

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Cave Advisory Group

Meeting 5th December 2021 at 09.30, Coelbren Scout Hut

Minutes

Chairman's opening comments.

- The Chairman welcomed the group to the first meeting of the OFDCAG.
- The next meeting in June 2022 would be held at SWCC on a date to be discussed, it was hoped that this would be a “hybrid” meeting. The date for the December 2022 meeting would be discussed at the June meeting.

•

Present

Clark Friend, Gary Vaughan, Allan Richardson, Vince Allkins, Tom Partridge, Iestyn Evans, Christina Byrne, Dave Dobson, Andy Dobson.

Apologies for Absence

- Gareth Davies, Nicola Pearce, Paul Dummer, David Phillips, Keith Goodhead

•

Correspondence Received

- To be covered under the Permit Secretaries report.

•

Permit Secretary's Report

THE PERMIT SECRETARY'S REPORT TO THE DECEMBER 2021

MEETING OF THE OFDCAG. 1. This is my first report as SWCC Permit Secretary. I have been in the role now for approximately two years. **2.** The last 18 months have seen unprecedented procedural challenges on account of the Pandemic stemming from Coronavirus. Virtually every organisation on the planet has been affected and SWCC is no exception. An incredible amount of work was undertaken by SWCC committee in the period March 2020 – August 2020. This work involved the production of risk assessments and method statements to help cavers to keep themselves as safe as possible. The then Treasurer of SWCC, Chris Grimmatt was at the forefront of this initiative. It was a bitter blow to SWCC that Chris was taken from us so early in life. His contributions are missed. **3.** The Version 7 (v7) annual permit application was rolled out in December 2019. This version followed on from the earlier versions where a simple application form was completed by the applicant club with statements as to acceptance of the terms and conditions of access to the system certified by the applicant and in turn allowing fast turn around of the annual permits themselves. 36 Annual Permits were issued for 2020. Only 20 Annual Permits were issued in 2021. Most of the shortfall were university clubs. Students were experiencing difficult times early in 2021. The application forms for 2022 have been sent to all clubs who have previously held annual permits in the past four years irrespective of whether they renewed in 2021 due to difficulties stemming from the pandemic. I remain optimistic of achieving a much higher renewal rate in 2022. **4.** The website application link for permits has been dropped for the time being. The system was hampered with problems and created more issues than it solved. Once things have settled down in 2022 I would like to look at a new digital application link with the current SWCC Webmaster. The current SWCC website supplies an e-mail link direct to my work computer and seems to be working well apart from the odd applicant which goes to junk mail as opposed to inbox.

Careful checking of the junk mail folder every week seems to be working. 5. SWCC has navigated a difficult course through the pandemic and still remains in a state of development and change with respect to its systems and protocols. Due to the Pandemic, it has not been possible to administer a duty officer from the HQ to administer cave keys and thus an alternative system is in development. This system has been in place since the end of the March - June 2020 lockdown. In simple terms it is an extension of the old midweek access system. Any permit holding caver can simply request a cave key by e-mail, text or phone. Codes are issued which enable the caver to access the changing facilities and showers at the SWCC HQ and to retrieve a cave key 24/7. The use of the key is logged on user sheets designed to keep records sufficient to comply with any usage statistics that may be required in future and with SWCC's legal responsibilities as a manager of premises under current Covid related requirements. The original system had five keys available and this worked well until recently. Late summer and Autumn 2021 has seen a massive surge in caver activity and as a result SWCC has expanded the system to twelve visitor club keys. It is now practical to issue visiting clubs with more than one key. Further development of this system is on-going. 6. The Digital Destination Board is now up and running and monitored around the clock by a team of SWCC members. This app can be downloaded from Google Play and runs currently on Android systems. It is hoped to extend this to IOS in the near future. This App will enable SWCC to offer call out cover for cavers visiting OFD without having to place a duty officer at the HQ. 7. I have received one application for an Annual Permit which I have passed on to The Chairman of OFDCAG. This particular application has caused me to report my concerns here..... i) The existing protocol for awarding Annual Permits is that they are issued to clubs which have shown consistent and steady interest in OFD over a period of time. ii) The applicant is a person and not a caving club. If this application were to be approved it would set a dangerous precedent and further reduce the value of caving clubs which in my view remain at the very centre of caving in the UK and are pivotal to caver development. Without exchange through the club network, news and views are not shared which in turn leads to isolation and polarisation. iii) The applicant has shown no demonstrable track record of caving interest in OFD despite the opportunity of going with other parties. The current application fails in that respect. iv) The applicant in question has been offered date specific permits with instant access to visit OFD on the basis of being a Direct Individual Member (DIM) of BCA. To date the applicant has not asked for a single date specific permit which in my mind calls into question the motive for the entire application. I have formed the view that the application is bogus and an attempt to secure an annual OFD permit in order to make a political point rather than to gain access to the cave. Based on the concerns above, I would urge the OFDCAG to advise against changing the established protocol and not issue an annual OFD Club permit to any individual. Gary Vaughan 29.11.21

Gary also wished to thank Josh Vaughan for his work on the call out system.

Cave stats will be available at the June meeting after the disruption.

There were two questions raised by the report:-

- a) Should we change the protocol for issuing Annual Permits? None were against it so it will be looked into.
- b) There is currently no process for a DIM member of bCA to get an Annual Permit, as happens in other areas, this needs to be addressed.

●**Chairman's Report**

●Nothing to report

●

●**Hon. Secretary's Report**

●Nothing to report.

●**Conservation Officer's Report**

●The usual taping/re-taping and cleaning up of footprints etc had been carried out.

●There was now a database of taping on the SWCC computer.

- **The route used after the major rescue in November had been checked, there were no problems.**

It was requested that the NRW supply up to date copies of the NNR and SSSI documents.

- **Fixed Aids officers report Dec '21**



- First please accept my apologies for this meeting, I'm unfortunately solo, in the office this weekend.
- This is my first year in the role and it's certainly been less than a year at that. Along with two previous members, I've visited all the fixed aids in the cave to look at and determine those which need maintenance. I've received two requests to look at places in the cave, one was after the 04 Sep 2021 accident and this area has been gardened to reduce the likelihood of another incident, this is a less visited and wilder part of the cave and those visiting it will be aware of this as the lead up to the area consists of elements for the more experienced caver. The second is to modify a loose hold in a more tourist part of the cave to prevent another accident – this will also be done shortly as this is often used by inexperienced cavers.
- Regarding the fixed aids I have a small, planned maintenance list which I plan to plan to update and replace in the coming months.



- Regards
- Gareth Davies



A report was given to the meeting that we need some strong chain for the pots in OFD

1

- **Natural Resources Wales Report (NNR related)**

- The NNR is changing all Reserve locks across Wales starting January 2022.
- The Grazing Tenancy with Colin on the Reserve is being renewed.
- NRW are aware of the state of the road and the car park, discussions are underway re repairs.
- The NRW would like another trip in OFD at some point in the late Spring/early summer, they were reminded that they had a standing invite in this respect
- Christina reported that there was a plan to do some monitoring in the cave in the future, SWCC would be happy to assist this.
- The Geopark validation was carried out recently, the outcome will be known by next April.



- **Reported Accidents**

- i) Pendulum Passage 2nd September 2021
- ii) Upper Smithy, Cwm Dwr 7th November 2021

Reports on the accidents are attached these were explained by Clark.

There were no safety implications for SWCC, as they were in a remote infrequently visited area of the cave.

The NRW pointed out that they need to be kept in the loop when things are happening on the Reserve, in the case of a Rescue it was Rescue's responsibility. They also noted that they have a 24/7 Ops room, with access to resources should they be needed.

- **Recruitment of Cave Wardens**

- Clark Friend is on a small working group who are looking at recruitment and retention of Wardens.

- Clark then outlined the protocols of a Wardens duties.

-

The following was not covered at the December 2021 meeting.

- **Cave Management Plan**

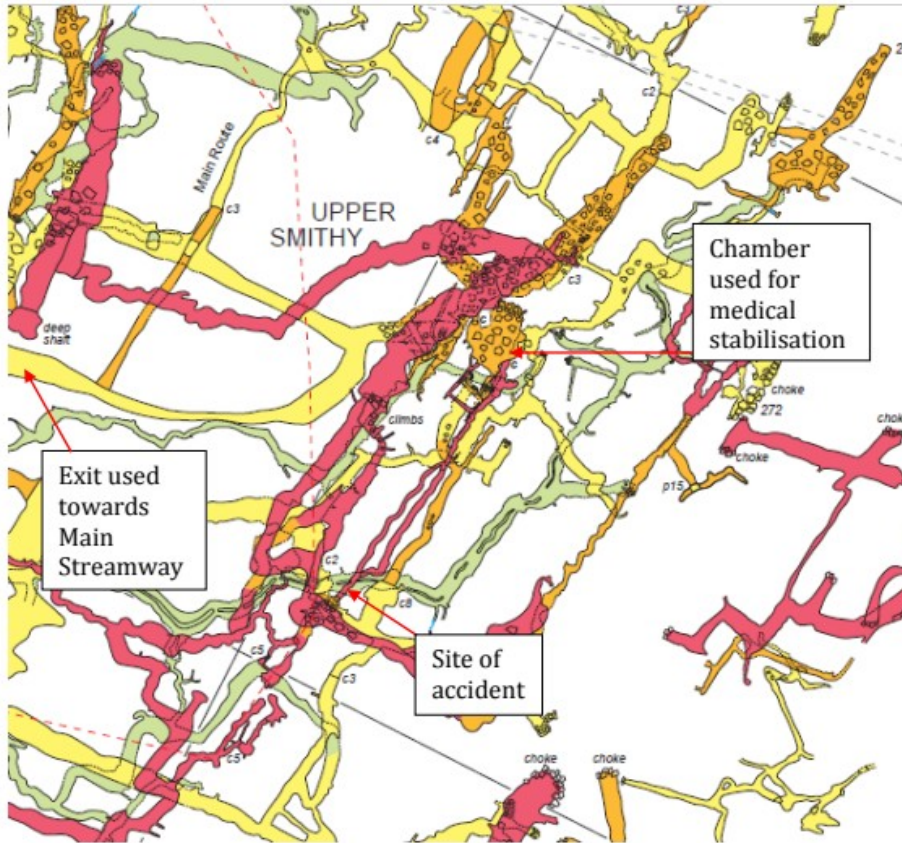
- Possible review of safety advice given in various documents presently used in relation to access, permit applications and elsewhere. (Background document to be circulated.)

- Consideration of any possible recommendations we might wish to make regarding minor issues with the Terms of Reference and related documents.

- OFDCAG digital interfaces. (Background document to be circulated.)

- Any other business if time permits.

Site of accident and general details.



Paradoxically, the accident was roughly 150m south of the SWCC HQ, yet the extraction route was in the order of 2.5km, the majority of which was up the Nant Newydd, Main Streamway.

Given the injuries, it was impossible to extract the casualty out the way he came in. This route would have involved a double right angled bend and then a flat out crawl that would have required the casualty to have guided himself.

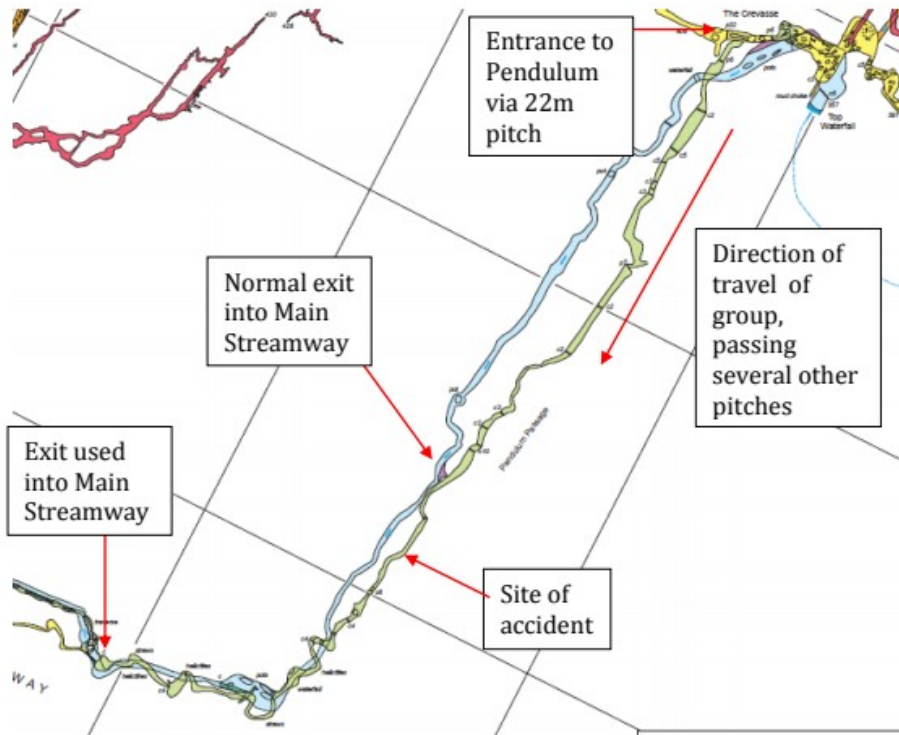
Action Taken

The following the operation took 54hrs, involving 10 rescue teams providing 255 people underground and more on the surface. A successful outcome was that the casualty was delivered to hospital by ambulance and that he has begun his recovery. The assistance of the Powys HART was invaluable in providing the constant flow of oxygen bottles and other medical materials needed.

This accident took place in a little-frequented part of the cave, in passages that are only visited for the purposes of exploration.

Details of the accident in Pendulum Passage, OFD, 4th September 2021

Site of accident and general details.



Action Taken

The site was subsequently visited by the SWCC Fixed Aids Officer and two very competent and experienced, long-term Members who carried out gardening of the passage in the vicinity of the accident.

Attached correspondence.

Dear Gary,

Thanks for forwarding this.

I think that you and I are immediately on the same page.

Caving is inherently dangerous and you have to cave within your limits. I have no understanding about the ability of the people that were in Pendulum Passage so cannot make any judgement other than based on my experiences there. It clearly requires a certain level of skills to accomplish which then places limits on the number of people going there and the intelligence that we get regarding the state of the cave. There has been a long break and, not being familiar with the trip tickets, have there been many trips there over the Covid break? Seems to me there is an amount of information that we will need to discuss this.

I will ask Allan to put it on the December Agenda.