COVID-19: Update for DYO Wardens

Dear Wardens

As you will be aware, at the moment Dan-yr-Ogof remains closed to both cavers and visitors under the coronavirus restrictions imposed by the Welsh Assembly, which differ from those in England. At the time of writing it looks as though the cave complex will be re-opening to visitors on Monday 13 July. The showcave management intends to welcome cavers back at the same time as they are able to open for business. To that end, the DYO CAP and showcave management have been holding meetings to establish how cavers will be able to access the 'wild' cave, while at the same time ensuring that the safety of showcave staff and visitors remain the highest priority.

We are now in a position to issue the following guidelines with regard to DYO access, and to inform you of some new and temporary rules that will apply when the cave re-opens:

1. The DYO CAP recognises that while the risk of contracting COVID-19 remains low, some Wardens may not be comfortable with leading groups of cavers from outside of their social circle, and as such may not wish to offer trips to members of visiting clubs that they don't know. Any decision to lead trips into the cave, whether for friends or visiting clubs, remains a personal one for each individual Warden. We will make sure that the wider caving community is aware that DYO trip requests may, for the time being, be difficult to fulfil and patience may be required.
2. Wardens are advised to do everything they can, in advance, to ensure that members of their party are free of coronavirus. Anyone displaying any of the recognised symptoms of COVID-19 (high temperature, persistent cough, loss of taste or smell) is asked not to enter the showcave complex.
3. As a temporary measure, to reduce the risk of infection by or of cavers in either the showcave or wild cave, only one caving party per day will be granted access to the cave. Usual party size rules (four cavers max plus Warden) apply. Rather than impose a formal 'permit' system, as is the case in some other caves, we intend to run this on an informal basis using Wardens' Sec Tony Baker as the point of contact. If you plan to visit the cave please check with Tony that your choice of date is available. Telephone calls or text messages to 07770 646045 are the preferred means of communication for this. Please only book trips that are confirmed (depending on the weather) and please do not reserve a date 'just in case I fancy a trip'. Only those Wardens whose trips have been agreed with Tony will be granted access to the cave by showcave staff on the day in question. As usual you will have to hand in a completed pre-trip declaration (available at www.dyo.org.uk) and complete an online trip report after your visit. Please do not turn up 'on spec' and expect to enter the cave, and do not take issue with showcave staff who are only doing their jobs. Your co-operation is appreciated and hopefully we can keep this as an informal arrangement rather than having to add layers of complication to what should be a simple process.
4. When the showcave is open to tourists, they will be asked to follow strict protocols and cavers will be asked to follow the same protocols while on site and in the showcave. These are as follows: masks are to be worn from leaving your car, while in outside areas and while in the showcave. Please wear gloves through the showcave and avoid touching handrails and other infrastructure (except, of course, the gate at the far end). Please observe the same direction of travel as showcave visitors – in other words, turn right at 'The Parting of the Ways' and travel anti-clockwise through Cauldron Chamber to reach the gate at the far end. Do not overtake tourists; please remain behind anyone ahead of you and observe strict social distancing. Whenever possible, please try and enter the cave before the 10am start-

time of showcave business. Even if travelling in or out of the showcave outside of business hours, please observe the protocols outlined above.

5. Although there are no plans to do this at present, it is possible that the showcave will be compelled to use some form of temperature scanning to screen visitors. Cavers will of course be subject to the same checks if this happens.
6. Once in the wild cave, please observe strict social distancing measures. The Long Crawl in particular will present challenges in this regard: you are advised that each member of the party should travel through the crawl separately, with a few minutes' gap between each individual.
7. Keyholders: some of our nominated keyholders in the valley are in the groups classed as vulnerable to coronavirus, and as such the DYO CAP does not feel it is appropriate to ask them to accept visitors to their homes to collect or deliver keys. For the time being, the only cave key will be available from Paul Quill in Abercrave who can be contacted on 01639 731407. Paul will only issue keys to Wardens so please ensure you have your permit with you. Social distancing measures will be used to issue and receive keys. As there is only one key in use, please ensure that you return the key promptly to Paul after your trip.
8. As you will appreciate, now is not the time to initiate a cave rescue. Any rescue team called out will have to operate within COVID-19 guidelines, and contact with even one infected person would leave everyone involved having to self-isolate, with the inevitable consequences for future rescues. Please cave well within your capabilities, and if the weather forecast looks even vaguely unpromising then go somewhere else. (As an aside – a few weeks ago water levels in the cave rose very quickly in response to a heavy storm on the mountain, while no rain fell at DYO itself.)

The coronavirus pandemic has affected everyone in the UK to an extent that no-one would have dreamed possible just a few months ago. Our working lives, leisure activities and shopping habits have had to change drastically in almost every respect. Dan-yr-Ogof Caves Ltd is a seasonal business that relies heavily on visitor footfall during just a few months of the summer, and that business has already been seriously affected even if they are able to re-open as planned. The DYO CAP appreciate that some of the restrictions outlined above impose a level of inconvenience on access arrangements, but we reiterate that these are intended to be *temporary* restrictions that will be kept under constant review.

Please respect that welcoming cavers back to DYO at the same time as visitors, while operating under difficult circumstances, is a generous gesture that demonstrates the owners' ongoing commitment to the sport of caving, and please do not do anything that might threaten the continued good relations between the showcave management and the caving community.

Yours sincerely,

Tony Baker, DYO CAP Wardens' Sec.

tonyphoto@supanet.com

Tel. 07770 646045