

Brief history of the SEWHGPG Club

Courtesy of Paul Dancy (former chairman of SEWHGPGC).



The South East Wales Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club can trace its own roots back to the early '70s when a group of pilots from the Swansea area formed the Welsh Hang Gliding Club.

Their idea was that the new Club would "branch out" and incorporate as many local Welsh groups as possible. Each group would have full autonomy in running its own affairs but would operate under the umbrella of a representative central council.

In December 1975 a local branch of the Welsh Hang Gliding Club (WHGC) was formed to look after the interests of fliers living within the area bounded by Bridgend to the west, Brecon to the north, and the river Monnow to the east. This was initially known as the Heads of the Valleys Branch. Ewart Jones, who was the first man in Wales to own a kite, was elected as Chairman, and Hugh Hutchinson became Secretary.

By early 1976 a new structure and constitution for the WHGC or Clwb Crog-Gleidio Cymru had been agreed. It now consisted of three Branches, the original West Glamorgan Branch, the Heads of the Valleys Branch and the Wye Valley Branch.

In 1977 the situation became more complicated when Jerry Breen established a proprietary hang gliding club based at the Welsh Hang Gliding Centre in Crickhowell. This caused considerable confusion and a dilution of already scarce hang gliding resources. It soon became clear that having two clubs covering the same area was not in the best interests of local fliers.

At a joint meeting held in Cwmbran in December 1977 members of the Heads of the Valleys Club and Jerry Breen's Club decided to amalgamate and form the SE Wales Hang Gliding Club. Alistair Benn was elected as the first Chairman of the new club, and Hugh Hutchison became its first secretary. Initially the club had around 57 members, and Membership fees were £8.00

plus, a £2.00 joining fee.

By 1978 the old Welsh Hang Gliding Club was no more, and its branches had all become clubs in their own right. The new Clubs decided to retain a close relationship with one another by forming the Welsh Hang Gliding Federation. The initial members of the Federation were:

The North Wales Hang Gliding Club

The Mid Wales Hang Gliding Club

The SW Wales Hang Gliding Club

The SE Wales Hang Gliding Club

Later that year they were joined by the Beacons Park Hang Gliding Club.

Each club within the Federation was truly independent, and was affiliated to the sport's UK governing body, the British Hang Gliding Association (BHGA). At that time the BHGA had around 3,000 individual members, 200 of whom were Federation club members.

The explosion of interest in paragliding in the 1980's brought further change. The South East Wales Hang Gliding Club was one of the first in the country to incorporate the new sport within its activities, and in 1989 the decision was taken to change the name of the club to the present one. That year also saw the introduction of the Club's first combined hang gliding and paragliding sites guide.

In 1991 the SEWHG&PGC became an affiliate member of the British Association of Paragliding Clubs (BAPC), which at that time was the UK governing body for paragliding.

The following year, on 1st October 1992, after a lengthy and sometimes acrimonious debate, the BHGA and the BAPC finally agreed to merge and form the British Hang Gliding and Paragliding Association (BHPA), with headquarters in Leicester.

By this time the Welsh Hang Gliding Federation had become largely dormant. The lack of any issues to unite them had sadly allowed the Welsh clubs to slowly drift apart.

Then in December 1996 representatives from the majority of Welsh clubs met to discuss the best way forward. The meeting proved productive. Everyone present expressed a desire to see improved communications and the re-establishment of reciprocal flying rights within Wales via the Federation.

The Federation was back in business, but as it now included paragliding pilots, a new name was required. In March 1997 the name was changed to the Welsh Free Flight Federation. At that time the Federation was made up of the following clubs:

Snowdonia Sky Sports

The North Wales Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club

The Mid Wales Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club

The South West Wales Soaring Club

The South East Wales Hang Gliding and Paragliding Club

In 1998 the SEW club successfully purchased the Bloreng (just under 1000 acres of land) from the Coal Board. It is designated a site of specific scientific interest (SSSI).

In 2011 it was agreed that the The Malvern Hang Gliding Club would be accepted into membership of the Welsh Free Flight Federation as it was the resident club for two Welsh flying sites, giving us the structure that remained in place until 2016. In 2016 the SEWHGPGC withdrew from the WFFF as part of a restructure and a desire to move in a different direction.

Since 2016 the SEW club has expanded from around 200 members to 500 to 600 members today. The core values of the club are still to promote free flight in the South East Wales area, whilst also promoting environmental concerns alongside this.