



# Route & Brânch

Issue 8

Still issued on time

Winter 2012

## Wishing you all a merry Christmas and a happy new year

Thank you all for your support and encouragement over the past year. We intend to do our best to keep the woodland a beautiful, safe and tranquil place to visit as well as encouraging nature in all its glory. Most of the improvements on the ground are now complete but if you want a tour of what has been done, join one of David Williams' guided walks in the new year.

It's been a year of mixed fortunes. We have created a new pond and several new tracks. The enterprise has got off to a good start despite the general economic gloom and a lot of wood has been cut and processed ready for sale.

However, it has not been a good year for trees in general. Phytophthora Ramona continues its relentless march across south Wales, threatening the larch trees. Now the chalara fungus is



causing ash trees to die. Fortunately, we don't have many ash trees in the woodland but the threat of imported tree disease is constant.

With the creation of Natural Resources Wales, the Forestry Commission will no longer be in existence. As they are the ones

who gave us the initial grant to buy Blaen Brân as well as much advice over the years, it is a source of worry.

I doubt if any of us is expecting a lovely white Christmas this year but at least the picture can remind us of how beautiful the woodland looks in the snow.



*The woodland in the snow.*

## Blaen Brân: What's occurin'

As we see increasing numbers of visitors to the wood, it seemed a good idea to plan some walks to cover different sections of the wood and explain about the different woodland compartments and how they feature in our original BBCW management plan – as well as outlining some of the things we have been doing to meet the long term aims for them.

Some areas for example are not going to be planted with trees, but remain as 'marshy and wet'; whilst in other areas the plan is to steadily replace plantation conifer with native broadleaf trees.

The first walk was planned for Saturday Dec 8<sup>th</sup> – which fortunately was fine and



*The new pond - people seem to be very much in favour.*

sunny! The idea was to have a one hour stroll with plenty of 'walk and talk'. Some five people turned up – including a couple who had never been up before, and

people were genuinely interested to hear about things (at least they asked plenty of questions!).

We were fortunate to see quite a few birds – including a great view of a crow mobbing a buzzard against a clear blue sky. The new pond attracted great interest – with suggestion for a rustic bench or two to set it off nicely, and the 'alamo' motor bike barricade also attracted a lot of interest.

Everyone said they would be back for the next walk (three more are planned) so look out for notice of these – and take the chance to join the 'walk and talk'!



The Newsletter of  
Blaen Brân Community  
Woodland

## Have you seen the magic mushroom trail?

If you walk along the top track just below the larch, you come eventually to a bench set above the track. Look above that and to the left and you can see some wooden mushrooms. There is a path leading from the bench that takes you onto a newly constructed trail that is festooned with these wooden mushrooms.



*Mushrooms on the new trail through a boggy area in the top section of the wood.*

Opening up this path shows yet another ecosystem in the woodland, this one being mainly bog and silver birch. As it is so soft underfoot, care had to be taken to ensure the trail was safe. So decking was constructed over the worst areas, using, of course, larch planks from our own trees and a "dead fence" was made from branches to guide walkers around.

But why mushrooms? Dave Higginson, forest manager, explains. "I'd seen someone carve a mushroom from a tree stump so decided to have a go myself. It looked so good we agreed to make a number of them, put some seats in and turn it into a fairy wood."

I think you'll agree, it looks enchanting. Hopefully, if we actually get a summer next year, children will be able to explore and play games on the magic mushroom trail.



*Decking across one of the boggier sections. You can see the dead fence to the left making sure people keep safe.*

## Causing a fence

It's hard work keeping the paths in good order and we ask cyclists and horse riders to stay on the roads in the woodland from October to the end of March. Most are sensible and are only too happy to oblige. Unfortunately, a minority disregard this and cause untold damage. So, reluctantly we have had to place posts where the tracks leave the roads to prevent misuse.



## What's On

### Volunteer work

A working party does maintenance in the woods. Contact Dave 07787525875 or email [blaenbran@gmail.com](mailto:blaenbran@gmail.com) for more details. Easier work takes place on Sundays. Technical stuff happens during the week.

### Woodland walk

The second of these woodland walks, as described on the other page, is provisionally arranged for **Saturday January 19th**, meet at the car park at **10.30 am**.

## For all details of events

Come visit our website

[www.blaenbran.org.uk](http://www.blaenbran.org.uk)

Or join us on

facebook

## Digging up the past

Most of you will have seen the signs advertising the archaeological dig by the remains of the fan house of Porth Mawr colliery. The site has long been an eyesore with ugly old railings around it and no clue as to what it actually was.

The JCBs arrived beforehand to clear the railings and the dig began December 10th. Fortunately the weather was dry but cold the week of the dig so work was able to be done. Not a lot was found but the site has been cleared and can now be made into something that pays homage to our industrial heritage.



*Volunteers digging at the remains of the old fan house. A lot of effort went in for very little return but a good time was had by all.*