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January 2022

Dear Warden

Dan-yr-Ogof: introduction of conservation fee for cavers.

I am writing to you to announce that, with regret, the DYO CAP has had to introduce a charge for cavers to enter the cave. A charge of £5 per head will be levied on cavers but *please note that this does not apply to Wardens who are leading caving parties or doing conservation or maintenance work.* This will take effect from Monday 14th Feb 2022 and will be referred to as a conservation fee, although it should more accurately be called a conservation, fixed-aid and rescue-provision fee.

Please also note that all of the monies raised will go directly to the DYO CAP and that Dan-yr-Ogof Showcaves Ltd. will receive no part of it.

You will have received back in October a separate communication about the DYO CAP's recent difficulties in securing a suitable bank account. This matter has highlighted the fact that, while our account balance continues to be depleted by the provision of fixed-aids and conservation work, and other items such as secretarial expenses, our only source of income is the £10 fee paid by new applicants for Warden status. At best this amounts to £20 or £30 per annum. In the past, funding for the CAP has been provided by Dan-yr-Ogof Showcaves Ltd, who over the years have funded the Panel to the tune of around £7000. After two tourism seasons wrecked by the COVID-19 pandemic, the showcave simply does not have any further money available to fund caving-related expenditure.

There is also a wider issue that requires some explanation. In 2008 two cavers were trapped in the cave by flooding. Their enforced overnight stay while awaiting rescue was uncomfortable and the cavers concerned subsequently made some (largely unjustified) criticisms of the provisions and equipment in the 'rescue dump' they'd had to rely on, that had been installed and maintained by the South and Mid-Wales Cave Rescue Team. The showcave management, concerned by the consequences of further such incidents, had within weeks set up what is now known as the entrapment camp – several large drums full of food, stoves, fuel, shelters, supplies, first aid and emergency equipment. They also installed a permanent communications link as well as power to the site of the entrapment camp. This was funded entirely by DYO Showcaves Ltd, at a cost of several thousand pounds.

With the camp in place, the issue then arose of how the supplies would be replenished should they be used during a subsequent rescue, or restocked once food went out-of-date. Having already laid out large sums to provide the camp, the showcave management could not be expected to provide further funds. After some difficult meetings, it was agreed that a sum of money in the DYO CAP's account would be 'ring-fenced' specifically for the purposes of restocking and maintaining the entrapment camp. We are fortunate that the entrapment camp has thus far remained unused, and that ring-fenced money is still largely intact, having only been used to replace some minor items that were out-of-date. However, the showcave management remain seriously concerned about the

prospect of cavers being trapped by flooding, especially since the hydrology of the cave has altered dramatically and the cave floods very rapidly in response to rainfall.

At the same time, other expenditure – the maintenance and replacement of fixed aids, for example – continues to reduce the balance in the bank account that sits outside the ring-fenced sum. A recent proposal, to undertake a scientific study to measure the relationship between rainfall, water levels in the Afon Giedd and those in the river cave, a study which could potentially improve caver safety, is on hold until the issue of DYO CAP funding has been resolved.

The funds issue has been under consideration for some while and a number of options have been explored. One suggestion was to charge cavers to park at DYO, with the money raised going direct to the DYO CAP, but the showcave was advised that they would need to add VAT to this and it would add accounting hassles. We also considered charging for the renewal of Warden permits, but we appreciate the good work done by Wardens in leading visiting clubs and would not want to discourage renewals. One alternative proposal, that involved having to ask trapped cavers to pay for subsequent replenishment of the camp, at a potential cost running into hundreds of pounds, was soon dismissed.

Please appreciate that this is not a decision that has been taken lightly. But it has been pointed out that numerous other caves have 'goodwill fees' payable to landowners, or fees levied to cavers to fund conservation work.

We have worked very hard to try and devise a method of payment that is easy for cavers to use but that minimises time and effort for Wardens, for CAP members and for showcave staff. Unfortunately, it has not been feasible to establish a cashless means of payment that satisfied the showcave's insistence on payment prior to entry to the cave. Cavers will be asked to pay the £5 per person in cash and this will be submitted before entry to the cave along with the (already required) pre-trip declaration form. The same system will be used whether the showcave is open or closed. The pre-trip form and the group's collated cash payments must be placed, by the visiting group leader, in a labelled envelope (a supply of these will be available in a box on the fence under the dinosaur arch on the car park-to-showcave access path). The group name and date is to be added to the label and then it is either handed in to the ticket office (when manned) or pushed securely into the ticket office's counter-slot (when unmanned).

When accompanying visiting groups, or involved in other work like conservation or maintenance, *Wardens do not pay for access* and just need to show their Warden permit as normal. Wardens on their own recreational trips will be expected to pay but activities such as checking and reporting back on fixed aids are considered valid work.

A couple of points to note: visiting clubs who submit trip requests will be made aware of the £5/head charge, but if you are asked for trips directly by cavers or clubs you have taken before, or by members of your own clubs, then please politely make them aware of the charge and the reasons behind it. Also, responsibility for collecting the money does not lie with the Warden leading the trip, but with the person who has requested or organised the trip. Monies collected will be checked against pre-trip declaration forms, and any club found to be responsible for a shortfall in the amount due will risk being denied future access to the cave.

Please remember that we enjoy caving access to one of the UK's most fantastic caves solely through the goodwill of Dan-yr-Ogof Showcaves Ltd. The showcave management is insistent that the current situation, in which the DYO CAP has regular outgoings (fixed aids, conservation and scientific work, secretarial expenses) and potentially significant liabilities (the full replenishment of the entrapment

camp, or repairs to the camp's power supply and communications link), while generating next to no income, is simply not sustainable, and that caving activities in DYO have, in the immediate future, to be become financially self-sufficient. The alternative is that caving access could be lost.

Your understanding and co-operation are much appreciated. I will be happy to deal with any queries or suggestions relating to any of the above: tonyphoto@supanet.com, 07770 646045. However, please understand that this decision is the product of many months of careful discussions and is final.

Yours sincerely,

Tony

Tony Baker, DYO CAP Wardens Secretary.