



BMC Cymru

January 2015

NEWS

IMPORTANT DATES

A Note from the Editor

Entering 2015 we thought it was time to start a new year with a new look newsletter.

Alongside the usual news on access, conservation and more general issues of interest to BMC members, we have decided to include opinion pieces to stir debate prior to upcoming local area meetings. Our aim isn't to be a digital version of Summit magazine – or offer tabloid style columns, but to offer opinions from BMC members on issues affecting hill walkers and rock climbers in Wales. As a disclaimer, the opinions proffered aren't representative of the BMC but of the individuals themselves – feel free to agree, disagree or reply in kind, with your own opinion piece or at your next local area meeting. It'd be great to see members getting involved and contributing their own thoughts on subjects that they feel have an impact on BMC members. To contribute, please use the contact details at the end of this newsletter. Particularly good opinion pieces could be included as articles on the BMC website with the author's permission.

This issue of the newsletter has thoughts on fixed gear on traditional sea cliffs and some strong opinions on the recent issues affecting "Mt" Snowdon. But first....

A Few Thoughts from the Chair

State of the Union

January 2015 marks the start of my ultimate year as BMC Cymru/Wales Chair and also puts a lid on an excellent 2014 that once again gave us an almost endless amount of things to discuss as well as one or two really big subjects to get our teeth into too.

The real biggie: the proposal for an extension and simplification of access in Wales; was stalled by organisations way bigger than our own, and has sadly been put on hold for the time being. But we have plans in place to try and rekindle things as we go into an election year. And we've already had contact with the new minister now in charge of this.

The other hot potato has been Snowdon and the Snowdon massif in general. We've been drawn into everything from false paths to hydro schemes to Land Rover adverts to safety in general. Members have been quick to criticise the Park Authority and our relationship with it, yet through diplomacy and decorum, we are now a trusted ally and our opinions are sought on most matters.

We need to continue building this relationship if we want any real influence and if this at times seems a little frustrating, remember that it's worth conceding a few small points if it's going to help get us heard

Next Area Meetings

The BMC North Wales meeting will take place on Tuesday the 3rd of February, 7.30pm at The Vaynol, Nant Peris LL55 4UF

The BMC South Wales meeting will take place on Tuesday the 3rd of February, 7.30pm at Up and Under in Cardiff CF5 1BL

Up and under will be providing discount shopping before the meeting for BMC members. There will also be a talk at the end of the meeting on the latest gear available for 2015.

There will be free food, both veggie and non-veggie and plenty of lively discussion. All are welcome.

on larger ones. If we always appear to be negative and critical, we risk being ignored.

Overall in Wales/Cymru, the picture is an incredibly positive one. We've had an Access & Conservation Officer for 5 years now and I think most of us forget what life was like before Elfyn took on the role. Just look at the hours being put in and ask who'd be doing that work if we didn't have an officer?

But to improve things further we need more input from the group in general. If people see things or hear things that bother them they need to bring it to the group. We've seen great examples of this in 2014, perhaps the best example being the bolt issues in the slate quarries. But we've also seen things work quite poorly, with people turning up at meetings with points to make and things to discuss that really should have been raised with myself or Elfyn first.

And perhaps I could also ask for a bit of help on a recruitment drive? If everybody could try and drag a mate or climbing partner along to each meeting, we'd have a better turnout and ultimately a better democracy. I think it's fair to say that most newcomers usually enjoy things a lot more than they thought they would.

And there is free food!

And finally, could we be doing things differently? Please let us know if you have any thoughts for improving meetings or the way the area runs in general.

New Post Holders

For 2015 Wales/Cymru has two new national council representatives in the shape of Anthony Eccles and Jim Kelly. I'd like to thank them both for standing and hope we can find plenty for them to discuss on our behalf during the year.

And we also have a 'vice' Chair in Kate Worthington, who would like to know a little bit more about the role of Chair before deciding whether or not to stand as the BMC's first female Area Chair. I'll be grateful for her help this year and know she'll be amazing in the role.

Jim Kelly has also expressed an interest in the Chair position and would no doubt make a big contribution too. So it looks like we may even have a leadership race come the Autumn. That would be really healthy for the Area and I'm sure they could both work together and support each other whichever way it goes.

Tom Hutton

Access and Conservation News

by Elfyn Jones

Winter Climbing Conditions Project

This project is now fully up and running and with some of the white stuff having appeared on the tops it seems the website is getting quite a few hits as people are checking the conditions before venturing out. The aim of the project is to enable climbers to check conditions, especially to see if turf is frozen, before climbing on crags with fragile protected flora – in this case Devil's Kitchen cliffs and Clogwyn Du. Up to the first week of January it's interesting that there have been several days when air temperature has been below freezing but that the turf remains unfrozen at a depth of 5cms. The other notable (and expected) result is that the turf takes longer to cool down than the air (i.e. pure ice routes will form before turf routes) but remains colder after air temperatures have warmed up. The coldest air temperature recorded to date was on Dec 24th at -2.40C and the coldest turf was 0.60C on Dec 15th.

It would be great if people could take the time to use the feedback form on the website to state what the actual climbing conditions were like so that a direct comparison can be made with actual temperatures and climbing conditions. For instance, it's highly probable that the surface turf could still be frozen by wind-chill while remaining unfrozen at 5cm.

Bird Nesting Time Approaching

A reminder that with spring round the corner, it's also the time when our feathered friends are staking their seasonal claim on some crags. Seasonal restrictions apply to many popular crags including Gogarth, Clwyd Limestone, The Lleyrn, and The Ormes and also on some inland crags. New restrictions apply this year to some of the newly developed crags and zawns at Penrhyn Mawr (The Range), mainly due to nesting Choughs. The absence of an agreed seasonal restriction does not mean that birds are not present and climbers should be prepared to look for alternatives if they find birds nesting on their chosen routes. It is a criminal act to damage or destroy the nest of any wild bird while the nest is in use.

All the agreed restrictions in Wales are on the BMC Regional Access Database:

<https://www.thebmc.co.uk/modules/RAD/Se arch.aspx?s=-1&t=&r=34>



Snowdon

Snowdonia National Park Wardens are submitting a plan to their committees and the senior management of the Park, suggesting that a long term plan for the future management of the mountain and its facilities (footpaths, interpretation, parking, etc.) is needed. They are keen to hear the views of user groups on how Snowdon is managed and are hopeful of opportunities where this can be explored further. In light of recent discussions at recent BMC meetings this is a welcome move and BMC are hopeful of improved dialogue and consultation as this develops.

Welsh Government Access Legislation Review

After such a great start (and a well-publicised and supported campaign by BMC) this whole topic seems to have fallen off the Welsh Government's radar in recent months.

However BMC and other recreational groups have not forgotten about this and going forward in 2015, this will be a major area of work for the BMC in Wales. BMC will be raising the issue with the new ministers and will be hosting a number of events and site visits with key people to make the case for the need for better access to our sea-cliffs, outcrops and open spaces.

Finally...a plea from your access officer!

Despite the wealth of information in Green Guides, the Regional Access Database, newsletters, guidebooks, etc. much of my time still seems to be involved in resolving issues and defending our freedom to climb after damage or disturbance has been caused by climbing activities. This is especially so with new routes, new bouldering venues, etc. that are within SSSI's. So a plea for 2015 -if you have plans for new routes, or even if redeveloping an existing area, then get in touch beforehand if the area is at all sensitive from an access or conservation perspective. It's highly unlikely that access will be denied but discussing the issues with conservation bodies before problems arise is always more productive than when a situation arises where vegetation has been stripped or a line of bolts placed on an SSSI.

Safety on Snowdon

Can we do anything? Should we do anything?

It crops up at least once a week: safety in the mountains – particularly Snowdon. It never ceases to amaze me that this full-fat, real-life soap opera is being played out just a few miles from my house and office. And every meeting I attend, somebody, somewhere offers up some kind of solution or blames somebody, or just plain moans about it. Yet as I sit on a summit, as I frequently do, and quietly contemplate the issue; I can't help coming back to the same question: is it really our (the British Mountaineering Council) problem?



The BMC defines its role as 'Working for climbers, hill walkers & mountaineers' and while this is a pretty loose remit, it would be stretching things somewhat to suggest that it includes holding the hand of the average Snowdonia tourist who has to 'do' Snowdon while they are here, regardless of what time of year it is, what the weather is like or whether they have their crampon compatible flip-flops with them.

Whilst, for one day only, these people are walking in the hills, this doesn't really make them hill walkers. And they certainly aren't mountaineers or climbers.

As I see it we have two connections to this problem...

The first is that most of the MRT people are members – so ok, we have a duty to 'work' for them although I'm not sure that reducing the number of tourism related incidents is actually doing that.

And the second connection is that, as experts, we are often asked our opinion on issues such as marker stones, false paths etc etc.

And here we really start to posthole into deep crud, as our stance is typically opposed

to navigation aids or anything else that could potentially devalue the mountain. So we instead offer up other solutions: training, posters, bans, more wardens etc etc.

Ok, so there may just be some middle ground: less-experienced walkers who get into difficulty; or even more experienced walkers/climbers who are having an epic. It happens. And yes, it is within the BMC's remit to try and reduce these incidents. This would be 'Working for climbers, hill walkers & mountaineers.' Fortunately, as an organisation, we do a lot of this. So where is all this going? In my opinion, this is a tourism problem not a climbing, hillwalking and mountaineering problem. It's a tourism problem because Snowdon has been made into a tourist attraction. And not just by the Mountain Railway Company, but by just about every tourism business in north Wales. Snowdon is the region's Cash Cow, the whole place is geared up around it. And it's just a bit inconvenient that it can be dangerous at times.

I heard a few years ago that the Aguille du Midi Cable Car is France's number two tourist attraction after the Eiffel Tower. I'm not sure this is true but it did see over 800,000 visitors in 2011. Imagine if even more people had decided not to take the cable car but to walk up...

Ok, so it's not going to happen but that is what happens on Snowdon and it's just fortunate that it's quite a benign mountain most of the time, so the majority of these tourists get back down again with little more than damp undies and a few blisters. And so the show goes on.

It wouldn't though if it was a fun fair ride, or even a railway; it would have been closed down years ago.

So my proposal isn't that when asked, we shouldn't have an opinion on Snowdon. Of course we should. It's just that our opinion should be based on 'Working for climbers, hill walkers & mountaineers,' and it's the interests of our members that should come first, not the interest or safety of the general public – that is the responsibility of those who look after tourism in the region and bring them here to climb the mountain. The irony, of course, being that if any real measures were taken to make this monumental tourist attraction a lot safer, we would almost certainly oppose them. Perhaps that's as good a reason as any to settle for the status quo?

Tom Hutton

LLAMFF

LLAMFF IS BACK. AND IT'S BIGGER AND BETTER THAN EVER



Born in 2002, in the mountains of Snowdonia; home to so many of the world's leading climbers, mountaineers, paddlers, mountain bikers and ground-breaking adventurers, LLAMFF was a regular and extremely popular fixture on the outdoor calendar until 2011.

And for 2015, the only UK mountain film festival to be actually based in the mountains, is back with a new management team, some great new ideas, and of course some brilliant films from home and abroad. And the fringe festival will be just as strong as ever too with skills workshops, family activities and master classes from sponsored athletes.

Friday night is quiz night, with George Smith and DMM's Chris Rowland providing a quirky set of questions; and Saturday evening will feature a panel of inspirational Female athletes and adventurers. Sunday's main event will be "An evening on the Indian Face:" a chance to hear from of a select band of ascensionists talk about one of Britain's hardest, least climbed yet most revered rock routes; and the evening will wind up with a closing party and live music.

More details found at <http://www.llamff.co.uk>

Jason Rawles

Time to say farewell to fixed gear on traditional sea cliffs?

On my last visit to Gogarth two pegs disintegrated (literally) when I clipped them and after a tussle I managed to climb higher to reach two more pegs, which in appearance at least, were somewhat reminiscent of metalwork found in a Viking horde. This route was described in the guidebook as being "safe but desperate" – I eventually

lowered off a sky hook and later retrieved my gear on abseil.

In the 1950s, 60s and early 70s pegs were a common place piece of equipment used to safeguard climbers before cams, micro wires and thin dyneema slings were available to protect climbers in the event of a fall. Many of the finest rock climbs of the era were climbed with their use and even then some were still considered to be bold undertakings. Just think back to Joe Brown who would set himself a personal limit of only placing two per pitch. Today though, we're in a different era. Pegs are mostly used as tools for aid or winter climbers, some purists even decide not to use them in these circumstances. On the coastal crags of North Wales however, pegs have left a more lasting legacy.



Steel or aluminium and salty sea air mean corrosion on a rapid scale. Good pegs can rust into poor pegs within the space of a year or two and the problem has become widespread on popular cliffs such as Gogarth and its more adventurous counterparts on the Llŷn Peninsula. Now isn't a time to judge the ethics of the past but to look to the future for a sustainable solution to fixed gear on some of our favourite cliffs.

I asked several leading activists from this generation and the past their opinion on pegs in sea cliffs and their answers were quite revealing. George Smith thinks that the use of pegs on his routes was a "difficult judgement call", feeling that "a couple of pegs here and there might make something into a balanced route of a given grade rather than no route at all." As well as raising the question: "when you put up a route are you setting an informal challenge or creating a long term recreational facility?"

Whilst Haston is more pragmatic in his response considering rusting pegs to be "part and parcel of the grip factor." Before adding "pegs are good and bad. People forget that we didn't have great racks of gear back then, and in really bad rock a bit of iron bashed in with a big hammer can be the answer."

It must be said that racks in the eighties were more rudimentary than they are nowadays and that with a big precedent already set, people can't be blamed for placing pegs. But have we really got any excuses to place pegs when we have access to such advanced protection technology? Pete Robins feels very strongly on the issue of pegs in sea cliffs both as a seasoned on-sight activist at Gogarth and one of the best sport climbers in the country:

"I think this is the most important issue in British climbing at the moment. The last fifty years have seen short sighted climbers bash pegs in all over Gogarth, like they've done all over the world.

It's Bizarre. We are now at the stage where the pegs are rotten and the routes are not getting climbed. To top it off, there's no decent new trad routes for this generation to do because they were all done with pegs before. The pegs need to come out, that's for sure. The routes should then either be climbed without pegs on natural gear, with no gear (eek!), with long lasting bolts, or not climbed at all. Maybe we need to rethink the placing of selected bolts on trad routes, like they do in the rest of the world. The argument that this will spiral into grid bolting is naive. For an example, take 'Rosebud' in Mousetrap Zawn, a Stevie Haston E5 that has probably seen less than 5 repeats. When I did it, the peg was about to snap, I thought E6 at the time and a deck out with drowning scenes when the peg goes. What should we do? There's no other kit. Bash in a peg which will do good for a few more years? Glue in a bolt? Leave it to rot? It's a tricky debate!"



Pete raises some really interesting discussion points. Replacing pegs like for like is a very short sighted response to the issue, imagine what the cliffs will look like a hundred years from now with rust marks all over them. But maybe it's best to leave the final say to a very reasoned argument from Dan Mcmanus:

"I don't think hammered-in protection has a place in British trad climbing nowadays. I couldn't justify placing protection that I knew would rot away in a few years, filling the placement and discolouring the surrounding rock. I also think that it makes trad climbing

more dangerous as it's difficult to assess the quality of protection that you haven't placed yourself.

Pegs on older routes are tricky though, I think that where possible they should be cleaned and climbed without. But there are some great routes that would be pretty unappealing without the pegs! Like 'The Bells, The Bells!' for example, I don't think anyone would do that without the peg. But maybe that doesn't matter; there are plenty of other good routes out there that don't rely on pegs."

Calum Muskett

North Wales Youth Climbing Academy

The North Wales Youth Climbing Academy (NWYCA) has had a very busy term! With half of its members now on the BMC Regional Academies, the Welsh Championships, Irish Open, and a handful darting off to other events here and there around the UK. (Oh, and don't forget a lucky few who also made it out to Sicily and Kalymnos for some hot rock over half term!).

Eight members made it south for the Welsh Climbing Championships at Boulders on 7th November, with Kieran Forrest and Cian Evans making podium in joint 2nd. Also, Academy Coaches, Libby Peters (3rd) and Ollie Cain (5th) competed in the seniors showing that the oldies (sorry Ollie) can still do it, too!



Six keen and eager ones then ventured off to Dublin the following weekend - for most their first taste of 'international' competition - and a bit of Irish hospitality (it was commented that even the bus drivers were nice!). Kieran and Cian came 1st and 3rd, Hannah just missed podium with 4th, and there were respectable finishes from the other members - Thomas Jenkins - 6th, Abi Henderson - 6th, Zoe Wood - 9th.

And finally, NWYCA has had its first member selected for the GB Junior Lead Climbing Team. Kieran Forrest has come frustratingly close several times, so he was over the moon when he found out that he had been chosen following the selection on 29th November.

Sophie Wilson has been getting good results in the Bouldering competitions and is heading for the BJBC this weekend, along with several other members. We wish them all the best of luck!

For the majority of members though it's training hard now for the BMC Youth Climbing Series starting end of January and

selection thereafter for the Welsh Team. Watch out for them pushing the boundaries at the Beacon, Indy and the Boardroom!

Samantha Forrest

***If you would like to make a contribution to any of the forthcoming BMC Wales Area newsletters then please send information and photo's across to the editor Calum Muskett by e-mailing:
calum_muskett@hotmail.co.uk***