



British Mountaineering Council SOUTHWEST AREA

ORDINARY MEETING MINUTES

Zoom Meeting: 27th February 2024 Zoom Meeting @7pm.

Chair: Colin Knowles, Secretary: Philip Wilson

If anything discussed at this meeting gives rise to a conflict of interest for anyone, please declare it at the start of the meeting.

Zoom Attendees:

Colin Knowles (Chair), Philip Wilson (Sec), Paul Ratcliffe (BMC CEO), Trevor Smith (BMC Members Council Board Rep), Ben Darby (Avon Rep), Marti Hallett (Swanage, Dorset Incl Portland & Isle of Wight Rep), Thomas Reeves (Hill Walking Rep), Iain Peters (Atlantic Coast & West Penwith Rep), Dave Wynne Jones, Steve Woollard, Adam Lowe, Beau Bell, Gwen Bennion, Ian Butterworth, Jerzy Wieczorek, , Mark Kemball, Nigel Crowe, Paul Roberts, Rick Sowards, Sam Benjamin, Richard Nadin, Tony Bird & James Mann.

- Welcome Introductions & Apologies for Absence:** Colin Knowles welcomed everybody to the meeting and introduced Paul Ratcliffe (BMC CEO) to the meeting. Apologies for absence were noted from Mark Courtiour (Somerset Rep), John Bentley & Julio Sánchez (Wye Valley Rep).
- Meet The New BMC CEO Paul Ratcliffe Q & A:** Paul introduced himself and outlined experiences to date which include being born and bred in Manchester and having more than 30 years' experience in the elite sport world, being a successful two-time Olympian who won the silver medal for Canoe Slalom at the Sydney 2000 Olympic Games. Since then, he has held a variety of leadership roles, and has experience within national governing bodies, from performance director and consultant, to holding a Non-Executive Board Director role at Surfing England, alongside being the Chair of GB Climbing Competition Climbing Performance Group (CCPG) as well as having held a highly commercial position within energy trading at Onyx Commodities. Paul outlined that he was meeting as many stakeholders and Volunteers as possible via Area Meetings to get up to speed. The subsequent Q & A session provided the following:
 - GB Climbing Overspend: Thomas Reeves asked about this. Paul confirmed that Members Council will be debating the Proposed 2024 Budget. He also confirmed that GB Climbing had overspent by £284k. He added that GB Climbing funding needed to be ring fenced and tightly controlled to also include how BMC Admin funding is paid for. He added that the BMC needed a financial system to provide accurate GB Climbing figures before any future decisions are made by the BMC to add more support money.
 - Simon Lee BMC Vote Of No Confidence: People asked about the resolution of no confidence in the BMC being brought by Simon Lee. Paul confirmed to question and that he had also met with Simon Lee to discuss his resolution and that this will be brought to the BMC Peak Area. It was also noted that Simon Lee had presented his Resolution to The Climbers Club in a meeting to a broadly sympathetic reception. Mark Kemball reported that as a Climbers Club member he would in no way support separating out GB Climbing from the BMC.

3. **Previous Meeting Minutes 2nd December 2023:** These minutes were agreed and signed off as an accurate and complete record of this meeting. The Chair noted that the AGM Minutes for the meeting also held at this time and place will be signed off at the next BMC SW Area AGM in 2024.

4. **Actions From Previous Meeting (2nd December 2023):**

- Link from the BMC RAD database to the Avon Gorge Fixed Equipment Policy on the BMC Community Site Southwest Area Meeting & AGM (02 12 2023). The link is [BMC Community \(thebmc.co.uk\)](https://thebmc.co.uk). Ben Darby is to do this shortly.
- Update From the BMC Board (Nov 2023) added to the BMC Community Site Southwest Area Meeting & AGM (02 12 2023). See [BMC Community \(thebmc.co.uk\)](https://thebmc.co.uk). Done.

5. **Cheddar Gorge for Everyone - Mendip Hills National Landscape Proposal. Should The BMC Support This?**

As a stand in for Mark Courtiour and in his absence, Colin Knowles outlined the proposal as follows:

- **Proposal Outline:** Sunday Road closure. A trial closure once a month - probably always on a Sunday. Legally and from the Narrows to Black Rock. Pedestrian and cyclist access only.
- **Pros:** No cars in the gorge between those points so nice to walk about in. Probably not much benefit to climbers as it's likely at least 4 of those Sundays will be in the closed for climbing periods (not National Trust side). Very nice for walkers and day trippers and BBQ's if they can park.
- **Cons:** Very disruptive for folk living above the closure, alternative routes are tortuous. Local businesses are unsure about it - it may have an adverse impact on trade. Poor weather may lead to poor attendances.
- **Alternative / Additional Proposal:** As supported by Cheddar Caves & Gorge (CC&G), this is the installation of a pedestrian walkway or pavement alongside the road. This is feasible for nearly all the whole route, except through 'The Narrows'.
- See: <https://mendiphills-nl.org.uk/news/cheddar-gorge-etrol/> for details.

The discussion & action was as follows:

- Seasonal Climbing restrictions still apply, climbers will not get a free rein in a relaxed environment, so no huge climbing improvements.
- Dedicated footpath would be good for tourists and hill walkers but of limited benefit to climbers.
- Narrows will still be a danger for pedestrians.
- Questions were asked about who would police the closure and erect and take down barriers, signs, etc.
- Parking would be an issue with only room for about 20 cars above the closures.
- Restricted road access a bad thing without decent parking, which itself has environmental issues.
- A trial is needed to pilot this proposal.
- **Action Point:** Colin Knowles agreed to write on our behalf to the consultation.

6. **Election For Clubs Committee SW Area Clubs Rep:** Beau Bell from Devon's LGBTQ+ Climbing Club. Beau has a strong People focused / Communication background and has already attended a Clubs Committee meeting. Beau was elected as our rep by a show of hands. She added that current Clubs Committee (and her) focus is on bringing 'For Profit' and 'student clubs' into the BMC. She added that there is a trial with 12 'Youth Clubs' being BMC affiliated (with proper safeguarding controls) which could be a huge growth area for the BMC). Steve Woollard reported on the recent debate within The Climbers Club as to whether to allow under 18's into the club. Resistance to this revolved around implementing safeguarding issues and the liabilities that this implied. Gwen Bennion added that she has professional safeguarding expertise, so would

be happy to help. Trevor Smith added that the [BMC Safeguarding Policy](#) covers both young people as well as vulnerable adults.

7. **Election For SW Climbing Wall Rep:** Gwen Bennion. Gwen is a long-term climber who wants good integration between competitions and sustainability and walls to be inclusive engaging families and children, to encourage and convert these groups into long term climbers. Values that are also shared by the walls themselves. Gwen was elected as our rep by a show of hands.
8. **Members Council Feedback:** Trevor Smith reported on the Proposed BMC 2024 Budget presented to Members Council 28/02/2024 and the motion of no confidence brought by Simon Lee for the next BMC AGM in the BMC Peaks Area. He also outlined work already carried out on the structure of the BMC to change the way GB Climbing is managed by the BMC. He hoped in 2024, the BMC could concentrate on issues that directly affect members such as access.
9. **Local Area Access Issues:**
 - **Dartmoor Wild Camping:** Thomas Reeves reported that Alexander Darwall was appealing against the wild camp ruling against them. The Dartmoor National Park was opposing this with indirect admin support from Devon County Council. This decision would be final and could potentially overturn the ban. The [Save Dartmoor Backpack Camping - Appeal Fundraiser \(Official\) - JustGiving](#) can be accessed from here for those wanting to donate.
 - **New Right to Roam Legislation:** Thomas added that Cath Flitcroft (BMC) is engaged politically to change the right to roam legislation, under a change of government. If successful, this might negate a Darwall win. There is also a new [BMC 'Right To Roam' Video](#) released by the BMC.
 - **Vixen Tor:** The proposed mass trespass which the BMC supported has been called off due to erosion concerns. Thomas questioned the wisdom of the BMC directly supporting this issue as a weapon of last resort.
 - **Avon Gorge Scrub Bash, Downs Parking, Regearing Requests, New Stakes on Main Wall, Mayoral & Council Neglect & Aggressive Rock Clearance:** Ben Darby reported on a successful scrub bash held on the 24/02/2024 in Avon Gorge. There is a proposal to limit Downs parking from 5 to 3 hours to discourage overnight camping. This affects climbers. Colin Knowles has written to oppose this as there is no aspect of this which the BMC can support. Some routes in Avon Gorge have had re-gearing requests, but these requests have been rejected as these proposals fall outside of our Re-gearing Policy. There is a need for stakes on some Main Wall routes which is being addressed. Colin Knowles said that he wants a commitment from future councillors for support for Avon Gorge before they are in post, following the shortly discontinued Bristol Mayor role. Dave Wynne Jones asked about recent aggressive rock clearance by an individual. Ben Darby said that the individual acted in good faith and the situation was resolved amicably. Meeting attendees agreed that this issue was difficult (once you start where do you stop) but did not want aggressive over clearing of climbs.
 - **Cheddar Gorge Via Ferrata:** A via ferrata has been established by an outdoor provider. Climbers are not blamed by Cheddar Caves & Gorge. Mark Courtiour is continuing to monitor the situation.
 - **Cheddar Brainbiter Route Peg Used for Aid Request for Bolt Replacement:** Dean Stock reported that this would also allow protection for an adjacent sports route. Richard Nadin requested clarification as to which peg this was and noted that it is a Littlejohn / Cannings route. This will be raised as an agenda item at the next meeting for discussion.
 - **National Trust Quarry Closures Winspit & Eastman Quarries:** The National Trust is concerned following rockfalls about danger to the public and are in a dilemma as to how to deal with this and

still allow climbing. They continue to view climbers as informed users who should have continued access.

- **Carn Gowla:** Iain Peters outlined the blanket climbing ban imposed last year on the cliffs. He outlined that the BMC under Cath Flitcroft wants to negotiate and information share with the National Trust & RSPB to determine and allow climbing in non-bird nesting areas. A high-resolution survey by boat and drone took place last year to identify these areas, none of which were in main cliff climbing areas. The National Trust Warden however remains unmoved. Iain is hopeful that climbing will be allowed.
- **Symonds Yat Rockfall:** Julio Sánchez reported by email that all of the crag and car park still remains closed to climbing and walking due to rockfall. This is despite this rockfall being minor and in a non-climbing area.

10. **Matters Arising Not Covered Elsewhere:** Paul Ratcliffe highlighted the 'Outdoors For All' on the 6th March 2024. See: The [Outdoor Industries Association \(OIA\)](#) collaborative manifesto called "Outdoors For All". This initiative advocates for responsible access to green and blue spaces across the United Kingdom. It encourages activities like cycling, walking, climbing, horse riding, caving, swimming, and flying in our countryside. If you're interested in specific outdoor courses or events, you might want to check local listings or organizations like [Thornbridge Outdoors](#) for any scheduled activities.

11. **Any Other Business:** None.

12. **Date, Time & Location of Next Area Meeting:** (date and time to be determined). The next area meeting in April 2024 will be held in Exeter and will be a Hybrid.