

BMC Peak Area Meeting

8th March 2024, Sir William hotel, Grindleford

Chair: Andy Reeve (AR)

Secretary: Judith Brown (JB)

Present: about 30

Apologies: Ian Millward, Louise Hawson, Andy Potter, Gordon Riley.

Volunteer reports:

Members' Council Area Representatives - Sean Milner (SM). (Sam Harris not in attendance)

SM introduced himself as one of the Area Reps on Council. He is also on the Nominations Committee and Deputy President. He said there was nothing to report with regards the finances as some things need finalising. The next MC meeting is on the 19th of March. There was some discussion about the role of the Members' Council and concern was expressed about the lack of diversity on Council. It is even less diverse than in the past.

SM left the meeting after the MC discussion.

Hillwalking - Austin Knott (AK)

AK gave a power point presentation outlining upcoming walks and the Staffs Walking Festival. The dates for working parties helping the NT with sphagnum moss planting and other tasks were given (see BMC website).

Sadness was expressed that Mariella Sullivan, Hill Walking & Volunteers Co-ordinator, was moving on from the BMC. She had been great to work with.

Peter Judd has stepped back from his role as hill walking coordinator after many years. He has been key to raising the profile of hill walking. Both Mariella and Mary-Ann Ochota, BMC's Hillwalking Ambassador, sent video messages thanking him for his hard work and inspiration.

Clubs - Paul Justin (PJ)

Peak Area:

Another clubs forum was held on 8th January, this time in conjunction with NW area. 11 people from 8 clubs attended, including 4 Peak Area clubs. Topics covered membership trends, diversity in clubs and managing meets. The forum was well received by the attending clubs with a desire to continue with further forums 3 times per year.

National:

Pete Saleniaks stood down as Clubs' Committee Chair after a full 6 year term and Paul Justin has taken over, adding to the already strong representation from Peak Area on Members Council.

Two further club support webinars are planned in the coming weeks; Managing serious incidents on club meets on 14th March and Club legal structures on 19th March.

Amongst a number of club orientated initiatives running in 2024, one is based around supporting clubs for young people. This is funded by Sport England and a pilot involving 11 clubs of varying types will run through 2024.

Access – Henry Folkard (HF)

Henry Folkard reported that:

Natural England (NE) have bought the SSSI woodland in Cressbrook Dale and Ravensdale Meadow from Stanton Estates after the Phoenix Rose Group failed to make a payment on the land; a bid from NE to purchase the remaining 53 acres of land owned by Phoenix Rose still stood; replacement of the Cressbrook Mill Wye Bridge had received funding from FiPL. Contribution from BMC's ACT charity, and others, had been crucial in securing this. Work was in progress;

A new Head of Assets and Enterprise for the National Park Authority was about to start work at Stange North Lees and would be looking at forward plans for that estate; Kim Leyland would be leading again on the ring ouzel monitoring work, and had already begun his raptor nesting work;

A national Access reps seminar earlier in the week on re-wilding had been addressed by Prof Alastair Driver who, in answer to a question, had wholeheartedly endorsed the BMC's approach to the ecological management of Horseshoe. It was reported the new pond was full of smooth newts, that a greater crested newt had been seen there too, that a Lapidary Snail had been recorded and that last years butterfly transects had shown Horseshoe to be the fourth best site in Derbyshire for Wall Browns; (Volunteers for butterfly surveys were welcome.)

Infill and landscaping proposals for High Rake on Longstone Edge were in question as the Italian mining company which owned the site (and other sites) had gone into liquidation. The meeting supported a suggestion that if an alleged £500k bond ever materialised it should be used in part to secure a concessionary route through the bottom of the rake. It was noted that there has been some quiet development in the area by climbers already, and the meeting was asked to determine whether there was more climbing potential there, or whether the rock was too shattered. It was agreed to make representation to the Planning Authority on the recreational potential. A request to create a concessionary walking route along the northern edge of the rake, to link with PROWs along Deep Rake, had been declined by the farming tenant; (The meeting was asked their opinion of a walking route through the quarry instead and that found favour with the group)

Peter Judd had recently visited the site of the Midhope Moor geo-textile matting, and found it still in place. Jon Fullwood had yet to receive any response from the Planning Authority in relation to his last letter requesting yet again that they expedite the matter. The meeting asked him to write again, and in strong terms;

Jon also reported on problems on climbing access at Wyming Brook. Henry said he would take this up with Sheffield Wildlife Trust at the next Sheffield Moors Partnership meeting.

Member proposed motions for the 2024 AGM

Simon Lee (SL) gave an update on his two motions:

First resolution requesting detailed financial disclosure with regard to GBC, has 343 signatures of support. Paul Davis, former CEO, had promised to supply details of the cost to the BMC of GBC but nothing was released.

Second resolution suggesting GBC should be a subsidiary company, has 292 signatures of support.

GBC becoming a subsidiary of the BMC was suggested by the ORG Report but not taken up. There was some discussion on the benefits of this.

The main focus of the discussion was on the best method to proceed with the resolutions. SL had been advised by the Company Secretary that although only 25 signatures were needed to get MC to discuss the resolutions, if MC decided not to put it forward to the AGM, the resolutions could not then be taken to the AGM even if enough signatures had been collected. However, there was some disagreement on this opinion from MC Reps present, who thought that although the two routes could not be followed simultaneously, if the MC route failed it was still possible to take it directly to the AGM if enough signatures were collected. There may, however, be time constraints.

SL said there were links to vote for both resolutions or for either one of them on the sheet he handed out.

Neil Foster said he would like the resolutions to go to the AGM although he personally didn't support the second one. Verifying that the signatories were BMC members could be a challenge. The policy of bringing motions to the AGM was felt to be difficult and it was proposed that the method should be reviewed. (17 for with 5 abstentions). (SM to be advised for later consideration.)

Neil and others asked people to make more use of their Council Reps as a first step. There were many more meetings of Council than just the scheduled ones.

CEO- Paul Ratcliffe (PR) First visit to The Peak Area as CEO

PR introduced himself and gave some of his background. He said it was a pleasure to take the role and he believed it was better to introduce change from within. He was very happy to share financial information (he didn't say how) but the accounts had not yet been audited. He was currently working with the staff. It has been a very tough year for them.

This was his 6th Area Meeting. He stated that we are the BMC.

He acknowledged the tight finances but his aim was to have money in the coffers to support, for example, underprivileged youngsters.

He had 1.5 years as a volunteer and on CCPG. As a canoeer he knows how performance should fit into an organization. He was asked how canoeing managed the 2 sides of their organisation. British Canoeing started as performance sport and now give about 10% to general coffers; many other sporting organisations with a long history of competition are similarly structured.

Spenser asked what PR thought needed looking at in the BMC. PR said would like a more inclusive culture. Area meetings need a more diverse audience. Also there is an educational role for people newly introduced to the countryside. HF said we must change access legislation. Cath Flitcroft (CF) had done lots of work on this and pointed to the launch of "Outdoors for all" produced in collaboration with 10 other groups.

PR wants to discuss with Roger Murray, BMC Chair, how issues can be moved to the Board. Gavin has done much work on developing a new strategy and is developing a new membership offer. There needs to be better, joined up communication. He wants the MC to be advisors to the Board. One member pointed out the lack of communication, leaving members in the dark and fostering rumours. PR asked how would members like the communication to look. PJ said something was currently being considered and a statement would be issued shortly. [Board] Minutes were seven months overdue.

PR commented that because of two very expensive claims against personal liability insurance, the insurance premiums were going up by £280k to about £900k.

JB asked what he could tell us about what the Board was doing to address the concerns of the athletes, and what were the obstacles to addressing these concerns. PR said he wasn't aware of any ongoing issues and feedback had suggested athletes were happy. JB said she had listened to the concerns raised at the AGM and it seemed that things were much the same. Josh Bridgens, a parent of two selected athletes, confirmed that concerns hadn't gone away and that procedures were not being followed.

Finally the issue of an online AGM was raised. The meeting wanted to know why the AGM was only online. JB said, as last year's AGM was only just quorate, did it matter? Steve Clark (SC) said the attendance at AGMs was usually around 50 (except for the year of the MoNC!). PR said he would find out the reason and look at the decision.

Post-Meeting Lecture:

The meeting was followed by a fascinating illustrated talk (including some unsettling specimens!) by Carlos Bedson on Mountain Hares, the subject of his PhD and with particular reference to the changing hare population in the Peak and surrounding areas.

Date of next meeting: 1 May 2024