

PWLL DU CAVE MANAGEMENT GROUP

Minutes of the EGM held at the Blaenavon Workingmen's Hall on Sunday 12th December 2009 commencing at 7.30pm.

Attendees:

Mick Day		Chairman
Fleur Loveridge	Oxford University C.C.	Secretary
Chris Densham	Oxford University C.C.	Club Rep & Trustee
Chris Seal	Chelsea S.S.	Club Rep
Peter Talling	University of Bristol S..S	Club Rep
Ali Garman	Draenen Diggers	Club Rep
Spencer Drew	Morgannwg C.C.	Treasurer
Bernie Woodley	South Wales C.C.	Club Rep
Ben Lovett	Morgannwg C.C.	Conservation Officer & Club Rep
John Pybus	Oxford Uni C.C.	Survey Officer
Richard Bayfield	Bristol Exploration Club	Club Rep
Owen Clarke	Cwmbran C.C.	Club Rep
Martin Laverty	G.O. Garimpeiros	Club Rep
Rhian Kendall	Morgannwg C.C.	Biological Recorder
Charles Bailey		Trustee
John Stevens	Chelsea S.S. / G5 Surveyors	Survey Recorder
Andy Farrant	Chelsea S.S.	Geological Recorder
Tim Long		Trustee
Malcolm Reid	Brynmawr C.C	Club Rep
Elsie Little	Cambrian Caving Council	
Thomas Lia	Cardiff University C.C.	
Tim Barter	Westminster S.G.	
Chris Gibbs	Cwmbran C.C.	
Tim Guilford	Oxford University C.C.	
Lou Maurice	South Wales C.C.	
Stuart France	G.O. Garimpeiros	
Huw Durban	Brynmawr C.C	

1. Apologies

Apologies received from Rich Hill of Gagendor, Paul Stacey of Croydon C.C. and Paul Nuttall of Brynmawr C.C.

2. Minutes of the last Ordinary and Extraordinary Meetings

JS raised the question of the validity of the election of the Officers at the meeting of 4th July 2009. This is covered by the discussions in the meeting of 1st November 2009 and the amendments to the minutes recorded below.

Consequently, the minutes from the meeting held on the 4th July 2009 were signed as a true and accurate record.

The minutes of the meeting held on the 1st November 2009 were amended so that the record “The previous elections were therefore constitutional” was changed to:

“The previous elections were therefore constitutional, however a number of clubs including CSS dispute the election.”

The minutes from the meeting held on the 1st November 2009 were then signed as a true and accurate record.

3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere in the Agenda

It was agreed to defer issues relating to the ladder at Balcony Pitch and bat records to the next Ordinary meeting.

It was noted that SF believes the following paragraph added to the Entrance(s) Policy at the meeting of 1st November is not in keeping with the terms of the License:

“The Group reserves the right to prevent or control access to entrances or connections that it deems to be against the interests of the cave. “

4. Revisions and Clarifications to the Constitution

It was agreed to move discussion of the proposed constitutional amendments to the end of the meeting, although lack of time subsequently prevented this discussion from occurring. SF pointed out that submission of the proposed amendments one week prior to the meeting was not in keeping with the constitution.

5. New Members

Admission of new member clubs was deferred to the end of the meeting in order to avoid the need to interpret the constitution with respect to their immediate voting rights.

SF requested immediate sight of correspondence from the new member clubs. This was not possible as stored electronically.

6. Original Entrance: padlock code and entrance security

It was recorded that following concerns raised by the landowner regarding security of the original entrance, and the fact that the padlock code was readily available on the internet, the gate padlock and code had been changed. The landowner had also requested consideration of a return to a key system. The Secretary recommended that given recent strains with the landowner relationship that it would be prudent for the Group to do so. This was unanimously agreed. **Sue Mabbett to arrange a new padlock and set of keys on the basis of one key per member club, a suitable number of keys for visiting clubs, a key for WBCRT and keys for the landowner.** It was suggested that keyholder and visiting clubs should provide a deposit for the key and should be recognised by the National Caving Body.

It was anticipated that funding would be available through the Cambrian Caving Council for the new lock and keys.

JS raised reservations about providing annual keys to some university caving clubs. However, it was also noted that concerns over continuity in university clubs could be addressed using the sections of the constitution referring to persistent absenteeism.

PT expressed sadness that lack of respect for the landowner’s position has led to this move, which will make it harder for some young cavers to access the cave. CS

pointed out that it was a condition of the License that the cave is locked with a key provided to the Landowner.

7. Ogof Drws Cefn (Back Door Cave)

Description:

The Secretary gave a brief description of the Drws Cefn entrance, located close to the stream above the tumbles. The entrance, first dug by Andy Farrant and Mike Simms in the 1990's leads to a scaffolded shaft and then to a rift. This rift has now been enlarged, in some places by the use of explosives. The rift now enters a chamber from which there are a number of possible leads being actively pursued. Doubling back from the chamber leads to a short walking passage, a crawl which has also been enlarged and further crawling which enters the previously known cave near Wyvern Hall. The total length of newly discovered cave is small, estimated 5 to 10 minutes caving to the connection.

Update of Current Position: Gate and Access:

A meeting was held between the Secretary and the Conservation Officer of the PDCMG and Nig Rogers and Stuart France representing the Drws Cefn Diggers (10th November 2009). At this meeting the diggers stated that their aim had been both to discover new cave passages and to create a new way into Ogof Draenen. It was fairly quickly agreed by all parties that a gate on the entrance was required, especially in light of the publicised through trip at that time. Subsequently further through trips have been heard of, although not recorded in the log book. A request from the Secretary for no access to Drws Cefn in the interim was rejected by the diggers. The Secretary also requested a key to the gate to be held by the PDCMG but again this was rejected and it was agreed that a key should reside with the landowner. The gate was installed (16th November 2009) and, as EL was unable to do so, SF provided Peter Jones with a key.

When the Secretary reported the above meeting and the installation of the gate to the landowner, a number of concerns were raised especially regarding liability. At the landowner's request, the Secretary wrote to Nig Rogers requesting full contact details for the new gate keyholders, however no response was forthcoming.

At this point SF suggested that the landowner holds no liability regarding use of Drws Cefn. There was much discussion over real and perceived liabilities. However it was agreed that any concerns of the landowner must be addressed and taken seriously.

CS pointed out that Section 2.7 of the License agreement refers to the Licensees providing public liability insurance. **FL/SD to confirm that this is the case.**

CD read out some legal advice from Ursula Collie regarding the License which is appended to these minutes.

Review of impact and consequences; test against agreed entrances policy.

Given that any further entrances to Ogof Draenen are required to be brought to the PDCMG with a strong case for how they are in accordance with the Conservation Policy, the Secretary invited SF to bring the case for the use of Drws Cefn.

SF made a presentation to the Group describing the newly discovered cave at Drws Cefn (attached with these minutes). The new entrance is 1km away from the original entrance and located on Open Access Land. It is not visible from the public road, but the gash at the entrance (although not the gate) is visible from a section of the tramroad. 12 – 15 cavers from 6 clubs installed the gate, for which a key is required for entry and exit. The original scaffolding on the 6m shaft which follows the entrance has been replaced. Photos were shown of the route through the cave, including a number of enlarged passages and the route to Wyvern Hall and Elliptic Passage. The main diggers were confirmed as Paul Shea and Chris Bradley.

JS confirmed that approximately 110m of new cave has been surveyed at Drws Cefn, but that this included some overlap.

CS asked SF about potential risk to formations from use of the Drws Cefn entrance. In reply SF noted that there are no formations in the area of the connection, but that the quality of the formations improves further into the cave. He suggested that comparisons to OFD and Agen Allwedd were not valid as these had not been subject to proper management. SF proposed that visitors to the cave could be “clocked” and monitored and that others were exaggerating the risk to formations.

The GOG view was that no gate was actually required on Drws Cefn.

SF compared the entrance at Drws Cefn to the Darren entrance crawl in character, but this was strongly disputed as Drws Cefn takes 5 to 10 minutes while the Darren entrance crawl is substantially longer and takes of 45 to 75 minutes depending on caver size and fitness.

The Secretary then invited the Conservation Officers to consider the conservation impacts of the use of Drws Cefn.

BL made a presentation to the Group (attached) drawing on the Impact Assessment (attached) previously circulated.

BL highlighted the conservation impacts of Drws Cefn including the impacts on pristine remote underground wilderness and important displays of aragonite and calcite formations. The concept of wilderness was explained as well as holistic minimal impact conservation. The main impacts of Drws Cefn were to reduce the remoteness and commitment required to reach the further reaches of the cave as well as the potential for physical damage to formations and sediments. The potential for several new sporting round trips close to the entrance were highlighted. BL discussed the limitations of taping, which although of fundamental importance cannot protect formations in narrow passages. A number of vulnerable sites which will be brought closer to the surface were also highlighted. BL finished with a review of management options and concluded that all except filling would lead to negative impacts and be open to abuse. BL also mentioned the need to maintain bat access with all management options.

CS asked whether there were any benefits to the use of Drws Cefn. BL considered that any positive benefits from reduced trip times to the end of the cave would be more than offset by the overall increase in caver traffic.

AF asserted that all special sites within the cave should be properly protected irrespective of the distance from an entrance. BL agreed, but added that the probability of damage was related to total footfall.

AG made the point that the timescale for exploration benefits from the new entrance were likely to be restricted to the next 5 to 10 years, but that the conservation timescale extended to many future generations of cavers. He suggested that the potential benefits of the entrance were therefore short sighted.

The potential for short round trips and tourist trips to formations was illustrated by a marked up copy of the 1997 survey provided by PT.

SF presented some caver footfall statistics (attached) demonstrating declining caver numbers in both Ogof Draenen and Eglwys Faen. It was observed by CB that caver numbers are declining in all caves.

EL raised a number of points, where she felt they fitted with the old NCA conservation policy. These were: that the entrance was not too visible, that a new through trip and some small roundtrips would be created, that perspex and sandbags should be used to protect formations, that further entrances would divide caver traffic, that a further entrance brings vulnerable sites closer but that they can still be protected by other means, that journey times would be reduced, that tired cavers, carrying equipment and camping can be damaging, the cavers need to be better educated about the importance of sediments.

Options for long term strategy for the management of Drws Cefn:

In order to reduce the number of options from the agenda under consideration it was agreed to vote initially on whether access through Drws Cefn was desirable with the intention to deal with either measures for preventing or controlling access subsequently depending on the outcome.

The following motion was proposed by BL and seconded by CD:

“There should be no access to Ogof Draenen though Drws Cefn”

The motion was passed by 7 votes to 5 (with no abstentions).

[Votes for: Treasurer, Draenen Diggers, UBSS, OUCC, MCC, Secretary, BEC; votes against: GOG, Cwmbran CC, SWCC, Brynmawr CC, CSS]

The views of the new members clubs (WSG and CUCC) were sought at they both indicated that they would have voted for the motion had they been elected prior to the vote on the motion.

[Post meeting note: the views of absent clubs are:

Gagendor – “in favour of multiple entrances as long as the access procedure is as the original entrance. This is the clubs overall view, some members are against more than one entrance and some are in favour of no gates at all but this is the club viewpoint”

Croydon – “a wide open 3rd entrance is too risky to the cave's continued conservation but an "exit" only might be the way forward”]

JS asked for it to be minuted that bats use Drws Cefn. SF added that bats had been seen roosting and the Secretary commented that she hope that use of explosives in Drws Cefn had ceased. This was confirmed by SF. The Biological Recorder made an appeal for information regarding bat records.

At this point GOG resigned from the PDCMG.

SF said he would talk to the landowner and negotiate his own access to Drws Cefn.

CS pointed out that the landowner had the right to change the padlock on Drws Cefn.

No further discussion or voting on the management of Drws Cefn were made due to lack of time.

8. New Members (from 5)

SF again requested seeing the correspondence from the prospective new members. It was accepted that it could be taken on trust that the correspondence had been received (now attached with these minutes). SF asked for the dates of the correspondence. The Secretary explained that as an action from the 4th July meeting she had invited CUCC to join the PDCMG in September, that the University Union lost the correspondence and so consequently an acceptance of the invitation was not made until 6th December. WSG wrote to request membership on the 28th October, but this was not brought to the 1st November meeting as it was an Extraordinary meeting. SF pointed out that, constitutionally, requests for membership should be 2 weeks before the meeting and therefore CUCC should not be admitted at this meeting.

Nevertheless it was pragmatically agreed that both new members should be admitted.

AG proposed that both new member clubs (WSG and CUCC) be accepted and it was seconded by CD. The proposal was passed by 8 votes for, no votes against and 3 abstentions.

[Votes for: Treasurer, Secretary, UBSS, OUCC, Draenen Diggers, Cwmbran CC, BEC, MCC; abstentions CSS, Brynmawr CC, SWCC]

9. Any Other Business (previously 8 on agenda)

The Secretary indicated that, following discussion with members of WBCRT, she had removed the rescue dump from part way round the round trip, as this mainly contained 10 year old food.

Meetings closed at 10.15pm