

Conserving special features

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Upland Ecologist

So many of our uplands are bare and devoid of wildlife, so we need to take particular care of the special habitats and species which have retreated to the places where grazing animals cannot reach.



A rare upland Saxifrage. It is not the fault of climbers and mountaineers that such species are rare but as our sport takes place in the very areas in which they grow, we need to take special care to ensure that they are not subject to even further damage.



Voluntary climbing restrictions to protect nesting birds are well established



Gorges and gorge walking

Wooded gorges on the western seaboard of the UK are wonderful, damp, humid places where a range of species including mosses, lichens and ferns can be found





Wilson's Filmy-fern



Beech fern



Black-eyed Susan lichen





With the increase in popularity of gorge walking, these species are vulnerable to damage.

A seminar was held to bring together outdoor leaders and conservationists to exchange information and find ways to avoid potential damage.

Groups in Gorges

Reconciling Conservation and Recreation

The damp confines of Wales' gorges have a magical air about them. Guarded by steep sides, their difficult access offers a sanctuary for ancient woodlands, providing an extremely important habitat for plants and lichens.

Some gorges are valued venues for outdoor recreation and education. On this DVD Ray Woods urges visitors to enjoy the privilege of visiting such a fascinating environment but to tread lightly, adopting a minimum impact approach to leave them pristine for future generations.



"These gorges are our ecological equivalents of the rain forest. Some moss, liverwort and lichen colonies found within these places are internationally rare and protected by European legislation.

They are very vulnerable; a colony could easily be wiped out by a boot or rucksack brushing against them. But enjoy them, these habitats are going to be one of the rarest, most special places you will ever visit in your life."

Ray Woods, Ecologist

A 2Rays Production for



Cronfa Her Hamdden Ddiwr | Gymru



Asiantaeth yr Amgylchedd Cymru
Environment Agency Wales



Cwmwr Cais Gwlad Cymru
Countryside Council for Wales



In addition to on site training, a DVD was produced and provided to all relevant education centres with information on the ecology and importance of the gorges and with a code of conduct to help avoid any damage. This has been very successful.

Winter climbing

Relatively little conflict between summer climbing and plantlife.



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Winter climbing and mountain plants prefer the same environment - cold, north/north-east facing cliffs with water seepage. Little conflict when there is a good cover of snow and/or ice, however.....

....good winter climbing conditions in the UK (especially England and Wales) do not often occur and there is often broken snow/ice cover.

This together with an increase in numbers climbing plus more activity on open buttresses in 'lean' conditions means that damage to plants in cracks and on ledges is possible.



The same location in winter and in summer





Tall-herb ledge vegetation, a special feature on upland cliffs supports species such as roseroot, ladies mantle, globeflower and angelica. Trampling when the ground isn't frozen can damage this habitat.



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Snowdon lily - one of many arctic-alpine species with small populations in, isolated sites. We need to protect these vulnerable species and help their numbers to grow so they can adapt to future threats such as climate change.

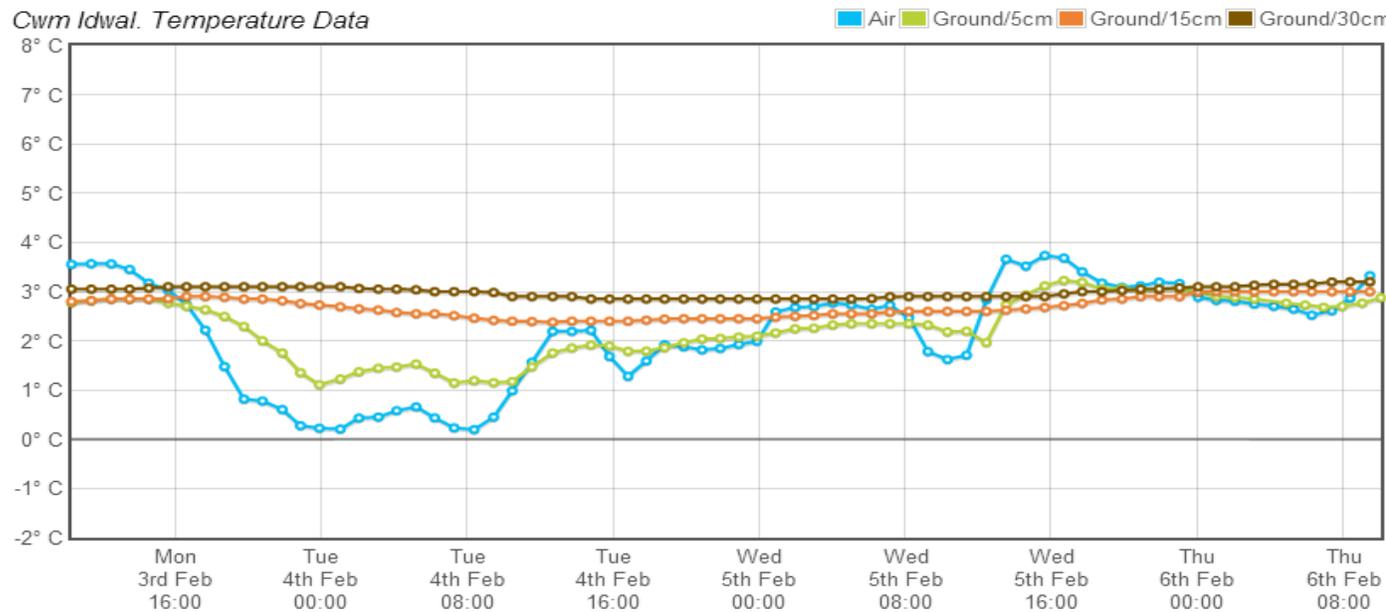


Moss campion





Temperature recording sensors were installed at sites in the Lake District and North Wales to provide web-based information so climbers can make informed decisions on whether or not to climb on a specific cliff and so hopefully avoid causing damage when the ground is not frozen.



14 DAYS

7 DAYS

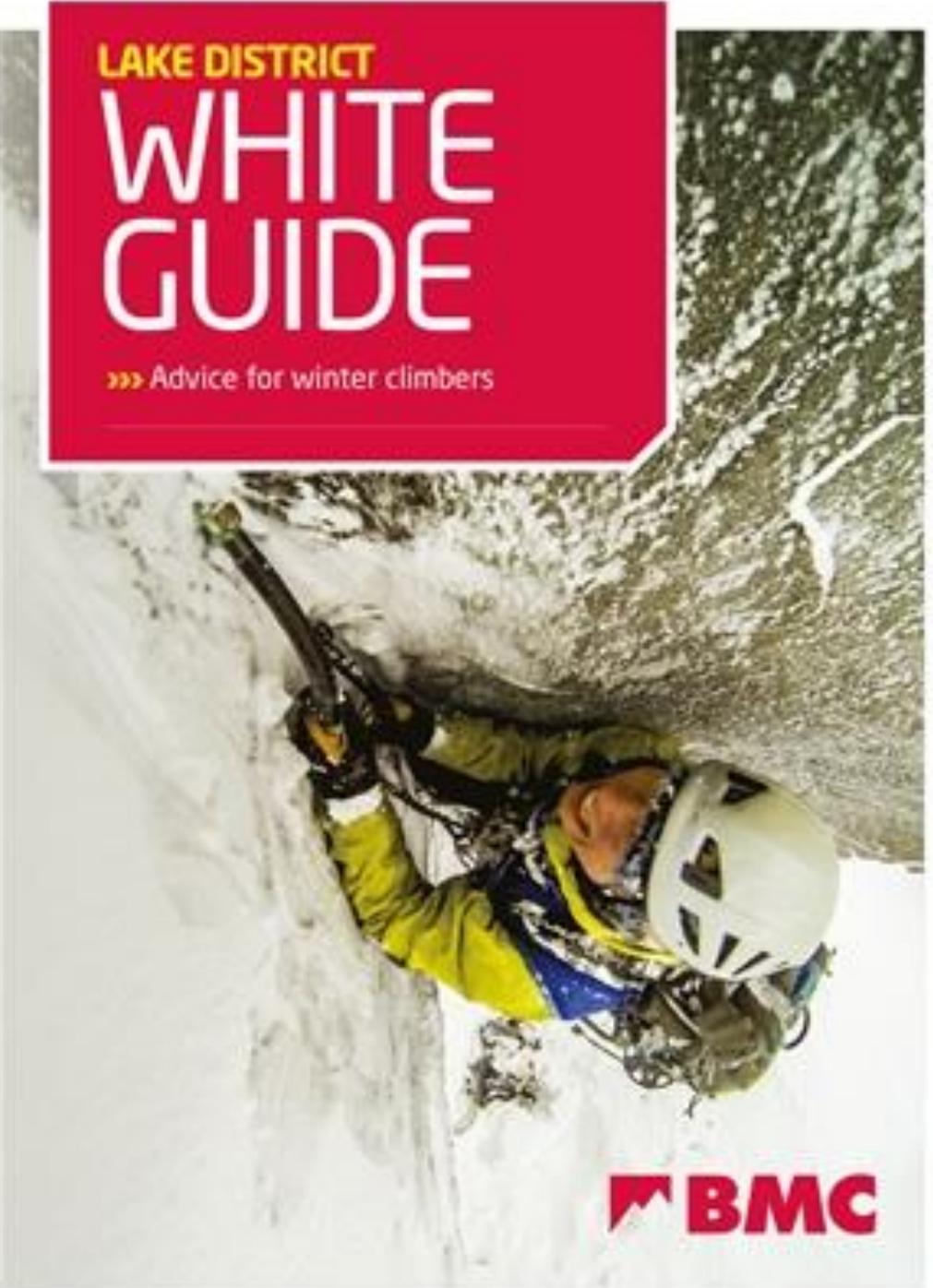
3 DAYS

North Wales White Guide

Reconciling Conservation and Recreation
Winter Climbing in Snowdonia



Information on species and habitats, the reasons for conservation concern and advice on best practice.



Clogwyn y Garnedd - Great Gully area

Both White Guides have topos showing climbing routes and the areas where we know rare species grow or which are particularly rich in plants. If winter climbing conditions are good climbing is possible if care is taken. If conditions are not good, these areas should be avoided.



From UK winter climbing forum:-

"The 850m measurements of the Cwm Idwal Winter Climbing Information Project suggests Snowdonia isn't worth a 3 hr each way journey this weekend. The ground isn't cold enough yet".

"To quote a mate of mine who went up to have a look on Friday...; "Not looking good. Turf is wet and snow is all slush. I'm turning back."
I'd personally give it a miss, especially considering the sensitive plants around that area."

The conversation around this issue is starting!



Before

Helvellyn summit showing effects of trampling on the fragile montane vegetation



After

Helvellyn summit after 'stone scattering' a technique which encourages people to keep to a more defined path and allows the vegetation to re-establish itself.



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Whether we are climbers or hill walkers, we all need to be concerned about the state of our upland wildlife and the land management which has resulted in it's current restricted distribution.

To protect this wildlife we need:-

Education
Inspiration
Dialogue
Compromise
Trust