

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

27th February - 7pm - Widehorizons Ty'n y Berth Mountain Centres

Attendees:

Catherine Miles - Snowdonia-Active  
Ashley Charlwood - Canoe Wales  
Jim Langley - Nature's Work  
Lei Bramich - Plas Caerdeon  
Rich Barry - Plas Caerdeon  
Mark Bramich - Arthog OEC  
Dave Grimes - Widehorizons Ty'n y Berth  
Mark Waite Corris Caverns Ltd  
Beth Hayward - CMC Pensarn Harbour  
Pete Ranstead - Outward Bound, Aberdovey  
Kate Sharples - Outward Bound, Aberdovey  
Glen Bickell - Outward Bound, Aberdovey

20 minute presentation from Catherine Miles which can be found [here](#).

The floor was then opened up for questions. It was stressed that the purpose of the evening was to give those present the chance to share ideas and feedback to the charter group any concerns in the area which could come within the scope of the group.

Concern was raised by Mark Waite that the group is the 'North Wales' EOCG, yet where we are right now is more 'Mid Wales' with his business being right on the boarder. This was seconded by Dave Grimes who asked whether there would be a Mid Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group. The response to this was that part of the reason for the launch series is to explore where the interest for the group, where issues lie and grasp a greater understanding of spread of providers across the whole region. As the group gathers momentum through wider awareness and increased membership, the dynamics of the group will be regularly reviewed by the members to accommodate their needs. Thus far the group has being reluctant to define the parameters of membership to allow for change and suit the needs of sector.

CM commented on the position of the Wales Activity Tourism Organisation (WATO) who operate nationally, overseeing the work of the three regional organisations, Snowdonia-Active (umbrella organisation for NWEOCG), Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter Group and South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group. There is an awareness that providers from 'mid wales' are not fairly represented within WATO which is why the North Wales group are covering a large region with this first series of events. The group is in the process of trying to secure funding which will enable greater co-ordination on a national level for the Environmental Charter Groups with the aim of working with a critical mass outdoor sector in Wales.

Whilst on the subject of the remit of providers the group will reach, it was asked how the group could contact those groups from outside the area who use local venues. There was concern for a number of people in the group that local centers generally operate within good environmental practice, it is those from outside the area who

misuse local venues, often through negligence rather than deliberately. When witnessing bad practice at local venues centre staff don't feel confident challenging this behaviour and felt the charter group could assist by widely promoting the Environmental Charter and any other relevant information to visitors to the area.

It was mentioned that centres are already overwhelmed by different badges - where does the charter group fit amongst them all? Ashley Charlwood highlighted that there is no badge to demonstrate environmental credentials as an outdoor activity provider, the charter mark fills this gap and demonstrates that activity providers are seeking to operate in a sustainable way when taking groups outside. Glen Bickell mentioned Green Dragon certification which centres can aim to achieve and asked how this was different. It was expressed that the charter group is more than an accreditation system and also about how providers can benefit from the group in terms of the provision it can offer. The Environmental Charter is more about best environmental practice outside rather than what an organisation does in other areas of operation to be environmental.

It was asked how the charter group would 'police' violation of the Environmental Charter (EC) by members who are signed up. Concern came over those who may sign up to get the badge and not practice the charter. It was stressed that the group will aim to influence rather than police. The group would deal with any issues as and if they arise, however, the charter mark will be owned by the group and could, in theory be taken away from members who violate the EC.

Glen Bickell mentioned it would have been too good to have had 'Endorsing Partners' at the meeting tonight to balance out conversations being had. There are representatives from CCW and SNPA on the steering group and it is hoped that future meetings will bring together parties from across the sector to allow for discussion and action.

Conversation moved onto particular venues which present problems to providers in the area.

The following issues were brought to the attention of the group:

Barmouth Slabs: Problems with littering, toileting (porta-loos have been burnt down twice), access paths are becoming heavily eroded, busy venue. Users (not just centres) liaise on site, at the crag, to ensure usage for all, through good communication at the crag. It was suggested that a venue such as Barmouth Slabs will continue to be heavily used so perhaps visual improvements could be made to the venue to cope with the volume of use. For example steps in place of access paths to limit the erosion. The majority of the group stressed that work done as attempt to improve the management of Barmouth Slabs had to be done sensitively over concern that raising awareness of issues could restrict access.

Barmouth Slabs has become an increasingly popular area due to restrictions on other areas, which has simply displaced any issues rather than solve them.

Centres no longer use Tyn y Fach gorge due to access issues. The landowner is worried about liability of letting people use the gorge for outdoor recreation. An action here could be to take steps towards understanding the route of the problem, finding a way forward through liaison with relevant parties and through raising awareness of the EC; a demonstration environmental responsibility.

Centres have generally stopped using Col Crag, Cae Du and Craig y Aderyn (Bird Rock) all because of issues landowners have over the recreational use of their land. More work needs to be done to understand the route of these issues. These issues will be followed up with the BMC who deal with access to climbing venues.

Broadwater, Towyn poses a different type of issue in the form of dog fouling. Dave Grimes mentioned he had contacted the town council about this problem, receiving no response. It was suggested that through the group and its relationship with the 'Endorsing Partners' the charter group may be able to have an influence over this problem. Mess bins in place would be a start.

Access to all parts of The Dovey were an area of concern. Land owners are simply not happy with paddlers using their land to access the river. One of the issues land owners have with paddlers is worry that their boats carry disease. Demonstrating responsible usage of equipment and environmental best practice through the Environmental Charter could be a way to change these sorts of attitudes. It was suggested that education internally amongst providers is very important but also to educate those outside the sector to understand responsible outdoor recreation can cause very little harm.

Ashley Charlwood asked whether prominent events in the area were an issue to local centres or the environment. Although major events do not cause too much trouble in the area it was agreed that it would be worthwhile getting the organisers of such events to sign up to the charter.

Summary of Main Points:

- Group should be all Wales to encompass all areas - WATO can implement Wales Outdoor Recreation Network but dependent on funding,
- Visitors to the area can be a problem, reach them with EC not preach to them,
- Charter intended to influence people rather than be about policing,
- It would be productive to have 'endorsing partners' (NRW, SNPA) present at these types of meetings - platform for discussion,
- Barmouth slabs - litter, toileting, erosion, busy - 'linch pin' spot, active sensitively,
- Centres stopped using Tyn Y Fach gorge - landowner worried about liability,
- Centres stopped using Col Crag, Cae Du and Craig Y Aderyn due to access issues with landowners,
- Access problems all along the Dovey,
- Event organisers could sign up to the environmental charter.