



**Cymdeithas Parc Bannau Brycheiniog
Brecon Beacons Park Society**

www.breconbeaconsparksociety.org

ANNUAL REPORT

2011/2012

FOR THE PARK, ITS PEOPLE AND ITS VISITORS

Registered Charity No. 1075345

Chairman's Report

This is the sixth published Annual Report of the Brecon Beacons Park Society. It contains information on some of the Society's activities during the year which, it is hoped, will be of interest to both existing members and potential members.

This has been my first year as Chair of the Society, it has been demanding, rewarding and fun. Society Members are great people to work with and I believe we have had a successful year.

At last year's AGM it was clear that members wanted more communication from the Executive Committee and that it should do more in the way of forward planning of the Society's business. I am happy to say that considerable progress has been made in both of these areas.

We continue to produce the excellent Beacon with its longer articles on matters of interest, which is now supplemented by the re-launched Newsletter with its shorter and more current articles. Additionally the recently added News section of our web site has even more up to the minute information on topics we hope are of interest to members.

The Executive and other members have been working hard on longer term planning for the Society and have produced a Strategic Plan covering the next three years. We believe this will allow us steer our finances and efforts in directions which will best benefit our members and the Park.

Continuing the general theme of communication, the Society has built an excellent working relationship with the other two Welsh Park Societies. The Chairs meet regularly to form united views on topics of mutual interest and share the work of supporting the National Park movement in Wales between the

Societies where that is appropriate. Additionally our relationship with our Park Authority is much improved. The two joint projects of Dark Skies, and Art in the Park are progressing well, and there is first rate collaboration on GeoPark matters. There are good and open communications between the two organisations which is to the benefit of both and to the Park.

Our flagship activity, the Guided Walks and Events programme, continues to be very successful and well received by our members. We continue the important work of monitoring planning applications for inappropriate developments. We object to a very small proportion of applications, when we do make our voice heard it is against applications with a major detrimental impact on our National Park and/or its residents.

The largest new area of activity for the Society is the monitoring of the Welsh Government's legislation programme which has considerable potential for negative impact on National Parks in Wales. We are working with the other Welsh Park Societies to form common positions and share the work in responding to consultation documents. We have formed a small working party to take responsibility for this work. We have also been working on how the Campaign for National Parks could evolve to better serve our needs here in Wales.

I have, with some difficulty, refrained from thanking people individually above as I didn't want to risk missing anyone out. So can I just say a very big thank you to all of our members for their contribution to the Society over the year and that I look forward to working with you in the future.

In accordance with Charity Commission requirements, the Executive Committee (being the Trustees of the Charity) conforms that the activities of the Society have been and are being delivered for the public benefit.

The Campaign for National Parks

In the early part of this year we received excellent information and assistance from the CNP, primarily through their deputy Chief Executive and her extensive knowledge on National Park matters.

Unfortunately the CNP has had major financial problems, which they are now trying to bring under control. However our Executive did not feel that the situation was handled well. The reorganisation that was carried out did not seem well thought through and the new structure may or may not be able to deliver what we need, and most of the key staff have left (including the deputy Chief Executive). As a result the Executive decided to pay our subscription quarterly rather than annually in future, and then only if performance is acceptable.

However, there may well be a considerable benefit to Wales as a result of this situation. The Chairs of the three Welsh Park Societies have spent a considerable amount of their time considering how best the National Park movement in Wales could be supported. As a result we have proposed the creation of CNP Cymru. This would be a largely autonomous section of CNP, populated by representatives of Welsh organisations supporting our National Parks, and with control over its own budget. This proposal from the three Welsh Park Societies has the support of all the Welsh National Park Authorities.

Guided Walks and Events

The Society's flagship programme of Guided Walks and Events, now in its fourteenth year, remains popular and continues to attract new members to the Society.

In addition to the more challenging walks for experienced walkers for which the programme has gained a well-deserved reputation, some members have asked for more moderate walks

to be included in the programme. In response a series of “Wednesday Wanders” has been added to the programme.

Also in response to popular demand this year Friday walks have become a permanent fixture all year round, so the programme now contains a walk every Friday, Saturday and Sunday, four Wednesdays a month, as well as most Bank Holidays.

The Society contributed one walk each day to the 2012 Crickhowell Walking Festival and seven walks to the 2012 Fforest Fawr Geopark Festival. The Society organised three guided walks to suit all ages and abilities at an event to celebrate the 75th anniversary of the Campaign for National Parks at the BBNP Visitor Centre. An extra walk along the Glamorgan Heritage Coast was organised to celebrate the official opening of the All Wales Coast Path.

Longer treks included the Pembrokeshire Coast Path, the final stretch of the Cambrian Way, the North Wales Coast path and a series of four one-day walks on the Monnow Valley walk, and there were two weekends away in Pembrokeshire and on Exmoor.

Events have included Special Interest walks with an expert guide to Kenfig Nature Reserve, the Woollen Line, the Brecon & Monmouthshire Canal, Cwm Gwrelych Geo-Heritage Trail and Big Pit Mining Museum; Illustrated Talks on a variety of topics ranging from Brecon Mountain Rescue to the Lesser Horseshoe Bats of the Usk Valley; and a Bat Watch .

The Society has continued to support its walk leaders by providing Rescue and Emergency Care and Walking Group Leader training, as well as an informal training day on the hills. The Society also continues to run its series of navigation courses which are open to all members.

During the year ending February 2012 the programme contained 184 walks led by 37 leaders. A total of 2638 walkers covered a total distance of 47,681 kilometres, continuing the society's well-established tradition of walking a distance greater than the circumference of the Earth (40,077 kilometres) annually.

Rights of Way

Rights of Way issues are monitored by the Society. We investigate proposed closures and diversions and report footpath problems to the BBNPA.

Development and Planning

The aim of the Development and Planning team is to try to ensure that the Statutory Purposes of the National Park are upheld, in particular the first purpose: to conserve and enhance the natural beauty, wildlife and cultural heritage of the National Park. To this end the planning team has continued to monitor all planning applications submitted. This has recently become more difficult as the amount of information given on the web site has been reduced due to concerns about data protection. We also attend the PAROW meetings where planning decisions are made. Detailed local knowledge is important so we really appreciate members contacting us with any matters of concern. Covering the whole Park is quite a large task so we would be delighted to welcome anyone interested in joining the team particularly to cover planning issues in the west of the Park.

Although we comment on a certain number of small applications the majority of time this year has been spent on larger issues. We were pleased that the inspector turned down the appeal for the development at Cwrt Y Gollen. We continue to be concerned about the number of large-scale developments on the southern fringe of the Park and had a useful meeting with the planners and CNP about the issues involved. We have commented on Section 3 of the dualling scheme for the A465 for which work is due to start in 2012. Section 2, which passes

through the sensitive area of the Clydach Gorge is next on the agenda. We believe the Welsh Government sees the road as important in bringing much needed new development to the Valleys, but we feel strongly that the National Park should continue to be afforded its proper protection from developments on the border. We were pleased that an application for a waste incineration plant at Brig Y Cwm, to which we were objecting, was withdrawn by the developers. However, there is now a plan for an 'International Motor Technology Venue' actually adjoining the southern edge of the Park.

We have continued to spend time responding to the Local Development Plan as it has progressed through its stages. It is now with the inspector and we await the timetable for the hearings: another busy year ahead!

The Welsh Government has instituted a number of reviews and consultations relating to planning. We are co-operating with the other Welsh societies to put in joint responses to some of these.

We continue to have regular meetings with the NP Planning Department. These enable us to benefit the Park by co-operation as well as by trying to monitor and hold to account.

Art in the Park

In February an Art in the Park walk was chosen by Clare Balding as the subject for one of her "Inspirational Walks" for the current series of Ramblings on Radio 4. She accompanied a group from Drugaid Cymru. The broadcast captured something of what the project, initiated by the Society in 2008, aims to achieve: inspiring young people through an experience of walking in the landscape of the Park. National Park Education officers lead the walks, which follow part of the Beacons Way, each featuring one of the art works created for the Art Trail. A local artist accompanies the group and leads activities which enable the group to develop their own artistic response to the landscape of the National Park.

The project is aimed particularly at young people with reduced opportunities within and around the park. This year 6 groups have benefited from the project including school groups, the local Mend group (Mind, Exercise, Nutrition,...Do it!, a group for children with obesity problems) as well as the group of young adults recovering from substance misuse.

Besides providing some of the funding for the project itself, the Society has obtained 'match funding' from the Usk Valley Trust, and the Brecknock Art Trust. The Brecknock Arts Trust has also given each of the participants a copy of the book of the Art Trail, '8 Stones, 8 Artists', by David Moore.

Walls of Llangynidr

The Society wishes to extend WOL activities elsewhere in the National Park. This process has begun with Cwmdu; WOL is funding building a new section of wall along the Beacons Way above Cwmdu. The YFC member who successfully completed the special training course for YFC members at Cwmdu will spend 3 days with the professional waller working on this wall and WOL has agreed to pay him a minimum wage during this time. The Cwmdu volunteer group is also preparing to tackle short sections of fallen wall.

In Llangynidr a special scheme to work with people with disabilities has started with the first of what we hope are many sessions on the hill wall above Danywern Farm. Nigel Spiers is the trainer and is working with a member of the L'Arche Community and his support worker.

Fforest Fawr Geopark

This has been another busy and productive year. The 2011 Geopark Festival was not particularly well patronized, possibly because of poor publicity, which we hope has been addressed for this year. The programme for this year's Festival, between

May 26th and June 10th, is full, varied and includes seven events organized by the Society. We hope that BBPS members will support both those and the other events, including the evening talks.

We held an interesting Seminar of presentations and papers relevant to the Geopark last October and intend to hold another in the autumn, information will appear in our Newsletter.

We are finalising the Geopark Action Plan 2012-2016. The main emphases are on interpretation, education, working with local communities and conservation. These continue the good progress made during the past four years.

The Geopark will be re-validated by the European Geopark Network in mid July and the society will be involved again. This involves scrutiny of the Geopark's activities and progress over the past 4 years by a small team from the European Geopark Network, in order to determine whether or not we are fit to remain a member of the Network.

The Dark Sky Project

The Dark Sky project is a joint Brecon Beacons Park Society/Authority initiative to counter light pollution in the National Park and to mitigate its adverse effects on the quality of the night sky, wildlife, and the environment.

By developing and applying good practice in lighting control we are aiming to attain the prestigious status of an International Dark Sky Reserve (the first in Wales) for the Brecon Beacons National Park.

Good progress is being made on the project. An audit of the existing external lighting in the darkest areas of the Park has been completed with 954 lights being assessed by our lighting engineer consultants and volunteers. A Lighting Management Plan has been produced which will be used by the planners in the future when assessing applications with external lighting to ensure there is no further increase in light pollution in the Park.

A survey of the quality of the night sky has been made by our collaborators at the University of Glamorgan which has confirmed the here in the Brecon Beacons we have some of the darkest skies in the country. Our communications programme is underway with a leaflet having been produced and distributed.

We have had good coverage in the local media and featured on the front page of the BBC Wales web site, and both the Park Authority and Society web sites have been updated and expanded. We have also developed an amazing video show to be used at public events including the Queen's visit to Glans as part of the Jubilee tour.

Contrary to previous advice we had received, the International Dark-Sky Association (the awarding organisation) decided that rather than applying on behalf of a section of the National Park, we needed to apply for the whole Park. This required some re-planning and as a result we have applied to the Sustainable Development Fund for additional financial support to supplement the £15,000 we have already been awarded by the Brecon Beacons Trust. This additional funding will allow us to carry out our full Education Programme involving schools and other communities in the Park.

Membership

Membership has passed the 700 mark for the first time, for a total at 31 March 2012 of 714, represented by 564 households. The Society lost 103 members, including 3 deaths. One of these was a very early member, Tony Drake, the creator of the Cambrian Way. On the other hand 3 members who left before year end 2011 have returned to the fold.

Some members resigning indicated that they were not able to join walks any longer. Although they appeared not to have moved away, they seem to have no continuing interest in our marvellous Park. 7 of them even have addresses within the Park boundaries.

I am pleased that some households have responded to the appeal (e-mailed on 30 March) to receive Walk Programmes, AGM papers etc by e-mail in future. Further offers would be greatly appreciated, in view of rising postage costs. Distribution cost has become 54p (including envelope).

If you are on e-mail but did not receive the e-mail referred to above, it means that the e-mail address I hold is incorrect in some respect – or I do not have it at all. If you have e-mail but have not yet given it to us, please consider doing so now, and then opting to receive Walks Programmes etc by e-mail. As always, e-mail communication is preferred for membership matters.

Publicity and Communication

Three newsletters – Summer and Autumn 2011 and Spring 2012, have been compiled and distributed by e-mail or post to all Park Society members. Each has had contributions sought from members and partner organisations, with several items of diverse interest submitted. The latter two newsletters are also viewable and available to download via the News Section of the Society web site.

A4 size posters describing the functions of, and how to join, the Brecon Beacons Park Society have been distributed to Information Centres in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The News section in the Society web site has been made easily accessible from the Front Page and is kept current and relevant, appropriate items being posted and regularly updated.

Working with the National Park Authority, the Park Society, in addition to Jim Wilson's leadership of the overall project, has contributed to the development of the publicity leaflet distributed to households in the Core and Critical Buffer zones

of the proposed International Dark Sky Reserve in the Brecon Beacons National Park.

The Beacon

The Society Journal is published twice a year (in January and July) and contains a wide range of articles on topics mainly relating to the Brecon Beacons National Park. A steady flow of material is needed for inclusion in future issues and Chris Barber, the editor would be very pleased to receive contributions from members, particularly those who have not previously written for *The Beacon*.

Please send your articles, poems, letters etc by email to: cbarber010@aol.com or by post to Chris Barber, Blorenge Cottage, Church Lane, Llanfoist, Abergavenny, Monmouthshire NP7 9NG. (Telephone: 018733 856114

Treasurer's Report

The P&L and Balance Sheet are distributed separately. The rise in subscription rates generated the anticipated additional income, but this was offset by a one-off, increase in leaders' training costs, with the result that a small deficit for the year was incurred.

Project costs came in at less than expected:-

Woollen Lines – Transport costs	£250
Talgarth Mill – Donation	£100
Dark Skies – Costs incurred to date	£172
Beacons Way – Installation of bench	£63
Brecon Beacons Trust. Travel to meetings	£74
Fforest Fawr Geopark. Travel to meetings	£68
	<u>£727</u>
Commitments	
Dark Skies – Up to £1300 to complete the project	
Art in the Park – Up to £1500	