



Discussion document:

The hill walking strategy of the BMC



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Preface by Carey Davies, BMC Hill Walking Development Officer

The main purpose of this document is to lay out the scale of the changes which I believe can and should be made to improve the BMC's commitment to hill walkers.

It is a slightly amended version of a document I produced in the summer of 2014 (it has been abridged in places and updated to include a section on the BMC's access and conservation work). It was written after more than a year in the newly-created role of BMC Hill Walking Development Officer, where I was tasked with improving the BMC's work for hill walkers. It had become clear to me that in order for change to be sustainable in the long term the BMC as a whole had to 'buy in' to a coherent vision, and that in order to achieve this, a long-sighted strategy was needed. This document was my attempt to kick off the process of creating this.

It is designed primarily to map the lie of the land when it comes to all the different areas of the BMC's work, and to give a sense of how challenging the way ahead could be. But its proposals are not by any means fixed in stone. It was written to get people talking and thinking, but the specific ideas, as well as being subject to financial and staffing constraints, may well change and evolve over time.

Another important aim was to get support from the wider organisation. In this respect, it is encouraging that the BMC's National Council ratified this paper in September 2014, and agreed to set up a working group in order to how best to implement the recommendations it contains.

The event in Hayfield on November 29 will give you an opportunity to discuss this document and add your own ideas and thoughts. There are also a limited number of places on the working group for those interested in joining, and we will discuss this further on the day. Ultimately, the BMC is a grassroots organisation, and the success of its hill walking efforts rests on people like you being willing to engage with us and contribute. For this we are very grateful and we look forward to meeting you soon.

Happy walking,

Carey Davies

Introduction

This document is designed to act as the basis for a discussion about the BMC's strategy towards hill walking. It proposes a range of steps designed to affect organisational, communicational and cultural changes that will allow the BMC to work better for hill walkers, overcome negative public perceptions of 'bias' and increase its appeal in the wider world.

A popular view exists that despite claiming to be for 'hill walkers, climbers and mountaineers' the BMC is heavily biased in favour of the latter two, and climbing in particular. This was acknowledged by the BMC as far back as the 2005 Future Policy Review, which subsequent research has reaffirmed.

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. And 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 reasons behind this perception are manifold. To some extent it is down to weaknesses in communication. The BMC's primary channels of addressing its members and the wider world – Summit magazine, the website, newsletters, marketing, social media etc – are often very strong and compare favourably with other organisations of a similar type (indeed, the BMC is one of the only UK NGBs to retain its magazine.) However, they have a pronounced climbing bias which obscures the work done by the organisation on behalf of walkers. This strategy aims to address these issues through a more coordinated approach to the BMC's communications effort.

However, the perception cannot simply be attributed to communication failings. Practically, financially and culturally, the BMC is overwhelmingly a climbing organisation. Many of the BMC's work programmes focus primarily on climbing; the roles of most BMC officers are designed to address climbing issues; the work of specialist committees is climbing-heavy; both local and national volunteer meetings are almost always dominated by climbers and climbing discussions; the majority of spending, both 'core' and in the form of government grants, goes towards climbing.

The preponderance of resource allocation to climbing is not representative of the membership at large, which encompasses a broad spectrum of mountain users, many of whom are concerned with wider issues of landscape, development and conservation which are being neglected by the BMC's often too-narrow emphasis on technical climbing concerns. It is also out of step with public habits. To walkers or casual outdoor enthusiasts, who constitute the vast majority of mountain users, the BMC can still seem rarefied, elitist or simply irrelevant.

This perception is, however, gradually changing, helped by the BMC's strong presence in the social media realm and its increasing relevance to younger climbers and outdoorsgoers. The broadening of the BMC's scope to include hill walkers can play a part in a wider 'refreshing' of its image and purpose; to become a more relevant organisation to the large numbers of people who wouldn't class themselves as 'diehards' but for whom mountains and the outdoors are nevertheless an important part of their lives. This is also the constituency into which the majority of hill walkers fall. Making this change need not be detrimental to the BMC's core values or integrity.

This document aims to set out the ways in which that can be accomplished, looking at the areas of communications, marketing, public engagement, and structure and organisation.

1. Communications

1.1. Summit magazine

Summit magazine is excellent in many respects, with its design and writing quality far surpassing comparable publications by sister bodies in other UK countries and even commercially available magazines.

Summit is a high circulation magazine with a broad range of readers, so every issue is a challenge to make interesting and balanced. But its content has long been perceived, with justification, as being biased in favour of mountaineering and climbing – the latter in particular – and this is frequently cited by casual and committed observers alike as evidence of the BMC's bias in favour of climbers. Summit is the main communications conduit of the BMC for many people, and in this respect perceived bias in its pages and presentation is central to the BMC's 'image problem' regarding walkers.

The frequency of hill walking content in Summit has increased since the HWO's appointment, but it has been somewhat obscured by the continuing predominance of climbing front covers, imagery and emphasis. A more thorough change in approach to the overall look and feel of the magazine is necessary before readers notice a difference.

However, it is worth considering how the best way to accomplish this might be. One option would be to pack Summit with the sort of content that might be carried in commercial hill walking magazines – generic route advice, features on Ben Nevis / Scafell Pike etc. It is possible that comments from hill walkers who have not noticed the increased hill walking content stem from a lack of this type of 'obvious' material. However, this approach has disadvantages, namely that it replicates material easily available elsewhere and risks spreading the focus of the magazine too widely, jeopardising its coherence.

Another option would be to refashion Summit into an 'all-mountain' magazine with an emphasis on the challenges, excitements and opportunities of the mountain environment generally, blurring the distinctions between different types of walking, climbing and mountaineering. Surveys confirm that BMC members are catholic in their approach to experiencing the outdoors; the majority of members describe hill walking as their main mountain activity, but more than 70% also go climbing. Around 50% also go mountain biking. The range of activities covered in the club survey was very broad-ranging, with walking, scrambling, trad climbing, winter walking, indoor climbing and bouldering all popular.

In other words, what unites members with disparate habits is the mountain environment itself. Therefore for Summit to move towards this 'all-mountain' emphasis potentially represents the best compromise between the different types of activities covered in our membership. Precedents for this type of magazine exist e.g. Outside. As other magazines falter, we have a real opportunity here to continue to develop Summit into the essential publication for active mountain people. We must acknowledge that we cannot please everyone with every issue or article, but if we focus on high-quality entertaining content, then we will have the attention of most. The risk in this approach is that it fails to change the perception the BMC doesn't do enough for hill walkers by failing to be explicit enough in its hill walking coverage; therefore measures would still have to be taken to ensure content which was recognisably 'hill walking' – as opposed to mountaineering, climbing, adventure, photography etc – was prominently included.

The possibility of 'segregating' climbing and walking content has also been discussed within the BMC in the past, for example by covering climbing and walking in separate publications (a 'Summit Walk' and a 'Summit Climb'), devoting particular issues of Summit to single activities, or having hill walking pullouts or supplements. Walkers and climbers can both be tribal in their mindsets and it is possible that neither contingent will ever be happy at the appearance of one or the other on the same pages.

However while the options of merging all types of content into Summit and 'segregating' it might seem to be mutually exclusive, they need not be. The Summit app, for example, allows digital 'special editions' to be created. The first attempt at this, an Alpine-themed issue, was well received. Similar issues on hill walking subjects can be created, giving people an opportunity to read BMC media with no climbing content 'interfering' with it. The downside of this approach is that the numbers who access Summit in its digital form are very small compared to those who read it in print (e.g. 800 people downloaded the Alpine special issue, representing less than a fiftieth of its typical print circulation).

Whatever approach is chosen, statistical and survey – as opposed to anecdotal – evidence in the form of surveys and questionnaires should be undertaken to help shape decisions.

The hill walking officer should also be consulted to a greater extent in the creation of each issue to advise on the walking – climbing balance, and can help and contribute where needed.

The following are possible options to address the climbing / hill walking balance in Summit:

Main ideas:

- Assigning more funding to Summit to secure an increased page count and commission high-quality and engaging hill walking content from professional writers and photographers.
- Re-launch Summit with a new design and a greater emphasis on 'unifying' all-mountain imagery.
- Implement 'quota' percentages for different types of content – e.g. climbing and walking to be split 33% in all issues, with remainder on 'general' subjects.
- Ensure front covers are balance – e.g. at least one to reflect hill walking per year and one to reflect a 'crossover' activity like scrambling, winter walking, Alpine walking, trekking or landscapes, with the others depicting climbing and mountaineering.
- HWO to be kept in the loop as Summit is being put together to discuss hill walking balance. Useful points for comment from the HWO would be 1. when the page plan is put together, then 2. closer to publication to look at layout, presentation, imagery and emphasis.
- Making hill walking-themed digital special editions. The cost of these editions is £2,500 each, but target market for hill walking editions would be much larger than alpine and not limited to a certain time of year.

Other possibilities:

- Have a specific hill walking pull-out supplement in every or occasional issues
- Theming the four annual Summits around specific activities: i.e. one about hill walking, one about climbing, one about mountaineering, and one (the clubs issue) to be all three. The risk here is that themed issues can alienate the non-targeted audience.
- Split Summit into two magazines: a 'Summit Climb' and a 'Summit Walk'. Risk is that the Summit brand is diluted.

1.2. 'Get into Hill Walking'

In 2014 the BMC published the 'Get into Climbing' magazine, aimed at beginner climbers. A hill walking equivalent could also be produced in the near future, but it would require a cost / benefit analysis based on predicted sales. This should be considered separately to the above discussions on Summit.

1.3. Media and press

An increased emphasis on hill walking offers opportunities for increasing our engagement with the media. Our coverage in the walking media is generally good, but our penetration into the mainstream media suffers in comparison to equivalent organisations. The HWO recently wrote a 'Top 5 beginner hills' article for the Guardian but there is scope for doing more of this sort of thing.

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland regularly issue press releases consisting of seasonal safety advice and warnings, which are widely picked up by the outdoor and non-outdoor media. The BMC issues far fewer of these types of warning, despite having a larger audience, representing a lost opportunity for easy coverage. Many of these types of press releases are easily anticipatable in advance so it should be possible to work them into the workload of staff with communications responsibilities.

- 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 e.g. suggestions for spring hill walks, favourite mountains of mountaineers, best hills for beginners etc. Aim to place 5 – 10 stories of this sort per year.
- Greater frequency of press releases on topic such as safety, seasonal awareness and ideas for people to be active.

1.4. Website

Since the appointment of the HWO the frequency and quality of hill walking stories on the BMC website has increased. Many of these articles have been written with social media in mind, and have received high page views e.g: 'Ten mistakes winter walkers make – and how to avoid them' (32,000 views), 'Six surprising scientific facts about walking' (27,000 views), 'High and dry: six myths about hiking in the heat' (17,000 views), 'Seven superb summits to climb this spring' (11,000 views).

This content is, however, often significantly overshadowed and outweighed by climbing content. Most hill walking-relevant stories are written by the HWO, but he is in 'competition' with many other staff who are largely creating climbing content. The general 'churn' of the BMC website means that at any one time the homepage is likely to be significantly skewed in favour of climbing.

This is slightly mitigated by the fact that most of the traffic to the BMC website comes from links on social media, with only a small portion actually coming through the homepage, but the BMC's social media itself is also dominated overwhelmingly by climbing content (e.g. the BMC's Facebook page.) To some extent this reflects the 'drowning' of hill walking content on the main website, and also the fact that the target Facebook audience is younger than other channels (very few % after age 44) so content is lighter and more action orientated.

To remedy this, a planned approach is needed which recognises the HWO cannot produce enough content to keep up with the climbing and mountaineering content. To do this freelance and outside resources are needed. A change in the work priorities of web-responsible staff may also be necessary.

The following options could be considered:

- Work with freelance writers to commission social media-friendly articles on walking e.g. 'Why walking makes you smarter', 'Top 7 walks in history', '5 mountains with unusual names', 'Britain's wildest places' etc. To be linked into BMC resources, events, info and clubs. Minimum of one article per week commissioned in this style.
- More articles to be written on 'hot topic' current affairs. Access officers to brief relevant communications staff when working on issues pertinent to walkers, with the aim of producing content for website and, when appropriate, press releases. Target of at least one per week.
- Investigate the practicability of the 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.
- Web-responsible staff to consider how they can help to create more hill walking content for the website and to be more mindful of the need to achieve a balance.
- Increased funding for freelancers to produce content for the BMC website.

1.5.BMC TV

BMC TV is a young project, and one that is becoming successful. As of writing, in the last calendar month, BMC TV video was responsible for 40% of the BMC website traffic. It 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.

To some extent this gulf reflects the lack of interesting hill walking filmmakers compared to climbing ones. Generally speaking, climbing lends itself to video in a way which hill walking doesn't; making an interesting hill walking video requires greater consideration than it would for a climbing film. Consequently the number of people who can be drawn upon for hill walking videos is smaller.

Nevertheless, we should aim to ensure a comparable level of financial resource is being put into producing walking videos as is currently being put into climbing. The current disparity does not reflect well on the BMC as far as hill walking is concerned and risks entrenching views about its bias.

Possible ways forward include:

- Setting a target for the number of hill walking films on BMC TV – e.g. the number of hill walking films to be at least 50% the number of climbing ones by summer 2015.
- Commissioning climbing filmmakers to produce walking videos, with guidance and input from HWO if necessary. Linking up with hill walking partners and magazines to promote films to their audiences. We need to be much more proactive in marketing our video content across the board to all audiences, such as schools, DofE, scouts, other organisations.
- Filming more short 'how to' films for hill walking, scrambling, winter walking and backpacking. There are a lot of films of this type which could be made given the technicality of the latter three. More funding would certainly increase our capability in this area. We are co-funding films with AMI and DMM on topics such as scrambling and, whilst co-funding is cost-efficient, it is slower.
- 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.

2. Marketing

2.1. Themes and initiatives

The BMC's marketing resources are a vital way of reaching new audiences. Our combined online and social media channels help us reach an audience of outdoor enthusiasts that is to a large extent self-selecting, but marketing represents our primary means of getting a message in front of new people, and particularly those people who are interested in walking / hill walking but haven't heard of the BMC.

The three main 'specialist' hill walking magazines (Trail, Country Walking, TGO) have a combined circulation of 60 – 70,000, while there are a number of broader countryside / outdoor publications (e.g. Countryfile) with wider circulations still. There are also relevant audiences in the readership of mainstream newspapers and publications.

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 e.g. 'Walk this way' or 'The natural home for hill walkers'.

Ways forward could be:

- Creation of a unified hill walking ad concept to push for 2015 – 2016
- 200,000 leaflets with a targeted hill walking message to go into relevant magazines in Autumn 2014: TGO, Trail, Country Walking, etc
- More hill walking imagery to be commissioned
- BMC 'roadshows' to tour shops, venues and popular hill walking areas
- Marketing priorities and messages for 2015 to dovetail with hill walking strategy

2.2. 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. There is potentially a lot to be gained from revising the benefits package to include specific benefits for hill walkers.

The following should be considered:

- HWO to liaise with marketing and insurance staff to decide what this could be. More benefits to give hill walkers things they want; accommodation discounts, free clothing, beer, etc
- Revising the insurance members receive to include something more tailored for walkers e.g. including trekking insurance in benefits package?

2.3. Digital marketing

Expanded resources to cover digital marketing could build on our 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 (£10k/year)
- A high-profile digital campaign, tied in to new walking content on BMC TV
- Twitter advertising
- Google Adwords campaign
- Increase SEO spend on walking-specific terms
- Additional walking-specific landing pages
- Banner advertising for walking sites

3. Public engagement

3.1. Partnerships

The BMC does not offer a great deal 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. Of course, individual clubs go hill walking, but the extent to which clubs welcome hill walkers – particularly newer ones – is patchy. Beginner hill walking courses are offered through Plas y Brenin but the take-up has been small.

There is little prospect of matching schemes like the Ramblers Led Walks in the medium term at least due to staffing and resources, but partnerships could play a role, for example teaming up to run courses, events and engagement days with the likes of HF holidays, the National Trust and the YHA. Some of these partnerships have already been piloted, for example an introductory hill walking course with the National Trust in Shropshire which will be extended to other places over the coming year.

The following could be implemented:

- Four 'bring a friend' beginner hill walking events to be held throughout England and Wales per year – two in conjunction with HF Holidays, two with the YHA. 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!). First of these to take place below Scafell Pike and Snowdon on August Bank Holiday and to be replicated the following summer.
- BMC to join up with Mountain Training and RDOs to have a strong, large presence at events like Keswick Mountain Festival.

3.2. Regional Development Officer (RDO) roles

Our three Sport England-funded Regional Developments Officers (RDOs) could potentially play an important role in contributing to the BMC's hill walking efforts.

Currently the focus of their roles is split between delivering 'indoor to outdoor' courses for climbers and working to improve the work of clubs. Not only is this approach climbing-biased, there is also an argument that it yields a low reward for their effort invested. The numbers involved in courses, for example, are very small for the amount of time they take to create and run, while climbing walls can sometimes be intransigent partners.

The focus of the role of the RDOs could justifiably be widened, with a more equitable split between walking and climbing, rather than being restricted to channelling people along the path of indoor-to-outdoor climbing or working with clubs. This could involve more emphasis on things like staging events, media and promotion, presence at outdoor festivals and other 'public-facing' initiatives. This type of work is more likely to lead successes than the current approach.

The RDOs have already assisted to deliver some hill walking work, for example helping to establish the hill walking courses at Plas y Brenin and liaising with the National Trust to deliver hill walking courses in partnership. More of this type of 'public-facing' work would be beneficial.

In summary, the RDO role could be altered to:

- Focus more on hill walking than presently
- Widening the scope of their roles beyond focusing on simply indoor-to-outdoor climbers or clubs.

4. Access and conservation work

4.1. Focus

The traditional focus of the BMC's work has been on climbing issues, but this has broadened in recent years with the appointment of a policy officer and officer for Wales (see below), the work of both of which is quite equitably distributed between walking and climbing.

Of course, the organisation most well known in the UK for representing walkers is the Ramblers. In considering the future direction of the BMC, there is little point in 'trespassing' on the traditional turf of the Ramblers – for example, by suddenly investing large resources into tackling legalistic issues around footpaths. At root, the BMC and Ramblers are organisations which share a commitment to keeping the countryside open for ordinary people, and they have often worked together where common cause is shared, for example on the Countryside and Rights of Way Act (CROW), coastal access, and gaining political recognition for the benefits of outdoor recreation. Walkers are best served by both organisations working in cooperation rather than competition.

In seeking to do better access and conservation work for walkers, the BMC would be better off focusing a) on the upland environment, as opposed to the countryside generally, and b) on issues of wider scope than those typically addressed by the Ramblers. Even within these parameters, there is a tremendous range of potential issues to address, such as: landscape-scale conservation e.g moorland restoration and 'rewilding'; inappropriate development; energy infrastructure and windfarms; upland path maintenance; harmful changes to planning law; parking and charging; public transport; biodiversity; land management; visitor pressure; erosion; social exclusion. In a broad sense, the struggle for access is not yet won; while Scotland now has Scandinavia-style presumed right of access, in England and Wales, even despite CROW, access is still limited and conditional.

The more resources and effort the BMC contributes to these issues, the more it will raise its profile and win respect among hill walkers.

4.2. Staffing

The BMC has three full-time access and conservation staff; an officer for Wales, an officer dealing with policy issues at the level of the UK government, and an officer whose role primarily focuses on localised climbing access issues in the English regions.

The work of the first two is split equitably between climbing and walking. The policy officer usually deals with broad-brush political concerns, and the benefits of their efforts are often spread across outdoor recreation generally. Likewise, the work of the Welsh officer frequently straddles both walking and climbing.

The third officer is largely focused on climbing, but this is justifiable; the officer in question has their hands dealing with the many hundreds of crags in Britain to which access is restricted or problematic, and updating the BMC's Regional Access Database (RAD), an online information source about live access problems. What is missing is a walking-focused counterpart to their role, another full-time member of staff whose job is to address hill walking issues across England and Wales. Currently hill walking is being represented on the 'higher' level of politics but the BMC is contributing little 'on the ground'. As mentioned above, we would not wish to intrude on the Ramblers' generally footpath-focused terrain, but there are still many issues which someone in this role could address e.g: localised problems of access to Open Access land, volunteer coordination, erosion, upland path maintenance, parking, litter, visitor pressure, public transport, harmful or objectionable developments, and larger-scale conservation issues such as moorland management. Many of these issues recur as priority concerns of our members. If a propitious financial opportunity arises to hire new staff, the BMC should consider creating this post as a matter of priority.

5. Organisation and structure

5.1. Spending

If the use of money is to be taken as an indication of the BMC's priorities and purpose, hill walking comes in a very distant third to climbing and mountaineering. Ascertaining what proportion of the BMC's spending is directed towards things which benefit hill walkers involves a certain amount of subjective guesswork, as the work of some staff is divided between hill walking and climbing in a way which is often blurred.

Suffice to say, hill walking is relatively underfunded compared to climbing. Many BMC specialist programmes – such as managed rocks, climbing walls, heritage, competitions, expeditions, international meets, training, youth, UIAA – are focused exclusively on indoor climbing, climbing or mountaineering, and do not benefit hill walking at all.

With a look at this imbalance, it becomes unsurprising that in the eyes of the wider world the BMC is not perceived as being committed to hill walking in a serious way. If the BMC is genuinely committed to the idea of doing more work for hill walkers it is not unreasonable for it to consider re-examining its spending priorities.

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 (see above 'Access and conservation work')
- 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 / adventure ambassadors
- Workshops for clubs to attract more hill walking members

5.2. Clubs

In the 2014 Club Survey, 90% of club members and 92% of non-club members saying their club did walking, compared to 62% for indoor roped climbing and 50% for trad climbing. Scrambling lay between walking and climbing in popularity. While it is difficult to extract firm conclusions from this about club priorities (some may simply go walking when the weather precludes climbing), it is clear walking is a significant element of the activities of many clubs, and that a large proportion of clubs are purely hill walking / scrambling clubs.

Currently the staff who engage most directly with clubs are the RDOs. This constitutes another argument for the focus of the roles of the RDO to be more equitably split between walking and climbing.

It is also striking that while club membership is in general decline, 'social' walking groups of the sorts found on Meetup.com and commercial providers like Large Outdoors are apparently enjoying a boom. This may suggest that the formalised, relatively expensive and committing nature of clubs is not currently appealing to the public in the same way as looser, more informal types of groups and gatherings. The BMC needs to address this discrepancy. This can be achieved either through channelling more resources to clubs to increase their appeal, or perhaps through hosting our own events, possibly in partnership with the likes of the National Trust, YHA or HF Holidays, that have an informal, social appeal. The input of the RDOs would be welcome on this question, as their energies are likely to be key to addressing it in the future.

5.3. 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.

Most BMC Area meetings are dominated by climbers and discussions about climbing. As far as many of the participants are concerned, the purpose of these meetings is solely to discuss issues affecting climbing, and largely technical ones such as bolting, crag clean-ups and access to specific crags which have no appeal or interest for walkers. When walkers do attend these meetings they often report feeling like it was not for them and rarely return for a second time.

There are many issues of crossover between hill walkers and climbers – see the ‘Access and conservation work’ section above. These types of discussions, however, rarely receive an airing at BMC Area Meetings, however, and if they are they are usually approached from a fairly narrow and self-interested climbing perspective which is often alienating to walkers (and indeed some climbers.)

More positively, since the appointment of the HWO some areas have taken the hill walking message on board and are taking positive steps to widen the focus of their meetings to encompass hill walking issues. Examples include the Yorkshire Area’s discussion of proposed changes to planning law in national parks, a discussion in the Midlands Area on whether the BMC takes hill walking seriously, and a general openness by the Peak Area to discuss hill walking topics. Most areas are amenable to having the HWO come and talk.

In some cases these efforts have led to more hill walkers attending the meetings and one or two hill walking volunteers stepping forward. The HWO can work with the more promising Areas to draw attention to hill walking issues, give talks and presentations and liaise with interested volunteers to help keep them engaged and persuaded of the relevance of attending the meetings.

There are many hypothetical possibilities for increasing the voluntary focus of the BMC’s hill walking work, but it requires cultural change within the BMC and a move away from simply seeing its role as being concerned with technical climbing issues. For example: upland path maintenance is an issue of growing significance as local authorities and national parks seek to make savings from severe budget cuts; work to reach out to under-represented groups such as BME and people from disadvantaged backgrounds could help tackle issues around health, obesity, social exclusion and alienation from the countryside; local members could lead campaigns against intrusive and harmful developments.

Tackling these issues is a long-term and likely ad-hoc process. The BMC does not have the resources to unroll a nationally-coordinated volunteer scheme like Ramblers Led Walks. However a wider focus and a more inclusive approach encompassing hill walking will in time help to attract individual volunteers who can contribute to affecting the sort of cultural change needed.

In the meantime 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.

6. Targets and measurement

Gauging the success of the BMC's hill walking efforts presents a challenge, as many of the measurements of success are intangible things like perception, opinion etc. Nevertheless, it is important to have some concrete targets to aim for. Here are some ideas for what these could be:

- New hill walking members: on joining the BMC, new members to be asked about their outdoor habits through online multiple choice question asking them to list 'hill walking', 'climbing' and 'mountaineering' by order of importance to them. Target of 1,000 people who describe hill walking as their primary mountain activity joining per year.
- Hill walking survey: Another hill walking survey to follow on from the October 2013 one to be undertaken in October 2016. When asked the question "In your opinion, which statement best describes the work of the BMC, total number of people answering "It does a lot of good work for hill walkers" to have increased from 29.5% to 60%
- Participation: The HWO's post is funded by Sport England, who are keen to see the BMC promoting hill walking participation. We should therefore aim to see a noticeable increase in the numbers of people going hill walking, measured via various channels; APS, path counters, Natural England surveys, our own research, other survey efforts.
- Spending: Specialist programme spending on hill walking to increase by 50% in the next budget