

Notes of meeting – BMC Cymru (North and South) response to ORG report.

“The Way Forward for Wales?”

Friday January 19th Plas y Brenin

Attendees – Tim Jepson (Chair of BMC North Wales), Will Killner (NC Rep South Wales and Exec member), Ray Wood (Access Management Group), Dan Lane (NC rep North Wales), Huw Gilbert (Mid Wales outreach chair), Andy Newton (Chair TyC and MTC rep). Mike Raine (past chair BMC Cymru and BMC vol).

Elfyn Jones – BMC Access & Conservation Officer (note taker/secretariat)

Apologies: Kate Worthington (previous BMC Cymru chair); Ollie Burrows (Chair BMC South Wales).

1) Purpose of meeting

For a group of current and past key BMC Cymru volunteer post-holders to consider and respond to BMC Organisational Review Group recommendations/proposals regarding operation and structure of BMC in Wales. To produce initial interim proposals that can be shared and agreed with the wider membership in response to Proposal 25 of the ORG report, *“The BMC should consider a clearly defined sub-group or creation of a wholly owned subsidiary for effective delivery of the BMC’s operations and support in and for Wales/Cymru”*. However many of these matters had already been noted and discussed at previous BMC Cymru meetings and are matters that the BMC needs to plan for irrespective of the outcomes of the ORG.

2) Background info /context

WK outlined the current status – North and South Wales now two separate areas (since Dec 2017) of the BMC, with a chair and associated post holders in both areas. This includes 4 NC reps. Mid-Wales is an “outreach” group with issues relevant to both areas being discussed. Important to maintain links and close associations between the three groups – important that BMC has an “pan-wales” outlook and that both areas have a mechanism to agree “all-wales” issues and provide an united response and view on strategic issues to BMC centrally and to external organisations. BMC has just over 5,000 members with Welsh addresses and some 20 affiliated clubs and two very popular and dynamic climbing academies based around Boulders Climbing Wall in Cardiff and the Beacon climbing wall in Caernarfon. However the vast majority of BMC members regularly walk, climb and use Wales for their activities and many clubs have well used huts in Wales.

EJ and MR explained how the political and external landscape in Wales had changed in light of devolution. Nearly all areas of BMC interest (sport, health, environment, recreation, access, conservation, etc.) are now managed directly by Welsh Government and overseen by the National Assembly for Wales. The implications of this are that organisations wanting to influence Welsh Government’s policy, work and future direction in these areas and those that wish to obtain funds deliver these policies increasingly need to have clear and distinct Welsh “identity”.

AN explained how Mountain Training Cymru has managed to achieve its own distinct identity but still works within the broad umbrella of Mountain Training UK (and in conjunction with the other home nation boards). MTC obtains some grant funding from Sports Wales to deliver their objectives to increase participation – this funding is used in essence to pay for an Executive Officer for MTC. BMC did consider applying for funds to Sport Wales to support club development in 2010 but withdrew the application when it became evident that Sports Wales could have then withdrawn funds from MTC.

BMC has a degree of political credibility and influence in Wales in the areas of access, conservation and to a limited degree in mountain safety issues. However in the areas of youth development, community engagement, encouraging participation and engaging with underrepresented groups (inc Welsh language groups), the BMC is not a major player. There is a clear vacuum in this area in Wales and increasingly Welsh Government, its agencies (especially Sports Wales and Visit Wales) and local authorities are looking to other organisations for advice and opportunities when it comes to mountaineering, climbing and hill-walking issues (for instance applications by mountaineering clubs for grant aid support from local authorities or for views on mountaineering issues from Sports Wales are referred to MTC or the Outdoor Partnership not to BMC). Various research and studies by Sports Wales and Natural Resources Wales have identified a considerable latent demand for mountaineering type activities within the Welsh population. Welsh Government is increasingly looking to other organisations (Wales based) to give advice and to fund and deliver programmes to fulfil these gaps. The practical implication of this is that in the medium to long term (and increasingly so) these bodies (such as the Outdoor Partnership, Outdoor Alliance, Snowdonia Active, South Wales Outdoor Provider Group, WATO, Ramblers Cymru, etc.), are the organisations that Welsh Government and other bodies are turning to for advice on all aspects of mountaineering in Wales. Without a clear and identifiable Welsh identity for the BMC within Wales, the BMC's influence and credibility will diminish as this process continues and as the devolution process continues to evolve.

These issues are not unique to the BMC – most NGO and sports bodies that operate cross-border are facing the same issues. Most sports and conservation organisations have already set up wholly separate structures in Wales (e.g. Canoe Wales, Cambrian Caving, Welsh Yachting, etc.), while others have invested disproportionately (compared to membership figures) in a distinct Welsh presence (e.g. Ramblers Wales have a full time office with 5 full time staff, including a Director of Wales with only 7,000 members in Wales, RSPB have separate policy and operational offices in Wales, over 30 members of staff and 20,000 members; National Trust 500 staff and 100,000 members; Canoe Wales have some 8,000 members and affiliates and over 10 staff members.....etc.)

3) Way forward?

- BMC should have a distinct identifiable presence in Wales. This probably requires the creation of a separate subsidiary (but still under the BMC's "ownership") legal board or "executive" for Wales.
- It's financially unrealistic for BMC to be able to employ enough staff in Wales to mirror the work done by staff in England – youth, hill-walking, policy, equity (language), development, clubs, training, etc. However the work done by

Manchester based staff in these areas within Wales needs to have a more distinct Welsh identity and to be directed through a subsidiary Welsh based office. This would require a cultural shift in the BMC's current operating model.

- The Welsh language issue needs to be addressed – there is currently no Welsh language content on the BMC website, magazine, membership documents or within its publications. Any need for translations is currently done ad-hoc by the Access Officer... All documents/posters/correspondence /policy document shared with local authorities, Welsh Government, schools, universities and other educational establishments really does need to be bi-lingual.
- The creation of a formal structure for the BMC in Wales could enable financial support to be accessed from various sources – Sports Wales/Natural Resources Wales/Heath Boards, etc. that could enable funding of a Welsh National Officer post to co-ordinate these works areas and lead on some areas.
- These ideas need to be shared with and agreed by the BMC's members and it is proposed that they are discussed at the next round of area meetings. It is also proposed that a meeting is held of the chairs of all the Welsh based clubs and those national (UK) clubs that have a Welsh membership (eg Climbers Club) to consider these ideas.
- BMC executive/office needs to investigate the technical and legal aspects to enable BMC Cymru to be a separate but subsidiary entity while still being part of the greater BMC and being able to make use of the resource and support from the main office.
- These proposed developments would not only be of advantage to BMC members (and potential members) in Wales but would also greatly increase the representation and influence of the BMC in Wales on behalf of all its members from across the UK, most of whom regularly use the mountains, hills and coasts of Wales for their activities.