

# BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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## Minutes of Midlands Area Meeting 7 Sept 2016 Old Edwardians' Sports Club, Solihull

**Present:** Phil Simister (Chair), John Edwards (Sec), John Churcher (SolihullMC), Margaret Harries (SolihullMC), Ed Shaw (SolihullMC), Richard Burton (SolihullMC), Richard Cope (SolihullMC), Helen Every (SolihullMC), Stuart Webb (M.A.M.), Michelle Aukland (Bowline Club), Graham Richmond (Bowline Club), Zoe Pickering (Bowline Club), David Jones (WestBromMC), Nigel Tarr (WestBromMC), John Handley (CoventryMC), Richard Lloyd (CoventryMC), Richard Law (WrekinMC), Bernard Lee (WorcesterMC), David Wilkinson (WolverhamptonMC), Phil Mullington (Fell & RockCC), Richard Greaves (CeunantMC), Adrian Jones (Red RopeCC), Elaine Little (Bear Rock), Colin Little (Bear Rock), George Cave (Alpine Club), Colin Knowles (BMC Executive), Nick Colton (BMC), Rosi Yule (SAKMC),  
Independent members: Roger Fanner, Ian Atkins, Ian Blanch, Stephen Burgess, Charles Gameson, Mike Beaumont, Brian Smith, Chris Price, Matt Cooper, Stuart Jamieson, Ruth Joynes, Phoebe Husband, Rebecca Husband, Richard Twilton, Pete Lubrano, C. Lubrano, M. Blake, Ian Cornish, Cat Gavriusova.  
Non members or unstated: Stuart Chester, Alun Hughes. **(49)**

### 1. **Welcome and Apologies:**

- a. **Welcome:** Phil Simister welcomed everyone to this unusual area meeting, in that the focus would be mainly on one topic: the rebranding hinted at in AOB point 2 in the last Midland Area minutes.
- b. **Apologies:** Apologies had been received from: Andy Railton, Ian Wyatt, Simon Pearce, Paul Weaver, Brian Downes, Brian Cooper, Jon Marsden, Zoe Pickering.

2. **Minutes of the last Meeting:** The circulated minutes were agreed as accurate.  
(proposed: Richard Law, seconded: Ian Blanch).

3. **Matters arising from the minutes not covered elsewhere:** None.

### 4. **Reports:**

- 4.1 **Access East:** Andy Railton had emailed that Hinkley & Bosworth district council had at last spoken to Rob Dyer about Markfield Quarry and Rob is producing a submission which will be sent to the council. A member present commented that they had been climbing there recently and had had no problems so wasn't sure what all the fuss was about.
- 4.2 **Access West:** Richard Law had nothing to report.
- 4.3 **Climbing Walls:** John Churcher reported that a new climbing wall in Lode Lane, Solihull was due to open next year.
- 4.4 **Youth:** Ian Blanch had nothing to report.
- 4.5 **Hill Walking:** David Jones had nothing to report.
- 4.6 **Club Issues:** Michelle Aukland had nothing to report.

5. **National Council Report from last meeting:** Phil Simister said there had been some reference to the inclusion of climbing in the next Olympics but the rest was about the rebranding proposals. He said he had abstained in the vote on name change.

6. **Proposed Rebranding of BMC to Climb Britain:** Phil outlined the format of the debate, pointing out that we were fortunate in having 3 members of the National Executive present. A show of hands revealed that all but 2 attendees were BMC members.

i) **Nick Colton** spent 15 minutes going through the BMC's Powerpoint presentation, emphasising the following points:

- Reason rebranding was looked at: Sport England funding is likely to be cut in a couple of years time.

Sport England offered funds to all sports to pay consultants to look at branding etc with a view to making organisations more commercially appealing, so reducing dependency on their funding. Sponsorship & increased membership or a hike in membership fees would be needed to cover the forthcoming cuts. The BMC did not ask for a rebrand; it was the consultants who suggested it. It got the rebrand ideas for free and there was no compulsion for the BMC to accept these. He stressed there were no links to sport climbing in the Olympics, which are funded through the totally separate organisation UK Sport.

- Why not stick with the old brand?: Surveys & interviews suggested the BMC was not seen as relevant to many hillwalkers, boulderers & indoor climbers. The idea of a 'Council' is outdated and the name could be a barrier to recruiting new, particularly young, members. More members = a bigger voice, more influence & less need to raise subscriptions.
- Timescale & why membership was kept in the dark: Talk of having to modernise image etc first arose at a Sport England conference in March 2015. The "Climb Britain" idea was agreed by the BMC Board on 18 May this year and agreed 18 For, 0 Against, 1 Abstention at National Council on 18<sup>th</sup> June. Commercial sensitivity was suggested as the reason why members were not told about the idea. The announcement of the proposed name change on 25<sup>th</sup> July was met with a massive & unexpected reaction and, as a result of this, the decision to consult with members before going any further was announced just 4 days later. Nick stressed that "*name change was not a done deal*". Club's representatives met in London yesterday. Area meetings conclude 14<sup>th</sup> Sept. All suggestions will be reviewed by National Council on 17<sup>th</sup> Sept and a way forward decided. If further discussion & debate were needed there were the options to use National Council on 3<sup>rd</sup> Dec and /or the AGM in April 2017.
- Consultancy slides: Some of the ways the 'think tank' came up with its opinions & ideas were shown in several slide, the final one of which presented the 4 'Options for discussion'.

**ii) Roger Fanner** spent around 10 minutes summarising the reasons not to change, airing his own views and those of others he had come across personally or read online. Unavoidably he had to miss the last National Council but had he been there he would have voted against the "Climb Britain" proposals because our existing name carries respect and is known throughout the world.

- Overwhelming opposition. He pointed out that of the 284 comments on the BMC website, only 4 were in favour of the change. The vast majority of the 350 posts on UKClimbing were also unfavourable, as they were on Facebook. Most reflected hurt at the lack of consultation with the membership, especially as National Councillors are there to represent members' views.
- Do we need change? The BMC name is the 'brand leader' in the UK and the real issue is not the name but reaching the people we don't currently reach – hillwalkers, indoor climbers and the under 25's. The proposed new name is seen as naff / childish / dumbing down by many and wrongly reinforces the impression that it excludes hill walkers.
- British / Britain. We get away with being the British Mountaineering Council because we have had the name for a long time. We do not have representation from Northern Ireland or Scotland and in light of the new politics of devolution any new name couldn't really claim to cover more than England & Wales. The new name also suggests we don't climb outside Britain and is grammatically dubious.
- Recent surveys: Since the rebrand announcement a survey on UKC suggested 94% of people are against the name change. MY Outdoors asked 216 people dressed in walking kit at Manchester, Edale & Castleton which name was more appealing. 32 expressed no preference but of the 184 who did, 91.3% chose British Mountaineering Council.
- Other uses for this commercial name: The UK will be fielding a GB team in sport climbing at Tokyo 2020 so this could be the name for it.
- The new Logo: Roger felt this was almost universally disliked. He finished by demonstrating how you could make your own version by folding 2 French tricolor napkins, wondering if by chance the consultants had Gallic connections.

**iii) Open Discussion** Phil Simister asked what the initial impressions of members at the meeting were. A show of hands revealed that 4 or 5 people liked the rebrand idea to some degree but the majority were unhappy. The following points were made:

- Matt Cooper wondered how accurate the consultants fact-finding process was on which they based their conclusions. He stated that the 2 climbing centre owners he had spoken to had negative views on the rebrand.
- Ian Atkins pointed out that many of the people present will be representing the views of another 20 or 30 people in their clubs who are not present. He was still suspicious that there was some connection in the rebranding with the competition climbing that would feature in the Tokyo Olympics.

- Charles Gameson felt the name change would be a massive backward step. 'Climb' isn't a word that is relevant to people who go for 'a good walk in the hills' and he had been pushing the hill-walking agenda since his first area meeting in the late 1980's. Don't get rid of the word 'mountaineering'. He felt it was very wrong of National Council to have a vote at the last meeting; their role is to agree policy only after consulting members.
- David Wilkinson said that WolverhamptonMC's members were unanimously against the proposal for a name change. He pointed out that the current logo on the website pages is good, especially the subtitle 'working for climbers, hill walkers & mountaineers' which he felt should be used more often.
- Richard Greaves thought both names should be kept and used. He was happy to rebrand a bit and felt the "Climb Britain" might help attract indoor climbers but wanted to keep the BMC.
- Phil Mullington reported as an independent member of the Fell & RockCC, some of whose 1,300 members will live in the Midlands. Their committee was very disappointed with the lack of consultation and thought that the emphasis on climbing needed to be tempered. They saw very few positives in the rebrand, particularly as mountain walkers didn't seem to be included with the new name. They would hate to see a separate organisation (eg British Association of Sports Climbing) to arise out of this process.
- Rosi Yule questioned the rationale for the change as she felt the BMC name was not a barrier to attracting new members. Just as British Petroleum had become BP, she suggested the rebrand should be to BMC.
- Mike Beaumont thought the BMC needed to look at rebranding and move with the times but felt "Climb Britian" was too cryptic. Just as 'The Ramblers Association' had become "Ramblers" and the British Canoe Union had dropped the last word why can't we just rebrand to "British Mountaineering"?
- A point of order was made from the floor that BMC membership was increasing year on year, it was just that some people wanted to see a more rapid increase.
- John Edwards was amazed by the breath-taking lack of consultation or warning given but felt that the services provided by the organisation were more important than the name. He pointed out that the BMC acronym also stood for organisations involved with medicine, cycling, IT & running, so he felt that #Climb or @ClimbBritain might be more useful for social media & advertising than #BMC. He felt the Union Jack should feature in the new logo.
- Helen Every said she didn't support the process by which the decision was reached. She felt that she had never 'mountaineered a hill' and that 'Climb' was more inclusive.
- Ian Blanch had lost count of the times he'd had to explain what BMC was to young people at the start of climbing competitions, then getting the response that 'this is climbing, not mountaineering'. He felt that much of the younger demographic would be for the 'Climb' idea.
- John Handley felt the lack of consultation was the main problem and was surprised a possible name change wasn't mentioned at the last AGM. Nick explained that consultation was still on-going at that time so nothing definite to discuss at the AGM. Someone else responded by saying they still didn't see why it all had to come out so quickly as a definite change in the online piece posted by Peter Burnside on 25/07/2016.
- Chris Price felt the name change was unnecessary as he hadn't been put off by it when he joined as a young person over 50 years ago. The rebrand sounded like a fitness club name and he was appalled by the change.
- Someone made the point that youth is a shifting demographic that we shouldn't become too obsessed with and Matt Cooper asked whether that age range were specifically surveyed. Nick thought not.
- Charles Gameson thought that Sport England were very good at putting funding towards activities that young people did and the BMC benefitted from this but it should be trying to increase membership from all ages.
- Richard Lloyd felt that many people seem to think that mountaineering only applied upwards of 2,000 feet and that the third option, to make use of Climb Britain in some way was the best way forward.
- Ed Shaw understood that the BMC tries to cover a range of activities and coming up with a single word to encompass them all was a tough call. Maybe "Mountaineering & Climbing" was better than a single word.
- Someone felt the BMC should have done the rebranding ideas 'in house' with members asked to make suggestions as they were being belatedly asked now.
- The problem of clubs needing parents or child protection officers to be present if under 18's were joining activities was mentioned. It was queried whether many 18-25 year olds had the club-joining mentality. 10,628 out of 82,536 members from this 7-year cohort might mean the BMC is connecting reasonable well with this age group.

**iv) Straw polls.** Members were invited to vote For / Against or Abstain on each of the 4 options presented on the last BMC slide. N.B. No formal motions were put and the numbers recorded do not tally with numbers signed in at meeting.

Full rebrand to "Climb Britain" For 3 Against 29 Abstentions 7

Remain as "BMC" For 12 Against 0 Abstentions Lots as there was some

confusion whether this meant ditching 'Climb' idea altogether. After some discussion members were asked would they be happy to....

Remain as "BMC" with some rebrand For 32 Against 2 Abstentions 0

Seek alternative uses of "Climb Britain" For 38 Against 1 Abstentions 4

Other name options: During the meeting "British Mountaineering" and "Mountaineering & Climbing" had been suggested. Discussion on this point closed after an ardent proponent of 'wild camping' suggested we should do something with the slogan "Camp Britain"!

**7. Any Other Business:** None. Meeting closed at 9.35pm

**8. Date & location of next meeting:**

- Wed 23<sup>rd</sup> November 2016 at Old Edwardians Sports Club, Solihull. This will include the AGM and will be Phil Simister's last meeting as Chairman.
- Speaker will be James McHaffie, the ex Plas y Brenin instructor who is now one of the seven current BMC Ambassadors.

Following the meeting refreshments were taken and then attendees enjoyed some spectacular images from Tajikistan presented by George Cave. We learned that taking a big box of chocolates direct to an Embassy could be a rapid & effective way to secure an entry visa, how not to pitch a tent (who would think of setting it on top of a rock on an ice boss?!) and how to enjoy 2 weeks of remote mountaineering for just £60 (plus £600 for replacement flights when the visas for the country of a connection airport were missing)

Written by John Edwards