

April 2016

Issue 49

WALES UNDERGROUND

News In Brief

- The National Trust have suggested they may start charging organized groups accessing their land. It is not yet clear if this would apply to non-commercial trips run by caving clubs, but it is a cause for concern.
- Roy Fellows started work in April repairing the mine portal on Lefel Fawr in the Cwmystwyth mine. This work is likely to last for a few months. Access will be permitted during the work, although some areas may be temporarily out of bounds.
- SMWCRT are holding a training day on June 4th at Whitewalls, followed by an auction of equipment and a BBQ. See back page for details. Come along to learn useful rescue skills, to buy good secondhand caving gear, chat to SMWCRT members, eat & drink!
- RFDC have recently celebrated the 50th anniversary of the first permitted access to the caves and mines in the Forest of Dean by the Forestry Commission.

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Photo credits

Dave Tyson

Stuart France

Peter Smith

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Cambrian Caving Council Newsletter

Cylchlythyr y Cyngor Ogofeydd Cymreig

A new swallow hole in the Alyn Gorge

The floor of one of the small 'leete' caves close to the Devil's Gorge area of the Alyn Gorge, has recently collapsed and revealed a 10m deep swallow hole. The area is part of the Alyn Gorge SSSI within the Loggerheads Country Park in North Wales.

The cave entrance is close to a public footpath popular with dog walkers and in two separate incidents, dogs have had to be rescued from the bottom of the hole. Denbighshire County Council (DCC), who lease the land, have installed a temporary

fence to avert further incidents and NRW have affixed signs indicating the area is within the SSSI. The cave serves as a minor bat roost and so any work will have to wait for the end of hibernation. DCC want to install a permanent grille and are consulting with NRW who are liaising with local caving groups and Cambrian Caving Council. It is hoped to fit a gate with a "Derbyshire key" style lock to allow equitable access for exploration subject to NRW agreement.

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Fenced off entrance to 'Leete Cave 2' containing the new shakehole

Cave Conservation and Access News

OGOF CARNO

Stuart France is planning to write a detailed bid to Welsh Water to re-instate access for caving at Ogof Carno. The new adit entrance, now under the re-aligned A465 after dualling, is visible in the photo on page 2. Stuart needs more photos of the mile-long tunnel and inside the natural cave beyond it, and any published materials as background. He already has Clive Gardener's lengthy account of the exploration done up to 2001, but that is all that is available right now.

OGOF GOFAN

A team comprising ecologist Peter Smith, accompanied by John Stevens and Stuart France, has been running a bat research project in Ogof Gofan since January 2016. There were no hibernating bats found in the main chambers but there were a few individuals hidden in alcoves of the passage linking the two sea windows. Cavers are reminded to take care throughout the cave and please follow the agreed procedure to obtain access permission for visits.

(Continued overleaf)

Training News

An SRT training session will be held at Plas y Brenin National Mountain Centre, Capel Curig on Saturday 24th September from 10am-4pm. There will be a small (£20) charge for attendance. Email Richard Hill to book a place.

An SRT training session for South Wales based cavers will be held on Saturday 25th June at Langorse wall from 10am-5pm. Please book on a first come, first served basis via email to Richard Hill.

Richard Hill, CCC Training Officer

Report on CCC AGM

The 2016 CCC AGM was held at the Ysgoldy-Goch community hall near Cymystwyth with 11 clubs out of the 53 being represented. The turnout was a little disappointing, but at least the meeting was quorate. The draft minutes, accounts and reports have been placed on the CCC website.

Next Year's AGM will be held at the GCRG Headquarters on Sunday 12th March 2017 from 12 noon.

2016 DIARY

May 22nd

CRO Challenge Fund-Raising Event, Yorkshire

May 29th

Columns Open Day, OFD

June 4th

SMWCRT rescue practice, caving gear auction and BBQ at White-walls, Llangattock

June 5th

BCA AGM, Priddy

June 17-19th

NAMHO Conference, Dublin

June 25th

SRT Training Course, Llangorse

August 13-20th

EuroSpeleo 2016 Conference, Dalesbridge Centre, Yorkshire

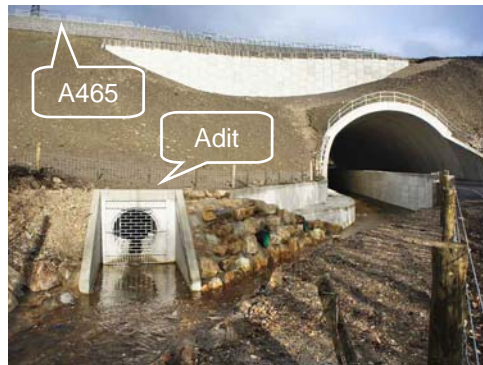
August 28th

Columns Open Day, OFD

Cave Conservation and Access News

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Pembrokeshire National Park ranger Lynne Houlston and army ecologist James Nevitt who works for the estate landowner came on the most recent cave research visit during March after receiving some access techniques training in a local quarry. They were both very impressed with seeing inside the cave. The difficulty of gaining access which they have now experienced first-hand has re-assured them that the cave is well protected naturally, and probably only some light-touch regulation is needed.



Above: The new Carno Adit and A465



Right: The Ogof Govan research visit

DRAETHEN LEAD MINES

A similar bat research project is being used to de-conflict underground access at the Draethen Lead Mines where NRW is the landowner. Currently there is no other official access to these mines, and underground explorers are requested to stay away. We hope to obtain general access permission during the summer.

Interestingly, the main mine was partially flooded in January but this water had drained away by April, and most of the bats seen in January had also departed. We found no bats in the Roman mine. There is unusual litter in the mines, along with pointless cairns and painted arrows which shows that inexperienced people are exploring underground here despite the need for vertical access techniques.

MINIMAL IMPACT CODE (MIC) LEAFLET

The BCA is intending to publish its new guidance, endorsed by Natural England, as a leaflet during the summer and the draft text is now available on the CCC website. NRW has agreed to help with and endorse a bi-lingual version for Wales. We hope to meet NRW soon to make a start on this publication. Any comments to Stuart France please.

BAT GUIDANCE LEAFLET

It has not proved possible for BCA to produce a "caving and bats" guide that will apply equally well to all caving regions, and the current plan is that each region should produce its own statements and leaflet to reflect each region's bat species variations and the character of its underground sites. Send ideas and comments to Stuart France who will be putting together a bat guide applying to underground Wales over the summer.

CAVE DIGGING GUIDE

Cambrian is working on a detailed guide for cave explorers covering the law in Wales and where to obtain vital information about compliance and to get assistance. This guide will look at SSSIs and archaeology conservation issues as well as advise on responsible cave exploration process up to the point where a significant new cave discovery may need to be managed by a group or a failed digging project has to be wound down. Offers of material and assistance with this writing project will be most welcome.

Stuart France
CCC Conservation Officer

A new swallow hole in the Alyn Gorge

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The cause of the collapse is uncertain: increased percolation of water into the cave may have saturated and destabilised the glacial infill or it could be due to erosion at depth from river water flowing in subterranean passages. It is known that the nearby River Alyn contains many shakeholes which extend beyond the river's boundaries and the past couple of years have seen abnormally high water levels in extreme weather conditions.

The swallow hole still seems to be on the move and its depth has increased since the original rescue incident. There is now a sloping mud passage at the base to a trapezoidal chamber about 7m by 5m with a ceiling height varying between 1.5-2.5m. The chamber is floored with mud and boulders, some of which seem to have clean fractured surfaces.

The sediment layers exposed in the shakehole sides may be of scientific interest and the chamber might lead to a connection to the far end of Ogof Hesp Alyn. However, further investigation and any digging will require a permit from Natural Resources Wales.

Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary



Inside the cave looking down the shakehole



View of chamber ceiling



Back wall of the chamber at bottom of shakehole

Safety concerns regarding zip wire on the Croesor-Rhosydd mine trip

There has been a recent report regarding the state of the zip wire over the first lake. There is a photo of this wire and a detailed description of the mine trip in a 4-page feature in the latest issue of *Descent* magazine. It appears that one or more of the metal fibres in the wire rope have rusted through and now cause problems with retrieval of the fixed pulley. Several groups have used electrical tape to hold the broken wire strands in place so the pulley can pass over the damaged section, but this is clearly a temporary solution at best. The suspended ladder bridge at the next lake is also showing signs of old age: an anchor has come loose at one end and some of the stringers which help spread the load on the bridge have snapped, thus exacerbating the problem. All visitors should take note that the remaining wooden 'bridges' are well past their sell-by date and the fixed safety lines protecting them may be only marginally better.

The Cambrian Caving Council are prepared to offer some funding to replace some of the fixed aids. But there are liability concerns due to the condition of the mine, the relative inexperience of some groups making the trip, and the lack of a central point for problem reports. However it is recognised that the trip is unlikely to diminish in popularity and if a group of people wanted to take on remediation work then CCC would try and help with funding suitable hardware.

Dave Tyson, CCC Secretary



**South & Mid Wales Cave
Rescue Team**
**Tim Achub Ogofau De a
Chanolbarth Cymru**

**CAVE RESCUE PRACTICE
EQUIPMENT AUCTION AND BBQ
SATURDAY 4TH JUNE 2016**

The Team will be holding a Cave Rescue practice in Eglwys Faen, to train people in the use of underground communications, including the new Cave Link system, as well as learn stretcher carrying techniques. The practice will start at **9.30am** at **Whitewalls, Llangattock Hillside, NP8 1LG**.

The rescue practice will be followed by an auction starting at **5.30pm** of equipment that has recently been retired from the Team's equipment store and will include a variety of static and dynamic ropes as well as **Petzl hardware** such as **Gri-gris, karabiners** etc.

A BBQ will be held in the Whitewalls garden with Sausages, Burgers, a Vegetarian option, and salad stuffs being on offer, as well as home-baked cakes and a barrel of beer - all sold at reasonable prices, and all in aid of rescue team funds.

The Cambrian Caving Council

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Please send news items, short articles, club profiles and newsworthy photographs for the next issue to Dave Tyson by **30th June 2016**

Report on the CCC Bat Walk

Cambrian held a very successful 'bat walk' inside Eglwys Faen on Sunday 28th February led by Peter Smith who is a very knowledgeable and helpful bat ecologist - as well as being an active caver. Nine enthusiastic members of CCC clubs were present and their bat observations are listed in the table below. Peter also comments:

"Natterer's bat, Daubenton's bat, Whiskered bat, Brandt's bat and Alcatheo bat are all different species of the Genus Myotis. I could perhaps have narrowed down identifications of some of those left in the general Myotis category by trying to see more detail close up, but the potential additional level of disturbance would not be justified. This is a very good count and is actually the highest number of bats recorded there to date. Just a shame there was no greater horseshoe bat present."

Richard Hill, CCC Training Officer

Eglwys Faen	Entrance Chamber	Eastern Series	Inner Chamber	Western Series	Total
Lesser Horseshoe Bat	13	4	8	7	32
Brown Long-eared Bat	0	2	0	1	3
Natterer's Bat	0	1	0	0	1
Daubenton's Bat	1	0	0	1	2
Whiskered/Brandt's/Alcatheo Bat	0	0	0	3	3
Myotis sp.	6	6	2	3	17
Total	20	13	10	15	58