



BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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North West Area Ordinary Meeting

Meeting held online via Zoom

Tuesday 18th January 2022, 19:00

Minutes

Attendance:

25 signed in (not all attendees were present for the whole meeting): Les Ainsworth (Lancashire Access Rep), Katie Allen (Area Co-Chair), Bill Beveridge (Members' Council Rep), Rob Bishop (Designated BMC Staff Member), Bernard Bradbury, Steve Charles (Area Hillwalking Rep), Katie Coffield (Area Secretary), Gavin Crompton, Tim Dobson, Sally Dyke, Paul Evans, Ben Gouldsworthy, Tim Greenhalgh, Agustin Guardiola (Area Co-Chair and **Chair for this meeting**), Jean-Baptiste Hau, Andy Holland, Stuart Holmes (Area Youth & Walls Rep), Mark Hounslea (Area Access rep for Cheshire), Dominic Oughton (Area Clubs Co-ordinator), Dudley Pritchard, Ruth Ramsdale, Steve Riley, Carl Spencer (Members' Council Rep and Council Nominated Director), Tom West, plus one unidentified member.

1. Welcome, Quorum and Apologies

Agustin Guardiola welcomed members to the meeting. The meeting was quorate in accordance with Article 28.6.1 of the BMC's articles of association. No apologies were received.

2. New Co-Chairs and Secretary – introduction and priorities

2.1 The three new committee members briefly introduced themselves and their personal mountaineering interests.

2.2 Agustin Guardiola outlined priorities for the 2021/22 year as follows:

- a) Actively recruit more volunteers to share workload and ensure smooth succession planning for when existing volunteers stand down, particularly with regards to access.
- b) Seek to improve member engagement and inclusivity.
- c) Trial smaller, subject-specific meetings that report back to the main area meetings (e.g. a meeting on Belmont access) so that members can engage in the subjects that interest them.
- d) Introduce a Wilton Management Group (WMG) Annual report to ensure better BMC oversight of activity at Wilton. On Les Ainsworth's advice it was noted that he is the best contact for WLM, rather than the Chair, until further notice.

3. Minutes and actions from the previous meeting held on 25th October 2021.

- a) The minutes of the previous meeting were approved, pending confirmation from Les Ainsworth who had not yet been able to access a copy. Katie Coffield to email a copy to Les.
- b) Actions from the previous meeting are covered under the relevant sections below.

- c) Approval of the 25th October 2021 AGM minutes had been included on the published agenda in error and will instead this will be covered at the 2022 AGM.

4. Matters Arising not covered elsewhere.

None reported.

5. Area reps reports

5.1 Access

Les Ainsworth provided an update Lancashire access as follows (NB slides are available on the BMC Local Areas site and the North West area Facebook page):

- a) Maintenance at Wilton One and Egerton, including details of work completed recently and requests for volunteers to assist with other specific tasks.
- b) There is now access for climbing for much of Silverdale Sea Cliffs. Les highlighted the access arrangements and suggested that climbers consider ways of supporting the local economy (e.g. use local pubs etc) to support this new relationship between climbers and the local area.
- c) This year Les will be trying to improve parking arrangements at two crags and focus the restrictions for nesting birds at two other locations.
- d) Les called for a significant increase in support from members in maintaining climbing routes and locations.
- e) Stuart Holmes referred to BMC and Government discussions/initiatives in relation to rewilding and asked if the access team was considering any work to populate crags with native plants and flowers, which might have the added benefits of reducing water logging and invasive species. Les Ainsworth replied that the recent work done above Red Wall at Wilton One was for this purpose and welcomed suggestions and volunteers for more of this activity. Les will speak to Rob Dyer to progress this.
- f) Les highlighted the growing urgency of continuity/succession arrangements and called for members to spread the word that it is a rewarding role and that new volunteers will be essential. It was agreed that as stipulated at the beginning of the meeting, this will be a priority task for the new Co-Chairs.
- g) Tim Greenhalgh expressed disappointment that at the recent workday organised by WMG to plant trees at Wilton, no members of WMG had actually attended.

Mark Hounslea provided an update on Cheshire access as follows:

- h) Gavin Crompton raised an issue around recent loss of access to, and gear removal at, Irby Quarry. Mark agreed to look into this. Katie Coffield would put the two in touch.
- i) Mark reported that during lockdown some climbers started to climb at St James Cathedral in Liverpool, but a group of ex-Police officers had been stopping this. He has tried to look into this but trying to contact the local council has proved unsuccessful. Due to the location and small size of the area it isn't deemed high enough priority to pursue this any further, and the local climbing community seems to have accepted this.

5.2 Clubs

Dominic Oughton gave an update as follows (NB slides are available on the BMC Local Areas site and the North West area Facebook page):

- a) An update on the Find Your Adventure campaign, including:
 - the number of clubs signed up to date – now 19 in total, with the North West area still at 5.
 - details of 5 webinars and a self-help guide that have been offered to support clubs with recruitment and retention.
 - an overview of social media stats which indicate that the high levels of engagement are continuing.
 - impact stats which indicate the campaign is very successful so far.

- b) An overview of the agenda for the next North West Area Clubs Chat taking place online on Monday 31st January 2022 at 7pm.
- c) Dominic expressed thanks to all clubs, walls and individuals who have supported sales of the charity calendar produced by the Rucksack Club and Climbers Against Cancer, which has raised over £4,000 so far.
- d) Following on from the item under section 7 (Any Other Business) at the previous ordinary meeting, relating to electronic vehicle charging points at club huts and other green strategies, Dominic reported that a BMC group has been set up to consider such matters. Paul Evans (former Secretary) further updated that Richard Toon, who had raised the matter at the previous meeting, has been included in this group at the BMC's invitation.

5.3 Hillwalking

Steve Charles gave an update as follows (NB slides are available on the BMC Local Areas site and the North West area Facebook page):

- a) The 2022 calendar is yet to be completed but so far is set to include a Joint Area Walk (JAW) with the Peak area, an open club walk with Rucksack Club, and walks at the Forest of Bowland, Winter Hill and Black Hill. Dates all TBC.
- b) Steve highlighted that open club walks are a good way for clubs to open themselves up to new members and asked Dominic Oughton to flag this as appropriate.
- c) Steve thanked Andy Holland for volunteering to organise one of the above-mentioned walks and encouraged more members to do the same, as there is clearly demand for these events but not enough volunteers to make them happen. In response to queries from a few members at the meeting, Steve outlined the process for organising a BMC walk. Stuart Holmes also confirmed that the process would be the same for any volunteer-organised BMC event.
- d) Upland restoration projects are going well, with recent events for invasive species clearance attracting so many volunteers – despite bad winter weather - that an extra date has been arranged for 23rd February 2022. More dates will be arranged for next autumn. Moss planting has been arranged for 11th and 12th March 2022. Landowner United Utilities has been appreciative of this work.
- e) In response to a query from Tim Greenhalgh, Steve updated on how Winter Hill was recovering following the fire of March 2020. Although the fire has given rhododendron the opportunity to thrive, the above-mentioned invasive species clearance efforts have had a very positive impact.

5.4 Youth and walls

Stuart Holmes gave an update as follows:

- a) The full Youth Climbing Series has taken place. It has generally run very smoothly although there have been some complaints regarding the change of location for the final to Southampton. Carl Spencer echoed this view and highlighted that the cost of the extra travel and accommodation required for competitors in the North had deterred many from participating. Carl confirmed he has raised this as a wider issue for competitions with the Board.
- b) Stuart noted that the ongoing pandemic situation, and particularly the differing restrictions in different parts of the UK, mean that other competitions and events might not be able to go ahead exactly as planned.
- c) No walls have closed in the North West during the pandemic, and currently walls seem to be experiencing a good level of business.

6. 2022 events calendar

- a) Agustin Guardiola presented a summary of events and meetings arranged so far
- b) The proposed calendar includes Wiltonfest 2022, provisionally scheduled for 3rd September. Tim Greenhalgh requested approval from the North West area for a funding application to be submitted to the BMC, which was given with no objections.

- c) Relating to the item under section 3 (Matters Arising) in the minutes of the previous meeting regarding BMC support for, and presence at, Wiltonfest 2021, Carl Spencer reported that had been discussed by the Board and gave assurance that this would be improved for 2022.
- d) Tim Greenhalgh is arranging a crag clean up at Deeply Vale at the end of February/early March - further details will be circulated in due course.

7. Ideas for future meetings and events

- a) Agustin Guardiola explained that the North West area is keen to maximise engagement in meetings and other events and informed attendees that a survey will be sent out a few days after the meeting to gather information on members' preferences.
- b) Les Ainsworth queried what the current process is for sharing meeting information – specifically the information presented by the reps at area meetings – with the wider membership. Katie Coffield confirmed that there are made available on the BMC Local Areas site, and Dominic Oughton confirmed that they are also shared on Facebook and these posts tend to be amongst the most popular/engaged with.
- c) Bill Beveridge requested that the Manchester Clean Air charges, once implemented, are taken into consideration when planning meeting locations.

8. Members' Council Report

Carl Spencer provided a report from the Members' Council covering the following topics:

- a) New chair of board welcomed – Roger Murray.
- b) An update on the BMC's financial situation and budgets for 2022. The £250k deficit forecast for 2021 was reduced to under £100k through cost savings. The forecast for 2022 is again a £250k deficit, though this will again be greatly reduced if the ongoing Sport England bid is successful.
- c) The Sport England Funding application is now at phase 2 and the outcome should be known in early April 2022.
- d) Due to Covid and budget, the 2022 AGM will now be virtual. It is currently planned for Saturday 14th May but there is a possibility that it could be held on an evening during the following week. The plan is to return to face to face meetings for 2023. *(Post-meeting note – AGM now planned for Wednesday 18th May 7-9pm).*
- e) Gavin Finch is now in post as Chief Commercial Officer, who will lead on the membership strategy with a particular focus on hill walkers, youth and indoor climbers, and with equality, diversity and inclusion being a consideration throughout this work.
- f) Your Movement Matters Survey - over 4,700 people completed the survey and the results will be published before the end of January. The findings will be used to further develop diversity and inclusion strategies.
- g) Specialist Committees – a Review Meeting was held on Saturday 15th January – updates to be provided in due course though Carl noted there was nothing requiring immediate attention in the North West area.
- h) Area Festivals are set to resume this year, money has been allocated in the budget to support these, with funding bids closing on 30th January 2022.
- i) Patrons – Sadly two Patrons, Doug Scott & Tony Greaves, passed away last year. The appointment process is being reviewed and the intention is to announce new appointments at the AGM.
- j) Notifications of area meetings and other email communications are being streamlined in line with the wider IT strategy.
- k) Email Opt Out – If a member has opted out/unsubscribed from any BMC email at any stage we can't use email to contact them. This means that they will not get any emails and may be missing invites and notifications. This can easily be reversed by contacting the office. Stuart Holmes suggested that this could be rectified over the course of a year by including opt in/out arrangements in the membership renewal process.

9. Any other business

- a) Attendees were alerted to a news article published on the BMC website on 17th January 2022 regarding the Government's response to a review of the protection of our National Parks and Areas of Natural Beauty. The BMC will be responding to the public consultation on this matter.
- b) Attendees were asked if they had a preference on the proposed AGM dates. Those who responded had a preference for a weekday evening, with two people specifying Tuesday 16th May. (*Post-meeting note – AGM now planned for Wednesday 18th May 7-9pm*).
- c) Tim Greenhalgh proposed a dedicated meeting for a North West fixed gear policy. This is to be progressed – date and venue to be coordinated via Katie Coffield. Stuart Holmes raised the question of how meaningful and enforceable such a policy would be, especially to climbers outside of the BMC. The general consensus was that although the policy may have such limitations, it was better to have one to give us the best chance of encouraging responsible bolting activity in the North West Area.

10. Date of next meeting

It was noted that the scheduled date for the next meeting – Monday 18th April - is a bank holiday and will need to be changed. The Co-Chairs and Secretary will update on this as soon as possible.