

Manifesto for climbing and hill walking in Wales

BMC Cymru wants to achieve a thriving, active nation enjoying life-affirming adventures in Wales' great outdoors.

In 2021, we are calling on the political parties to ensure that outdoor recreation and access to the coast and countryside is a key component of future public policy.

The coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic has proven that free and fair public access to the countryside is essential for an active, healthy nation. Enabling opportunities for people to benefit from outdoor recreation from their doorstep, as well as managing our landscape for sustainable recreation is central to the delivery of the Well-being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015 and Environment (Wales) Act 2016. Strong policies which enable and encourage outdoor recreation will help achieve the seven well-being goals and deliver long-term social, cultural, environmental and economic well-being for the people of Wales.

Regular outdoor activity, particularly in childhood, delivers long-term benefits for good physical and mental health, fosters an appreciation and understanding of the countryside leading to environmental awareness, and provides useful knowledge and skills, developing resilience and independence. BMC Cymru is committed to working with Welsh Government to build a brighter and more adventurous future for all.

In this manifesto for 2021, BMC Cymru highlights the key actions we believe Welsh Government must take to achieve a healthy nation and a sustainable environment to be enjoyed by all.

We have 5 key asks:

1. Recognise the value of walking and climbing within government portfolios

The value and benefits of outdoor recreation are relevant across many portfolios: Culture, Sport and Tourism; Economy and Transport; Education; Environment, Energy and Rural Affairs; Health and Social Services; Mental Health, Wellbeing and Welsh Language. We wish to work with all relevant Welsh Government departments to realise a long-term vision for outdoor recreation, with a particular focus on climbing, walking and mountaineering and access for all.

We ask for:

- ***all political parties to support policies which recognise and promote the importance of outdoor recreation in meeting the seven well-being goals outlined in the Well being of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015***

- *the formation of a Senedd Cross-Party Group for outdoor recreation, to include climbing, walking and mountaineering*
- *engagement with communities especially young people, supported by effective communications and marketing to embrace equality, build resilience and enhance community cohesion.*

2. Improve access to the coast and countryside

BMC Cymru believes that access on foot to the countryside is a public good. We strongly support the principle of the Access Reform Programme in Wales to provide improved and increased access to the countryside for informal recreation. New legislation should provide clarity and certainty over where people can go and what they can do whilst modernising and simplifying the current regulatory framework.

We ask that:

- *the right of access on foot be extended to the coast and an associated margin of land*
- *land owners or occupiers do not incur any liability to protect visitors from personal injury from informal recreation on their land*
- *Welsh Government invest in improving access, including appropriate and environmentally sensitive infrastructure to accommodate increasing demand; developed sustainably and in consultation with the outdoor sector*
- *support for land management delivers improved access opportunities developed in consultation with user/recreation groups.*

3. Ensure sustainable management of the landscape

The quality of the countryside and coastline of Wales is integral to the health and economy of our nation and must be managed sustainably. With increasing demand for outdoor recreation, the sustainable management of our designated and wider landscapes requires a renewed focus. BMC Cymru strongly supports the statutory purposes of our Designated Landscapes which include many of our most cherished places.

We call for:

- *adequate funding for all bodies managing Designated Landscapes (including National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty) to properly protect Wales' most sensitive areas of mountains and coast*
- *a sustainable approach to planning which protects our countryside and coastline from inappropriate development, recognising the importance of the beauty and wildness of Wales' landscape*
- *an environmentally sustainable, affordable public transport system to allow residents and visitors to travel to access the countryside, linked to the network of active travel routes*

- *investment in initiatives which encourage responsible behaviour and develop understanding in those enjoying outdoor recreation; to include personal responsibility for safety; care for the environment; respect for local communities and other users*
- *Welsh Government to take further urgent action to address climate change, cut emissions at a faster rate and support communities already being affected in Wales.*

4. Improve public health through participation

Participation in climbing, walking and mountaineering has significant life-long impacts on improving physical and mental health. Being active outdoors, exposed to natural places and wildlife whilst exploring mountains, coasts and cliffs leads to personal growth. BMC Cymru welcomes the investment Welsh Government has committed to initiatives which increase participation in outdoor recreation and supports the further roll-out of these schemes. This will be especially important in building a resilient nation post-Covid.

We call for:

- *financial support for social prescribing initiatives which can reduce the reliance on the National Health Service; driven by cross-sector partnerships*
- *increased support for appropriate and environmentally sensitive initiatives which enhance access to and enjoyment of adventures in rural and urban environments*
- *investment in opportunities for young people from the earliest age to enjoy frequent and progressive outdoor activity experiences including via the curriculum for Wales*
- *Welsh Government to work with the BMC as the national governing body for competitive climbing, to nurture elite talent and further invest in competitive climbing in Wales, recognising and supporting those inspired by the inclusion of climbing as an Olympic sport.*

5. Evaluate and appreciate the economic importance of informal access to the countryside

Outdoor activity tourism (in which climbing and walking are an important part) is currently an important sector for the Welsh economy and will continue to grow in importance as the outdoor activity sector grows.

Wales' rural economic prosperity is reliant on continued free access to its coast and countryside. The 12 million people a year accessing Wales' National Parks and spending an estimated one billion pounds on goods and services is testament to this. Wales' strengths as a visitor destination lie not only in its natural environment but also in the resultant potential for engaging in outdoor activities using high quality professional outdoor sector providers (8,000 FTE), who are a core component of the rural economy in Wales.

We call for:

- *up-to-date research into the value of the social and economic contribution of the sector*
- *Welsh Government to embrace and support outdoor activity opportunities to empower local communities, businesses and individuals to gain direct and indirect economic benefit*
- *Welsh Government to recognise that indoor climbing gyms, as part of the indoor gymnasium sector, are a major gateway for participation in climbing, providing access for people of all abilities while also being a valuable social resource.*

Our pledge

The British Mountaineering Council has over 75,000 members and more than 250 BMC Affiliated Clubs. BMC Cymru represents approximately 7,000 members and 18 affiliated clubs in Wales and protects the interests of the increasing number of people who enjoy quiet access to our Welsh coast and countryside each year.

Through our Wales access and conservation officer we have a strong track record of working in partnership with land owners and conservation bodies to ensure successful access management, where all parties recognise and respect the legitimate interests of others and where recreation and conservation benefit mutually. In 2021, we will build on this by employing a policy officer based in Cardiff to work on the full range of issues affecting climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers in Wales.

We look forward to working with Welsh Government and its agencies in the future; working together to achieve a thriving, active nation enjoying life-affirming adventures in Wales' great outdoors.

References

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