefty amount of persuasion and left alone to stabilise itself. And there it remained for 11 years.

By spring 2004, Nig had enlisted Les Welch to the Garimpeiros after they had met again by chance for the first time since the 1980s. A return trip to the DYLW choke with Les and myself found that an opening, of sorts, had been exposed. Further digging allowed easier access by means of wriggling through the boulders. This led to an unpleasant awkward drop down through a constantly moving, damp, narrow, draughting rift which descended into good clean cave passage. Incredible!

Frenetic activity over 18 months then ensued, exploring this new extension with Les and myself mostly, as well as Paul and the few remaining Garimpeiros, and utilising to the full Les' climbing expertise gained on the Pembrokeshire coast.

A rift traverse to the right – Omaha Rift – led back towards the Lower Series. Following walking passage on the left past Crowbar Junction, a large pitch was soon reached opening into big cave passage. This was self-explanatorily named Absent Friends. The main line of the cave continued southwards, scrambling up and down, with numerous side passages to explore – Peaceful Easy Feeling. Nig had to start bolting up a pitch in Les' absence, ably assisted by a hypothermic Richard Jenkins. I was fortunate enough to be there for the return trip when the climb was completed. We traversed/crawled up a sandy slope at the end of which a strong draught was felt through the sandy infill. A bolting spanner, being the only available digging utensil, was then used to shift the sand to make progress possible – Spanner Dig – and off we went, very gingerly, along more fine passage south to another 20m pitch down.

Subsequently many leads were explored and other pitches scaled in side passages, most leading south and west. A fine massive upward sloping chamber found early on – Arthur's Table – was well decorated with pristine white calcite. This is also found at many other places in the cave but is far more prolific here than in the 1990s part of the cave. Tape was laid to protect these formations and photos taken (pre-digital ones). A good centre line survey of most of the finds was then carried out which gave a length of 1144m and depth 58m as seen on the surveys here.

Activity gradually waned due to other distractions but several potential sites for further discoveries had been identified. Interest was re-ignited in 2010 by another chance meeting with a caving friend from the past and some of his mates. This younger group of Garimpeiros was eventually given the news of the discoveries. Several trips were made over the next few years along with other cavers with varying skills. Some pitches were re-bolting, a bypass to one developed, and other areas dug and explored. One especially memorable mega-collapse was probably heard in Brynamman! Around 2014, the original and still unpleasant breakthrough was modified, but activity since then has diminished due to life's vagaries.

continued on page 4

Ogof Dan y Lleud Wen *continued from page 3*

Les Welch by a solution tube in the roof above a collapsed roof span



Nig Rogers admiring pristine flowstone in his wetsuit socks

At the beginning Nig decided to keep quiet about these finds, and all visiting cavers, who all along have numbered 16 at most, were persuaded to remain silent and they did so. Initially he had just hoped to explore whatever was possible but, over the years, many other factors came into play, as our Registrar has described. These served to exacerbate feelings and heighten his general disillusionment. Thus the silence remained virtually intact until he unexpectedly passed away last year. I believe he was content in the knowledge of what was there, so close to home, and with good potential for further extensions at some time by others.

Although the cave entrance is wide open to all, with no gate, this cave is very obviously rarely frequented. It seems incredible that, apparently, no one has just stumbled across the extension in over 15 years. It should also possibly be pointed out that these passages should be treated with great respect, as caver activity has been sparse in spite of the timescale involved. It is quite an undertaking to do a worthwhile trip to DYLR, set as it is in a beautiful but remote area. Visits would not be recommended in the depths of winter or bad weather. Those early discoveries were long, arduous and exhausting but they gave me the most exhilarating experiences of my fairly limited caving life. These memories were enhanced by surreal hikes back over the mountain lit up by a white moon rising over Foel Fraith, or heaving tired limbs and wet sacks back through thick mists, howling winds, heavy drizzle and bogs galore – all part of the adventure I guess.

Discussions subsequent to Nig's death have led to this article. Since late September 2019, work has been done to stabilise the breakthrough point and to explore some leads as well as to start a Grade 5 survey and collect digital photos. Varying amounts of water are found in some parts of the extension, obviously dependent on the time of year, but as yet it has not been traced to a resurgence. This will most likely be to Ffrwdiau Twrch (333m) to the east, like Pwll Swnd, rather than west to Llygad Lluchwr. The main passages do appear to have developed at the same three levels as in Pwll Swnd.

Most likely, DYLR would still lie undiscovered under the Black Mountain were it not for the original exploits of Mark in 1991. Sadly Nig lost contact with him by the late 1990s after combining on many exciting caving adventures. Unfortunately renewing contact in recent years has so far proved unsuccessful. It would surely be very appropriate for Mark to learn about these cave extensions, if anyone can help.

Mary Rogers, CCC Treasurer



Photo right: Mary Rogers, Les Welch, Chris Duroe and Nig Rogers (left to right) getting changed near the cave entrance. All photos on this page were taken in 2004.

BCA TRAINING GRANTS

Over the last few years there have been big changes in the structure of the two BCA training committees. There used to be a single BCA Training Committee that dealt with both the needs of recreational cavers and the professional Local Cave Leader and Cave Instructor Certificate schemes. This split up into two committees a few years ago, although a representative from each sat the other committee to ensure there would be consistency of techniques where appropriate.

The BCA professional awards scheme is now managed by the Qualifications Management Committee (QMC) and the Training Committee oversees the remaining training issues. The Training Committee comprises all the regional council training officers and a few others — including representatives from BCRA, BCRC, CHECC, ACI and Scouting.

CCC has always operated slightly apart from the other regions on Training Committee because we get funding from Welsh sources. CCC and DCA have been active in providing workshops for SRT, photography, surveying etc for many years but the other regions have not been so active. Now the Training Committee is putting on national workshops that are available to any BCA member to try and spread the training.

The idea is that these workshops will be run by members of Training Committee and organised by the regional Training Officer. So, for example, if I organise a SRT workshop in South Wales it would be open to any BCA member whether they are affiliated to a CCC club or not. The people running the workshop, and therefore paid through the BCA Training Committee, would be chosen initially from the Training Committee. If nobody from Training Committee can work on that date then other suitable trainers could be employed. This is different from how I have staffed the training in the past.

The process for obtaining BCA grants will also now change. So if a caving club wants to run a surveying workshop they could self-finance and just sort it out themselves, but if they want a BCA grant to run the course they would apply via their regional training officer (currently me) to BCA Training Committee. Training Committee would decide whether they want to support the training and then find members of Training Committee to deliver it, or someone external if none of them are available. The host club would be able to take 50% of the course places but then must advertise the remainder to all BCA members.

A blank BCA grant application form can be downloaded from: www.cambriancavingcouncil.org.uk/training/bcaform.doc

Richard Hill, CCC Training Officer

CAMBRIAN DEPARTS SPORT WALES

Cambrian Caving Council has a long history of involvement with Sport Wales (and its forerunner the Sports Council for Wales) that I believe goes back to our formation.

This relationship has, over the years, brought money into caving through direct grants to CCC to support Access and Conservation; also Sport Wales were the last UK national body to provide grant support to cave expeditions. Latterly their generosity has been curtailed with general financial cut-backs and the fact that we are not a competitive sport. For the past few years we have received a few hundred pounds per year, which even Sport Wales described as nominal.

In order to claim grant there was a yearly form-filling exercise. Completing the forms had until this year been straightforward: basically they wanted to know what their money was being spent on. This year it changed and CCC was asked to sign up to implementing an increasingly demanding series of Child Protection measures now and in coming years. This was discussed by our Executive and we rapidly came to the conclusion that whilst we wholeheartedly supported the aim of child protection there was no way we could be made responsible for overseeing its implementation in caving clubs in Wales. This is simply because we are only an advisory and representative body, not a 'governing body', and thus cannot interfere in the workings of clubs unless they request that.

This resulted in myself being involved in a number of discussions with Sport Wales officials, all of which were held as friendly and open exchanges of views and positions. It was pointed out to them that we operated under the policies of the British Caving Association which includes a Child Protection Policy. The BCA's Child Protection Officer was consulted and a copy of the BCA's Child Protection Policy was then sent to Sport Wales.

Initially we were being imagined like most other sporting groups and thus expected to be training groups of children. Even after coming to an understanding that CCC did not have that role, SW were still unable to offer future grant aid without implementing their Child Protection Programme which implies CCC supervising its member clubs to enforce compliance.

The result of these discussions is that we no longer receive any grant money from Sport Wales nor have any involvement with them. However, the door has been left open should we wish to re-apply in the future.

R. Allan Richardson, CCC Secretary

CAVING AT CASTLEMARTIN RANGE

The 2019 'annual' permits expire in May 2020, so anyone wanting a new permit to explore for caves on Castlemartin **Range West** will need to attend one of the upcoming safety briefings shown opposite. Please arrive at the Range Guard-room ten minutes before the meeting begins as latecomers will be turned away. Everyone in the group will need their own permit which is issued for cave exploration only on the coastal margin. Permits are personal and not transferrable. Dogs are not allowed on to the firing range. Access routes and other T&Cs are explained at the briefing meetings:

Thursday 5th March 18:00
Saturday 7th March 10:00
Thursday 9th April 18:00
Friday 10th April 10:00
Thursday 21st May 18:00
Saturday 23rd May 10:00

This briefing system does not apply to visiting Ogof Gofan which is on **Range East**. Cavers should continue to book Ogof Gofan by emailing me, ideally giving a couple of weeks notice so I can clear each request with the military. Please respect the rule that group size is limited to four people.

Stuart France, CCC Access and Conservation Officer

CAVEFEST UK

So with August bank holiday of 2019 upon us, it was time to kick off Cavefest again! The weekend weather was set to be a scorcher, which it definitely lived up to. Cavers from across the country, and indeed, the continent, were set to experience some of South Wales finest underground places.

The first day saw sweltering heat and glorious blue skies, which was excellent considering this was only the meet-and-greet part of the weekend. What followed in the evening was a good catch-up with old friends, drinking in the marquee and generally getting to know people.

The second day's temperatures also topped 30°C. It was to be a busy day with caving trips and organised walks and tours, so there was something for everyone. Cavers took in the sights of such beauties as Ogof Ffynnon Ddu, Ogof Craig a Ffynnon and Ogof Draenen.

A photo competition was also run during the weekend, which made it a good opportunity for cavers to get some quality pictures displayed. The winning shot by Stuart France was of the Trident formation taken on Cavefest's tour around OFD2.

This took the prize of the latest Duo Z2 lamp with a Boreo helmet from event sponsors Petzl.

In the evening everyone gathered for food and a Mexican themed a fancy dress party and an old fashioned knees up!



The third day was almost as equally brisk, with more caving trips to Agen Allwedd, Ogof Clogwyn and Eglwys Faen. Afternoon entertainment on site was catered for by a mobile crazy golf course, Nerf gun battles and remote-control car racing. The evening consisted of a cavers quiz with more drinking and music provided by local DJs. This final day saw cavers and their families saying farewell, the Cavefest team packing up the marquee and heading home. Everyone had a brilliant time and were thankful to have seen some of South Wales most beautiful caves.

It has been an honour, but one now tinged with sadness, for the Gwent Caving Club to have been the first host of Cavefest UK. In 2020 the Cavefest production team will be moving in their own direction to provide future festivals that will surpass this year's event. So we wish them all the best and hope to see them and everyone back soon.

Darren Postians, *Gwent Caving Club*

Please send news items, short articles, newsworthy photographs (at their original resolution as we will fit them into the page layout) club news and profiles for the next issue by 30th April 2020.

CAVE ACCESS LTD – RENEWALS

Another year has all but passed, so it is time to renew or take up annual free membership of CAL to take advantage of its mine explorer access scheme. More information at:

<http://caveaccess.co.uk/index.html>

All we need is your name, your club if you are in one, and your BCA membership number. We'd also like a brief trip report when you visit the mines so we can make an annual report to NRW about scheme usage. Please contact:

permits@caveaccess.co.uk

Dave Tyson, *Director, Cave Access Ltd*

CAMBRIAN AGM 2020

Our next Annual General Meeting will take place in North Wales on Sunday 15th March 2020 at 1pm. We have booked the Memorial Hall in Mill Street at Betws-y-Coed, LL24 0BB, from noon. This is on the B5106 just over the stone bridge by the waterfalls at the top end of the village.

Why not make a weekend of it and visit some of the nearby mines that are available through the CAL access scheme?

There is an interesting through trip at the Rhiwbach Slate Mine and extensive possibilities, including optional SRT, in the Parc Lead Mine just a few miles drive away in the Gwydyr Forest. The Snowdonia National Park also provides great walking and other outdoor activities of all kinds close by.

The Cambrian Caving Council

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