



The British Mountaineering Council (BMC) is the national representative body for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in England and Wales.

The BMC is committed to protecting the freedoms and promoting the interests of climbers, hillwalkers and mountaineers, including ski mountaineers; and good practice in all activities related to these pursuits.

At present the BMC has close to 83,000 members. The BMC works for its members to provide services and representation for: access and conservation, youth, equity, and climbing related activities.

Ahead of 8th June, the BMC is challenging politicians to recognise the huge value of outdoor recreation in their manifestos and policies, while also understanding the need to protect the special qualities of the outdoors for the benefit of all.

The importance of outdoor recreation in Britain

Hill walking and mountaineering activities comprise Britain's highest participation recreation activities, as evidenced below:

- Sport England's **Getting Active Outdoors** report (2015) found that there were 8.96 million people 'active outdoors', of which 27% (2.4 million) went 'strenuous walking' and 14% (1.25 million) went 'mountaineering', and stated: "Hill walking/rambling is the most consistent activity across all ages."
- Natural England's **MENE** (Monitor of Engagement with the Natural Environment) research found that almost 20 million people visited the outdoors in 2013 to go walking.
- A 2012 Visit England survey found that of the 93 million day visits for active pursuits/sports in 2012, 75 million were for long walks/hikes/rambles.

There is a significant latent demand to participate in hill walking and mountaineering activities:

- The two activities identified as having the highest 'potential latent demand' in Getting Active Outdoors (those that have not participated in the last 12 months but may participate in the next 12 months) were 'strenuous walking' (90% of respondents, equating to 16.4 million people) and mountaineering (64%, 11.6 million people).

In the BMC Outdoor Survey 2016, an online survey into the habits and spending of hill walkers, climbers and mountaineers, put out through BMC channels; participants were asked which activity they had undertaken over the previous weekend. By far the single biggest activity was hill walking for more than 2 hours, at 42%. When the results of hill walking for under 2 hours and scrambling are added to this, it amounts to 60%, which means the large majority were engaged in ropeless 'hill walking' activity. The most popular climbing activity was traditional style climbing at 21%. This echoes the results of the 2010 membership survey, in which 62% of members described hill walking as their 'primary mountain activity'. With climbing about to become an Olympic sport, support is necessary to translate the interest this will generate into active participation.



What benefit does outdoor recreation provide?

Outdoor recreation provides many health benefits to those participating in activities, such as improved physical and mental wellbeing, suggesting better access to green space could save the NHS in both England and Wales billions of pounds. As well as improved health, in the English countryside alone, walkers spend over £6 billion a year which helps support 245,000 full time equivalent jobs ^[1], while a growing body of evidence supports the view that outdoor recreation is integral to the wellbeing of society as a whole.



Political Support for Outdoor Recreation in the Election

The BMC want political parties to recognise, in their manifestos, the huge value of outdoor recreation. We want to see a long-term strategy for outdoor recreation to challenge the epidemic of inactivity. We are calling for politicians to be genuine advocates for the outdoors, protecting our countryside and green spaces from inappropriate developments.

The BMC wishes to see positive measures for the improvement of access and the conservation of our countryside, safeguarded in a long-term strategy for outdoor recreation. Clear benefits for public health are provided by outdoor recreation activities, in addition to economic benefits provided to areas that people visit whilst participating in these activities.

However, access to the countryside is getting harder due to the impact of cuts and the countryside itself is at increasing risk of being harmed by development. In light of this, BMC would like to ask for political support on several key issues.

Key Issues for Government Support – General Election 2017

The BMC key issues for government support are summarised below. The three strategic priorities we ask you to address in your manifestos for the forthcoming general election are:

1. **Promote outdoor recreation:**
 - *“Get people active outdoors for health and well-being”.*
 - Clear long-term strategy is essential for outdoor recreation and recognition of the importance of the industry to physical and mental health.
2. **Support designated areas and protected landscapes:**
 - *“Safeguard the best of what we’ve got”.*
 - Through better planning policies, stronger governance, expansion of protected areas.
3. **Support countryside management:**
 - *“Continue to support those who manage the countryside”.*
 - Ensure that land managers continue to receive financial support post-Brexit; but place conditions on all public subsidy: e.g. public rights of way kept open and easy to use, free of obstacles; open access land open and easy to use; recreation promoted; landscapes and wildlife protected and enhanced.
 - Put mechanisms in place for effective monitoring and enforcement of these conditions.

Future Commitments

The British Mountaineering Council also compels Government and all parties to make three specific commitments, for the future:

1. Commit to continue roll-out of coastal access in England.
2. Commit to protect funding in real terms for National Parks and designated landscapes.
3. Lobby Sport England for better funding for recreational activities to assist and enable increased and more diverse participation in outdoor activities.





BMC and the General Election 2017

As the general election draws closer, the BMC is issuing a call to government to protect and support the countryside and people's access to it for hillwalking, climbing and mountaineering.

The huge benefits of getting outdoors to the health, happiness and culture of society are clearer and needed more than they have ever been. Although at the same time, our mountain landscapes and wild places are under threat from large scale developments, national parks are subject to the impact of cuts, schemes engaging the public with the countryside are few and far between, and greater support for rural economies is needed.

It is imperative that politicians recognise the fundamental value of outdoor recreation in their manifestos and policies, in addition to understanding the need to protect the special qualities of the outdoors for the benefit of all. We will be inspecting manifestos and commenting accordingly.



References

[1] The Sport and Recreation Alliance's [Reconomics](#) report published in June 2014 brings together all existing information, research and evidence on the impact of outdoor recreation and provides a compelling case to politicians of the true value of outdoor recreation.