

NEWSLETTER 35 – SPRING 2020

Coronavirus and the hostels

The Trustees took a decision to close the hostels with effect from Friday 20th March. The decision was taken to remove the risk to our own wardens as well as visitors staying at the hostel and to avoid any risk to the local community of people travelling in from parts of the country where the virus is more prevalent.

Needless to say the decision to close the hostels will have a big impact on our finances. We are offering all those who have booked accommodation a full refund or the opportunity to rebook at a later date. We are in the fortunate position of not having any paid employees and, thanks in a large degree to the generosity of its members, we own the hostels outright and so do not have any rent payments to cover. Moreover, a significant proportion of our costs, e.g. laundry, gas, electricity, vary according to the number of overnights. There is the possibility that we might be eligible for one of the smaller Coronavirus grants that the Welsh government is putting in place for small businesses in receipt of small business rate relief. Our hard working Treasurer, Dave Matthews, is investigating this.

While the current situation persists we are also strictly limiting access to the hostels. The hostel managers, Colin and Richard and Janet plan to make occasional visits, subject to Government advice, to check on the hostels, do any essential maintenance and arrange access for any external contractors such as the annual gas safety survey and the electrician for PAT testing. However, we are asking everyone else not to visit the hostels. These limited visits by the hostel managers will only take place in accordance with Government restrictions.

At this stage we have cancelled the April open meeting which was due to be held at Ty'n Cornel. And we are investigating whether we can use technology to have a "virtual" Trustee meeting. At this stage we have not cancelled the AGM although it looks likely that we will do so. The organisers of the Eisteddfod, due to be held during the first week in August in Tregaron, have not yet cancelled the event but this also seems likely. The Trust was planning to have a stand at the Eisteddfod. We already have a good number of attendees for the warden's training which is planned for early October. This seems a long way ahead but will also be subject to review.

Like everyone else, we all hope that we can get back to normal as soon as possible and we will keep members informed of developments.

Successful Spring work party at Dolgoch – just in time!

The usual Dolgoch Spring work party was held during the weekend of 13th-15th March. The following day, Monday 16th everything changed with the Government's announcement on the Coronavirus which would have forced us to cancel the work party.

We had a really good turn out with 13 of us sharing a delicious communal meal on Saturday evening prepared by Marilyn and Frances. To work up an appetite we did our usual track maintenance of filling in the pot holes which always seem to appear. Frances' friend Leila worked so hard on this that she even went for a cooling dip afterwards in the river to ease her aches and pains! Bill and prospective new warden Mike did a good job erecting a fence around the PV panels that power the borehole. Lots of kindling was replenished by Bill and Mike's daughter Sophie. Frances and Leila changed all of the bedding. We did lots of internal cleaning and even tried out a cordless vacuum cleaner which helped a lot with the dormitory floors and mats. Matt and Lisa thinned out the trees close to the hostel. Lisa, the Trust's environmental officer, informs us that this will allow more light through to the ground cover and should, in time, allow more flora and fauna to thrive.

Having finished all of this and made Dolgoch look spick and span we confidently looked forward to welcoming visitors, only for the hostels to be closed!

Ty'n Cornel update

We have also achieved some maintenance and improvements at Ty'n Cornel over the winter. The electrician laid telephone cables across the yard from the shed into the hostel, and Aidan has now installed the phone into the hostel. There are phone sockets in the warden's room and the common room. We'll keep the phone in the warden's room when there's a warden, and we'll move it into the common room when there's no warden, to enable communication with hostellers. A phone is also provided in the shed, as before. We've also done some more mundane maintenance – the kitchen has been re-painted and several rooms smartened up ready for the new season.

We've made preparations for some much-needed improvements to the external drainage system. During the wet autumn, it became apparent that too much fresh water was being piped through the septic tank. The effluent was being washed out before the tank had any chance to process it. The water is piped into the system from land drains which shouldn't be feeding into the sewage system, and which needs to be directed elsewhere. We feared that a long, expensive new drain would be needed to solve the problem, but the drainage contractor's clever camera equipment showed us that the existing drains didn't go where we thought they did and the problem can be solved much more simply. The contractor has now been tasked to do the necessary work – some new drains will be installed in the garden and under the terrace. The work will be done as soon as coronavirus precautions allow.

We gained an unexpected bonus in the form of a large beech tree which was uprooted by a gale over the winter. The farmer has allowed us to take the timber for logs, and the difficult task of cutting and moving the heavy timber has been done safely by Richard Elliott, who operates a forest timber business based at nearby Bryn Carregog. There is probably still some medium-sized timber to be collected by our own volunteers.

It's probably academic to discuss overnight numbers in the current situation, but at least I can report that Ty'n Cornel's bookings for 2020 were quite satisfactory before we had to cancel everything. The 84 overnights achieved during January, February, and March were slightly more than for the corresponding period for 2019, and the number of forward bookings was also respectable. Let's hope for a successful return to business when we're allowed to re-open!

Marketing activity

The Trust has always struggled with a lack of marketing expertise, particularly the new forms of social media marketing. This mattered less when the number of overnights continued to grow or at least remain stable. This year however, we experienced a sharp fall in the number of overnights at both hostels even before the Coronavirus. The Trustees decided to engage an external agency with expertise in social media marketing Insynch for a trial period starting in February. Much work was done and improvements made to the website, including offering an attractive walks guide to web site visitors. Unfortunately the timing of the Coronavirus crisis and the decision to close the hostels could not have been worse. We therefore have had to cancel the contract before the trial was complete. We intend to restart this work once things are back to normal.

If any member has marketing experience or feels that they would be able to help the Trust with marketing please get in touch with Marilyn.

On Line Membership Form This is now up and running. It is now possible to become a member/renew membership of the Trust via the web site.

Key dates for your diary – (Please check, as they could get cancelled)

Date	Meeting	Location
July 4 th	AGM	Talbot and Ty'n Cornel
October 3 rd – 4 th	Wardens training weekend	Dolgoch
November 7 th	Open meeting	Dolgoch

