

PWLL DU CAVE MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minutes of the Meeting held at the Salisbury Community Hall, Govilon, on Sunday 21st June 2015 commencing at 10am.

Attendees:

Mick Day		Chairman
Fleur Loveridge	Oxford UCC/Red Rose CPC	Secretary
Sue Mabbett	South Wales C.C.	Permit Secretary & Club Rep
Ali Garman	Draenen Diggers	Club Rep & Fixed Aids Officer
John Williams	Oxford U. C. C.	Club Rep
Chris Seal	Chelsea S.S.	Club Rep
Joshua White	Aberystwyth C. C.	Club Rep
Peter Talling	University of Bristol S. S.	Club Rep
Richard Hill	Gagendor	Club Rep
Helen Stewart	Crodon C. C.	Club Rep
Dave Glover	Morganwg C. C.	Club Rep
Steve King	Shepton Mallet C. C.	
Barry Hill	Hereford C. C.	
Cristina Byrne	Natural Resources Wales	
Charles Bailey	Trustee	
Stuart France	C. C. C.	
Thomas Leung	Oxford U. C. C.	
Malcom Stewart		

1. Apologies

Apologies received from Peter Smith (Biological Recorder), Chris Densham (OUCC), Andrew Farrant (Geological Recorder), Tim Barter (WSG) and Spencer Drew (Treasurer).

2a. Minutes of the last Meetings (23rd November 2014)

The minutes were approved and then signed as a true and accurate record by the Chair.

It was commented that page numbers on the minutes would be beneficial. *Post meeting note: this has been actioned.*

2b. Matters arising not covered elsewhere in the Agenda

There were no matters arising which would not be covered later in the agenda.

3. Officers Reports

a) Secretary

A recent bereavement prevented the Secretary from submitting a written report. A verbal report was given which is summarised below.

i) Cambrian CC interactions. As discussed at the last meeting FL has replied to the letter previously received from CCC. FL also attended the CCC AGM in North Wales. A rather unprofessional report on the activities of the PDCMG was submitted by the CCC Conservation Officer which was challenged both verbally

and by submission of a formal report. Both reports are appended to the minutes. It was proposed at the meeting that the BCA C&A officer be invited to mediate between the differences of opinion of the PDCMG and the CCC. This proposal required discussed with the group (see below). Additionally, in the interim a further letter to the PDCMG Chair was received from the CCC (attached). This mostly concerned the issues mentioned above and is thus covered by discussion of these points (see below).

ii) The BCA AGM was held the previous weekend. The Secretary had been intending to attend to obtain an update on the position with respect to CRoW. However, due to the bereavement she was unable to. The minutes were not yet available, but the officers reports indicated that a route of diplomacy was being taking and that no changes were anticipated in the immediate, or possibly mid-term future.

iii) Section 26 Directions. Following the last meeting CBr had provided some information of this route. However, given the BCA situation, it was agreed to not act on this topic further at present. FL to circulate information following the meeting.

iv) Drws Cefn License. This had been largely drafted by not submitted at the time of the meeting.

v) Discussion of matters arising.

SF: there is a demand for use of Drws Cefn, but the opportunity for access was not taken six years ago.

FL: but the landowner's views must be considered.

CS: is pro mediation as a significant minority were against the decision when made six years ago.

CBa: reiterated the importance of the landowners wishes.

SF: highlighted that young cavers from BCC were using the entrance. However, that not many people were using it.

SM: suggested that the CCC constitution did not permit interference in PDCMG affairs and also enshrined the principal of respecting landowner rights.

RH: any mediation should be about CCC and PDCMG coming to an agreement, not necessarily about changing any outcomes.

CS: suggested that the CCC writing letters is not interference.

AG: pointed out that the issue with the CCC letters is more that they are partisan, not professional and in many places contain factual inaccuracies.

AG: highlighted that there was a huge debate and mediation in 2009. That there was a process of democracy, but since then there has been a semi-deliberate campaign to place roadblocks in the way and slow down the process.

SM: suggested that we need to both vote on the mediation issue and on continuing with the closure as per the landowners wishes.

CS: agreed that we needed to vote on the matter (i.e the mediation).

Deleted: Drws Cefn needed to be shut

FL: reiterated point made at the CCC AGM that she was willing to talk to the BCA C&A officer.

SM: good to send the message to the BCA that landowners wishes need to be respected.

SF: the PDCMG can't act against the landowners wishes, but they could suggest a gate and monitored access.

CBr: asked whether, if the landowner won't change his mind, then will the CCC go along with this outcome?

SF: yes they would.

CBA: asked that that the CCC both collectively and as individuals need to cease to undermine the process.

AG: if the PDCMG does not accept mediation it will be criticised. However, it is actually half a dozen individuals with whom the mediation needs to occur.

DG: recognition that it would be useful to hear from the landowner, whilst not wanting to put him in a difficult position.

SM proposed that: "we proceed with closing Drws Cefn to meet the landowners wishes; that mediation as requested by CCC proceeds as long as no proviso that current closure is stopped by this mediation" and votes were cast in favour 10-0.

Membership of any mediation party was discussed separately and a 2+2+BCA approach was suggested. It was agreed that CBA and FL are to represent the PDCMG.

CBr summarised the situation with respect to Section 26 and CRoW. Drws Cefn is on CRoW land, so if there was a change in the interpretation of CRoW to include caving that a section 26 could be submitted. This could lead to anything from a ban to a gate with a key; there are many options. However, there is no update from Natural England with respect to their thinking on CRoW. It was agreed to park the issue to await results from further discussions between the BCA and NE.

It was also discussed whether by closing Drws Cefn there were any safety issues raised or other liability (e.g. by delaying the call-out for a rescue). However, not conclusion was reached on this subject.

b) Treasurer

The treasurer sent his apologies, but had circulated a report (attached). The TBC item on the accounts is for a key for Dudley Caving Club.

The cost of the hall hire for the current meeting was not yet in the accounts as had not be submitted by FL. The cost of the meeting room for the last meeting was within the CHECC organisation and did not cost PDCMG anything.

c) Permit Secretary/Access Officer

The Permit Secretary presented the caver data up to June 2015 along with a brief report (pasted below):

PDCMG Access Officer 's Report June 2015

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Numbers entering Ogof Draenen spiked for the period Nov 2014 to June 2015,(~ 40 more cavers) this is due to CHECC event last November. These are tabulated below with previous year's data.

	Jan-15	Feb-15	Mar-15	Apr-15	May-15	Jun 15
Parties	10	1	6	10	4	1
Persons	21	5	22	37	12	2
	Jul-15	Aug-15	Sep-15	Oct-15	Nov-14	Dec-14
Parties	0	0	0	0	13	10
Persons	0	0	0	0	63	36

	Jan-14	Feb-14	Mar-14	Apr-14	May-14	Jun-14
Parties	7	3	6	5	7	7
Persons	25	12	22	25	26	24
	Jul-14	Aug-14	Sep-14	Oct-14	Nov-13	Dec-13
Parties	5	3	5	5	11	5
Persons	16	13	19	23	46	18

On other news NRW (CCW) have kindly supplied use with a new stock of log sheets which are now in the cave. Dudley Caving Club has received a permanent key on receipt of required donation.

I have had no reports of lock problems in last six months, but if anyone does find padlock becoming stiff then please let me know as I do have a spare to allow the padlock to be cleaned.

Sue Mabbett
Jun 2015

It was reported that most access continued to be by permanent key holder clubs.

d) Conservation Officer

No report.

e) Survey Secretary

No report.

f) Survey Recorder

No report.

g) Biological Recorder

No report; the biological recorder sent his apologies.

h) Geological Recorder.

No report; the geological record sent his apologies.

i) Fixed Aids Officer

The fixed aids officer gave a verbal report. Due to severe illness the inspection for this summer had not yet been completed. As the inspection also includes replacement of ropes the officer wished to do this himself and it was anticipated

to occur within the next two months. The rope lengths are known, but require purchasing first.

4. Election of Officers/Recorders

- a) Secretary. FL agreed to stand again and was elected unopposed.
- b) Treasurer. SD has indicated his willingness to stand again and was elected unopposed.
- c) Permit Secretary/Access Officer. SM agreed to stand again and was elected unopposed.
- d) Conservation Officer. As HP continues to be in Norway, and in the absence of other candidates, JW agreed to stand as conservation officer to act in the role before and after a years' travelling. A co-option may be required in the interim period. Elected unopposed.
- e) Survey Secretary. It was assumed that JP would stand again; he was elected unopposed.
- f) Survey Recorder. It was assumed that JS would stand again; he was elected unopposed.
- g) Biological Recorder. It was assumed that PS would stand again; he was elected unopposed.
- h) Geological Recorder. It was assumed that AF would stand again; he was elected unopposed.
- i) Fixed Aids Officer. AG agreed to stand again and was elected unopposed.

5. Other Group Business

N/A

6. Applications for membership

Hereford CC had requested membership. There had been some confusion over whether they were previously members, but it was concluded that they were only in the past a permanent key holder. Their membership was agreed unanimously.

7. Applications to become keyholders

None.

8. AOB

SF raised the question surrounding the PDCMG's position on other digs on the mountainside. While the PDCMG's constitutional remit covers the catchment, the legal access agreement relates to land owned by Pwll Ddu Conservation Ltd. For digs on other land, landowner consent is always advised. The PDCMG could help with brokering consent. Legal requirements regarding digging in SSSIs should also be met. Consents here must be applied for by the landowner. CCC guidance will be forthcoming on the subject.

AG raised a forthcoming stretcher rescue practice to be held in the entrance series. He is to write an email for forwarding to the landowner to notify them to prevent any undue concern.

Next meeting: Sunday 22nd November 2015.

Meeting closed at 12.08am

Attachments:

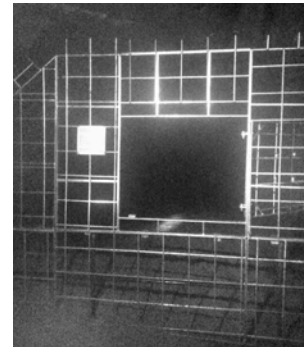
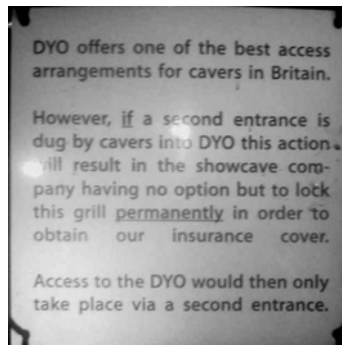
- 1. extract from CCC Conservation Officer Report to CCC 2015 AGM**
- 2. report submitted to CCC 2015 AGM by Secretary**
- 3. letter from CCC to PDCMG Chair**
- 4. Treasurers report**

CAVE MANAGEMENT COMMITTEES

I am very grateful for the efforts of many others in managing our biggest and best caves. It is a massive contribution by so many people to look after them so well.

The arrangements at OFD and new access system into OFD1 following SWCC's land purchase are working well. Further east, the MLCMAC has also had a quiet year with nothing more to contend with than a few fallen boulders coming from various cliffs above cave entrances or footpaths. OFDCMC and MLCMAC are NRW committees and we are grateful to Richard Preece and his professional staff in Abergavenny for their leadership with cave management over many years. We also give Richard Preece our best wishes for the future on leaving NRW in March.

The new DYO committee is now running smoothly although the cave landowner is understandably concerned about activity in 2014 with regard to upland cave digs. A new grille and a notice about cave access have appeared recently at the DYO lakes.



PDCMG's self-belief remains inversely proportional to their comprehension of what caving is all about. They are still intent on closing the Drws Cefn entrance as soon as they have official 'bat consent' on the grounds that the landowner now wishes it closed having been persuaded by them that caving is harmful to bats. This is not a view shared by CCC officers and a letter was written to PDCMG accordingly. Some bat data loggers placed by PDCMG were stolen during the past year, but there have been no more lock/gate thefts. Drws Cefn is on CRoW Access Land and given the pro-CRoW referendum result in BCA, I feel that it is pity that no fresh attempt was made to compromise, such as fitting a gate like the one at the first entrance. The group is said to be bracing itself for the inevitable backlash that closing Drws Cefn may imply. Let's hope that PDCMG's political talent does not run to closing the whole of Ogof Draenen.

LOOKING BACK AND FORWARD

I have had an interesting first year in this role and it has taken up a lot more of my time and broadened my understanding in ways that I did not imagine at the outset. I could have said more in this report, but it is long enough already, so apologies if I have missed out a topic of greater interest to you.

The 2015 focus has been on better access and this effort should be continued. But a greater effort needs to go into cave conservation from here onwards, which is far more complex to plan and deliver successfully. We need to study the Derbyshire Caving Association's flagship methods, then begin to catch up. It is not something to attempt alone. We will need a whole team for advancing this, and thus unity amongst ourselves, along with winning the hearts and minds of others to uphold our aims.

I would like to thank my fellow officers on our Council for their support, the wider help and encouragement, and I am willing to be nominated in this role for a further year.

Stuart France

PDCMG Report to the CCC AGM Sunday 15th March 2015

Since the last CCC AGM there have been two PDCMG meetings, one in June and one in November.

In respect of access, we continue to have good relations with the landowner. This is despite some individuals in our community doing their best to disrupt this key relationship by making obvious use of Drws Cefn. Blatant breaching of access agreements only runs the risk of making access conditions less favourable in the future, not more favourable. It is in no one's interest to annoy the landowners in this situation.

During ongoing discussions with the landowner about these issues, he has reiterated clearly his desire to see the closure of Drws Cefn. This is not related specifically to the proposition that caving is harmful to bats as has been suggested, but reflects two factors: 1) the landowner's deep regard for conservation in the general sense and 2) the fact that the entrance was dug without his consent and the intimidation he received from the diggers and their associates following its opening. However, no closure can be made without completion of the necessary ecological licencing paperwork, and this is currently ongoing. Further ecological survey work has been carried out within the cave as part of the licencing process. This has been hindered by the disappearance of two bat loggers from the Drws Cefn entrance. Despite pleas for their return, nothing has been forthcoming.

We are aware that not all of the officers of the CCC agree with the decisions taken by the PDCMG with respect to Drws Cefn, especially given their letter on the subject received last year. At the last PDCMG meeting it was commented that the CCC are operating very close to the limit of their constitutional remit in this respect. Nonetheless, we have written in response to the CCC and addressed the points they raise.

The PDCMG has also had extensive discussions in relation to the recent CRoW debates and the BCA poll held at the end of last year. At the November meetings some very useful discussions were held with NRW regarding both SSSI status, and the potential for use of Section 26 should the law regarding CRoW be re-interpreted more favourably with respect to caving. It was agreed that the group and NRW would engage in further fact finding regarding the use of Section 26 so that any decisions regarding potential applications could be discussed at the next meeting this coming June.

On other matters, caver numbers remain relatively steady with respect to the longer term position. It is likely that some of the fixed aids will be replaced as part of the next inspection cycle and some work has been carried out on the entrance scaffold. Ecological surveys for stygobites continue by Lee Knight et al., with only the War of the Worlds streamways remaining to be sampled. We are also in the process of reviewing our conservation plan and considering whether any more formal cave monitoring programmes should be carried out.

F Loveridge,

Hon Sec, 15th March 2015.

CAMBRIAN CAVING COUNCIL

Representing Caving in Wales and the Marches

Please reply to:

Stuart France

The Smithy

Tretower

Crickhowell

NP8 1RD

Home Tel: 01874 730527

Mobile Tel: 07740 871845

Office Tel: 01495 321569

Email: ccc@linetop.co.uk

Mr Mick Day
Chairman, Pwll Du Cave Management Group
Bryn Aur, Brecon Road
Penycae
Swansea SA9 1FA

31 May 2015

Dear Mick

WITHOUT PREJUDICE

At our March AGM there was a motion from a member club, which was passed, to ask the BCA to mediate between PDCMG and this Council to resolve our concerns about the way your group has been handling the issues around the Ogof Drws Cefn entrance to Ogof Draenen. Andrew Hinde, the BCA Conservation Officer, has now agreed to assist in this, but I have received no communication whatever from your side (i.e. Fleur Loveridge) despite requests that you enter into discussions with us.

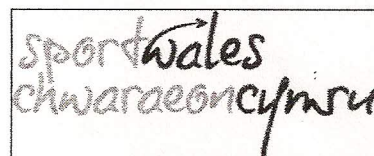
As I understand matters, Drws Cefn is a natural cave feature, explored initially when the land was in the ownership of the Coal Authority, comprising a rift that led to a narrow level passage. This was subsequently widened over a distance of 5-10m to reach open passages at the end of which a final blockage of about a metre was passed to reach a part of Ogof Draenen. This all became known in about 2009 and the new landowner Pwlldu Conservation Ltd was at that time willing to go along with any reasonable access or closure request as determined in a fair manner by cavers via your cave management committee. The Drws Cefn cave is on CRoW Access Land which it is not scheduled as SSSI or archaeological. Your committee's argument since that time has been that this entrance is a threat to the proper conservation of Ogof Draenen, that it will impact on bat life, and so it should be closed, and to that end you have conducted research into bats to obtain legal consent for ground works. Others take the view that an awkward entrance like this presents no threat. Also, cavers and bats are sharing cave access at this entrance, and in many other caves, without any harm arising, so this is no reason why entrances cannot remain in use.

/continued



British Caving Association Regional Body

Supported by Sport Wales



We do not accept your assertion that the landowner is driving this. The landowner told me that he was open to persuasion but would likely wish to follow the position determined in your committee. The driver therefore is your committee, and our view is that you are driving in completely the wrong direction, against cavers' interests. The implication of your argument is that if entering a cave by one fairly ordinary route can result in harm within that cave, then all ordinary entrances into all caves would pose similar risks. Likewise, if cave visits via Drws Cefn are being said to put the bats at risk then that idea could be generalised even though it is utter nonsense.

In the PDCMG Constitution, you claim to control caving over a wide area which includes the Bloreng; to promote caving, conservation and exploration; to control access; to make conservation a primary concern; and to advise cavers about responsible access and cave use.

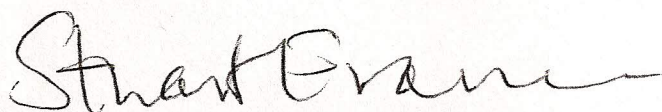
I understand that key members of your committee have been carrying out a major cave dig called Ogof Cwmwl Ddu (sic) plus another nearby dig within the Bloreng SSSI on land owned by the hang gliding club at the very same time as these same people have deprecating the Drws Cefn entrance and been working on closing it. But I have not approached the Bloreng landowner nor Natural Resources Wales yet so I do not know if permission was given. Without conservation consent, what these cavers have done within this SSSI breaches its PDO list comprehensively. I have photographs of scaffolding, command wires, and spoil heaps with very nice stal in it. This is a determined piece of work which must have involved many visits to this site.

I shall ask about these digging activities and consent for them at the June PDCMG meeting. One purpose of this letter is to put you on notice that if you do not answer me then I will say that fair warning of the subject matter and reasonable time to prepare your answers was given. I enclose extracts of the Bristol Exploration Club website to appraise you of background. I assume these to be broadly truthful if somewhat colourful accounts. I have printed the Bloreng SSSI boundary map and its PDO list for you as well. Andrew Hinde of BCA already has the same documents.

It is too early to say how I would see all of this best resolved, but certainly not in the Courts. Given where we find ourselves now after actions that cannot be undone, the only positive way forward is to seek formal compromise agreements between the various Ogof Draenen stakeholders focusing on the central idea that cave exploration is often beneficial in terms of expanding scientific interest, and acknowledging that conservation is not prejudiced by consented and responsibly run discovery activities, and ensuring by some new approach that exactly this will be achieved in the future.

Kindly acknowledge receipt of this letter promptly by telephone. I am willing to discuss any of its subject matter with you on a without-prejudice basis.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Stuart France', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Stuart France
CCC Access/Conservation Officer

Pwll Du Cave Management Group

Income And Expenditure Account For the Year Ended 31st May 2015

	Period ending 31/05/15		Period ending 31/05/14		Period ending 31/05/13	
	£	£	£	£	£	£
Income:						
Donations:						
SWCC		0.00		80.00		0.00
F Loveridge		0.00		48.00		0.00
Cwmbran CC		0.00		20.00		20.00
S Drew		0.00		20.00		0.00
Wild Places Publishing		0.00		20.00		0.00
BEC		0.00		20.00		0.00
Shepton Mallet CC		0.00		20.00		0.00
CSS		0.00		0.00		20.00
Devon SS		0.00		0.00		20.00
Gagendor		0.00		0.00		20.00
Deven SS		0.00		0.00		20.00
York Un CC		0.00		0.00		10.00
OUCC		50.00		0.00		0.00
UBSS		30.00		0.00		0.00
TBC		20.00		0.00		0.00
Refund From CCC (Insurance)		50.00		50.00		50.00
Refund From CCC (Hall hire)		0.00		76.00		0.00
Bank Interest:		0.00		0.00		0.00
		150.00		354.00		160.00
Expenditure:						
New lock and Keys	0.00		(389.82)		(62.40)	
BCA Insurance	(50.00)		(50.00)		(50.00)	
Llanelly Hall Hire	0.00		(48.00)		(28.00)	
Glo-tape	0.00		0.00		0.00	
Administration costs	0.00		0.00		0.00	
		(50.00)		(487.82)		(140.40)
(Deficit) of Income Over Expenditure		100.00		(133.82)		19.60

Notes to the above for the year ending 31st May 2015

	2015	2014	2013
The closing balance actually requests the following:			
Balance in current A/c	407.61	307.61	441.43
Balance in Reserve A/c	0.10	0.10	0.10
Total Funds	407.71	307.71	441.53

Sorry the for incomplete donation list but will reissue narrative on the £20 when further information arrives.

Many thanks to all the clubs that donated monies in the past year (which may include key replacement costs)

Spencer Drew ACA DipPFS BSc
Treasurer
(Spencer.Drew@Ntlworld.com)