

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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BMC CYMRU – NORTH WALES LOCAL AREA MEETING

8:00pm, Thursday 9 June 2016 at Vaynol Arms
Nant Peris, Gwynedd, LL55 4UF

MINUTES

Minutes taken by Stephen Hobdell
Meeting chaired by Kate Worthington

1. Welcome & apologies for absence

Present: Richard Bale, Andy Boorman, Anthony Eccles, Dave Evans, Mark Evans, Stephen Hobdell, Tim Jepson, Elfyn Jones, Stephen Jones, Will Kilner, Dai Lampard, Dan Lane, Harry Marshall, Chris Parkin, Iona Pawson, Mike Pycroft, Mike Raine, Ron Rees Davies, Eluned Roberts, Owen Samuel, Rocio Siemens, Mary Snowden, Andy Townsend, Peter Whittaker, Kate Worthington, Ross Worthington, Dan Yates (27).

Apologies: John Harold, Tom Hutton, Calum Muskett, Helen Pye (SNPA), Peter Johnson, Dave Turnbull.

Kate Worthington (Chair) welcomed everyone to the meeting, and introduced Elfyn Jones (BMC access & conservation officer for Wales) and Stephen Hobdell, acting as secretary for the meeting.

KW thanked everyone for signing in via the computer, which was an experimental method, and asked what people thought of it; the response was mixed!

2. Note issues for AOB

- Cover for Elfyn Jones
- Officer attendance at meetings

3. Minutes of previous meeting

Minutes of the meeting held on 6 April at Plas y Brenin were accepted.

4. Matters arising not covered elsewhere

None.

5. Actions from previous meeting

- KW to contact Hannah Hughes about bilingual communications – in progress
- Apologies for not producing newsletter in time for this month's meeting – in progress

6. Agenda items

6.1 Welsh language policy for BMC Cymru

Hannah Hughes is working to translate text for the Cymru Wales newsletter, social media (Facebook and Twitter) and other relevant communication channels.

6.2 TremFest 2016

TremFest was held in early May, and once again was really successful, with about 80 people attending. Weather was mixed, but that was good because it meant more footpath work! Eric Jones helped out and was pleased with what was achieved. Eric is definitely selling the café this year, and is keen for it to be sold to a sympathetic buyer, but there could be parking problems for climbers if sold for use as a garage. There was a discussion about whether the BMC could purchase the site or a portion of the site for parking. Andy Boorman (AB) felt that we needed to be careful not to prejudice any sale that Eric makes. Anthony Eccles (AE) felt that we

should at least raise the issue at National Council, and request a decision on whether to pursue a full or partial purchase.

ACTION: AE to raise at National Council, with view to actioning it at Exec.

6.3 TradFest 2016

KW reported that this annual event would be happening this weekend in NantPeris, featuring talks, test equipment, food, beer and camping. Tickets cost £30 and have sold out. BMC youth and partnerships officer James McHaffie was attending to give careers (and climbing) advice.

6.4 Hill walking days

Cari Evans and Anthony Eccles (South and North Wales Hill Walking Reps respectively) organised hill walking days for members in May (South) and June (North), but, despite promotion, there was no take-up. The meeting asked for ideas on how to better promote such events and reach the right audience. EJ reminded the meeting that the purpose of the walks was to get BMC members together to talk to BMC staff, so not just a walk for the day, but a bit of a walking meeting, to see how hill walkers can be better served.

Mary Snowden (MS), a BMC member who was previously a Ramblers member, said that she hadn't been aware of the walks. There was a general feeling that the BMC office could have done more to support and promote the walks. It was also felt that bi-lingual promotion would have helped. The fact that the BMC Cymru Wales newsletter did not come out in time for the meeting probably also contributed to a lack of awareness. It was suggested that the Outdoor Partnership / Y Bartneriaeth Awyr Agored could help us to promote such events, as well as local clubs, if they had not already been targeted.

6.5 Access updates

EJ provided an update on a number of nesting restrictions:

Pembrokeshire: lots of new restrictions at St Govans due to birds nesting in new places

Anglesey: no more belay stakes at Penrhyn Mawr please, due to rare plants being pierced (South Stack Spatulate Spleenwort!). Some are being removed and replaced by more discreet ones.

Ormes: Hornby Crags restriction lifted (Choughs not nesting there); St Tudnos and Castell y Gwynt restrictions still in place. AE asked about reports of people chasing sheep over cliffs on the Ormes. EJ said that the reports hadn't been corroborated.

Craig y Tonnau: EJ reported that the crag sits in forestry which is privately owned but managed by a third party for the Forestry Commission, which has written to outdoor centres saying it shouldn't be used commercially (non-commercial use is permitted). There have been previous warnings not to take groups there, but no environmental concerns. A change of management company is likely soon, and EJ suggested to keep groups/centres away from the crag for now.

National Trust licensing

The trust's pilot activity and event licensing scheme is not being run in Wales; NT Wales has told Central NT that they don't want it. If providers want to use a trust site, or to be based on a trust site, then NT would license them to do that, but wouldn't stop other people.

In the Lake District, one of the areas where the pilot scheme is running, it appears that scheme is not being rigorously enforced. EJ added that one of the trust's managers in the Lake is a former BMC access officer, and has perhaps lent some common sense to the way the pilot has been running.

6.6 Mend Our Mountains

Not discussed at meeting.

6.7 Women's Development Group

Rocio Siemens (RS) gave an update. The group was formed in December 2015, and will run for two years as a pilot to see what can be done to engage more women in the BMC and encourage participation in all aspects of the outdoors and mountaineering, including leadership roles. Although the group membership is currently all women, men could also be part of the WDG if it was felt that a more balanced and inclusive membership was desired.

KW reflected on wanting to include more females at local meetings, and involvement in volunteering at all levels. KW also asked for suggestions of the name of a person who represented the spirit of the group, after whom the group might be re-named; email suggestions to KW.

Mike Raine (MR) asked whether there was a parallel with the existing Equity Steering Group. KW replied that the current chair of the ESG sits on WDG as well. EJ reminded the meeting that the Women's International Climbing Meet, a joint BMC/Pinnacle Club event, will be held in North Wales later in the month.

6.8 News from clubs (Mike Byrne)

Clubs rep did not attend meeting; no club issues discussed.

6.9 National Council update

Small-scale hydro-electricity schemes

KW introduced Dan Yates, who is heading up the Save The Conwy Campaign (STCC) with Snowdonia Society (SS).

DY said that his interest started with the large Conwy Scheme, which STCC has been working with SS to oppose. There has also been an increase in smaller-scale schemes, which are having an impact on our mountain environment as well. STCC feels that the national park lacks a clear and coherent policy on hydro when compared to its policy on wind. There is a lack of care in choosing sites (which are important for leisure, landscape and ecological reasons) and the national park does not appear to be considering the cumulative effect of the schemes. Additionally, the role of the National Trust in renting its land for such development conflicts with its message of preservation. Due to these schemes having a high impact on the mountain landscape, DY asked if the BMC is interested in adding its support to the efforts of STCC/SS

EJ explained that the BMC has no view on the relative merits of different forms of energy production. Its role and responsibility, as expressed in the BMC Landscape Charter, is in campaigning to protect areas from developments that damage their landscape character and detract from their recreational and amenity value. The national park's policy is in favour of individual small-scale schemes, but this doesn't address the combined effect of multiple schemes (over 150 applications are live in the park at the moment).

KW said that many people had complained about rubbish and materials being left at various sites. EJ added that some of the schemes around Nant Peris have not been adhering to the conditions of the consent/licences, yet they weren't fined for these breaches, simply issued a letter. Dai Lampard added that the village had requested help from the BMC, the Climbers' Club and the Alpine Club in opposing the schemes. EJ said that a BMC response would have to be very factual in defining the visual and physical impact of the schemes.

Mike Rosser asked whether we could object on landscape grounds to similar development in Ogwen Valley, by targeting the National Trust. EJ said that we have already objected site by site (all we can do), and we need a more concentrated approach to influence policy.

DY explained that the legislation which permits the schemes had been imposed at a European level, which makes it more difficult to oppose than if it came from the Welsh or UK government. EJ added that ultimately, it's the landowner who says whether the scheme goes ahead. The NT is a big landowner, and sees the schemes as a source of income, but could be influenced by opposition to the schemes. DY said that STCC has managed to arrange a meeting with the Justin Albert, the National Trust's Director for Wales, to discuss the schemes; SS is also requesting meetings. The aim is to get the trust to withdraw support for the RWE project on the Conwy, as well as for other schemes until the national park is consulted. DY believes that there is something to be gained by lobbying the national park to have a better policy and to apply it.

KW asked how the BMC might be able to have an impact on the developments. EJ said we can advise members, and we can campaign as an organisation. We can ask the BMC's Access Management Group, which is meeting next week, to discuss the issue and advise on action. Ross Worthington asked whether we should consider arranging an open meeting to discuss this issue. EJ said that the BMC is organising a conference in November (in Cumbria) to discuss access and footpaths, and the hydro schemes could be included in discussions. DY felt that by working together we could pool resources and funds, reach out to more supporters, and engage more effectively with the national park in dialogue aimed at clarifying its hydro policy.

In summary, the meeting agreed that the BMC should support and work with the Stop The Conwy Campaign and the Snowdonia Society to pressure the Snowdonia National Park to improve its policy on hydro-electricity schemes. The BMC should also target the National Trust, to object to further development of hydro-electricity schemes in the Ogwen Valley (and relevant other NT properties). DY also requested that the BMC adopt a view on the Conwy scheme, even though it's not a mountain landscape.

7. AOB

Cover for Elfyn Jones

Elfyn will be off work for substantial periods in the coming months for health reasons. Limited cover will be provided from BMC head office.

Officer attendance at area meetings

Mike Raine noted that it's been a while since a BMC officer (other than Elfyn Jones) attended a meeting. EJ said that this had been noticed, and that a small working group was looking at how better to serve members in

Wales. BMC officers had also been reminded that Elfyn is not the only officer who should be supporting area meetings in Wales. EJ added that it was up to the area to agree ideas and present them for support where necessary.

8. Date of next meeting

Proposed date: Thursday 8 September, or some time in November if it was felt that a September meeting wasn't necessary.

(Post-meeting note: next meeting now likely to be on Tuesday 13 September)

Meeting closed: 21:33.