



18th Full Meeting – 19th November 2020, via Zoom Video Conference

Attendance

Zoe Anthony, Miskin
 Steve Bird, LoadedUK
 Stuart Burns, Gower Activity Centres
 John Clark, Longtown Outdoor Learning Trust
 Paul Dann, Natural Resources Wales
 Steffan Davies, Hawk Adventures
 Paul Donovan Escape Routes
 Gary Evans, Gary Evans Outdoors
 Simon Fenton, Gower Adventures
 Lee Garbett, Quest Adventure Activities Ltd

Rhys Green, Green Ideas
 Brian Hanwell, Natural Resources Wales
 Graham Harvey, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
 Helen Jones, Visit Wales
 Roger Lee, Independent (Chair)
 Jethro Moore, Adventure Beyond
 Tom Moore, University of Wales Trinity Saint David
 Ant Morgan, Ant Morgan Coaching
 Chris Pierce, Oxfordshire Outdoors

Steve Rayner, Steve Rayner Outdoor Pursuits
 Jamie Rose, Gower Activity Centres
 Tom Sampson, Hampshire Mountain Centre
 Mike Smith, Parkwood Outdoors Dolygaer
 Mark Soanes, Call of the Wild Ltd
 Ieuan Starks, School Camp Ltd
 Paul Webb, H5 Adventures
 Lucy von Webber, Visit Wales
 David Williams, NPTC group of colleges

1. Welcome and Apologies

Roger Lee opened the meeting, welcomed attendees, introduced Steering Group Members and representatives from NRW and Visit Wales.

Apologies had been received from:

Bob Keep, Caerphilly	Kevin Walker
Tom Partridge, Atlantic College	Dianne Worall, Way2GoAdventures

2. Matters Arising from 2018 AGM

Steve Rayner reported on three items raised at the 2019 AGM:

- Regarding the access lane to Loonies' Leap, the 2019 AGM had tasked “the Steering Group to focus efforts on engaging with the local community and reporting back to Members in due course”. Regular meetings had been setup with the community, but most were cancelled due to the Covid pandemic. However, SWOAPG is engaged with discussions about forming a Community Organisation to help ‘manage’ the area. The owner of the lane had only reported one ‘infringement’ since banning gorge-walkers; and since NRW has recently opened-up one-way access for groups on the river-left path, it was neither necessary nor appropriate for SWOAPG to ‘challenge’ the closure of the lane to gorge-walkers at present.
- Regarding Welsh Government Access Reform, the 2019 AGM had agreed that SWOAPG should participate in the “Expert Working Group on Open Access” and “Access to Water Group”; and that Members could be approached for additional funding if this became necessary. However, our application to join the Open Access Working Group was declined; but we have liaised with the group via representatives from the outdoor sector (through the Outdoor Alliance Wales) - and responded to the Government’s information requests. We expect to see the latest round of ‘proposals’ – including consideration of ‘commercial’ access – in the next few weeks.

We are fully engaged in the ‘Access to Water’ Group, which was tasked by Welsh Government to consider how to increase paddlesport access on rivers (with the ‘threat’ from Government that they may legislate if the Group doesn’t make progress by March 2021, meaning that everyone has an incentive to explore solutions, resulting in more fruitful discussion on this topic than ever before). The group includes representatives for paddlers (Canoe Wales & SWOAPG), anglers and landowners; is chaired by NRW

and observed by Welsh Government. The group is working towards a model that could enable increased access in the absence of any Public Rights being confirmed through legislation; and is aiming to run a 'pilot' during 2021. The group has established some 'key principles' for increased paddlesport access on rivers:

1. The approach should be equitable and fair to all vested interests – although this doesn't necessarily mean *equal* for everyone
2. It should be sustainable economically, socially and environmentally
3. It should provide rights to both anglers and paddlers, avoiding conflicting use
4. All users should contribute funding to maintain, improve and develop the resource – probably via some form of 'annual licence', with details still to be confirmed
5. All users should be subject to regulation to control use, manage access, and protect the environment – which should be 'least restrictive' possible
6. Land and riparian owners should receive financial contribution for the use of their asset – with any funding for 'navigation' to come from Government funds, not from users; although users might pay for access / egress / parking on private land – as we sometimes do now
7. Land and riparian owner liability should be minimized – with some form of legislation to reduce occupiers' liability for riparian owners; and users should have liability insurance

Steve emphasise that the group is advocating a voluntary approach, regardless of whether disputed Public Rights may or may not exist; and that this could offer the opportunity for improved access – i.e. opening more rivers for 'hassle-free paddling' by groups – but that payment by users – and funding to landowners – were fundamental elements in 'unlocking' voluntary agreements. Although we don't know the details, Steve suggested that we should perhaps think of it like the Reservoir Passport Scheme and, if genuinely 'better' access is on offer and the price is right, it might be worth paying. The meeting endorsed SWOAPG continuing to support the process of discussions and the subsequent 'pilot' project, bearing in mind that if this goes nowhere, the option for Welsh Government legislation is still on the table but would take years and has no guarantee of going 'our way'.

Although access reform activity is consuming a significant proportion of the Coordinator's time, the Steering Group has not felt it appropriate to approach Members for further funding in the current climate.

- Regarding the River Wye from Glasbury-Hay, we had reported to the 2019 AGM that the Wye & Usk Foundation (WUF) was proposing arrangements including tighter time restrictions and possibly seasonal restrictions. These new 'arrangements' were eventually published by WUF in the summer – reducing launch times and adding a minimum river-level condition. SWOAPG was not properly consulted and has not endorsed these arrangements, although we have advised Members that they might experience conflict if operating outside their terms. Members didn't ask us to actively challenge the arrangements, but Powys County Council has told us they will still consult publicly on launch arrangements at Glasbury Bont, although we have no timescale for this. For now, SWOAPG is waiting to see what happens next.

3. Overview of SWOAPG's recent & planned activity

Roger Lee described the following achievements and activities on behalf of the Steering Group:

- Access in Waterfall Country: we have continued liaison with BBNPA & NRW; the Loonies' Leap river-left egress path has been opened and 'Good to Go' certification for gorge use introduced by NRW; and a range of SWOAPG workshops have addressed 'good practice' for managing social distancing in the gorge. Paul Dann expanded on the background to the 'Good to Go' requirement, which had been introduced for all their sites; and emphasised the importance of groups avoiding the sensitive bryophytes near the Loonies' Leap path. He acknowledged that there might be conflicts between group and public use on the path but suggested that we wait to see whether any issues arise before considering signage or other actions.
- Paddlesport Access: SWOAPG has renewed discussions with Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water around reservoir access, focused initially on Lower Swiss Valley Reservoir. Steve Bird explained that Llanelli Rural Council were working towards paddlesport provision there, with a full-time ranger, but had not yet confirmed how this would be managed. Mike Smith stated that he had experienced some difficulties dealing with BBNPA over the Reservoir Passport Scheme and Paul Donovan suggested that Members refer to Jason Rees who was now managing this day-to-day on behalf of Richard Ball. Mike offered to take on administrative arrangements at Pontsticill if that could be useful. Steve Rayner explained that the Head of Estates post in Dŵr Cymru Welsh Water was currently vacant, which meant there was no-one there responsible for managing the scheme, so we may just need to put up with teething problems for the time-being.
- Member Services: we have continued regular communication with Members, including Covid-19 information, updates and sign-posting as well as 'routine' activity alerts and messages; using website

blog, e-mail newsletters, Facebook and Twitter; and have continued to manage routine Membership administration, enquiries, payments and issue of ID cards. We ran the following workshops over the past year:

- Nov 2019 & Feb 2020 Dinas/Sychryd & Mellte Code of Conduct Training
 - May 2020 Geological e-Field Trip over Cribarth from Craig-y-Nos (with BBNPA)
 - Jun 2020 Stargazing in the Summer Sky (with Usk Astrological Society)
 - Jul 2020 Gunpowder & Gorges webinar and River Usk webinar (with BBNPA)
 - Aug 2020 Gorge user's online workshop
 - Sep 2020: online Workshop for Good Practice around Activities and Covid-19
 - Sep 2020 Mellte Code of Conduct Training online workshop
- **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 – feeding into Welsh Government Access Reform and drafting significant elements of the 'Post-Covid Recovery Plan' for our sector
 - National Access Forum Wales – including Access to Water Group
 - Regional Tourism Forums – feeding sector views to Visit Wales
 - UK Outdoors – supporting the campaign to Save Outdoor Education
 - Brecon Beacons Local Access Forum
 - Brecon Beacons, Swansea Bay & Southwest Wales Tourism groups, feeding sector views to Visit Wales
 - Waterfalls Area Safety Advisory Group
 - **Governance:** Covid-19 struck just as Membership renewals were due and as a result 28 Members have not paid (yet) this year.

Category	2020	2019
Full Member	55	75
Associate Member	14	15
Unpaid Members	28	
Additional Staff of Corporate Members	75	78
Youth Members	0	1
Supporters	30	30
Subscribers	72	66
'Old' Members still on Subscriber List	110	110

Uncertainty about how best to respond to this led to some revised governance arrangements, with more detailed oversight of Coordinator workload / costs and Directors initially taking more day-to-day decisions. During the year the Chair had rotated from Stephen Parsons to Jeff Calligan to Roger Lee and the Steering Group had been re-engaged; with some new members; and was now taking responsibility for clarifying, reviewing and assisting to deliver the SWOAPG 'Work Plan'. We have also started a transition to 'professional' Microsoft 365-based document and e-mail management.

4. Annual Report & Accounts

Roger explained that he didn't intend to go through the Annual Report since he had covered most of it by his presentation (and copies of the Annual Report and Accounts had been published on our website).

Ieuan Starks presented the accounts to 31 July 2020, noting that these would be submitted formally to Companies House & HMRC.

Income & Revenue	£ 4,086
Membership Fees	£ 4,035
Workshop Fees	£ 50
Bank Interest	£ 1
Expenditure	£ 7,189
Co-ordinator fees	£ 5,812
Membership costs	£ 128
Workshop costs	£ 100
Payment Processing Fees	£ 136
IT	£ 386
Insurance	£ 577
Administration / Miscellaneous	£ 50
Income less Expenditure	£ - 3,103

He explained that we had a significant deficit this year due to reduced membership income, resulting in a significant reduction in our reserves (we had £4,751 in the bank on 31 Jul) – but that this should be enough to continue with our current level of activity until Mar 2021 and, if all paid-up Members re-join then, we may still be able to continue with depleted reserves. However, it is impossible to judge the ongoing impact of Covid-19 on our sector and on future membership numbers, so future funding remains a significant risk that the Directors will continue to monitor closely.

Roger added that SWOAPG activity would therefore be limited for the rest of 2020; and both he and Ieuan thanked those Members who had paid-up; and thanked Steve for having donated a lot of extra time this year to enable us to keep going.

5. Election of Steering Group, Directors and Chairperson

Steve explained that three Members (Steve Bird, Steffan Davies and Tom Sampson) 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. Katie Lloyd, Emyr Rees and Ieuan Starks were therefore 'retiring' – but Ieuan was standing for re-election. Steve, Steffan, Tom and Ieuan were elected unanimously by the meeting.

Roger Lee had also been co-opted recently as a Director and Acting Chair and was formally elected, unanimously, into these positions by the meeting.

6. 2021 Membership Fees

Roger 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 2021 of £79 for Full members and £27 for Associate Members.

7. Presentation by Visit Wales

Mark Soanes introduced Lucy von Weber and Helen Jones of Visit Wales. Lucy gave a summary of Visit Wales' plans for 2021, including the following points:

- The 'Year of the Outdoors' planned for 2020 was interrupted by Covid-19 but will be carried forward to next year
- In future, 'Years of...' would only be introduced every other year, with 'fallow' years between
- The Covid crisis had led to weekly meetings between Visit Wales and National Park Authorities, etc. which had improved working relationships which should pay dividends post-Covid
- *Addo* – our promise to Wales, <https://www.visitwales.com/promise> – is now being used across all Visit Wales tourism messages

- Tourism marketing material including royalty-free images for use by Providers etc. are now available freely at <https://assets.wales.com/>
- The 'We're Good to Go' scheme had been taken up widely across Wales
- All Visit Wales' marketing funds had been subsumed within central government this year, so there had been no significant campaigns
- Messaging had now changed from 'Visit Wales LATER' to 'Visit Wales SAFELY'
- The Welsh Government's Covid-19 Tourism Task Force meets weekly and can be reached via Visit Wales' Regional Tourism Forums of which WATO is an active Member

Helen summarised the funding currently available to tourism businesses in Wales, including the Economic Resilience Fund which may re-open soon. Providers can find details of all funding schemes on the Business Wales website at <https://businesswales.gov.wales/coronavirus-advice/> - although Sport Wales would also be launching a fund for Freelancers next week (see <https://www.sport.wales/content-vault/sportfreelancerfund/>).

Mark thanked Lucy and Helen for this useful information.

8. Q&A Session

Roger explained that SWOAPG had just launched a Membership Survey and would like to get AGM attendees' thoughts around some of the questions we've asked. The meeting therefore broke-out into small groups which generated responses to the following questions:

- **What have been the main challenges facing you this year?**
Worst thing ever happened; lockdown has affected tourism; lost most of schoolwork/residentials; when work does come back, it gets postponed/cancelled; undercutting in industry?; lack of income; no work with real effects on individual and family well-being; different ways of working to cope with Covid-19; staff leaving the industry; huge influx of public into NRW land with poor visitor behaviour e.g. rubbish & fires
- **How, if at all, has SWOAPG helped you this year?**
Updates on general circulation are great and relevant to the area; access to gorge and water (although not relevant during lock down); access to left-hand side of the gorge was a Godsend; SWOAPG is providing an effective service in providing a united voice; providing and maintaining access; effective in the dissemination of information across providers.
- **Given our limited resources, where should SWOAPG be focusing its efforts over the next 12 months? What should we Stop, Start or Continue doing to best support outdoor providers in South Wales?**
Access – joined-up approach very important; access for public at Dolygaer - if there is a demand should it be looked at; could it be brought under SWOAPG control / be part of Membership; use (and don't underestimate) lobbying power; could be a significant driver for change; protect against poor practice and increasing best practices through shared spaces and workshops; Stop nothing; Start no new projects; Continue to maintain links with WG/Tourism/BBNPA;
- **Any other feedback for us?**
Thanks for the good work of SWOAPG, it's great to have this support and representation; if lack of uptake on events, consider low lying fruits; those that don't turn up on Covid-type training are the ones that are out there doing the worst – impossible to target them; how to ensure staff stay as a career?

There were no further questions raised by Members.