

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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20th National Open Forum Saturday 16 April 2016 – Castleton YHA Losehill Hall

The following notes summarise the 20th National Open Forum meeting, which was held prior to the BMC AGM and was well attended by around 80 members.

Rehan Siddiqui welcomed everyone to the meeting, the first open forum and AGM of his presidency. BMC CEO Dave Turnbull added that the forum provided an annual opportunity to raise any issue about the organisation. He introduced a number of people in the meeting who were formally involved in the running of the BMC: Executive Committee members John Simpson, Nick Kurth, Mina Leslie-Wujastyk and Rupert Davies; a number of National Council members; and honorary legal advisor Martin Wragg. He also introduced Richard Doubleday and Andy Goulbourne from Perkins Slade, the BMC's insurers.

Issues raised:

1. Women in the BMC

Kate Worthington (BMC Cymru Wales chair) requested a rundown of the work of the BMC Women's Development Group. Mina Leslie-Wujastyk said that the group had met twice (in Dec and Feb) and next meets in May. It aims to help the BMC be more inclusive, promote female involvement and to address barriers to participation.

Lynn Robinson (co-chair of the WDG alongside Emma Flaherty) said the group is looking at ways to support and develop female participation across a broad range of activity, including clubs, instruction and the outdoor industry, as well as at senior levels in the BMC. It is not just about how women can help one another, but how men can support women in the outdoors as well. DT added that the BMC had recently organised the Women in Adventure network event (SHAFF, March 2016) and awarded £6k to the Pinnacle Club Women's International Meet (Llanberis Pass, June).

Nick Kurth added that this initiative is really important and should include a vision to have a female president within the next 10 years. Lynn Robinson (and others) said she hoped it might be much sooner than that.

Nick Bond queried why honorary membership had been awarded to two members (Angela Soper and Gwen Moffat) who were not longstanding volunteers. RS replied that the award is in recognition of a wider contribution to the outdoor community and not just to the BMC. The award also reflects the BMC becoming more inclusive.

2. Governance of the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC)

Honorary member and former BMC president Bob Pettigrew raised an issue about the IFSC, the world governing body of competition climbing. He believed the IFSC is intent on replacing the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA) as the world body for climbing and mountaineering, and urged the BMC to consider its support for the IFSC's bid to make climbing an Olympic sport, and to raise questions about its governance – as he believes the IFSC President could be a president for life. He urged the BMC to initiate a debate.

Honorary legal advisor Martin Wragg summarised the establishment of the IFSC, firstly as the International Council for Competition Climbing (ICC), a new structure created inside the UIAA in

1997, and later (2006) as the independent IFSC. Former BMC president Scott Titt reminded the meeting that the issue of BMC support of an Olympic bid for climbing was debated and approved at area meetings and in National Council several years ago.

RS suggested that any debate needed to be on the specific issue of the governance of the IFSC and the BMC's relationship with the organisation.

Jim Kelly expressed concerns about the potential negative impact on the current Olympic bid which such a debate might bring about, and Dave Musgrove felt the BMC should not take the lead on what is an internal conflict between the UIAA and the IFSC.

Nick Colton suggested we could check to see whether the IFSC meets the standards of good governance set by the Sport and Recreation Alliance, and if not, make the IFSC aware of our concerns.

RS agreed that the matter would be put to the BMC International Committee for further consideration.

3. Insurance

Martin Wass requested an update on BMC travel insurance. Richard Doubleday advised the market, although not particularly profitable, was currently quite stable, and he didn't foresee any changes which might affect the state negatively or positively. The BMC scheme is running smoothly, and in addition there have been few civil liability claims. Andy Goulbourne added that the general market trend was one of increasing claims costs above the rate of inflation.

ST asked about the future of north American travel insurance business. AG replied that insurance costs there were increasing more than anywhere else, with medical costs spiralling out of control, and he felt that limiting exposure to these potential costs was a good idea. DT added that US medical cost payouts are in the order of 4-6 times more than anywhere else.

Mark Anstiss asked whether we had ever considered not offering insurance cover for the USA. AG said it had been considered and RD added that there was a continuous process of reviewing, analysing and correcting policy cover and pricing. RS added that the BMC intended to continue offering worldwide cover provided it remained viable.

DT said that one of the suggestions put forward by external marketing consultants currently examining the BMC's commercial activities was the promotion of civil liability insurance cover to indoor climbers. This was an interesting but potentially controversial idea, as it could be perceived as promoting people to sue one another.

There was a discussion of the pros and cons of the suggestion, which included: the potential increase in exposure to the BMC set against potential income from expanding membership; the likelihood of legal actions and the increasingly restricted cover of household insurance; and the opportunity it might provide for the BMC to make indoor climbers more aware of outdoor climbing opportunities. Rob Greenwood supported ways in which we could connect with indoor climbers, but Anthony Eccles felt that insurance should be for reclaiming costs, not for punishing others.

Frank Cannings queried why BMC travel insurance premiums doubled at age 65. RD replied that it's simply a fact that the older people get, the more they cost the insurance industry. BMC insurance tries to be as generous as possible to this age grouping.

Post meeting note: Since January 2015, when the BMC changed underwriters, no extra premium has been charged for those under the age of 70 taking out insurance cover for within Europe.

4. Mend Our Mountains

NK reminded the meeting that the ongoing BMC Mend Our Mountains campaign was close to raising £50,000, half way towards its ultimate target of at least £100,000, and that the evening's auction would raise funds for the campaign and CAC.

Questions were raised about contingency planning if the target amount wasn't reached (less work will be done) and plans for ongoing work and potential collaboration with other organisations such as Fix The Fells in the Lake District. Henry Folkard said the campaign has been successful in raising awareness, and the follow-up needs careful consideration.

The impact of charity challenge events, and whether a levy on such activities should be charged was discussed. NK said that without recommending regulation the BMC had raised the bar for event organisers with the running of a conference on challenge events in 2014 and a soon-to-be-published booklet providing good practice advice.

Becky Hammond asked whether the BMC had considered paid posts for regional access representatives. DT replied that the main issue was cost, but that Elfyn Jones' appointment as access & conservation officer for Wales in 2009 was in response to demands for increased staff resources in this work area. Dave Musgrove added that the workload of volunteer access representatives and paid officers is closely monitored by the Access Management Group.

The meeting finished at approximately 10.45am.

Tony Ryan
20 April 2016