

- Grŵp Siarter Amgylcheddol Awyr Agored -
- North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group -

Thursday 21st March - Conway Centres, Anglesey

Attendees:

Catherine Miles - Snowdonia Active
Ash Charlwood - Canoe Wales
Jim Langley - Nature's Work
Chris Wright - Snowdonia-Active
Storm Bate - Lledr Hall OEC
Duncan Eades - National White Water Centre
Paul Bayliss - National White Water Centre
Bleddyn Lloyn - National White Water Centre
Louise Tully - Freelance
Joe Begley - Mountaineering Joe
Sandra Begley - Bangor University
Simon Patton - Marle Hall OEC
Liz Walsh - Marle Hall OEC
Martin Chemer - Marle Hall OEC
Kat Court - Lledr Hall
Nicky Fryer - Lledr Hall
Richard Watson - National White Water Centre
Jenny Wilson - Nant BH/ Pentrellyncymer Centre
Paddy Walsh - Blue Peris
Simon Van Dam - Freelance
Jon Brookes - Conway Centres
Tom Carter - Freelance
Lyndsey Evans - Afon Goch
Steve Smith - Conway Centres
Karl Midlane - Freelance
Chris Hooper - Conway Centres
Joe Roberts - Countryside Council for Wales
Gordon Neil - Bach Ventures
Tim Jepson - Bangor University

Apologies:

Efan Milner - AONB Anglesey
Kathy James - Nature Bites
Anna Morgan - Freelance
David Smith - Outdoor Active Sports
Paul Anton Lowenthal
Rod White - Llanrug OEC
Michelle Rogers - Institute of Outdoor Learning

Catherine Miles introduced herself and then ask those present to introduce themselves to the rest of the group.

A short 20 minute presentation was given by Catherine Miles to explain the reasons behind setting up such and group, its aims and how NWEOCG would like to operate.

The floor was opened up to questions.

Jon Brookes asked "How funding for the project was going?". CM answered by saying the Forestry Commission had offered some funding which will take the group until August/ September time. This will allow time for the group to hopefully secure more long term funding. The group were assured that appropriate steps were being taken to secure funding and positive conversations were being had with a variety of potential funders. The reception the group has received so far from potential members and external organisations has all being positive therefore the group feels well positioned to receive adequate funding for it to continue operating.

"Any more questions?" No one asked any more questions although AC chirped up "No one has even asked how much it costs to be a member?" Membership to the group is free and NWEOCG would like to keep it this way.

AC was then invited to facilitate a brainstorming session so those present had the opportunity to voice their opinions on the group, raise any concerns in the area or the sector, bring to the group's attention any problem sites, have the opportunity to suggest any training they would like/ need and discuss with others ways to minimise the impact of outdoor activities.

Ash gave a general synopsis of points raised in the three other areas the group had visited to give a rough indication of the types of discussions being had. AC stressed that the charter group is a place to 'open a can of worms safely'. AC also reiterated that the group is not about access. Access is bound to be brought up in group meetings and through other channels. It will be the role of the charter group to pass on to other organisations any access related issues unless the access issue is due to environmental problems.

It was decided due to the group size to split into three groups to allow for more intimate discussion.

The points brought up in the small groups included the following:

Union Rock is a popular venue for climbing. The site is extremely popular due to ease of access and the fact it is a single pitch crag - ideal for group use. The ground at union rock is becoming heavily eroded and centres are wondering what could be done about this.

Staff from the National White Water Centre in Bala mentioned that the Lower Prysor Gorge is often being heavily impacted by groups who are unaware of environmentally vulnerable sections of the gorge. Staff from NWW in the past have been taken into the gorge by Doug Oliver, a senior reserve manager from the CCW who has delivered environmental training specific for the gorge. NWW say their colleagues are aware of where and where not to go in the gorge and stressed others using the gorge should be aware of the same parameters.

NWW centre also commented on the ambiguity of some signage in the park. For example 'spawning salmon' are not found up Cadair Idris but signage indicates otherwise. To be effective signage needs to be accurate.

A point was raised about how widely is the group hoping to impact. For example would it address the distance some travel to venues as an environmental concern. CM offered this question for discussion. Some members of the group felt this was a valid concern and important point to be raised but unsure of how the group could tackle this issue and whether it was high on the list of priorities. CM expresses that the group is what the members make it and we aim to offer support to areas on concern which enable to ensure the continued sustainable development of outdoor activities.

The problems with litter around popular venues was brought up by a member of the group and it was mentioned that this can be particularly problematic underground. The litter has nowhere to go underground, makes a mess and goes moldy. Wrysj Mine was pinpointed as a place where this is an issue. A couple of members of the group suggested eating lunch before entering underground whereas others said it would be a shame for young people to miss out on the underground, candlelit picnic experience. It was asked whether groups use lunch boxes. Most of the centres present said they either provide lunch boxes for their groups or ask them to bring their own. This could be something to be shared with all centres as not all use lunch boxes. Less packaging is needed with lunch boxes so by removing the packaging you are attempting to remove the problem.

On the subject of lunching. LT said recently she had seen people picnicking in the dunes at Cable Bay whereas she thought this was restricted. It seems as though different groups know different information so the charter group could work on spreading messages such as this to everyone.

Protecting the Marine Environment was suggested as a possible training session instructors would like and value. On the subject of training it was mentioned that those present felt they are interested in the environment and therefore will learn about habitats and wildlife in their own time. It is those who aren't at the meeting that need to learn more. A discussion began about how to convey the positive message of responsible recreation to those who do not come to meetings or do not join the group. A website for conveying information and acting as a portal for sharing advice and environmental best practice was suggested as a great starting point for the group. Instructors and activity providers both local and visitors could be directed to the site through various channels.

It was asked how Natural Resources Wales fits into the outdoor sector and the charter group. It was mentioned that NRW will be an endorsing partner of NWEOCG when they come into being on April 2nd. After then NRW will seek to support the charter through staff resources, promotion of the environmental charter and through financial contributions where possible. Regular communication with the three organisations which will make NRW already exists which will continue as the NRW comes into being.

It was expressed that the charter group could really support smaller organisations who make not feel they have a voice on bigger issues which are affecting the centre. National White Water Centre felt like they are often represented in meetings and events and are kept in the loop with what is going on and get themselves heard. Whereas smaller organisations often are not represented. It was suggested that the charter group could be a valuable source of information and be able to act as a voice for smaller businesses and freelance instructors.

Afon Ddu was brought up in the context of popular venues. Afon Ddu gets a lot of use and is susceptible to erosion. The charter group is closely working with the CCW reserve manager to monitor this situation. Toilet facilities would be good in Afon Ddu car park.

There is concern over a tree which has fallen in Lower Prysor prohibiting access down the river.

It was mentioned that there is a fair expectation of use on venues from local providers but many experience a lot of traffic due to outside groups which puts greater pressure on resources. Groups who use local venues need identifying and environmental best practice needs communicating.

Car parking under pressure at many popular venues - any in particular?

It was suggested as a possible training that instructors are offered Dolgarrog water management information training.

Education on indicators of good environmental practice which could be conveyed through training, website and any other relevant literature.

Knowledge of and tackling invasive species could be something the group could get involved with. Collaboration with other projects and initiatives.

For activity providers knowledge is always good. It would be good for the training to be environment specific – Field studies guides.

Easily accessible rubbish tends to be near car main access routes - potential for more bins at popular venues

Problems with tat left on hill close to PYB - Pinnacle rock.

Anglesey coastal path – human faeces due to toilet closures in winter, public impact on landowner perception.

Padarn is a busy canoeing location.