

## PROTECTING OUR LAST WILDERNESS

The virtues of the Cambrian Mountains have been extolled in a passionate speech to a new group set up to secure better protection and recognition for the area.

TV naturalist Iolo Williams was acclaimed as the first president of the Cambrian Mountains Society, and told the group's launch meeting: "This is the last wilderness in Wales, and it's where I come to escape. Parts of north Wales are lovely, but there are people everywhere - they're like ants.

"This is the most overlooked part of Wales and maybe the nicest, so you'd think it would be better valued. Yet it has faced threats from reservoirs, inappropriate forestry and windfarms.

"It is a real shame that the National Park proposals in the 1970s didn't go ahead, because the Cambrian Mountains need to be valued and protected for future generations."

The packed meeting, held in the Elan Valley Visitor Centre near Rhayader, also heard from CMS chair David Bateman, who echoed Iolo's views but warned that future plans for the mountains depended on the consent and involvement of the farming community.

"But at the moment farming is in trouble, and when farming is in trouble then we are all in trouble. Because this is when other things like inappropriate forestry and wind turbines step in to fill the void - and create problems for the rest of us," he said.

However, new European policies designed to support farming included the idea of "bottom-up development strategies", and this meant that a group like CMS could have a major influence on the future of its area provided it worked in conjunction with local farmers and other residents.

He added that when the National Park proposal for the Cambrians failed, one reason given was that the designation of Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty might have been more appropriate, and so the group would campaign for AONB status.

In the first CMS elections, the meeting voted in Prof Bateman as chair, Rhys Davies as secretary and Richard Wilson as treasurer.

The meeting also elected five trustees to the CMS committee: Dave Bradney, Roger Bray, Pete Jennings, Anne Wilson and Martin Wright.

Elections were followed by a lively question and answer session, in which

the issues discussed included member involvement in decision-taking and how to root the group firmly in both linguistic communities.

Prof Bateman commented: "We want as much member involvement as we can get."

After the formalities, members and guests stayed on for a scintillating slide-show talk on Welsh birds by Iolo Williams, and in the afternoon there were guided walks exploring the wildlife, archaeology and geology of the area.

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#### NOTES TO EDITORS

The Cambrian Mountains as defined by CMS include parts of Ceredigion, Powys and Carmarthenshire - a map showing the boundaries is available.

The meeting took place on Tuesday 25 October.

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