

Pwll Du Cave Management Group

Minutes of the meeting held via Zoom on Wednesday 19th June 2024 starting at 7.30pm.

Present

Les Williams (LW)	Chair
Sue Mabbett (SM)	Secretary
Clive Owen (CO)	Treasurer / UBSS
Dan Thorne (DT)	Permit Secretary
Ali Garman (AG)	Fixed Aids / Draenen Diggers
Peter Smith (PS)	Biological Recorder
Chris Densham (CD)	Trustee / OUCC
Sam Richards (SR)	BEC
Chris Seal (CS)	Chelsea SS
Rich Hill (RH)	Gagendor
Barry Hill (BH)	Hereford CC
Steve King (SK)	Shepton Mallet CC
Frank Tulley (FT)	Wessex Cave Club
Christina Byrne (CB)	Natural Resources Wales
Isaac Neale (IN)	Aberystwyth CC (arrived ~ 30 mins after start of meeting)

1. Apologies

Josh White (Conservation Officer), Rich Smith (Survey Officer, Webmaster and Cardiff Hill Divers), Chris Howes, Morgannwg CC; Nick De Gare Pitt, Brynmawr CC and Stuart France, Caving Wales Conservation Officer.

2. Approval Minutes from Last General Meeting

2a. Approval of Minutes from last general meeting held 29th November 2023

The minutes had been circulated prior to the meeting, with all corrections complete. There was minor amendment in early June as no cave data had been received from DT, the blank appendix for data was removed, this updated version circulated with agenda 2 weeks ago. One minor correction noted spelling of CB's surname corrected to Byrne. No further corrections were identified.

These minutes were proposed by BH and seconded by SK, the vote was abstentions 2 (not present at meeting) and remainder for approval, therefore these minutes are approved as true record of the meeting. SM will arrange for LW to sign minutes soon.

2b. Matters Arising from the Minutes NOT Covered Elsewhere in the Agenda

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

3. Officers Reports

3a. Secretary

SM had written up and circulated minutes of last meeting. I have sent to the landowner, the log book data sent by DT, copy of draft minutes and information on the new entrance to Ogof Draenen, as required by our access licence. I also received an indirect request from Bob Mehew in event of new access agreement could this include all members and associate members of BCA, I replied we were not at stage of new access agreement.

I sent information to PDCMG member Clubs related to the Limited Company but this is discussed later in the minutes.

3b. Treasurer

CO's treasurer's report had been circulated before the meeting, it is copied below.

PDCMG Treasurer's Report to the General Meeting 19 June 2024

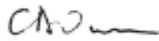
There has only been one transaction on the account since the last meeting. Here is a summary:

Date	Description	Paid in	Paid out	Balance
29 Nov 2023	Balance carried forward			£614.19
4 Dec 2023	Donation from UBSS	£10		£624.19

The balance in the account currently stands at £624.19.

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

CO commented only change was annual £10 donation from UBSS.

Note CS raised point at end of reports he could see no expenditure for insurance, should this be an expense reported in the treasurers report? CO confirmed this is paid by BCA annually, and it was renewed in January. LW confirmed BCA covers insurance costs for all caving access body e.g. CNCC. The only exception is access organised by a caving club to an individual cave then the club has to cover the cost. CS only asked as our access agreement has a clause relating to the landowners be indemnified for £5 million. CO confirmed this is in place via the insurance.

3c. Permit Secretary

DT sent summary data and updated code of conduct to SM. SM had circulated both documents to PDCMG. Data from 2023 and 2024 copied below.

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		
Partys	2	2	5	1	4	4	5	5	1	3	2	4	38	Total Partys
Persons	4	6	18	3	9	13	12	14	2	13	7	14	115	Total Persons
2024	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24		
Partys	5	5	3	3	3								19	Total Partys
Persons	14	14	6	8	7								49	Total Persons

Additionally DT reported there had been 5 or 6 key requests since the last meeting, most not collecting key. The log book was still there, and only few trips recorded. The changes to code of conduct were minor, parking location and position of log book.

3d. Conservation Officer

JW had sent apologies to meeting, he had sent 2 sentence report to SM. This was read out by SM and copied below.

Since the last meeting I have had not any correspondence from anyone about any issues in the system. I have been in once and again saw nothing to report on my trip.

JW stated he had spoken to Isaac from Aber(Aberystwyth CC) and he is planning on attending. JW suggested him for new Conservation officer but the two yearly vote for new committee occurred at meeting last June (2023) so no voting at this meeting.

3e. Survey Recorder

RS had sent apologies as he was away on holiday. He had emailed a report to SM. SM read this out, it is copied below:

Short summary: not much surveying done and no survey data to present yet, sadly. But at least I've made a start...

I've been updating my surveying software (Sexy Topo, got the Arthur Butcher award at Hidden Earth this time) to handle bigger caves, so at least visible progress on that front.

Several people have expressed a bit of scepticism that the job is feasible, but my response is that you have to start somewhere; the cave isn't going anywhere. Even if it takes many years, the data won't disappear once published.

Surveying the whole cave is almost too big a job to contemplate at the moment, but there are some intermediate steps that could be taken that could be useful; e.g. surveys of individual series would be useful for publishing on certain online guides.

I think some parts of the cave have only ever had a centreline recorded so they would also be useful starter steps towards getting a survey.

My vision for producing a survey was to create an open survey archive, with a free documentation license, using modern software engineering techniques to automatically build the survey, and make it easy to share the survey and submit updates from different surveyors. My understanding is that even if a certain other survey ever gets published, the raw data will not ever be made available, so this would not be possible.

Anyway I could do with more surveyors, so if any of you are interested then please get in touch - survey@pdcmg.org. Experienced surveyors would be great, but I can teach people who are not.

LW commented a journey of 1000miles starts with single step the same applies to this task.

As the 'certain other survey' mentioned in RS report, CD asked if anyone knew what was happening with Arthur Millet's data following his passing. CS answered he did not know. PS commented he believed data left to a nephew in his will but as the passing was recent he did not believe John Stevens had approached the nephew yet.

3f. Biological Recorder

PS's report had been circulated previously and copied below.

PDCMG – Biological Recorder report June 2024

As Sue pointed out at the meeting of 29 November 2023, my speciality is bats and permission to complete any bat surveys in Ogor Draenen has been withdrawn by the Pwlldu Conservation Ltd landowner. However, there is now an alternative access to the Ogor Draenen cave system via Ogor Tarddiad Pwll Du (OTPD – see Farr, M. Descent 298 p12, June/ July 2024; Anon. Caving Wales News/ Ogor Draenen via Ogor Tarddiad Pwll Du visitor guide; Anon. Caving Wales/ Cave Registry/ Ogor Tarddiad Pwll Du) and that cave is in different ownership. There are no plans for restricting access and the site will not be gated. The OTPD owners have given me permission to carry out bat surveys and have agreed that NRW may also carry out bat surveys. Hence, I can report that on 25 February 2024 I recorded two lesser horseshoe bats in the passage heading south from the top of the 3m fixed ladder installed on the way from Waterfall Series to Outcast Series. On 5 May 2024 I recorded two lesser horseshoe bats in the 6th Heaven area at the far end of Knees Up Mother Brown.

I have had a further report from Stuart France of his casual sightings of bats. In winter 2023-24, Stuart noted about 80+ lesser horseshoe bats in Nunnery Passage. He noted occasional greater horseshoe bats and the odd Myotis bat there too.

There have been no other reports.

Dr Peter G Smith

Biological Recorder, PDCMG, 15 June 2024

In addition to the report above the following point were raised:

SM raised the point that there are scientific studies into insect life / mini beasts ongoing in Ogor Draenen supported by NRW. PS confirmed this is by Lee Knight and he did report at earlier meeting but he has not heard anything recently, the study is on-going.

CD noted PS had mentioned the new entrance (Ogor Tarddiad) in passing and as it was big news to him, he wondered when PS had become aware of the entrance. PS replied beginning of year, but did not see it as his place to report its presence to the secretary of PDCMG. But he had now reported it via his biological recorder report. CD asked what PS thought the landowner for the original entrance would think when they found out the biological recorder was using an alternative entrance. PS stated he had let it be known by his report. CS raised that this new entrance has only just become public, and many digs in early stages are kept secret. But Ogor Tarddiad has now been publicised in Descent by Martin Farr. CS raised point that the landowner would not like it if members enter Ogor Draenen by Nunnery or Drws Cefn. AG raised point he is more upset that Caving Wales (AKA Cambrian CC) had not contacted PDCMG as we had always been open with them. LW noted the Caving Wales constitution did not allow them to make an access agreement when there was a body in place to manage access to a cave so they may have over stepped the mark, but we are where we are and there is no point talking further about this. CD stated the land owners for the original entrance may think we (PDCMG) no longer have a role due to this new entrance. CB asked about the Descent article, CS summarised information he received from Stuart France. The information was supplied to MF who wrote the article, the editor of Descent had added information which contravenes the one entrance policy but this has of course been superseded. The next Descent should include some correction to information given. SM would send Cave Registry info to CB, in meeting chat the URL link was added.

3g. Fixed Aids Officer

AG reported he had not completed any checks and has not taken up the offer from James Waite of Cardiff University CC to complete checks. These are now overdue, however none of the ropes or other fixed aids are due for replacement, the replacement was completed as planned. AG will contact James to arrange for checks of the fixed aids to be completed.

4. Progress on setting up Ltd Company to enable updated access agreement.

SM had sent explanatory notes and draft limited company articles to all PDCMG clubs and had received no replies directly as secretary. She had received indirect comment from Tim Long (TL) via MCC discussion, that he believed £1 was too little. TL had already raised this point in discussion in the small group set up to create company, and it was explained this was the standard amount for company Limited by Guarantee, it does not mean this is only monies available in event of public liability claim as we would continue to have BCA public liability insurance which now has limit of £20 million, the £1 is maximum sum the directors would be liable for personally in event of a claim. CS commented it was not only public liability they needed to be protected against but claims from others e.g. from Cadw when the tramway was damaged due to a new entrance being dug. LW believes BCA insurance not only public liability but also professional indemnity it is very extensive insurance cover.

There were no other comments received SM did wonder if we should progress at moment as there is now a new entrance to Ogof Draenen with free access, when purpose of the company is to set up new access agreement to use the original entrance. SM questioned who would want a key to go through gated entrance when open access entrance entered cave at similar point. It is thought the new entrance is also easier. SK commented Martin Farr's comments in Descent this was easier entrance. CS thought also safer surface topology.

SM asked do we progress, we also have not heard from landowners, we know Pwlldu Conservation Ltd (PCL) the land owners do not want any changes to current 'rules' e.g. conservation, scientific studies, use of original entrance, details of who enters the cave, etc. SM not sure where we stand.

CS commented we can't progress is landowners don't want new agreement, we should not 'tear up' current agreement until we have a new agreement. We can't progress until we have response from the land owner. SM had sent PCL an email with details of new entrance and copy of document published on the Cave Registry by Caving Wales. SM has not had a reply but this only was sent on Monday. CS believes we cannot do anything we have reply from owner. They are various ways the PCL can react, until we know their reaction we cannot progress. LW stated fair comment.

SK commented what is the future role of this group is Caving Wales are administering access through another entrance? LW commented this also fair comment.

CB asked if she could contribute to the discussion on new entrance (Ogof Tarddiad), the group welcomed any contributions she may have.

CB reported the new entrance is within Gilwern Hill SSSI and the PDO (Potentially Damaging Operation) list for Gilwern Hill includes PDO27, recreational activities within the control of the owner occupier likely to damage upland and woodland habitats. As recreational access could damage then consent will be required from the landowner and NRW to access the cave. As NRW understood it only a small number of people have been given the right to access this cave, so it does not cover general access, the document from Caving Wales does not appear to say this so this will have to be looked into. At the moment as CB understands it there is no general access through this entrance as there may be potentially damaging activity by access the cave and therefore potentially end up with a prosecution of the landowner for allowing the potential damage.

SM comments this puts a new perspective on this matter, this does not match the cave registry article which states anyone may enter please fill in the log book if you enter the cave.

NRW have not seen the agreement with Caving Wales but they have correspondence with the land owner, they were not led to believe it was open access. CS stated the cave was in existence and went substantial way in therefore to make the entrance it has been made within the mountain. CB commented amount of debris outside cave was not enormous, however this has had an impact on the SSSI due to these materials being dumped outside of the cave entrance. CS commented has no knowledge of digging required but debris could be piled within the cave, debris piled up within the cave would not have an impact on the SSSI. There is no public footpath across SSSI to the entrance the footpath is a permissive path only.

LW asked what this means for NRW, CB doesn't know as she is not the officer for this SSSI, but she will inform the officer of the article in cave registry. CB would be interested if PDCMG consider this to be better entrance. NRW do not want to upset current relations with the landowner, however this PDO27 is a bit of an issue. The current agreed entrance is not within the SSSI it is just outside. This PDO27 has been put in for a reason. PS assumed this meant things like motorbike scrambling or similar causing lots of damage, he does not think a footpath not matter how well used would cause damage. CB commented scrambling is illegal but it could be for example picking wild garlic or putting new footpath in. CB pointed out as there is no public footpath then any recreational activity, including walking on a footpath, is considered to have a potential effect. LW commented we do not know how NRW will react so we cannot do anything at current time, apart from inform our landowner of new entrance which SM has done.

CS moved back to comment made by SK as to purpose of this group with Caving Wales controlling new entrance. CS believes there remains a purpose for the group as it not just an access body, it manages conservation of the cave, put in tape, policies for no carbide, biological studies, and fixed aids. LW commented although he does not disagree, however if the access via the new entrance remains in place then we may be in conflict with Caving Wales, as we are both administering access. We would have to work with them. SM commented who would take final responsibility e.g. for fixed aids is it our fixed aids officer or the fixed aids officer of Caving Wales. It was confirmed there is list of fixed aids which PDCMG take responsibility no matter location in cave this is because historically only one entrance available for use to enter the cave. LW can see potential conflict in future deciding who takes responsibility for each aspect of cave management, therefore as SK said earlier is there a function for this group? We had a mandate as to manage the whole cave as we controlled the only access, but this is no longer the case. These are all questions we need to consider and decide what to do.

SM commented if we take access arrangements as the Cave Registry state and not as CB reported to us, then who is going to apply for a key when few yards down road open entrance that enters cave in similar location? CO summarised we are in a position of responsibility but with no authority. DT commented in this position for last 10 years as people accessing cave via the Nunnery, which has been a little farcical, but we can only control what we have. LW stated Caving Wales now state that they are controlling access into the cave. LW did not think it would not be an easy resolution.

SK asked is the original entrance still needed? LW commented if new entrance is as easy as suggested the then original entrance would only be used for esoteric gem who want to reminisce. These are all questions we need to consider in future.

SM noted DT comment of entering the cave by other route, SM noted cavers can enter via the Nunnery but we as a group had always published and publically stated it is not a permitted route and to use the only entrance agreed with the land owner. SM checked Caving Wales constitution does have a line that the land owners and mineral rights owners do have right to grant or withhold access and this be respected, therefore Caving Wales should also support not using other entrances on PCL land such as Nunnery.

CS commented when we created the entrance policy we did accept new entrance could pop up anywhere not necessarily on PCL land, and this didn't change our commitment to review and adopt or not adopt any new entrance, therefore we could take on responsibility for a new entrance not on PCL land. We could advise cavers to use Ogof Tarddiad and original entrance and discourage cavers from the Nunnery and Drws Cefn, so we can continue as an advisory body. LW believed to do as CS proposed we would need an agreement / understanding with Caving Wales. In summary we are not sure where we are as the information from CB and NRW means the access via the new entrance (Ogof Tarddiad) may be affected.

PS commented he believed walking access in SSSI woodlands is not generally discouraged so may be no impact. LW in this case we do not know why this schedule is in place specifically banning recreational use, it maybe whole wood full of orchids. So until CB's colleague in NRW decides what recreational use is permitted and what has to be protected then we cannot make any further decisions. LW states the only things we can do is ensure we inform our landowner, which SM has done via email and is going to follow up with paper copies being sent, and inform Caving Wales. We could discuss for hours and achieve nothing as there is nothing we can do.

CB asked us to do one thing which is to let our clubs know access is not as 'free' as suggested in Cave Registry or Descent article as this is an evolving situation and the last thing we wish to do is to upset the landowner as we all wish to maintain good relations with landowner.

LW agreed with CB that we need to keep good relations with all landowners giving us access to cave entrances on their land, most are good at this but there always some who aren't. CB commented PDO27 is a rare condition for a SSSI so there could be something in there that can be affected people walking in this woodland, such as delicate bryophytes, mosses and lower plants present which means tramping may affect these plants, however it could be potentially worked out at some point.

CS concurred we do not wish to upset the landowner, however this maybe better entrance. PS who has been in via this entrance found it to be a better entrance to access the cave. CS commented he does not wish it to be seen we are against this new entrance. LW agreed, we can only be neutral as it is an evolving situation.

CS suggested we tried to identify the cavers involved in creating new entrance and try work with them to determine which the best entrance is. SK and LW stated not as it is evolving situation Caving Wales, the landowner with advice from NRW need to determine way forward, at moment we should take no action. DT pointed out actual numbers visiting Ogof Draenen is small only 14 in last month. LW commented he believed some still avoid visiting the cave due to the politics and the entrance is not pleasant especially for the larger caver and gets you wet. DT comment is we are not OFD (Ogof Ffynnon Ddu), we are not talking 100s each month going in the cave some months less than 10 go in. AG commented he thought Caving Wales had made faux pas advertising this, when access may be issue. However at current time it is probable, Caving Wales is not aware it is an issue as they did not know about SSSI conditions.

CB explained due to the PDO list, in particular PDO 27, NRW should have been consulted prior to the SSSI owner giving permission for the cavers to excavate within the cave. Concerns were raised that the SSSI had been damaged, leading to an investigation and enforcement action. PS believed this was going a bit far as the SSSI owner had only received a warning letter. CB confirmed the enforcement action is a warning letter. CB did emphasise NRW are working with the landowner, assist in their understanding and to help ensure no further damaging activities are taken/avoid a more serious outcome.

CB stated we could work with SSSI landowner to ensure the SSSI features are protected, in case this new entrance appears to be a good one. LW commented it is up to Caving Wales to urgently work with landowner to ensure the SSSI conditions are met. RH who is on Caving Wales committee stated he will be contacting other Caving Wales committee members after this meeting, so action is taken promptly. RH asked are those in Caving Wales who set up the access were aware of these issues. CB said there is a plan to do this but first step was to inform the landowner of the enforcement action before anyone else was given any information this occurred previous Friday she believes. PS questioned why enforcement action did not include the cavers crossing the woodland, again CB emphasised NRW are working with landowner. LW commented we cannot question actions of NRW as we do not have all the facts. PS suggested the landowner did not fully understand the implication of the digging at this site so this is simple misunderstanding. CB commented that the next stage is NRW is to work with Caving Wales and landowner.

So in summary PDCMG will put on hold creating company until we hear from landowners of current entrance on their response to new entrance and willing to proceed with new access agreement. SM has already sent emails, however she will put in post details of new entrance. SM comment as have not received recent correspondence from land owner we are not sure if they have received the email.

There will be no action from PDCMG apart from ask our Club members not to go rushing in via new entrance. We hope Caving Wales update their information soon on website (when the can access internet from holiday location). Again emphasised we do not wish to see land owner threatened with prosecution as when this happened in Mendip a few years ago a lot of landowners stopped access to caves as did not want to take any risks of prosecution.

PS suggested PDCMG support the landowner and use of new caves. A number present stated this is not PDCMG business at the moment and we must not interfere, it is up to Caving Wales to take action and up to date information, RH is already going to get back to Caving Wales committee. It was agreed that we should not put information on our website, as we have privileged information and it is Caving Wales who must be given chance to update as required, also our website does not get high level of traffic so unlikely to be used as source of information about the new access via Ogot Tarddiad.

LW commented this needs to be handled carefully as in 1980 Nature Conservancy Council badly implemented SSSI conditions in the Mendips which led to a number of caves being closed for 18months, so we must work together.

SM summarised discussion going in circles, in summary we need to allow Caving Wales to sort the issue and all we can do is verbally to ask our caving club members not to go rushing down via the new entrance. CB apologised that Caving Wales would hear indirectly from RH, but matters had been evolving quickly and there was not time to contact them before this meeting as land owner had to know first and that only happened previous Friday.

Finally CS commented we should not see entrances managed by different landowners a problem. LW agreed we need to work with all landowners.

ACTIONS

SM put on hold creation of Company

SM send in mail paper copies of details of the new entrance to our landowner PCL

All verbally inform club members on going situation please do not rush to use new entrance

RS do not publish anything on our PDCMG website with regard to Ogot Tarddiad.

5. Submissions for Adoption of Additional Cave Entrances

No submissions had been received for the adoption of additional entrances. This is despite new entrance via Ogot Tarddiad being publicised in Caving Wales Cave Registry and in Descent. PDCMG secretary had received no correspondence on the new entrance.

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

LW went around those present.

8.1 SM raised point that prior to this meeting there had been some discussion on Ogot Tarddiad and as part of this discussion information on website had been checked. This found minutes of last 2 meetings were not present. SM believed we had agreed to publish draft minutes (once initial corrections complete) as long as clearly marked as draft. SM had checked previous minutes to confirm we had agreed this in June 2021. SM will work with RS to ensure draft minutes were uploaded in future, this put less pressure on uploading copy of approved minutes following the next meeting. Also SM will work with RS to upload current Entrance Policy as the old Single Entrance policy is still on the website.

8.2 IN raised point that JW wished pass role of conservation officer onto him. SM said it was discussed earlier in meeting this is not election meeting. LW believed there must option in constitution to allow an officer to resign and an option available to have a co-option. SR confirmed JW wishes to resign and pass Conservation

Officer role onto IN. The meeting agreed that IN and JW for to check constitution and follow the applicable clause to pass the Conservation Officer role onto Isaac from Josh.

9. Date of Next Meeting

After review of the 2024 calendar, it was agreed the next meeting will be Wednesday 27th November 2024, at 8.00pm. Meeting closed at 9.30pm.

DRAFT