

Partnership working: Managing adventure activities

Approximately 1400 hectares of the WGWE is in Waterfall County in the Brecon Beacons National Park. This is a popular area for adventure activities including white-water canoeing, gorge-walking and wild swimming. Due to the remote nature of the area, any serious accident requires mountain rescue evacuation skills.



The area has a long history of use by local people for adventure activities. However, from 1995 onwards, there has been a significant increase in the number of outdoor activity providers using the area without permission which has caused problems, such as overflow car parking, irresponsible behaviour by some visitors, path erosion, damage to plants in the gorge and the introduction of invasive species. By 2010, it was clear that a different approach to managing adventure activities was needed.

The solution was a collaborative effort, working with outdoor activity providers and the Brecon Beacons National Park Authority. It involved the formation of the South Wales Outdoor Activity Providers Group (SWOAPG) and the negotiation of a Concordat agreement. This includes a Code of Conduct, access rules, training requirements, an enforcement policy and an environmental charter. Any commercial organisation wanting to operate in the area must be a member of SWOAPG and adhere to the Concordat.

Commenting on the Concordat, Steve Rayner, SWOAPG Coordinator, said:

“It provides a simple mechanism for outdoor providers to access the Sychryd and Mellte gorges while meeting NRW’s goals for protecting this fragile environment. It enables clients of all ages to enjoy outdoor activities in this very special corner of South Wales.”

Today the Concordat is used by almost 200 organisations to access the WGWE in Waterfall Country and the model of working with SWOAPG has been replicated by Welsh Water, and the National Trust in Pembrokeshire.

Since the introduction of the Concordat, many of the activity providers have worked voluntarily with the warden team to repair paths and map invasive species. Signage has also been improved to clearly identify hazardous areas, so visitors can better judge the risks involved in undertaking activities.

Pursuing SMNR:

