

Westminster Hall Debate:

'Economic Value of Outdoor Recreation', 2.30-4.00pm Wednesday 28th October

The BMC is the national representative body for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in England and Wales with over 81,000 members who participate in a wide range of activities from hill walking to climbing and bouldering. The BMC is a statutory consultee under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 (MCAA) and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000 (CROW) and our remit covers a broad spectrum of cliff and mountain based activities, as well as a growing and vibrant indoor climbing wall sector.

Popularity and economic benefit of climbing, hill walking and mountaineering

- **Economic contribution-** Climbing, hill walking and recreational activities make a substantial contribution to rural economies. The BMC membership alone spends on average £52 million a year on outdoor gear, accommodation, food and travel costs in the UK (BMC Outdoor Surveys 2015). Research commissioned by Sport England, Getting Active Outdoors, suggests that the climbing, mountaineering and walking sector alone is worth £2.3 billion.ⁱ There is still capacity within the outdoor sector to deliver increased opportunities for engagement in outdoor activities and indoor climbing.
- **Mainstream Vs Outdoors** - For many people participation in conventional sport is not an attractive proposition. The latent demand to participate in outdoor activities (e.g. climbing and hill walking) is enormous however, and the sector is very buoyant with good capacity.
- **Genuine life-long activities** - Climbing and hill walking are genuine life-long activities which use natural outdoor facilities as well as indoor walls and can become a way of life for participants. Greater focus should be put on active lifestyle sports which provide opportunities to participate irrespective of age, background or location.
- **Increasing numbers of people are climbing and hill walking** - The latest Active People Survey (APS) results from Sport England suggests that around 211,000 people (aged 14+, living in England) go climbing or hill walking at least once a month and 84,000 take part at least once a week.
- **Significant growth in indoor climbing** - There are five million climbing wall user visits in the UK each year and 350 public access climbing walls listed within the BMC climbing wall directory. Very few of these are supported by any kind of public subsidy. There are further climbing walls in schools, gyms and military establishments. Provision is growing year on year and has more than doubled in the past 7 years. It is estimated that the sector is worth £200 million to the economy.
- **Girls Definitely Can** - The National Indoor Climbing Award Schemes (NICAS) have c.50:50 male/female participation in teenage climbers.
- **Young People are engaged** - The number of young people taking part in the BMC Youth Climbing Series has risen by 50% in the last five years, from 494 in 2009 to over 740 in 2014. Around 100 climbers take part in the British Lead Climbing Championships and almost 200 compete in the British Bouldering Championships. Between 35 and 40 climbers have taken part in the BMC Paraclimbing Series every year since it started in 2011.
- **Health & well-being benefits** - More people walking, climbing and enjoying responsible recreation 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 billion.ⁱⁱ
- **Getting Active Outdoors** - Research commissioned by Sport England 'Getting Active Outdoors' comprehensively demonstrates the latent potential for greater participation in outdoor sports and recreational activities; 8.9m people are currently active outdoors, of these 2.8m want to do more, and there are 18.2m not currently active outdoors who want to re-engage and participate in the next 12 months.

Call for Government to recognise and value outdoor recreation alongside mainstream sport

The BMC's calls upon Government to acknowledge the importance and potential of outdoor activities in the forthcoming sports strategy. In particular;

- **Fundamental shift of focus:** Increase focus on sports and outdoor activities with genuine potential and capacity to make a real contribution to the long term physical health and mental well-being of the nation. Reduce focus on minority participation sports – even if they have Olympic status. For long term inactive people – simple, accessible and low cost activities such as walking, running, cycling and basic gym / aerobic activities are likely to offer the best potential for engagement.
- **Cross-departmental working:** Outdoor activities have clear health benefits and the increased interaction with the Department of Health is very much welcomed. The BMC believes that DEFRA should also be involved in its capacity as the body responsible for the natural environment and the laws governing access to it – access to the outdoors being essential to participation. Climbing and hill walking are genuine life-long activities, which rely on natural outdoor facilities and often become a way of life for many participants.
- **Appoint a dedicated Minister for the Outdoors:** A champion for the outdoors and outdoor recreation should be appointed or responsibility for the outdoors should be added to the brief of the existing Sports Minister.
- **Greater support for outdoor access:** Beyond traditional sporting facilities, it is essential that Government supports the provision and upkeep of access infrastructure e.g. public rights of way, national trails, open access land, public green spaces and parks, and coastal access as these are the means by which people access the outdoors. Promotion of outdoor opportunities should go hand in hand with an investment in infrastructure. The previous coalition set a date of 2020 to complete the English coast path under the Marine and Coastal Access Act 2006; this will encourage greater use of the UK's exceptional coastline and will also ensure sea cliff climbing continues in perpetuity - this 2020 commitment must be honoured. The public make over 70 million trips to the coast each year, spending over £1.4 billion, which helps support local businesses as well as many seaside towns.ⁱⁱⁱ

For more information please contact Dr Catherine Flitcroft on 0161 4383333 or Cath@thebmc.co.uk

ⁱ <http://www.sportengland.org/research/encouraging-take-up/key-influences/getting-active-outdoors/>

ⁱⁱ 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

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://archive.defra.gov.uk/environment/marine/legislation/mcaa/sectors/industry.htm>