



PRINCIPLES & PROPOSALS FOR GOVERNMENT ACTION

ON ACCESS TO THE COUNTRYSIDE FOR CLIMBERS, HILL WALKERS & MOUNTAINEERS

THE BMC – BACKGROUND

This Manifesto sets out the views of the BMC on access to the countryside of England and Wales, particularly to cliffs and mountain areas.

It calls on political parties to develop an integrated package of measures that will further secure and enhance sustainable public access to the countryside.

The BMC, with a membership of over 75,000, is the representative body for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in England and Wales. All of our activities typify the concept of quiet enjoyment of the countryside and bring significant benefits to users, local communities and society in general.

NEW SUPPORT NEEDED FOR ACCESS AND RECREATION

Opportunities for recreation, leisure and tourism, and enhancements to access infrastructure have enormous potential to deliver not only rural growth but a range of benefits, including improvements to public health, well-being and an increase in public understanding of the environment. Yet we are today faced with new challenges threatening access to our coast, our publicly owned areas and uncertainty over the renegotiation of access agreements. Public access and recreation must continue to be an essential component of government policy.

Increased public access to the countryside directly supports the government's ambition, set out in the Natural Choice: the Natural Environment White Paper (NEWP), to reconnect people with the natural environment. The Paper highlights the findings of the UK government's National Ecosystem Assessment, which asserts that the social value of people being able to access and enjoy the countryside is in excess of £10 billion per annum.

The Climbing Higher strategy is the Welsh government's 20-year vision

for sport and physical activity. It too recognises that increasing levels of physical activity and engaging local communities in more active lifestyles will make important contributions to other strategic priorities of the Welsh government.

More people walking and climbing could bring vast savings to the nation's health bill. Physical inactivity currently costs the NHS in England between £1 billion and £1.8 billion a year. Costs to the wider economy are conservatively estimated at £5.5 billion in sickness absence and £1 billion in premature deaths – a total of £8.3 billion¹.

There is good evidence that clear, easy to use, well-promoted path and trail networks and secure access to our countryside influence more people to make day trips to an area or stay for longer periods – thereby increasing visitor spend. For example, since it was created in 2003 Hadrian's Wall path has brought £19 million into the communities around it², and in Wales around 2.89 million visitors per year have used the Wales Coast Path since it opened in 2012, generating £16 million for the Welsh economy³. It has been estimated that walking as a countryside leisure activity involves expenditure of £6.1 billion a year, supporting £2.8 billion in income and up to 250,000 jobs⁴.

Greater public access to and enjoyment of the natural environment can help to deliver multiple benefits.

“ Greater public access to and enjoyment of the natural environment can help to deliver multiple benefits. ”

INTRODUCTION

For over 60 years the BMC has secured sustainable access to cliffs and mountain areas in ways that do not threaten their natural beauty or wildlife and are in keeping with the needs of landowners. It has also lobbied for changes to primary legislation in order to ensure permanent access to areas of mountain, moor, heath, down and common land as well as along the coast.

With the introduction of the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW), the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) and the creation of the Wales Coast Path, provision for recreational access to the countryside has changed significantly in the last ten years. The CROW Act gives a right of access on foot to 865,000 hectares of 'open country' in England and Wales. This right of access has now been extended through Part 9 of the MCAA which secures the creation of a path around the coast of England and an associated margin of land which is accessible for the purposes of open-air recreation.

The BMC continues to work in partnership with landowners and conservation bodies to ensure successful access management, where all parties recognise and respect the legitimate interests of others and where recreation and conservation benefit mutually.

As a landowner and manager itself, the BMC is responsible for several areas of recreational space from woodland to disused quarries, and our expertise in environmentally sensitive land management practices is increasingly being called upon by private landowners, communities and other organisations.

ACTION FOR GOVERNMENT

The BMC calls on government to develop an integrated package of legislation, policy and practice based on our core principles and to consider the following actions:

1 Ensure coastal access is not jeopardised by public expenditure cuts

It is a statutory requirement for government to implement the coastal access rights under Part 9 of the MCAA around the whole of the English coast. Government must continue to fully support the roll-out of the England Coast Path and associated margin of land. In Wales, a firm commitment is needed to support the ongoing maintenance and improvement of the Wales Coast Path.

2 Support potential changes to access legislation in Wales

The BMC supports a review of the legislative framework that enables access to the countryside for informal recreation in Wales with the intention of securing improved and increased access to the outdoors while modernising and simplifying the current regulatory framework. This will help provide clarity and certainty over where people can go and what they can do – these changes must be enshrined in Welsh law.

3 Recognise and support informal recreation alongside sport

Informal recreation plays a fundamental role in facilitating the public's understanding and enjoyment of the natural

environment and offers the potential to deliver not only rural growth but improvements to public health and well-being. Government should fully support initiatives such as the Britain on Foot campaign led by the Outdoor Industries Association, which encourage more people to get active outdoors.

4 Understand personal risk in outdoor recreation and occupiers' liability

It is essential that government policy initiatives are based on the need to secure people's sense of freedom and adventure, rather than imposing restrictions for fear of perceived liability. Visitors should be able to exercise responsibility for themselves and explore the outdoors, as set out in the BMC Participation Statement.

5 Support use of agricultural subsidies to secure access opportunities

Landowners and managers are eligible for a wide variety of public funding support for land management purposes. The BMC believes that cross compliance with greater public access opportunities must be central to all such schemes.

6 Ensure no loss of public access or the conservation value of public land through sale or transfer

There must be a clear commitment that public access to land which is being considered for disposal is secured for future generations under any new management. Land must be maintained in a way that continues to provide and protect natural value and the public interest. The transfer of assets that are already publically owned should not involve costs to charitable or other community-based bodies.

7 Protect our countryside from inappropriate development and change

More of our countryside is now under threat from badly planned developments. Our wilder landscapes are particularly vulnerable. There has to be a continuing commitment to protect these areas from inappropriate developments and land management changes. We need a more sustainable approach to planning.

8 Dedicate public land to create permanent access rights

Where there are currently no legal access rights to publicly owned land, government must put these in place before any change in ownership. Private landowners should be encouraged to follow suit. Section 16 of CROW is an appropriate and existing mechanism to safeguard public access and reduce occupiers' liability.

9 Recognise the potential of quarries for recreational opportunities

The BMC believes that disused hard rock quarries are a potentially valuable recreational resource. We seek a better legal and planning framework that supports and realises the restorative potential of hard rock quarries for recreation and conservation and which will allay fears of liability.

10 Change the wording of the CROW ACT 2000 to match the MCAA 2009

The BMC supports the use of the phrase 'physical feature' in Section 1 of the Occupiers' Liability Act 1984, as in the MCAA 2009. This will be easier to objectify than 'natural features', the form of words used in the CROW Act 2000. The CROW Act and any subsequent Acts in Wales must also be amended to follow suit.

PRINCIPLES

The BMC has agreed a set of core access principles which should guide future policy and legislative proposals:

1 Recognise the benefits of access

Access to our countryside and green spaces has wide reaching benefits from greater recreational opportunities and a better understanding of the natural environment to increased well-being and a prosperous rural economy.

2 The right of access

Access to countryside on foot for quiet, informal recreation should be a basic right to be enjoyed by all.

3 Responsible access

All who enjoy access to the countryside whether by right or by permission must respect the land, its wildlife, the interests of those who live and work in the area, as well as other users.

4 Freedom to enjoy our open country

The freedom to enjoy the access rights set out in the CROW Act 2000 and the MCAA 2009 must be recognised and respected by all, with due consideration given to the need for land management restrictions.

5 The least restrictive option

The BMC has worked hard to negotiate access to areas of high conservation as well as high recreational value in England and Wales, and advocates managing access in a way that is of mutual benefit to recreation and conservation – adopting the least restrictive option.

6 Paying for access

Recreational visitors should not be required to pay for access to the countryside.

7 Management costs

Greater financial resources, principally from public funds, should be made available both to maintain and improve Rights of Way, and to support the management of open access and landscape-protected areas.

8 Liability

Landowners or occupiers should not incur any liability to protect visitors from personal injury from informal recreation on their land.

9 Freedom to take risks

The freedom to take risks and personal responsibility for your own safety is an integral part of recreation and adventure sport and must be upheld.

10 BMC Participation Statement

The BMC Participation Statement is accepted by our members. It states:

‘The BMC is the representative body that protects the freedoms and promotes the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, including ski-mountaineers. The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions.’



The number of people in England who go mountaineering (including climbing and hill walking) at least once a week has increased from 86,100 (2007-08) to 98,700 (2011-12)⁵.

15.3 million adults (16+) in England participate in moderate intensity level sport at least once a week for 30 minutes or more⁶.

The English adult population participated in an estimated 2.85 billion visits to the natural environment in the 12 months from March 2012 to February 2013. An estimated £21 billion was spent

during visits to the natural environment taken in England in 2012-13 – the majority of this expenditure being on food and drink (54%). The average expenditure per Leisure Visit is estimated at £28.16⁷.

As a sector, Tourism is the 5th largest industry in the UK with the contribution to the economy growing at 3.5% per annum. Outdoor recreation is at the core of this⁸.

It is estimated that for each mile of coastal path, £375,000 is delivered in income to coastal economies each year, supporting 33 FTE jobs⁹.

For more information, please contact

Dr Cath Flitcroft

E cath@thebmc.co.uk

T **0161 438 3333**

thebmc.co.uk/accessmanifesto



In Wales, please contact

Elfyn Jones

E elfyn@thebmc.co.uk

T **01690 720 124**

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

177–179 Burton Road, Manchester M20 2BB

T **0161 445 6111** F **0161 445 4500**

¹ Steven Allender, Charlie Foster, Peter Scarborough and Mike Rayner 2007, 'The burden of physical activity related ill health in the UK' in Journal of Epidemiology and Community Health 61

² Natural England (2003-2007) Economic Impact Study and Trail User Analysis, <http://www.nationaltrail.co.uk/HadriansWall/downloads.asp?PageId=191>

³ <http://wales.gov.uk/newsroom/environmentandcountryside/2013/6954882/?lang=en>

⁴ Costs and benefits of public access to the countryside – Literature Review, Natural England 2013

⁵ Sport England (2012) Active People Survey 6 (October 2011 to October 2012)

⁶ www.sportandrecreation.org.uk/lobbying-and-campaigning/sport-research/UK-fact-figures

⁷ Natural England (2013) Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment: The national survey on people and the natural environment – Annual Report from the 2012-13 survey (NECR122)

⁸ <http://www.visitbritain.org/britaintourismindustry/introbritaintourism/>

⁹ Christie, M. and Matthews, J. (2006). The Economic and Social Value of Coastal Walking in England, report for the Ramblers' Association