

17th Full Meeting – 27th November 2019, Pontneddfechan Village Hall

Attendance

Chris Allen, WLA	Rhys Green, Green Ideas	Matt Perrott Parkwood
Dave Barber, Longtown	CJ Griffiths, Brecon	Outdoors Dolygaer
Outdoor Learning Centre	Adventures Ltd	Chris Pierce, Oxfordshire
Nick Bates, independent	David Hassard, Maes y Lade	Outdoors
Jeff Calligan, Mountain and	Centre	Steve Rayner, Steve Rayner
River Activities Ltd	Ian Jenkins, independent	Outdoor Pursuits
Joey Chapman, Llandysul	James Lawrence, Brecon	Emyr Rees, UWC Atlantic
Paddlers	Beacons National Park	College
Mick Collins, Outdoors@Hay	Authority	Tom Sampson, Hampshire
Paul Dann, Natural Resources	Lee Lewis, Adventure Nomad /	and Cass Foundation
Wales	Taff Valley	Mountain Centre
Richard Doyle, Princes Trust	Katie Lloyd, Princes Trust	Mark Soanes, Call of the Wild
Cymru	Cymru	Ltd
Simon Fenton, Gower	Jamie Maxwell, Brecon	Mick Standing, Black Mountain
Adventures	Adventures Ltd	Activities
Rob Finley, Ultimate	Neil McMullen, Blue Ocean	Ieuan Starks, School Camp
Consortium	Activities	Ltd
Eleanor Flaherty, Brecon	Tom Moore, University of	Dave Thomas, Call of the Wild
Beacons National Park	Wales Trinity Saint David	Ltd
Authority	Ant Morgan, Miskin	David Williams, NPTC group
Lee Garbett, Quest Adventure	Stephen Parsons, School	of colleges
Activities Ltd	Camp Ltd	Nick Winder, Tirabad
		Residential Education Centre

Welcome and Apologies

Emyr Rees opened the meeting, welcomed attendees, introduced Steering Group Members and representatives from BBNPA and NRW.

Apologies had been received from:

Steffan Davies, Hawk	Bob Keep, Caerphilly	Mike Smith, Parkwood
Adventures	Roger Lee, Trewern	Outdoors Dolygaer
Michael Downey, Life	Jethro Moore, Adventure	Kevin Walker
Changing Activities	Beyond	Matt Woodfield, Outdoor
Dave Grimes, Blue Dot	Jo Musson	Matters
Adventure	Will Ripley, Outward Bound	

1. Matters Arising from 2018 AGM

Emyr Rees reported that, since the 2018 AGM had “tasked the Steering Group to consider the introduction of gorge ID cards and to recommend new signage to NRW”, we had introduced ID cards for vehicles & leaders and installed new signs in the Dinas changing screens. He added that NRW would be replacing their own signs in due course.

2. Overview of SWOAPG's recent & planned activity

Emyr Rees described the following achievements and activities on behalf of the Steering Group:

- Administration: During the year we have completed our transition to company status and have completed our first annual submissions to both Companies House and Her Majesty's Revenue & Customs. The BBNPA grant that we obtained last year allowed us to complete this transition and to

maintain some reserve funds, but also allowed us to setup the new gorge ID arrangements with the purchase of a card printer and new signs.

We have trialled a simplified event booking system on our website, which is more user-friendly than the old one (but does mean a little more work for the Coordinator). We have also started advertising our Members' events via our website and newsletter, and Members wishing to publicise events in this way should contact the Coordinator. We have recently introduced video-conferencing for our Steering Group meetings to allow more people to take part as well as reduce travel costs.

Membership numbers are similar to last year, which is a good position for us to be in:

Category	2019	2018
Full Member	75	73
Associate Member	15	18
Additional Staff of Corporate Members	78	
Youth Members	1	
Supporters	30	
Subscribers	66	
'Old' Members still on Subscriber List	110	

- Waterfall Country: We've continued to work very closely with Brecon Beacons National Park Authority and Natural Resources Wales to operate the gorge-walking Concordat and maintain good relations with the local community. One example of this close liaison is that NRW have been very quick to respond to issues raised by us affecting group safety, including the steps down to the lower Mellte which were repaired recently.

We expect to have an updated version of the Concordat next season, incorporating the revised rules that we'll be discussing later. It may also include climbing and walking in Waterfall Country, which are both activities which require permission from groups on NRW land, following the publication of new NRW policies last year.

We've continued to keep members informed about the Loonies' Leap access lane and would also be discussing this later in the meeting.

On 5th May we again organised a free activity day for Pontneddfechan residents, with gorge-walking by Call of the Wild and climbing by Parkwood Outdoors.

In April we introduced our new 'gorge ID arrangements'. We've issued ID cards and sent regular updated lists to NRW & BBNPA and published these on our website – and put signs in the Dinas changing areas to tell clients that their leaders should have our ID cards. BBNPA and NRW have carried out several 'spot-checks' through the year and have told us the new system has been very useful for them – so we'll carry this on in 2020. Next year's cards will be a different colour and will have holes in them for attaching to packs or BAs.

We also published this year the Upper Mellte evacuation map – many thanks to Lee Garbett and Mountain Rescue for putting this together; they are now working on a similar project for the Lower Mellte.

- Paddlesport: the Coordinator is still discussing (slowly!) with Dwr Cymru Welsh Water the prospects for extending the Brecon Beacons Reservoir Passport Scheme and/or SWOAPG taking responsibility for it. BBNPA has agreed to arrange with Dwr Cymru to repair the Pontsticill Reservoir access steps (at the causeway end), using funds from the Passport Scheme.

We held a couple of meetings this year with Providers about Glasbury-Hay, which led us to respond to Powys County Council's consultation and proposals for future commercial launching at Glasbury. However, things have gone quiet here since the Wye & Usk Foundation decided that it would work with the anglers to propose a Voluntary Access Arrangement for this stretch of the river – which we would be discussing later in the meeting.

- Representing Members' Interests: the Coordinator and Steering Group members continue to represent SWOAPG at various national and local forums to ensure that the interests of Outdoor Activity Providers are properly represented, including:
 - Wales Adventure Tourism Organisation
 - Outdoor Alliance
 - National Access Forum Wales
 - Brecon Beacons Local Access Forum
 - Brecon Beacons, Swansea Bay & Mid-Wales Tourism groups
 - Waterfalls Area Safety Group

SWOAPG has become an Organisational Member of the Institute for Outdoor Learning this year, which means that our Members are now able to access some IOL events at discounted prices and we are able to keep Members informed about developments in IOL.

We made a submission in October to the Welsh Government consultation 'Sustainable Farming and our Land', calling for access improvements to be included in any post-Brexit farm payment scheme.

We are also in the early stages of a conversation with NRW to explore the scope for some kind of Concordat arrangement that might permit our Members to operate bushcraft on NRW land.

- Workshops: we've run several workshops this year and are planning several for 2020. We are always interested in ideas for what else Providers would like us to offer:
 - Caving workshop May 2019
 - Gorges Code of Conduct Jul & Nov 2019
 - Mellte rescue workshop Jun 2019
 - Gower climbing workshop Jun 2019
 - Welsh in the Outdoors 2020
 - Geology in the Swansea Valley 2020
 - Gunpowder & Gorges Local Ambassador 2020
 - Monmouthshire & Brecon Canal 2020
- Vale of Glamorgan Coastal Activities Study: WATO undertook a feasibility study this year for Vale of Glamorgan Council, exploring the scope for more outdoor activities on the Vale's coast – including a 'showcase event' at Atlantic College on 9 Jun. The Council was pleased with the results and, although most work was done by other WATO Partners, SWOAPG provided some support and earned some funds.

3. Annual Report & Accounts

Emyr explained that he didn't intend to go through the Annual Report since he had covered most of it by his presentation (copies of the Annual Report and Accounts were included in the pack handed out on arrival and had been published on our website).

Ieuan Starks presented the accounts to 31 July 2019, noting that they had been submitted formally to Companies House & HMRC (the accounting year having changed from 31 Mar since we became a company) and that we had achieved a net surplus for the year because of BBNPA grant, which had allowed us to build up some reserves:

Income & Revenue	£ 12,398
BBNPA Funding	£ 4,120
Membership Fees	£ 6,090
Workshop Fees	£ 570
Project Fees	£ 1,618
Expenditure	£ 9,166
Co-ordinator fees	£ 6,183
Membership costs	£ 645
Workshop costs	£ 187
Project Costs	£ 948
Payment Processing Fees	£ 254
Administration	£ 950
Income less Expenditure	£ 3,231

However, he added that, if we continued to spend at our 'expected' level, with similar membership in 2020 and no additional income, we would have around £2k less by this time next year:



He went on to explain that, since we don't want to maintain large reserves, we intend to maintain current membership fees while keeping a close eye on spend and to review the position again next year – but would also be asking for Members' views on potential additional expenditure later in the meeting.

4. Amendment to Terms of Reference

Emyr explained that the Steering Group wished to amend SWOAPG's Terms of Reference to:

- increase the Steering Group from 12 to 16 Members – because we want to ensure that we properly represent the sector and would like to have more members to actively represent your interests, without losing any of our valuable, existing members;
- seek a 'balance' in the Steering Group – to cover a range of business / organisation types including Large Private Businesses; Small Private Businesses; Freelancers; Education Centres; Charitable Trusts; the Military; Voluntary Organisations; and Clubs – as well as covering our entire geographical area; and
- add a 'role model' clause requiring Steering Group members to "demonstrate to the satisfaction of Members their suitability for the role including their adherence to...our Environmental Charter; the NRW Concordat...and any other policies and agreements that SWOAPG should adopt in the future"

Members present voted unanimously to approve the new Terms of Reference.

5. Election of Steering Group, Directors and Chairperson

Steve Rayner thanked Emyr Rees – who was retiring as a Director and as Chairperson – for his contributions over the past 2 years.

Steve then explained that two Members (Simon Fenton and CJ Griffiths) had recently been co-opted to the Steering Group and now needed to be elected formally – and that the Terms of Reference required one-third of the Steering Group (those who've served longest) to 'retire' each year. Will Kilner, Jet Moore, Mark Soanes and Nick Winder were therefore 'retiring' – but were each eligible for re-election. He concluded that, with the newly-agreed changes to the Terms of Reference, we therefore had 10 Steering Group vacancies for which 7 nominations had been received: Simon Fenton (Gower Adventures), CJ Griffiths (Brecon Adventures), Will Kilner (Adventures with Will), Neil McMullen (Blue Ocean Adventure), Jethro Moore (Adventure Beyond), Mark Soanes (Call of the Wild) and Nick Winder (Tirabad REC). All 7 were elected unanimously by the meeting.

One nomination had also been received for a Directorship: CJ Griffiths (who was already co-opted but needed to be confirmed by election), who was elected unanimously by the meeting.

The Steering Group nominated Stephen Parsons as our new Chairperson: he was elected unanimously by the meeting.

6. 2020 Membership Fees

Emyr announced that the Steering Group was not proposing any change to Membership fees other than the inflationary increase that was agreed at 2018 EGM (linked to Consumer Prices Index), resulting in fees for 2020 of £78 for Full members and £26 for Associate Members.

7. Amendments to Access Rules and Advice for Dinas and Mellte

Emyr explained that NRW and BBNPA had requested that we update the Rules and Advice for Dinas & Mellte to incorporate all recent changes and one or two new items. Copies of the amended rules, with changes highlighted by revision-marking, were included in the pack handed out on arrival and had been published on our website. These changes encompassed some 'tidying up' of the documents and the following substantive changes:

- a) Dinas Area: a reminder about the Concordat, Code of Conduct and insurance requirement; use of the Angel Car Park until 10am; no coach parking in Pontneddfechan (drop-off and pick-up only with 30min waiting time); no clothing or equipment on playground fence; display of SWOAPG ID Cards prominently in vehicles and on each Group Leader; marking BAs where practicable; and access to Loonies' Leap now only over hilltop.
- b) Upper Mellte: a reminder about the Concordat, Code of Conduct, insurance and AALS / TA Statement requirement; Cwm Porth one-way ("at weekends, bank holidays and when the area is seen to be busy, follow the advisory one-way system to help reduce the congestion around Cwm Porth – and use your discretion at other times"); and display of SWOAPG ID Cards prominently in vehicles and on each Group Leader; marking BAs where practicable.

These changes were approved unanimously by the meeting

8. Presentations on Items of Interest to Members

- a) Effects of Ash Dieback on our Woodlands. Paul Dann of NRW gave a presentation (see attached slides) describing the extent and effect of ash dieback in Waterfall Country. He explained that there were, for example, 200 affected ash trees on the lower Mellte which was one factor leading NRW to deny group access to the path on river left. He advised Providers to be particularly cautious if involved in any helicopter rescues in the area since rotor blade downdraft could dislodge a great deal of dead timber. In response to questions, Paul stated that Denmark had suffered 99% loss in its ash trees and a 60-70% loss was expected here. He added that it only takes 4 years for individual trees to die from this disease and that South Wales seemed to be particularly badly affected. The disease cannot be controlled (the only response is to clear debris), although a 'living ash programme' is trialling the long-term aim of replanting resistant varieties.
- b) Update on the Waterfall Country Project. James Lawrence of BBNPA gave a presentation describing the traffic management arrangements that had been trialled this year and would be formalised next year, including use of overflow parking in farmers' fields; parking restrictions; and Cwm Porth signage favouring the one-way system. He also explained the long-term aim for a Waterfall Country Partnership that would involve residents in managing the area; and introduced Eleanor Flaherty as BBNPA's new Community Development Officer for Waterfall Country. Eleanor then described the newsletter she would be publishing quarterly; and a community drop-in session planned for 16 Dec. She encouraged SWOAPG to work closely with her in building relationships in the area.

9. Discussions on SWOAPG's role in current access issues

- a) Access to Loonies' Leap. Steve Rayner explained the current position regarding the lane from Pontneddfechan Village Hall to Loonies' Leap and the Gunpowder Works. The lane is 'private' from the Village Hall to start of BBNPA land and, while frequently, regularly and historically used by the public is not registered as Public Right of Way. The landowner has installed gates – but not locked them – so the lane is still accessible to the public. However, the owner has requested that gorge walkers do not use the lane. Incidentally, NRW has 'private rights' over the lane to access the weir and BBNPA is seeking 'private rights' to access the gunpowder works etc.

To have the route registered as a Public Right of Way requires an application for a 'Definitive Map Modification Order' (DMMO), which needs a 'trigger' such as public access being denied by the gates being locked (the 'threat of closure' of installing the gates is not enough). However, since gorge-walking groups have been denied the exercise of rights we believed we had, this could also be used as a trigger. Once triggered, the DMMO application needs evidence of historic public use, unobstructed, covering at least 20-year period, by several people (at least 7), ideally supported by documentary evidence.

Steve suggested two possible options on which the Steering Group would like Members' views:

- A. a 'public' application for a DMMO, which would have to wait for the gates to actually be locked, which may never happen (so gorge-walking groups would continue to be denied access) – by a member of public which could be a SWOAPG Director, supported by others; or
- B. a 'SWOAPG' application which could be triggered now, raising the possibility of re-gaining access to gorge-walking groups – by SWOAPG with evidence from Members, supported by others. However, this would put SWOAPG in the limelight and would need us to manage very carefully our relationship with local community.

In response to questions from the floor, Steve confirmed that he did not believe that the landowner was prepared to negotiate; and Paul Dann confirmed that the path on river left could not be made available as an alternative route. Only one Member at the meeting voted 'for' Option B (with one abstention) so...

⇒ **the Steering Group agreed to focus efforts on engaging with the local community and reporting back to Members in due course**

- b) Welsh Government Access Reform. Emyr explained that the Welsh Government had just launched a process that will see changes to various access legislation, including the lifting of some restrictions on Open Access Land and the inclusion of Cliffs and Coast in Open Access Land. As things stand, "commercial" use is excluded from the Open Access legislation and, while it is not specifically defined in this context, "commercial" has already been interpreted by some land managers to mean any activity conducted for hire-and-reward (i.e. where instructors are paid), whether for profit or not-for-profit. The SWOAPG Steering Group believes it is critical that this 'loophole' is explored properly so that the definition of "commercial" is made as narrow as possible so that only activities that truly 'exploit' our landscape for commercial gain are excluded (and not those activities that educate and contribute positively to wellbeing and tourism). We therefore believe it is crucial that the Activity Provider sector is represented in the Government's new "Expert Working Group on Open Access" to ensure this issue is considered, otherwise we risk losing some of the Open Access that we already have – and not benefitting from any future extensions of Open Access that could occur (which might even include inland waters in the distant future).

He added that we therefore intend to propose to Welsh Government that our Coordinator, representing the three Welsh Charter Groups, should be one of the 'users' in this Working Group (for which applications close on 29 Nov). However, the cost to SWOAPG of supporting this work would make a significant dent in our funds, so we need to check with Members whether you (a) agree that this is a high-priority action for SWOAPG; and (b) would be prepared to put any additional funding towards this if necessary (either through donations or increased membership fees). CJ Griffiths reported that the BMC had confirmed recently that it was not intending to represent the case for "commercial" users. Following discussion, the Coordinator agreed to contact in due course other organisations such as MTA and IOL that might have funding available to support this work.

Emyr then posed three specific questions:

- i. Do you agree that participating in the Open Access Expert Working Group is a high-priority action for SWOAPG (for which we should commit up to c.£1500)? The meeting agreed unanimously with this question, so the Coordinator will press ahead with an application to the Working Group.
- ii. What about continuing to participate in Welsh Government-led discussions about Inland Water, which may lead nowhere but do need the 'commercial' view to be represented (could be another 3-4 meetings)? Again, the meeting agreed unanimously with this question (while noting that Canoe Wales was looking to engage other organisations in its own work on this subject), so the Steering Group will consider how to support this work as it arises.
- iii. Would you be prepared to put any additional funding towards this if necessary, through either increased Full Membership fees or voluntary donations? Discussion suggested that voluntary donations would be preferred to an increase in Membership fees – and that the same request should be made of Members of the other Charter Groups in Pembrokeshire and Snowdonia. One Member voted against, one abstained and 21 agreed, so the Steering Group will consider whether and how to approach Members for additional funding if and when this becomes necessary.

- c) River Wye Glasbury-Hay. Emyr explained that we were aware that the Wye & Usk Foundation is preparing an “access agreement” that could severely restrict paddlesport access from Glasbury to Hay. SWOAPG has not been involved in their discussions so far but Chris Pierce, as the local AHOEC representative, had managed to get himself invited to recent meetings where WUF had made proposals for restricting canoeing to satisfy anglers’ concerns and thereby meet the needs of the land covenant at Glasbury (which prevents Powys County Council from permitting activity at Glasbury that interferes with angling downstream). Chris explained how he had educated the group at these meetings (including Powys CC) on how the river was currently used by Providers and had succeeded in fending-off some of the most extreme proposals, but it was likely that proposals would still include tighter time restrictions and possibly seasonal restrictions (but unlikely that they would seek to prevent all canoeing nor deny all navigational rights). He had also made clear to WUF that both SWOAPG and Canoe Wales needed to be consulted on any emerging proposals.

10. Q&A with Steering Group & Coordinator

There were no further questions raised by Members.

Prize Draw

Nick Bates, Joey Chapman and Matt Perrott were the winners of the prize draw, each winning two vouchers kindly donated by Cardiff International White Water for their ‘Air Trail’ course.

Ash Dieback

SWOAPG AGM meeting



17/12/2018

Ash Dieback

Ash Dieback



Spread of Ash Dieback in Europe, UK infected in 2012

17/12/2018

Ash Dieback

Ash Dieback



Ash forests in Denmark

3

What causes it

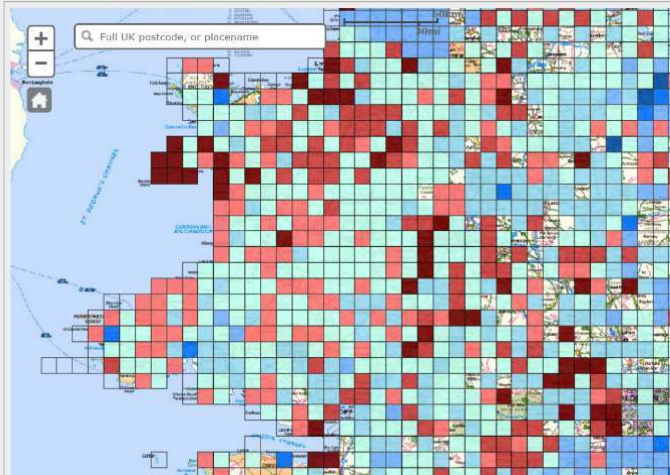


Fungus: *Hymenoscyphus fraxineus*

17/12/2018

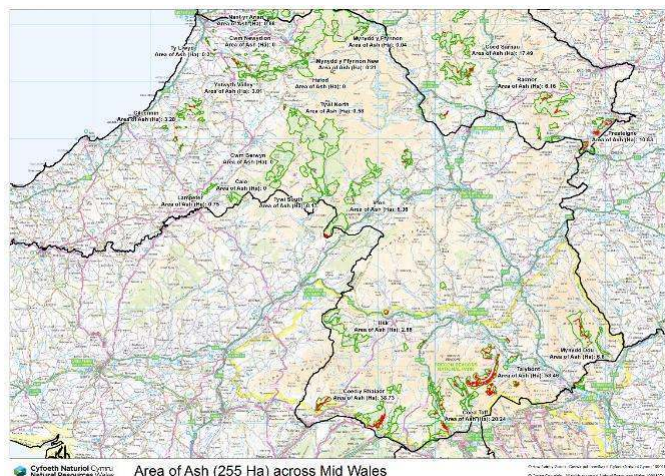
Ash Dieback

Ash Dieback, it is everywhere

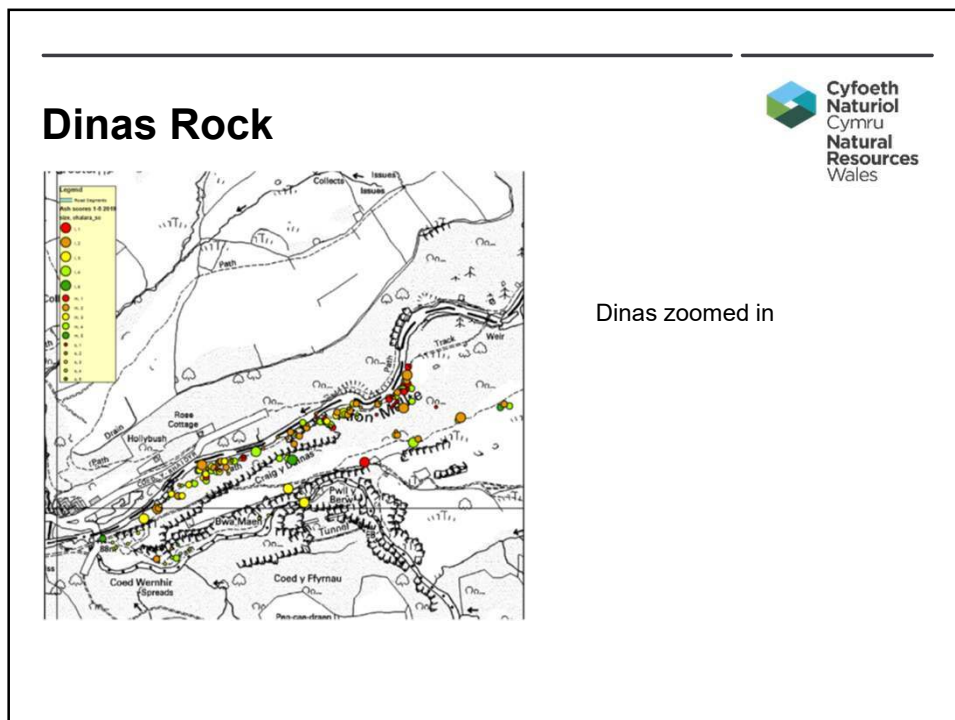
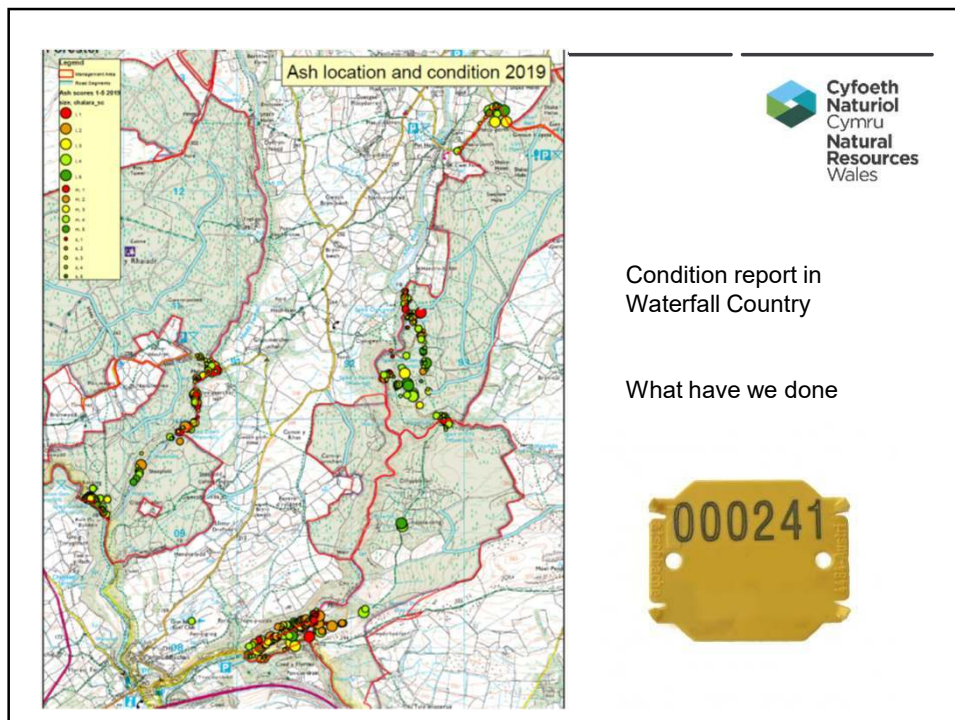

[Chalara Explained](#)
[Map Legend](#)
[Website Information](#)


5

Overview in the South



Area of Ash (255 Ha) across Mid Wales



17/12/2018

Ash Dieback

Ash Dieback



9

Affect of dieback on mature trees



17/12/2018

Ash Dieback

Ash Dieback



Honey Fungus



11

17/12/2018

Ash Dieback

Ash Dieback



Honey Fungus causing
stem failure



12

Branch loss



How can you help



Consider if site is suitable in stormy conditions

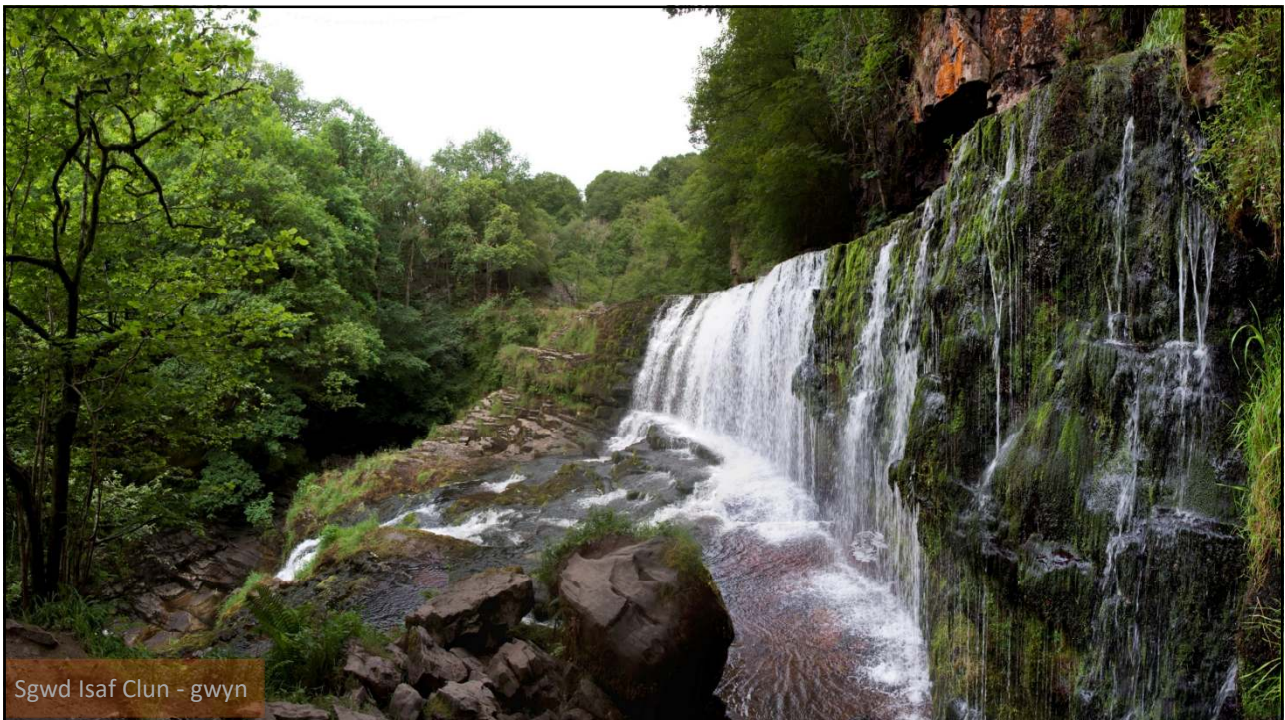
Only use approved routes, these are the only ones we are surveying

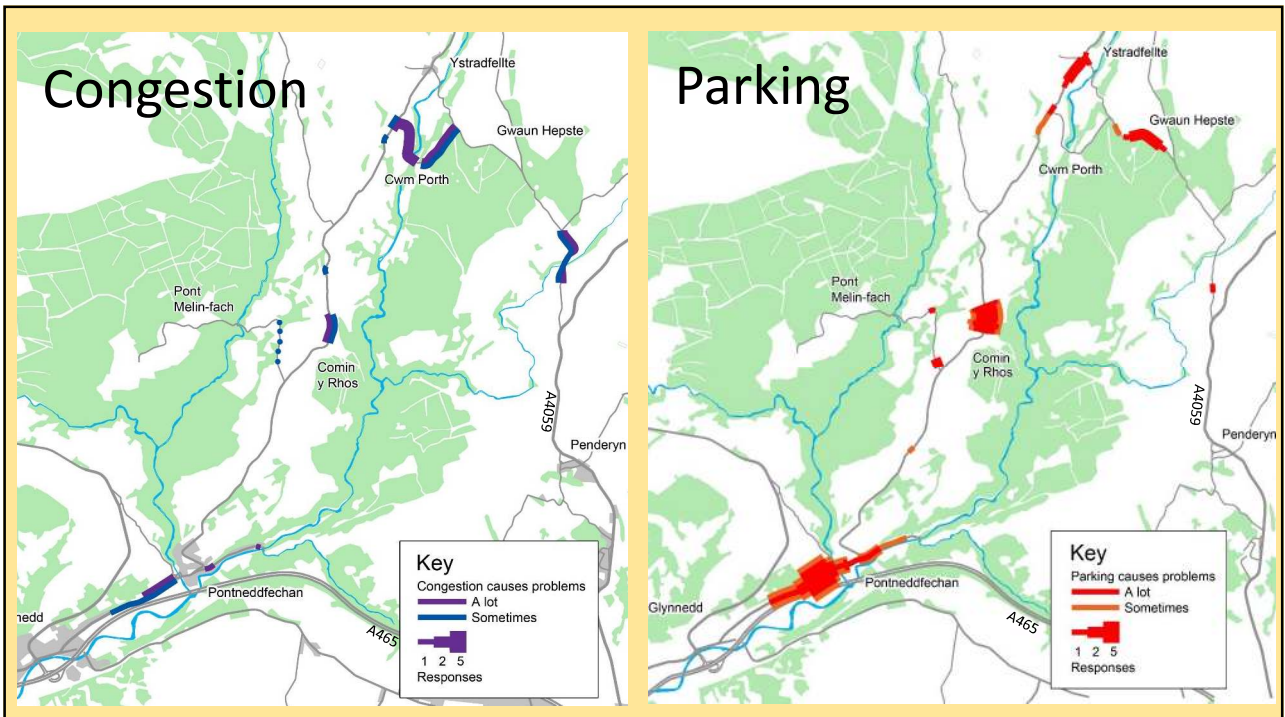
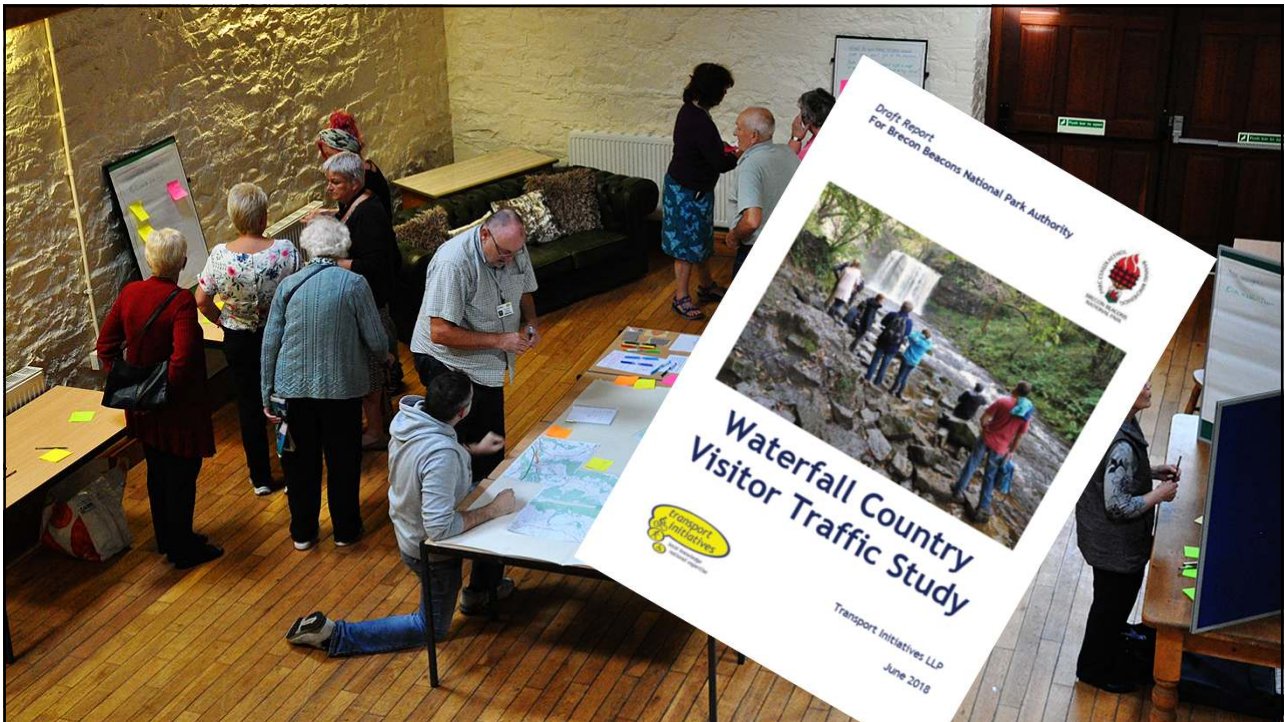
Clean your shoes before and after visiting a wood
Avoid taking cuttings or plant material from the countryside.

Report any trees of concern to us

Waterfall Country Update

James Lawrence, BBNPA





I appreciate our parking situation still leaves a lot to be desired but in terms of positive change [redacted] had his field open today for parking and PCSOs from Glynneath were patrolling and booking cars parked inappropriately. Hopefully this is just the start and a sign of things to come.

You and 32 others · 2 comments

Pontneddfechan news & views

20 April at 19:24

Im really fed up with the way ppl are parking up here today why isn't there any police patrolling up here? It's a nightmare going down from the Angel as they are all parking on the pavements! Anyone with Pushchairs and little ones out walking have to now walk on the road!! It's absolutely shocking and our street in Brodawel is full of cars!!

16 · 23 comments · Seen by 196

Like · Comment

[redacted] It was the same yesterday [redacted] the only time they'd do anything is if there's a bad accident, too bloody late then xx

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] Yeh totally agree it's shocking it really is! Our rates have gone up by over a hundred quid this year! And what do we get from it? What do the Council do for us?

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] I know it's hard driving through the village with so many tourists however fantastic to see all the businesses being so busy. Well done [redacted] in opening up your field to help the traffic congestion

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] Great Easter lunch today at Sced Gwladys and The Angel and White Horse looked roared as well. This weather will give them all a great boost at the start of the season. Also big shout out to [redacted] for delicious cheesecake Easter eggs and quiche you made us nothing left except the extra inches on our stomachs

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] High street is worst cant get a car through god help if there's a fire in one of our houses.

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] Just seen two PNV Residents clearing the leaves off the yellow lines on the bridge. A big thank you

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] Powys, NPTC and Police don't give a shite and Brecon National Park's promoting the area constantly unfortunately accident waiting to happen because all authorities haven't got a clue how to control or manage it.

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] field is open this morning for car parking and along with the excellent work done last night cleaning the yellow lines hopefully we will see some general improvement.

Like · Reply · 2d

[redacted] At last some sense

Like · Reply · 1d

[redacted] Great to see [redacted] getting permission from The National Parks to open up his field. He was doing a fab job directing traffic in and making sure they could exit safely almost full of cars

Like · Reply · 1d

[redacted] it's made a big difference today thanks to all who have helped made it possible. As well as making it better for the locals hopefully it has improved the experience for visitors.

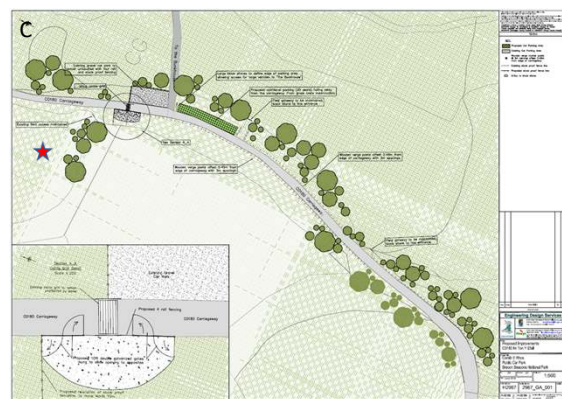
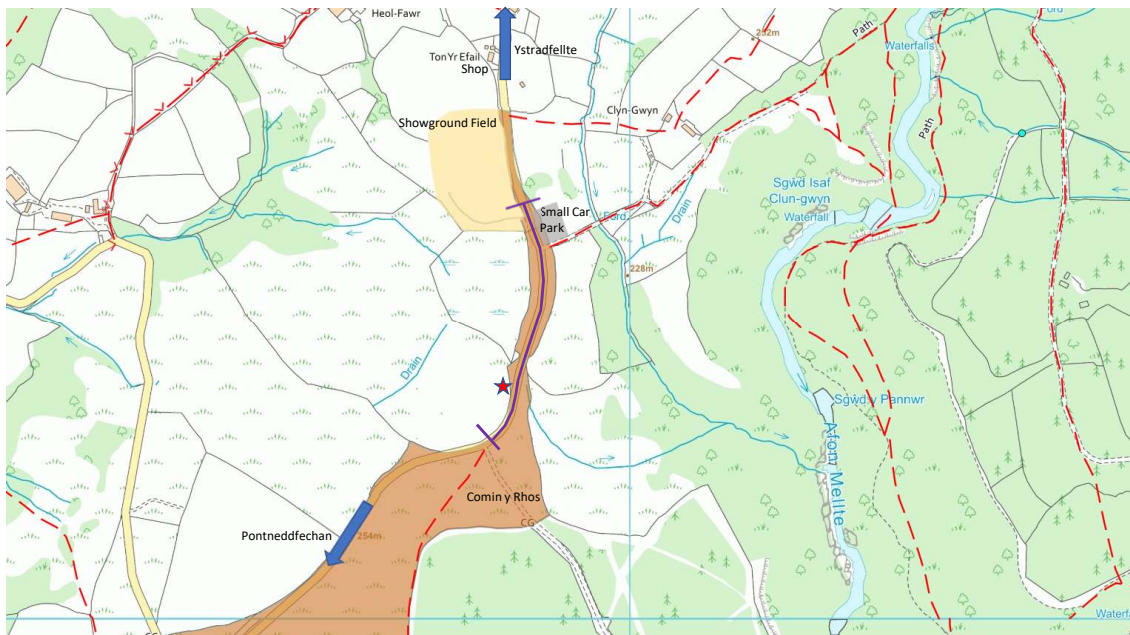
Like · Reply · 1d · Edited

[redacted] totally agree it's the best set up and a safe place for visitors to leave their cars. My son was in car heaven when he saw an Aston Martin parked there earlier

Like · Reply · 1d



Approximate location of photograph marked by ★ symbol on the Comin y Rhos map.



A: Unchecked parking reduces lane to single track with no passing places

B: Wardens tape off 1km section of road to allow traffic to flow both ways

C: Scheme being developed with Powys Highways to restrict verge/ highway parking and provide additional off road parking

★ Symbol indicates informal peak parking solution in agreement with local landowner

Advisory One Way



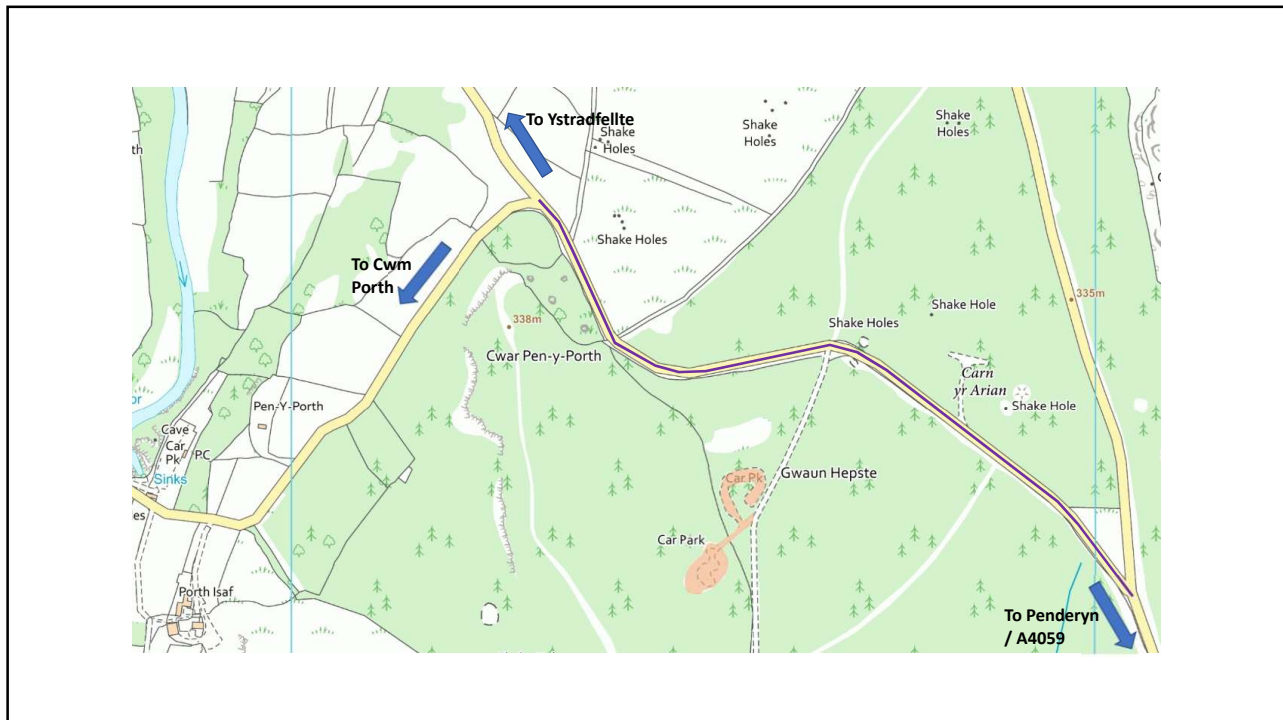
Drivers need confidence on narrow lanes with limited passing opportunities

From Porthdrechan

From Penderyn/A4059

Cwm Porth

Rhaeadrau Waterfalls



Waterfall Country Partnership – Project Board Relationship Diagram:

