

# BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

177-179 Burton Road  
Manchester M20 2BB  
www.thebmc.co.uk

Tel: 0161 445 6111  
Fax: 0161 445 4500  
e-mail: office@thebmc.co.uk

## 19<sup>th</sup> National Open Forum Saturday 25 April 2015 – Plas y Brenin

The following notes summarise the 19<sup>th</sup> National Open Forum meeting, which was held prior to the BMC AGM and attended by c.50 members.

Scott Titt (ST) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced a number of people in the meeting who were formally involved in the running of the BMC: Brian Smith (Executive Committee, independent director); Deirdre Collier (Executive Committee, National Council); Rupert Davies (vice-president); Rehan Siddiqui (president elect); and Nick Kurth (vice-president elect); he also introduced Richard Doubleday and Andy Golbourne from Perkins Slade, the BMC's insurance brokers.

Questions were then taken from the floor; during the meeting the following topics were discussed:

- Insurance
- Mitigation of risk to club members
- AGM attendance
- Area structure
- Guidebooks
- Crag Care Fund
- Continuing historical record of BMC
- Lancashire climbing T-shirt
- Hill walking guides

### **a. Insurance**

Harry Marshall (individual member) asked why taking out BMC Travel & Activity Insurance was more expensive than becoming a member of the UK branch of the Austrian Alpine Club (AAC), which provided worldwide mountain rescue and repatriation insurance as part of its membership package, as well as reciprocal rights in alpine huts.

ST replied that BMC insurance provision seeks to provide members with cover for all eventualities and not expose them to the risk of being insufficiently covered. Also, comparing BMC and AAC insurance was not a straightforward like-for-like comparison.

Richard Doubleday (RD) said that Dave Turnbull (DT) had asked Perkins Slade to examine the model used by the AAC. One possible provider was identified, but adopting such a scheme would prove prohibitively expensive, requiring a substantial increase to membership subscriptions. It might also infringe Financial Conduct Authority regulations if members who did not need or want the cover were obliged to contribute to the scheme.

DT added that he had talked with the CEO of the AAC about its insurance scheme. It is only able to provide it because of the size of membership (400,000+), many of whose activities are relatively low risk, which means the claims rate is low. Even then, he felt that they wouldn't be able to launch such a scheme now.

Charles Gameson (individual member) asked if we had explored whether BMC members would be willing to pay higher subscriptions for inclusive insurance cover. RD advised that it would cost in excess of £30 per member to match AAC insurance cover.

Rehan Siddiqui (Climbers' Club) advised that a task group, of which he is a member, is currently analysing the insurance market and that different types of BMC insurance product may evolve in the future.

#### **b. Mitigation of risk to club members**

Peter Salenieks (club member) asked what was felt to be a reasonable expectation of clubs with regards to mitigation of risk to members.

ST replied that the series of Club Guidelines documents, hosted on the BMC website, provide guidance on a range of issues affecting clubs; one of the documents covers risk, responsibility, duty of care and liability. The clubs seminar event being held later in the day at Plas y Brenin also enabled club officials to discuss relevant issues and share good practice.

Rupert Davies (BMC vice-president, and a barrister by profession) explained that liability within the context of a club was different from that of the BMC.

RD added that the civil liability cover provided by the BMC effectively covers all activities approved by the BMC. He also referred to an online risk assessment programme run by the Lawn Tennis Association, which supported officials in the management of over 2,500 clubs. The LTA had offered to demonstrate the programme to the BMC.

#### **c. AGM attendance**

Martin Wass (individual member) said that the BMC Peak Area Meetings regularly see much better attendance than BMC AGMs, and asked what is being done to increase attendance at AGMs.

ST responded that AGM attendance is low. It is never going to be an exciting event, particularly when most members feel that the organisation is running smoothly and there are no controversial issues to be debated! Last year's AGM in Portland included guided walks, climbing masterclasses, and a band, but didn't significantly boost attendance. This year, the clubs seminar was scheduled to coincide with the AGM as an incentive for some members to attend both events.

DT added that on the same day as this year's AGM, over 300 young climbers, supported by more than 70 volunteers, were competing in the Youth Climbing Series Grand Final at the EICA Ratho. Members choose to attend the events and meetings which interest them.

#### **d. Area structure**

David Brown (Peak CC) felt that the introduction of 'one member one vote' in 2006 had made the BMC a more democratic organisation, but inequality remained in the area structure, with some areas much greater in size and/or membership than others.

ST replied that National Council had discussed area structure. Area meeting attendance in all areas is low as a proportion of BMC membership; creating smaller areas would probably lead to meetings becoming unviable. In the South West Area, for example, meetings held outside of Bristol tended to have much lower attendance.

DT added that areas could establish outreach groups and hold meetings as and when necessary to discuss issues relating to part of an area. In Wales, a Mid Wales outreach group was established a couple of years ago, and has worked well for discussion of local issues.

Charles Gameson (individual member) felt that the current structure worked well whenever an important issue needed addressing.

Kelvyn James (Kendal MC) asked why young members don't appear to attend meetings. ST replied that older members coming to meetings and younger members preferring to spend their time doing their chosen activities was a reflection on society. Peter Salenieks felt that young people had a different model of participation, and used social media rather than attending meetings. DT agreed that social media was becoming increasingly important in engaging with members. The BMC's Facebook, which currently has 65,000 Likes, is now probably more important than our website in terms of engaging with our members.

Will Kilner (club member) asked whether there was a need to engage more with student clubs. ST replied that we have made special efforts to encourage participation by student club members. For the 2014 AGM in Portland, we offered subsidised accommodation, free climbing masterclasses with BMC ambassadors, and a live band, but take-up was still low.

#### **e. Guidebooks**

Bernie Bradbury (FRCC) referred to the write-down of guidebook stock in the BMC's 2014 accounts, and asked whether current stocks represented a potential forward risk to the balance sheet and could contribute to future deficits.

ST replied that most of the 2014 deficit was planned expenditure from BMC reserves, and that guidebook write-downs were not a cause for concern.

BB also asked about plans for future guidebook production, given the trend for declining sales. ST replied that a review would be undertaken once the guidebook cycle had been completed with the publishing of the definitive series for Peak limestone, giving us a complete range of modern guidebooks; updating of any of the guidebooks would then be quicker and cheaper.

DT added that the BMC had joined forces with the CC, FRCC, SMC and YMC to develop Wired Guides, in response to competition from selected climbs guidebooks. Wired Guides will be a series of selected climbs guidebooks covering the areas for which those clubs produce definitive guidebooks. Wired Guides will have a consistent look and feel to them. The first in the Wired Guides series, Lake District Rock, is due to be published in June 2015.

Charles Gameson (individual member) felt that we needed to develop apps to respond to the way young people consume information. ST replied that apps had been developed, but the requirement for vast amounts of data input was an issue in producing guidebook apps.

#### **f. Crag Care Fund**

Tim Greenhalgh (Lancashire MC) asked about applying for support from the BMC Crag Care Fund. DT replied that the fund had been set up a few years ago to meet the need for funding of projects that were smaller than those funded by the BMC Access & Conservation Trust., and advised TG to contact BMC access & conservation officer Rob Dyer for further information.

#### **g. Continuing historical record of BMC**

Martin Wragg (individual member) said that it was over 20 years since we published a history of the first 50 years of the BMC, and asked if we were going to have to wait another 30 years for the follow-up. DT replied yes.

#### **h. Lancashire climbing T-shirt**

Tim Greenhalgh (Lancashire MC) asked whether there were any copyright issues with the 'wordle' word cloud design on the BMC's Lake District T-shirt, as some climbers in Lancashire

would like to produce a similar T-shirt design to promote rock climbing in the county to coincide with the new definitive guidebook which is due to be published soon.

DT replied that he was not aware of any copyright issues that would prohibit a word cloud design for Lancashire crags similar to the design on the Lake District T-shirt. The Wainwright family had contacted us about the Lakes T-shirt but had no concerns about the design.

TG asked whether the BMC would be prepared to endorse the T-shirt; DT replied that we probably would.

ST added that the Lakes T-shirt had been expensive to design, but had proved very popular and was good a medium for linking hill walking activity with the BMC.

### **i. Hill walking guides**

Bernie Bradbury (FRCC) asked whether we had considered publishing walking guides or apps. ST felt that the market was already very crowded, and self-publishing made entry into the market relatively inexpensive. DT added that we had discussed the idea with Harveys, who publish the British Mountain Map series; they weren't convinced that we could be certain of producing a distinctly different offer that would generate significant income.

Brian Smith (Executive Committee, independent director) felt that inclusion of the BMC logo as some kind of endorsement might appeal to guidebook publishers. DT said that BMC endorsement of publications had been considered, and some issues identified. We would have to be confident in the quality of the publication, and we would also leave ourselves open to accusations of favouritism.

### **Key lessons from presidency**

ST asked for one final question from the floor. Peter Salenieks asked ST what key lessons he had learnt during his presidency.

ST replied that being president is a bit like being a swan. Above the surface of the water, you appear to be moving serenely, but under the surface you're paddling furiously. What members get to see or hear about is just the tip of the iceberg, and there is so much happening behind the scenes to resolve issues and move the organisation forward.

Most of all, he would like to acknowledge the dedication and commitment of BMC volunteers, without whom the BMC would not be able to achieve anything.

The meeting concluded at 10.15am.

Tony Ryan  
28 April 2015