

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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17th National Open Forum Saturday 27th April 2013 – Plas y Brenin

The following notes summarise the 17th National Open Forum meeting, which was held prior to the BMC AGM and attended by c.40 members.

Scott Titt (ST) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced the panel, which consisted of Dave Turnbull (CEO) (DT), Nick Colton (Deputy CEO) (NC) and Elfyn Jones (A&C Officer – Wales) (EJ). He then opened the discussion by asking people to think about what the BMC should do for members in the future. The organisation has a 4 year strategic plan, but what should it be doing 10-15 years from now? ST introduced the three Regional Development Officers who have been recently appointed: Jane Edwards (west of England); Rob Greenwood (east of England); and Elizabeth Holley (London). They gave a brief summary of the work and roles. ST also informed the meeting that we have recruited our first ever dedicated hill walking officer, Carey Davies.

Questions were then taken from the floor.

a. Membership recruitment and retention

Peter Salenieks referred to the 2010 BMC membership survey, which indicated an ageing demographic. He asked what was being done to address this trend. ST replied that some of the funding from Sport England would be used to address the issue of retaining young (16-25 years) members as they get older. DT explained that two key roles of the new RDO's would be to assist the transition from indoor to outdoor climbing, and support clubs who wish to grow their membership. Additionally, we will try to address the loss of student club members, many of whom do not go on to join a senior club. There will be a two-pronged approach to encourage student club members to join the BMC as individual members or join a 'senior' club; special offers may be put in place as an incentive.

b. Climbing 2020

Mike Parsons asked what the BMC was doing about climbing's bid to become an Olympic sport. NC explained that the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) was pursuing the bid for climbing to be included in the 2020 Olympics, and that national federations, including the BMC, were supporting the bid by raising awareness and encouraging support of the IFSC Facebook campaign. DT added that the IFSC, along with seven other shortlisted sports, would make a presentation to the International Olympic Committee (IOC) on 29 May, after which it is expected that the shortlist will be reduced to three sports. The final selection is in September 2013.

c. Increasing awareness of the BMC

Nick Kurth asked what the BMC was doing to communicate to non-members who don't necessarily know about the BMC and its work. NC responded that we were constantly trying to improve our communications, with new website content, and greater use of social media including Facebook and Twitter. The BMC now has four Twitter feeds, a main feed and dedicated feeds for access and conservation, competition climbing, and most recently hill walking.

DT said it would always be a challenge to reach beyond our own audience, but initiatives are in place to do this. We know that visits to website homepages are reducing as the growth in Facebook and Twitter continues. The BMC now has over 30,000 Facebook followers and 10,000 Twitter followers. At least 50% of our Facebook fans are thought to be not members. Sport England funding will enable us to significantly increase the video content on the website, in the way that news on the BBC website is often accompanied by video. Summit magazine editor Alex Messenger's newly defined role as Digital Communications Manager will spearhead this project.

ST added that we regularly exhibit at major outdoor events including the Outdoors Show in London, the Keswick Mountain Festival and the Kendal Mountain Festival.

d. 2012 Annual Report Summary

John Barrett thanked the BMC for producing a summary of the 2012 Annual Report, and distributing it with the Spring issue of Summit, as agreed at the 2012 National Open Forum.

e. Sport climbing terminology

Bob Pettigrew (BP) raised a point about the inclusion of the term 'sport climbing' in the name of the International Federation of Sport Climbing. He felt that this created confusion about the distinction between the activity of competition climbing and the activity of sport climbing which takes place outside the competition arena. Ice climbing competitions still remain in the remit of the UIAA, and BP reported that good progress was being made in attempts to make ice climbing a winter Olympic sport. DT agreed that there was some confusion, and reminded the meeting that the UIAA's remit still does include the activity of sport climbing.

f. Promotion of club membership

Trevor Smith asked whether the BMC should place greater focus on promoting membership of affiliated clubs, as opposed to individual membership. DT replied that we can and do promote the benefits of club membership.

g. BMC Access & Conservation Trust

Daphne Pritchard asked if donations to ACT could be made using the Gift Aid scheme, in order to maximise contributions to the charity. EJ replied that if Gift Aid donations were not already possible, we would certainly look at setting up this facility.

Post meeting note: ACT already allows tax efficient donations to be made using Gift Aid.

h. Recruitment of indoor climbers

Nick Bond asked what plans the BMC had to market itself to people who climb solely indoors and have no intention of climbing outside. NC replied that we are active in this area, with initiatives such as the Climbing Walls Essentials DVD and an Indoor Climbing section on the BMC website. DT added that there had been internal discussions about a possible new membership category for indoor climbers; the difficulty is that indoor climbers tend not to need much from the BMC and may not appreciate the broader work of the organisation. The biggest member benefit to indoor climbers is probably the retail discount scheme. Kate Phillips said in her experience as a climbing wall operator, the greatest involvement many indoor climbers have with the BMC is the participation of young climbers in competitions. This encourages parents to take an interest in the work of the BMC. This aspect of the sport is growing and will become more important in the future.

BP felt that there was a parallel with artificial ski slopes, which can be an aid to maintaining fitness and support the transition to the outdoors. Facilities have become much more sophisticated and lifelike over the years.

DT explained that the BMC supports the work of the National Indoor Climbing Award Scheme (NICAS) and the new equivalent in bouldering. ST added that some people use walls purely for strength and flexibility training, much like a gym.

Trevor Smith said his club (South Devon MC) had grown its membership from 35 to 200+, mainly by recruitment at two walls in the area. New members joined primarily for benefits of retail discounts and insurance, as well as to support competition climbing work.

i. Quarry regeneration

ST introduced Neil Hewertson who has been contracted by the BMC on a 2 days per week basis to lead to project to promote the regeneration of hardrock quarries for climbing. NF briefly described the work he is undertaking.

j. BMC in the future

ST explained the BMC's main income streams (subscriptions / insurance / Sport England) and asked whether we should try to increase the proportion of commercially generated income e.g. by increasing the range of products in the BMC online shop?

Rab Carrington replied that the first question that should be asked is how much profit or loss an activity is making. He queried whether the BMC guidebook programme was a commercial venture, and suggested we should not take on new ventures based on this model.

BP felt the future of the BMC lies in the three principles set out by founder Geoffrey Winthrop Young, which were: to act as a representative body to government; to protect the mountain environment; and to encourage and train hill aspirants. The BMC will still be doing that in 10 years' time.

Nick Kurth suggested we should conduct a sensitivity analysis of all our income streams to discover the potential effects on our overall aims.

Trevor Smith warned that increasing commercialisation can bring with it a change of focus, and lead to a profit-driven organisation.

As an example of a commercial initiative we could develop, DT referred to the large amount of revenue generated by the Ski Club of Great Britain by selling advertising on its website.

Roger Bennion reported that the structure of the BMC's access and conservation work had changed in recent years, with the establishment of specialist working groups and an overarching strategic management group which will advise the organisation and guide the Officers. He also advocated the idea of establishing a database of member skills.

k. Helicopter search & rescue

Bob Pettigrew, on behalf of Dennis Gray, raised the issue of privatisation of helicopter search and rescue. As well as bringing about the loss of advanced training for RAF pilots, Dennis believes that this may lead to compulsory insurance as private companies will need to recoup the costs of their operations

Elfyn Jones (former Chair of the Llanberis Mountain Rescue Team) replied that from 2015 helicopter search and rescue cover will be provided by Bristow. The funding is guaranteed, and there is no prospect of charging for the service. Pilots will continue to be military personnel. There is every chance that the service will be improved, with a new fleet of aircraft and no risk of pilots being sent on military operations. ST said that helicopter search and rescue on the South Coast had been privatised since 2000, and he had a positive view of the impact.

l. Insurance / Heritage

DT introduced Richard Doubleday and David Fieldhouse from Perkins Slade (BMC insurance brokers), and Julie Summers and Maxine Willett from Mountain Heritage Trust.

The meeting concluded at 5.15pm.

Scott Titt thanked everyone for their contributions.

Tony Ryan
29 April 2013