



BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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NORTH EAST AREA GENERAL MEETING

Hybrid meeting: Brinkburn St. Brewery (NE6 1NW) / Zoom
on 17th November, following the Annual General Meeting

Minutes

Attendance (17)

NE Area Committee (7). Peter McCreedy (Chair), Simon Litchfield (Secretary), Jon Punshon (Members' Council), Jonathan White (Members' Council), Adrian Wilson (Area Club Coordinator), Chris Bullock (Youth & Competitions), Lewis Hobson (Access Central). **NE Area Members (8).** Mark Anstiss, Richard Davies, Graham Harkness, Mark Goodings, Bob McAdam, John Spencer, Arda Deniz Turgul, Jessica Wortley. **Guests (2).** Fiona Sanders (BMC, Council Nominated Director), Keith Sanders.

1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair, Peter McCreedy, opened the Meeting. Apologies received from Steve Blake and Mike Conlon (NE Area Committee) and Ciara Barrett Smith (President, NMC).

2. Quorum

There was 15 voting members in attendance at the start of the meeting (9 in the room and 6 online), so it was noted that a quorum was present in accordance with Article 7.1 of the Area Terms of Reference.

3. Minutes from the previous Area General Meeting held on 16 June 2021

The minutes from the previous Area General Meeting held on 16 June 2021, a draft of which had been made available prior to the meeting, were approved by way of a vote on a show of hands.

4. Matters arising not covered elsewhere

There were no matters arising not covered elsewhere.

5. Update on local issues

5.1. Walking.

No report.

5.2. Access North. Steve Blake submitted a report for the meeting:

- 5.2.1. At Back Bowden, following liaison with Natural England the landowners of the Lilburn Estate have agreed to the removal of an Elderberry Trees from under 'Transcendence' and the 'Duke of York'.
- 5.2.2. At Kylee Out, post-Arwen clearing is currently still being progressed. The paperwork required by Scottish Woodland has been submitted and an arborist has been identified, although the window for removal this year has likely already passed. The removal is forecast to cost £600-£700 – both the BMC and NMC have been approached to cover the costs.
- 5.2.3. At Kylee In, Scottish Woodland will clear totems and root plates and climbers have been granted permission to remove any self-seeded trees on or near to the crag.

5.3. **South Area.** Mike Conlon submitted a report for the meeting:

- 5.3.1. Rob Dyer, at the BMC, is continuing to lead negotiations with the Dawnay Estate about access to crags on the land.

5.4. **Competition and Youth.** Chris Bullock (CB) delivered an update at the meeting and provided a written submission at Annex A.

- 5.4.1. There had been 10 competitions in six months, plus the Northumberland Boulder Meeting. All of which had received excellent feedback. Consequently, the Association of British Climbing Walls had expressed an interest in working more closely with the North East Area
- 5.4.2. **Youth Climbing Series (YCS).** The YCS had regrettably seen a low level of participation - 35 entrants for 120 spaces – initial assessment was that the BMC need to provide more proactive advertisement and the series being solely scheduled in the North East provided significant additional travel and cost burden on Cumbria based competitors.

There was a sense that series is being used by the BMC as a “cash cow” with increase entry costs (£30 per round, plus £60 for the final) not presenting value for money and becoming a potential barrier to entry for some; especially when added to travel costs.

To support the YCS CB was having a plywood podium built (c.£80) for which a contribution from the BMC would be sought.

Action. The Chair would approach the BMC to provide a financial contribution to building of a podium for the YCS

- 5.4.3. **Youth Climbing Meet.** This year's meet was held in Wooler 28-30 October, with 21 16-18 years old in attendance and supported by eight instructors.

The meet has again proven to be hugely successful, however, CB raised serious concerns that the recent resignation of James McHaffie (JM) at the BMC would jeopardise BMC and DMM support to future events as he was a massive champion of the Area's Youth Meet.

Fiona Sanders (FS) responded to CB's concerns by explaining that the BMC had appointed an Equity and Diversity Manager who would replace JM, but the individual was yet to start in the role. Once in situ, role would liaise with area representative understand the requirements and concerns to shape the next steps.

Action. – FS would liaise with CB to more fully understand the potential risks posed to the Area's Youth Meets meet no JM had moved on.

Mark Goodings (MG) underlined the importance of the North East youth meet and emphasised that a previous event was successful without JM.

- 5.4.4. **Youth Christmas Meet.** This year's event would be held at Newcastle Climbing Centre; however, a date is still to be set as the current date offered coincides with the football World Cup Final.

5.5. **Clubs.** Nothing significant to report.

6. **Remedying access issues on Weardale.** Lewis Hobson (LH), Access Representative for County Durham updated the meeting on the current situation with regards to the problematic access in areas in Weardale:

- 6.1. It was suggested by LH that Ashes West is probably the best quality quarry worth fighting for and enquired as to what the BMC could offer landowners to enable greater access. In response the Chair explained that he had spoken to Jon Fullwood, the BMC's Access and Conservation Officer for England, ahead of the meeting and that the BMC position was that while cash could not be directly made available to encourage the landowner, a number of other initiatives e.g. signage, parking bays, gates etc where within scope.
- 6.2. Richard Davies (RD) provided an overview on the recent developments and issues in Weardale: at Stanhope Dene hangers had been removed; at Lakeside hangers were still in place; and Ashes, where access is banned, but access into the crag it is on a public footpath, the owner is still unwilling to allow access.

LH opined that potentially people climbing where access is banned could be a good thing as it could shift the debate away from 'do not climb, to how we can access it in an agreed way'. This assertion, however, was strongly rebutted by Jon Punshon (JP) on the premise that the BMC cannot stand behind a position of supporting individuals breaking the law. As a next step RD suggested getting in contact with the local council.

Mark Anstiss (MA) enquired whether most crags with which there are issues were on Access Land, RD responded that Bollihope Quarry is, the others are not. LH noted that his main approach has been dealing with signage.

- 6.3. Jonathan White (JW) repeated a previous proposal of conducting a Young Farmers event in the area to improve local sentiment towards climbers and establish more robust channels of communication. In response RD explained that he has already reached out to local landowners through a local contact who knows the landowners and was adamant this approach was unlikely to work. MA rightly cautioned the meeting not to conflate landowners with farmers: this nuance was important. Simon Litchfield (SL) noted that care should be taken with regards to any type of BMC sponsored event in Weardale to avoid creating a negative effect by antagonising the situation.
- 6.4. Jon Spencer (JS) told an anecdotal story about his experience climbing at Washpool: JS recounted being challenged by a representative of the landowner, however, once the individual had raised their challenge there were no follow up action to remove climbers that hadn't already moved on.
- 6.5. The question of access to Houghton Graveyard was raised, in response MG reported there were no issues.

- 6.6. Closing the item, the Chair expressed directly to RD his keenness for resetting the relationship in Weardale and seeking new crag development opportunities with BMC engagement from the outset as a means of achieving it; and successful crag development supported by a local landowner could assist in overcoming current anti-access sentiment in Weardale. This proposal, however, would require the Weardale climbing community, to work in concert with the North East Area Committee and to give time for BMC engagement to run its course; to do otherwise would most like undermine BMC efforts in the area. RD welcomed the renewed approach and looked forwards to taking the issues forwards together.

Action. The Chair agree to meet in Weardale with RD and LH to discuss the proposed way ahead in more detail and better understand the climbing opportunities in Weardale.

7. North East Area Festival 2023

- 7.1. The Chair reported to the meeting that the BMC Area Festival funding for 2023 had be announced on 8 November. The deadline for applications is 9 January 2023, with applicants informed of the outcome by 18 January 2023. Following the announcement, the Chair has spoken to Becky McGovern (BM), BMC Events Co-ordinator, to understand the likely size of the grants available – in previous years grants were £800.00-£1,200.00.
- 7.2. The Chair made clear his intention to make an application, however, set out that an Area Festival should be delivered for the benefit of all, and prospective, area BMC members and not for funding a Young Farmers engagement event in Weardale or the Youth Climbers Meets in 2023. Funding for these events should be sought from the appropriate business areas within the BMC.

Action. Application for Area Festival funding for 2023 will be made.

SL advised that leadership/planning group is key to driving such an event forward - previous single organisers have done sterling jobs, however, they can get volunteering fatigue. In addition, any aspiration to conduct an event in the south of the Area would invariably require a strong sense of local support and the CMC. JP and MG proposed another event in Wooler based on the success of the previous event and the existing contacts in the area - MG offered a copy if previously successful funding application. CB supported this and expressed a desire to have youth involvement, albeit would require a greater degree of supervision.

- 7.3. The Chair reported that in discussion with BM he had suggested funding areas on a biennial basis may be more beneficial, this was supported by MA who highlight the considerable amount of time and energy required by volunteers to deliver a flagship event annually.
- 7.4. A question was posed to FS of whether the area festival funding available for FY23 was also made available to areas that already receive BMC funding for larger festivals e.g. Pembroke for their annual climbing festival or the Lakes for Lakefest. The assertion was, if so, then those area would reducing the potential funding available to areas that don't host annual BMC led events. FS responded this was matter for Member's Council, however, more broadly the BMC was looking at ways to increase support for area festivals.

Action. The North East Area Members' Council Representative would raise the matter of the fairness of area festival funding for areas that already host BMC led events at the next Members' Council Meeting.

8. **Members' Council Update.** Jon Punshon (JP) and Jonathan White (JW) reported:

- 8.1. The BMC has recently discussed and reviewed the 'Participation Statement', the outcome being that the existing principles remain relevant, but wording is important.
- 8.2. Hillwalking strategy is being reviewed in recognition of it potentially being the most underrepresented group in the BMC.
- 8.3. Four vision events have taken place with the most recent being climbing vision and discussion around bolting policy.
- 8.4. It was understood that the BMC has planned to knowingly make a c.£250 deficit in FY22 – which seems counterintuitive. Furthermore, it was understood that recent IFSC round at the Edinburgh International Climbing Area in September had been run at a significant loss.

JW asserted this money could have been better spent elsewhere in the BMC and to the benefit of a greater number of beneficiaries. MA questioned who had decided to run the IFSC event at a loss? JW responded it was a BMC Board decision.

- 8.5. It was noted that there have been several changes and the BMC – an updated staff list will be provided in due course.
- 8.6. There remains an unfilled vacancy on the Nominations Committee.

9. **BMC Board Update.** Fiona Sanders (FS) provided an update from the perspective of a Council Nominated Director:

9.1. FS describes that the Board's current focus now is the need to balance the role of being a National Governing Body and the need to deliver for its members.

9.2. MA enquired what proportion of the BMC's budget comes from Sport England? The response from FS was c.£2M (c.40%), however, this was restricted funding that could only be used in certain ways. MA followed up to enquire "Where is the Sports England money going to?" FS outline a number of areas where Sports England funding had provided wider benefit across the BMC e.g. safeguarding, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion, and performance pathways. MA enquire whether Sport England are happy with the new governance structures, to which FS responded yes, however this response was challenged by CB who had reason to believe that Sports England are not happy with the BMC.

9.3. Adrian Wilson, the Area Club Coordinator, pointed out to FS that she only had to look at the low attendance at the meeting to observe the poor the level of BMC engagement and traction at areas and club level: local affiliated clubs are paying increasing fees into the BMC while club training contributions have been cut and only limited amounts of funding is going to local areas. money is being lost and spent elsewhere. JW raised that is not the cost of the BMC that is the issue, rather is the increasingly lack of value for money for club members.

9.4. FS undertook to take all the point raised back to the BMC Board.

10. **Any Other Business**

Nil pre notified or raised at the meeting.

11. **Date of area meetings and format for 2023**

Locations and nature of meetings would be confirmed in due course. The provisional dates were:

- Area Meeting week commencing Monday 13 February.
- Area Meeting week commencing Monday 24 April.
- Area Meeting week commencing Monday 10 Jul.
- Area General Meeting week commencing Thursday 19 October 2023.

12. Close meeting

21:50

Item	Action	Involving	Target date
5.4.2	The Chair would approach the BMC to provide a financial contribution to building of a podium for the YCS.	Chair	Before next Area meeting
5.4.3	FS would liaise with CB to more fully understand the potential risks posed to the Area's Youth Meets meet no JM had moved on.	Youth Rep	Before next Area meeting
6.6	The Chair agree to meet in Weardale with RD and LH to discuss the proposed way ahead in more detail and better understand the climbing opportunities in Weardale.	Chair	Before next Area meeting
7.2	Application for Area Festival funding for 2023 will be made.	Chair	9 January 2023
7.4	The North East Area Members' Council Representative would raise the matter of the fairness of area festival funding for areas that already host BMC led events at the next Members' Council Meeting.	Members' Council Representatives	At the next Members' Council Meeting

13. "Bratwurst, Beer and Bears".

After the meeting Simon Litchfield delivered a humorous and insightful talk about his exploits of climbing, developing crags and enjoy the climbing culture in Germany.

Simon Litchfield, Secretary
29 November 2022

The above is accepted as an accurate record of the meeting:

Signed  29 November 2022

P M S McCree, Chair

Annex:

A. Youth and Competitions report to North East Area General Meeting 17 November 2022.

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Youth Report

It's been a busy summer of competition for Northeast youth climbing, June, July, August was taken up with the Rock Solid Bouldering Competition, then we were straight into Sept, October, November with the BMC Youth Climbing Series, that's 10 competitions in 6 months. Plus, we had the Northumberland Youth Meet at the end of October.

Rock Solid Bouldering

We received 87 entries from all over the UK for the 5 rounds of the boulder competition, from as far away as Kent and Herefordshire. We even had 2 entries from Spain, as 2 Spanish kids were over here on holiday and asked to take part. So, we are cheekily claiming to have gone international.

The whole series was a huge success, the feedback we have received is tremendous, I was positively pleased to receive a call from a representative of the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC) who said that they had been monitoring what we and the midlands region had been doing and that they were impressed with the results and would like to work with us in the future.

The process of booking walls for next year's Northeast Boulder competition has already begun, and the Midlands Youth Climbing Series starts again in January.

Youth Climbing Series

The entry numbers for this year's YCS are very disappointing, with only 35 entries from an allocation of 120. The reasons for this are numerous,

1. There was zero advertising for this year's event from the BMC. Normally there would have been posters and flyers in every climbing wall in the country, but the BMC simply did not bother this year. To counter this, Rock Solid printed and displayed our own posters in as many regional walls as possible.
2. There was a disagreement between the BMC and Cumbrian climbing walls which resulted in no YCS rounds in the Lakes this year. Greatly upsetting our Cumbrian friends and the balance between the Northeast and Lakes.
3. Cost, £120 for 4 regional rounds, plus another £60 for those who qualify for the final, which used to be free. In return the kids got cheap medals in place of the trophies of the past, and I'm getting reports that there will not even be any tee-shirts for finalists this year.

The YCS is being priced out of the market.

I have received assurances from the BMC that the disagreement with Kendal, Lakeland Climbing Wall has been resolved but the financial disagreement with Eden Rock, Carlisle is ongoing. Plus, the BMC has also agreed to reinstate the advertising for next year. So hopefully we can rebuild the numbers next year.

The national final for this year's YCS will take place at Rockstar Climbing Centre, Swindon over the weekend of 25th / 26th November.

Northumberland Youth Meet

The largest ever youth meet took place at Wooler Youth Hostel over the weekend of the 28th 30st October. 21 young climbers, 8 climbing instructors and numerous parents providing transportation.

This was a fantastic weekend for adult and child alike with two full days of outdoor climbing introducing indoor youth climbers to the great outdoors.

Unfortunately, this is likely to be the last ever youth meet, as James McHaffie has resigned from the BMC. James has done a tremendous amount for youth climbing nationally and will be a huge loss.

We are looking at the possibility of running independent youth meets next year, but there is a great deal of admin, sponsorship and insurance to setup before this can happen.

Competition Podium

We have been talking with a local joiner with a view to have a competition podium built. The podium would be built of plywood and the 1st, 2nd & 3rd place units would fit inside each other Russian Doll style to assist with transport and storage when not in use. Rock Solid could also make the podium available to local climbing walls for their events. We have funds to cover cost of materials but if any further funds were available for this project, please let us know. It's an item that would be well used at youth competitions throughout the year.

Rock Solid Christmas Climb

We are holding a Christmas get together at Newcastle Climbing Centre, Sunday 18th December. 3pm. This is a chance for all of the Northeast and Lakes youth climbers old and new to get together to have a fun climb away from the pressures of competition and celebrate Christmas.

The event will be filled with fun activities not least a parental taster session to try and get some parents on the wall. Santa hats are compulsory and anyone who would like to come along and support us on the day, are more than welcome.

Merry Christmas to all from Rock Solid.

