

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Cave Advisory Group
Minutes

The meeting was held at at South Wales Caving Club on the 28th May 2023
starting at 0930

The meeting was held in person and by Zoom

Apologies

Christina Byrne, Claire Vivian, Jill Brunsdon, Tony Baker

Present

Allan Richardson, Luke Ashton, Paul Dann, Jo White, Andrew McLeod, Duncan Hornby, Tom Partridge, Vince Allkins, Dave Dobson, Andy Dobson, Nicola Pearce, Si Lewis, Tomasz Zalewski.

Chairmans opening comments

Chairman not present.

Appointment of new Wardens

No new Wardens.

Correspondence received

None

Chairmans Report

No report

Hon. Secretary's Report

Extension of wardens.

Vince Allkins, Dave Dobson & Andy Dobson were verified as Wardens as of Dec 2022, all in favour.

The process of recruiting wardens is ongoing.

SWCC Permit Secretary's Report

- Updates to permits, access advice and application documentation are complete at of December 2022.
- The development of an electronic permit application form is still in progress. Electronic key booking for annual permit holders has undergone further developments and enhancements and is in the final stages of testing with selected caving clubs with the aim to roll this out further by the end of June.
- Cave usage statistics prior to 2021 are still being transcribed. Records are up to date from 2021 onwards.
- One issue with logging trips was noted with caving clubs attending CHECC this year due to a misunderstanding with how the permit holder managed allocated keys.

Period 28/11/2022 – 29/04/2023

Number of cavers via all entrances – 985

Year	No. of Date Specific Permits (OFD) Issued
2023	27
2022	76
2021	(no data)
Year	No. of Annual Permits (OFD) Issued
2023	33
2022	30
2021	20

Luke reported to the meeting that there had been a 40% reduction in visits to OFD, compared with the same time last year.

Luke Ashton – 20/05/2023

Conservation Officers Report

Work this year has mainly focused on maintenance - tape cleaning, re-aligning and replacement.

The usual places such as the Wedding Cake have required the removal of careless hand prints, this seems to be a perennial problem, at least it is quickly remedied.

As always thanks go to Andy & Brian for their stalwart assistance.

Dave Dobson, May 2023

Fixed Aids Officers Report

The majority of approved fixed aids in the cave have been checked. The entrance to Cwm Dwr 2 has been re-secured. A new scaffold pole has been installed in OFD1 across Pot 1 as the chain securing it had snapped (the old scaffold pole is likely at the bottom of Pot 1). The work to stabilise the rest of the Cwm Dwr 1 entrance is still outstanding but not urgent. Three of the four scaffold poles in OFD1 are secured to heavily rusted anchors of indeterminate age and should be replaced.

The rope of the Diver's Pitch is showing some wear at the top of the rope where it is tied around a large natural thread. It may need to be adjusted, or possibly better to be replaced by a length of stainless chain or a stainless wire stop; the rope will then need to be secured with a thimble and appropriate splice.

The securing pin on the tensioner on the Airy Fairy traverse was recently reported to have fallen out; it was refitted by the user. This, and other pins, will be re-inspected in due course.

It is my intention to, for future installations, generally use only stainless steel in the cave where practical. The OFD1 Maypole flood escape route chain should be replaced with a stainless chain as it is rusting and this rust is being left on the walls of the cave. Similarly, using stainless chain for securing the scaffold poles in OFD1 (even though the poles themselves are not stainless) would likely increase the lifespan of the chain, which (for Pot 1) had failed due to the links wearing away due to the action of the stream, but was likely accelerated due to the rusting.

Installation of via ferrata style steps in OFD1 on the flood escape route to replace the current aid ladder, rawl bolt and fat rope was approved by the fixed aids group and has been previously presented to OFDCAG but is still pending negotiations about the scale of what constitutes an OLDSI (operation likely to damage the special interest - formerly known as a PDO or potentially damaging operation). It seems likely that sympathetic installation of a limited number of anchors in the wall of an active stream way is unlikely to constitute a damaging operation or have any impact on the features of special scientific interest.

A number of the fixed aids are life-expired and in need of replacement; specifically, most of the anchors for ladder/lifeline or SRT (this does not include the stainless expansion bolt anchors on the wire traverses in OFD1, which are acceptable at present). All these anchors should be replaced with resin anchors through the BCA scheme via Cambrian Caving Council. BCA resin anchors have already been installed in the cave in the past but do not appear on the Approved Fixed Aids list as they are not maintained by SWCC; they are maintenance-free anchors requiring only user inspection and any future replacement would be undertaken by Cambrian.

There are a number of locations that either:

- require additional resin anchors (e.g. the Columns pitch),
- require new resin anchors to replace decayed and unrated anchors (e.g. Letterbox bolt, Fault Aven bolt, Arete climb bolts)
- are not used as anchors/do not provide a safe anchor setup and should be removed from the fixed aids list or replaced with a new fixed aid (Midnight Passage bolt, Maypole Inlet bolt), or
- are not approved fixed aids but are commonly used and would benefit from the installation of new resin anchors (eg. the Skyhook).

There may be additional locations where new anchors would be of benefit to cavers without jeopardising cave conservation (or in some cases assisting with cave conservation).

A meeting of the Fixed Aids group will be organized in the near future, which will include assessing which locations in the cave should be recommended for the installation of new resin anchors to (initially) replace life-expired anchors. Further discussion on anchor installations will take place after all installations on the Approved Fixed Aids list have appropriate anchors or have been removed from the list and, if appropriate, removed from the cave.

Cambrian have recently trained four new resin anchor installers, meaning that once agreement and all relevant permissions have been obtained there should be no practical obstacle to the installation of new resin anchors.

Motion:

To accept the previous recommendations of the Fixed Aids Group to, pending all necessary legal permissions, install a set of via ferrata style steps at the climb into Low's Passage in OFD1 and, if judged appropriate, to recommend installation of resin anchors to Cambrian Caving Council.

Notes:

The steps currently under consideration (Bolt Products resin steps) are made from 12mm stainless steel rod, conform to the mountaineering anchor standard and have a dropped step to prevent feet

sliding sideways off the step. The resin anchors would be placed to allow safe belaying techniques to be used by cavers who wished to do so. The expectation is that the steps will be easy to negotiate, even for cavers of shorter height, and that most cavers will not feel the need to be belayed. It is important that the climb is made easy to facilitate its use as part of the flood escape route, as the stream way it climbs out of can become hazardous in flood conditions.

Andrew McLeod

All were in favour of the following proposals:-

Replacing the bolts in OFD 1, once the funding and necessary permissions were in place.

Placing new bolts on the Columns pitch and replacing the Rawl Bolt with a modern Resin Anchor, pending required permissions.

Installing Via Ferrata style steps at Low's Chain.

Paul Dann reported that NRW were waiting for the above OFDCAG decision, now it has happened they could proceed with the necessary permissions

Reported Accidents

None reported

Rescue Liason Report

No report received

Allocated Columns duties

28/05/23, 27/08/23, 1/1/24

These have been published on the SWCC notice board and on the OFDCAG webpage.

There will be a request coming out for volunteers for the next round of Columns open days.

Cave Management Plan

No report

Update on safety advice

No information from NRW.

SWCC is looking into Radon advice for cavers eg when assisting filming or other commercial groups.

Possible changes to TOR's

Review ongoing at present initiated by SWCC with reference to the MOU.

OFDCAG digital interface-update

A page for OFDCAG is on the SWCC page.

After some discussion in the meeting Andrew is to make the page easier to find.

The aim is to have all OFDCAG information on the webpage, including minutes of meetings from the formation of OFDCAG. AR to sort digital copies for Andrew.

Andrew McLeod

AOB

Request from Cardiff Uni CCC re gaining permission to bolt a climb in OFD.

Withdrawn pending more detailed information.

Gary Vaughan asked about an Access Review document, Andrew reported that it was an SWCC document, the OFDCAG Chair will bring it to the next meeting.

Vince asked about the availability of keys, there are 4 in total. Vince asked about a wardens key box, agreed to install a key box with two keys in the DO cupboard (tbc). Vince to get a key box and install it. We will need more keys, as we can't get more cut so will have to get new padlocks and keys. Vince to sort.

Date of next meeting 3/12/23 at 0930

This will be a blended meeting held at SWCC.

R. Allan Richardson
Hon. Secretary
OFDCAG