

BMC Cymru Wales

Access & Conservation Update – January 2019

Craig y Forwyn

No progress made here. The owners (Hogans Group) had applied for planning permission to expand and redevelop the caravan park below the crag, at Plas Newydd. They had asked BMC not to pursue the lease/acquisition options until this had been resolved. It now seems that in December 2018, Conwy Council rejected their plans for the redevelopment of the caravan park. Letters and emails have been sent to Hogans Group requesting a meeting and to restart negotiations for access to climb here but there has been no reply to date. This continues to be a priority for the BMC in terms of access work.

Pembrokeshire and Range West

Review of 2018: At the annual Pembrokeshire Climbing Liaison Review Meeting, the conservation bodies reported a successful year for wildlife on the Castlemartin Army Ranges. With not a single reported instance of any infringements of the agreed climbing restrictions, the National Park and MoD were keen to praise climbers for their co-operation and for sticking to the climbing agreements throughout 2018.

On Range East, seven pairs of Choughs successfully reared 16 chicks (the highest number for some years) and a pair of Peregrines also successfully reared young. Elsewhere on the Ranges, Guillemot and Razorbill colonies also did well as did the Kittiwakes, which are now regarded as nationally scarce and are on the RED list of birds of conservation concern in the UK.

A total of 171 climbers attended the annual Range West briefings but only a record low of only 225 climbers actually went into to Range West to climb. Hopefully more people will go in to Range West this year to enjoy the superb climbing (as well as some desperate adventures, Range West probably has the best collection of low grade and utterly unique sea-cliff climbing in the UK). At least 68 seal pups were counted along the coast in the autumn; again a record and climbers are reminded to avoid abseiling in to coves where seals may be present and to give young seals and breeding seals a wide berth (at least 100m). Seals normally breed in the autumn months from late August until early November. Despite being a fully operational and busy firing range, St Govan's cliffs were open for 231 days in 2018 (a 71% increase on 2017) while the rest of Range East was available to climbers for 132 days. The MoD is also introducing a trial of mobile "guardhouses" for 2019, meaning that if only part of the ranges are being used, then only that section will be closed (for instance if military training is only happening beyond Saddle Head, than access will be allowed up to that boundary, even during mid-week).

Range West 2019 Arrangements: All climbers wanting to climb here in 2019 must attend a safety briefing. Range West is a live firing range and unexploded ordnance and other dangerous military items are found on parts of Range West. The dates for the 2019 briefing are:

Thursday 07 March at 18.00

Saturday 09 March at 10.00

Thursday 18 April at 18.00

Good Friday 19 April at 10.00

Thursday 23 May at 18.00

Saturday 25 May at 10.00 (part of the Annual Pembroke Climbing Festival - details to follow!)

And by special demand, **an extra August briefing on Thursday 08 August at 18.00**, to take advantage of the month long shut down of the Ranges. (There is no firing at all and full access for briefed climbers to Range West for the whole of August).

All the briefings are held at the Castlemartin Army Camp, postcode SA71 5EB. As usual turn up about 10 minutes early to allow for parking (next to the big Chieftain tanks!) and to get through the security gates.

There is no military training or firing (and therefore there will be full access for climbing, subject to the usual conservation restrictions) between the following dates:

Saturday 13 April to Sunday 28 April and Thursday 01 August to Monday 02 September.

Finally, some tips to help both climbing and conservation at Pembrokeshire...

All of the cliffs along this dramatic and spectacular coastline are within a Site of Special Scientific Interest and as well as being the nesting grounds of many protected seabirds, they also have many scarce and rare plants growing here, so please do not uproot or remove any vegetation from the cliffs. Overnight camping or vaning is not allowed in any of the car parks – please use the established (and incredibly cheap and good value) campsites with facilities at Bosherton and surrounding areas. Do not place any belay stakes on these cliffs – if you think belay stakes are required contact the BMC who will arrange for a specialised MoD unexploded ordnance team to scan the area for old bombs and to ensure no rare plants or archaeology is disturbed.

Pembrokeshire Coast National Park produces an annual leaflet detailing the current and up to date agreed restrictions for 2019, available at the car parks. The BMC Regional Access Database is also the definitive source of information. There were a number of avoidable accidents in 2018 – please ensure before abseiling in to a sea cliff that you have the means to climb or prusik out again! And in the event of an accident or incident contact the Coastguard by dialling 999 and when a helicopter is being used for a recovery or rescue, ensure all bags and loose debris (as well as yourself!) are fully secure (the downdraught is enough to blow over a fully grown adult).

Cwm Dudodyn Bridge – Elidir Fawr

Discussions are on-going with Snowdonia National Park and the landowners (who are amenable for a replacement bridge to be built) to replace the bridge on the main access path to Elidir Fawr from Nant Peris (and on the line of the 15 peaks routes). The path is not a public right way of and as most of it lies outside of the National Park, no one organisation appears to be responsible for the bridge. It is hoped that the BMC's Access & Conservation Trust, together with support from Snowdonia National Park and possibly Snowdonia Society may be able to fund this replacement. When the funding is in place it's likely that a volunteer work day will be arranged to construct the bridge.

Llandarcy – Swansea

This is relatively newly developed, very accessible, quick drying mid-grade sandstone sports venue with some 40 routes up to 25m on the outskirts of Swansea. Located on an old oil refinery site, the whole area is being redeveloped as a huge housing development of 4,000 houses and associated schools. The landowners have obvious concerns regarding liability and the impact climbing could have on this huge multi-million pound development! However the developers, St Modwen Homes Ltd are very keen to work with climbers to develop this area as a green space within the development and discussions are ongoing and initial signs are very positive that they will grant some form of access subject to the BMC taking on a licence or lease of the climbing area and responsibility for managing the climbing here. This option is now being taken to the various BMC processes and to the relevant committees to approve. Local area support is essential if this is to happen.

Pant Quarry

This is definitely located in Glamorgan, South Wales not in North Wales as noted in the last Summit magazine!! I've sent an atlas of Wales to the Summit editor! However progress here is not so positive. The landowner, Tarmac, has again restated that it's a working quarry and that in their opinion the climbing area cannot be separated from the remainder of the workings. Until they finally stop working here, they do not want to even discuss the options for access for climbing.

Finally: It may be winter but our feathered friends are already starting to prospect for nest sites. Please check the BMC Regional Access Database for the current situation regarding access for nesting birds on the crags. Remember some start nesting early, for instance the Gogarth restrictions (mainly South Stack but also Flytrap Zawn) start on 1 February and the Clwyd Limestone restrictions start on 15 February. Also, a reminder that just because there may not be agreed restrictions for climbing, it does not mean that there are no nesting birds on any particular crag. We only agree formal restrictions for specific bird species, usually Schedule 1 protected species and the key sea-bird species. However every bird nest is protected by law, so if you come across nesting birds on a route the advice is to climb past as quickly as possible or abseil off and not hang around to cause further disturbance.

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