

## Cambrian Mines Trust. NAMHO 2019 Conference Review

This is a paper on the event written for general interest and the benefit of future event organisers. The event was centred at Llanafan, Ceredigion over 5 days from the 4<sup>th</sup> July 2019. It was generally considered a great success, but there are lessons to be learned.

Cambrian Mines Trust is not a membership organisation and when we were offered the opportunity to host the event the main organisation was undertaken by me almost in entirety, with Dr Peter Claughton being asked to run the lecture program. I shall go on to describe the organisation of the event and then examine what went well and what could have been done better.

The first task is obviously the choice of venue. It is important that the venue for the evening meals and bar is within walking distance of the camp site. If a convenient location can be found whereby a suitable building that can be economically hired is close to an existing camp site the organiser of such an event will have it made. This is seldom the case and even after locating a suitable venue, such as a hall close to a field that can be rented, the biggest headache is the camping by far. It should be target to achieve a situation whereby the camping breaks even. This was achieved in 2019 by organising a 5 day event with 4 nights camping charged by the head rather than by the tent to reflect the use of the hired facilities. The two main nights of Friday and Saturday were charged at £12 per head, with Thurs and Sun at half price at £6 each. This proved very successful in recovering costs.

I was aware of halls being available to hire in Ceredigion and a quick search of the Internet turned them up. Lisburne Hall, Llanafan was immediately attractive due to the size of the hall and its closeness to the main field trip venues. Inquiries confirmed that it could be rented for the 5 days for £150, however it was pointed out that adjacent fields were hay fields and therefore could not be advanced booked for camping. As an alternative we were offered the Maesefelin Sports Field close by for the same rental, and we were told that it would be OK for campers to take vehicles onto the camping field, however as it turned out this was not the case.

I also noted a Church Hall which we were offered for £30 rent. This was an opportunity decision, for the modest cost it could be used for displays. The sports field had a utility block, this had two toilets but no showers so it was obvious that extra facilities would have to be hired. We were also shown a hose connection and I felt concerns about the water pressure being sufficient to feed the showers being hired due to the distance from where the showers were to be located. I there decided to hire a water bowser, this proved an unnecessary expense as when the portable shower block came to be connected the hire people were able to plumb it into the utility block which was much closer to where the showers were located. However, it was initially thought better to be safe than sorry.

Due to the fact that vehicles could not be taken onto the sports field where the tents were to be set up (not stated at the time of booking the site) it was perceived quite early on that parking would be an issue, and there was a contingency plan (expensive!) as a last resort. Enquiries had been made at a small 'industrial estate' a short distance down the road with room for about 30 cars and we were assured that it would be OK to use this providing access was not blocked. The occupants only needing room for three or four cars. However this in itself would have proved inadequate.

The success of the event is in part luck due to the very kindly weather which allowed early haymaking and left a freshly hay harvested field empty, with the owner very kindly allowing us its use for parking.

With the change in parking arrangements it was obvious that close supervision was needed by an admin staff. It was a last minute decision to purchase some HiViz vests lettered "NAMHO Administration" which enabled easy identification of key personnel.

Choice of caterer for the meals and the running of the bar is obviously an issue. Hafod Hotel at Devils Bridge were chosen as they had run events at the hall before and were quite close. The service and the meals were first class; however I omitted to consider the provision of lunches.

This problem was solved by offering this 'franchise' to Nenthead Mines Conservation Society whose key personnel are involved with NAMHO and would be at the event anyway.

Whoever organises these events will depend on an efficient mass emailing system. Mail Chimp has been mentioned in the past; however I use a desktop version of MS Office Outlook which is well up to the task.

I am fortunate in having a very wide circle of mining friends all over the country, many of whom are very experienced and this is where I looked for leaders. It is an issue for organisers of who pays and who doesn't. I took a bold step of offering free delegate fees and free camping to all trip leaders and admin staff. Lecture program speakers got free delegate but had to pay for camping. This worked OK but may well not in other (more expensive) parts of the country.

The booking website is the main vehicle used to make the bookings for events and looking at it I saw in learning how to use it the straw that would break the camels back. There was an event website as a subdomain of the CMT website which is a straight html website I developed myself, and I was very relieved when the NAMHO webmaster, Nigel Dibben, offered to run the bookings website and also integrate it with my own. This turned out to be very successful and I hope it sets a precedent for the future as NAMHO is presently considering making a NAMHO team available permanently for future event organisers. I have to acknowledge the help given by Nigel as being instrumental in the success of the event. It was a task I could just not have coped with.

I decided to organise my field trips and leaders on an MS Access database. This proved to be a mistake as some trips were messed up. I would recommend that future organisers have some kind of big wall chart whereby what trips are scheduled with what leaders can be seen at a glance. Of course this needs to be synchronised with the trips on the booking website which in itself can be problematic.

Several underground sites on offer where under the Cave Access Ltd remit and had risk assessments filed. I decided to extend this to all the other sites. In the event of an accident it's likely to be the first thing anyone asks about

One single person organising the event had its pros and cons. To a degree it obviated the "right hand and left hand" situation, however it's really was too much work for one person. Springing on this I recommend future organisers work off an event committee but with one single competent person in overall charge.

## WHAT WENT WELL

Obviously the weather, something over which we had no control, solved the potential parking issue as well as contributing to the overall success of the event. Contingency parking plans were prepared for a bad weather spell but would have likely proven expensive.

The 5 days event with 4 nights camping, two of which were at a discount. This was heavily subscribed to and accounts for camping breaking even. Big success

The HiViz vests for admin staff out and about

The availability of Risk Assessments. How many people actually read them I don't know, but the fact that they were available would be a big factor in the event of an accident.

The choice of caterer. Its best to put quality before cost here. Delegates won't mind an extra few pounds for the meal as long as its good. Hafod did an excellent job.

Frongoch underground trips. Certain places were left by each party with a marker "Group Beyond" or "Beyond Clear" as the case may be. This meant that 3 separate trips running each day over Saturday and Sunday never clashed on the hang up points

Financials. The event has a surplus of about £2400 to spend on the work of the trust. I also took a very strict line with collecting money making it clear that anyone who had not paid for their meal would be taken off the list. Likewise anyone who had not paid delegate or camping as applicable would not be allowed to camp or participate in field trips. As a result of this all monies due were successfully collected.

## WHAT WENT BADLY

My organisation of the field trips. Wrong methodology, lesson learned. Also I initially had Cwmytwyth Lefel Fawr set for "every hour on the hour" on the Friday. Wrong, it's not the way that NAMHO field trips are organised, this was reorganised.

Display Hall. Although only round the corner and signposted the number of visitors was small.

The original campsite hose pipe split and people were trying to get water from the wash bowls which resulted in the flooding of floor

The above is my personal take on the event, but should be read in conjunction with the feedback as below from others. I personally disagree with some comments, while others appear to reinforce my own, and yet again some appear to contradict comments from others.

Roy Fellows. Aug 2019

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APPENDIX:

## 1/FEEDBACK

I have had a lot of email from delegates congratulating me on an enjoyable and successful event, however I omit all but those offering constructive comment. By far the greatest feedback is from Steve, which runs to several pages.

### **Immediate Thoughts on NAMHO 2019**

I think it is of value to try and learn from previous events so am writing down my immediate thoughts on this years NAMHO Conference. This is not intended to be any criticism or praise, just immediate thoughts.

#### **Hall for Lectures, Meal & Reception**

All appeared to work well but I might not have been around enough to witness any problems. The only 'problem' that I was aware of is that we were still waiting for the caterers to remove their equipment at the end and hence not able to have a final clean of the kitchen area.

The provision of AV equipment by Hidden Earth appeared to work very well and Les Williams has made it clear that NAMHO is welcome to loan this in the future – only cost seems to be free entry for Les and Wendy. Note that Les is also a licence holder for drinks and could be used for NAMHO to provide its own bar.

There appeared to be no problem with Moorebooks, and Starless River having stalls in this Hall and presume that this worked for them, but this would not be practical in a smaller hall (see comments on Church Hall).

Having the Reception outside of the main hall was OK but essential that it is not in the same hall.

Meals and Bar were very good (though some thought the beer a bit expensive) – I think that a lot of the success was down to using experienced caterers who were familiar with the venue. It seems that quite a lot (possibly all) of the cooking was done on site. We need to remember lunch provision as well as evening meals.

Having a PC on site and the ability to access the conference website/booking system was clearly a major advantage.

Having use of radios to communicate between different parts of the venue was a very clear advantage.

#### **Church Hall – Displays**

Despite good intentions, I was one person who failed to get to see the displays at the Church Hall. The Church Hall and the Village Hall were close together but ... I wonder (no more than speculation) whether it might have worked better if the reception had also been at the Church Hall – this would have required persons to visit the display location but was close enough not to detract from the main venue.

If Starless River and Moorebooks had been with the other displays it would have generated more visits to the other displays, however, they might not be happy to be away from the lecture/reception venue.

### Car Parking

The availability of the nearby, main car parking field was essential, and it is a bit of a fright that this was last minute. I would go as far as to say that I feel the whole event would have been a disaster without this.

The entrance was a bit tight and one gate post was knocked over during the weekend – this had been rotten at the base and leaning before the event.

### Camping & Camper Vans

This is where I was particularly involved and hence maybe a few more comments. The venue used worked very well but matters might not have been as good.

I counted a maximum of 38 tents and 8 (small) camper vans on site. It would not have been possible to have the estimated 10 other (larger) camper vans on this site – camper vans with their own toilet facilities were asked to use the main car park.

On the Thursday and Friday nights, I was quite vigorous on sorting out the camper vans (redirecting the larger ones) and getting persons to move their cars after unloading – after this, all seemed to be happy with the system and all ran quite smoothly.

The shower block was very good, but a design or placement fault meant that the floors were generally wet. The number of showers (4) were appropriate for the numbers camping and in camper vans.

There were 4 portable toilets (plus 1 disabled) on the camp site plus two WC's in the building – if anything there were more portable toilets than really needed. We provided extra toilet rolls (14 were used) – the portable toilet providers may have topped these up if required but we needed to add for the fixed WC's.

Water for containers – this needs to be available. After an initial delay with no provision (resulting in flooding of the WC's with persons trying to use basin taps), a hose pipe was turned on. The hose pipe provision was reasonable, but the external tubing was perished, and two leaks repaired (sections cut off pipe) – this meant that the supply could only be sensibly turned on when someone was available to supervise (an hour at night and an hour in the morning).

Rubbish – someone provided rubbish bags but if you provide rubbish bags, you also need to decide how they are going to be removed. I collected 5 full rubbish bags from the camp site and relocated to the main venue where Roy made subsequent arrangements.

Washing Up Bowl – a washing up bowl and sponge were made available, but I don't know if really needed – I did not see it used.

Fire Precautions – there were no provided fire precautions – with hindsight, there should have been thought given to this and possibly to providing some fire-fighting equipment (extinguishers and blankets?).

### Trips and Lectures

Somehow it turned out that plenty seemed to be able to participate in trips and have a good number at the lectures.

I did hear of some persons not able to get to trip locations or simply not turning up and there were quite a few who changed their trips during the conference. It might be of value to obtain feed-back of how numbers on trips actually worked out.

### Timing & Turnout

Overall attendance at the conference seemed to be good and therefore the start of July appears to be convenient.

I was surprised at just how many arrived for Thursday night and having trips Thursday to Monday, inclusive, seems to work, however, this might not be appropriate for other venues. The majority camping and in camper vans did appear to arrive on Thursday.

### Travel

The conference location was somewhat remote but good for access to the various mines etc. It might have been good to give more emphasis to the best routes to the venue (to avoid the narrowest of approach roads – which seems to be the SatNav preferred route).

### Insurance etc.

We do need to check that the conference organisers have appropriate public liability insurance. If the body organising the conference is not a member of BCA, then it is important that the conference is clearly in NAMHO's name. NAMHO is specifically named in the BCA insurance documents and there is clear reference to provision of conferences. There was some discussion with Les Williams (also Chairman of BCA) and clearly no problem.

There may have been an issue this year with CMT but I will explain this separately to Roy.

(Roys note, there wasn't)

All 10 places for BCA Temporary Insurance were taken up but two of these did not turn up for the conference.

### Summary

Overall, I felt that this was another very successful NAMHO Conference – some aspects of this were more luck than judgement (I put the good weather down to luck rather than Roy's Buddhist prayers), but it could not have been successful without the effort put in by Roy and a host of other persons.

The venue was good and the numbers attending good – I think that there would have been problems had the numbers been as high as Roy wished for.

My main observation for future conferences is the need for plenty of good car parking space and an appreciation of the increase in use of camper vans.

Steve Holding

9<sup>th</sup> July 2019

From Neil (Delegate)

- Site locations and travel times. Whilst the sites may be well known to the local team, they were all a mystery to me. Although lots more information was provided at the site, the booking information didn't prevent me from making some basic errors.

-> Location. Whilst an OS grid reference is definitely a gold standard, many commonly used mapping websites/ sat navs won't accept them, especially for route planning. Offering an approximate post code would make it much easier to find a route - especially since most mines are nowhere near a population centre that is easy to search for.

There are tools such as this one that can help with conversion

The other useful bit is travel times - I got caught out (twice) by booking a morning and afternoon trip without there being enough travel time between them. A simple matrix of travel times would have helped me avoid this error (or scheduling all trips with enough travel gap), which was frustrating and meant I missed (and potentially prevented other people going on) 2 trips.

- Trip start time clarification would also help - is the start time 'be there' or 'be ready to go underground'. On one trip I arrived just on the meeting time after a long drive from Ystrad Einion to Cymystwyth to find no-trace of anyone, but a lot of parked cars. (I still had a nice afternoon wandering the surface though)

- car sharing: it would be great if there was some way for delegates to be able to communicate with each other and potentially share travel to trip sites - it won't always work out, but it does seem wasteful for 6 or 7 cars each to take 1 person to the same place - and even trickier if you don't have transport. I picked up someone en route who was walking from the campsite to Frongoch (and had apparently walked to Cymystwyth the day before) after travelling by bus.

- sharing contact details. It would also be helpful to have a list of delegate contact details - for those who are happy to share them. This could be achieved by an opt-in on the booking system.

From Nigel (Admin)

From the point of view of reception, I think as close as possible but not in the lecture hall is ideal. People changing trips was a significant (but reasonable) workload which I will simplify before next year. The other thing

I felt we were weak on was site descriptions (e.g. Level Fawr at PRG cf. Frongoch) and locations. I will adapt the website to have an NGR for where to leave the road, where to park as well as where the mine is. Allt-y-Crib and Bwlch Glas definitely needed "where to turn off" NGRs.

One thing I forget to take out of my van and should have had at reception was a first aid kit. Some things I brought (scanner and laminator) were not used but still should be taken - just in case.

The only real problem I felt was out of anyone's control and that was communication between reception and leaders just before and after trips.

From Emma (Admin) (In answer to Nigel)

Thank you for including me in your thoughts Nigel. I didn't see Steve's original email attachment, but I felt that Reception was well equipped and ready for most eventualities.

Thinking it through, in reception, I think we should have a clear notice saying exactly where the reception hall is, with grid reference and post code, and a note of the nearest A&E department. Luckily we didn't need anything like that this time, but it's like an umbrella. Have it, and you won't need it.

Perhaps next time we should have door insulation strips for slamming doors, just in case. Also spare pointy wooden sticks for attaching notices to, and a mallet.

The laminator comes into its own in rainy weather. All the signs we printed would have needed laminating if the weather had been wet.

Be aware, Nigel, when preparing trip-person numbers that quite a few people asked the individual leader if they could join the trip (for non-SRT ones) and did. This would possibly balance out the no-shows.

## 2/Accounts

### NAMHO 2019. Simplified Trading surplus and loss account

Turnover	£7,830.00	
	Less:	
	Meals	£2,510.00
		£5,320.00
Costs		
	Camping	£1,806.00
	Event	£1,109.00
		£2,915.00
Trading surplus	£2,405.00	

Expenses: Event Printing	£174.40
Halls	£310.00
RF-OOP	£185.00
Nigel-OOP	£140.45
Refunds	£199.85
SCMC OOP	£100.00
Total costs	£1,109.70

#### Camping

Showers	£625.00
Bowser	£175.00
4 toilets	£200.00
Disabled toilet	£90.00
Service	£125.00
Sub total	£1,215.00
VAT	£243.00
Ins	£54.50
Total	£1,512.50
Site hire	£293.80
Grand Total	£1,806.30

#### NOTES ON THE ACCOUNTS

1/ Main figures are rounded out

2/ "OOP" = Out of pocket (expenses). Typical RF: Hangers and fittings, pipework, HiViz jackets etc. ND: badges, paper, ink, wallets (delegate packs) etc. SCMC: Donation of £100 towards rigging and ropes. Detailed figures are available.

3/ Figures for turnover obtained from bankings as figures from other sources have been complicated by people double booking etc. There was also a 'cash account' running at the event from which expenses were deducted. However figures from other sources reconciled to within £100 of the bankings anyway.

4/ Site charges were as originally agreed plus water and electricity plus an £100 gratuity paid to the Playing Fields Association and to Lisburne Hall. Church Hall hire was rounded up to £50 to cover electricity used.

5/ Refunds were given to non paying delegates who had paid in error, plus a couple who had paid but had to cancel due to family bereavement. (50% refund). Also some cancelled meal tickets that were subsequently sold on.

I hereby certify that to the best of my knowledge and belief the above figures give a true and accurate representation of the financial affairs of the NAMHO 2019 Conference.

Roy Fellows July 2019