Cwmorthin terrace
Comments on proposed conservation scheme

Introduction


The following comments in response to that article have been selected from the AditNow mining history web forum (http://www.aditnow.co.uk/community/viewtopic.aspx?t=8730 where they can be seen in full) and the persons making the comments are, in the main, people with a strong interest in the slate quarrying history of the area and particularly in recording the surface and underground remains. Many are local to the Blaenau Ffestiniog area. The comments were made during the period 31st October to 3rd November 2013.

The comments have been lightly edited to remove spelling mistakes and correct capitalisation etc. Other editorial alterations have been bracketed [ ]. Comments considered not directly relevant to the discussion have been omitted. The comments are presented in chronological order and have been numbered to allow future reference to them.

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Comments

1. While I’m in favour of capping the stone work to stop the cottages deteriorating further, I personally don’t want to see new footpaths laid down going round the lake, information boards going up etc. Cwm car park is full most weekends as it is, more cars, more people, more dog fouling and more litter strewn everywhere. Cwn is a lovely place, whatever the weather, peaceful and tranquil, all that will be lost. I have lived in Ffestiniog all my life and these are my opinions. Over to the rest of you ...

2. I agree with [comment 1 above]. It’s a ruin, and it is gently returning to nature. It has been photographed endlessly and documented. Conserve it by
all means, but it seems a lot of money to spend in a town that has just lost its hospital, has very little affordable housing and fewer jobs. A few jobs might be created in prettifying the cwm, I suppose, but as [said above], the downside will be the litter, cars, and possibly unwelcome attention [to the underground workings] from the health and safety brigade.

3. I think much depends on what the actual plan details are. Article says: “The money, if approved, would pay for repairs to stop the ruins deteriorating further.” This suggests consolidation work and nothing more.
We don’t want to loose the place but we don’t want it turning into a sanitised tourist attraction either. Right?
The Daily Post also reports that they want to create a circular pathway around the lake with historical interpretation boards. Not sure how I feel about that bit.

4. Isn’t the current path sufficient enough? I fail to see the point in putting a circular path around the lake, most people who go up there are either climbers, mine explorers or hill walkers/ramblers. So its not really going to benefit the average person out for a small walk. Maybe a board with old pictures explaining a bit of the history behind the site wouldn’t be too bad and I’m all for preserving the cottages, maybe some money should see its way to Rhosydd chapel as well as that can’t have much longer left without any work doing to it.

5. I am all for saving the cottages but part of Cwm’s charm is its perceived remoteness. Creating paths and notice boards will ruin this. Just waiting for the phrase “Wheelchair Access” to rear its head. Why can’t people leave things alone!

6. I would not worry too much about [comment 5], even if the road up from the car park were tarmaced most people would have a heart attack pushing a loaded wheel chair up it. If a motorized wheel chair could do the trip I suspect we would all consider changing to electric cars.

7. We have had a lot of this in the Tamar Valley – it totally changes the character of the very thing that well meaning people are trying to preserve. It is very easy to destroy that intangible “something” that makes a place special. Almost impossible to get it back.
Consolidate the structures and then leave it at that. Those who want to explore and find out will.

8. Leave it – let nature take its course. It will win, it is inevitable. Like Canute trying to hold back the sea …
9. I like the idea of conserving what's left and like [comment 4]’s take on what should be done.

As others have said, sanitise it and its charm is ruined forever. There are enough paths for folk to do a circular tour - the old Conclog Tramway bed on LHS past Cwm Chapel and later tramway course / path up RHS to Rhosydd.

It’s the wildness and raw beauty of Cwm that gives it’s charm for those of us that know it and for the few more who might find it. Hoards of people would spoil the isolation and raw beauty and bring the inevitable litter and other rubbish.

General tourists go to Llechwedd or the quarrying museum in Llanberis for a view of what slate quarrying / mining was all about.

Am I being a spoilsport?

10. I’m with [comment 8] on this one ...

As much as I don’t want to actually see it all fall down ... I’d rather that than see some concrete topped walls and bloody information boards all over the place, if you want to see window dressing etc. head over to Llechwedd.

Some mines will inevitably decay to a shadow of their former selves ... that’s just life.

11. If one visits the St Just mining area [in Cornwall] a lot of consolidation work has been done down there without the sanitisation that is upsetting us all. It can be done. It better than seeing it all fall down.

12. I’m definitely donating [to the proposed project]. People are fascinated about this area, and I’ve bumped into a few people up there who haven’t known anything about what the buildings were for and upon educating them they’ve become even more fascinated. I myself am fascinated by the area and its industry for that exact reason.

I’m not entirely sure what Blaenau’s future involves when it comes to industry, but I can only imagine tourism will be a massive part of that, and whatever draws more people in can only benefit the local economy. I can only hope that any conservation work carried out will be delicate and faithful, but I’m prepared to take the risk, mainly because I honestly couldn’t imagine the area without the terrace and its chapel, which combined with it’s landscape and weather is the most hauntingly beautiful location I have ever visited.

13. I personally think if anything is to be done, then the parking area could be enlarged a bit, as you often have to park further down the road, even at the café. I feel it would be nice if the old miners’ garden area was tidied up and the rubbish removed from the pelton wheel pit. As for the rest of Cwmorthin, leave it to mother nature, next thing you know is the Rhosydd dual carriageway with a KFC and Ikea at Croesor.
14. I think everyone with an interest (walkers, mine explorers, anglers, historians, mountain bikers, dirt bike riders, local authorities etc), in the Cwmorthin area needs to sit round a table and have a sensible discussion before any rash decisions are made!

15. I’m not sure I understand why a bit of conservation work is considered such a bad thing? [I] can think of plenty of places where its been done sympathetically with long term benefits – i.e. the whole thing doesn’t fall down next time there’s a freeze/thaw.

16. Looking at the [pictures], and considering the amount asked for, put a roof on it and use it for a club hut, generator and water pump, job done!

17. A little conservation is a good idea. Save what’s there but certainly don’t try and rebuild anything. Notice boards would really ruin the place. They just wouldn’t blend in. As for people not knowing what the buildings are – I’m sorry, it’s a bit bloody obvious!

18. I can’t say that I’m convinced that notice boards would ruin the place; what with its farming and quarrying it is a man-made environment after all and not a truly wild place ...

Taking somewhere like Grassington Moor as an example, information boards can be relatively discrete yet still serve a very useful purpose, particularly if care is taken to ensure that the content is accurate.

19. I would disagree with [comment 18]. There seems to be a desire (by urban-based planners?) to urbanise and sanitise the landscape with information boards, way marks, signposts, paved paths etc.

Cwm Idwal is, to my mind, a terrible example of somewhere that used to be a relatively wild place. It’s been very much tamed by wide flagged footpaths with steps etc. The creation of a visitor centre at Ogwen Cottage and street lamps in the car park there all detract from the wildness of the place, particularly in winter or at night. The paths on Snowdon (not just the summit) are even worse.

I’m not keen on the conservation of buildings. I think the main thing is to record what exists. Conservation, no matter how carefully and sympathetically done, adds new material or makes changes to the existing structure and adds an element of artificiality – like a ‘ruin’ specially built as a landscape feature to ‘improve’ the view. Whilst I don’t condone vandalism or demolition of such buildings, I would prefer to see their gentle decay, or even rebuilding and reuse, rather than conserving them in their dilapidated state.
I came across the following (Gwilym R. Tilsley, extract from ‘Cwm Carnedd’)

A gwaith dyn, fel brethyn brau  
Yn braenu rhwng y bryniau.

Which I translated as:

... and a man’s work, like rotten cloth  
Decaying amongst the hills.

It summed up my feelings on this subject perfectly.