

Pwll Du Cave Management Group

Minutes of the meeting held via Zoom on Sunday 21st June 2022 starting at 7.30pm.

Present

Les Williams (LW)	Chair
Sue Mabbett (SM)	Secretary
Dan Thorne (DT)	Permit Secretary
Ali Garman (AG)	Fixed Aids / Draenen Diggers
Rich Smith (RS)	Webmaster / BEC
John Stevens (JS)	Survey Officer
Nick De Gare Pitt (NGP)	Brynmawr CC
Barry Hill (BH)	Hereford CC
Chris Seal (CS)	Chelsea SS
Martin Hoff (MH)	South Wales CC
Rich Hill (RH)	Gagendor
Frank Tully (FT)	Wessex CC
Steve King (SK)	Shepton Mallet CC
Stuart France (SF)	Cambrian CC (CCC Conservation Officer)
Chris Binding	Independent Observer
Mike Moxen	MCG Observer

Apologies

Clive Owen, Treasurer/ UBSS; Chris Howes, Morgannwg CC; Chris Densham, Trustee / OUCC
Peter Smith, Biological Recorder, and Josh White (JW), Conservation officer / Aberystwyth (JW apology came via e-mail at end of meeting)

1. Pre-meeting and Opening Remarks

LW was delayed so meeting commenced with SF summarising some caver data he had collected from his caver monitors. Some key points from SF: Data were last collected in Feb 2022 and data presented were affected by Covid restrictions. The footfall had shifted from approximately 50/50 pre-Covid between the no.1 entrance and Nunnery to 40/60 since Covid which means the Nunnery is now the preferred entrance. There were ~ 10 trips per month, most cavers entering on Saturday. There were < 20 trips in any month. SF and DT will liaise to review and combine data from caver loggers and log book to generate a report to be sent out after the meeting.

LW joined the meeting and apologised for lateness due to connection problems. LW welcomed everyone present, and the meeting officially started.

2. Minutes from Previous Meeting On 01 Dec 2021

2a. Approval of Minutes from last meeting

SM thanked SK for his diligence in reviewing the minutes and sending corrections in, SK was the only person to identify corrections. No further corrections were identified.

Minutes to be approved as true record of the meeting, proposed by SK and seconded by AG. All present accepted the minutes as true record, there were no abstentions and no votes against.

As in June 2021 SM will arrange for signature from LW on these minutes to confirm true record.

2b. Matters Arising from the Minutes not covered elsewhere in the Agenda

No matter arising that will not be covered elsewhere in the agenda.

3. Updates on Key Activities since the General Meeting in Dec 2021

3a New Entrance Policy –

CS apologised for missing the meeting in Dec he had to go to France for a family funeral and wasn't back in time for the meeting in Dec 2021. SM had sent out a follow up e-mail after the last meeting requesting again that all PDCMG members reviewed the proposed New Entrance Policy. CS had very little response to the e-mail from December 2021, CS believed 4 or 5 Clubs had returned comments to him overall.

CS shared his screen so we could all see the proposed new entrance policy as below, some changes had been made prior to the meeting in December 2021, these were discussed at that meeting:

Draft Policy (as June 2022) – as circulated in Dec 2021 to PDCMG clubs / CCC for comment, discussion at their committees.

=====

Ogof Draenen is one of the largest cave systems in the UK and may warrant more entrances to facilitate further exploration, discovery or research. At the same time there is a need to consider many other factors before adopting any entrance as a recommended route. This policy states PDCMG's approach to adopting any new or additional entrance as one that the PDCMG helps manage or recommends for use.

Each entrance will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the PDCMG Committee and a recommendation will be put forward to the PDCMG member clubs for a **final** vote (e.g. at a general meeting, or EGM). The PDCMG Committee's recommendation will be based on consideration of the following factors,

- location in relationship to surface features and entrance accessibility.
- location inside the cave in relationship to other entrances.
- conservation needs in respect of the area inside the cave that the entrance facilitates access to.
- the benefits of the entrance to promote further exploration, surveying, discovery and other research activities
- other potential benefits or detriments of the entrance (e.g. loss of wilderness)
- the views of the landowner(s) if known on which the entrance is located.

The Committee may announce an interim policy on a new entrance until a vote has taken place. The membership **final** vote shall take place on or before the next scheduled PDCMG meeting. The PDCMG Committee will publish its recommendation to member clubs ahead of that vote along with the entrance proponents' response and reasoning for proposing the entrance. Voting is based on 1 vote per PDCMG member club.

Should an entrance be recommended and/or accepted for adoption, the PDCMG will approach the landowner(s) where necessary and if applicable any regulatory body for permissions.

Should PDCMG membership vote not to adopt an entrance, then PDCMG will request that its membership and the wider caving community do not use that entrance. It does not automatically follow that an unadopted entrance will be closed by PDCMG; there could be good reasons why an entrance must remain open, in which case PDCMG will look at what alternative measures can be taken to discourage its use (e.g. remove / not support fixed aids on that route). Ultimately any decision to close an entrance lies with the landowner(s) and/or a regulatory body. PDCMG will if requested advise landowner(s) and if applicable regulatory bodies on the best options for unadopted entrances.

The decision on whether any adopted entrance needs a gate / barrier will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Should a gate be required then access will be granted to all bona fide cavers as per current access conditions.

On the version sent for comment in Dec 2021, CS had received 2 comments / clarifications. These were:

1. The word 'Club' is an acceptable word to describe the member caving groups of PDCMG.
2. Remove the word 'final' from 'final vote', as final is superfluous and not required.

CS reported in total only 4 -5 Clubs had sent in any comments / confirmation of acceptance.

SF commented if an entrance is used by bats it is illegal to close the entrance. This is covered by the proposed policy. It states PDCMG membership vote not to adopt an entrance... It does not automatically follow that an unadopted entrance will be closed by PDCMG; there could be good reasons why an entrance must remain open... Regulatory bodies. No further detail specific to bats is required. There were further comments from JS; JS believed if the entrance was on open access land the entrance has to be permitted, and in this case it would not just be land owner or committee who makes the decision, and secondly if the entrance is being used by bats it could not be closed.

In response LW said this was a policy and extensive wording is not wanted in a policy, as it is a high level document. In response to both these comments the proposed policy states it will consult the necessary regulatory bodies and it does recognise there maybe reasons why an entrance cannot be closed even if it is not adopted. SM commented as a policy it is a high level document and should be short, under an A4 page of paper.

In event of an entrance review, the decision to adopt or not adopt will be made in consultation with the PDCMG members. The detail that matters can be discussed at that time.

Those present believed this policy as above (with the final removed from final vote) is ready to go forward to an EGM. The constitutional requirements for calling an AGM were checked. An EGM can be called by a General Meeting.

Therefore CS (CSS) proposed the calling of an EGM, RH (Gagendor) seconded this proposal, all those present voted for the EGM to be called to accept the new entrance policy. It was agreed this will be a face to face meeting, with Club representatives voting in person.

After a short discussion it was decided to call the EGM after the summer holiday period, aiming at mid-September allowing Clubs time to discuss at a committee meeting before the EGM.

3b Progress on updating Access Agreement including setting up Ltd Company

Earlier this week two of the proposed directors CS and Chris Densham had met with Ursula Collie (UC), LW and SM to discuss the proposal to set up a Company Limited by Guarantee (CLG) and the activities that will be required for us to set this up. SM asked LW to summarise the meeting with any feedback he had from UC. LW had not received any feedback but he summarised the discussions at this meeting.

UC advised on legal requirements, procedures and processes for setting up a CLG, those present at the meeting agreed that the model used by Charterhouse CC in the Mendips was a good model on which to base our planned set up on. The reason for moving to a CLG was to limit the liabilities of the trustees. We were happy with the advice received from UC. LW proposed we set up a small sub-committee to progress with the activities required to set up the CLG and that the sub-committee came back to the group with a proposal on a way forward.

UC advised we would require new accounts as a company, each of the Member Clubs of PDCMG would have a shareholding and we would have a director and secretary.

SF commented a CLG does not have shareholders, this being the point, that there is no share or value to the company. SM said she may have used a wrong term by 'shareholders', but UC proposed the Member Clubs were part of the set up. SF suggested if we deviated from a standard set up, which costs £50, then in his opinion it could lead to unnecessary grief, complications and additional costs. SF stated the directors would be in complete control and we would have to trust them. They would decide if the directors changed or not.

CS commented UC had put forward a proposal, and this conflicts with comments from SF. SF commented you cannot absolve yourself from stupidity, those present know that gross negligence still applies.

LW and SM confirmed we wished to use the principle of the system used by Charterhouse CC. SF commented this was set up a long time ago. LW commented we need written advice so a small subcommittee can bring a proposal to a future PDCMG meeting. SM proposed this small sub-committee consisted of the chairman (LW), secretary (SM), treasurer (CO) and the three proposed Directors (CS, CD, and TL). No-one objected to this proposal of the sub-committee therefore this group will work together to progress the matter.

3c Update on Request for Additional Access for

- i) Cave Leader Assessments and Training**
- ii) Access for Bat Surveys via alternative entrances.**

SM had sent 2 to 3 emails and a text message since last December with no response, this included the offer of additional information as offered by RH at the last meeting. SM managed to speak to Ann (wife of landowner) on the phone in the last week. The landowner was consulting their insurers and hoped to get back to us in a week's time. SM has been concerned as to whether we had upset the landowner or if there were other issues, but this was not the case.

On the issue of access for Cave Leader Assessments and Training, RH asked if he could speak directly to the landowner. Those present at the meeting summarised the situation for other large caves in South Wales. Those at the meeting confirmed the caves under the control of the Mynydd Llangatwg Committee, including Agen Allwedd, do permit cave leader assessment and training; however it is not permitted in Ogof Ffynnon Ddu in the Swansea valley.

CB commented in the Zoom chat on the general situation, and the status for Wookey Hole caves in Somerset, these comments are copied below:

If it's of interest/relevance: on the topic of cave access for training/assessments, it's perhaps worth mentioning that people engaged in the BCA's own scheme for professional leadership should arguably have unfettered access (unless the landowner specifically vetoes it) on the default basis that such users are top shelf bona fide cavers. e.g. at Wookey Hole Caves we have an understanding that CICs/trainers/assessment group(s) are exceptionally welcome to utilise the cave for such purposes..... Wookey has hosted training/assessment at L1, L2 and CIC levels.

CB was thanked for providing this supporting information.

DT had spoken to Ann recently when visiting the cave, discussing general access to Ogof Draenen, as he is permit secretary. DT is planning to visit Ogof Draenen this week, so if he sees the landowner (Ann or Peter), he would raise general access issues.

4 Officers Reports

4a. Secretary

I have completed the actions from last meeting relating to the new entrance policy, setting up a Company Limited by Guarantee for a new access agreement and additional access requests, and all are covered in section 3 above. I have received no new correspondence and I have forward enquiries to applicable committee members as required. I sent copies of the last meeting minutes to the landowner.

4b. Treasurer

CO had sent apologies for this meeting. CO's treasurers report was circulated prior to the meeting and is copied below.

PDCMG Treasurer's AGM Report 19 June 2022

There have been 4 transactions on the account since the last meeting. Here is a summary:

Date	Description	Paid in	Paid out	Balance
20 Jun 2021	Balance carried forward			£585.17
6 Jan 2022	Donation from UBSS	£10		£595.17
31 Jan 2022	Donation from Morgannwg CC	£50		£645.17
15 Feb 2022	Gate repairs, Dan Thorne		£132.98	£512.19
16 May 2022	Donation from Dudley CC	£50		£562.19

The balance in the account currently stands at £562.19 (Jun 2021 £585.17). Whilst this small decrease in funds held is not a problem, donations are always welcome. The easiest way to pay in to the PDCMG account is by bank transfer. The account details are:

Pwll Du Cave Management Group
52-21-07
36707473

Clive Owen

4c. Permit Secretary

DT reported he had not had chance to collect data but he is planning to go down next Tuesday to collect data. The entrance gate was now fixed and with a padlock in place. There is steady stream of keys going in and out, a number of keys were being collected directly from DT's home. Since last meeting there had been some discussion regarding the £10 deposit as a number of people no longer have cheque books, particularly students from student caving clubs. It was proposed by DT to drop the £10 cheque deposit, but instead charge for a replacement key, currently the cost is £15; in the event the key is lost. It is accepted most folk are honest. Everyone agreed to drop the £10 deposit and to replace it with a requirement to charge to replace the key if lost.

JS suggested a Draenen key was kept at Whitewalls, the CSS cottage, to be lent to cavers staying at Whitewalls. The overall objective for the locked gate is to keep non-cavers out, but let cavers in therefore we should facilitate access for cavers. Those present accepted the concept that a Draenen key could be kept at Caving Club Cottages for the purpose of lending out to 'bona fide cavers' (the term for cavers permitted access in the access licence). SM needs to check the Access Licence to confirm there is no restriction on the control of keys. If there is no restriction then CSS may hold a Draenen key for the purpose of it being lent out to visiting caving clubs. This concept also applies to other caving clubs with cottages if they apply for a 'loan key'. In conclusion, it was agreed by all, a Draenen key may be held by caving clubs to be lent out to visiting caving clubs.

Action DT to send a summary of cover data collected to SM for circulation to PDCMG members.

The data below was sent to SM post the meeting. The 2021 data with exception of Dec 2021 was presented in PDCMG meeting minutes of Dec 2021.

2021	Jan-21	Feb-21	Mar-21	Apr-21	May-21	Jun-21	Jul-21	Aug-21	Sep-21	Oct-21	Nov-21	Dec-21	Total
	Log Book stolen no data												
Partys							5	4	3	4	1	7	24
Persons							13	10	12	6	2	23	66
2022	Jan-22	Feb-22	Mar-22	Apr-22	May-22	Jun-22	Jul-22	Aug-22	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Total
Partys	8	4	2	5	6								25
Persons	31	20	10	12	15								88

Action SM. to check the access licence to confirm there is no restriction on the control of keys for Ogof Draenen.

4d. Conservation Officer

JW sent apologies via e-mail just at end of meeting. JW's report is "I had no report to add anyway with no information or changes sent to me since the last meeting."

4e. Survey Secretary

JS reported as the last meeting confirmed there is no archive data to pass. No new data has been submitted therefore currently it is a 'null job'. Nothing further to report.

4f. Biological Recorder

PS was unable to attend the meeting as he was ill with Covid. The report he sent before the meeting is copied below:

PDCMG – Biological Recorder report June 2022

Since the last meeting on 30 June 2021, the only new biological records I have received are reports from Stuart France of his casual sightings of bats. Stuart also provided me with a report of his analysis of his records of bat activity during winters 2019-20 and 2020-21 from his passive ultrasound detectors that he has deployed in various locations within Ogof Draenen. Stuart's records reaffirm the importance of the Drws Cefn and the Nunnery entrances to bats. While the records show these entrances are well used by lesser horseshoe bats, in the last year Stuart has also noticed about a half dozen greater horseshoe bats roosting in Nunnery Passage and another one in Megadrive. He has also observed a few non-horseshoe bats in Nunnery Passage. Both the Drws Cefn entrance and the Nunnery entrance into Ogof Draenen must be kept open for flight access by bats to comply with wildlife legislation under which it is an offence to obstruct entrances used by bats to access their roosts. Alterations restricting either entrance way would require licensing by NRW.

Dr Peter G Smith Biological Recorder, PDCMG, 16 June 2022

SF added to the report above:

SF commented both the Nunnery and Drws Cefn entrances are in use by bats. On re-opening the Nunnery entrance in 2015 (+/- 1 year) 8 bats were observed using the entrance, in 2022 > 100 bats observed, this included a few Greater Horseshoe bats. The bats are moving into the Nunnery but roosting ~ 30 m down the passage away from the entrance and where it is larger so safely away from caverns.

Bats have been observed in Megadrive. SF has also seen bats near the Snowball.

It was noted Goatchurch Cavern in the Mendips a heavily used cave also has increasing bat numbers. JS commented that number of bats in Drws Cefn is not changing.

4g. Geological Recorder

No geological recorder in post, no geological reports received. SF suggested that whoever goes under the pseudonym *graiwen* (or similar) may be willing to become the Geological recorder. SF is willing to contact him. Those present agreed for SF to contact him

4h. Fixed Aids Officer

AG reported all fixed aid checks are up to date and in good order. The next checks are due in Dec 2022. There have been no reported problems.

5. Applications for Membership and / or Key Holders

No applications had been received for membership of PDCMG

6. Applications to become Key Holders

No application to become key holders.

7. Any Other Business

a) BH for many years has made stainless steel ladders at work for Ogof Draenen and Daren Cilau using a special jig. As BH has now retired he wishes to find a suitable home for this jig so ladders can be made in future. After short discussion it was proposed the CSS cottage was best location for the jig. BH and CS agreed to sort outside the meeting.

b) CS raised on behalf of C Densham, concerns over the state of the hillside at the Nunnery Entrance. There were reports of rubble moving downhill. DT and SF both commented they believed the entrance looked acceptable from outside but agreed longer term we need to consider stabilising the entrance area. Currently no other entrances are officially adopted so we need to discuss the matter with the landowner. DT and RH agreed to chat with the landowner on their visit to Ogof Draenen next week (if the landowner was available).

Action DT and RH to talk to landowner.

8. Date of Next Meeting

The date of next General Meeting was agreed to be Tuesday 29th Nov 2022 at 8.00pm via Zoom.

It was proposed to call the EGM in mid-September dependent on what happened with the BCA Hidden Earth Conference. This will be a face to face meeting, and the secretary (SM) will call this meeting at a suitable date, in September. Sufficient notice is required to allow Caving Club committees to discuss the proposal.

LW thanked everyone for giving up their time and attending.
Meeting closed 9.30pm.