



Grŵp Siarter Amgylcheddol Awyr Agored
North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group

Tuesday 13th May - Plas Menai Watersports Centre - 6pm

Attendees

Catherine Miles - Snowdonia-Active (CM)
Chris Wright - Snowdonia-Active (CW)
Jamie Williams - North Wales Active (JW)
Tom Carter - Freelance (TC)
Gordon Neil - Bach Ventures (GN)
Andy Short - B@ctive Rhoscolyn (AS)
Simon Van Dam - Freelance (SVD)
Matt Beaumont - Plas Menai (MB)
Anne Vowles - Freelance (AV)
Debs McKeown - Plas Gwynant (DM)
Laura Hughes - National Trust (LH)
Ben Stammers - North Wales Wildlife Trust (BS)
David Hughes - Plas Heli (DH)

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. 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. 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.

2. Group Developments

The group was then asked to split into two to discuss 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:

- MB from Plas Menai suggested that training on the rocky shore would be useful and that evenings would be a good time to hold training sessions, in the past Plas Menai have run in house training sessions like this but not for a number of years. Repetition of previous training sessions was also requested as many had been unable to attend organised sessions.

AP1: CM to ask NWWT about another coasteering and marine ecology event

- GN reported that the flow in the Afon Ddu has returned to normal after the pipeline has been reconnected. However, CM expressed that after the heavy rain the water levels had risen again. Concern was expressed over the number of trees which have fallen in the gorge after the storms and that it looked like a lot of trees are delicately suspended above the gorge. CM said she would raise this with NRW.

AP3: CM to meet with Joe Roberts, NRW to discuss remedial work in the Afon Ddu and develop a funding proposal for work and environmental training and resources.

- GN gave a update on access to Gerionydd mines. Access is still not quite there yet as it has been held up with negotiations between BCA and NRW. Hopefully what will eventually happen is that access will be granted via NRW land to a number of mines within the Glydwr forest, those mines will then need to be assessed by mine engineer and blue routes will be opened to appropriately qualified mine leaders/ centres etc who are part of the North Wales Mine exploring group.

AP3: GN to update the group when more information is available

- After discussions began at the steering group meeting about changing facilities in the Afon Ddu car park, the group were asked their thoughts on this. The Angling Association have fenced off the river in the car park, meaning groups can no longer get changed under the bridge, meaning that the car park is getting muddy and eroded. There appeared to be concern over the building of changing facilities particularly over who would look after it. The group felt it might be better on focusing on graveling the car park to minimise erosion rather than building a changing facility. It was also suggested that an agreement with Surf Snowdonia could be negotiated with regards to changing facilities, however, there was also concern that they may refuse and capitalise on the gorge themselves.

AP4: Those using the gorge to monitor the situation and report any issues to the charter group.

- Bolting in Dollgarog gorge was also discussed. Concern was raised over who would look after the bolts. It was suggested that potentially an outdoor centre could be responsible like the National White Water Centre look after bolts in the Afon Prysor. In addition to bolting the question was asked as to whether there could be a better system for indicating the tippers, for example a webcam.
- AS from B@ctive Rhoscolyn raised the question of whether there is scope to further develop mountain biking trails on Holyhead Mountain. CM suggested that the development of the trails in Penmachno could be used as a model.

AP5: CM said she would raise this with Snowdonia-Active as a development project

- Other training suggestions which came out of the meeting were:
 - Woodland Management for Centres
 - Recycling with Keep Wales Tidy
 - Blanket Bog training - David Smith, National Trust
- It was suggested that the charter group could look to link with the following organisations/ projects:
 - Anglesey Grazing Project
 - Learning Outside the Classroom

- Universities
- It was suggested that a training calendar would be useful, including events which were organised by the group and other trainings which would be relevant to the outdoor sector.
- The pathways in and around the Afon Ddu were raised as being a problem.
- It was asked whether it would be possible for environmental charter members could get money off external training sessions.

AP6:CM and the steering group to further explore options for training and partners.

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 Llennyrych, 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

CM and CW 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:

5. Outdoor Badge Scheme - Discussion Session

CM 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:

- Cost would be a limiting factor
- Perhaps there could be some compulsory modules and then bolts on ones
- Big time and financial investment
- Sense of place central to the training would be useful - understanding what and where we work and how we can share it with customers
- It is great to have a good understanding of the environment
- Felin Uchaf - an example of successful courses?
- Credits to money not a good ratio
- NGB's do provide all elements of the course anyway so people could get this information by doing recognised qualifications
- Geomôn - geology tour guide is an example of this working
- The one off sessions the charter group run are working well, no need to formalise it into a scheme
- Is there an opportunity for the charter group to run/implement Leave No Trace™
- Courses/sessions/schemes should be flexible
- Needs to be sector lead not funding lead
- Consistency to the training sessions would be good - programme of trainings known in advance - training calendar. Cofnod does produce an events programme but not all necessarily relevant to the outdoor sector
- Charter group discount for other courses? However, many other organisations are charities so would it fair to get a discount?
- What are the benefits of the scheme? A badge/mark/logo? If so how does this differ from other schemes?

- Potential advantage to be promoted by bigger bodies if you have completed X amount of modules
- An employment edge
- 3 or 4 core modules would be the best way forward, 1 day per module which are held 3 times per year. Possible modules: 1. Environment 2. North Wales heritage and 3. Structural - geology & how it is farmed and managed
- Could there be potential for levels of membership within the charter as a mark of environmental commitment? This would reward those who do attend meetings and training sessions
- Is there potential to turn this into a degree/get university recognition? However, this is complicated and expensive
- Potential for cultural grants (sense of place) to fund this kind of project.

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:

- Very well received
- Welsh and English could be combined rather than having two separate versions - flip idea?
- "Perfect"
- "Just the right size"
- Try and keep them free!
- Blank pages for notes would be useful
- Welsh glossary at the back rather than completely bilingual
- "Big fonts great"

7. Environmental Training - Marine Wildlife and Conservation, Ben Stammers, North Wales Wildlife Trust.

Ben 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 Plas Menai 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