



Grŵp Siarter Amgylcheddol Awyr Agored North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group

Thursday 15th May - Marle Hall OEC

Attendees

Catherine Miles - Snowdonia-Active (CM)
Ashley Charlwood - Environmental Charter Chair (AC)
Martin Chesmer - Marle Hall OEC (MC)
Simon Paton - Marle Hall OEC (SP)
Andy Taylor - Field Studies Council - Rhyd y Creuau (AT)
John Hobson - Bushcraft Calling - (JH)
Gethin Thomas - Oaklands OEC (GT)
John Ratcliffe - Natural Resources Wales (JR)
Karl Midlane - Freelance (KM)

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

1. Environmental Training - John Ratcliffe, Natural Resources Wales - Projected Sites

John delivered a 45 minute presentation on protected sites, what designations mean and how to find out about them. Many questions were asked:

SP - Where is the best place to go, locally if you want to show a group an SSSI for environmental education?

JR - Great Orme or Afon Conwy. JR suggested that the warden on the Great Orme might be a good person to lead some staff training.

SP - Ask specifically about a site close to Marle Hall (Marle Cragg) they wish to use for abseiling but are aware it is a SSSI. SP wondered whether it would be possible to use it at certain times of the year.

JR - Answered by saying it is impossible to give an exact answer without visiting the site, however it is likely, due to the reasons it is a SSSI, that there would not be times of the year when the site can be used. JR said he would pass on the appropriate contacts for protected sites across north Wales. These officers will be able to visit any sites providers would like to discuss.

The Woodland Trust who own the site do not allow access for climbing on this venue due to concerns they have about possible damage from climbing activities to the nationally important flora and the sites' designation as an SSSI.

The Woodland Trust state that:

"Marl Hall Woods are owned by the Woodland Trust. Whilst their woods are open to the public for quiet enjoyment, it should be noted that Marl Hall Woods form part of Creuddyn SSSI / Creuddyn Peninsula Woods SAC and as such, third parties who wish to undertake work notified as an operation likely to damage the special interest (which would include any vegetation removal or crag 'development') would need permission from the owner to deliver works in accordance with written consent from Natural Resources Wales. This consultation process

enables an assessment to be made on the likely impacts of proposed works on the rare plant populations, woodland and grassland habitats that occupy the site."

MC - Asked if there was anything they could do about the kids starting fires in the SSSI by the crag.

JR - Phoning the police is one way. People can be prosecuted for intentionally causing damage to SSSI when they knowing are aware it is a protected site. It is difficult to prove that 'kids who start the fires' know it is a SSSI.

MC said the police have been an effective way of dealing with the problem, however, soon enough, another group of kids come along to have fires.

AC stated that outdoor recreation really does have minimal impact on the natural environment. He stated that attendance at events and an interest from providers to learn more demonstrates a willingness to care for the environment. Being able to participate in recreation on SSSIs causing minimal impact on the environment provides a good case for changing legislation on access.

JR acknowledge that those who engage in outdoor recreation are as passionate about nature as NRW and now NRW have a role in helping people to understand their material.

AC asked whether it would ever be possible for red/yellow cards with regards to access for outdoor recreation on protected sites to open up more areas for recreation. For example: Spawning in the Conwy - Red = no paddling, Yellow = paddle with caution.

JR stated that these conversations do happen with NRW. If a operation wishes to be carried out on a protected site the questions of when, what and how many times will be asked. NRW don't want to just say no.

GT asked whether training could be habitat specific rather than venue specific.

CM said she would look into organising an environmental training in the Gwydir Forest.

AT said at Rhyd y Creuau some of their activities take place on SSSI with permission from the landowner. AT asked whether it was the responsibility of the landowner to inform them it is a SSSI.

JR said it was the responsibility of the landowner to inform any third parties who access their land of any designations.

Finding out information on protected sites

Link to the protected sites map.

<http://www.ccg.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/protected-sites-map.aspx>

You can:

- Search for a venue
- Click  to find out information on if and how the site is protected
- You will also be able to find the citation (information on why the site is protected) by clicking 

Contacts from John Ratcliffe:

Fiona Evans (Meirionydd) Fiona.Evans@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Bethan Beech (NE Wales / Clwyd) Bethan.Beech@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Arfon Hughes (Berwyn) Arfon.Hughes@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

John Ratcliffe (NW Wales) John.Ratcliffe@cyfoethnaturiolcymru.gov.uk

Other links:

<http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/splash?orig=/>

http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/out-and-about/nrw-web-maps/protected-sites-and-landscapes/?lang=en#.U4dks_uQNw0

<http://www.ccw.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/protected-sites-map.aspx?lang=en> and then you need GIS skills to access the information; using + / - and info tools you can get to some of it, but some requires you to click on the map, grab the site name or code and insert it into a box on

<http://www.ccw.gov.uk/landscape--wildlife/protecting-our-landscape/designated-sites-search.aspx> as the hyperlinks seem to have gone awol. You should be able to get the map, citation / description and a "site management statement" which is a short synopsis of what TLC it needs.

2. Introduction to the environment 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. The Environmental Charter is summarised by the following key points:

- Avoid damage to sites
- Educate group leaders on natural environments
- Encourage others to respect the natural environment
- Consider others
- Respect conservation based management plans

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 people can become members of the environmental charter as an individual, an organisation or an endorsing partner.

CM then covered the aims and objectives of the environmental charter which are as follows:

- Providing environmental best practice guidelines to activity providers
- Enabling an effective and reliable communication system to and from the sector internally and externally
- Offering relevant environmental training to raise awareness and encourage best practice
- Facilitating a platform for discussion, development and action

- Building consensus between activity providers, external agencies, conservationist and land managers
- Promoting the Environmental Charter

CM explained that the current number of signatories to the chart is 81.

Steering Group = 13

Individual = 28

Organisation = 35

Endorsing Partners = 5

CM then explained some of the events the group have organised and promoted such as the environmental training sessions, invasive species workshops and clean up events.

Partner organisations which the group may be working with in the future were listed and potential involvement explained:

- Natural Resources Wales - Doug Oliver - Groups in gorges - June 19th
- North Wales Wildlife Trust - More marine wildlife training
- RSPB - September - Anglesey
- Seacams - Expanding their work to work with kayaking/coasteering operators - starting discussion
- Snowdonia Society - Meeting tomorrow about putting in a joint grant for a training grant with Environment Wales
- Plantlife - Heritage Lottery Fund - asked to submit a full proposal. As part of the project we are keen to increase knowledge and understanding of this habitat including the development of materials that can be used by outdoor instructors (both adventurous outdoor practitioners and environmental education practitioners) as well as training. Both resources and training would be free.

3. Events

Once the group re-grouped, CM gave an update on events which might be of interest to the group:

- 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.
- Llyn Padarn Clean Up - May 26th. Meet at Caban, Brynrefail, 10am-12pm. Free train ride for those taking part.
- 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, the recent findings which have been released on the economic impact of the outdoor sector in Wales were explained. 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. Group Developments

A document which detailed the progress of the group was passed around the groups. The groups were asked to input into the developments and elaborate on any areas they would like to see further developed. This document is included at the end of the minutes.

The following points were raised at this meeting indicating areas for development:

- There seems to be some confusion over whether the Eco-Centres scheme is still operating in north Wales. It was clear from the meeting that there is an appetite for the scheme in north Wales.

AP1: CM said she would find out a definitive answer.

- AT asked whether there was likely to be any training within the Afon Ddu. CM explained that the group are hoping to put together a proposal for funding for a project within the Afon Ddu which will be based on recommendations made by Joe Roberts' (NRW) MSc dissertation. CM also explained that Chris Hooper had written his dissertation on a number of popular venues across north Wales. The findings from this project created the foundations of NWECCG.

AP2: CM will find out whether summaries of Joe's project and Chris's research could be circulated.

- AC explained that Sustainable Use of Snowdonia who carried out the initial development work on the Afon Ddu handed their remaining £700 of funds over to the charter group for monitoring and improvements to the Afon Ddu to continue.
- GT asked for a training in Gwydir Forest.

AP3: CM will contact NRW education team to try and organise this.

- MC suggested it would be a good idea to repeat trainings which have already taken place such as the coasteering session for those who had been unable to attend.
- Weekends were suggested as a good time for training sessions.

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:

- Is there potential for the charter group to become a governing body?
- Modular would be a better idea than people having to do the whole course
- Sharing of information between centres would be a better way of carrying out training rather than paying for external trainers - there is a lot of knowledge amongst centres already it could just do with sharing
- 2 hour sessions every now and again would be a good way to run training sessions, otherwise people struggle with time commitments
- General feeling that sharing expertise within the Conwy Valley e.g a local focus would be a effective way to learn more
- People will only pay for something if they absolutely can't get in any other way - e.g they would pay for the Natural Navigator

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.

Feedback:

- The group were generally very impressed with the booklet and felt minimal changes should be made to future versions
- Some felt having separate versions for Welsh and English was a good idea, whereas others felt it would be more useful to have them combined
- Rounded corners to stop the guides getter scruffy

- No need for blank pages for notes

AP4: CM said she would circulate links to two apps which were discussed:

Mountain Flora and Fauna - <https://itunes.apple.com/gb/app/mountain-flora-fauna/id791977108?mt=8>

Plant Tracker - <http://planttracker.naturelocator.org/>

AP5: CM to distribute more copies of iSee North Wales Coast once they are printed.

8. Close

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

Additional Resources

Agenda Point 2. Group Developments

Update on discussion points from previous meeting

Environmental Training:

- Training largely dominated discussion.
- Trainings should be habitat specific.
- Training should use appropriate language for outdoor instructors and their application.
- GJ suggested a similar format to what happened when initial conversations started in South Wales and the solution was to have a 'round robin' at venues with Countryside Council for Wales (as it was) and outdoor providers had the opportunity to ask questions - an informative exercise for the providers and CCW.
- Best example of conveying environmental information is US National Park standard leaflet.
- CPD for environmental trainings. Should also focus on sanctions for misuse.

Ongoing developments with regards to environmental training.

Opportunities with Natural Resources Wales:

- There was a general consensus that NRW has the expert knowledge and outdoor providers want to learn more.
- Those from NRW said they need to know what instructors want to know and which level to pitch it.
- Meeting needs to be organised between NRW and outdoor providers.

12th February - Meeting with Natural Resources Wales Education Team - General discussion on delivery of training to NWECCG. Decision made to start with a Habitat Exploration Day.

20th March - Meeting with Natural Resources Wales to finalise plans for a Habitat Exploration Day.

9th April - Habitat Exploration Day
Ystradlyn, Cadair Idris National Nature Reserve

- As a starting point, more information on SSSIs where they are and their significance.

John Ratcliffe, protected sites team leader, NRW invited to speak at Marle Hall as part of this series. Information on this was also given at the habitat exploration day.

Consultations:

- Outdoor providers should have an input into the NRW: Planning for Our Future consultation to highlight the importance on the role NRW can play in sharing information with the outdoor sector.

Natural Resources Wales - Corporate Plan 2014 - 2017:

<http://naturalresourceswales.gov.uk/content/docs/pdfs/our-work/about-us/corporate-plan-2014-17.pdf?lang=en>

Packaging Concerns:

- Liaise with organisations such as Keep Wales Tidy and Tesco discuss lunch packaging and biodegradable bottles.

Workshop organised May 27th @6pm - CMC Pensarn - Running a Sustainable Outdoor Centre.

Litter Picking:

- Could have a coast tidy - Menai Straights and Cable Bay.

Tidy Coast Week - Keep Wales Tidy May 10th - 17th

Gorge Walking Concerns:

- Afon Ddu - there has been chainsaw activity.

Update from Mike McCabe Reserve Manager:

Examples of Environmental Best Practice:

- John Muir exemplars of success.
- Duke of Edinburgh - Approved Activity Provider - environmental requirements?
- Wild Country panel (D of E) for schools.

Other points:

- Signatories to the environmental charter could provide exposure on poster boards at within centres - outward statement of environmental best practice.

Is the environmental charter displayed in your centre/ business?

- Education packs at a certain level - syllabus leading to certification for certain trainings.

Discussion on the outdoor badge at this meeting.

- School Programme.
- Wild Camping - good environment for training?

Agenda Point 5. Outdoor Badge Scheme

AONB Dee Valley Guide Course - Cost £70

	Session					
	1	2	3	4	5	6
Date	March	March	April	April/May	September	September
Time	Evening	Full day	Half day	Half day	Full day	Half day
Session Title	Introduction	Introduction to historical environment	Farming and Agriculture	Moorland management	Biodiversity	Accreditation
Session Content	AONB Intro, history, status, outstanding features, SSSI's, WHS	Iron Age, Industrial Archaeology, Medieval, Pre historic. Grassland, crag nesting birds, welsh hawk weed. Pressures from recreation. Welsh names of Eglwyseg crags, Geomorphology	Farming calendar, breeds, upland/lowland, Welsh field names	Lek visit at Sam	Bats, invasive, biosecurity, damage, SAC, protected species, fish, otters, water vole. Estates, drovers, horseshoe falls, Telford, A5, Chainbridge	

Wilderness Guide Training Programme - Wild Scotland

Cost:
Full Course £1200
Module £85

The course is delivered in three blocks, and the modules are:

1. Core Modules (6 days)

Cultural History & Interpretation (1 day)

Environmental Advocacy (1 day)

Leave No Trace Awareness (certificated) (1 day)

Nature Conservation (1 day)

Creating Great Customer Experiences (2 days)

2. Habitat & Geology Modules (4 days)

Coastal, Upland, Riparian and Woodland Natural History, Ecology & Ethnobotany (3 days)

Scottish Geology (1 day)

3. Options Modules (2 days)

Choose two from the following:

Astronomy

Environmental Storytelling

Wilderness Cookery

Gaelic in the Landscape