

NEWSLETTER 41 – AUTUMN 2021

Further cautious moves to “normality”

We have made some further cautious moves back to operating the hostels as in pre Covid times. When the hostels first opened on 12th April we only accepted single bookings from individual or extended households. At Dolgoch, which has separate warden’s accommodation, we were able to accept bookings throughout the week. At Ty’n Cornel bookings were only possible at weekends with the warden staying Monday to Thursday.

Following the Welsh Government’s further relaxation of Covid restrictions on 7th August, we have been able to allow some limited mixing of hostellers and of wardens. At Dolgoch this means that we are now accepting an additional booking as long as numbers are relatively small. We are also allowing mixed use of the kitchen and common room area. The wardens are also able to use the main kitchen. Wardens ensure that the kitchen and common room areas are well ventilated during any periods of mixed use. At Ty’n Cornel one small booking either in the hostel or camping, can now be accommodated during the week with segregated toilet and washing facilities.

Farewell to sheet sleeping bags.



When the Trust first started to operate the hostels we were very fortunate to inherit a large supply of the traditional YHA sheet sleeping bags. These were supplemented over the years with more supplies as they became redundant at YHA hostels. Over the years, visitors to our hostels were increasingly unfamiliar with making up beds using the sheet sleeping bags. We left “demonstration beds” in each dormitory but visitors would often not use the bags correctly.

Covid required us avoid any risk of cross contamination of bedding. We therefore decided to remove the sheet sleeping bags and replace them with “bedding packs” comprising a bottom sheet, duvet cover and pillow case. These packs are left on the beds and hostellers make up their own beds and remove the bedding when they leave. Wardens leave replacement packs on the beds when cleaning the rooms.

The new system seems to be working well. At some point we will replace our existing bedding which is something of a mix and match of colours and patterns.

We now have a large store of redundant sheet sleeping bags. If any members would like one for reasons of nostalgia please let us know and if anyone has any imaginative ideas for alternative uses for our large stock of sheet sleeping bags e.g curtains, table cloths, summer skirts and trousers get in touch.

Dolgoch update



Ever since the Trust took over Dolgoch and, shortly after, installed a solar water heating system, we have had problems with water pressure. Even on hot days when potentially we have had almost unlimited supplies of hot water, the showers have often slowed to a trickle. Our local plumber, Martin Pugh, queried why we have a system of using 3 loft tanks to supply the hostel's water rather than connect directly to the large hillside tank. The head of water from the loft tanks to the solar tanks that supply the hostel's hot water is tiny compared with the head of water between the hillside tank and the hostel. We could only think that originally the loft tanks had provided an additional back up reservoir of supply in case the stream supply had dried up. Martin reconfigured the water supply from the hillside tank (the blue pipe in the picture above) to the hostel supply pipes (pictured white) thereby by passing the loft tanks. Long experience of managing Dolgoch has taught us to be cautious but so far the result has been transformational. The water pressure is consistently good and air locks seem to have vanished.

Our plans to upgrade the hostels electricity capacity are progressing. A local contractor with experience in off grid systems, including work for the Elan Valley Trust, is drawing up a detailed proposal which the Trustees will consider.

Our request to acquire ownership of the unregistered land at Dolgoch has now been submitted to the Land Registry and we await the outcome. We do not expect a rapid response but, as we have been occupying and using the land since the Trust first acquired Dolgoch, we can afford to wait. One curious fact to emerge is that a named individual has hunting and fishing rights over some nearby land, a small portion of which extends over our car park. At this stage we do not plan to put up warning notices in the car park!

Bookings at Dolgoch have been really buoyant. We now have over 1,000 bed nights either completed or booked for the year. The summer months were particularly busy with 253 overnights in July and an amazing 335 in August. The August figure was our highest monthly figure ever, even in pre Covid days. This is particularly surprising given the limitations on multiple bookings. Dolgoch was occupied every day during August, probably reflecting the "staycation" effect. Bookings for September onwards have slowed but are still coming in.

Ty'n Cornel Update



Overnights have also recovered well at Ty'n Cornel. The hostel is smaller than Dolgoch and the warden has no separate accommodation, so we have restricted bookings more tightly to preserve safety against COVID. During the early summer, we adopted a pattern in which the hostel accepted a single booking each weekend (with no warden), and the warden is present (with no hostellers) on weekdays. Since COVID restrictions were relaxed in July, we have also accepted one small booking each weekday evening. There's been a good response - we currently (16 September) have 475 overnights for the year, including forward bookings. Our annual total for recent "normal" years has been in the range 600-800 overnights, so this year's performance is quite promising.

The Cambrian Way long-distance path, which passes the door of Ty'n Cornel, has become an important source of overnights. The route has been particularly busy in 2021, since it's an excellent long-distance route that can be accessed without international travel, and without encountering too many people. Even while the hostel was only taking dormitory bookings at weekends, we were able to accommodate the occasional camper, giving them access only to a washroom. Those who stayed were very grateful as this basic accommodation was still a big improvement over wild camping. The popularity of the route has been increased by the publication of a new Cambrian Way guidebook by Cicerone Press, <http://www.cicerone.co.uk/the-cambrian-way>. The new book may achieve wider circulation than Tony Drake's rather idiosyncratic guide. Although the Cambrian Way is still not waymarked as thoroughly as official national long-distance paths, many waymarks have been added recently. There is now a waymark at the Ty'n Cornel gate.

Our planning application for a shepherd's hut is still awaiting the Council's decision. The planners are making inquiries to check whether increased occupancy might affect the sensitive environment surrounding the hostel. National Resources Wales has confirmed that there are no issues related to the phosphate sensitivity of the river, but our application is still in a queue awaiting inputs from the Council's Environment desk. Our agent advises that we should be patient, since if we demand a decision without the missing input our application will inevitably be refused. Richard asks for an update from the Council every few weeks.

There's been plenty of maintenance work over the summer – indoor and outdoor paintwork, repairs to the Tony Drake memorial bench, cutting of grass and hedges, and innumerable other tasks. Many thanks to Bill Hine, Richard Ward, Nicola Price, Frances Passey, Toby and Rachel Taylor, and indeed to all the wardens who have kept the hostel clean and smart.

Sad news

The Trust has lost two long serving wardens – Cecilia Rawlings and Brian Pottle, both of whom have sadly died, Cecilia in August 2020 and Brian earlier this year, in June.

Cecilia has wardened in both hostels – Ty'n Cornel and Dolgoch since 2009, travelling all the way from her home on the Isle of Wight to do so. She has wardened every year, some years more than once, often bringing members of her family with her.

Cecilia had led a very interesting life; this came through in her chats with the hostellers with whom she loved interacting; she was lively and good company and the weeks she wardened there was no lack of conversation in the common room! She was enthusiastic about all aspects of her wardening – the hostels, the surrounding countryside, the bird and animal life and she passed this enthusiasm across to the hostellers.

She even managed to find time between her wardening duties to enjoy going out for coffee and lunch most days in the local cafes and restaurants.

Brian loved the wilderness area of Mid Wales and, as a long distance cyclist, used to stay at both Dolgoch and Ty'n Cornel hostels long before the Trust was in existence. The Ty'n Cornel hostel managers remember first meeting him in about the year 2000 when they clearly remember his enthusiasm and his red cycling socks!

At the time YHA owned the hostels and Brian became a YHA volunteer warden and when in 2006 the Trust was formed he continued to warden, spending at least 3 weeks every year doing so.

He was always very reliable and self motivated. About 10 years ago, he was wardening Ty'n Cornel, when a gas inspection took place and the gas cooker was condemned with the result that the hostellers were left without cooking facilities. Brian used his initiative, jumped in his car and drove to Lampeter - no short drive- and bought some electric ring cookers thus saving the day!

Janet and Richard Hollins remember that he took pride in repainting the white front wall outside the hostel and did so frequently.

Brian's enthusiasm for the hostels can be judged by his attendance at the AGM and Celebration Lunch at Y Talbot Hotel in Tregaron in 2016 to mark the Trust's 10th Anniversary. Brian left home in Harrow at 5am, driving all the way to Tregaron to arrive as bright as a button in time for the AGM at 11am. (He was 80 at the time)

Both wardens will be greatly missed by the Trust.

Wardens training weekend cancelled

Unfortunately we have had to cancel the Autumn training weekend for new wardens. Covid concerns still mean that we cannot have shared dormitories. This is particularly unfortunate as we have a number of prospective wardens who are very keen to be trained. We did consider ways of holding the weekend with prospective wardens staying in other local accommodation but in the end we decided to postpone the event until next spring when it is hoped that we can accommodate more people at the hostels. Given that wardens need to become familiar with the lay out of the hostels this is one case where Zoom training falls down!

Hostel Christmas cards for sale

Cards featuring our two hostels are for sale again this year. The wording inside is 'With Best Wishes for Christmas and New Year'



Pack of 5 cards – chose Dolgoch OR Ty'n Cornel = £4
Pack of 10 cards – chose Dolgoch OR Ty'n Cornel = £7.50
Pack of 10 cards (mixed) - 5x Dolgoch AND 5x Ty'n Cornel = £7.50

Email order to: janet.hollins@btinternet.com

Phone order to: Janet Hollins on 01980 629259

(Please include your delivery address and exact requirements with your order)

If paying by cheque please make cheque payable to: Elenydd Wilderness Hostels

If paying by Bank Transfer make payment to: Sort Code: 404643 Account No: 51253182 and include reference 'Xmas & Surname' as appropriate.

Colin Hughes

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(On behalf of the Trustees)