



*Dedicated to research, restore and protect
Mynydd Twmbarlwm - Gwent's most iconic landmark*

*Ymroddedig i ymchwilio, adfer a gwarchod
Mynydd Twmbarlwm - tirnod mwyaf eiconig Gwent*

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CHAIRMAN'S REPORT 2017-18

Presented to the A.G.M. Monday 12th November 2018

Held at Crosskeys RFC



Another year has gone by and it was another busy year for the Society and probably an unforgettable one for Twmbarlwm and the surrounding area.

You all know that I'm referring to the Cwmcarn Forest and Twmbarlwm fires but before I get into that I'd like to outline what the society has been involved with over the past year.

The Trustees meet on the first Monday of the month every two months and the minutes of every meeting can be seen and downloaded from our website - but the following "end of year report" will give a brief overview.

TRUSTEES

At the AGM last year when it came to electing our group of Trustees two of our longest serving and staunch members asked not to be considered for re-election.

Alun Booth, probably our oldest member, has been active with the society from the start and has rarely missed a meeting or litter pick day, his enthusiasm for bracken bashing will be sorely missed. Dave Parry, also has been with us from the start and he played a great part in the building of our fences and gates, he has moved away from the area so can't get as involved as he used to.

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I'd like to thank them both for the sterling work they have put into the society over the years.

All other Trustees were re-elected en-bloc and at the subsequent meeting of the Trustees I, TERRY EVANS, was voted in as Chairman for the sixth year, SUE EVANS as Secretary and MARTYN VAUGHAN as Treasurer and Membership Secretary. NORMAN LIVERSUCH continues as Vice Chairman

ROB SOUTHALL, our event organiser is still highly involved in his role as chairman of the Friends of Cwmcarn Forest Drive, the campaign for the re-opening of the Forest Drive. We consider the Friends of CFD to be a sister organisation as we share boundaries and have common aims - perhaps he will give us an update on the campaign later on.

TIDY TWMP

MAGGIE THOMAS continues to organise our monthly litter picks. These have been reasonably well attended throughout the year with between 6 and 12 volunteers each month - often in the most atrocious weather conditions. Several bags of rubbish are collected each time and, of course Maggie has provided the tea, coffee and biscuits - which are always welcome at the end of the day.

The monthly Litter Pick and Volunteer Day is a major part of our "Tidy Twmp" objectives which have been in place since our Welsh Government grant some six years ago and I'm sure our efforts have helped reduce the number of major incidents.

However, the area is still prone to casual littering, fly-tipping, vandalism and the occasional burnt-out car - following is a list of the worst offences, all of which were reported to the authorities for them to deal with. And I must say that generally CCBC deal with our reports fairly promptly but there are still occasions when it's left for several days resulting in what we collect being set fire to or re-distributed around the mountain by vandals or animals.

The following is a brief list of what was found at our litter picks in the past year.

- DECEMBER - Large fly-tip which included address on bank statements - reported to authorities
- JANUARY - burnt out car on the ridgeway - cattle gate between the ridgeway and the Tump vandalised, removed and seriously buckled by running over with vehicle. Half dozen tyres dumped around car park.
- MARCH - Burnt out car on car park. 2 fly tips, one just up from the cattle grid, one around car park.
- MAY - Gate to ORPA propped open (on two occasions) allowing cattle to roam about the lower common. Lots of picnic debris and used BBQs around mountainside including one still alight. Burnt out Land Rover Discovery at entrance to lane to Cwrt Henllys (removed while we were there litter picking).
- JULY - Start of the Twmbarlwm fires

OTHER TASKS - we don't just litter pick though, following is a list of other tasks completed on our Volunteer Workdays include:

- Repaired and re-hung the kissing gate on the left of the slope up to the Tump
- Replaced stones in the dry stone wall on the couple of occasions it was vandalised.
- Bashed bracken flat in the planted areas around the car park - and in the centre of the double fence.
- Replaced several rotten posts in the original fencing.
- Dug out the silt from the storm drain near the car park.
- Cleared thistles and reeds from around the monument.

And so the work continues on our Volunteer Workdays and Litter picks – as always I'm very grateful to all those who turn out for these days - but I would still like to urge a few more to come and join us. Apart from the work it can be fun meeting other visitors to the mountain who come from far and wide.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

The society has neither the authority nor workforce to undertake any major works and the majority of the Landscape Management of Twmbarlwm and Mynydd Maen is led by the Commoners Association. But the Society plays an active role in advising and commenting on any proposals put forward.

For example: It was suggested that new signage was required at each entrance to the Commons - explaining clearly who and what is allowed on the Commons. CTS put together ideas and Gethin Bowes (CCBC) is in the process of implementing and installing the signs.

The day to day maintenance tasks tend to fall to Trustee Howard Vicary, as the main tenant of the Commons and our thanks must go out to him for his patience with us and particularly for repairing the ridgeway gate three times this year and once it had gone beyond repair, putting up a new one - only to have the nearby fence cut and ripped out just a couple of weeks ago.

Trustee Les Murphy is also Secretary of the Commoners' Association and he is invaluable in keeping the society informed of all management issues of the Commons from Mynydd Maen to Penyrheol - hopefully he will give us a brief report of works that have been undertaken the past year.

OTHER EVENTS

We continue to organise events to help raise funds and maintain the public's interest in the Society – and we attend any meetings that affect our landscape in the past year these have included:

FUND RAISING

- ❖ ANNUAL QUIZ NIGHT – This was the fifth time we held this event and it proved very successful with over 40 people attending and this year the event was bolstered by the launch of TWMBARLWM HONEY ALE.
- ❖ TWMBARLWM BEER – In September 2017 we approached Tudor Brewery of Llanhilleth to ask if they would consider brewing a beer carrying the name of Twmbarlwm because much of their existing range of beers were named after other south Wales mountains such as the Skirrid and the Bloreng. They were very keen on the idea and gave the society a keg of beer for its launch at the Annual Quiz along with a few cases of the beer in bottles that we were able to sell in gift packs for Christmas. The beer helped us make almost £300 profit over the Christmas period.
The brew was a great success for the Brewery and it has continued to be brewed and sold in several pubs in the area - the beer will again be available at this years Quiz on the 3rd December.
- ❖ CALENDAR – Also launched at the Quiz was the 2018 Calendar - this time it was A4 size and we only printed 50 copies which easily sold out by Christmas. We only sold it online and at events and sales netted the society approx. £160.
- ❖ BOOKS – Ralph Collins donated some remaindered copies of his book Western Valley Walks which netted us nearly £70
- ❖ DONATION – We had an unexpected donation of £250 from the local Masonic Lodge
- ❖ TALK (and WALK) ON HISTORY OF TWMBARLWM - We have enjoyed closer links with Cadw this year mainly through local Field Monument Warden, Amelia Pannet. So we were very pleased when she agreed to give a talk, together with colleague Will Davies, on the Pre-History of Twmbarlwm at Crosskeys RFC. This turned out to be one of the best attended talks we've ever had and it was extremely well received by the audience of nearly 50 people.

Amelia's talk was followed on the next weekend when she led a walk around Twmbarlwm pointing out the archaeological features that had been discussed during the lecture - a further 15 people attended.

WALKS

- ❖ XMAS EXCESSES – Maggie Thomas organised a walk for us after Christmas to walk off the Xmas Excesses but due to a little confusion with another group only half a dozen of us turned up. A bright sunny day and a couple of inches of snow on the ground made it a very picturesque walk. We hope to do a similar walk this year although there is also sponsored walk planned by another group that may conflict with our plans.
- ❖ THE HOT CROSS BUN WALK – Often seen as our main event of the year. We promote this local tradition of climbing to the top of the mountain on Good Friday and offer hot cross buns to those who get to the top. This year we had organised groups starting from Pontymister, Cwmcarn, Cwmbran and Blaen Bran. This year was very cold and overcast but we still estimate there was a couple of hundred people visiting throughout the day. We were given more hot-x-buns than usual from Greggs and Tesco's and we raised over £70 on the day.
- ❖ PWLL TRA – Rob Southall led a walk for us to Pwll Tra (The Pool of Avarice) - this is the fourth time he's done this walk and although there were only about nine people they were all new to the area and thoroughly enjoyed the experience.

WORKSHOPS

LES MURPHY – As part of the TACP funding through the Commoners and Torfaen CBC, Les ran three "Workshops" in country crafts including Hurdle Making, Walking Stick Making and Building a Greenwood Shave Horse - each one was attended by half a dozen CTS members.

PROJECTS

TRIG POINT ADOPTION – This project, started earlier in 2017, continued apace this year. Norman and Terry met with Amelia Pannet of Cadw on top of the mountain in January. This was followed by another meeting at Cadw's offices and eventually an official application with our proposal to build a stone pavement around the trig-point went to Cadw in June. Six weeks later permission was granted - the project is still ongoing but is momentarily held up due to the fire damage on the mountain.

MANAGEMENT PLAN – Another result of our dialogue with Cadw was the suggestion that we should establish a management plan for the Scheduled Ancient Monument to help us protect, improve and research the area more effectively. To achieve that it was decided to arrange an aerial Drone Survey and a Geo-Phys examination.

DRONE SURVEY – We quickly acquired funding through CCBC for the Drone Survey, obtained all the necessary permissions and on 18th April Mark Williams completed the survey of the mountain top - the resulting images can be found on our website.

GEO-PHYS SURVEY – We organised for someone to come and do the survey for us in July but before it could be done fire struck the mountain top devastating the grasses and much of the sub-soil to a significant depth making any results from a survey very dubious - so we will have to wait for the ground to recover to make a geo-phys survey worthwhile.

MEETINGS

Members or those wishing to join the society often ask "exactly what is it that we do?" - well what I've reported above should answer that but there's also a lot of work goes on behind the scenes - not only in all the communications and paperwork involved but in meetings and networking with other organisations - so to mention just a few...

- ❖ Norman and Terry met with with CCBC in December where we first learned about the joint council's bid for the so called Adventure Triangle. This project will bring £250,000 to the area over the next three years and we will be expected to play our part in suggesting where it can best be used. Other funding opportunities were outlined and ongoing matters such as fly-tipping, erosion scar repairs and new signage were discussed and are itemised in the Trustees minutes of the 4th December
- ❖ Sue and Terry attended two meetings to network with groups in Torfaen on their Clean and Green Community project.
- ❖ Les, Howard and Terry attended a seminar in Blaenavon that had several organisations from around the UK demonstrating various environmental projects.

MOUNTAIN FIRE

From the beginning of June the UK experienced its hottest and driest summer since 1976, temperatures regularly exceeded 30°C. Therefore the surrounding forests and the moorland were tinder dry and it came as no surprise when parts of the Cwmcarn Forest were set ablaze on 17th July (or thereabouts). The fire quickly spread to the south side of the mountain and the flames were soon at the base of the SAM itself. The fire services struggled to control the blaze and helicopters were constantly drenching the mountain side with water gathered from Pantyreos reservoir.

After a week much of the fire seemed to under control and only a small proportion of the hill fort was affected - but a strong wind arrived and rekindled the fires. This time the flames went right over the top of the Tump destroying a great deal of the heather and wimberry undergrowth - the fire services had to dig a significant fire break around the northern ditch of the fort to prevent the fire from encroaching into the forestry.

The fires raged around Twmbarlwm for nearly two weeks and once it was over Terry and Norman met on the mountain with Cadw officers Amelia and Will to examine the damage. We also met with Alison Jones (ecologist with CCBC) and Andre Berry - a landscape engineer affiliated to Cadw - who produced a report on how best to help the SAM's recovery.

It was decided that in the short term it would be advantageous to re-seed as much of the damaged area as possible before severe weather set in. So after another round of form filling we found the necessary money from the landowner and Cadw to pay for the necessary seed.

With just three days before the proposed day to sow the seed we put a call out on our website and Facebook for volunteers to help with the sowing - it was a marvellous surprise on 7th October when over 40 people turned up to help. It was a glorious sunny day with just a small breeze - perfect sowing weather - and we had the whole top of the mountain covered within three hours - it was a marvellous day and just underlines why we do this.

Since the fire, a second Drone Survey has been done of the area - this time paid for by Cadw - to compare with the earlier survey and help with establishing a new management plan which will be very different to the original expectations. For instance the fire appears to have revealed archaeological features that may be worthy of further research

POLICING

PC Simon James remains the Wildlife Crime Officer covering our area and, if available, will give his update of the situation.

Although off-road vehicles have diminished in the area, on practically every Volunteer day we still encounter bikes entering onto the Common at the car park. Some bikers seem to be habitual visitors who ignore all the rules of the countryside while some arrive with legal machines and know the routes they should adhere to - and some claim to be ignorant of the rules and back off when persuaded they should not be there.

However, as usual I must stress the importance of reporting any incidents that concern us on the 101 non-emergency service - every burnt out car every fly-tip every anti-social act should be reported - the police may not be able to act on every incident immediately but it must be logged so that the police can gather statistics to ensure future action.

FINANCE and MEMBERSHIP

Martyn Vaughan, Treasurer, will be providing his report separately.

Membership remains at the 40 - 50 mark with nearly 570 followers on Facebook.

- Opening Balance was £6,881.61
- Closing Balance was £ - (*see treasurer's report*)

Please note that the final balance still includes £5,000 which was originally intended for interpretation signs and way-marking - the trustees will decide how to proceed with this in due course.

SUMMING UP

I can only sum up with the same words as my previous reports:

- The Twmp still needs our diligence to protect it from those who do not respect our environment and to improve it for future generations.
- There are still areas of our original mission statement we have not yet addressed - for instance we are yet to progress any notable research into the history and archaeology of Twmbarlwm - we have made a significant start on that this year but we still need to keep the momentum going.
- To achieve our aims we need the support of the membership. The Trustees do what they can and I personally thank everyone for their personal input - but we are all very busy people and without further help the work progresses very slowly - or is in danger of grinding to a standstill.
- I'm proud of what we have achieved in the past eight years - there are fewer off-roaders than a few years ago and I'm sure there are more visitors and I always love to hear their positive comments. But I still think there is a great deal more work to be done and we must continue with our work for Twmbarlwm to remain the Iconic Landmark of Gwent.

Thank you

TERRY EVANS

Chairman Cymdeithas Twmbarlwm Society

(This report forms part of the official minutes of the AGM)