



## BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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### NORTH EAST AREA GENERAL MEETING

Physical meeting: Gosforth Hotel (NE1 1HQ)  
on 16<sup>th</sup> February at 7.30pm

#### Minutes

##### Attendance (14)

**NE Area Committee (5).** Simon Litchfield (Social Media), Jon Punshon (Secretary & Members' Council), Jonathan White (Members' Council), Mike Conlon (Access Rep South), Chris Bullock (Youth & Competitions). **NE Area Members (9).** Mark Anstiss, Graham Harkness, Philip Powell, Alan Hinkes, Philip Hull, Colin Lofthouse, Bob McAdam, John Spencer, John Taylor Ben Pearce & Tom Pearce.

##### 1. Welcome and apologies for absence

The Chair, Peter McCreedy was away on business in Dubai, so Jon Punshon opened and chaired the Meeting. Jonathan White was then ambushed into taking minutes. Additional apologies received from Steve Blake, Adrian Wilson (NE Area Committee). Mike Faccini, John Heron, and Tom Parkin.

There was no BMC Director in attendance, nor a BMC member of staff.

There was also a brief discussion about the venue. To try to prompt a more sociable and fun atmosphere, the secretary had chosen a different pub for the meeting. Views were that the venue was great, parking was available if you knew where to find it (this will be circulated with future agendas. Feedback was that the ambiance of Newcastle's own Gordon Sumner's early regular gig venue was excellent, as a 'north of centre' location it worked for the regular attendees, but we should venture south from time to time, though this may not be further than Durham. However, if some more members from e.g. Cleveland and Middlesbrough confirmed that they would attend, then we'd be happy to meet on the Costa del Teesside.

##### 2. Quorum

There were 14 voting members in attendance at the start of the meeting, 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 Meeting held on 17 November 2022

The minutes from the previous Area Meeting held on 17 November 2022, a draft of which had been made available prior to the meeting. Apart from questioning whether the reference to 'lager meets' on page 2 was a typo for 'larger' or not, they were approved by way of a vote on a show of hands.

#### 4. Matters arising not covered elsewhere

Most matters arising were covered elsewhere, and a relaxed approach to the precise sequence of items on the rest of the agenda was taken. Specific points raised:

- The Chair had reported that he had spoken with Richard Davies about Weardale and the recent controversial bolting and access issues, but the meeting had not yet taken place.
- Chris Bullock again thanked a member present for his generous donation at the last meeting to pay for the long sought after area competitions podium, and reported to his amazement that the office had also now made a contribution. An inspirational set of stacking podiums (podia?) will now be procured.
- The NE Area Committee was now almost fully staffed, with the exception of Walls Rep. **Anyone willing to cover this small but important role would be most welcome.**
- Funding for Area Festivals. This had been somewhat overtaken by events, but the breaking news was very good.

#### 5. NE Festival of Climbing and BMC AGM

The hot news was that the Chair and Secretary were at an advanced stage of negotiations with the BMC office to hold the 2023 BMC AGM in the North East. Details were provisionally 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> June in Alnwick – tbc once the venue booking was confirmed.  
*[PMN: now confirmed].*

The expectation is for the AGM itself to take typically a couple of hours, and for the rest of the weekend to be spent doing fun things – outdoors and indoors. Members present noted that the last time the BMC AGM had been in the NE was about 15 years ago – it had been in Belford and a thoroughly excellent time, and the hotel still has pictures of it on the wall (quite what they may be covering was not speculated upon). **The Chair and Secretary would be very pleased to hear from some NE Area members who would be able and willing to assist with organisation and logistics, and showing people around on the weekend itself.**

#### 6. Dartmoor: Recent Legal Judgement on Wildcamping and the Wider Implications

Devonian expat and Dartmoor evangelist Jonathan White gave an overview of:

- the historical position (presumed right to wild-camp under the Dartmoor Commons Act right of access),
- the recent issues (massive increase in roadside 'fly-camping' and associated anti-social issues during and following the Covid restrictions),
- the conflation of issues ('leave no trace' wild-camping/backpack camping as promoted by the likes of the Duke of Edinburgh's Award and Ten Tors training, has got caught up with the very real problems faced by landowners and others from 'fly-camping')
- the recent High Court judgement (that the right of access on foot does not extend to wild-camping),
- potential next steps (appeal if granted, payment for permission to wildcamp from the DNPA to landowners, reduced areas available to wild-camp)

MA asked what the BMC hoped to achieve. JW advised that the BMC access team and local SW&S area was working with the DNPA and others, but couldn't give a clear answer as a detailed plan had not yet been circulated.

CL felt that the news story had gone, and the BMC had missed an opportunity by not having a clear public voice in a high-profile response.

Members present felt that there were already massive restrictions in the north east – we are surrounded by land where you could in theory wild-camp discretely, but were often kicked-off. Even in Scotland where there is a legal right, people are finding themselves challenged.

Members felt that the implications could be massive – it would embolden landowners across the country to more strongly challenge those that were taking a minimum impact approach.

Particular sensitive areas in the north east mentioned included:

- The North Yorks Moors, where challenges are more frequent now on the grouse moors.
  - The grouse moors near Alston
  - Blakey ridge – where younger climbers have recently been challenged
- These were despite most routes being on recognised tracks, as walking through high heather was not the easiest of alternatives.

Conversely Swaledale was noted as not suffering from these issues.

E-mountain bikes were raised as a growing problem, particularly on bridleways.

The following motions were proposed by SL and seconded by MA:

1. The North East Area publicly supports the South West Area and its attempts to maintain its traditional rights of access on Dartmoor.
2. The North East seeks clarity on why the BMC response has been low-key compared to other organisations, given its status as national representative body for hillwalkers.

The meeting asked that the NE Chair convey these messages to the SW area.

3. That the BMC reach out to the relevant cycling organisations and ask that they provide their members and the public with good practice advice on considerate cycling in the hills and on the moors.

The meeting asked that the Members Council reps convey these messages to Members Council.

## **7. Update on local issues**

### **- Walking.**

No report. LK is currently at sea.

### **- South Area.** Mike Conlon provided a verbal report for the meeting:

- North York Moors National Park liaison.
- MC represents climbing interests on the Local Access Forum (LAF). Budget constraints have impacted on Ranger Services which will have an impact on maintenance work including footpaths. NYMNP has sought to minimise impact, looking to support user groups in their areas of interest. There already exists good working relationships with NYMNP in terms of providing advice, liaison with landowners, providing materials for conservation work, feeding back on issues, etc.
- Belay stakes - A bid has been put in to Jon Fulwood for some of the stakes that he offered, awaiting a response currently.

### **Site Specific -**

- *Beacon Scar* - A landslide some time ago made access to the South end of the crag even more problematic than usual. A CMC work party cleared a path which should ease the problem.

- *Tranmire* - A succession of ownership changes at Bilsdale Hall have resulted in reports of climbers being challenged on their way to the crag. The access is via public bridleway onto Open Access Land. Climbers are advised to explain that Climbing is permitted on Open Access Land, a fact that a number of Bilsdale Estate owners have failed to grasp.
- *Park Nab* - The reinstatement of the parking bay below the crag has been much appreciated.
- *Scugdale* - A tree has been cleared in liason with NYMNP Ranger, farmer and a local instructor. Reports came in at the weekend that the normal approach path was flooded. A visit showed a culvert that was installed some years ago by a CMC work party with materials provided by the NYMNP had become blocked. Temporary culverts were dug and a work party will be recruited to provide a more permanent fix.
- **Access North.** Steve Blake was away, but John Spencer reported that:
  - At Thrunton Wood, Scottish Woodland are not permitting access at present due to the number of trees that are down.
- **Access Central.** The Chair raised the issue of v poor attendance at meetings by the representative. Simon L assured the meeting that good work was going on. The area meeting would love to hear about it!
- **Competition and Youth.** CB stunned everyone present – not least himself – by praising the BMC not once, not twice, but three times during his report. Some balance was though subsequently returned to proceedings:
  - From January to November there would be at least one competition per month.
  - The National YCS final in Swindon had been the best organised in many years.
  - Rock Solid – four rounds have been held in the north east, attracting competitors from as far afield as Kent, Hereford, the Midlands and Spain!
  - Chris Bullock was keen to name and thank some generous sponsors ( **Beyond Hope; Griptonite; Climb Newcastle; Durham Climbing Wall; Newcastle Climbing Centre; Friction Bouldering**) providing lots of prizes.
  - YCS – this starts in September, but the first planning meeting started in January.
  - The exciting prospect of the NE soon having its own set of podiums was again highlighted.
  - The difficulty attracting people to be competition judges was highlighted:
    - o There is currently a shortage of volunteers – it's a national issue
    - o It's not rocket science – anyone could do it.
    - o It is actually fun and enjoyable.
 (as one of the UK's first qualified international judges, JP confirmed all of the above)
  - There is now a 3-year arrangement for walls – this is great as it gives certainty and helps keep costs down, though some are concerned that those that are not in currently might miss out for 3 or 6 years.
  - It was pleasing that the NE walls have always worked together in the past, but concerning that the new contractual arrangements might undo that and be divisive in the long term.
  - **Greatly concerned that the Edinburgh (Ratho) IFSC world cup event that the BMC had stepped in to run had lost £75,000. Also, that qualified judges had not been used.**

SL praised CB's posts on social media.

**Clubs.** There hadn't been a Clubs Committee meeting since September. After a blistering couple of year, things had gone pretty quiet on the BMC Clubs front.

- 8. Members' Council Update.** Jon Punshon (JP) and Jonathan White (JW) reported that there had not been a Council meeting since the last Area meeting, but the next was due on 11 March.  
An update was requested on the review of the Participation Statement. JW reported that there was an increasing convergence of many different views, but that whether or not to retain reference to the risk of death was still the most debated point. One member stated that he had spoken to our insurers, who'd given the view that ours was one of the most honest statements of any sport.
- 9. BMC Board Update.** No update from the Board was available.
- 10. Any Other Business**  
Nil pre notified or raised at the meeting.
- 11. Date of area meetings and format for 2023**  
Thursday 27 April.
- 12. Close meeting**  
Round about 9.30, give or take.

Item	Action	Involving	Target date
4.1	The Chair to meet in Weardale with RD and LH to discuss the proposed way ahead in more detail and better understand the climbing opportunities.	Chair	Before Area meeting
4.2	CB to source three podiums, that are made of actual gold, silver and bronze, or alternatively plywood.	Youth Rep	Before next meeting
5	NE Area members please volunteer to assist with organisation and logistics, and showing people around on the weekend itself	All	Before next meeting
6.1 & 6.2	Convey NE support for SW attempts to defend access, and ask why the BMC response has been low key compared to other organisations.	Chair	Before next meeting
6.3	Request that the BMC contact cycling organisations about e-bikes in the hills.	Members' Council Representatives	Before next meeting
7.4	Volunteer to be trained as a Competition Judge	All	ASAP

**13. "Recent developments In Mapping".**

As part of the meeting, Jon Punshon gave an informative, illustrated and interactive talk on recent developments in digital mapping. Starting with the UK (OS, £28 pa, print all you like), selected international highlights were reviewed, culminating in the 'gold standard' for mapping of Switzerland provided by *Swisstopo*. Numerous members shared their discoveries and top tips.

Jonathan White, Acting Secretary for one night only.  
01 April 2023

