

The Conservation of *Ogof Ffynnon Ddu*

Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (The Cave of the Black Spring) is a cave in the upper Swansea Valley opposite Dan Yr Ogof, in the Brecon Beacons National Park. The first section of the cave was discovered in August 1946 by explorers from the South Wales Caving Club. Exploration continued until the present extent of the system was reached in 1971. The cave is one of the longest in the British Isles with a surveyed length of over 60 km, while its vertical range of over 300 metres makes it the deepest cave in Britain.

After the cave's discovery, it quickly became apparent that what lay here was something unique. The physical and geomorphological complexity of the cave system that was being revealed was soon recognised as a discovery of national importance, and the Nature Conservancy Council designated both the cave and the land above it as a National Nature Reserve (NNR) in order to protect the system from encroaching quarrying. The status of the system was further enhanced by designating the cave and land as a Site of Special Scientific Interest.

The three entrances to the cave system are gated in order to protect it from indiscriminate access and to protect the public from harm through entering without adequate precautions. Currently, the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) owns the majority of the land above the cave and only allows entry by permit through the top entrances or by a leader system through the bottom. This ensures that the cave system is conserved by limiting the number of cavers traversing it. Both methods of entry are administered by the South

Wales Caving Club.

The sensitive parts of the cave are marked with bright orange tape to designate them as being "out of bounds". No one is allowed to cross the tapes. All of the calcite formations are protected, as are good undisturbed examples of sediment banks. The banks of sediment are protected because they contain information relating to how and when the cave was formed as well as data concerning the history of climate change.

Over the last year, volunteers from the SWCC have been carrying out a condition assessment of the whole of the cave system on behalf of the CCW so that they can carry out their legal obligation of producing a management plan for the NNR. The results of the survey show that there has been no detrimental impact from caver access to any part of the cave system, that there is no longer any danger from quarrying and there is no pollution entering the system from the surface.

This unique and priceless treasure is conserved by an alliance of volunteer cavers who care for the cave system underground in partnership with the CCW who protect the land surface above it. ☘

*Text: Bernie Woodley, Conservation Officer, South Wales Caving Club.
Images: Peter Collings-Wells, South Wales Caving Club.*



Selenite Tunnel

Calcite columns and straw formations