

CAMBRIAN CAVING COUNCIL

NEWSLETTER July 2009

Editorial

In view of the Gwent CRT meeting scheduled for August 3rd this edition was delayed by a few days. As you will see as you read on it was decided to disband the team. The members were essentially a combination of a few small local clubs and that they managed to provide cover for an area containing so many long and complex caves over such a long period is a credit to their commitment and warrants the gratitude of everyone who has ever caved in the area.

We are fortunate that the West Brecon team is on hand to fill the void and that members of the previous team will remain available to provide local knowledge and continuity.

It is one of my regular rants to members of my own club that so many of them fail to attend rescue practices and then grumble when their skills are not fully used when they unhesitatingly turn up when called to an actual rescue.

Those few who do support the everyday activities of rescue teams put in huge amounts of work, mostly unrecognized by the wider caving community, but they are not telepathic. If team members fail to attend training activities those who have to organize a rescue are unlikely to know of their abilities.

Rescue teams need support, they certainly deserve support. Please support your local Rescue team and put in some effort to train with them.

Robin Weare [e-mail](#)
Newsletter Editor

Llethrid Swallet

There has been a report of a collapse in the entrance series. It has not yet been possible to investigate but an update will appear on the Cambrian website when more is known. Probably best to avoid the cave for the moment.

Agen Allwedd Keys

If your club has an annual permit and key to Agen Allwedd you may have been contacted earlier this year by the permit secretary, Malcolm Reid. If you have not been contacted, or you were contacted but you have not responded, please get in touch with him at 39 Railway Terrace, Blaina, Gwent, NP13 3BU.

It is in your interest to do so because there are proposals to change the lock, possibly during 2010, and clubs will only be sent replacement keys if they are known to be keyholders already.

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Gwent Cave Rescue Team

On Monday 3rd August, a Special General Meeting of Gwent Cave Rescue Team took place, with the 18 members present unanimously voting in favour of the proposed dissolution of the team. West Brecon Cave Rescue Team has agreed that they will take responsibility for incidents in the GCRT area with immediate effect. The team had struggled to elect an executive for several years, and once again was short of a chairman due to my imminent departure to work overseas.

It is with some sadness that we have to say goodbye to GCRT. Over the years, the team carried out many successful rescues under Llangattock and Llangynidr Mountains, including several difficult and protracted ones. However times change, and GCRT has lately suffered from two unavoidable realities. Firstly, cave rescues are far and few between, meaning that the team rarely get a chance to do things for real, and consequently it is difficult to remain fully prepared. Secondly, there is a diminishingly small pool of cavers in South East Wales who are able and willing to put in the huge amount of effort necessary to get the team up to scratch. Nowadays, despite being composed of volunteers, cave rescue teams have to work to the same standards of professionalism that do the other emergency services.

Everybody is keen that the combination of the two rescue teams should not be seen as a West Brecon “takeover”. Not surprisingly, there is some apprehension that WBCRT will attempt to apply their strategies for OFD to a Daren Cilau rescue – but it is well understood that the caves in the Gwent area present different challenges. It is recognised that the enlarged rescue team has much work to do to develop rescue plans for Aggy, Daren, Draenen, etc, making use of the wealth of expertise held by former GCRT members. There are plans to hold a series of rescue practices in the Gwent area, and it is also hoped to recruit several wardens from GCRT. A rescue store will continue to be maintained at Whitewalls, although the contents will be reviewed. There is even discussion about a possible name change at WBCRT to more accurately describe the team’s area.

I am confident that the planned changes will lead to a more robust cave rescue organisation for South East Wales, and I urge everyone who was previously involved with GCRT to give the combined organisation their full support. It is imperative that the transition takes place as smoothly and quickly as possible.

Adrian Fawcett

I’d add that all those on the GCRT call out list have already been sent a West Brecon call out questionnaire which they should complete and return in order to join the team. There is also a general invitation to attend the annual big rescue party at Penwyllt, on 29th August where there will be a live band, a “bring your own” BBQ and many barrels of beers. For those attending this would be a good opportunity to meet other team members, have a tour of the rescue stores and drink a lot of beer. [Editor]

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Slaughter Stream Cave (Wet Sink)

Slaughter Stream cave is now open to visiting cavers. The choke has been stabilized, and a good deal of work done to effect a permanent repair. There is still work to be done, and there is some loose material in the area between the choke and Balcony Pitch (which visiting cavers are invited to assist on its journey to the bottom of the main pitch), but the cave is safe for visitors.

Since the collapse of the choke in Wet Sink that barred access to the Slaughter Stream Cave work has been underway to remove the restriction and open the cave back up again.

Initial work involved quite a large team of cavers to get a good quantity of scaffolding, clips and timber into the cave. Following on from this, work centred around constructing a protective side wall and roof in the first part of the choke to ensure that those working on the collapsed section were not hit by any further material coming down from above.

With this completed the task of working through the collapse got underway and a route was opened up. However it was determined that the only way to make further progress was for somebody to be working from the far side as well.

Paul Taylor drew the short straw and made a very careful crawl through, avoiding a very delicately poised scaffolding pole along the way.

This enabled considerably quicker progress to be made and with the addition of a lot of new scaffolding, combined with the removal of a lot of the old original tube the second baulk of the choke was secured.

Further work on this has followed with the positioning of a steel plate in the roof and the construction of support walls.

The large void that was created above the choke by the collapse is slowly being filled in with rocks so as to support the infill above.

Although further work is required to construct more dry stone walls and the floor section is to be concreted to stop it being washed away again access through the choke is clear for visiting parties again.

Paul Taylor/Greg Jones

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Pwll Ddu Cave Management Group

At the AGM of the PDCMG on the 4th July 2009, a motion for the opening of the currently blocked second entrance to Ogof Draenen was discussed and a majority were not in favour. However, it became clear that a wider review of the group's entrance(s) policy was required. This policy currently states a preference for a single entrance system and was originally adopted on the grounds of conservation and protection of the concept of remote wilderness, including recognition that easing access to the further reaches could affect fragile calcite, gypsum and mud formations.

However, views were brought to the AGM that easier/multiple access is now desirable, while others in the Group retained their opinion that a single entrance preserves the unique feel for caving here. This is an important issue that may impact the nature of the cave forever. Consequently, the wider caving world is now being consulted for their opinions on a possible amendment to the entrance(s) policy in advance of an Extraordinary General Meeting of the PDCMG at the end of October.

Cavers belonging to clubs which are members of the PDCMG should provide their feedback to their club representative. Alternatively comments can be sent to the secretary of the PDCMG for compilation (pdcmg_sec <at> hotmail.co.uk). Further details of the EGM will be made available in due course.

Fleur Loveridge, Secretary, PDCMG

South Wales Caves Website

Check out <http://www.ogof.org.uk/> which I spotted by accident a few weeks ago and discovered, after enquiry, to be the work of the Cambrian Registrar, Brendan Marris who tells me:

"I have been taking photos in caves for a number of years, very often in South Wales, I decided to start to put together a site with the South Wales photos on, and it has evolved from that. Google maps seemed to be a great tool to build into the site, and then the DY0 interactive survey came off the back of that. It does act as a little incentive to go and visit some of the more obscure caves as well!"

Whatever his reasons for putting it together I've bookmarked it and am sure I'll be using it regularly in the future. I particularly liked the photographs of the more obscure caves in the region and must give special mention to the muddy wallow that is Ogof Cynnes and the fact that someone could actually smile in the bedding planes of Rhyd Sych amazes me. Both brought back memories.....as did many others. Thanks, Brendan

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Otter Hole Telephone Cable

With concern expressed during the annual leaders meeting at the age of the cable a trip to check was made before the start of the season. At the entrance, a quick investigation a few metres into the cave was performed to ensure there were no joins/junctions and the somewhat rotten free end that comes through the gate was cut, stripped and prepared. Measuring the cable at the entrance indicated a fault but that was not surprising.

The cable was visually checked through the entire entrance series (except where it is deeply buried) and in a few cases was moved away from the normal access route. The sump was behaving itself, open, all bar the pool which was about knee deep (but interesting to note that the sump mud is very sandy not silty any more - no more mud fights!).

At choke one the old junction box was cut out entirely and the cables tidied and coiled. The ends were cut, stripped, prepared and then sealed off. This meant the entrance section was isolated. Indeed the cable wire colours do change at this point!

Continuing into the cave out of choke one and over the traverses the cable was again visually checked to beyond the rescue dump. Back at the rescue dump we removed any excess slack we could from the cable by feeding and re-routing cable from as far back as the traverses to gain enough to pull the cable up into the rescue dump. This loop was then cut, isolating the section going on to choke 2 and the previous section leading back to choke 1. The wire ends were cut, stripped and prepared and the dump to choke 1 section tested. This proved that the Choke 1 to the Rescue Dump section was good.

We then headed out and collected the old junction ammo box (which had no handle left and was like carrying a large brick) on our way back through choke 1 and then other rubbish (old tape etc) was removed from the entrance series. Back at the surface, the entrance to choke 1 cable section was tested and found to be good.

So, we now know that the old cable (which has been in Otter for 30 years!!) from the entrance to the rescue dump is still usable. The newer 2 core cable, which is cable tied to the old cable between the rescue dump and part way through the entrance series, was not tested but has still been left in place. We may remove this once the old cable is fully tested and proven.

We have purchased some joint packs so we can rejoin the cable and terminate the cable for the telephone connections and be sure the connections are completely sealed and corrosion proof. We are sourcing suitable waterproof terminations/connections which will withstand the environment yet be easy to use (and maintain) in a rescue scenario.

Dave Appeling/Craig Cameron

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Gloucester Cave Rescue Group

Officers appointed at the 2009 AGM were:

Chairman: Paul Taylor

Secretary: Pete Turier

Treasurer: Liz Maisey

Information Officer: Gareth Jones

Communications Officer: Craig Cameron

Training Co-ordinator: Andy Harp

Equipment Officer: Ed Williams

Ordinary Members: Dave Appleing, Steve Tomalin, Jon Maisey, Nicky Bayley

Tribute was paid to Tim Gilson who retired as Treasurer during the year after more than ten years service.

Summer Holiday Trips

A few notes from other member clubs would be very welcome for inclusion in the next edition. [Editor]

Vercors

A party of 17 Hades and YSS members returned at the weekend from their rented gite at Lans en Vercors. Caving included three visits to Scialet Robin, the big discovery of 2006, and after route finding trips to each end, the newish through trip in the Christian Gathier system from Trou des Anciens to Scialet de Brudour.

Old favourites including the Gournier, Glaciere d'Autrans & Saintes de Glace were revisited and it is admitted with a degree of embarrassment that some of the younger members of the party were seen climbing, canyoning, on via ferratas and even engaging in a ping pong tournament in the basement of the gite.

There was a parapente flight during which the young lady concerned "pulled" the instructor but despite that triumph the high spot of the entire trip had to be the viewing of the video clip of Matt deciding to ignore the abseil rope and instead carefully aim himself at a rock for a crunching descent of a canyon. I suppose the low spot was the subsequent display of his bruises.

After his return he told us by e-mail - I'm uploading the infamous video to You've Been Framed. If the money comes in, it will pay for my shiny new SRT kit, so on that basis I would thoroughly recommend reckless toboggans to all!

Robin Weare

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Montenegro

Just a brief ***press release*** - 8 team members of a multi-club expedition comprising the Cerberus SS, Chelsea SS, Gloucester SS, RFDCC, UBSS, and Wessex CC have just returned from a successful two week expedition to Montenegro, in a twin-pronged project - firstly to revisit and push an undescended shaft in a cave, PT4, which at a depth of ~178m marked the previous end of a 2004 expedition by the Belgrade Caving Club SOB, and secondly to look at other entrances in the locality.

In total, 9 days were spent working in PT4. The undescended shaft was soon conquered (the final one in a series of enormous cascading "Yorkshire-style" pitches, altogether descending over 100m) which led to an area of choked boulders and mudbanks. A route underneath boulders, "Moonmilk Pitch", was found and negotiated, descending with a dip of about 50 degrees to a series of strike-aligned mud pots. The furthest was rigged and descended (Mud Slide Pitch), opening to another high clean-washed aven inlet. The water flowing from this had carved an impressive vadose trench; a mud-coated traverse and naturally-rigged pitch of about 15m emerged, after a short meander, to a three-way stream junction. Glorious horizontal progress with multiple inlets and some great Mendip-style cascades appeared to end at a large boulder choke (ceiling 16+m above!); a circuitous and necky route was forged and regained the streamway, descending to a dicey "free climbable" 11m waterfall (but soon rigged for safety!). Further streamway, with traversing, plunge pools and gours broke out into dark space (ceiling beyond reach of laser!) and a twin pitch waterfall totalling ~30m. Descent of this "White Line Waterfall Pitch" onto a spray-lashed ledge atop a Longwood/August style Swing Pitch Waterslide/Cascade (another 30m, approximately 70 degree dip!) closed down to a crabwalk and further slope, followed by more scalloped cascade-type wet climbs and a boulder choke. A route through was soon located (squeezy) and walking-size passage continued to an area of mud banks, steeply dropping into another vadose trench – the mud banks were in the region of 20m high with a huge black void visible ahead (sadly the 825 lumen lamp being tested during the expedition had run out of full battery power by this time... doh!). In true Ghar Parau tradition, the expedition ran out of time to go further as it already had more passage than time allowed to survey.

Although the survey data has not yet been processed it is estimated that the depth has doubled (probably to 400m or even slightly more) and the length has tripled. The cave PT4 is now well inside the top 10 deepest Montenegrin caves, with potential for about another 300m!

An ancient and/or gigantic river system appears to have formed the cave but we did not intercept it, despite the region suffering the worst summer rainstorms in "about 50 years". So it appears all that has so far been explored may just be an inlet to something bigger!!!

Film, pics and write-up should be delivered at this year's Hidden Earth, held at Churchill.

14 pitches and still going....

Chris Binding

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Dan yr Ogof

Following the flooding incident in March of last year a considerable amount of work has taken place to ensure that there is adequate provision within the cave for any party that may become stranded beyond the lakes.

A communications system and entrapment provisions including clothing, sleeping bags, food and cooking facilities have now been installed in Wigmore Hall. This location has been chosen as it is dry and draught free, the previous location in Boulder Chamber proving to be too wet and noisy in flood conditions.

A safe route from Boulder Chamber to Wigmore Hall has been formed and flagged with marker tape.

Please do not be tempted to open any of the drums out of curiosity, these are sealed airtight to protect the condition of the contents. The communications cabinet will signal an alarm in the showcave when the door is opened, so please do not open it unless in an emergency as this could trigger a false alarm.

Diary

August 29 th	Big Rescue Party, Penwyllt
August 30 th	OFD Columns Open Day
Sept 5 th	GCRG Rescue Practice
Sept 25-27 th	Hidden Earth, Churchill School
October 10 th	WBCRT Rescue Practice
December 6 th	GCRG Rescue Practice
December 12 th	WBCRT Rescue Practice

Cambrian Caving Council Officers

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