

Towards a hill walking Strategy for the BMC

Introduction

The BMC's National Council is considering a discussion paper re this at its Meeting on 20 September 2014. This briefer version of the original document is intended to provide a flavour of the original in order to facilitate discussion at the Area Meeting.

Background

There is a popular view backed up by research that the BMC is biased in favour of climbing & mountaineering rather than hill walking.

The 2010 member survey found that 87% of the membership described hill walking as *one of* their main mountain activities, compared to 62% for climbing. Breaking those results down further, 62% described hill walking as their *primary* mountain activity, compared to just 26% for climbing (however, more than 70% say they go climbing *in general*.)

In the 2013 Hill Walking Survey just 30% of the 2,000 respondents were satisfied with the BMC's work for hill walkers, the rest either saying it was good but could be improved or was poor.

In the 2014 Club Survey, walking was by far the most participated in activity amongst respondents, with 90% of club members and 92% of non-club members saying their club did walking, compared to just 62% for indoor roped climbing and 50% for trad climbing.

The perception could have several causes but 2 main ones are:-

Communications – Summit magazine, the website, newsletters, marketing, social media etc – are often very strong and compare favourably with other organisations of a similar type. However they are climbing biased.

Resource allocation – More focussed on climbing & not representative of the membership at large.

Options

Various options are outlined below for consideration. It should be noted that at this stage these are just suggestions. Part of the process will be consideration of associated resource implications as the staff time and financial implications of the various ideas / proposals will need careful evaluation before anything can be finally agreed.

Summit

- More funding for more pages & to commission high quality hill walking content.
- Making hill walking themed digital editions – cost £2500 per edition but large target market.
- Hill walking pull out supplement in every or occasional issues.
- Theming the 4 annual Summits around specific activities to include one re hill walking.

'**Get into Hill Walking**' magazine aimed at beginners similar to the recent 'Get into Climbing' Magazine. Cost/benefit analysis needed.

Media & Press

- Cultivation of relationship with outdoor magazines through BMC TV, events and general feeding of content and stories.
- Strategy for targeting the mainstream media with hill walking stories
- Greater frequency of press releases on topic such as safety, seasonal awareness and ideas for people to be active.

Website

- Work with freelance writers to commission social media-friendly articles on walking.
- More articles to be written on 'hot topic' current affairs.
- ? BMC providing more directly useful 'technical' information to walkers like route information and gear advice. This information is already covered by other sources and websites, but there may be scope for partial information or partnership arrangements.

- More hill walking content for the website .
- Increased funding for freelancers to produce content for the BMC website.

BMC TV

BMC TV is a young project, and one that is becoming successful & is becoming a recognised brand with younger people. However, at the time of writing there were 167 climbing videos on BMC TV and only 32 walking ones.

Possible ways forward include:-

- Commissioning climbing filmmakers to produce walking videos, with guidance and input from Hill Walking Officer if necessary.
- Linking up with hill walking partners and magazines to promote films to their audiences - being more proactive in marketing video content to all audiences, such as schools, DofE, scouts, other organisations.
- Filming more short 'how to' films for hill walking, scrambling, winter walking and backpacking.
- Filming more gear films. One of the most successful new initiatives on BMC TV has been the new gear channel (<http://tv.thebmc.co.uk/channel/gear>). This is one important cross-over area of interest to all climbers and walkers. Developing and starting video gear reviews would target a very large audience.
- Commissioning an all-mountain BMC promotional film. A short film mixing up inspiring imagery, from walking to Himalayan climbing, by a young, cutting-edge filmmaker. To emphasise the adventure of walking, climbing and mountaineering, and their connection to the BMC.

Marketing

The BMC's marketing resources are a vital way of reaching new audiences. The best way to combat the widespread perception of the BMC as an organisation simply for climbers or 'extreme' enthusiasts is to create an advertising concept that tackles this perception head-on, and which has an explicit hill walking message.

Ways forward could be:

- 200,000 leaflets with a targeted hill walking message to go into relevant magazines eg TGO, Trail etc
- More hill walking imagery to be commissioned
- BMC 'roadshows' to tour shops, venues and popular hill walking areas

Benefits package

There are also possibilities for tailoring the benefits package to better benefit hill walkers; civil liability insurance, for example, is less of a draw for walkers than it is for climbers. ? revise the benefits package to include specific benefits for hill walkers.

Digital marketing

Expanded resources to cover digital marketing could build on the already successful social media, online news and video. Some ideas are:

- A budget for advertising Facebook content to people not currently associated with the BMC
- A high-profile digital campaign, tied in to new walking content on BMC TV
- Twitter advertising
- Google Adwords campaign
- Increase Search Engine Optimisation spend on walking-specific terms
- Additional walking-specific landing pages
- Banner advertising for walking sites

Public engagement

Partnerships

The BMC does not offer much to members of the public who want to get into hill walking, meet others hill walkers or learn new skills on a casual and informal basis. Individual clubs go hill walking, but the extent to which clubs welcome hill walkers – particularly newer ones – is variable. Beginner hill walking courses are offered through Plas y Brenin but the take-up has been small.

Options:-

- Four 'bring a friend' beginner hill walking events per year to be held throughout England and Wales in conjunction with other organisations eg HF Holidays. The idea is that experienced people take along friends or family, who receive guiding or instruction over the course of a fun weekend.
- BMC to link up with Mountain Training and Mountain Rescue to have a presence at the foot of popular mountains like Scafell Pike and Snowdon on the busiest days of the year to engage with the public, run mini-workshops, promote Mountain Training skills courses and hand out materials and publications (on the way down)
- BMC to join up with Mountain Training and the Regional Development Officers (RDOs) to have a strong presence at events like Keswick Mountain Festival.

Regional Development Officer (RDO) roles

Currently the focus of these roles is split between delivering 'indoor to outdoor' courses for climbers and working to improve the work of clubs. The focus of the role of the RDOs could be widened, with a more equitable split between walking and climbing. This could involve more emphasis on things like staging events, media and promotion, presence at outdoor festivals and other 'public-facing' initiatives.

Structure and organisation

Possible extra money for hill walking could be spent on:

- Money to improve and grow hill walking content in Summit and the BMC's media
- An access officer devoted to hill walking – encouraging more hill walking volunteers, covering issues of landscape-wide significance like built developments and renewable energy (windfarms etc), lobbying for better recreational infrastructure, working to resolve local access issues etc
- Introductory hill walking events
- Partnership courses and events with the National Trust, YHA, HF Holidays etc
- Hill walking promotion in schools and universities
- More hill walking ambassadors
- Workshops for clubs to attract more hill walking members

Volunteers and areas

Currently there are very few BMC hill walking volunteers, and the efforts directed towards hill walking on a grassroots level are minimal to non-existent. If the BMC is ever to become an organisation with hill walking in its marrow it must tackle this massive under-representation of walkers on a grassroots level.

The following actions are proposed:

- Every Area to appoint a hill walking co-ordinator to ensure broader / hill walking issues are covered in each meeting
- Every Area Meeting to have hill walking as an agenda point
- Work with Fix the Fells / national park authorities / other organisations to launch a publicity campaign aimed at attracting more volunteers to help maintain upland paths in busy areas across England and Wales. To launch and run in the summer of 2015.

Original document by Carey Davies, BMC Hill Walking Officer

This summary version by Deirdre Collier, Yorkshire Area Secretary.

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