



British Mountaineering Council SOUTHWEST AREA

Ordinary Meeting

Date, Time, Type & Venue of Meeting: 24th January 2023, By Zoom
Chair: Mark Kemball, Secretary: Philip Wilson

MINUTES

If anything discussed at this meeting gives rise to a conflict of interest for anyone, please declare it at the start of the meeting.

Attendees:

Mark Kemball (Chair), Philip Wilson (Sec & MC Rep), Trevor Smith (MC Rep), Cath Flitcroft (BMC Office), Pete Salenieks (BMC Board), Colin Knowles, Nathalie Caulder, Thomas Reeves, Simon Torr, James Mann, Rik Meeks, Tony Bird, , Adam Lowe, Nathalie Caulier, Rik Meek, Mark Courtiour, Owen Wynne Griffiths, Dan Osmond, Ju Lewis, Ian David, Emma Canis, Iain Peters, Terry Gifford, Tony Sanders & Ian Butterworth.

1. **Welcome Introductions & Apologies for Absence:** The chair welcomed all attendees, including Cath Flitcroft (BMC Office) and Pete Salenieks (BMC Board). Apologies for absence were accepted from Helen Wilson.
2. **Previous Meeting Minutes:** The previous meetings minutes for the meeting held on the 22 October 2022 at the Quay Exeter were accepted and signed off as a true and accurate record of the meeting.
3. **Outstanding Actions:** There were no outstanding actions from the previous meeting held on the 22nd October 2022.
4. **Dartmoor Bylaws Update**
 - a) Trevor Smith reported that prior to the court case ruling the National Parks Authority were reviewing their byelaws by public consultation. He confirmed that the byelaw changes would be discussed further by Dartmoor National Parks at their board meeting (27 Jan 2023). Any byelaw decisions are however likely suspended until a decision is made as to whether they will appeal against the court case ruling restricting wild camping.
 - b) Tom Reeves queried whether proposed bylaw referring to restricting commercial activities would apply to outdoor activities such as fee-paying freelance work. Trevor Smith replied that this wording would only apply to vendors direct selling to the public such as ice cream vans and pop-up stalls.
 - c) Emma Canis stated that this bylaw clause was not specific enough and should explicitly state that no Dartmoor Walk Leaders would be affected, to protect this activity in perpetuity. She added that she has made this important point to the BMC and others on several occasions without action and now needed them to. Trevor Smith confessed to not understanding what she meant by this, but he agreed to liaise with Emma by email to come to a mutually satisfactory position.



5. **Right to Wild Camp Court Case:**

Mark Kemball, Cath Flitcroft & Trevor Smith who were sitting in on the National Parks meeting held earlier (24 01 2023) outlined the position which is that following the recent court case between a landowner and the National Parks Authority.

The right to wild camp on Dartmoor was deemed by the judge as not part of walking access rights and therefore revoked. This effectively removed the right to wild camp on Dartmoor without landowners' permission.

Subsequently the National Park then negotiated with landowners to secure wild camping with the landowner's permission for the Ten Tors and Duke of Edinburgh events. Full details can be found here on the BMC web site [Agreement reached following Dartmoor wild camping discussions \(Thursday 19th\) \(thebmc.co.uk\)](https://thebmc.co.uk/agreement-reached-following-dartmoor-wild-camping-discussions-thursday-19th).

Mark Kemball stated that the court deadline to lodge an appeal is 3rd February 2023, the court would then take between 3 to 6 months to decide whether the appeal is sound. It is very likely that the outcome of any appeal would take over a year to play out and would be a long process. He added that at least £100k would be required to fund any fund court case and that the money could be raised by a crowd funding campaign.

Cath Flitcroft reported that due to this this ruling and following the negotiated permissive access agreement between the (DPNA) and landowners, this now means that there is now 14% less land available on Dartmoor for wild camping. The (DPNA) would release a press release on Friday regarding this.

Cath Flitcroft reported that the BMC strategy is to provide full support from behind the scenes to such organisations as the Dartmoor National parks Authority, Ramblers Association, Right to Roam Campaign in their direct campaign against this ruling. She added that the BMC supported the Right to Roam protest last Saturday. Mark Kemball and Trevor Smith both also attended the event.

Cath Flitcroft added that it was positive to see Labour & Lib Dem Parliamentarians supporting this, as this means in view of the likely 2024 conservative election loss Westminster law changes to preserve our right to roam on common land, including wild camping. She added that upcoming initiatives include our "Outdoors for All" campaign, part of which will involve a letter writing campaign to MPs, to raise the profile of this during parliamentary discussions.

Mark Kemball confirmed that the DNPA had made no payments to landowners to date, following their interim access agreement.

Pete Salenieks asked what the chance of success the appeal had and whether the BMC had sought advice from our honorary legal advisers? Kath Flitcroft replied that 2 BMC barrister members, as well as a very knowledgeable Hugh Craddock of the Open Spaces Society had been consulted. She confirmed that only Hugh had replied stating that in his opinion we had enough evidence for a right to appeal.

Pete Salenieks stated that we could be mutually supportive with the Wales Right to Roam debate in Wales which faced on some points, similar issues. He added that there was scope for co-operation and links could be formed here for those interested.

A Zoom poll was then taken asking members whether the SW Local Area should write to DNPA asking them to appeal in order to pressurise them to do so. This was carried For 89%. Against 19%,



Abstain 5% and Not A BMC Member 5%. This result was without both the Chair or Secretary as Zoom co-hosts voting, as this is not allowed by the software (both confirmed that they would have voted yes). Mark Kemball added that he would write to the DNPA on behalf of the BMC asking them to appeal. Cath Flitcroft said she would provide him with the draft text for this.

6. Proposal For Allowing Guided Climbing Cheddar Gorge

Mark Courtiour outlined this proposal brought to him by Andy Sparrow a local Outdoor Activity provider on behalf of the Cheddar Vision Group which represents the Cheddar Community in this matter (see Appendix A for a copy of this document).

He explained that his purpose in bring this document to the meeting was so that it could be debated; and a view formed as to whether the BMC SW Local Area should support this initiative or not. This would then enable the BMC to state its position to the National Trust who will take a steer from our view.

Thomas Reeves made the point that the document states that instructors holding BMC Qualification would act as guides, which is not correct as it is Mountain Training who supervise this.

It was agreed that there are lots of issues here to complicate what appears to be a simple proposition. It was felt that ultimately this is a commercial decision, designed to bring in income to guiding instructors and the Cheddar community.

The proposed improvements to rock belay anchors was seen as the thin end of the wedge leading to increased top roping with subsequent rock degradation.

The point was made that Longleat would not grant access to the north side as they top rope tourists on a small area with bolt on holds, which they feel would damage their commercial interests.

This would likely lead to restrictions for social climbers and may endanger our access to the North Side owned by Longleat Estates.

It was felt that the most likely scenario if granted is for guided climbing to be allowed on the south side of the gorge only (due to the opposition of Longleat Estate whose position to date has been not to allow climbing on the north side, which they feel would infringe their commercial rights). It was felt that this monopoly agreement with one client would not be maintained for long and could quickly widen to allow the areas 20+ guides to become active with clients. This activity would take place on a small number of easy due to lack of novice climbs, with potential rock wear and polish.

A Zoom poll was taken as to whether we should support this proposal, results of which were favour a firm No 56%, Yes 0%, Abstain 39% & BMC Non-Voting Member 6%. Neither the SW Area Chair or Secretary as Zoom co-hosts did not cast their votes as this is not allowed by the software.

Owen Wynne-Griffiths (Cheddar Access Rep), proposed that a smaller meeting be held on this and other issues relating to climbing in Cheddar Gorge and asked for volunteers with Colin Knowles (Somerset) & Philip Wilson (Bristol) agreeing to help.

7. Hybrid SW Area Meetings:

Philip Wilson outlined that he was keen to do this at the Quay Climbing Wall in Exeter and stated that this was a good solution as the SW Area is so geographically large it enables non-local BMC members to Exeter to attend electronically. It was confirmed that The Quay Climbing Centre was happy to host this. The BMC has kit we can use. Natalie Caulter reported that she had 3 weeks previously held a hybrid SDMC talk which went well. Natalie confirmed she was happy to help. It was agreed that 3 trial should be help 3 weeks in advance of the next meeting in March, 3 weeks



beforehand and if good go to a full hybrid, in April /May. It was agreed that there was no point in holding an in person full meeting without the hybrid element, as this is not representative.

8. BMC Supplied Abseil & Belay Stakes in South Devon:

Mark Kemball reminded members that BMC stakes are available for suitable abseil and belay locations in the Southwest. Simon Torr stakes at Myrtle Turtle near Haytor as well as for Meadfoot Quarry, Telegraph Hole & Daddyhole Torbay or failing that, fixed bolt anchors. It was concluded that the ground is too rocky for stakes and that bolt belays would affect our relations with the owners. It was also pointed out that belays harder to find natural belays are available using a second rope.

9. Exmoor Climbing Guide Update:

Following on from the excellent presentation by Mathieu Burtschell at the last meeting, he confirmed that this is now going ahead with Climbers Club support. James Mann reported that this would be no menial task and asked that folks with knowledge of climbs / first ascents in the area, please contact Mathieu @ mathieu.burtschell@nationaltrust.org.uk as he will need substantial help.

10. Matters Arising Not Covered Elsewhere:

Colin Knowles reported that the annual Avon Gorge Scrub bash would be taking place on the 19th Feb 2023, weather permitting, or if not the following weekend. He implored all in the area to attend so we could clear overgrown access to climbs in what is a fun social event.

11. Carn Gowla Access:

Iain Peters reported that he and James Mann that a boat would be chartered to count bird numbers and species from the sea to find out where nested schedule 1 birds were nesting during the breeding season, as this would help determine access to climbs on the cliff to counter planned draconian National Trust / Natural England licencing to restrict climbing. Proper discussion before the nesting season and following the boat trip with these bodies would be scheduled.

12. Skeleton Ridge Access:

No news received. Mark Kemball to contact Marti Hallet for an update.

13. Board Update:

Pete Saleinieks gave this. See Appendix B for this report. James Mann asked Pete about James McHaffies BMC replacement and pickup of youth climbing outside James Mann. Both Mark Kemball and Philip Wilson reported that they had helped out at this pre pandemic event.

14. Homes For Ukraine:

Members of the BMC have taken a lead in supporting Ukrainian families who have a link to the mountaineering world. Sadly, as the first group of families step out and find their feet, there are 4 more families in need of support. Please consider whether you would be able to host them and if so contact the BMC.

15. Vixen Tor:

No update, Mark Kemball contact Will Hornby.

16. Any Other Business:

Dave Turnbull illness was outlined, he has now left hospital and is partially mobile again. This is good news. Mark confirmed that he has sent a get-well card to Dave from the SW Area. All hoped for his speedy recovery.



17. BMC Annually Sponsored Mountain Medicine Event:

Philip Wilson reported that Dave Hillebrandt the organiser of this event had contacted him, concerned that the BMC Office were going to withdraw support for this event held annually in Hathersage. This event is well attended, raises the BMC profile and supports our Mountain Training partners responsible for those working in the outdoors at home and abroad. Thankfully this is now not the case.

18. Date, Time & Location (next area meeting):

This is still to be arranged.



Appendix A

A proposal for allowing limited access for commercial climbing activity in Cheddar gorge

1. Background

The Cheddar Gorge Climbing Project ran from 2003 until 2005. Its objective was to clean and restore routes in the gorge, many of which were being lost to vegetation. Loose rock was (and remains) a hazard. Selected routes were cleaned of vegetation and loose rock. Many were equipped with bolt protection. Almost all had twin bolt lower offs installed.

One of the new outcomes agreed in the project was that climbing in the gorge was not suitable for commercial groups. The landowners - National Trust and Longleat Enterprises Ltd. (CC&G) - agreed not to allow any commercial activity. The guidebook states that "climbing activity is prohibited to all 'commercial users'" and "applies to all the cliffs in the gorge" both NT and Longleat owned. (P165 point 10 Cheddar Gorge Climbs).

However the guide also says (P.11 Commercial and Group Use) that access is prohibited to all commercial users and that explicit permission must be sought in every instance.

The reasons for the prohibition were over-use and subsequent damage to the rock by groups climbing, and especially abseiling, over routes. This would take the form of polish and loss of holds. Also the conflict for access for individual climbers confronted with outdoor activity providers setting up top ropes over multiple routes. There were also concerns over additional wear to lower offs.

In addition CC&G wish to retain all commercial climbing opportunities for their own business interest. They run climbing taster sessions for non climber visitors on some of their own rock faces.

Until 2022 all applications by Outdoor Activity Centres to use rock faces for group use were declined by both landowners.

In 2022 a local provider made an application to the National Trust for a licence allowing small group use to climb on NT rock faces, specifically to facilitate learning of outdoor and lead climbing skills and as a progression route for climbers emerging from climbing walls with no experience of real rock.

The application was made without reference to CC&G or the BMC and a licence was granted by NT to the provider. CC&G were extremely annoyed by this and called for a meeting with NT and BMC. The Provider was not invited. At the meeting NT agreed to rescind the licence on the grounds that a prior agreement was in place – prohibiting commercial activity, as with changes in staff over the years they had not been aware of it.

The Provider has responded with a detailed proposal for allowing qualified guides to work in the gorge with clients learning outdoor lead climbing skills and in particular multi pitch climbing skills. Attached below. He has the support of a local business consortium - The Cheddar Vision Group. He intends to apply again to the National Trust for a licence on the grounds that refusing to licence contradicts NT national policy on encouraging the learning of outdoor skills on their properties.



Whilst licensing would most likely be site specific, if NT felt that there was no conflict of interest in Cheddar gorge and it fitted with their National Objectives, they may revisit their prohibition and allow some commercial climbing activity as outlined in the proposal.

CC&G will almost certainly oppose it. The question for climbers is, will it cause any issues for climbers coming to Cheddar, or will it be a positive development for the future of climbing in the gorge? Things have changed since the 2005 project and many people are learning to climb indoors and want to make a safe progression to climbing.

2. The Proposal

Proposal for allowing commercial guides to take clients on routes in Cheddar Gorge

From Andy Sparrow, local Outdoor Activity provider

1. Cheddar Gorge is not a suitable or appropriate venue for large groups of novice climbers or abseilers.
2. Instructed groups should not exceed 5 persons including instructors.
3. Instructors must be BMC qualified - SPA, RCI, MIA, or MIC.
4. Instructed groups have no special privileges or priority over other climbers.

The benefits of this proposal for climbers and aspirant climbers are:

1. Aspirant climbers will have the opportunity to climb and to receive coaching and training in Cheddar Gorge.
2. Climbers aspiring to use sport climbs will be able to receive appropriate instruction.
3. Climbers aspiring to 'trad' climb will be able to receive appropriate instruction.
4. Climbers will have the opportunity to be guided up classic multi pitch routes.
5. BMC members will have access to BMC instructors, and vice versa.

Regarding concerns that climbers may have over these proposals:

1. They will not result in large groups of novice climbers using the Gorge.
2. The increased number of climbers using Cheddar Gorge will be negligible (there are over 600 climbing routes at Cheddar).
3. There will be no 'hogging' of routes or excessive wear on anchors.
4. The instructors could be asked to make a financial contribution towards anchor maintenance.

Benefits to the business community of Cheddar.

1. Allowing BMC qualified instructors to work with small groups will raise the profile of Cheddar Gorge.
2. Cheddar could become a nationally recognised centre of excellence for climbing instruction and coaching.
3. Guided and instructed climbing will generate extremely powerful social media images.
4. As Cheddar's climbing profile rises it will attract more 'high quality' visitors.
5. As a climbing centre of excellence Cheddar will attract more media attention further raising its profile which will generate increased public awareness and visitor numbers.



Appendix B

Summary from Board Activity November 2022 to mid January 2023

For Members' Council – January – February 2023

1. Context

During the 4th Quarter of each year the focus of the Board inevitably is on Planning, Financial Management and approval of the budget for the forthcoming year. The 4th Quarter of 2022 fits this model – consequently much of this summary report is focussed on those subjects.

2. Quarterly Performance Review

For some time, the Board has had in place a formal review of the performance of the BMC as a whole. The review happens at the end of each quarter and after we have had the financial results for the quarter end.

At the Board Meeting at the end of October the reporting of the performance of the BMC across all of its activities improved further – there is considerably more transparency and the quality of the reporting continues to improve.

It is clear that bringing the whole of the Senior Leadership Team – Paul Davies, (CEO), Joeline Chisholm (CFO) and Gavin Finch (CCO) into the meeting and contributing to the discussion enables deeper and more considered conversation. We will be continuing with this practice

3. Financial Performance and Planning

As at the start of 2023 the indications are that the BMC is close to planned financial outcome for 2022 with a deficit considerably below £300,000.

It appears that the Finance and Audit Committee is becoming more effective ... or maybe the Board and FAC are just getting a lot better at interacting around everything, from in year financial management, through multi year planning and onto guiding the Board on the 2023 budget. In November the Board approved the much improved Terms of Reference covering the Finance and Audit Committee during 2023.

At the end of October the Board reviewed the overall plan and budgeting for both 2023 and 2024. We agreed that during 2024 the BMC is planning on a break even and hopefully a profitable financial outcome. Considerable feedback was provided followed by at least one much deeper dive into how both the income and expenditure for 2023 was being planned.

At the end November meeting of the Board the 2023 budget was approved based on running a deficit of £71,000 with a planned income of £5.336 million and a planned expenditure of £5.407 million. Along with the financial figures the Board reviewed the Strategic Goals and targets that will take the BMC to the end of the current Strategy period in 2025. All of the activity has been allocated to one of 3 categories:

1. Licence to operate: The things we have to do to meet regulatory requirements and have a safe organisation (e.g. providing an office, safeguarding, maintaining our owned properties).

2. Core: Everything that we do to serve the needs of our members, participants and the sector.



3. Growth: Strategic initiatives to grow and be able to meet our ambitions. These things will become 'Core' in the future.

With the budget approved along with Strategic Goals and clarity on how the BMC allocates resources we are now focusing on being clear about the small number of Key Performance Indicators that will determine progress in 2023.

4. Sport England (SE) Funding

During December and into January a considerable amount of work was focussed on getting to contracts with our Partners ABC and NICAS. During the 2nd week of January the National indoor Climbing Awards Scheme (NICAS) signed the contract with the BMC and we are hopeful that the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC) will be able to do the same in the near future.

5. Supporting the Outdoor Sector of our activities - sports

The BMC working with Mountain Training and Plas y Brenin have developed an excellent document with the title *"Everyone Exploring the Hills Safely"*. A lot of credit goes to Mountain Training who have done much of the work behind development of the document.

In mid January, it was presented to Sport England, who recognise the quality of the document and the story that it tells about the growth in people on the hills and mountains, the challenges that produces and the developing nature of how people engage with the outdoor environment - much of which is now led by social media.

Sport England wish to engage with the BMC, Mountain Training and Plas y Brenin in order to work together and hopefully fund further work by all parties which support the communities which now enjoy our hills and mountains.

6. Sector Leadership and Partnerships

It has become apparent that whilst the BMC strategy states that a key pillar is to lead the sector, the BMC has a way to go before it is possible to declare that the BMC genuinely does lead the sector.

Unlike other sports and activities, the mountain, crag and wall sector has grown up with many organisations, all of which are playing important roles.

It has become apparent to the Chair and the Board that delivering the BMC strategy and providing a high quality service to the membership requires the BMC to work with these organisations and make a step change in how it works with its partners – be they funded, in the conservation and access sector or within indoor and competition climbing.

Going into the next 2 years the BMC must address how it becomes a better partner and steps up to Sector Leadership.

7. Hill Walking Strategy, Complaints Policy and Ukraine families

The Board approved the Hill Walking Strategy at its meeting at the end of October. This is a well considered and a very well networked strategy which is supported by the Hill Walking Group, Mountain Training et al and as it is implemented should improve the visibility and delivery of the BMC to current and future members who hill walk.

A new complaints procedure has been developed and approved by the Board which covers Directors, Staff and Members.

Members of the BMC have taken a lead in supporting Ukrainian families who have a link to the mountaineering world. Sadly, as the first group of families step out and find their



feet, there are more families in need of support. Please consider whether you would be able to help.

8. Appointments

The BMC is delighted to confirm that John Willmott has agreed to join the Board as an Independent Director. John brings wide and very senior leadership experience across multiple industries with a real depth of knowledge of the Insurance business. He is a hill walker, involved with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Programmes, and has a wide range of interests.

Within the staff a really important appointment has been made of Helen Murphy, who has joined in order to lead and manage the Safeguarding programme for both the BMC and the Sector as a whole. She has wide and deep expertise and experience including within British Gymnastics during the Whyte Review.