



BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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North West Area ORDINARY MEETING

Meeting held online via Zoom
On Monday 26th April 2021 at 19:00

Minutes

Attendance (15 signed in): Les Ainsworth (Lancs Access Rep), Bill Beveridge (NC Rep), Steve Charles (Area Hillwalking Rep), John Derrick, Roger Dyke, Richard Eden, Paul Evans (Area Secretary, KMC), John Glynn, Tim Greenhalgh, Andy Holland, Stuart Holmes (Area Youth and Walls Rep), Rob Jarrett (Innominata Club), Geoff Mann, Carl Spencer (NC rep and CND), Adrian Turton.
Note that no BMC staff member attended the meeting.

1. Initial informal session – Zoom Rooms

Emily Pitts welcomed people to the meeting. This meeting opened with a 30 minute informal chat session where people could choose their topic – rooms were available for Hillwalking, Climbing, Access & Conservation and Youth / Comps.

2. Welcome, quorum, apologies for absence

Emily Pitts opened the standard section of the meeting. A quorum was present in accordance with Article 28.6.1 of the British Mountaineering Council's articles of association.
Apologies were received from Mark Hounslea, Dominic Oughton, Steve Riley, Dave Robinson and Roberta Spagnul.

3. Minutes & Actions from the previous meeting held on 02/03/21

The minutes from the previous meeting on 2nd Mar 2021, were approved without amendment.

3. Matters arising not covered elsewhere

None noted.

4. BMC Response to COVID-19, coming out of lockdown.

Paul Evans summarised the latest BMC advice on lockdown for local members – this can be seen on Rob Dyer's BMC website article dated 14/04. There are no known Covid related access issues in the North West. It was noted that in other areas, BMC encouragement to visit "non-honeypot" crags had led to landowner concerns about unusually high visitor numbers, and also concerns had been raised about "lamping" – bouldering after dark with bright lights. Les Ainsworth said that he was not aware of any such issues in the NW.

5. Area reps reports

5.1. Access – several topics were covered under this heading –
Les Ainsworth gave an update on Lancs access issues –

- Unauthorised bolting has taken place at Cowsmouth and Nogarth. Noted that the affected slab at Coswmouth is getting very polished. The offending bolts have all been removed. There was some discussion on the best method of “community education” to explain the local ethics and how to obtain approval for the placement of any fixed protection. See also AOB.
 - Good progress has been made regarding access to the Silverdale Sea Crag and Montcliffe – please avoid both for now, further details will be issued when access is finalised.
 - Troy & Stanworth – Les is working on parking issues at both sites.
 - Pinfold – route 1 (Acid Test) - the dangerous section of this route has now fallen down. We are not at present sure whether the route is still climbable and if so at what grade.
- On guidebooks, Les reported that a group of local activists are intending to publish updated definitive guidebooks to Lancashire as a set of 3 smaller volumes.

Paul Evans gave a brief report on Cheshire on behalf of Mark Hounslea. Members may wish to know that local climbers are intending to place a memorial plaque at Pex Hill to honour the recently deceased Phil Davidson, a legendary and much respected NW climber. This would be similar to the plaque placed at The Breck in memory of Al Rouse. Details can be found on the “friends of Pex Hill” facebook page – an excellent general source of local news on Cheshire Sandstone.

5.2. Paul Evans presented an update from Dominic Oughton of NW clubs news.

- The 3rd episode of the NW Clubs chat took place in March, with around a dozen clubs represented, and the sessions have been invaluable in helping keep up to date with the changing situation around meets and huts. A huge thank you to Jane Thomas of the BMC for guiding us all through the complexities.
- Clubs can now start to take advantage of the "rule of six", "organised meets of up to 30" and day-trips to Wales - check the website for the latest guidance.
- The next session is planned for Monday 28th June at 7pm – club members are urged to get in touch if they would like to be added to the invitation.
- In a significant development in the NW Clubs landscape, around 70 members of the Anabasis Club (founded 60 years ago) have been welcomed into membership of The Rucksack Club.
- The Clubs Committee is working with The BMC on a campaign to encourage Club membership. A launch event is planned for 4th May - keep an eye on the website for details.

5.3. Steve Charles presented a roundup of Hillwalking news, covering the Climate Project and the purchase of Sphagnum Moss for Moors for the Future, the BMC “Hiking Essentials” initiative, “Wild Horizons” – the BMC Hillwalking Podcast, and the “Million Mile Mountain Clean” scheduled for the 15th to 23rd May. Steve reported that the sphagnum moss planting on Holcombe Moor had gone well, but that work had now stopped due to it being the nesting season for ground nesting birds. Steve finished with a summary of the events planned this year by himself and Dave Robinson, all of which were clearly dependant on government restrictions. There is an additional opportunity for volunteers to work on dry stone walling on the moors – Steve explained that these walls play a key role in controlling moorland fires. The following actions were noted – PE to ask DO to circulate details of the “Million Mile Mountain Clean” to NW clubs. EP to set up events on the NW area facebook page to publicise the upcoming Hillwalking events. PE to include Steve’s email in the minutes - stevecharles25@gmail.com

5.4. Stuart Holmes reported that it is still hoped to start the YCS in Sept this year, but this is obviously dependent on good progress being made on the pandemic – a final decision is expected in late August. Continue to monitor. Stuart reported that no NW based walls had been forced to close yet. However walls typically make most money in the winter and least in the summer, so the upcoming summer is expected to be financially challenging for a number of walls. A new wall has opened in Oldham, and work continues on Blochouse in East Manchester. It was noted that the MCC group had rebranded to “Parthian”. There was some discussion on a walls committee proposal for the BMC to prepare standard “noticeboards” with regularly updated content and news, both local and national, which could be placed at all walls willing to host them. EP to write to Alex Messenger adding NW area support to proposal. SH to email suggested wording to EP.

5.5. This, and the previous discussion about unwarranted bolting, lead to a more general discussion about how the area should engage with people who are active in the outdoors but are non members and do not see BMC messages. Topics covered included types of social media used by younger climbers and hillwalkers (Facebook doesn’t work for under 35s), the current Eventbrite system being a “barrier to entry” to these meetings. Area members expressed significant concern and frustration. Carl Spencer stated that initiatives were in progress at board and office level to address some of these concerns. Stuart asked whether the BMC has ever had a youth council? There was a strong desire amongst attendees to know more about these initiatives, and when they were likely to deliver. Members are keen to review and input into these proposals. No single clear action recorded.

5.6. Roberta Spagnol was not able to attend the meeting, and has had to step back from her social media analysis volunteer role due to pressures of a job change.

6. **NW Events Calendar 2020**

No change since previous meeting.

7. **Feedback from National Council (NC) meetings**

Carl Spencer (NW area NC Rep and CND) reported that recent NC meetings had continued to focus on the final stages of completing the ORG / ODG organisational changes. Work had concentrated on specialist committees, transition to members council, signing off the accounts. We are shortly expecting a release of detailed information about the arrangements for the 2021 AGM. This will include nominations for 4 new councillors and one new member elected director. It is believed that we may not have a nominated director for the indoor climbing representative role. Bill Beveridge reported that member numbers had fallen not just amongst ordinary members but also amongst clubs.

8. **Any other business**

Tim Greenhalgh asked whether there would be any objections to the addition of a small number of bolts to help with the top outs in Wiltons 3 & 4. Paul Evans said that in view of the small numbers of members at the meeting and the limited time available for discussion, it would be good to have a written proposal for the next meeting which could be both discussed at the meeting and circulated more widely amongst local climbers to gather a consensus. Les suggested that a small group meet outside the meeting to discuss and produce a proposal.

Stuart Holmes suggested this could then be used as a “how to do it” case study when engaging more widely on the topic of “unwarranted bolting”.

Rob Jarrett commented that the meeting had been largely “information giving”; due to time pressures there had been limited opportunity for discussion. EP said she would speak to PE to explore different ways of running the NW area meetings which would allow more time for discussion. RJ also commented that the NW area clubs forum is working very well.

One attendee had expressed frustration during the meeting and left early. EP will speak to him to understand more about his frustrations.

Geoff Mann said that as well as considering ways to contact people via social media and posters, we should not underestimate the value of talking to people we meet while climbing and hillwalking!

Emily Pitts expressed frustration that the impact of the BMC furlough on office staff was leading to resource constraints which made it harder for volunteers to achieve their roles.

9. **Date of next Area Meeting**

The next area meeting is expected to be during July, precise date will be confirmed nearer the time, to be held via Zoom.