



Grŵp Siarter Amgylcheddol Awyr Agored
North Wales Environmental Outdoor Charter Group

Thursday 20th November 2014 - Llangollen Outdoors

Attendees

Catherine Miles (CM)- Snowdonia-Active

David Shiel (DS)- Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB

Dawn (D- Denbushshire Council Biodiversity Officer

Rosie (R- Llangollen Outdoors

Mike Clark (MC)- Duke of Edinburg, Wrexham Youth Service

Steve Mattocks (SM)- Nantyr Outdoor Education Centre

Mike Smart (MS)- Trek Smart

CM opened the meeting with introductions asking each person to say a little about who they work for and their interests in being at the meeting.

1. Introduction to the Environmental Charter

For those who had not attended a charter meeting before CM gave an introduction to the work of the group and what the Environmental Charter means for the outdoor sector.

Current membership numbers:

Steering Group = 13

Individual = 66

Organisation = 42

Endorsing Partners = 5

Total = 126

2. Updates

CM discussed group developments since the last meeting. At the last series of meetings members in other areas were asked whether they want the group to go down a similar route to those in the Dee Valley with the AONB badge scheme. An example of a similar scheme was also discussed from Scotland (Wild Scotland Wilderness Guide). Most members expressed that they value having the option of attending trainings which are of interest to them rather than having to go to a prescribed number of sessions which may not fit round their working schedule or be of interest to them.

CM explained to the group that thanks to Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB and Cadwyn Clwyd the group have received funding to produce an iSee North Wales Rivers guide which will be similar to the north Wales coast booklet created earlier in the year.

CM talked about funding for the group. She explained that an application to the Nature Fund for Afon Ddu had been unsuccessful so she was now in the process of writing a funding bid to the European Outdoor Conservation Alliance (EOCA). A joint working partnership application has

also being submitted to Natural Resources Wales. A decision on this will be made by Christmas. If successful this would see a three year contribution to the group.

CM talked about training sessions since the last meeting which include:

Groups in gorges with Natural Resources Wales in the Ceunant Llennyrch/Afon Prysor

2 x Wild Cooking with Nature's Work

2 x Making the most of Afon Ddu with Gritten Ecology

An evening talk from the Natural Navigator, Tristan Gooley. CM explained that Snowdonia-Active were hoping to run two more sessions with the Natural Navigator in the new year.

3. Wild Camping

CM explained that over the summer and also at steering group meetings topics are brought up and suggested as discussion topics for charter meetings. CM said that she had tried to select topics which were relevant to the area. Wild camping is a topic that is relevant to most areas across north Wales. CM asked the following questions to the group:

- Issues/specific sites at risk
- Alternating camping sites
- Asking landowner permission/semi-permanent camps
- Site already in use
- Sanitation: carried out or buried?

A few members of the group discuss Wild Camping and said that they go to quiet areas which not many people use or know about. Duke of Edinburgh groups were discussed and two specific points were raised. Firstly, that it would be interesting to speak to the bigger centres like Plas Y Brenin about how they rotate camping spots and minimise impact, particularly with DofE groups.

AP1: MC said that he would raise this with the person in charge of DofE at Plas Y Brenin to get some feedback on the way camping spots are rotated and how best practice messages are passed on to students.

The second point was about environmental best practice with DofE groups in general. MC expressed that DofE groups wrongly (although, sometimes deservedly) get a bad name for themselves. CM talked to the group about the Challenge Network, a similar group who are bringing large groups of students to the area. CM explained that the Challenge network are a deliverer of the National Citizenship Service, as are DofE. The big difference between these groups is that Challenge network groups are always guided by an instructor whereas an important element of DofE is that groups navigate and camp alone without an instructor.

CM then shared some information on wild camping best practice. Link to the points raised and articles mentioned can be found below:

[BMC - Wild Camping Worries](#)

[BMC - Going Solo: Call of the wild](#)

[BMC Green Guide to the uplands](#)

[Kathleen Meyer - How to shit in the woods](#) - Shhh-it! Kit

[Snowdonia National Park - Wild Camping Code](#)

[Pembrokeshire Outdoor Charter - Bushcraft & Wild Camping Best Practice](#)

[The Scottish Mountaineering Council](#)

Managing Human Waste



Managing Food Waste

Prepare and repackage food before leaving – reusable containers and resealable bags can save on waste

Try and deposit cooking water a good distance (30m) away from any watercourse

Strain the food scraps out of the water (tea strainer) and carry it out with you (or bury it if need be)

Clean the cooking utensils away from running water and with a non-biological cleaner

4. A National Charter

CM explained that there are two other charter groups across Wales and it had recently been brought to the attention of the groups that it might be beneficial to have a national charter which is the same for all groups across the country. It was therefore important to gather thoughts from the group on the possibility of a national charter.

Comments included:

"Mountain Leader is the same everywhere so couldn't see why Environmental Charter same everywhere would be a problem"

"An all Wales charter is a good idea"

"A national charter makes sense, however, it maybe more difficult to engage people on a local level"

5. Managing groups whilst minimising impact

All leaders adapt their plans and actions when out with a group. It may be due to the weather, the group's skill or an emergency. The same adaptive thought process can be used when considering the environment. With this in mind the following questions were asked to the group:

Is it currently working?

How are venues shared?

Is there any mechanism to find out who will be a certain venues?

In short the group agreed that there was not really any management of venues in the area which at times did cause some issues.

R? mentioned that Llantysilio is a venue which instantly pops to mind with there sometimes being 100 people ready to get on the water at 10am. Rosie explained that there are about three companies who use this venue and managing this better could be done through liaison with them. CM suggested that a training session to accompany the soon to be published iSee north Wales rivers guide could be the place to discuss this.

SM mentioned the Afon Ddu. Although, Afon Ddu is not a venue in the direct vicinity of the area, many providers still travel to the gorge.

DS mentioned that Llantysilio and also Loggerheads for abseiling were being monitored. However, DS said that he does not want to manage these venues. With regards to the gorge for abseiling, concerns were due to implications for insurance. Historically providers need to be granted access from Loggerheads Country Park to use the abseil, however there are not concerns that this could leave the country park liable for any accidents that might occur which means access for groups could be withdrawn.

SM mentioned that Trevor Quarry is probably one of the most busiest venues in the area and used by centres, university groups, clubs, individuals and other groups for climbing. SM said that volume of use is an issue but so is the litter at the site with many locals using it for camping and leaving litter behind.

DofE groups were mentioned again and D? asked the question of whether freelance DofE staff have training days? DS said that he would be happy running 1/2 day with DofE leaders from Cheshire and other local areas.

<p>AP2: MC suggested that he could post about the Environmental Charter on the DofE freelance leader page and offer people the opportunity to sign up.</p>

<p>AP3: SM said he would take information on the Environmental Charter to the next DofE leaders meeting and mention that DS, AONB would be happy to run a half day training session for leaders on the local area.</p>

<p>AP4: CM to explore options for running an environmental training session on the Dee.</p>
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6. AOB - None

7. Presentations on Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB and River Dee

David Shiel, Senior Project Officer for Clwydian Range and Dee Valley Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) gave a presentation about the the AONB.

DS explained a little about what the AONB means as a designation and how Natural Resources Wales/Welsh Government came to a definition on what 'natural beauty' actually means as much of the landscape is not 'natural'. These are areas that have been moulded by centuries of human activity, where there is a diversity of land use with a "sense of place". A useful definition about be found here: <http://www.highweald.org/high-weald-aonb-management-plan/natural-beauty-defined.html>

DS stated that the AONB is 390 square km and one the biggest in Wales now that it has been extended to include the Dee Valley. He said that 26% of Wales is designated as a protected landscape.

DS explained to the group about other designations such as SAC - Special Areas of Conservation which are governed by Europe and SSSI - Sites of Special Scientific Interest which area governed nationally by Natural Resources Wales. DS explained that SAC are like the best SSSI and that some sites are both SAC and SSSI.

DS talked about some of the differences between National Parks and AONB. National Parks are legally obliged to provide for public recreational opportunities, whereas AONBs, however the Clwydian Range and Dee Valley AONB does deliver for access and recreation. DS said that 200,000 people visit Moel Famau each year with 80% of people visiting from Merseyside. DS talked about the importance of recreation from a health perspective, quoting a statistic from the NHS who found for every £1 invested into access, the NHS would save £19!

Dawn followed DS presentation by focusing on the River Dee. D? explained that some of the problems which effect it which include amongst others: pollution, acid rain, invasive species and silting which causes flooding, slows down the Dee.

D? talked about the difference species which can be found in the Dee: Freshwater Pearl Mussels, Banded Demoiselle, River Lamprey, Atlantic Salmon, Grayling, Bullhead, Water Vole, Bats, Kingfisher, Water plantain and Otter.