

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

Minutes of The Peak Area Ordinary Meeting Tuesday 18th July 2023, Bamford Village Institute Hybrid meeting – face-to-face and online

Present:

46 people attended in person

17 people attended on-line

1. Welcome & Introduction

Andy Reeve, BMC Peak Area Chair welcomed everyone to the meeting, including those who were joining the meeting on-line.

Andy informed the meeting that someone had expressed an interest in being the permanent Secretary but couldn't attend this meeting. Lynn Robinson had volunteered to take the notes for this meeting.

1.1 Apologies: Gordon Riley.

2. Minutes of the last meeting held on 21st April

Agreed as correct.

3. Update from Paul Davies, BMC Chief Executive

Paul was asked to give an update on recent developments in the BMC. In summary he talked about:

- The re-configuration of BMC staffing
- Tracking membership growth and 2023 revenue.

He began by thanking us all for bearing with BMC management. They have tried to go through the re-configuration of BMC staff with compassion. Statements in relation to this, with details and a video from Andy Syme have been released today on the BMC website, but he felt it was important to attend this meeting to directly answer any questions.

In relation to tracking membership growth and 2023 revenue, course corrections had been put in place, meaning, in summary, if the expected income didn't come in then the BMC couldn't do all the planned project work. Since the start of 2023, a bit of course correction was required, some of this has been misinterpreted as cuts. The aim of the Board was to reduce the deficit during 2023 and to break-even during 2024.

During the past 2-months it had become apparent that even by increasing cost savings by reducing some project work, this alone wasn't going to solve the financial challenges as income was increasing slower than expected. They then had to look at the base cost of running the BMC, which included looking at reducing some staff costs. An approach of balancing reducing staff costs versus reducing project costs was examined. A redundancy process was entered, working within employment law. The redundancy process had just finished: yesterday the Board were informed, then staff and then the membership via the information published on the BMC website.

Henry Folkard stated that access is fundamental to all we enjoy and outlined a summary of all the access work that has taken place in the Peak District, all of which have taken and continue to take time to resolve, including input from BMC staff and volunteers. He outlined all their liaison work and groups they're involved in. Because of their input the BMC has huge representation within the Peak District National Park. Henry highlighted a few achievements including the BMC buying Horseshoe Quarry and the Stand Up For Stange campaign. He emphasised that this is who we are and what we do. It isn't about competition climbing or membership growth.

Paul responded by saying that there is absolute recognition that the BMC has built its community around access. He emphasised that there have been no compulsory redundancies. There has been a small

reduction in capacity to reflect that they overdid the growth of the access and conservation department. There is still better provision in this area of work after the restructure than the BMC has had for most of the past decades. Paul stated that the BMC is not facilitating competitions at the expense of other areas of BMC work.

A question and answer session followed:

Question: Had the competition team spending increased whilst the access team spending had decreased?
<p>Answer: Paul said that the reported £500,000 spend on competition is not correct. The spend from the BMC on GB Climbing is £180,000 per year. Paul went through the detailed breakdown:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • To get grants from UKSport and Sport England the BMC has to make a financial contribution. • For UKSport they require a 15% contribution. For Sport England there isn't a fixed amount. • The £180,000 BMC contribution divided by its members gives a contribution of £2.18/member. • This £2.18 has been topped up £11.40 by grants per member from UKSport and Sport England. • It isn't possible to compare year-on-year spend as the way in which things have been accounted for has changed. • The £280,000 spend on access and conservation also doesn't include overhead costs. <p>Paul stated that he will make the reporting of financial spend more transparent in the future and committed to clarifying numbers and spend.</p>
Question: When staff leave from the access team, will they be replaced? and asked for clarification as to whether x2 posts will be recruited to.
<p>Answer: Paul outlined the changes to BMC staff:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is one post within the Land and Property Trust whose salary is topped up with BMC funds. The current post-holder is a contractor who takes a planned break each summer therefore this post is on hold. There is no intention to get rid of this post. • There is a 4 days/week Mend Our Mountains post. This is split into two. 2 days/week on fundraising and 2 days/week on project management. This post has been terminated however one half of the post still exists and that is being transferred into the access team. • A Council Support Officer has left the BMC and there is no immediate plan to recruit into this post. • The Chief Finance Officer has left the BMC and there is no immediate plan to recruit into this post.
Question: We've got to defend what we've got for generations to come to enjoy. How much money does the BMC spend on access?
<p>Answer: Access is a very important area of work for the BMC. Paul wanted to counter the narrative that the BMC doesn't care about access and conservation. Spend has increased from £280,000 to £370,000 per year.</p>
Question: How can we work on increasing membership numbers?
<p>Answer: Membership numbers are increasing but not at the level / speed that we expected. However, the BMC remains in a strong position and our members have stuck with us. Post COVID-19 and then the cost of living crisis is impacting on our ability to increase our membership numbers and income. For example, one partner told us that their marketing budget had been cut and they couldn't be involved in the BMC anymore. Paul acknowledged that they haven't used members help enough in member recruitment and that the BMC wouldn't exist without staff, members and volunteers. We have to engage and work with people who love the BMC and what it stands for. Communication is key in this.</p> <p>Sean Milner, Peak Area Members' Council representative made the point that as an incentive to encourage members to recruit to the BMC, then that member who referred them gets discounts etc.</p>
Question: Are the one-off cost for the international climbing competition that took place at Ratho included in the GB Climbing costs?
<p>Answer: No, it was an additional, agreed investment. The budget for that event did overrun from around £50,000 to £90,000 due to less support funding than expected. Paul explained that you have to put on events to get credibility to host future events. He pointed out that on the big screen at the British Bouldering Championships, that recently took place in Sheffield, the images talked about all the other work that the BMC does, not just competition climbing.</p>

<p>Question: The father of one of the youth competition climbers asked for more detail on how the money (? £1.1 million budget) is being spent on GB climbing because he doesn't see anything being spent on the athletes. What is the money being spent on and where is the oversight and monitoring of this budget? At a recent overseas climbing competition tens of thousands was wastefully spent on car hire</p>
<p>Answer: Paul emphasised that he needs to work through the figures as he doesn't recognise the £1.1 million. All money that comes into the BMC is tracked against expected budget. In relation to money being spent on individual athletes, unfortunately that is the system most sports operate under: government money is only allocated to athletes that are medal hopefuls.</p>
<p>The Climbing Competition and Performance Group (CCPG) has put a proposal to the Board on what expenditure / what's spent on domestic competitions / what's spent on international competitions. Once agreed the Board will give delegated authority to the CCPG regarding its expenditure.</p>
<p>Point: The BMC needs volunteers and staff to function. There is huge expertise in volunteers and there would be huge costs if the BMC had to pay for this. There needs to be trust between the staff and volunteers. The Board took one and a half weeks to issue a statement (last Friday). This felt like a 'kick in the teeth'. A clear statement would have been helpful. Please be clear and shout out how good the BMC is.</p>
<p>Response: Agreed – staff and volunteers need to work together. There needs to be a better link between staff and volunteers. In Australia, they count volunteer time in the cost of work. This issued as evidence as to what is being delivered.</p>

Paul concluded by saying that there needs to be better communication on both sides. There has been so much misinformation on some forums and social media, however there was a requirement for a little bit of patience whilst following through the legal process of a restructure.

Paul stated that the article by Rob Greenwood on UKC was very measured. There were however some 'headline grabbing' incorrect statements made on some forum posts.

Paul stated that a recent focus group indicated there is 25% recognition of the BMC from people within our target community. This needs addressing and the percentage increasing.

Rather than working on spreadsheets to get the figures together he wanted to attend this meeting. He will go back and provide the extra information requested and communicate back to the membership.

4. Extending the freedom to roam: What should the BMC ask for?

Cath Flitcroft, Senior Manager for Campaigns and Policy, attended the Royal Courts of Justice in London today (18th July) for the Dartmoor Wild Camping appeal and was therefore unable to attend the Peak Area meeting, however Jon Fulwood (BMC Access Officer for England) reported back. Whilst in London Cath met with the Green, Liberal Democratic and Labour MPs to discuss their manifesto pledges for the next general election. They are proposing a 'Scottish' style 'right to roam' approach which is fantastic news.

Peter Judd (Hill-walking representative) asked the meeting – do we think that responsible wild camping should be included as our right in certain places? He went on to explain that at the moment wild camping is tolerated but we have no right without the permission of the landowner. For some people that is too much and some people feel too uncomfortable doing it. As highlighted in the Glover Review, some people don't feel welcome in the outdoors.

He read a question from Cath Flitcroft –

“Would you support the BMC to support the 'right to wild camp' if there was a proper code, so people have a clear understanding as to what is responsible wild camping and what isn't?”

It was clarified that the wild camping rules in Scotland are included in the Land Reform of Scotland Act. Some restrictions have been brought in (for example, no camping on the shores of Loch Lomond).

A questionnaire has been distributed to members via email. The link is also on the BMC social media platforms and the BMC Hillwalking website (<https://hillwalking.thebmc.co.uk/>).

Question – is there a tension between the BMC being radical and this approach interfering with difficult negotiations with land owners?

Answer – from Jon – this is not incompatible, if we can put forward a good argument.

Jon has spoken to Mountaineering Scotland and they have a ‘good practice’ code. A code could include areas such as; litter, damage, fires, not cutting down trees etc to negate the impact of wild camping.

Peter asked for a show of hands: Do you think responsible wild camping should be included in the freedom to roam legislation?

	Room	On-line
Included	38	7
Against	1	5
Abstention	7	0

5. Area Rep Updates

5.1 Hillwalking

Austin Knott gave a summary of future Peak Area Hillwalking events. Everyone is welcome.

Date	Venue / walk
12.08.23	Buxton – meeting at the Railway station. 10 miles taking in Combs Moss and likely Goyt Valley. This will include a litter pick to coincide with the Outside, Hathersage, Crag Clean Up and BBQ.
05.09.23	Rhododendron chopping Hayfield (Steve Charles) - Volunteering opportunity
10.09.23	From Baber Booth, Edale - Kinder exploring aircraft wrecks – led by Gordon Riley
15.10.23	Walk in the northern area of the Peak District led by Peter Judd
04.11.23	Rhododendron chopping Hayfield (Steve Charles) - Volunteering opportunity
11.11.23	Walk in the northern area of the Peak District, Kinder/Bleaklow (Peter J)

Contact Peter if you'd like to register interest in his events. All the events are, or will be, on the BMC's website event listings.

Thanks to:

- Peter for two walks in 2023, one in the Staffordshire Moorlands walking festival.
- Mark Royall led his first walk for the Peak area, which was well attended.
- BMC staff for helping to promote the walks and for trusting us (actually Emily Taylor, IG Trigsandteeth) for our takeover of the BMC Instagram account on the festival walk.

Peter gave an update on the geo-textile matting on Midhope Moor which has to be removed by the landowner. As there are currently bird restrictions in the area, the work won't start until after 01.09.23.

Peter informed the meeting that he will be standing down as the Peak Area hill-walking representation at the AGM in November.

A vote of thanks for all his exceptional work and commitment over the years was given.

5.2 Members' Council

Sean Milner, Peak Area Members' Council representative informed us that Council had sent a letter of concern to the Board in relation to the poor communications from the Board. The Board has said they would try to improve communication in order to build trust between the two bodies, The outcome of the letter hasn't happened, but when it does it will hopefully alleviate some of the challenges that were

discussed earlier in the meeting. Within Council they will try and get more information and feedback to members.

Steve Clark, Nationally Elected Council for Rock Climbing gave brief feedback on the BMC AGM that took place last month. As well as the core AGM business there was a long discussion from parents and an athlete around issues they faced with GB Climbing.

5.3 Local Access

Henry Folkard has a planned meeting with Severn Trent in relation to the Derwent Reservoir. If anyone has any questions they would like Henry to ask, please contact him.

Jon gave an update on Wildcat. He is meeting with the owners, Manor Adventure, on Friday. He will know more, in relation to access, in a weeks' time.

6. Stoney Middleton

After a crag 'clean-up' because of ash dieback, Jon reported that people need to be very careful of ash trees in using them for anchors etc. Some anchors have been replaced. Ask Kristian Clemmow for more detail.

7. Any Other Business

A question was asked in relation to BMC Insurance. Sean and Andy Reeve will get a response.

8. Date and venue of the next meeting

3rd November 2023 at Bamford Village Institute. This will be the Peak Area AGM and annual quiz.

After the break BO (Boldly Original) gave a hilarious and fascinating talk on his quest to climb the lowest hill in the Peak District, and all the distractions that he encountered on his journeys. Many thanks BO for the absolutely brilliant talk.

Post-Meeting Note from Paul Davies

In relation to the £1.1m spend on GBC climbing, Paul has clarified that he had misunderstood the figure that he had presented. He thought that the person asking the question was suggesting that this was the member contribution, but the question was in relation to total spend which Paul had misinterpreted. Paul has since had a conversation with the person who asked the question to clarify things with them.

More detail on expenditure and overheads for 2022 are in the interview that Paul did which can be found here: <https://thebmc.co.uk/ceo-ga> Paul will be doing a follow-up interview.