

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Cave Advisory Group
Minutes

The meeting was held at South Wales Caving Club on the 29th May 2024
starting at 1800

The meeting was held in person and by Zoom

Apologies

Claire Vivian, Si Lewis, Jules Carter, Mike James, Luke Ashton

Present

Tony Baker, Allan Richardson, Dave Dobson, Andy Dobson, Vince Allkins, Paul Dann, Jo White, Andrew McLeod, Tomasz Zalewski, Duncan Hornby, Nicola Pearce.

Chairmans Report

Nothing to add since last meeting.

Appointment of new Wardens

None

Discussion needed on how many wardens we need on each open day.

The topic was discussed, decided to maintain the current status quo, we need to ask for volunteers who can warden at short notice.

Correspondence received

None

Hon. Secretary's Report

Nothing to report other than the normal administration.

OFD Access Review Group Report

No update from SWCC yet, ongoing.

Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between NRW and SWCC

NRW has not been able to progress this at present, some ideas have been received from Gary Vaughan, Ongoing though currently paused.

SWCC Permit Secretary's Report

- A quinquennial permit has been created for cave rescue organisations (see below)
- Electronic key booking for annual permit holders has undergone further developments and enhancements and is still being promoted to annual permit holders as the primary means of requesting keys.
- No further access or key issues have been noted in the past 6 months.
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Period 15/11/2023 - 28/04/2024

Number of cavers via all entrances – 1642

Year	No. of Date Specific Permits (OFD) Issued
2024 (to date)	60
2023	55
2022	71 (Previous data reported incorrectly as 76)
Year	No. of Annual Permits (OFD) Issued
2024	33
2023	33

Cave usage stats are available on request to the Secretary.

Luke Ashton – 14/05/2024

Proposal to issue the SMWCRT with a 5 year Ogof Ffynnon Ddu entry permit for non incident access.

Without going into too much detail regarding the background relating to the above.

Last year there was an informal face to face meeting attended by a small group of SWCC committee members, Gary Vaughn as Chairman of SWCC and Myself, Vince Allkins as SWCC Caving Manager together with George linnane as Rescue liason officer and Dan Thorne as chairman of the Team and Jules Carter as a SMWCRT OFDCAG rep and Team Warden. The purpose of which was to discuss continuing entry into the OFD system by the Team but to do so with consideration to the permit system which applies to all those wishing to enter the cave and managed on a day to day basis by the South Wales caving Club on behalf of Natural Recourses Wales.

Briefly. We wanted to both clarify and agree the way forward for the SMWCRT to enter the OFD cave system but to formally incorporate the permit system into any agreement for entry by the Team **outside of any rescue incidents.**

A suggestion of a 5 year modified permit was agreed after discussions with changes to allow greater number of team members on practices which would necessitate surpassing the existing permit limit for 6 people. Whilst the SWCC would continue to support and accommodate the rescue Team, it was thought that the permit system should be upheld even if there was a need for revisions to take into account the Team's important regular practise regime within the OFD cave system.

This modified 5 year SMWCRT specific permit is included for your attention.

SWCC has assurances that existing and continuing conservation considerations would be adhered to and would like the Team to inform us of all practises in OFD in advance to avoid any clashes with SWCC activities.

Unfortunately an email from the team via George Linnane agreeing to the 5 year permit went astray and I also have been dragging my heels on this one so I must apologise for the delays.

Your thoughts or ratification of the proposal to go back to the SWCC committee asap would be appreciated.

It is important to note: The proposed specific 5 year SMWCRT permit **only** applies to rescue practices, reconnaissance or fact finding trips outside of actual emergency incidents by the Team. Please let me know if you need any further details.

Best Regards.

Vince Allkins. SWCC. Caving Manager.

Luke Ashton. SWCC Permit Secretary

Gary Vaughn. SWCC Rescue Liason Officer

QUINQUENNIAL PERMIT No. Q-2024-01

Access to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu I, II (Top Entrance) & Cwm Dwr

The entrances to OFD II & Cwm Dwr lie within a National Nature Reserve/SSSI administered by Natural Resources

Wales (NRW). The entrance to OFD I is owned by the South Wales Caving Club (SWCC) and also lies within a Site of

Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). This permit is issued on behalf of NRW and SWCC and is required for any entrance

to OFD. Entrances are gated and keys can be collected from SWCC HQ on production of a permit.

Quinquennial Permits: Applications for permits that are valid for five years should be made directly to The South

Wales Caving Club Permit Secretary. Such permits are normally granted only to cave rescue organisations able to

demonstrate a responsible attitude to safety and conservation.

Special Conditions of Access to OFD I, II (Top Entrance) & Cwm Dwr

a) These Entry Conditions and Rules apply to all parts of and all entrances to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu.

b) These Special Conditions of Access apply to the cave. They do not apply to the surface above the cave. If the

practice involves the use of vehicles above ground, permission to use motor vehicles on the relevant private property

should be sought well in advance of the date of the proposed practice. It is not necessarily within the remit of SWCC

Permit Secretary to grant access for motor vehicles above ground.

c) The Organiser of the Practice is responsible for the conduct and safety of the participant AND for the provision of

the equipment necessary to complete the trip. The Organiser of the Practice must draw to the party's attention the

conditions relating to the use of any fixed equipment within the cave, which are displayed on the board in cottage 3 of

SWCC HQ. (A copy of these will be given upon request). The Organiser of the Practice is responsible for the cave

key. Lost keys will incur a charge of £50.

d) ONLY electric lighting is to be used. Carbide MUST NOT be taken into the cave.

e) This permit is for participation in Cave Rescue Practices only. The placing of any 'Rescue Fixed Aids', Camping,

(not including temporary casualty care bivouacs), commercial filming, digging, the use of explosives, dye tracing and

other research projects require special permission, for which application is to be made via the South Wales Caving

Club Permit Secretary in advance.

- f) Conservation of the cave is very important and those who enter the cave are responsible for its welfare. Some areas are taped off for conservation reasons. Marker tapes must not be crossed or moved, under any circumstances other than in extreme emergency. Observe all tapes and route markings in the cave. If there is no tape, proceed only if there is a clearly defined path. If in doubt, STOP. The planning of Cave Rescue Practices shall take into account the conservation of the cave.
- g) Smoking is prohibited throughout the cave and no litter whatsoever is to be left either inside or outside the cave.
- h) Cavers visiting OFD 1 must park vehicles in approved locations and approach the cave entrance by approved routes. Details of locations and routes can be found on the notice board in cottage No. 8 of SWCC HQ.
- i) The gates are to be locked at all times except when entering or leaving the cave or when monitored by a member of the Cave Rescue Team appointed to the task by the Organiser of the Practice.
- j) Cavers enter at their own risk.
- k) Installations, apparatus and equipment must not be damaged. If accidental damage occurs this should be reported immediately on return via the whiteboard in SWCC cottage no. 8 and/or by email to the South Wales Caving Club Permit Secretary.
- l) Access to the land surface of the NNR and of much of the remainder of the SSSI is unrestricted to pedestrians but visitors are asked to help protect the wildlife and natural beauty and avoid disturbance to grazing animals.
- m) Failure to observe these conditions may result in the refusal of any future application for entry.
- n) These Entry Conditions and Rules may be revised from time to time.

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu II Streamway

1. CAVERS ARE ADVISED TO WEAR WETSUITS IN THIS STREAMWAY.
2. IT IS RECOMMENDED THAT NOVICES SHOULD NOT BE TAKEN INTO THE OFD II STREAMWAY.

Columns Access

Access to the Columns (in OFD II) has been restricted since 1978 following a number of incidents of wanton damage to the area. The Columns and adjacent floor are particularly vulnerable because, being formed from limekiln seepage, they are much more fragile than conventional calcite formations. For the avoidance of doubt this permit does not extend to the areas of the cave controlled under the Columns Access protocols.

NRW/SWCC QUINQENNIAL PERMIT - VERSION 3 MAY 2024

The meeting voted to accept the above permit, all in favour.
Passed nem con.

Conservation Officers Report

Much of the focus recently has been on tape replacement and re-alignment, to better direct cavers around sensitive areas, particularly mud formations and deposits, these are a much undervalued resource and impossible to recover once damaged. Cleaning and restoration work also continues, there seems to have been less accidental damage this year, hopefully this trend will continue but may only be due to reduced footfall during the roof project. The usual thanks go to Andy and Brian for their invaluable assistance.

Dave Dobson

Nothing to add in the meeting.

Fixed Aids Officers Report

Fixed Aids report for OFDCAG meeting 29/5/2024

Andrew McLeod

The majority of fixed aids in OFD have been inspected within the last year. A number of life-expired fixed aids have been removed from the Fixed Aids list and/or replaced with resin anchors via the Ogofa Cymru (formerly Cambrian Caving Council) resin anchoring programme.

The anchors for the scaffold poles across the OFD1 Pots are now all stainless steel throughbolts. The chains and poles are generally in good condition, except for the chain on Pot 2 which will need replacing in due course. The chain on Maypole Chain has been replaced with a stainless chain to reduce rust marks on the cave; it is cut shorter than the old chain (while still easily in reach) which should reduce movement of the chain in flood conditions and thus wear on the cave.

Resin anchors have been installed at Low's Chain (along with nine stainless steel via ferrata steps) as previously agreed. Resin anchors have also been installed on the Chasm pitches, the Bedding Chambers pitch, the Columns pitch (additional anchors), Swamp Creek (work ongoing) and the Skyhook (work ongoing).

Rigging topos for these routes (where complete) have been, or will be, posted on both the Ogofa Cymru and SWCC websites, along with horizontal rigging topos for rigging the Awkward Corner and the Maypole/Bold Step using natural anchors.

Previously agreed locations for resin anchors where work has not yet begun are the Letterbox chain, Fault Aven, and the p8 and p20 pitches in Great Oxbow.

The SWCC Fixed Aids Advisory Group met on 22nd May. The group recommends the following work is carried out (for the consideration of OFDCAG):

- 1) Further scaffolding, or a ladder, is installed in the Cwm Dwr entrance to protect the loose fill at the back of the rift.
- 2) Resin anchors are installed (by Ogofa Cymru) at the Crevasse to replace life-expired anchors (making use of existing 12mm stainless throughbolt anchors where appropriate).
- 3) Resin anchors are installed (by Ogofa Cymru) at the traverse on the Lavender Way bypass route to Northern Lights, to replace life-expired single-point anchors.

4) That stainless rings, maillons and chains are used for pull-up systems, attached to resin anchors, on the Skyhook and Fault Aven pitches (and, subject to agreement, elsewhere as appropriate on existing anchors).

Resin anchor work is carried out with the agreement and consent of NRW and we will continue to notify NRW about all work that is carried out.

The 4 proposals above were voted on, two abstentions the rest in favour.

Passed.

Reported Accidents

None

Rescue Liason Report

The rescue training calendar has been set and the group should have been sent this as usual to highlight when the team planned to use OFD. Next date involving the cave is 30th November and it is looking like this practice will also be the team's peer review assessment which happens every few years.

Jules Carter

Allocated Columns duties

25/8/24, 1/1/25

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

Cave Management Plan

Ongoing

Update on safety advice

Nothing to report

Possible changes to TOR's

These are part of the MOU, they are ongoing.

OFDCAG digital interface-update

The Columns open days and wardens names have been updated.

AOB

Tomasz reported a problem with the OFD 1 lock, Vince said he would look at it.

Date of next meeting TBC

It was proposed that the meeting is held one week before the SWCC committee meeting of the 16/12/24

Need to agree on time and day by email vote.

R. Allan Richardson

Hon. Secretary

OFDCAG