

ANTUR

The news source for the outdoor sector in North West Wales

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Snowdonia-Active
Eryri-Bywiol

Reconciling Conservation and Recreation

Look out in early summer for a short DVD that promises to be a fascinating insight into the damp confines of Wales' gorges and ravines.

It will highlight why these habitats are incredibly important, but very vulnerable, and the necessity for responsible recreation.

The idea of a DVD that could be given to outdoor providers in the area arose from a successful seminar, 'Gorges in North Wales - Reconciling Conservation and Recreation', held last year (tiny.cc/OISz1). Snowdonia-Active is producing the DVD with input from a steering

group comprising of Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), Sustainable Use of Snowdonia (SUS) and Plantlife. Gorges are often the last stronghold of internationally rare lichens and mosses. Many are covered by European legislation, meaning for gorge based activities to continue at these sites, a sensitive and minimum impact approach has to be adopted. Awareness of recreational best practice is vital. One thoughtlessly placed boot or rucksac brushing against a boulder could wipe out an entire endangered colony.

Dr Ray Woods, Plantlife Conservation Officer,

is the DVD's key presenter. With his passionate and charismatic presentation style, it is hard to imagine viewers not being enthralled by the fascinating world of lower plant life. He describes Wales' ravines with their ancient woodlands, "as our ecological equivalent of the rain forests."

Their educational value to outdoor centres also features. Lun Roberts from SUS, said: "We shouldn't forget that gorge activities are important for switching young people on to important environmental issues." Funding is through CCW and the Environment Agency Splash Fund.

ENVIRONMENT

Enjoying the countryside

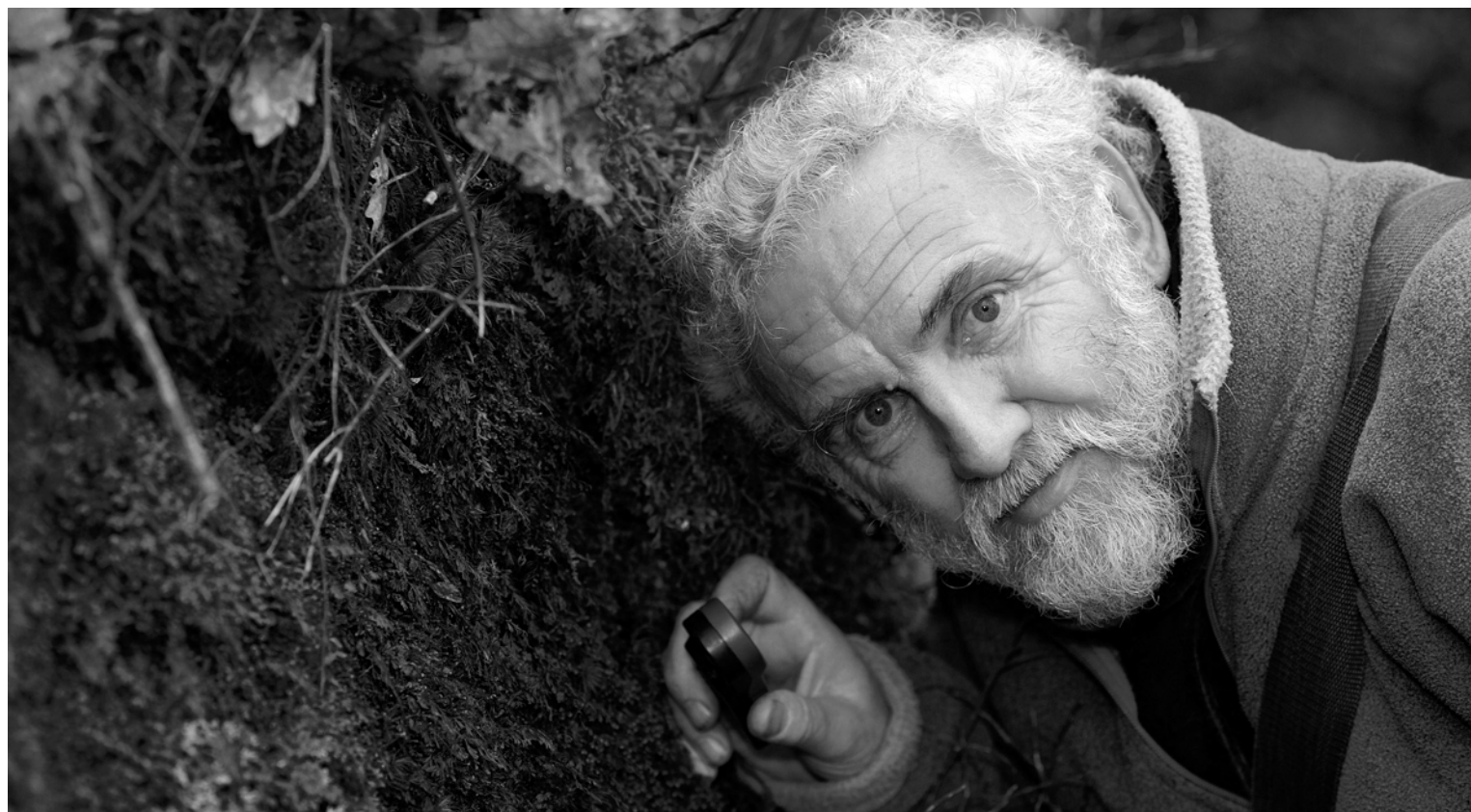
Return of the Beaver

Once native to Wales, the Beaver was hunted to extinction during the Middle Ages for its meat, pelts and scent glands. A soon-to-be published report, looking at the feasibility of reintroducing European Beaver (*Castor fiber*) to Welsh wetlands, could be a vital step in seeing its return. The *Welsh Beaver Assessment Initiative*, undertaken by the Wildlife Trusts in Wales, began in January 2008.

The Assessment has undertaken surveys of all the suitable catchments in Wales, with the best five of these undergoing further study. It discovered that there is plenty of habitat in Wales suitable for beavers. The only potential problems, unsurprisingly concerns conflicts with human activities. Management options following a reintroduction have also been examined by the assessment, together with collating the ideas and issues from a wide ranging consultation.



© Scottish Beaver Trial



Dr Ray Woods looking into the incredible world of lichens

New Outdoor Accreditation

Adventuremark, Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge and UK Ropes Course Guide

Outdoor activity providers may seek external accreditation for a variety of reasons. It could be to satisfy legal requirements, meet particular client needs or help with marketing and promotion.

Since 1996, providers to unaccompanied under-18's of caving, climbing, trekking and water sports activities (excluding water skiing), have had to pass a statutory inspection by the Adventure Activities Licensing Service (AALS), under the authority of the Health and Safety Executive (HSE).

A new non-statutory safety accreditation scheme has been introduced and named Adventuremark (tiny.cc/UvXjc), for those activities not requiring AALS approval, such as mountain biking, ropes courses, climbing walls etc. or for providers delivering relevant activities to over 18 year-olds. The Adventure Activities Industry Advisory Committee (AAIAC), have devised the scheme at the government's request.

The Adventuremark applies to all adventure activities and age groups in England, Scotland and Wales. Having the Adventuremark will allow providers to demonstrate to their customers or

users, that their arrangements for managing the potential risks of adventure activities, have been inspected and found to meet nationally agreed and recognised standards.

Further recent accreditation, this time aimed at young people aged 0-19, is the Learning Outside the Classroom (LOtC) Quality Badge. As part of the LOtC initiative, the government has introduced a non-statutory badging regime that will be the gold standard for such providers.

This national accreditation combines the two essential elements of provision - learning and safety. AAIAC is the awarding body for the adventurous activities sector. It should make planning school trips easier, as they will be able to use the services of a provider, without having to do further checks.

Outdoor providers already holding an Adventuremark or AALS licence, wishing to acquire a LOtC Quality Badge (tiny.cc/PKtbN), only require a 'top-up' inspection for the areas of operation that haven't already been assessed. AAIAC has appointed Adventure Activity Associates Ltd as

being responsible for managing the accreditation process for both these awards.

Following on from the introduction of the European Ropes Course Standard in March 2008, a document providing guidance for operators, builders, trainers etc. involved with ropes courses, is now available from AAIAC.



CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS

All uncredited photos: Ray Wood

Antur is a joint communication project between Snowdonia-Active, the Countryside Council for Wales and The Snowdonia National Park Authority. If your organisation would like the opportunity to contribute to future issues please contact us at antur@snowdonia-active.com



Snowdonia-Active
Eryri-Bywiol



Cyngor Cefn Gwlad Cymru
Countryside Council for Wales



SNOWDONIA
NATIONAL PARK

Beavers are considered a 'key-stone' species by conservationists because they provide essential habitat for other flora and fauna. Their damming activity and ditch digging helps maintain wetland ecosystems, addressing issues such as erosion, sedimentation and flow problems. They also coppice woodland and create bank-side glades. The increased light reaching the water encourages plant growth, providing food for invertebrates, which in turn provides food for fish.

Beaver activity could have an undesirable effect on certain human activities. Farming is likely to suffer the greatest impact with potential minor flooding and damage to arable crops. Beavers only fell certain live trees close-by and do not damage man-made wooden structures. As herbivores they won't affect fish stocks.

As for paddlesport recreation, Ashley Charwood, from Canoe Wales, considers a reintroduction posing few problems. He said: "After discussions with the Wildlife Trust, we are confident that the two can co-exist harmoniously. Perceptions of beavers damming rivers is based on the North American beaver, the European species has a very different behaviour. It'll be another Welsh wildlife spectacle to enjoy."

Britain is one of the few European countries to have not carried out beaver reintroductions. However, currently in Scotland, four Norwegian beaver families are completing a six-month quarantine that began in November. They will then be released in Knapdale (mid-Argyll) as part of the Scottish Beaver Trial (keep up-to-date at scottishbeavers.org.uk), making it the UK's first native mammal reintroduction.

WALES AIR AMBULANCE

Air Ambulance's helicopter lives up to its goal of 'saving time - saving lives'



Helicopter rescue in Snowdonia, is synonymous with the sight and sound of the yellow Search and Rescue Sea King coming to the succour of climbers or walkers in the mountains. However, since July 2003 the bright-red Wales Air Ambulance based at Caernarfon Airport, has also played an important role in providing a fast response to outdoor activities when they occasionally go awry.

The Air Ambulance aircraft has the capacity to carry a pilot, two paramedics and two patients. When the terrain allows the pilot to land, a paramedic can be dropped off at the accident scene so that pre-hospital care can be administered. Treatment within the 'golden hour' improves the chances of a patient's recovery. As opposed to the Sea King it doesn't have winching capability so the topography is a limiting factor in where the helicopter can be effective.

'Saving Time, Saving Lives' is very much the ethos behind Wales Air Ambulance. Covering North Wales, Helimed 61 can be airborne in under four minutes from the time of the emergency call being taken and travels at 140 mph, covering over two miles/minute. The average time for the aircraft to reach a patient is just 12 minutes.

Helimed 61 Team Leader, Ian Binnington, explained: "We work closely with Mountain Rescue Teams, the Lifeboat teams and Search and Rescue from Valley. This requires effective teamwork and good communications from all the agencies involved." He added: "Injured mountain bikers can be problematic as on a couple of occasions we have gone to their aid, but they simply have no idea where they are, apart from being on a track somewhere in a particular forest."

Around 40% of Air Ambulance call-outs are to road traffic accidents and the aircrew can work in many different environments during one shift. This year, the Royal Oak branch of the outdoor retail store, Cotswold, have sponsored the Helimed 61 team with top of the range Rab shell jackets.

Wales Air Ambulance has two other dedicated emergency helicopters, one at Swansea and another in mid-Wales at Welshpool Airport. The start of 2009 marked an important milestone for the life-saving charity, flying it's 10,000th mission. For information on Wales Air ambulance, go to their website (tiny.cc/hKLI2), where you can also make a donation to keep its helicopters flying.

Remember, that for incidents in the mountains and on inland cliffs, the advice is to phone 999 and ask for the Police who will then set in motion the appropriate response.

Outdoor Vision

The first stage of developing a Vision and Action Plan for the North Wales outdoor sector is underway. The aim is to provide a collaborative plan of action to shape the growing market and form the basis for future funding priorities.

The sector has been proven to make a valuable contribution to the economy of Wales and the north-west area in particular. With this in mind, the North Wales Economic Forum through Tourism Partnership North Wales has commissioned Planning Solutions Consulting (PSCL) to produce the Action Plan for 2009-14.

Snowdonia-Active will be working closely with PSCL, aiming to build on the collaborations and partnership working already going on across the region. The initial stage of the project is looking to improve the understanding of who is doing what in relation to the outdoors. This includes consultation with activity providers as well as people and organisations that are involved with the outdoor sector, such as tourism, health, education, economic development, training, conservation and recreation.

It is hoped that this work will allow a clearer picture of the sector to emerge, allowing those tasked with developing the sector to do so more efficiently. Once a clearer vision is developed it will be easier to identify areas needing support and better coordination.

PSCL and Snowdonia-Active will be contacting key stakeholders, local and national, over the coming weeks for their views. Anybody interested in making a contribution should contact rachael@snowdonia-active.com. The project is scheduled to finalise its report by the end of June 2009.

TOURISM
The active
economy



Green Tourism

A leaflet aimed at helping visitors minimise the impact of their visit to Snowdonia is now available for organisations and businesses to add to their websites. Produced originally for North Wales Tourism, to be included in a folder promoting the region's attractions (26,000 copies) that is distributed to hotels, B&B's etc., it gives tips on being a 'sustainable tourist' such as how to reduce car usage during their stay.

The Green Snowdonia Project (tiny.cc/BSy1b) has produced the leaflet with funding from Snowdonia National Park Authority (SNPA) and the Snowdonia Sustainable Development Fund/Cronfa Arbrofi Eryri (CAE).

Project Officer, Emma Edwards-Jones, said: "We'd like to see the leaflet used as widely as possible, as it's an ideal way of activity providers for example, to promote the important message of looking after the Park for future generations to enjoy." Email tourism@snowdonia-society.org.uk to get a pdf copy.

In its third year, the deadline for the Snowdonia Society 2009 Green Tourism Awards is also approaching. They are looking for tourism businesses in or around the Park to demonstrate their green credentials and stand the chance of winning a share of the cash prizes totalling £2000, as well as benefiting from all the publicity.

Last year, Trigonos, a residential venue in Nantlle were the winners in the Best Sustainable Tourism Business (£500 prize) and Low Carbon Award categories. To take part, simply complete a downloadable application form (tiny.cc/BSy1b). The Society says you can't win if you don't enter!

Just the Ticket?

A collaboration of Mountaineering Instructor Certificate (MIC) qualified instructors have set up a community website (themic.org.uk), to promote qualified and experienced climbing instruction across the seasons. It is hoped this will make it clearer for the public to identify appropriately qualified climbing instructors. It is widely accepted that climbing instructors working in winter should have a minimum of MIC and in summer they should hold a Mountain Instructors Award (MIA) for multi-pitch rock routes.

A spokesperson for the new MIC Community said: "A primary catalyst for establishing this new organisation was the growing confusion of use of the familiar Association of Mountaineering Instructors (AMI) logo - an umbrella brand for outdoor instructors. Using this logo when advertising winter courses, inferred qualification, but in reality some individuals (non-MIC) were actually under-qualified."



AMI Secretary, Rob Johnson, commented that: "All AMI members are bound by our established code of conduct and all full-members hold an MIA or the higher award, the MIC."

An interesting aspect of the Community website is that it's trilingual! Look out for the new Mountain Instructor Community logo.

WHAT'S SO SPECIAL ABOUT A SSSI?

Wales is full of very special and beautiful places - literally. Nearly a third of its land and waters has 'special' designation, under either UK, European or international law. Recent developments at the limestone crag of Craig y Forwyn (tiny.cc/BuaTQ), a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) near Llanddulas, highlighted why it is important for recreational users to be aware of these designations and the attached obligations.

What is a SSSI?

Sites of Special Scientific Interest are one of the cornerstones of conservation practice in Wales and there are more than 1000 of them. They cover the full range of different wildlife habitats and species.

Who is responsible for their designation and monitoring?

The Countryside Council for Wales (CCW), as the statutory conservation agency, is required to implement policies on behalf of the UK Government and the National Assembly for Wales. CCW has carried out a systematic survey of the countryside, on a field by field basis, identifying wildlife habitats and geological features of national and international importance that make up the SSSI network. Some SSSI sites are also designated under other schemes (e.g. Special Protection Area and Special Area of Conservation) recognising them as the very best examples of natural heritage sites in Wales, the UK and Europe.

How are SSSIs managed?

The majority of SSSIs are on privately owned land. CCW sends owners/occupiers a statement about appropriate management to safeguard and enhance the site's stand-out features. Such management can be achieved by drawing up a legal agreement between the landowner or occupier and the Welsh Assembly to manage the site in a certain way in return for payment. There is also a requirement to notify CCW about any Operations Likely to Damage or Disturb (OLDDs) that might affect the SSSI. These are listed in the management plan and could include ploughing, drainage works or recreational use by third parties. An example might be a crag on a SSSI important for bats and flora, which rock climbing might potentially damage.

Are these restrictions 'set in stone'?

The OLDDs are not a rigid set of restrictions or prohibitions, as in many cases consent can be issued if the activity is on a part of the site that will not be damaged or they can be modified after seasonal considerations. Not climbing on certain cliffs during the nesting season (as on many coastal SSSIs like South Stack) is a good example.

How do you get consent?

It is necessary to apply to CCW under Section 28 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981. This responsibility falls on the landowner if sporting users are carrying out any activities listed in the SSSI notification of OLDDs. In practice, CCW is usually willing to consent, via the landowners, to the existing levels of sporting use.

What are the consequences for contravening SSSI regulations?

There are penalties associated with contravening SSSI legislation. An owner or occupier who carries out a notifiable operation or allows one to be carried out, without giving written notice to CCW, could be fined up to £20,000. A third party could also be liable to a similar fine, if he or she knowingly, intentionally or recklessly, damages the special features of a site or disturbs any animal notified as a special interest. Existing rights of way are unaffected by notification.

How do I get SSSI information?

CCW will be launching a new Protected Sites and Landscapes Map on their website in late-April with a far greater depth of detail (site management statements, OLDDs) than currently available (tiny.cc/myhuU).



100 YEARS OF GUIDEBOOKS

Lliwedd's 1909 Climbers' Club pocket guidebook established a tradition



Comparing the new Climbers' Club (CC) Llanberis Pass guidebook, that has just hit the shelves, with the very first pocket climbing guide produced 100 years ago, is a fascinating exercise; revealing as much about changing social mores as how vastly different the sport is today.

Although the J.M. Archer Thomson and A.W. Andrews 1909 CC *The Climbs on Lliwedd* guide, was written to "tell the new-comer what he is in for before he starts a climb" and to "avert in our own country the calamitous flood of catastrophe" seen

abroad, the book doesn't grade climbs. A short summary at the start of the route description is considered a better choice. They liked their words back then and plenty of them.

It explains in the preface: "The estimate of difficulty among climbers varies largely with their physical confirmation just as their capacity to gauge danger fluctuates inevitably in accordance with their physical experience. Satisfactory classification, therefore, is impracticable, and its attempt only misleading. The fact alone that such lists are found to

encourage competitive climbing would be sufficient reason for their omission." Since its nascent years climbing has tried to divorce itself from our natural tendency towards competitiveness.

But what has become more competitive over time is the portable guidebook market. One that has grown with the increased interest in outdoor recreation. Climbing guide production in Wales is no longer the preserve of The Climbers' Club. Rockfax were the first serious contenders to the CC's domination and took full advantage of desktop publishing technology to start selling topo orientated guides in 1990. Since then they've produced 28 Europe-wide guides.

North Wales now has its own homegrown talent in the 'outdoor user' publishing business, Pesda Press and Ground Up. The former began with a specialisation in kayaking and Ground Up's first book was the critically acclaimed selected guide, *North Wales Rock*, from 2007. Ground Up Director, Simon Panton, commented: "Without a doubt, a new, good quality guide to an area revitalises interest in it, drawing more visitors."

For anyone venturing on to Lliwedd's cliffs in celebration of this centenary year of CC pocket guides, the last words are best left to the billowing Edwardian prose found between the covers of the one that began it all: "Whatever be the line of ascent, a true mountaineer can rejoice in an environment of boldly sculptured crags, and inhale the influences of rare and beautiful scenery."

South Stack Birdwatch

Climbers help South Stack visitors watch sea-cliff spectacle

Climbing instructors from Plas y Brenin have been working with the RSPB, installing cameras at South Stack on Anglesey, in readiness for the annual sea-cliff nesting spectacle.

Around 140 metres of cabling had to be carefully routed from the cliff edge to two cameras: one to cover a muddy ledge where puffins nest in burrows and another by a chough nesting site in a small cave, just above the sea. The cameras in Mousetrap Zawn, will allow visitors this spring to see live close-up action of the bird colonies at the RSPB Information Centre in Ellin's Tower, that opens just before Easter.

The 'puffin cam' has zoom, pan and tilt controls that can be operated from the Centre. And it even has a mini windscreen wiper for the lens. Last year was the first time cameras were installed at these sites, although the 'chough cam' failed to work. These teething problems have now been solved. South Stack is a nature reserve that is also a SSSI and a European Special Protection Area (SPA) to safeguard the resident choughs. There are only about 450 nesting pairs in the UK.

Rock climbers, know it as part of the extensive cliffs hereabouts called Gogarth and is considered as one of the most important traditional climbing venues in Britain. None of the camera cabling or installation affects the routes.

There is a voluntary access agreement by climbers not to climb on certain cliffs, that includes Mousetrap Zawn and the adjacent Red Walls, during the nesting season.

Reserve Warden, Dave Bateson, said: "The agreement is held in high regard and it's good for climbers and the RSPB to be seen working together on projects such as at South Stack."



Assembly Examines Inland Water Access

Petitions Committee inquiry

A final report on a short inquiry by the Assembly of Wales Petitions Committee, examining the issue of access to and along inland water, should be completed by the end of March.

In April 2008, a petition with nearly 10,000 signatures (the largest to date), calling for new legislation that would secure rights of access to and along inland water, was handed in to the Assembly by Canoe Wales - then called the Welsh Canoeing Association (WCA). The petition cited the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 as a model of good practice and argued that existing rights are unclear and restrictive.

In the light of this and a commissioned briefing paper from the Members' Research Service together with written and oral evidence from Canoe Wales, the Petitions Committee decided to carry out an inquiry. The scope of the inquiry before making recommendations

is to look at a Welsh example of public access to inland water and clarify the key issues. It will also include assessing the effectiveness of the Scottish statutory approach to securing access rights together with public responsibilities for non-mechanically propelled recreation.

Although the Petitions Committee can't make legislation, it can make a recommendation that a Scrutiny Committee needs to hold a full inquiry, which could lead to a call for a Legislative Competency Order (LCO) from Westminster; allowing Wales to enshrine in law responsible public access to inland water.

Canoe Wales Access Officer, Ashley Charlwood, said: "All four political parties on the Petitions Committee now recognise access to inland water as a complex and national issue. It was the Government of Wales Act (2006) that allowed us to start making this progress."

CULTURE &
HERITAGE
A sense of place



Park Photography Competition

One of the things that people taking part in hill-walking, kayaking, rock climbing etc. all have in common is that they like to record the event with a few photos. Be it a carefully considered composition or just a quick 'point-and-shoot'.

So if you think you've some inspiring images that you're particularly proud of, then you should consider entering the Snowdonia National Park photography competition to raise awareness of the Park's cultural heritage. It takes your interpretation of this theme as its subject and material has to be sent in by the 31st May 2009.

Entries are invited in four categories - people, events, landscape, made by man - across three age group categories - Adults, 16-21 yrs and 6-15 yrs. The winner of the first two categories will receive a voucher to buy camera equipment to the value of £200 and the juniors get a voucher for £50 from Cambrian Photography in Colwyn Bay. Plus, one overall winner will be chosen and receive a free place on a Park Authority photography course at its field study centre, Plas Tan y Bwlch.

Winners will be announced and exhibited on the maes of the Meirion and District National Eisteddfod 2009. Only images taken within the boundaries of the Park will be accepted and entrants can submit up to four images in each category. While the Park reserves the right to keep images on file, they will only use them with the owner's permission.

The Park says: "Cultural heritage includes all evidence of human activity and involvement that can be seen, understood and felt. This could be industrial or historical remains, activities such as the eisteddfod or sheep dog trials, landscapes etc." Details and entry form at tiny.cc/izwfd.

WHAT'S ON

Here are some spring / summer '09 diary dates:

Anglesey Walking Festival

23rd May - 7th June, (tiny.cc/lojcl)

BMC Family Rock Climbing Meet

30th May, email bmccymruwales@live.co.uk for details

Ras Cader Idris

30th May, 2.00 p.m., cader-race.co.uk

BMC Cymru Open Meeting

9th June, Deganwy Castle Hotel, 9.00 p.m.

Conwy Ascent Canoe Race/Tour

27th June, 15km course upstream from Conwy Morfa, (tiny.cc/316aa)

Conwy Walking Week

1st - 8th July, booking required, (tiny.cc/uk8pq)

International Snowdon Mountain Race

18th July, 2.00 p.m. start, Llanberis

IN BRIEF

The Snowdonia National Park Authority has published the consultation version of the Snowdonia National Park Management Plan. "It's a document for all who live, work, visit and enjoy Snowdonia." The Authority would like to hear your views on the document. You have until 5.00 p.m. on May 11th to respond. Full details including response forms and guidance notes at tiny.cc/0L2US.



Use of Welsh in Tourism Businesses

Anglesey Walking Holidays (tiny.cc/VHw1w), based in Menai Bridge, were two-time winners at this year's Anglesey Tourism Awards. They won the Best Adventure/Activity Operator of the Year for the second year running and along with Neuadd Lwyd also topped the Use of Welsh in Tourism Businesses category (sponsored by the Welsh Language Board and Menter Iaith Mon).

Judges commented that Anglesey Walking Holidays showed good practice in the use of Welsh in the business, while delivering the complete Welsh and total holiday experience.

Eurwyn and Gillian Williams, who run the company offering a highly customised holiday service for walkers along the Anglesey Coastal Path, are both Welsh speakers and have lived on the island for over 25 years. Judges were impressed that their packages are tailored to meet the requirements of its customers, are highly personalised and bilingual.

Anglesey Walking Holidays has divided the 125-mile circular coastal route into 13 different walks, ranging from 7 - 14 miles, with plenty of accompanying up-to-date information. Further details of the 2009 Awards organised by the Anglesey Tourism Association at tiny.cc/Andcy.