



Grŵp Siarter Amgylcheddol Awyr Agored
North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group

Monday 5th May - Arthog Outdoor Education Centre - 6pm

Attendees

Catherine Miles - Snowdonia-Active (CM)
Ashley Charlwood - Freelance Consultant (AC)
Nia Hâf Jones - North Wales Wildlife Trust (NJ)
John Pinder - Arthog Outdoor Education Centre (JP)
Matthew Cox - Arthog Outdoor Education Centre (MC)
Stephanie Heeley - Arthog Outdoor Education Centre (SH)
Jasper Davie - Arthog Outdoor Education Centre (JD)
Ingrid Matthews - Freelance (IM)
Beth Hayward - CMC Pensarn (BH)
Abby ? - CMC Pensarn

CM opened the meeting by welcoming everyone and asking those present to say who they were and where they worked.

1. Introduction to the environmental charter

CM gave a short introduction to the environmental charter for those who has not attended meetings before and distributed copies of the environmental charter. It was explained that the charter is a live document and open to regular review, the steering group are likely to address the wording of the environmental charter at their next meeting so any comments on the document should be voiced. JP suggested it would good for the environmental charter to pay recognition to outdoor instructors respecting the culture and heritage of the area.

CM explained that her contract with Snowdonia-Active has been extended until March 2015. However, funding has still not been secured for future work specifically for the environmental charter but CM will be around to search for that funding.

CM explained the aims and objectives of the environmental charter and the background to why the group has been set up. These reasons include:

- Organised group use predicted to increase in the future
- Stop solutions being imposed on us
- Environmental and access issues on the increase
- Network throughout the sector
- The outdoors is our livelihood

CM explained that the current number of signatories to the chart is 70.

Steering Group = 13

Individual = 24

Organisation = 30

Endorsing Partners = 5

2. Group Developments

CM explained some of the developments over the passed few months and handed round a document which detailed the progress of the group. The group was asked to input into the developments and elaborate on any areas they would like to see developed more. This document with the comments made at the meeting can be seen below. The additional points made at this meeting are in italics.

Gorge Walking concerns:

- Nantcol gorge used by CMC, lots of erosion, not only due to them, but also from public use. CMC don't know whether there is an impact from them using it, and would like to look at the site in a positive and proactive way.
- The Artro Estuary not aware of the species in there, not aware of any impact, but would like to have more education about what small things they could do to positively influence the area.

Information can be found out on the gorge and estuary here:

<http://www.ccw.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/special-landscapes--sites/protected-landscapes-and-sites/sss/ssi-sites/coed-aber-artro.aspx?lang=en>

(I can email this link)

AP1: CM to email link round.

However, direct training would be more useful on site at these particular area.

AP2: CM said she would follow this up with NRW to find out who the reserve manager is and whether their would be potential for a training session in the gorge and/or the estuary.

Training needs:

- The member of staff that had knowledge to run field studies on the Beach has left, CMC are very keen to get this going again, but need some training.

Nia Hâf Jones invited to speak at this meeting about Marine wildlife.

- Practically it is better to train a couple of senior centre staff and let them do in house training.
- Brian McDonald from Wildlife Wales was suggested as potential partner for collaboration for training as he has extensive knowledge of the areas.

Brian has been contacted and been invited to this meeting.

AP3 CM will invite Brian again.

- Training, Arthog and CMC would like to work together and help share knowledge and training on all environments, but perhaps coastal birds would be a good place to start.

How could Arthog and CMC work together?

Those present expressed it would be useful for trainees from other centres to be mixed up to learn other operating procedures and knowledge about a variety of areas. Those present thought that knowledge sharing amongst outdoor centres would be valuable and beneficial all round. Centres in south felt it would be useful to exchange knowledge with those in the north. The content of these sessions could be learning more about nature.

The question was asked whether training sessions could be done in staff time. JP expressed that it would be possible to perhaps free one member of staff who could filter information back to the centre. However, all were in agreement that this would not be as effective as someone actually attending a session.

Discussions have just begun with RSPB about running training together - not likely to be until September.

AP4: CM to organise and publicise

- There was general consensus that site specific, relevant training was best for the centres needs, but most also wanted to broaden their own personal development by attending other venues.

Habitat Exploration Workshop with Natural Resources Wales, Cadair Idris - more will be organised in the future.

- There was unanimous agreement that environmental training is a good idea. There were mixed feelings about online courses being a good idea. CMC expressed the more they could learn the better and that anything learnt by senior staff could be passed on the trainees and become part of the centre training.
- There was a general feeling of how to discuss the use of the environment with young people (like sphagnum moss and all its uses) as it really brings the environment alive.
- Discussion again about CPD points if possible for any training sessions.

CPD points from Mountain Training Association. Are any other accreditations important?

It was mentioned that AMI CPD points would be beneficial. However, those present said the most important thing about environmental training is the knowledge gained rather than the CPD points.

AP5: CM to Contact AMI to find about CPD points for training.

- A real desire to see NGB qualifications having a greater emphasis on the environment, but all accepted this might take a long time to actually get in place. Could NWEOCG provide support to NGB's at revalidation days by having some key, environment specific training in a couple of hours.

Joe Roberts Recreation Officer, Natural Resources Wales and member of the steering group is pursuing this with Mountain Training Association and the environmental charter group are now represented on the Canoe Wales regional development teams whose role will be to cater for the development needs of the respective regional members & coaches – recreational, competitive & professional.

- From the domestic side Eco-centres and Eco-schools was mentioned as an organisation that might be better approached from the charter group.

The environmental charter group, Green-Snowdonia and Snowdonia National Park are organising a workshop My 27th, 6pm to address this which will be held at CMC. 'Running a Sustainable Outdoor Centre'.

Climbing concerns:

- Barmouth Slabs came up again, same issues toilets/litter/erosion and rigging problems. The old slabs committee was talked about, and there was a feeling this might be useful. They would really like to see a code of conduct for the slabs produced to deal with the issues, but would like to do it in collaboration.

Elfyn Jones - BMC Access and Conservation officer has been asked about this and wasn't aware of the Slabs Committee. More information from those who use the area would be useful.

JP explained that the slabs committee previously existed to manage the relationship between those who use the venue for climbing and the owner.

How keen are you as a group to pursue the idea of a code of conduct for Barmouth Slabs?

JP expressed that recently centres had started refusing to pay for access to Barmouth Slabs. This has resulted in a meeting being organised to bring together those who use the venue and the owners of the venue, which may be the beginning of a new slabs committee. If such a committee does form their is possible scope to work with this group to draw up a code of conduct for the venue, until the outcome of this meeting no further action will be pursued by NWEOCG.

AP6: JP to update CM on the outcome of this meeting,

Conversation turned to land owner liability and the question was asked whether paying for use of a venue actually is more likely to hold the owner liable for any accidents. AC stated that paying for venues does exactly the opposite and is in effect a way of accepting conditions of access to land which includes acknowledging the owner is not liable.

Here is a link to a resource created by the BMC to reassure landowners, managers and users on 'Climbing and Occupier's Liability'
<https://www.thebmc.co.uk/downloads/all/all>

CM explained that she is speaking at the next Local Access Forums (south and north Snowdonia) and will get the opportunity to explain to landowners the environmental charter and what it means.

Venue management concerns:

- The overflow car park at Ty Nant (SNPA owned) is really treacherous when at all wet when visiting with a minibus-is there a chance of making this slightly better.

This hasn't been pursued - how is the problem?

- Dog mess was reported as a problem n the sand dunes at Harlech and it was suggested that a mess bin could be placed where the life ring is.

Gwynedd Tidy Towns officer, Gwen Alun has been contacted - new Tidy Towns officer is in place, Jonathan Neale who is following up on this.

- One of the group members had an idea of a Wales coastal path litter pick and wondered about sections of the path being adopted by individuals and organisations. Although they didn't want to lead on this, they thought maybe the charter group could.

Tidy Coast week: May 10th - 18th. Register a litter pick through Keep Wales Tidy.

- A mess problem was also reported on Snowdon, particularly noticeable after the snow had thawed. There was all round consensus that the general public are not acutely aware of how damaging poo can be to soil and vegetation and this is an issue that needs raising.

This has been raised with the Snowdonia Society who are leading on the Snowdon Tidy project.

- Those present suggested an organised clean up along the Mawddach estuary would be a good idea.

Ash Charlwood has been pursuing this with the the harbour master who has been really supportive, offered to dispose of all the rubbish that is collected and bring Gwynedd Council in on the advertising and media coverage. However, this has been put on hold after the recent storms.

AP7: AC said he will finalise plans for the clean up and publicise through the charter.

Other concerns:

- It was suggested that there are many organisations in the area which were not present at the meeting and that those present should take responsibility for spreading the word about the charter. Air cadets, Scouts, schools, youth groups, rotary clubs and golf clubs were just some of the groups mentioned which should be informed about the environmental charter. Lei Bramich offered to approach local organisations. CM will provide information on the group and the charter.

AP8: AC is creating a resource which will be distributed as a Pdf.

- It was suggested that food at meetings would be a good way to attract more people and that if funds are limited so this could be done on a bring and share basis.

Still no funding for food :(

Those present were invited to express any other concerns which were affecting the sector in the area. JP asked about navigation on the Mawddach. AC answered ..???????

3. Events

Events organised by NWECCG and other organisations relevant to the outdoor sector:

- Tidy Coast Week, Keep Wales Tidy: May 10th - 18th
- Local Marine Wildlife, pollution and sustainable fish: May 22nd, 7pm, Bangor University. The Snowdonia Society has arranged for a speaker from the Marine Conservation Society to talk to members, volunteers and the public about the wildlife found locally, the impact that different pollution has on the it and what to look for when buying fish.
- Running a Sustainable Outdoor Centre: May 27th, 6pm, CMC Pensarn. This free workshop is aimed at outdoor education and activity providers who offer accommodation. Come along to find out how you can improve the environmental and economic sustainability of your operation. The session will provide lots of practical tips on how to understand and improve

energy and water efficiency, along with discussion of how improved environmental performance can be linked into your marketing.

- Groups in Gorges: June 19th, 10am. Ceunant Llennyrch, NNR. With Doug Oliver, Reserve Manager. This workshop is for those who run gorge walking sessions and will take place in the gorge environment. Doug Oliver will guide us through sections of the gorge highlighting rare species within the gorge to raise awareness of how to avoid causing damage. Gorge users will learn about plants and wildlife found in gorge environments, knowledge which can be passed on to clients. Environmental best practice will be discussed throughout the session.
- Envirotrek: August 17th, Llanberis. <http://www.respectthemountains.com/envirotrek>

4. General Sector Updates

AC provided an update on the current situation with regards to a Green Paper which was said to review existing legislation on access and outdoor recreation. However, due to opposition to this change the paper which was said to be released in December 2013 is now not looking like it will be published at all.

Since the meeting this written statement has been published by Welsh Government:

<http://wales.gov.uk/about/cabinet/cabinetstatements/2014/accessoutdoorrecreation/?lang=en>

Secondly, AC talked about the recent findings which have been released on the economic impact of the outdoor sector in Wales. Outdoor activity tourism is estimated to be worth £601m and directly support 8,243 jobs.

The full report can be found here:

<http://www.snowdonia-active.com/toptopic.asp?tipid=866>

5. Outdoor Badge Scheme - Discussion Session

AC shared information on the AONB badge scheme which recently been launch by the Dee Activity Providers Group and Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB. This scheme includes bespoke course content relating to the unique history and heritage of the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley. There is another badge scheme running in Scotland, 'The Wild Scotland Wilderness Guide' which provides comprehensive training for professional outdoor guides working on a wide range of leisure trips and instructional courses. The training provides guides with both knowledge and practical skills, leading to an increased awareness of sustainable tourism and best practice. These examples were explained to the group and they were asked to give feedback on whether a similar scheme would work in this area. This session was designed to gather feedback on whether there is demand for such a programme across north Wales. Feedback gathered from members will help the steering group decided whether this is something the group should pursue and look for funding for.

Feedback:

- Outdoor Education Centres felt it would not be useful for them as a marketing differentiator and would be more useful for independent businesses.
- From a freelancers perspective it was thought environmental training should be more generic and that another scheme or badge could end up confusing things as there are already a lot of badges/awards one can gain.
- Another freelancer expressed that the reason for gaining a badge might be so you could put it on a CV, however you could simply list the courses you have been on instead and therefore their be no need for such a badge scheme.

- It was also expressed that the charter group should benefit everyone and a scheme such as this may exclude some.
- The questions was asked about whether the Leave No Trace scheme could be adopted by the environmental charter. CM answered by explaining some initial steps had been taken to better understand the Leave No Trace scheme, however, due to costs being involved in people become Leave No Trace masters, the charter group had decided against implementing this scheme as they were keen for the membership to the charter to be free.

6. iSee North Wales Coast Feedback - Discussion Session

Copies of the newly produced resources were distributed around the room and those present were invited to share any thoughts on the booklet. For this resource the group received funding from the Anglesey AONB Sustainable Development Fund and worked in partnership with North Wales Wildlife Trust, Geomôn and Nature's Work. The charter group is hoping to turn these guides into a series of iSee guides to north Wales.

The feedback was generally very positive and the following comments were made:

- The facts about the booklet are a good addition as clients are more likely to remember these
- The geology section is really useful and something the group felt they knew little about
- It was suggested that examples of bad practice would be a useful addition to the booklet

7. Environmental Training - Marine Wildlife and Conservation, Nia Jones, North Wales Wildlife Trust.

Nia started the session by explaining the background to the North Wales Wildlife Trust and then gave a 30 minute, interactive presentation on wildlife which can be found along the north Wales coast and also included some information in her presentation about the use of our seas and the impacts on them.

8. Close

The meeting was brought to a close and Arthog Outdoor Centre was thanked for hosting the meeting. Those present where invited to help themselves to some of the free environmental resources which were brought to the meeting.