

Meeting: Capel Curig - Crafnant Bridleway – 11/01/22

Summary Report

This meeting was organised to discuss BMC Cymru concerns about the Snowdonia National Park Authority's 'sustainable repair work' (their term!) to the bridleway from Capel Curig to Llyn Crafnant.

The two-hour walk-and-talk was attended by eight people, and covered, in a frank and open manner, all sorts of issues relating to path repairs, both in principle and in detail. 20 key points arising from the meeting are recorded below.

Those present:

Adam Daniel - Head of the SNPA Warden Service

Hywel Jones - SNPA Access Projects Officer

Rhys Weldon-Jones - SNPA Senior Warden (North)

Peter Rutherford - SNPA Access Officer

Tim Jepson - Chair BMC Cymru (Gogledd).

Tom Hutton - Ex Chair BMC Cymru; Representing the interests of mountain bikers.

Philippa Thompson - Crafnant resident, Hillwalker and Bryophyte Recorder

Elfyn Jones - BMC Access and Conservation Officer for Wales.

1. The smoothing and gravelling of the bridleway will continue all the way to the bwlch.
2. This construction method is considered by the Park to be the only viable repair solution to the path.
3. There seemed to be little concern for the damage to natural, or heritage, features such as bedrock or ancient walls.
4. There will be no work done on either the initial section from Capel Curig to the wooden bridge, or from the bwlch down to Llyn Crafnant.
5. It was pointed out that this was inconsistent with the notion of an inclusive path linking communities, which we understood to be a declared objective of their preferred repair methods.
6. When BMC Cymru suggested that stone pitching in selected areas was a more appropriate, sympathetic repair method, it was variously countered by:
 - Four times more expensive than gravelling.
 - Very labour intensive
 - Path workers lack the necessary skills
 - No helicopters available
 - People tend to walk off the pitching, leading to wider paths
 - Not suitable for horses
 - There is a legal obligation to repair to a 'high' standard.
 - Government grants needed to be spent quickly, ie. within 12 months.
7. It became clear that there was a grudging acceptance that stone pitching, properly done, was an excellent repair solution, but ...
8. Given the constraints listed above, using dumper trucks and diggers to carry path repair materials requires a smoothed gravelled track.

9. It is therefore logistically impossible to create a path consisting of alternating sections of gravel and stone pitching.

10. The repeated mantra from the Park is that the gravel will grow over in a few years to leave a durable, minimally invasive path requiring little further maintenance.

11. It was hard to pin down any Park policy which has led to this kind of repair work.

12. Plans exist to similarly resurface a path from Capel Curig to Betws-y-Coed. (Also from the bottom of Maesgwm across to the Llanberis path.)

13. Tom pointed out that bikers react to smoothing a technical bridleway in the same way that scramblers would react to putting a handrail across Crib Goch.

14. Some of the Nat. Park officers were dismayed when shown a picture of the 'No Speeding' sign recently erected on Bwlch Maesgwm.

15. Everyone agreed that signage in the mountains was intrusive.

16. Nat park Officers weren't prepared to reveal the actual cost of the repair work, but admitted it was over £100,000.

17. We were assured that the money given to the park from the BMC Mend-our-Mountains campaign had all been spent on stone pitching on Yr Wyddfa (Llwybr Watkin) and on Cadair Idris.

18. We discussed potential conflict between users on fast mountain bike tracks.

19. Some of the Nat Park Officers were very receptive to the idea of putting narrowings, boulders and rough areas on the gravelled track as a way of slowing bikes down, and offering a more natural character to the path.

20. Finally, although little or no progress had been made in persuading the Park to rethink the Capel Curig to Crafnant bridleway, the officers admitted that consultation with interested parties had been very poor in respect of these current bridleway projects and that many of the current problems could well have been eliminated had a full consultation been conducted prior to contracts being signed and work started. Hywel Jones was convincing in his determination to remedy this for future projects. Furthermore, he recognised that consultation was needed at all stages, planning through to completion. In turn, BMC Cymru offered to offer prompt advice whenever it was sought.

Predictable outcomes, but with some hope for better consultation in the future.*

In a sentence, the BMC Cymru position is that:

An Upland Path should have the character of an Upland Path.

Tim Jepson, 15.01.22

* Post script: Subsequent to the meeting I received the following email from Hywel Jones. "Diolch yn fawr iawn Tim ac i bawb ddaeth i'r cyfarfod. Thank you all who came to the meeting on Tuesday morning. I found the discussion genuinely useful and look forward to our future collaboration".