



Cyngor Mynyddu Prydain Cymru – Gogledd  
BMC Cymru/Wales – North

## Annual Report Adroddiad Blynyddol November 2020

### From the Chair

At the 2017 BMC Cymru (Gogledd) AGM, I accepted the role of Chair, and promised to stay in post for three years. Those three years are now completed and I intend to stand down at this, the 2020, AGM. At the time of writing this report, no member has come forward as a potential replacement. Both our NC reps. are also standing down this time round, and as yet only one member has offered to take up one of those roles. We continue to have a vacancy for a Clubs representative.

The North Wales area relies on volunteers to represent members' interests at UK, Wales and local levels. Without volunteers we cannot influence future events and developments. Personally, I prefer a team approach to volunteering, in order to share the work, refine the pool of ideas, increase the benefits and, to be frank, make it more fun .... the more the merrier!

I have enjoyed most of my time as Chair, and it has been interesting to learn about the functioning, and malfunctioning, of the BMC, while working with a close band of local volunteers, now firm friends, on many important local issues. I will certainly want to carry on being part of the Welsh volunteer team after my time as area Chair.

A big thank you to all those volunteers who have progressed the work of the BMC over the last three years, and to Elfyn (BMC Access and Conservation Officer for Wales) for steering us so expertly through a maze of issues, both within and outside of his official remit.

Two issues have dominated the last three years, the Organisational Review and the Covid pandemic.

In respect of the Organisational Review, I started by reading all the related reports and documents, and trying to understand all the issues, especially those that impacted Wales, in order that I could confidently conduct local meetings. However, while time moved on quickly, the organisational review issues did not, and I soon learned to let others take responsibility for explaining to members the relevance of the complex review. The recent advent of virtual 'zoom' meetings, has proved this strategy to be a good one, with BMC officers and/or board members now able to join and contribute to all our meetings, taking the pressure off the Chair.

The Covid pandemic offered a dramatic contrast to the Organisational Review in the sense that the situation was changing with alarming rapidity and had immediate, tangible effects on local members, particularly in relation to access to the hills and crags. There is no need to reiterate the details here, but I am proud to have been part of the reactive BMC team at a time when it worked incredibly hard to keep up-to-date, exert influence on government-sponsored bodies, and release appropriate advice to members under very difficult circumstances. No doubt some members were, and maybe still are, critical of the BMC's response to Covid, but I would like to think that the hills being open for locals to enjoy during this second lockdown in Wales, is in part a result of the BMC's reasoned, persuasive approach during the first lockdown.

In the 2019 Annual Report, I listed four aspirations for 2020, as follows:

1. to see a motion passed at the BMC AGM which will settle the future shape of the BMC in Wales,
2. to see the Welsh Government's radical access proposals enshrined in law,
3. to see N. Wales become a working model for the happy co-existence of trad. and sports climbing.
4. to see the BMC declare it's commitment to policies and actions which acknowledge our Climate Emergency.

I think it is fair to say that none of those aspirations has reached the conclusion I might have hoped for, but that is not due to a lack of ambition or desire from the officers and volunteers involved, but rather an indication of the complex, persistent and evolving nature of the issues, compounded by Covid. Time and effort continues to be applied to these on-going issues alongside many other important emerging issues

During the latter part of 2020, I would highlight four issues which have demanded considerable attention from the Chair through numerous (covid-compliant) email threads and on-line meetings involving active local members. Two are iterations of my 2019 aspirations, and two are issues emerging from our relationship with the Snowdonia National Park Authority. All four will come up as agenda items at the November local area meeting.

1. A 'Pwyllgor Cymru/Wales Committee' has now been established, and meets regularly under the chairmanship of Neal Hockley, reporting to the BMC Board. A key achievement of the committee is to have secured BMC funding for a contractor to help develop a BMC Cymru Manifesto for Wales. The manifesto will lay out our objectives for hill-walking and climbing in Wales, ready for use in the run-up to Senedd elections in May 2021.
2. The extensive ground-work being undertaken by the National Park on the bridleway from Llanberis, over Bwlch Maesgwm, to the Snowdon Ranger has caused dismay amongst members and prompted a group to produce draft generic guidelines for path work in the uplands. This draft will be presented to the November local area meeting for amendment and approval.
3. The consultant's review of 'Transport and Parking' around 'Yr Wyddfa and Ogwen' has now been delivered to the National Park Authority, but only an 8-page summary has been made public. However Helen Pye's promise to the September 2020 local area meeting was that the review's recommendations are 'not a done deal'; therefore BMC Cymru needs to thoroughly familiarise itself with the document's contents and be ready to insert our own analysis into any future decision-making process.
4. 'Fixed Gear' on the crags of N Wales is a recurring and apparently intractable topic for debate amongst climbers, and therefore an unavoidable one for BMC Cymru. During 2020, the issue has been raised in respect of two specific developments, the Castell Helen abseil station, and the use of drilled, stainless steel 'hardware' to replace existing, decayed peg placements. November's local area meeting needs to agree a way forward towards some degree of consensus. To that end, as part of the 2020 discussions, I compiled the following plea to current and future climbers in North Wales:

"It is a statement of fact that in North Wales there exist not only adventure crags and sport crags, but also crags where trad.-protected and bolt-protected routes co-exist side by side. Crags can't therefore be classified as trad. or sport based simply on rock type, or altitude, or the degree to which they can be described as natural, or man-made, environments. As many have intimated, it requires a

grown-up, nuanced discussion involving notions of history, ethics, safety, ecology and access to understand how consensus and compromise have resulted in the amazing variety of climbing opportunities we have in North Wales. Furthermore, if that variety is to be protected and appreciated by newcomers to climbing, then those of us who care (the majority, I'd like to believe) need to take responsibility for carefully articulating the issues in a persuasive, rather than dogmatic, manner. Only that way can North Wales expect to retain, and further develop, its reputation for offering 'best practice' across the whole range of climbing types/experiences, and expect all climbers, whether local or visiting, to buy-in to the concept of conserving that variety for the sake of future climbers."

To end on three disappointments from 2020:

I am sad to see Gareth Pierce resign as Chair to the Board; he was a great advocate for Wales within the central BMC. It was disappointing to see that the move to virtual meetings did not realise the expected increase in participation in meetings. And the enthusiasm for reintroducing the BMC Cymru Newsletter in order to engage members' interest in the BMC's work prior to meetings has largely waned.

Thank you all for your support.

Tim Jepson  
(Cadeirydd BMC Cymru Gogledd)

## **National Council**

Since the last area AGM, National Council has been inundated with issues of politics and governance and has experienced significant disruption at the highest levels of the organisation.

With a number of director resignations, a lot of the work has necessarily been reactive, to firefight some rather unpleasant behaviours from a small number of BMC members. What this has meant is that, disappointingly, almost nothing that is of any interest to the average BMC member has been discussed; I cannot remember the last time an actual climbing- or walking-related item appeared on the agenda.

To me, National Council urgently needs to find its way again, in order to re-establish its responsibility to represent members on members' issues, and not to act purely as an internal, political sounding board, as is the situation currently.

Nevertheless, with new directors to be appointed imminently, as well as more staff support at the top of the organisation, hopefully future local area NC reps. will be able to steer the group away from its current position and back into dealing with real issues that real members care about.

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Dan Lane  
Anthony Eccles

## **Youth Development**

Nothing to report due to the cancelation of all climbing competitions and the general restrictions on us all.

Jemma Powell and Martyn Eade

## **Hill-walking**

Nothing to report from this year, but with the possibility of charging to access Yr Wyddfa, and the ongoing parking issues, I hope to find my voice in 2021.

**Will Miller**

## **Mountain Training Cymru**

Mountain Training Cymru's year has been dominated by the Covid pandemic and the impact this has had on course providers. Some of the Board's tasks have been put on hold as it hasn't been possible to make progress or it hasn't seemed appropriate to do so in the circumstances.

As the general lockdown was eased, Mountain Training Cymru's providers were able to re-start some course delivery through July, August and September. New candidates have registered with Mountain Training in good numbers. Numbers of course participants have also risen, albeit more slowly. Providers and their staff have shown flexibility and ingenuity in adapting their methods for Covid safety.

**Matt Woodfield**

## **Access**

### **N. Wales Limestone – Andy Boorman**

Not much new to report except that the stabilisation work at Castle Inn Quarry is now complete and, hopefully, by the time the BMC meeting occurs, the main crag and car park should be open again (subject to other Covid regulations).

The other on-going issue, and probably the most important one in this area, is the prospective lease or purchase of the centre and right hand end of Craig y Forwyn, plus securing some sort of long term agreement to secure parking at the top. Elfyn Jones was making promising progress on this before lockdown in March. Hopefully things will improve next Spring and negotiations can resume.

### **Mid-Wales - Dave Williams**

Nothing to report other than first hand observation, and second hand reports, of much increased levels of cragging activity (and thankfully no associated access issues) in the Rhinogydd, Cadair Idris and Elenydd areas. Presumably the increased visits were mainly due to the 'avoid-the-honeypots' mentality.

### **Access Round Up 2020 – The highlights.**

## **Elfyn Jones (Access and Conservation Officer for Wales)**

### **Tremadog**

Sadly, no Tremfest this year, and due to ongoing Covid restrictions it proved impossible to even organise a less formal crag clean up this autumn. Despite that, contractors were employed to remove a number of identified dangerous trees. These were mainly ash trees and the issue of Ash Die Back will become a serious issue at many crags in the near future. Also, at Tremadog the Covid issues meant the café and car park operating arrangements were not available to climbers. It's likely that this will become the normal situation here in the coming years as the business model of the café owners change to be more of a glamping style campsite where parking for climbers is going to be increasingly limited.

### **Wyddfa/ Snowdonia**

The parking and transport issues around Yr Wyddfa and in other areas of the Snowdonia National Park were exacerbated this summer with many more staycation holidays, less car sharing and a huge number of new visitors to the countryside, some whom have little thought or knowledge of countryside code or behaviour (and this does include many climbers, as issues were also reported at many climbing sites as well). The congestion, parking issues and littering were splashed across national media on many occasions and BMC have been active in attending meetings, attempting to influence National Park and local authorities' policies in this area. A consultant report has been produced looking at these issues and recommending several quite radical suggestions to address these issues. We are yet to officially see the full report. With only a brief summary in the public domain, that suggests a need to be less dependent on private cars to access the core areas, an improvement and investment in outlier parking and sustainable transport and real time information on parking availability within the core area. We have been told that the report is only a consultant's opinion and that nothing is agreed or will be agreed, until there is full consultation with user groups. Of course, any new transport/parking scheme will also need substantial public funding to implement and then need ongoing regular income to maintain. BMC will be pushing hard to ensure that, while the environmental issues raised by the parking, congestion and heavy use are looked at positively, that any new proposals do not unduly restrict access to world class climbing and walking areas. We also have concerns that any scheme does not have the affect of "deflecting" the issues to other, quieter areas of the Park.

### **Pembrokeshire**

This has certainly been a strange year, and for the first time in over 20 year even I didn't manage a trip to Pembs! One of the many victims of Covid were the Range West briefing meetings. Apart from the very first one back in January, there were no Range West briefings and effectively this meant there was no access to climbers to Range West in 2020. We pressed the MoD quite hard to allow climbers who had attended previous briefings to be allowed access, but this was not possible for various, including legal, reasons. (The Range Bylaws are very strict on this). We will be pressing MoD to agree Range West briefing dates again for next year in the hope that these can go ahead. We have also suggested that the briefing go online, and that BMC would fund this but so-far the MoD have not accepted this.

### **North Wales Limestone and Craig y Forwyn**

Various rockfall, access and other issues have all affected numerous sites along North Wales Limestone – not least where rockfall caused the closure of parts of Castle Inn for much of the summer. Some of this was not immediately apparent to the lay person or even to a climber and it was disappointing that the signage and barriers were continuously removed by climbers. The rock scaling work was finally completed in early autumn and thankfully the council staff involved in managing this site are still very supportive of climbing here and have no intentions of allowing the

Council to sell off the site (which is a real possibility) to a neighbour.

At Craig y Forwyn, there are new owners on the right-hand side, who have so far been tolerant of climbing. Access to the main, central area is still not officially permitted by the landowners, but with some low-level activity and with no reported issues or altercations with the caravan park staff, some access does seem to be tolerated. However, some climbers have been parking on the lane below the crag and vegetation removal is still highly sensitive (and illegal without consent) at this SSSI site. Both activities are likely to attract attention and lead to future restrictions if they continue.

### **South Wales sites**

With ongoing Covid restrictions affecting travel and access in the South Wales area quite hard, the value of the South Wales outcrops as important venues for locals was highlighted. A lot of volunteers and local activists have invested a lot of time, funds and effort to re-equip and clean-up many of these venues. However, this has also focussed and attracted the attention of landowners and conservation bodies – and it's important to stress that many of these sites are important conservation sites, many with protected species of birds, bats or flora and that it really is essential to check the status of the land before doing any clear up or re-equipping.

### **Wales Government Access Reform Programme**

The BMC has been involved in this since the beginning and in fact were instrumental in ensuring that Welsh Government looked seriously at amending the CROW Act, the Highways act and other legislation to extend open access land to include the coast and sea-cliffs of Wales (there is currently no secured or legal right of access to climb on most of the sea-cliffs of Wales). In addition to this element of the programme, other proposals are to do with simplifying the way public paths are managed, how new access rights are promoted, and allowing hitherto banned (or at least technically trespass activities) to be lawfully carried out on open access land as of right such as paragliding, swimming in lakes and rivers, and similar proscribed activities. A more controversial element is that that cycling will be permitted on open access land and on all public paths (unless those specific paths have been identified as being unsuitable, due to safety, congestion, conservation or land management reasons). The final comments have now all been forwarded to Welsh Government and a final draft report is expected in the New Year before it then goes to Ministers and government lawyers to draft new legislation to be debated and hopefully agreed at the Welsh Parliament in early summer. BMC have been very involved throughout this process and I sit on one of the so-called expert panels looking at this, which has involved many tens if not hundreds of hours of work pouring over proposals and counter proposals and legislative changes.

### **Nesting birds and other fauna**

Despite the lockdown, the process of agreeing access arrangements and keeping the nesting birds and breeding seals information up to date has been ongoing. One of the factors we saw this year was that with a very different start to the year, birds nested in many places that they haven't previously been seen. Despite this there was very little need for many new restrictions on climbing venues and climbers were exemplar at sticking to any last-minute new restrictions or agreements, even when imposed at very popular crags such as Mayfair Wall at Pen Trwyn. However, this demonstrated that climbers really need to be constantly checking the BMC's Regional Access Database, even for popular usually unrestricted venues as the situation can change on a daily basis. Far too many climbers rely on the unverified and unchecked information found on other climbing forums and logbooks – which is not proof-checked by the BMC, land owners or our volunteers.

### **Manifesto for Climbing and Hillwalking 2021**

Welsh Government elections are due in May 2021. As has been starkly shown by the Covid pandemic, much of the legal, policy, funding, outdoor education and environmental matters (including and especially access to the countryside and even to indoor climbing walls) are fully

devolved to and managed by the Welsh Government from The Senedd (Welsh Parliament) in Cardiff. In the past the BMC has been and continues to be very effective at “punching above its weight” with politicians in Westminster for the betterment of climbing and hill-walking activities. However in these days of devolved administrations, this good and continuing work in Westminster, has little influence or traction on events in Wales and if BMC is to have influence and profile in Wales to have positive impact at policy level, on those matters that affect our access and activities, then BMC has to step up to the mark and be seen and recognised as a serious body at Welsh Government level. As part of this we are preparing a “Manifesto for Climbing and Hill-walking” in Wales, which will have specific asks and demands of Welsh Government ahead of the May elections. We will be advertising for applications for a suitable contractor to help prepare this document very soon and hope to launch it in the New Year, hopefully with a real “event” at the Senedd soon after. The BMC will then be using this to lobby for and advocate on behalf of climbing and hill-walking in Wales, at a time when political awareness, understanding and support of our activities is really needed.

**Finally...a big thank you to all of our volunteers...**

A heartfelt thanks from me to all of our amazing and industrious volunteers, based all over Wales, who've very quickly had to learn how to resolve access issue remotely, attend a ridiculous amount of Zoom and Go To meetings and not had the usual “hands on” support or site visits from me or the office due to the travel and associated issues of this crazy year.....

Elfyn Jones  
BMC Access and Conservation Officer (Wales)  
1 November 2020