

**Minutes of the Northern Snowdonia Local Access Forum Meeting
held on Monday 5th June 2023 at 5.45p.m
at Pensychnant, Conwy**

Present - Members:

Mr Edwin Noble	Mr David Firth
Mr Richard Williams	Mr John Gladston
Mr Mark Jones	Mrs Fiona Davies
Mr Dafydd Gwyndaf	Mr Paul Williams
Mrs Janet Wilkin	Cllr Beca Roberts
Cllr Goronwy Edwards	

Officers / Speakers:

Peter Rutherford (SNPA)	Adam Daniel (SNPA)
Dion Roberts (SNPA)	Simon Roberts (SNPA)

1. Apologies:

Mr Robin Parry	Mr Arthur Davies
Mr Callum Muskett	Mr Tim Jones
Mr Connor A Watt	

Mr Julian Thomson welcomed the LAF members to Plas Pen Sychnant conservation centre and gave an interesting history of the hall and grounds. There were 150 acres in total which is managed as a nature reserve combined with wildlife friendly farming practices (mostly sheep).

PR welcomed all this evening and announced that as this was the first of this LAF groups meeting he would Chair this meeting as required by the LAF Regulations. The election of Chair and Vice Chair would occur at the next meeting.

2. Previous Minutes

Approved

3. Matters Arising

i) Fishermans Path Dolwyddelan – Update

The National Trust had now confirmed that the ladders and cables had been removed. It was disappointing that this recreational asset was no longer available. But this was due to the condition of the infrastructure, and they were no longer considered safe. There were no formal public access.

Signage had been placed on site to indicate this.

ii) Previous LAF letter to Minister re off roading provision for motorcyclists

PR drew members attention to the letter (within the papers) which was sent to the Minister recommending that they allocate specific areas for motorcycling off roading to help reduce the illegal problems elsewhere and to give alternatives within forestry holdings.

It was unfortunate that they had not received a positive response to this and the illegal off roading issue continued to be a problem across the NP and many parts of Wales.

MJ commented that without additional provision then this exacerbated the situation as there was no easily accessible sites i.e. available from van directly onto a dedicated site. There is a site in south Wales which was used but there are no others.

PR stated that he would seek views from other NRW recreational officers on this idea and report back.

iii) Marsden report Wales (2015) Glover (2019) covers English National Parks review.

Not a great deal had been moved forward since this report emerged and there were 69 recommendations made. However, NP`s had been described as *`factories for well-being`* and that was interesting given the situation post Covid where the NP`s, AONB`s and RoW became so much more to local communities and visitors alike. They did recommend that there should be a new closer alignment between Areas Of Outstanding Natural Beauty¹ and NP`s.

If any members required further information then he would be happy to supply it.

iv) Memorials

EN mentioned that the minute stated that it was the National Parks preference that trees be planted in lieu of a plaque or memorial stone. Therefore would this also require landowner`s consent and would a plaque be on a tree. In the past some people had simply turned up on their land and planted a tree without any permission.

PR stated that this is a sensitive issue and involved talking to bereaved families who may be dealing with a family members last wish. However, planting trees required landowners` consent, but the NP had also offered some sites for tree planting and certainly no plaques would be allowed and certainly not on any existing trees. There were frequent requests for permanent memorials which are refused.

Yr Wyddfa is particularly problematic for ashes, but any plaques that appear on the summits will be removed². Local persons has also recently imbedded a plaque on the top of Tryfan but will have to be removed by the National Trust as this is their property.

JG mentioned that this was a problem on Crib Coch for some years ago and the Mountain Rescue used to remove them and had a memorial wall in their base in Nant Peris. He was unsure if this was still there.

¹ Ardal o Harddwch Naturiol Eithriadol – pump yn Cymru - Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty - Wales has five AONB`s. Four of these (Anglesey AONB, Clwydian Range & Dee Valley AONB, Gower AONB and Llŷn AONB) are wholly in Wales and one (Wye Valley AONB) straddles the border between Wales and England.

² <https://awdurdod.eryri.llyw.cymru/gwybodaeth/cofebau-a-gwasgaru-llwch/>

<https://authority.snowdonia.gov.wales/information/memorials-and-scattering-ashes/>

v) Pen Y Pass Cromlech footpath

PR asked SR if the signage had been erected in Pen Y Pass and Cromlech indicating the location of the off-road route between the two points.

SR stated that the way markers were now in place but would double check the signage and report back.

DF thanked the staff for this as it was a sensible option to try to get people off the roadway.

vi) p3 Event notification.

ED commented that PR had mentioned that a landowner had received monies from an even organiser for runners using access land and that this may be detrimental to the reduced liability afforded by the CRow Act for natural features. He asked that if landowners had agreed to allow an event on access land would this then increase their liability under Occupiers.

PR stated that EN had raised a very interesting point. If events used Rights of Way – they had a right to pass and re pass legally *as long as the route was not impeded by something known to be dangerous.*

Events *per se* were not a prescribed activity under the CRow Act (such as walking, birdwatching, climbing or photography) and required landowner's consent. One or two had taken payments and as such had by default entered a contract with the organisers. He was unsure if they could lose protection afforded by the CRow Act for natural features and revert to their responsibilities under Occupiers Liability. He would seek some additional advice/comment and clarification from the CRow Officers at the NRW on this.

MJ commented that any events organisers would have Public Liability in place, but would an honorarium made after the event be viewed in the same way.

PR thought that such an arrangement would probably be viewed in the same way i.e. as a payment, but it has thankfully never been tested. He would draft an email to the NRW and report back on their response- they may take their time to consider this.

vii) p3 Recreation Strategy - draft

PR mentioned that he had been in discussion with some specialist groups on some aspects of the activity statements within the document so hopefully there would not be too many difficulties during the consultation. This was due before the Performance and Resources Committee in two weeks. Following their recommendations this would then go for a 6-week formal consultation including the LAF members (although LAF members had already seen a draft and he had informally received some interesting comments from some).

JG asked if the draft had been through the test for the Public sector section of the Equality Act.

PR stated that this process had been undertaken and it had been approved independently by the Officer responsible at the National Park.

4. Correspondence

i) NRW Access Reform Advice

This was an update on the work undertaken by the Access Reform groups in 2021 – 2022. The themes of the subgroups was listed. He expressed disappointment that not a great deal had emerged after all these long deliberations and subsequent recommendations. The subsequent NRW report to WG was also disappointing. *It was likely that any changes they WG may consider will only happen after the next election.* The Access to Water deliberations has also stalled which was also disappointing – the LAF`s had been discussing these issues since 2013 and the NP`s upper Conwy model had proved to work well.

ii) Countryside Code and Responsible Recreation Update

PR informed the members that they had recently received this document from the NRW which was largely self-explanatory and included an additional Dog Walking Code.

He was not sure how effective this was going to be. There was consensus across the sector that consistent national promotion of the Countryside Code material would be more effective in getting these messages out to the public – similar to the older Aardvark adverts³ which covered issues such as dogs and litter which were successful.

It was also unfortunate that in recent days the Westminster Government had pulled out of the proposed Animal Welfare Act at committee stage. One of the themes included dogs worrying livestock and dogs on leads. It is uncertain what will now follow. Rob Taylor from the original Rural Crimes Teams had given evidence to this Committee and PR would ask him if he could update the members at the next meeting in September.

RT statistics revealed that 80% of the animals involved in sheep worrying incidents were escapees from their dwellings and 70% of those involved Huskies or similar breeds.

FD mentioned that that may be the statistics for lowlands sheep worrying but typically on Yr Wyddfa – Snowdon and in her experience this was a mixture of breeds.

JW added that as a horse rider she had encountered similar issues in the Conwy Mountain area when dogs cannot be recalled. She did report this on the NWP website and the owner was visited. When dogs appear even in a small pack of 2 or 3 this can be a frightening experience.

PR added that this had happened to him, and it was problematic and knew of others which had resulted in injuries to the horses.

JW mentioned that Conwy Council had been very good in installing horse signage in the area.

³ <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IMLHrBtLMTI>

5. LAF Membership arrangements – 2023-26

He asked that if any member was interested in becoming Chair and Vice Chair then he would be grateful to receive their self-nominations. Following this he would send CV's out to members for their information and they can then indicate their preferences before the next meeting. A reminder email will be sent shortly after the southern LAF in two weeks.

It was useful that when LAF were asked to respond to various consultations there was a joint subgroup – made up of the Chair and one or two LAF members who sat with their counterparts from the southern LAF and the adjacent Arfon Dwyfor LAF to enable joint and consistent responses. This process had worked well in the past and hopefully it could continue.

6. SNPA Visitor Monitoring figures for 2022

PR showed the 2022 report (hot off the press), and they were the first to see this. It indicated that figures were down slightly in some areas.

He emphasised that following both lifting of lockdowns the figures had shown that although numbers appeared anecdotally higher this was largely due to the fact that the standard annual numbers for the NP has been squeezed into those three months of the year – July, August, and September so the overall picture was misleading. The peak numbers within those three months following the lifting of lockdowns also exceeded our previous peak levels across the NP and showed that carrying capacity in terms of parking and transport was not adequate.

For 2022 Yr Wyddfa in particular has seen increases on the Watkin path and Llanberis with slight reductions in numbers on others. The Watkin pools issue being a recent phenomenon which had been promoted through various social media saw a large increases. Volunteers had undertaken an exercise in the area last season and determined that only 50% of walkers on the path went beyond the pools onwards to the summit.

All statistics had been distorted due to post covid effect. With the availability of overseas travel then this may reduce the numbers.

It was also obvious that there were more people out with dogs. He had counted dogs for a period on the Llanberis track recently and found that at least 1 – 4 people were accompanied by a dog. With the Llanberis path counters indicating 220,000 people a year then potentially that may be up to 50,000 dogs in tow.

Figures also showed significant increases for Dol Idris on Cader and Llywbr Cynwch - Precipice Walk in Llanfachreth – interesting that this figure was consistent throughout the week which indicated a high degree of local use of this path. Figures indicated that this was now in the region of 28,000 pa. and had been consistent throughout Covid.

Lon Gwyrfaï had also seen record levels of use and was not up to 29,000 per annum.

FD added that unfortunately many were `off lead` even from the tarmaced road. Some people had reported that their dogs had attacked sheep, but unfortunately this was a minority of the public.

MJ asked if it was possible to put more signage – “all dogs must be under control” up on the lower gates to indicate the presence of stock.

PR stated that they were currently looking at this issue and had agreed signage indicating a residential area downhill and litter and stock reminders uphill. They were just looking at where this could go to the best effect. I was unfortunate that the two pieces of legislation for Rights of Way and access land were different – one was under close control and the other on a lead between 1st March and 31st July. They had recommended during the ARAG consultation that this should be `on a lead in the vicinity of livestock` at all times. This is the definition that the NP has used for many years.

DG stated that they should be on lead at all times in the countryside – this would be clear and less ambiguous.

Cllr BR asked if the NP volunteers were trained to deal with this issue specifically what to say to people when dogs are off lead. She herself had cause many times to mention this to people in Cwm Idwal although it was best to avoid direct conflict if there was aggression – which sometimes happened but in her experience most people were respectful.

JW mentioned that many dog owners do not realise the problems that dogs can bring stock or horses.

Cllr GR added that it was time for WG to move forward on this to make the public realise the problems that dogs off leads in stocked areas can bring. He thought that dog owners should have some form of insurance when in public places.

EN stated that insurance would be a useful way forward.

PR asked AD if the dogs' issue was a part of their volunteer training or induction.

AD thought that there was some information within their induction packs but would confirm this.

PR recommended that once we heard from Rob Taylor then possibly the members can raise concerns with the Minister once we know more about what has transpired.

JG asked if areas such as Rhinogydd were experiencing increases in numbers as some videos had been posted online from that area. These were misleading as much of the area was difficult underfoot.

PR stated that that area was still relatively quiet, but Cader and Llyn Tegid had been particularly busy.

DF mentioned that the Nant Gwynant area was still busy and chaotic over last Easter and thought that we could see similar numbers to last year. There is a now a clearway, but people are still parking on the verges.

7. Update on Warden Section North area on works in Conwy and Carneddau Area.

SR introduced himself as the acting Head Warden for the north area of the NP. The Wardens for the north in his area team included

Alun Jones – Warden for the Yr Wyddfa, Beddgelert, Ioan Davies – Cwm Penmachno, Mignaint, Ysbyty Ifan, Betws Y Coed & Dolgarrog, Alan Prichard - Carneddau & Ogwen.

There are two seasonal Wardens in place – Andre Griffiths on Yr Wyddfa and Lewis Pennant based in Ogwen.

He showed some slides of some of the work they had undertaken recently, and some planned for the next few months.

This included footpath improvement works in Cwm Eigiau and Dolgarrog for the HLF Partnership and to explore the least restrictive options in the area by replacing stiles with gates where possible. Some of these will be locally made to be in keeping with the area as far as possible. They would function in a similar way to a modern gate.

PR commented that the `miles without stiles` philosophy was one which all the National Parks in the UK has signed up to. He appreciated that in many places given our terrain it may not be possible to change furniture but in areas which were flat then this was needed and to comply as far as they could with the Equality Act.

SR continued - some works were also to be undertaken from Capel Curig to Cowlyd.

There are also works planned under the Service Level Agreement (SLA) with Conwy County Borough Council on various PRow. This takes place over the whole financial year.

The SLA between the NP and CCBC has been in place since 2008 and over that time some £220k has been spent to improve the PRow in the Conwy area of the NP which is in the region of about 640km and has improved the network considerably.

Some combined working is also taking place on Foel Drum in conjunction with the NT and installing new way markers and flag stones in wet areas.

Additional works have been undertaken by the footpath team in the Sychnant and Penmaenmawr areas.

ID has been assisting and improving routes for the community group Trefriw Trails and was discussing work with the Community in the Penmachno area.

There has also been work undertaken on renewing the furniture and signage on the Upper Conwy canoe access and egress points in Ysbyty Ifan and Rhydianfair (Padog area).

Yr Wyddfa area included new gating works in the Beddgelert and the Llanberis area. Some walling improvements have also been made to the entrance to the Llanberis path first gate.

The zig zags fencing (450m) on the Rhyd Ddu path were also planned but this required a heli-lift to get the materials in place but unfortunately this had been delayed several times.

Additional works were to be undertaken by the footpath team on the bridleway in Cwm Marchnad in Rhyd Ddu and also Maen Llwyd Uchaf and some on PRoW in Nanmor.

Maintenance works had also been undertaken by the footpath team on the lanos all ability route adjacent to the Cwellyn/Snowdon Ranger car park.

Some works are also planned in the Cwm Cynfal area, but this was still being assessed.

Some filming of the Wardens to highlight their activities had been done in recent months by Cwmni Da.

The Wardens also oversee the Winter ground conditions information undertaken by contractor twice a week in the winter months. This information is then made available on the NP website.

The Wardens also take part in wildfire reporting and nature conservation/wildlife works including camera traps in conjunction with biodiversity officers and other agencies.

The information van has also been out an about on various routes around the periphery of Yr Wyddfa.

The Volunteer Wardens had also been out every weekend and there are about 50 in the whole group with about 8 -10 out every weekend and they engage with the public about dogs, litter, and safety.

MJ asked if the volunteers worked with the Caru Eryri volunteers.

PR commented that the groups did work together on occasion, but the Caru Eryri volunteers tend to be in more specific areas collecting litter and carrying out some basic maintenance works. Volunteer Wardens undertook a more roaming remit on routes.

SR showed slides of the substantial litter issues they faced across the NP and the photos of Yr Wyddfa in the 60`s did not differ a great deal from what we see today.

MJ agreed that there are similarities in the parking and numbers on Snowdon between today and back then. However, by today the litter issue seems to have become a major issue.

PR commented that it was not always the case, and it was still possible to access Yr Wyddfa on one or two routes that were still quiet. But appreciated that the most popular routes had seen substantial increases.

DF asked when the café was reopening on the summit.

PR thought this around the 30th of June.

JG asked if the interpretation panels were being changed in Hafod Eryri.

SR stated that it was his understanding that they were being renewed and updated.

He thanked SR for his very comprehensive report.

8. HLF Update on the Montane Heath Restoration Project

Dion Roberts introduced himself as the Project Officer for this part of the Carneddau HLF scheme and gave an update on their work.

The project was complex and was made up of a partnership of 23 partners to enable shared working, resources, and expertise.

The area encompassed approximately 200km² in area.

There were many sub elements of the projects but essentially were three themes- access, natural heritage, and industrial heritage with some overlapping elements.

Working with the various landowners and agencies he was responsible for the non-NT natural heritage elements of the scheme including the montane heath restoration project, tree planting - *woodland elements in the Carneddau are poor or not linked*, creating habitat corridors and some wild meadow restoration (working in conjunction with Plas Pensychnant) and using local provenance seed and peat restoration – considered more important globally in terms of carbon storage and flood prevention.

The montane heath⁴ element - of which there is only 94Ha found across Wales and 78% of this is found within the Eryri uplands mainly in the Carneddau.

Much of these areas are in poor condition and they were planning to apply some management techniques to try to expand their areas and to ensure their longevity by reducing the grazing pressures and other detrimental activities such as excess nitrogen, recreational pressures, and climate change.

In conjunction with landowners – essential partners in the project, they were considering some additional management in Garreg Wen on Foel Fras – about 940m in elevation which has currently only 5Ha of montane heath and hopefully this can be extended eventually around 40Ha.

He displayed a map showing the extent of a new linear fence line which was within CRoW access land and stressed that there would no obstructions to the walking public. And that he was interested in obtaining views from the LAF members on this proposal for a new fence line within access land.

⁴ Montane heathlands and scrub comprise a range of dwarf-shrub, moss and lichen dominated communities occurring above the potential treeline.

The second site was 21Ha near the summit area (900m) of Pen Llithrig y Wrach – again private land where some additional fencing will be required – again with no restriction to the walking public.

The third site is Pen Yr Helgi Du at 820m down to Cwm Eigiau at 400m which gives a range and will be interesting to monitor in the long term.

All sites will have interpretation signage to explain to the public the purposes of the fences and the overall strategy of maintain the montane heath.

He invited members comments.

DF asked if there would be crossing points at those locations were the public normally crossed.

DR explained that any routes that were normally accessible across the access land or PRow will remain so, and new stiles will be erected if necessary to ensure this.

JG asked if it will still be possible to access Drum with an off road all ability vehicle along the existing track.

DR stated that if any new gating was required which allowed this then they would explore this.

JG asked DR how long it would be before they expected any results from this work.

DR stated that a pilot project had been run in Plynlimon⁵ where a section was fenced off for 15 years and the results are encouraging.

PR added that it was important that any existing access points/routes were respected. He added that for any CRow restrictions over 6 months applicants were obliged to come to their respective LAF for approval.

PR thanked for his time interesting presentation.

9. Recommended Agenda items for next meeting –

- i) Recreation Strategy
- ii) Animal Welfare Act update Rob Taylor
- iii) National Trust – perspective on access
- iv) Cromlech route update
- v) Angela Jones – parking and transport (if available)
- vi) Off roading (as requested by JW).
- vii) CRow access land and events update

10. Any Other business

- a) *Cllr GE mentioned that surely it was time for WG and the NP's to consider additional parking provisions given the situation and seek monies through schemes such as Active Travel.*

⁵ Plynlimon is the highest point of the Cambrian Mountains in Wales and the highest point in Mid Wales.

PR explained that AT was not meant for rural environments but that the criteria had been changed but was fundamentally not tourist orientated.

b) EN asked if the NP was undertaking work on Moel Siabod.

PR stated that he was unaware of any works in that area.

11. Date of next meeting – 4th September 2023

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