



21st Full Meeting – 24th January 2024, via Teams Video Conference

Attendance

Simon Ablett, Live2Flow	Phil Hughes, Independent	Matt Perrott, Parkwood Outdoors
Zoe Anthony, Miskin	Paul Lilygreen, SDW Sennybridge	Steve Rayner, SWOAPG Coordinator
Steve Bird, LoadedUK	James Martin, Call of the Wild	Mike Smith, Parkwood Outdoors (Chair)
Tom Burrett, MonLife	Ant Morgan, Ant Morgan Coaching	Gemma Starks, Fairways
Paul Donovan, Escape Routes	Liz Orchard, LiveLife Adventure	Cilla Withers, Plas Pencelli
Rhys Green, Green Ideas	Cath Parker, Parc Bryn Bach	
Dave Grimes, Longtown OLC		
Dave Hanham, RipnRock		
Brian Hanwell, Natural Resources Wales		

1. Welcome and Apologies

Mike opened the meeting and welcomed attendees, explaining that it has been postponed from 5 Dec due to Steve's personal circumstances.

Apologies had been received from:

Justin Bradley, Trewern OEC	Chris Pierce, Oxfordshire outdoors
Steffan Davies, Hawk Adventures	Mark Soanes, Call of the Wild

2. Matters Arising from 2022 AGM

There were no matters arising from the 2022 AGM which were not already included on the agenda.

3. Overview of SWOAPG's recent & planned activity

Steve Rayner reminded attendees of SWOAPG's aim "to promote & develop sustainable outdoor activity provision in South Wales" then described (with additional comments from attendees) the following activities and outcomes from the last year and intentions for the next:

- Access in Waterfall Country:
 - We continue to have a positive relationship with Natural Resources Wales (NRW) & Bannau Brycheiniog National Park Authority (BBNPA). Steve had given a briefing to the BBNPA 'Board' Members in November, on their visit to Waterfall Country, which had been well received.
 - The Sychryd river-left owner has declared that he is no longer willing to welcome SWOAPG groups – even with payment – although he has offered access to a few of our Members who have approached him directly.
 - Access from Loonies' Leap is still restricted to the hilltop route for gorge-walking groups; with no easy solution to re-opening alternative access.
 - The number of gorge users has decreased to 47 in 2022/3 (from 69 in 2018/19, pre-covid), with lower uptake of the online Code of Conduct training courses (129 Sychryd and 82 Mellte, compared with 253 and 81 respectively last year). There will be no new training update this year; just a requirement for an annual Member 'confirmation'.
 - There have been two complaints about instructor behaviour in Sychryd.
 - BBNPA is planning to remove timber debris from Porth yr Ogof – with our help – and to upgrade the Cwm Porth toilet and changing facilities in the summer; and Neath Port Talbot Council is planning to upgrade the parking and toilet facilities at Pontneddfechan (opposite the Angel).
 - Brian explained that NRW was in the process of reviewing the format of the Concordat but was awaiting input from its solicitor; and that NRW was working with BBNPA on a project

management plan following the recent Visitor Safety Management review, but this should not affect providers. He added that work was in hand to improve the paths to Sgwd yr Eira and Sgwd Gwladys and to repair vandalism damage to the Dinas changing screens.

- Paddlesport Access on the River Wye Glasbury-Hay:
 - Powys County Council published in July 2023 (over 2 years after banning launching at Glasbury Bont) a report by its environmental consultants to support the Habitat Regulations Assessment (HRA) and was now considering responses from stakeholders – although they had indicated that there was nothing ‘significant’ in this.
 - SWOAPG was still developing a concordat arrangement in partnership with the Council, based on the format of the Waterfall Country gorge-walking concordat with voluntary sign-up by providers supported by information resources and online training. Grant funding has been provided for the setup costs from both The Canoe Foundation (British Canoeing’s charitable arm) and Powys County Council. The Council’s intention is that the concordat should cover all groups using Glasbury Bont and should be in place by Easter 2024 (previously Easter 2023). There would be further, detailed discussion on this matter later in the meeting.
 - Hay Town Council had ascertained that it must also conduct a HRA and had received advice on this from NRW, but SWOAPG has still had no contact with them since March 2022 when they abandoned plans for operators to sign-up to a Code of Conduct for operations at The Gliss.
 - SWOAPG has still had no further contact with the Wye & Usk Foundation regarding its published ‘voluntary access arrangement’.

- Member Services:

Category	2023	2022	2020	2019
Full Member	70	69	55	75
Associate Member	14	13	14	15
Additional Staff of Corporate Members	76	82	75	78
Supporters	31	31	30	30
Subscribers	218	220	72	66

- Membership numbers have stabilised and are almost back to the pre-Covid level – despite fewer Members being signed-up for gorge access.
- We have continued regular communication with Members, including ‘routine’ activity alerts and messages; as well as advertisements for events and jobs; using a website blog, e-mail newsletters, Facebook and Twitter.
- We have continued to manage routine membership administration, enquiries, payments and issue of ID cards – but were likely to move to a different online system next year to simplify administration.
- We resumed a programme of CPD (Continuing Professional & Development) workshops this year, having provided the following:
 - Jan 2023: Learn about the Blaen y Glyn area
 - Mar 2023: Learn about the Nedd Fechan Caves
 - May 2023: Invaders of the National Park – tackling some of the invasive species found in places we visit
 - Dec 2023: Mountain Rescue in the Gorges – networking at Central Beacons MR base
 - Dec 2023: Learn about Craig Cerrig Gleisiad & Fan Frynich
 - Jan 2024: Climbing & Abseiling at Dinas Rock

and were hoping in the coming year to offer:

- Mar 2024: Learn about Porth yr Ogof
 - Feb 2024: Learn about Cribarth OR the Clydach Gorge
 - TBC: Learn about the Bannau Brycheiniog Reservoirs
 - TBC: Mountain Rescue in the Gorges (on-site)
- 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 & UK Outdoors – feeding into Welsh Government Access Reform; the Senedd Cross-Party Group for the Outdoor Activity Sector; and skills/qualifications reviews for our sector
 - National Access Forum Wales
 - Regional Tourism Forums – feeding sector views to Visit Wales
 - Wales Council for Outdoor Learning – representing the ‘adventure’ sector

- Brecon Beacons Local Access Forum, National Park Management Plan Stakeholder Reference Panel & Geopark Management Group
- Brecon Beacons, Swansea Bay & Southwest Wales Tourism groups, feeding sector views to Visit Wales
- Waterfalls Area Safety Advisory Group
- **Outdoor Alliance Wales Update:**
 - Steve explained that the Outdoor Alliance Wales (of which SWOAPG is an active member) was continuing to achieve collaborative engagement across our sector, thanks largely to the tireless work of Paul Donovan and member organisations. Paul and the OAW have been active in:
 - pressing Welsh Government Ministers for action on Access Reform – with the intention to adapt & adopt the ‘Outdoors for All’ manifesto (from England);
 - initiating the Outdoor Education (Wales) Bill, working its way through the Senedd (currently in the first of four stages) with the aim of securing a mandatory week-long residential visit during everyone’s school journey in Wales;
 - pursuing the industry-led alternative to AALA which had, regrettably, been rejected by the Health & Safety Executive – Paul explained that HSE had decided to continue with AALA as it is, so the industry is now focusing on promoting non-statutory schemes such as AdventureMark for those providers who don’t require AALA accreditation; and
 - supporting the Senedd’s Cross Party Group (CPG) for the Outdoor Activity Sector in Wales, which continues to raise the profile of our sector with MSs around both access and outdoor education – Paul emphasised that this differed from the Westminster All Party Parliamentary Groups in that anyone, not just MSs, were able to attend, and our sector was well represented on it by a wide range of outdoor professionals.

4. Annual Report & Accounts

Steve Rayner explained that he didn’t intend to go through the Annual Report or Accounts in detail since copies had been published on the SWOAPG website.

He then presented the accounts to 31 July 2023, explaining that we had a small deficit this year which avoided any tax liability, with some project funds being recorded as ‘deferred income’ for 2023/24.

While we do have growing confidence in future membership income, future funding remains a risk that the Directors will continue to monitor closely.

5. Election of Steering Group, Directors and Chairperson

Steve Rayner explained that the Terms of Reference required one-third of the Steering Group and Board of Directors (those who’ve served longest) to ‘retire’ each year. Steve Bird, Steffan Davies and Jet Moore were all retiring from the Steering Group; and Steve Bird as a Director; but were all standing for re-election. James Martin needed to be elected formally to the Steering Group; and Mike Smith as a Director; following their co-option last year. They were all elected unanimously by the meeting (with one abstention for the Director election).

Mike Smith had agreed to continue as Chair.

6. River Wye Glasbury-Hay

Steve Rayner had circulated to attendees the latest position regarding the proposed concordat arrangements, as well as draft *Rules & Code of Conduct*, draft *Memorandum of Understanding* and a project report from Nov 2023. He presented a summary of the situation and explained that the outstanding issues included:

- the Council wanting to obtain stakeholder feedback before agreeing the arrangements;
- hire companies objecting to the arrangements because of the proposed ‘Closed Season’;
- the need for legal advice to confirm SWOAPG indemnity; and
- finalisation of ‘umbrella membership’ arrangements for the like of Canoe Wales, the military and ScoutsCymru.

	2022-3	2021-2	2020-21
Income & Revenue	£10,447	£ 6,158	£ 6,642
Membership Fees	£6,670	£ 6,158	£ 6,342
Workshop / Project Fees	£3,760		£ 300
Bank Interest	£16		
Expenditure	£10,494	£6, 803	£ 5,263
Co-ordinator fees	£4,659	£ 4,826	£ 3,904
Membership costs	£124	£ 88	£ 83
Workshop / Project costs	£3,837		£ 25
Payment Processing Fees	£222	£ 201	£ 216
IT	£505	£ 494	£ 357
Insurance	£1,121	£ 1,105	£ 621
Administration / Miscellaneous	£26	£ 89	£ 58
Income less Expenditure	£-47	£ -645	£ 1,379

Steve then posed the following questions and agreed to take further action based on the voted decisions:

1. Are you content with the approach we're taking with the concordat arrangements and for us to now circulate the draft documentation publicly (despite the 'outstanding issues' that we're aware of)? This was agreed unanimously (albeit with 2 abstentions).
2. Are you content that we press ahead with finalising these arrangements without bringing the details back to Members for endorsement (unless we hit any major snags, or if substantial changes are required)? This was agreed unanimously.
3. Do you agree that we should allow some groups (or their parent organisations) to sign-up to the concordat arrangements without becoming SWOAPG Members? This was denied by 9 votes to 2 (with 6 abstentions).

7. 2024 Membership Fees

Steve Rayner announced that the inflationary increase that was agreed at 2018 EGM (linked to Consumer Prices Index) would result in fees for 2024 of £94 for Full members and £32 for Associate Members. However, he explained that 25% of his time, as Coordinator, was spent on managing gorge access but only 2/3 of Full Members were now using the gorges (compared with >90% pre-Covid), so he had questioned whether non-gorge users should be subsidising gorge users. Further to this, assuming that Glasbury-Hay administration was to be covered in future by membership fees, he had also questioned whether non-river users should subsidise river users; and whether river-only users should subsidise gorge users. The Member Survey in Oct 2023 showed that 2/3 of those who expressed a view would rather pay a smaller 'core' membership fee with optional 'add-ons' for access to individual venues, compared with the remaining 1/3 who would rather continue to pay a single, fixed price for membership that provides access to venues 'managed' by SWOAPG. The Steering Group was therefore suggesting an alternative model whereby members would pay £60 for Full Membership, £40 for a Gorge 'Passport' and £40 for a Wye 'Passport' (or £32 for Associate Membership) – although we needed more information to know whether this would work (such as how many existing Members might purchase a Wye 'Passport'; how many new Members might the Wye attract; and whether 'umbrella' organisations should pay the same 'Passport' fee). Attendees voted on this proposal "if the Board can be satisfied that the numbers would work"; 8 agreed, 6 disagreed and 5 abstained. This did not produce a clear mandate for change, so fees will be set at the inflationary level unless the Board is able to return to Members with a refined proposal before March.

8. Q&A Session

There were no further questions raised by Members.

Mike thanked everyone for taking the time to attend.