

Pwll Du Cave Management Group

Minutes of the meeting held via Zoom on Tuesday 27th June 2023 starting at 7.30pm.

Present:

| | |
|----------------------|---|
| Les Williams (LW) | Chair |
| Sue Mabbett (SM) | Secretary |
| Josh White (JW) | Conservation Officer / Aberystwyth |
| Dan Thorne (DT) | Permit Secretary / Gagendor after RH left |
| Ali Garman (AG) | Fixed Aids / Draenen Diggers |
| Rich Smith (RS) | Webmaster / BEC |
| Chris Densham (CD) | Trustee / OUCC |
| Chris Seal (CS) | Chelsea SS |
| Vince Allkins (VA) | South Wales CC |
| Rich Hill (RH) | Gagendor (First part of meeting only) |
| John Sheehy (JS) | Gwent Caving club |
| Steve King (SK) | Shepton Mallet CC |
| Frank Tulley (FT) | Wessex Cave Club |
| Stuart France (SF) | Conservation Officer, Cambrian Caving Council |
| Christina Bryne (CB) | Natural Resources Wales |

1. Apologies

Clive Owen, Treasurer/ UBSS; Peter Smith, Biological Recorder; Barry Hill, Hereford CC, Chris Howes Morgannwg CC and Martin Hoff, SWCC.

LW had technical issues joining the beginning of the meeting. SM took names of those attending and which Club / organisation they were representing. SM then took apologies for meeting. LW then joined the meeting as SM finished recording those present and apologies.

2. Approval Minutes from Last General Meeting

2a. Approval of Minutes from last general meeting held 6th December 2022

The minutes had been circulated prior to the meeting, with all corrections complete. No further corrections were identified.

Minutes approved as true record of the meeting, proposed by CD and seconded by RS. Those present accepted the minutes as true record, with exception of 5 abstentions, as these people were not present at last meeting; there were no votes against.

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

SF raised concerns about the company being set up to enable a new access agreement. LW pointed this matter was on the agenda to be discussed later in the meeting and this was for matters not covered on the agenda.

SF commented that he believed the term 'bump' used in the minutes of last meeting was inappropriate. DT commented the term was 'bump into' to describe meeting the land owner. LW pointed out the minutes of last meeting had just been approved as an accurate record and any corrections should have been raised before approval.

CD raised the new entrance policy at EGM in the meeting before last. This was to consider proposals for other entrances. CD was expecting a proposal regarding the 'Nunnery' entrance at least which is currently in a degenerating condition. Agreed to discuss in any other business.

There were no matters arising that were not covered elsewhere in the agenda.

3. Officers Reports

3a. Secretary

SM shared her report with those present at the Zoom meeting, this report is copied below.

Secretary's Report June 2023

After completion and circulation of the minutes, I was hit with a never ending cough, this slowed progress on setting up a company. This has started to progress again now, see report for item 5.1.

I finally received a reply from the land owner on two outstanding queries:

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

Ann Jones has replied on behalf of Pwlldu Conservation Limited (PCL), Ann apologised for not being in contact, due to family matters. The reply from Ann is in blue text below.

For item i) On the cave leader assessments and training: again, we do not agree to providing access for these activities to be undertaken on the property. This would also extend to any commercial activities.

For item ii) On bat surveys: we do not give permission for any bat surveys to be undertaken. This would be our position in general, but obviously we would also be unwilling for bat surveys to be undertaken that require access via other entrances, as with this specific request, given our above position on new entrances. In addition, we would note that part of the site is covered by a Special Area of Conservation for its bat populations. This is the highest European habitat designation and means there are additional requirements, even if we were to agree, as the site should not be disturbed or surveyed without written consent from NRW and, even then, it should only be surveyed by someone with a bat license as all bat species are protected under European law. Finally, it may be a misunderstanding on our part, but the material you have shared could be read to suggest that surveys have been undertaken without our consent. We hope this is a misunderstanding as we note that we have never given, and would not give, permission for PDCMG, its members or other cavers to undertake surveys of this nature in the past, present or future and ask that any such activity ceases immediately.

Ann did follow this with an explanation for these decisions:

For the avoidance of doubt, we do not give permission for the above access / activities on any common or private land owned by Pwlldu Conservation Limited. We have come to these decisions after considering the potential impact on the land's ancient monuments, SSSIs, its World Heritage Status, and existing bat populations, as well as for insurance purposes and our own liabilities. We have liaised with our insurance provider, Cadw, as well as others, which has contributed to the time it has taken for us to respond but means we have been able to make more comprehensive and informed decisions.

Whilst we understand that some of your members may be disappointed with the above decisions, we would appreciate it if any further requests are made via you, Sue, rather than through multiple approaches by different people.

I personally believe we must respect these decisions made by PCL, as they have taken time to consult various bodies / organisations before finalising these decisions. Please also note Ann only wishes to discuss matters with a single representative of PDCMG. I have replied to Ann to confirm I received her email and that I would report these decisions to the meeting.

Sue Mabbett

June 2023

From the Secretary's report following discussion arose.

On CD's comments on entrance policy above, SM believed we should prepare proposals to adopt the current open entrances, obviously currently the answer would be no, but if the landowner changes mind in future it would be good to have ready prepared well-presented proposal.

On the bat surveys, SM asked CB from NRW to comment on legal requirements for bat surveys as NRW had previously obtained permission for bat surveys in Ogof Draenen. SM recognised this is not CB's speciality. CB commented it is a bit complicated, but NRW ask permission if they wish to do a bat survey. Under SSSI legislation if they think there has been damage that affects the bat survey then they can force a survey. NRW approached PCL last November for permission to do a survey, this was refused. The decision was taken NRW had no evidence there was damage in this area and they did not wish to upset relations with the land owner, so they did not proceed further and cancelled the planned survey. This was disappointing as a survey had not been done for a number of years due to lack of funds. CB commented they will have money next year, so they hope to be allowed to do a bat survey next year.

On the need for NRW permission, CB wasn't sure if this was required, however NRW have been responsible for issuing licences to people to perform bat surveys, the issuing of licences has switched between NRW and Welsh Government. CB noted it was Peter Smith who would have done the bat survey for NRW if permission had been granted. CB asked the source of the request to use other entrances. SM reported this request had come directly from PS and was ~ year ago.

SM asked for opinions on historical bat surveys in Ogof Draenen. SM believed a number of reports in the minutes on bats were simply caver observations. There have been historical bat surveys completed with permission by NRW, and on behalf of Cadw when the tramway entrance was opened. PS has completed Bat Surveys but he has a licence, the group believe this was with permission, as the licence agreement allows scientific studies, and under this PS has completed bat surveys. Some surveys completed have been emergence surveys, this does not involve going into the cave, and is therefore out of scope. Going forward we recognise the landowners request not to complete bat surveys in Ogof Draenen, SM will reply to the landowner to reassure them we will abide by their requests.

CS commented that going forward we hope to update the access agreement as part of setting up the company limited by guarantee, this will be an opportunity to review conditions. SM commented she had replied to this email, in this reply SM mentioned the setting up a new company limited by guarantee, this will need a new access agreement, but this new agreement does not need to change conditions of access.

It was noted the landowner only wished to correspond with one person from PDCMG, this will remain the secretary of PDCMG, as has occurred historically. All those present agreed that the secretary should be the only point of contact going forward. CS believed that if anyone does meet the landowner and have a conversation that covers matters related Ogof Draenen, then this should be reported back to SM. This would exclude passing time of day conversations.

SK asked about bat data reported on the Ogof Draenen website, LW commented this is historical data so no need to remove, RS agreed with LW.

3b. Treasurer

CO had sent apologies as he was on holiday in France. CO's report had been circulated via email prior to the meeting and is copied below.

PDCMG Treasurer's Report to the General Meeting 27 June 2023

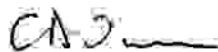
There have been 3 transactions on the account since the last meeting. Here is a summary:

| Date | Description | Paid in | Paid out | Balance |
|-------------|---------------------------|---------|----------|---------|
| 6 Dec 2022 | Balance carried forward | | | £562.19 |
| 6 Dec 2022 | Hall hire for EGM | | £28 | £534.19 |
| 19 Jan 2023 | Donation from UBSS | £10 | | £544.19 |
| 13 Feb 2023 | Donation from Cardiff Uni | £20 | | £564.19 |

The balance in the account currently stands at £564.19.

This balance would be sufficient for normal day to day running of PDCMG. However, in anticipation of the expenses that will be incurred in setting up a company it would be very helpful if member clubs were able to assist with donations. 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
Treasurer

As CO was not present this report was not discussed further. LW highlighted CO requested more donations.

3c. Permit Secretary

DT has not collected the recent cave log data from the cave and has not had chance to generate a report yet. DT commented he has regular requests for keys to the cave, also with Club keys he assumes a number of trips have occurred. Tarquin (Wilton Jones) had reported there were screws loose on the gate lock, DT will visit to tighten these.

SM asked if he had generated a report for period June to December 2022, as SM had not received new data. DT reported he had generated a report and thought he had sent it to SM, but SM had received no reports. The actions for a new report were agreed.

DT asked if we should include cave counter data, but he didn't have recent data. SF had not collected data recently. The counter at Drws Cefn had been stolen. He has monitors at current entrance, Nunnery, Snowball, and in Big Country. SF commented when data is collected it is freely available to all.

Based on the landowner's recent email, SM asked if we should remind people they should not use alternative entrances. CS suggested we simply emphasise we should only use the entrance for which we have the agreement, we should not advertise additional entrances. It was agreed we should highlight we only use the entrance where we have an agreement to respect the landowner's agreement and wishes. It was agreed to email key holding Clubs, to remind Club members of our access agreement and use of the official gated entrance. DT already attaches an access conditions letter when he replies to requests for a cave key to go into Ogof Draenen.

ACTIONS

DT to generate report of caver data visiting Ogof Draenen for last year (Jun 2022 to now) and send to SM.
SM to send full report to the landowner and put summary of data in the minutes post meeting. *Post meeting note, summary trip data in attachment 1 of these minutes, page 9.*
SM to send current list of email addresses of PDCMG member Clubs to DT.
DT to send reminder of access conditions to key holding Clubs.

3d. Conservation Officer

JW reported, Tarquin (Wilton-Jones) reported he had been down to the Last Sandwich area and re-taped the area. No additional information since last meeting.

3e. Survey Recorder

John Stevens was not present and had not sent a report in, therefore no report.

3f. Biological Recorder

Peter Smith had sent apologies to the meeting and had sent in a report, which SM had circulated. It is copied below

PDCMG – Biological Recorder report June 2023

Since the last meeting on 06 December 2022, the only new biological records I have received are reports from Stuart France of his casual sightings of bats. On 21 December 2022, Stuart noted about 60 lesser horseshoe bats in Nunnery Passage and occasional lesser horseshoe bats in Perseverance 2, Elliptic Passage and Mid-Winter Passage.

Also, Lee Knight said he planned to carry out further cave invertebrate monitoring in Ogof Draenen on 14 and 15 May 2023. I have not seen any results of that monitoring as yet.

There have been no other reports

Dr Peter G Smith

Biological Recorder, PDCMG, 26 June 2023

SF commented numbers were down on previous year in Nunnery, but this probably means bats have moved further into the cave.

3g. Fixed Aids Officer

AG had moved recently from Cardiff to Carmarthenshire, and now lived further from Ogof Draenen. Due to the house move he had not been able to complete a fixed aid inspection. There is one out standing inspection due, however new ropes were put in 19 months ago and he is reasonably confident the Fixed Aids are in good order. AG had received no report of issues from other cavers. AG commented he had been Fixed Aids officer for 11 years, and is hoping someone new would like to take on the role.

JS asked if the rope on way to Circus Maximus, which protects a steep drop, was a fixed aid. AH confirmed it was not a fixed aid and all other ropes in the cave are unofficial. JS commented this protected a big drop and asked if we should make it a fixed aid. AG said people may propose adoption of new fixed aids however the trend is to have less not more adopted fixed aids and the responsibility is with the users. LW noted potential danger points in many caves and it is by definition a hazardous sport. JS agreed but just wished to raise point.

SF commented there were good natural belays at this point with bolts and he suggested someone replace the rope, CS suggested if this happened the person replacing it should put date on the rope. It was agreed to review at a future meeting if someone wished to present a case for adoption of this rope.

4. Election of Officers and Recorders

Firstly as a reminder to the group that the officers step down at this point and therefore could not vote unless they were also present as a member Caving Club representative. Also observers and LW do not vote. Those who could not vote were SM, SF, CB, SK and LW. It was clarified these people could not act as proposers or seconders in the election.

Tabulated below are the list of officers, the person proposed, the proposer and seconder.

| Post | Nominee | Proposer | Secunder |
|---------------------------------------|---|---------------|---------------|
| Secretary | Sue Mabbett | Chris Densham | Chris Seal |
| Treasurer | Clive Owen | Rich Smith | Ali Garman |
| Permit Secretary | Dan Thorne | Chris Seal | Josh White |
| Conservation Officer | Josh White | Dan Thorne | Chris Densham |
| Survey Secretary ^{*see note} | Rich Smith | Chris Densham | Josh White |
| Biological Recorder | Peter Smith | Dan Thorne | Chris Seal |
| Geological Recorder | No nominations or volunteers for this post. | | |
| Fixed Aids Officer | Ali Garman | Chris Densham | John Sheehy |

Note: John Stevens (JS) the previous person in this role, had not attended this meeting, sent apologies, sent a report or sent any information on whether he wished to be considered for this role at this election. As no information had been received the meeting agreed we could not nominate someone for whom we had no indication of them wishing to hold this role. RS stated he would like to be considered for this role as he wished to initiate a re-survey of Ogof Draenen. CS asked if we still have Survey Secretary and a Survey Recorder. This had stopped as JS held both roles. We hope going forward everyone will work together

5. Other Group business

5.1 Progress on setting up company limited by guarantee

This has been delayed due to SM never-ending cough. A small committee has been set up, this includes LW, CO, SM; the trustees, CD, CS, Tim Long and Ursula Collie. SM had sought advice on finding a suitable law firm for this work. UC had provided some suggestions, and some companies were approached. One of the more detailed replies suggested Caving Clubs could not be members of a Company as they are not incorporated bodies or individual people. The small committee met, we looked at how Charterhouse is run; we use Charterhouse as a basis of how we wish our company to be set up. Charterhouse have individual members of the company, these individuals are nominated and approved by their Caving Clubs; in other words the Clubs are not members. We agreed questions for a solicitor based on this, and the solicitor confirmed we could have individuals who represent the caving clubs. Further advice emphasised we must keep our company records up to date, so Clubs will have to inform us if they change their representative. Charterhouse have an annual meeting, at this meeting each Club provides a letter to confirm who is to represent them. So we would set up the PDCMG Company similarly. Another piece of advice is each Club should consider how they decide on the individual to represent them: the whole Club, the committee or another method. This is to prevent two individuals claiming to represent a Club. We do already have examples in the caving community where clubs provide a representative / individual to an organisation, Charterhouse, Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Cave Management Group.

SF commented that in his opinion we are heading for an almighty mess, the information supplied by SM suggests directors don't have a vote, but directors are financial liable. SF commented there were law companies available to give advice. SM suggested we don't have to provide accounts, but SF has to provide accounts to companies' house. SF states we have to provide accounts.

SM commented we have just sought advice, we have found a company to provide us with advice. LW clarified we are at the start of this process, and with UC advice we have found a company and that is currently where we are.

Going forward, at our meeting mid-June, we reminded ourselves why we are going down this route is because no one was willing to replace Charles Bailey as a trustee. Our constitution requires 3 trustees but we have not been able to find another trustee so this is why we are following this route for a company limited by guarantee to hold the access agreement on our behalf. LW commented we have a unanimous agreement from a general meeting to go forward with this route, we would need another proposal at a general meeting to reverse this decision.

SF opinion is we should chose 3 people we trust to take as a company, and they follow the advice of the group. LW commented directors could resign or be replaced without permission. LW commented that due to a historical lack of trust we need to make sure we go forward together.

JS commented that when we talked about not being able to find a new trustee, he assumed this was because people were concerned about liabilities that is why we did not get volunteers; SM confirmed this was the case. JS said therefore this is why we were pursuing the Company Limited by Guarantee option, SM confirmed this is exactly why. JS asked if we had considered a Charitable Incorporated Organisation which does not have the disadvantages of having of record information as you do for a company. The status of such an organisation is confirmed by the Charity Commission, but JS emphasised it is not a charity. LW wished to restate we have already agreed this route. JS said this was a new thing, so may not have been considered. SM asked if this was a charity, JS said it was not a charity. SM agreed to ask about this.

Charterhouse have a 150 year lease on the ground owned by Somerset Wildlife trust, Bristol Water sold their lease to Somerset Wildlife Trust when there was a change to legal responsibilities for water sources.

The only other matter is where we choose for the company address, we do not want to use an individual's home address. There are options where we can register a company address, we intend this address to be in Wales as the cave in Wales.

6. Applications for membership

SM and DT had received no requests or applications from caving clubs for membership of PDCMG.

7. Applications to become key holders

SM and DT had received no applications to be permanent key holders.

8. AOB

8.1 SF returned to the topic of the rope on route to Circus Maximus. He suggested the BEC who had dug Rainbow Canyon beyond Circus Maximus could replace the rope. RS from BEC stated this dig is currently shelved, and they not currently using this rope.

8.2 CD commented he thought that the PDCMG should have received proposals to adopt one of current open entrances. He commented a lot of work had gone into updating the Entrance Policy by CS and others, to create a policy that everyone could work with going forward. It created a frame work for cavers to propose adoption of an entrance, therefore he expected people to come forward with proposals for adoption of entrances. CD commented the Nunnery was becoming a scar on the landscape in his opinion. CS agreed with CD that he was disappointed after putting in a lot of time and effort to update the new entrance policy that no-one had come forward with a proposal. LW commented we did a lot of work to get where we are, then we wait for people to come forward with proposals. CS is only aware of Drws Cefn and the Nunnery, he is not aware of other entrances although he has heard rumours of other entrances.

LW we can only publicise the option to propose alternative entrances. There has been a lot of effort for this new entrance policy with no-one now submitting proposals. It is now up to people to come forward and submit proposals to the group. The member Clubs should publicise that options are in place to propose adoption of another entrance. Although the landowner currently states no additional entrances on their land may be used, but we have changed the policy for other entrances.

The discussion moved onto current Nunnery entrance. CD noted this is an entrance on a scree slope and the area around it is degrading. This entrance was opened, it was closed on a vote, and then it was opened again. It is a great shame that people have not abided by our access agreement. Discussion continued on whether we should suggest taking action to stabilise the slope around the entrance, finally agreed not to pursue at current time.

8.3 DT has just looked at the code of conduct and realised it requires updates. E.g. it states park on the concrete area opposite the Lamb and Fox which has been closed for a while. It talks about checking DMM hangers. To ask for sightings of bats to be in log book. It ask for details of new discoveries to be sent to conservation. DT will look at the code of conduct and update it for current situation re parking, fixed aids etc. Whilst checking on updates DT would add words to only use the official entrance.

8.4 CS and LW wish to recognise the sad passing of Arthur Millet at this meeting. Arthur had put in a lot of effort on Ogof Draenen. He did a lot of work on the Grade 5 Survey in the early years following the discovery of Ogof Draenen.

8.5 SF commented there is a comment at the bottom of the agenda that all interested cavers are welcome. RS commented it is detailed on the website. SM commented that at previous meeting we agreed not publicise the link, as people turned up who would not say who they were or who they represented. SM said if anyone had contacted her asking to come she would have sent the link (assuming they were willing to say who they were). SM agreed to adjust the wording that the secretary should be contact for the meeting invite / link. CS commented this may have to change when we set up a company.

8.6 CS commented he thought we should hold the biennial meeting (the meeting where we vote in a new committee) face to face. LW agreed this would be better.

8.7 SF wished to express a vote of thanks to CB from NRW for attending. Everyone agreed and thanked CB for coming. CB said she is happy to come, and enjoys coming.

9. Date of Next Meeting

After some discussion, it was proposed the next meeting Wednesday 29th November. This would be date of next meeting unless a major event comes up which would stop most coming.

Meeting closed at 9.50pm.

Approved as a true record


CHAIRMAN

Attachment 1: Ogo Draenen Trip Data from Log book

| 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 Parties | Total Persons |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Parties | | | | | | | 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 Parties | Total Persons |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Parties | 8 | 4 | 2 | 5 | 6 | 4 | 4 | 5 | 1 | 3 | 2 | 5 | 49 | |
| Persons | 31 | 20 | 10 | 12 | 15 | 13 | 9 | 14 | 2 | 13 | 7 | 18 | 164 | |

| 2023 | Jan-23 | Feb-23 | Mar-23 | Apr-23 | May-23 | Jun-23 | Jul-23 | Aug-23 | Sep-23 | Oct-23 | Nov-23 | Dec-23 | Total Parties | Total Persons |
|---------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|--------|---------------|---------------|
| Parties | 2 | 2 | 5 | 1 | 4 | 4 | 3 | | | | | | 21 | |
| Persons | 4 | 6 | 18 | 3 | 9 | 13 | 8 | | | | | | 61 | |

incomplete
Month