

OGOF FFYNNON DDU ACCESS AND ENTRY

Entry Conditions and Rules including Interim Access Guidelines and Procedures During the Coronavirus Pandemic

Interim Access Guidelines

Due consideration should be given to the local community when visiting Ogor Ffynnon Ddu (OFD). The cave is located in a remote area where local healthcare facilities could easily be overwhelmed in the event of a Coronavirus outbreak. A substantial proportion of the local population is likely to be in one or more of the 'at risk' groups. It is particularly important that visitors to OFD1 follow the approved route to the cave and **DO NOT USE** the minor road which runs close to the resurgence for access. **The correct route is described next to the cave key boxes in the SWCC headquarters. Please ensure that you follow the correct route.**

1. Due consideration should be given to transmission of the virus at key locations. This includes but is not limited to the following
 - o The SWCC headquarters, especially Cottage No.3
 - o The key safes and adjacent notice boards, hut sheets and log sheets
 - o All stiles and gate latches
 - o All cave gates, handles and locks together with fixed aids inside the cave
 - o Major hand holds on trade routes such as Salubrious Passage, corkscrew climb etc.

2. Due consideration should be given in the event of encountering another party underground. OFD is a labyrinth cave; there are many alternative ways to reach each destination. If it is clear that another party is using a particular passage you are advised to go another way.

3. Due consideration should be given to the longevity of virus survival in cold humid locations. Cavers visiting OFD should satisfy themselves that they have read and understood any necessary guidance in this respect.

4. General guidance has been given by the Cambrian Caving Council as follows
 - o **Follow Welsh Government Rules and Advice** - Travel restrictions in Wales are different to those in other home nations. Currently travel is more strictly limited
 - o **Keep Apart from Other Groups** - Consider modifying your plans to avoid other caving parties, especially in the more popular caves and those with constricted sections
 - o **Wear Gloves** - We recommend wearing gloves whilst caving to reduce contact with the cave
 - o **Cave Within Your Ability** - And the ability of those in your party
 - o **Respect Locals and Land Owners** - Some people may be shielding

Interim Access Procedures

1. These Interim Access Procedures apply to all parts of and all entrances to OFD and will apply until further notice.
2. The South Wales Caving Club Permit Secretary (The Permit Secretary) can be contacted by e-mail at permit_secretary@swcc.org.uk or by writing to 419, Wimborne Road East, Ferndown, BH22 9LZ or by mobile phone..... 07309 024293.
3. The Permit Secretary administers access to OFD acting on behalf of the landowners (NRW) and South Wales Caving Club (SWCC). The entire cave is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a large part of it is a National Nature Reserve (NNR). Access to the cave is subject to obligations placed upon the landowners by its special status.
4. Entrances to the cave are gated. Permits for entry may be obtained from The Permit Secretary by following the procedures below. Conservation of the cave and its flora and fauna is a priority and cavers are expected to act responsibly and adhere to the Entry Conditions and Rules.
5. Access is available to members of *bona fide* caving clubs who have read, and are prepared to abide by, the Entry Conditions and Rules published by The Permit Secretary and who have also read and understood the guidance set out in this document. *Bona fide* caving clubs are defined as those affiliated to the British Caving Association (BCA) or another appropriate national or international body.
6. Applications for permits must be made by an officer of the visiting club and be received by The Permit Secretary at least two weeks prior to the proposed caving trip. Preferably, applications should be made by e-mail to ofdaccess@hotmail.co.uk or by using the link from the SWCC website. Alternatively, applications can be made by post to The Permit Secretary at the address above.
7. The maximum permitted party size is 6 people, including the Leader, and individual parties must remain separated in the cave. A permit covers a single party of up to 6 people. If more than 6 people from the applying club will be in the cave at the same time then multiple permits must be requested. See the rule below with regards to size of party.
8. Permit holders may ONLY obtain keys to the cave from the SWCC headquarters. The following procedures shall apply.....
 - Cave keys are held in key safe boxes within the porch area of SWCC Cottage No.3. Adjacent to the key safe boxes are located the SWCC Cave Keys User Log Sheets. On the inner porch door there is a whiteboard for recording trip details
 - The code to access Cottage No.3 and the code to access one of the key safe boxes will be provided to you with your permit. Both codes are changed regularly. Visitors requiring access should therefore check the current code with The Permit Secretary during the week immediately prior to their intended visit. This can most easily be done by texting the name of their club to 07309 024293
 - Upon collection of a key, an SWCC Cave Keys User Log Sheet **MUST** be filled out with all of the information boxes completed clearly and legibly. Leaders are reminded that *Advanced* levels of skill are expected of them in this respect (see Appendix A)

- The SWCC Cave Keys User Log Sheets are a critical data source that would allow SWCC to respond appropriately and with expedience in the event of identification of a Covid-19 case. Failure by the Leader to complete a sheet will result in the withdrawal of their club's Annual Permit for the remainder of the calendar year and may lead to a refusal to issue future permits to the club in question
 - Leaders are requested to make known to the SWCC Coronavirus Officer by e-mailing to paul_haleymeredith@hotmail.com details of any suspected/confirmed Covid-19 cases within their party following a visit to OFD
 - Upon obtaining a key, Leaders are requested to be courteous towards other cavers and to leave a brief note on the whiteboard stating start time of trip, destination and number of cavers in the party. This is intended to assist cavers to choose different parts of the cave to visit and to avoid bunching of different groups. **NOTE: THIS IS NOT A CALLOUT SYSTEM. THIS BOARD IS NOT MONITORED**
 - Upon completion of the trip:-
 - The cave key must be returned to the same key safe from which it was taken
 - The key safe must be relocked
 - The SWCC Cave Keys User Log Sheet entry should be completed with the time of return and the sheet deposited in the box provided
 - The trip details left on the whiteboard should be removed
 - The outer door to Cottage No.3 should be locked on exit
9. Permit holders **MUST** ensure that they have made adequate provision for rescue call out via an independent contact or system not connected with the key acquisition process. Most cavers will be aware that formerly under the normal weekend caving regime, SWCC has operated a Duty Officer system to administer keys and monitor a cave destination board, thereby providing a rescue call-out process. **THIS SYSTEM IS NOT AVAILABLE AT THIS TIME.** It is essential that cavers obtaining a key from SWCC headquarters have in place alternative rescue call-out processes.
10. The Permit Secretary shall, on behalf of SWCC, have absolute discretion in interpreting these conditions and may refuse a permit, in which case the applicant will be informed of the reason for refusal. The applicant may appeal in writing to the Committee of SWCC at 1-10, Powell Street, Penwyllt, Pen-y-Cae, Swansea, SA9 1GQ.
11. There is a facility for Annual Permits to be issued to clubs that have demonstrated a regular and conscientious interest in OFD. Applications for Annual Permits should be made to The Permit Secretary. Annual Permits for 2020 have already been issued. The Permit Secretary has notified the contact for each Annual Permit holding club of these Interim Access Procedures. All Leaders, be they permitted by Date Specific Permit or Annual Permit are assumed to have read accepted and understood these guidelines and Interim Access Procedures.
12. Access to The Columns area is currently unavailable. Please contact The Permit Secretary for further information.
13. The Entry Conditions and Rules, below, are issued with all permits and must be complied with by all visitors to the cave.

Entry Conditions and Rules

- a) These Entry Conditions and Rules apply to all parts of and all entrances to OFD.
- b) Parties must now make their own arrangements for rescue. Note that even if the headquarters is open, no monitoring of trips will be made. Parties using the key safe boxes within Cottage No.3 shall log the use of keys on the SWCC Cave Keys User Log Sheets provided but note that these are strictly NOT MONITORED for the purpose of rescue call-out.
- c) For reasons of cave conservation and adequate supervision of less-experienced cavers, the maximum permitted party size is 6 including the Leader. Parties must not join up underground and should deliberately maintain separation from other parties.
- d) The Leader is responsible for the conduct and safety of the party AND for the provision of the equipment necessary to complete the trip. The Leader must draw to the party's attention the conditions relating to the use of any fixed equipment within the cave, which is listed at the bottom of these Entry Conditions and Rules. The Leader is responsible for the cave key and lost keys will incur a charge of £50.
- e) ONLY electric lighting is to be used. Carbide MUST NOT be taken into the cave.
- f) This permit is for ENTRY ONLY. Camping, digging and the use of explosives, dye tracing and other research projects require special permission, for which application is to be made to The Permit Secretary.
- g) Conservation of the cave is very important and those who enter the cave are responsible for its welfare. Some areas are taped off for conservation reasons. Marker tapes must not be crossed or moved, under any circumstances other than in extreme emergency. Observe all tapes and route markings in the cave. If there is no tape, proceed only if there is a clearly defined path. If in doubt, STOP.
- h) Smoking is prohibited throughout the cave and no litter whatsoever is to be left either inside or outside the cave.
- i) Cavers visiting OFD1 must park vehicles in approved locations and approach the cave entrance by approved routes. Details of parking locations and approach routes can be found at the bottom of these Entry Conditions and Rules.
- j) The gates to the cave are to be locked at all times except when entering or leaving the cave.
- k) Cavers enter at their own risk. Many sections of the cave are arduous. For safety reasons, adequate experience and suitable clothing and equipment are required throughout the cave and especially in the further reaches of the cave and in the streamway.
- l) Installations, apparatus and equipment must not be damaged. If accidental damage occurs this should be reported immediately on return via the whiteboard in SWCC Cottage No.3 and by e-mail to The Permit Secretary at ofdaccess@hotmail.co.uk.
- m) Access to the land surface of the NNR and of much of the remainder of the SSSI is unrestricted but visitors are asked to help protect the wildlife and natural beauty and avoid disturbance to grazing animals.
- n) Failure to observe these conditions may result in the refusal of any future application for entry.
- o) These Entry Conditions and Rules may be revised from time to time.

Appendix A

Principles and Direction

1. This document has been issued to set out how access to Ogof Ffynnon Ddu (OFD) has changed as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic.
2. This document should be read alongside The Welsh Government's Coronavirus regulations and advice; the Leader should defer to these at all times. This document is advisory guidance, intended to complement the wider suite of information published by The Welsh Government, National Resources Wales (NRW) and South Wales Caving Club (SWCC).
3. Statistics recorded by SWCC show that there are between 2000 and 2500 caver trips in OFD each year. Most of these trips occur at weekends. In broad terms, on any given weekend day, up to sixty cavers could be minded to visit OFD. To have 60 people concentrated into one location would be a cause for concern. This would be particularly relevant at the cave entrances which are small and constricted and through which all must pass. There are however over 50km of passages in OFD. 60 cavers in 50km of passage is considered *Undeveloped* in terms of visitor numbers per square km when compared with other public outdoor sites such as Pen-y-Fan and Snowdon.
4. This guidance uses the work of the Visitor Safety Group (VSG) to underpin the approach to the guidance now offered. VSG has created a risk control matrix as a way of explaining its proportionate approach to risk management at natural and outdoor cultural sites.
5. Within the VSG risk control matrix, areas are designated as either *Highly Developed*, *Moderately Developed*, *Lightly Developed* and *Undeveloped*. An *Undeveloped* area is one which has the following characteristics..... "Wild and rugged countryside; remote forests and landscape." OFD has been classified as falling within the *Undeveloped* category by virtue of the overarching principle to maintain the cave in its original natural state with the intervention of mankind kept to a minimum. Specifically; the view that large numbers gathering at a particular viewpoint does not occur in caving.
6. Within the VSG risk control matrix, the skill levels of users are designated as *Advanced*, *Moderate*, *Minor* and *Minimal*. Users designated as *Advanced* are deemed to have the following attributes... "Competent personal safety skills, planning, training and experience of first aid, leadership and self reliance are expected. Accepts responsibility for own safety."
7. Within the VSG risk control matrix the management intervention requirement is described as being *Minimal* if the two conditions of *Undeveloped* and *Advanced* as set out above are met. Physical safety measures are unlikely to be required. The supply of routine information about site conditions is not likely necessary but arrangements should be made for exceptional circumstances.
8. Based on consultations between NRW, SWCC, The Ogof Ffynnon Ddu Cave Advisory Group (OFDCAG) and The SWCC Permit Secretary, it has been concluded that OFD can be classified as an *Amber* site in accordance with the Welsh Government's outlined 'traffic light' phases for returning to normal.

Appendix B

Fixed Aids

The normal monitoring of fixed aids has not been possible due to the Coronavirus crisis. Leaders should assume that fixed aids have not been checked in the year preceding their trip and take necessary precautions before using a fixed aid.

Appendix C

Parking Locations and Cave Approach Routes

Please refer to the information boards near the key safes in Cottage No 3.