

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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13th National Open Forum Saturday 25 April 2009 – Plas y Brenin

The following notes summarise the 13th National Open Forum meeting, which was held before the AGM and took place between 1.30 and 3.00pm. The meeting was attended by approximately 65 members.

The President Charles Clarke welcomed everyone to the Open Forum and introduced those on the top table – David Lanceley (BMC Honorary Treasurer), Rab Carrington, Rehan Siddiqui and Pat Littlejohn (Vice Presidents) and Dave Turnbull (CEO). He explained that the purpose of the Forum was to provide an opportunity for people to raise and discuss any issues not on the AGM agenda. He went on to request items for discussion from the floor; the following items were then raised:

- 1. KC Gordon (Individual Member) asked whether the BMC had made contingency plans for the possibility of the withdrawal of the Sport England grant for 2009-2012 after the next General Election.*
- 2. Gordon Adshead (Rucksack Club) queried the source of financing for the Access & Conservation Officer (Wales) post. Steve Andrews (Climbers' Club) asked what the Officer was going to do.*
- 3. Peter Dixon (Wayfarers' Club) asked how much money the BMC had allocated to competition climbing and asked how many BMC members are involved in competition climbing.*
- 4. Terry Gifford (Climbers' Club / Alpine Club) wished to speak about the Sports Heritage Network.*
- 5. Stuart Llewellyn (Individual Member) raised the issue of event scheduling and questioned why the AGM and a round of the BMC Youth Climbing Series were on the same day. Charles Clarke suggested this would be a good opportunity to discuss having a national diary of events.*
- 6. Dave Turnbull proposed a discussion of the BMC's land management / land purchase policy.*

The above issues formed the agenda of the meeting.

1. Sport England grant

Dave Turnbull reported that the grant from Sport England for 2009-2012 totalled £1.287m. This was a 60% increase on the original grant for the previous 4-year period, although this had been supplemented by further funding during that period, which meant that the grant increase (comparing actual amounts received) currently stands at 30%. The grant is for the 4-year period is assured, and would not be affected by a change in government.

David Lanceley advised that there was no contingency for withdrawal of the grant, but that the BMC has significant reserves to call upon, keeping a minimum of 6 months running costs in reserve. Dave Turnbull added that the Sport England grant is a relatively small (about 15%) proportion of BMC income.

Richard Doubleday (Perkins Slade, BMC insurance brokers) said that in his experience of sports bodies he could not recall an occasion when grant funding had been withdrawn, other than

when it had been used for purposes other than those for which it was granted, or when the organisation was performing particularly badly.

2. Access & Conservation Officer (Wales)

David Lanceley advised that the Finance Committee had no objections to the appointment on financial grounds; he also noted that the 3-year post was not in the original 2010 budget but that it would be funded from reserves. Responding to a question about the work of the new Officer Bill Renshaw (Chair, BMC Access, Conservation & Environment Group) explained that some of the work would involve supporting the two current Access & Conservation Officers and so would not be exclusive to Wales. Mike Raine (Chair, BMC Cymru / Wales) added that part of the Officer's role would be to lobby Welsh organisations including the Welsh Assembly and the Sports Council for Wales on relevant issues.

Bill Renshaw went on to explain that increasing demands on the BMC to support area based access and conservation initiatives, especially in Wales. The BMC has not always been able to provide the full office support to all of these demands, and has had to rely heavily on volunteers (such as Henry Folkard in the Peak for example). An additional Officer would strengthen support in all areas, and a Welsh base would strengthen the BMC's lobbying position in Wales. Dave Turnbull added that the job description for the new Officer was a combination of the two current A&C Officer roles i.e. covering both policy development and site/area based work.

Dave Roberts (Midland Association of Mountaineers) welcomed this initiative and felt that the new Officer would act as 'glue' between mountaineers, land owners and the Authorities in Wales thus improving relationships and reducing the potential for misunderstandings.

Steve Andrews asked what would be in the new officer's in-tray when the job starts. Bill Renshaw replied that the Officer would have a number of responsibilities including the development of a legislative framework; pursuing strategic interests with other bodies including National Park Authorities, the MoD and CCW; funding issues; developing contacts; forward planning; local management issues (eg. Bwlch y Moch); and reporting to members.

3. Competition Climbing

Rab Carrington provided a brief summary of the history of the BMC's employment of a Competition Climbing Officer. For the past 10-12 years the BMC had employed an Officer in a combined role with the Climbing Walls Officer position. This reflected the development of indoor climbing in respect of the growth of indoor walls and the increasing participation of young people. He felt that the growing popularity of the BMC Youth Climbing Series was an example of the enthusiasm young climbers had for competition climbing. He also felt that supporting young competition climbers resulted in higher levels of achievement outside of competition climbing, and pointed to Ben Bransby and Leo Houlding as examples of people who competed when younger and who have subsequently climbed at the highest levels on crags and cliffs around the world.

Peter Dixon asked about the number of BMC members involved in competition climbing. Rob Adie (BMC Walls & Comps Officer) responded; c.500 young people participate in the annual Youth Climbing Series, 60 people took part in the recent Leading Ladder Final (from a field of c.450 participants) and c.100 people enter each of the British Bouldering Championships and the British Lead Climbing Championships. Mike Raine commented that there would be more climbers from all over Wales at the Beacon Climbing Centre for today's Youth Climbing Series event than members attending the Open Forum.

David Lanceley referred to the 2008 BMC Annual Report and Annual Accounts for information on BMC funding of competition climbing. The pie chart on page 8 of the Annual Report shows that net cost of the competitions programme is about 12% of the cost of all BMC specialist

programmes. This is shown in the 2008 Annual Accounts as £70,845, which equates to just over £1 per member.

Charles Clarke expressed his view that the BMC would be a very different and smaller organisation if it had nothing to do with competition climbing, and he felt that the organisation should encompass every aspect of the sport. He did not want to see a split in the BMC like the one between the UIAA and the IFSC.

Rab Carrington said that the approach taken by the BMC should be one of asking what it can do to support clubs like the Wayfarers' in addition to supporting other members who have an interest in competition climbing.

Vin Machin (Honorary Member) felt that if the BMC wasn't involved in competition climbing, another organisation would establish itself and may not have any interest in all the other forms of climbing.

Dave Musgrove (Individual / YMC / CC) warned that should climbing become an Olympic sport and if the BMC was not involved in competition climbing, any associated money might benefit competition climbing to the detriment of the rest of the sport.

Mick Johnson (CC / FRCC) recognised that competition climbing is a thorny issue but supported the BMC in its role.

Steve Andrews said he believed that many people were unwilling to join the BMC because of its support for competition climbing.

Mark Vallance (AC / CC) felt that competition climbing was a great activity for children, but wasn't sure if adults should be encouraged to participate.

Dennis Gray (AC) reminded everyone of the history of BMC involvement in competition climbing; at one time people began trying to stage competitions on natural crags, the BMC opposed this development, but in doing so agreed to support competitions on artificial walls.

Charles Clarke thanked everyone for their contributions to this topic, which he felt were useful for National Council members to hear.

4. Sports Heritage Network

Terry Gifford explained that the Mountain Heritage Trust (MHT) has been the heritage arm of the BMC since 2001, and that the BMC is involved in the 2012 Olympics through the Sports Heritage Network, which aims to increase public awareness of Britain's unique sporting heritage. One of the network's initiatives involves people identifying sporting heroes, objects and experiences that have inspired them and sharing them through the Our Sporting Life website – www.oursportinglife.co.uk

TG also advised that MHT had received Heritage Lottery Funding to catalogue and preserve Chris Bonington's archive.

Rehan Siddiqui reminded the meeting that MHT was currently funded by the BMC to the tune of £15k per year for 2009 and 2010.

Tom Ripley (Individual Member) asked where the Bonington archive would be displayed. TG advised that MHT was in discussion with the University of Cumbria about a permanent exhibition on the Ambleside campus.

5. Event scheduling

Charles Clarke felt that some form of national calendar hosted by the BMC would be a good idea. Clubs could submit their events, to increase publicity and to avoid date clashes.

Rab Carrington advised that the go-ahead had been given last week for a new online Events Module on the BMC website, which would incorporate BMC Area Meetings and other BMC events, and this could be expanded to include other events.

Iain McKenzie (Individual Member) reminded everyone that BMC Area Newsletters, produced by area volunteers, can be used to publicise events too.

Dave Turnbull explained that the AGM date is set a year in advance, so the clash with the Youth Climbing Series (YCS) must have been down to the organisation on the YCS.

6. Land management policy

Dave Turnbull explained that the BMC's policy on land purchasing / leasing was not to actively seek to purchase / lease crags – but that the BMC had in fact taken on a number of crags in recent years (i.e. Horseshoe Quarry, Craig y Longridge and Wilton One). He suggested that perhaps the organisation needed to re-visit the policy in light of these experiences.

Bill Renshaw advised that the main thrust of the policy is to be a purchaser of last resort and not to create a market in crags.

Henry Folkard noted that Horseshoe Quarry had been acquired in order to preserve climbing, and that there had also been interest in the site from a local shooting organisation. He felt it was beneficial politically for the BMC to be able to show it could manage such sites. HF also felt that the BMC's involvement with the Stanage Forum had benefitted climbers and walkers, and said that we are now faced with a change in ownership of the Eastern Edges (including Froggatt and Curbar) and the possible sale of the Roaches estate.

John Farrow (Rucksack Club) commented that acquisition costs come out of BMC funds, and if there is pressure to acquire more sites it becomes a strategic issue.

David Lanceley advised that the cost of acquiring Wilton One is in the 2008 accounts, and that there is no budget for future purchases.

Dennis Gray referred to the acquisition of Bwlch y Moch (Tremadog) when the landowner, for fear of rockfall and potential liability, proposed to ban climbing unless the BMC took over the site.

Steve Andrews warned that landowners might be keen to sell off crags if the BMC created a market.

Charles Clarke thanked everyone for their contributions, and suggested that we might utilise the presence of staff from Perkins Slade to discuss BMC Insurance.

BMC Insurance

CC introduced Richard Doubleday and David Fieldhouse from Perkins Slade, and asked whether BMC members were getting the possible best deal from Perkins Slade.

RD replied that the best and most effective cover for climbers and walkers was through an organisation like the BMC. The underwriters feel that the management of climbing and mountaineering is in good hands, and the claims experience is good. However premiums are

still high because of the potential for large claims, and the recession is likely to affect future premiums.

Scott Titt asked how the current low interest rates were affecting investment of premiums, and RD replied that they were increasing the pressure to raise premiums.

Mark Vallance said that he could get free travel insurance from his bank, but couldn't buy insurance just for climbing. RD said that the bank was being very selective and that there would be significant gaps in the cover provided. David Fieldhouse added that the bank policies had many exclusions – he worked for the financial services division of a bank before joining Perkins Slade.

Dave Musgrove related his experience of a travel insurance policy provided by a bank. There was no cover above 2000 metres, so his wife had been effectively uninsured when they visited Tuolumne Meadows whilst on a trip to California.

Dave Roberts said that trip duration limits were often reduced, and gave as an example travel insurance offered by a supermarket which had an individual trip limit of 40 days, compared to the BMC limit of 93 days.

DF reminded everyone that cover included Directors' and Officers' Liability, which was not covered by standard Public Liability policies.

Gareth Morgan (Individual Member) asked why there was not an option to increase the individual item cover for valuables such as cameras and tents. DF suggested this could be looked at as part of the BMC's annual insurance review; he also noted that cover for specific items could often be provided by household insurance.

Lyndon Gill (CC / Individual) said that he knew of climbers who were combining Austrian Alpine Club rescue and repatriation insurance with bank travel insurance, but that this did not give comprehensive coverage and that some climbers had incurred significant costs which could not be claimed on their insurance.

Phil Wickens (AC / Individual) asked why he had to take out an Expedition policy for a 2-month trip when he already had an annual Alpine & Ski policy. Would it not be possible and cheaper to offer an upgrade or top-up for the 2-month period rather than effectively being covered twice for the same period.

DF said that Perkins Slade would look into this scenario at the next review. DM asked if the review could look at a top-up option for all policies, not just the Expedition policy.

Arun Patel (BMC Membership Services Team) said that it was already possible to upgrade from one policy to another by paying the difference (e.g. extending the territorial coverage from Europe to Worldwide).

Charles Clarke summed up the meeting. He felt that the mood of the meeting indicated that the forum was a good idea and enabled freer conversation and discussion.

Tony Ryan
BMC Information Co-ordinator