



British Mountaineering Council Southwest Area

ORDINARY MEETING MINUTES

Hybrid Meeting @ The Quay Climbing Centre, Haven Road, Exeter EX2 8AX On The 23rd April 2024 6pm Social Start (With Refreshments) & A 7pm Main Meeting Start.

Chair: Colin Knowles, Secretary: Philip Wilson

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

In Person Attendees:

Colin Knowles (Chair), Philip Wilson (Sec), Trevor Smith (BMC Board & Members Council), Beau Bell (Zoom Tech), Marti Hallet, Ben Darby, Dave Turnbull (BMC), Nigel Berry, Mark Courtiour, Mark Kemball, Iain Peters, Tom Reeves, Ceri Mott & Colin Price.

Zoom Attendees:

Graham Hassell, Mark R, Rick Sowards, Mel Bacon, Adam Lowe, Steve Wollard & Pierre's Ipad.

1. **How US Access/ Lobbying Is Organised to Safeguard Crag / Wild Places Access:** Prior to the meeting commencing officially Dave Turnbull gave a short introduction to a video recorded a few weeks earlier regarding this. A short synopsis can be found in Appendix A, together with web site links.

The meeting then commenced officially.

1. **Welcome Introductions & Apologies for Absence:** Following the presentation by Dave Turnbull presentation Colin Knowles welcomed everybody to the meeting. Julio Sanchez, Gwen Bennion, Jay Jackson and Richard Nadin gave their apologies.
2. **Sign-Off & Actions from the Previous Meetings Minutes:** The minutes for this meeting held on the 27th February 2024 via Zoom were signed off & Actions. The actions x2 it contained have been done.
3. **The Immediate Objectives of The BMC Southwest Area:** These were stated by Colin Knowles to
 - a) Recruit access reps / stewards to cover all climbing and walking areas.
 - b) Connect & build bridges between climbing walls & outdoor climbers.
 - c) Connect with clubs, starting with student ones. Facilitate a pathway post university to join adult clubs and or the BMC.
4. **Meeting Participants views were then canvassed on these objectives with the following suggestions being made:**
 - a) UK Volunteers should get Free BMC Membership.
 - b) Climbers could take ownership /stewardship of crags.
 - c) BMC signage and messaging at climbing walls are mainly negative e.g. check or deck or the participation statement. These tell people what they cannot do with little or no positive messaging.

- d) There is nothing in climbing walls about the BMC even at competitions (no branding, membership recruitment or fund raising).
 - e) No visible BMC presence at youth climbing competitions.
 - f) For the bulk of climbers in the southwest area, climbing is centred around their use of the various climbing walls and not the crags. Many climbers using walls are not BMC members, club members or outside climbers.
 - g) The BMC needs to engage climbing walls and their climbing clientele.
 - h) To target all climbers and not just BMC and Club Members, BMC Marketing literature should be given to walls by BMC SW Area reps and YCS reps. Reps should be engaging with the local walls.
5. **What We can Learn from US Access As Outlined by Dave Turnbull in point 1:** A discussion as to how aspects of the US Access model could be applied to the SW Area then took place as follows:
- a) Buying crags is very popular with climbers and should be a priority for the BMC.
 - b) The BMC should be more pro-active in purchasing crags following recent failed bids, even if this potentially inflates purchase prices.
 - c) No tax incentives in the UK to donate as in the US, we only have the National charitable bodies purchasing land, crags and areas of outstanding natural beauty and biodiversity.
 - d) The BMC currently handles these details centrally in the UK and does not devolve tasks locally as in the US. This makes it less focused and responsive to its membership and local areas climbing community.
 - e) Single issue campaigns to a specific crag or area (whether Dartmoor Wild Camping or purchase of Kilnsey or Sirhowy Crag) work well and involves, recruits and enthuses local activists.
 - f) The SW Area could take on board aspects of an American LOU with the acting in oversight of this. We could run UK access more like the American model.
 - g) The BMC Policy towards crag purchase should be reviewed.
6. **Establishment Of a Professionally Managed SW Area Bolt Fund:** There followed a discussion of fixed gear in the Southwest area, introduced by Ben Darby (Avon). The main points raised were:
- a) Fixed belay chain and stakes (no bolts) are used in all coastal non limestone areas.
 - b) Bolt replacement is starting to be required in Brean Down and Cheddar.
 - c) It is easy to raise the funds and purchase the equipment, but we have a shortage of people willing and able to place them. This needs to be addressed.
 - d) Fund raising on a per crag basis is more successful than a general fund in the southwest for bolting as it is more targeted. Bolting funds should be run locally and not centrally by the BMC, but the BMC should support this. The example of the BMC's £50k 'Better Bolt Fund' which was popular and useful was given.
 - e) Ben Darby briefly described how the current Avon team is being built by first setting the bolt policy (done) and then building the team via social media (the current situation). He added that much support is and can be gathered by publicising fixed gear failures / accidents and access problems.
7. **Elections Of Access Rep Officers:** All 3 were unanimously elected as follows.
- a) James Mann was elected as West Penwith / The Lizard Rep.
 - b) Paul Harrison & Simon Cardy were elected as Lundy Rep.
8. **SW Area Briefing April 2024 Main Points:** Trevor Smith outlined this report. See Appendix B for this document.
9. **Local Area Matters:**
- a) **Symonds Yat Recent Rockfall:** Local management has applied again for the closure of Symonds Yat cliffs and paths under the CROW legislation but is preparing to open areas for climbing where it this does not affect the repair of the rock catch fence damaged in the recent rock fall.

- b) **Wye Valley:** The local council has put up rockfall notices at Wintours Leap in error. The rockfall in question happened when historic quarrying occurred. They are to be ignored and will be withdrawn. The vandalised Woodcroft Quarry gate is to be repaired professionally.
- c) **Cheddar Gorge Sunday Road Closures:** This may well happen as there is considerable local enthusiasm, but this will not make much difference to climbers. The Brainbiter peg is not the aid peg, but another where a sport route crosses it. Replacing it with a bolt will interfere with Brainbiter. Issue not progressing.
- d) **Avon Gorge Review:** Local Bristol elections are being held in the near future. Colin Knowles has written to all parties taking part, inviting them to commit to carry out an Avon Gorge review if elected. One party has responded positively to say that they are prepared to consider this.
- e) **Dartmoor Wild Camping:** Thomas Reeves reported that a date of 8th October 2024 has been set for evidence to be heard in the Alexander Darwall appeal against wild camping being allowed on Dartmoor. No judgement is expected until 2025.
- f) **Tintagel Access:** Dave Turnbull said that he would try to resolve this with English Heritage and that it would help if the names of the climbers involved in the unexpected refusal of entry could be passed to him.
- g) **Carn Gowla Peregrine Bird Restrictions:** No change in the blanket Spring/Summer ban by the local National Trust Warden warden. Dave Turnbull reported that he will contact to object to this ban.

10. **Matters Arising Not Covered Elsewhere:** None.

11. **Any Other Business:** The National Trust has contacted the BMC for help with removing invasive plants on steep crag ground, which their volunteers cannot reach to clear. Anyone interested in helping can contact Colin Knowles.

12. **Date, Time & Location of Next Area Meeting:** It was determined that the next meeting should be a hybrid to be held on either the 9th, 16th, 23rd or 30th July 2024 (date yet to be determined).

Appendix A: Synopsis Of How US Access/ Lobbying Is Organised to Safeguard Crag / Wild Places Access:

America has a culture of charitable giving. This is how access is funded in the US. Dave Turnbull felt that UK Southwest activists and volunteers can learn from this.

A Devolved Model: A central US Access' organisation, set up, oversees, supports and funds Local Climbing Organisations (LCO's) of which there are 140 and growing. LCO's have grown from 1 in the 1990's to 140 today. These LCO's are run by local volunteers and advocated with professional support from full time staff, where funding supports it.

Where access issues arise LCO's are created to purchase and manage crags on behalf of local climbers. They are created by an Affiliation Program run by the before mentioned 'Access' organization. LCO's become affiliated by forming a board, fund raising, agreeing to uphold the Access fund principles, adopting / purchasing crags and agreeing to co-ordinate on campaigns with all other LCO's.

An example of an LCO [Southeastern Climbers Coalition](#) was discussed in detail. This LCO protects 50 climbing areas and was formed in response to access bans. They have grown to include 3 full time staff supported by many volunteers. This organisation works with land managers, state parks and private landowners to raise funds, purchase or lease climbing areas with partners to keep areas open.

Their strategy is to Build Community, Steward Resources, Seek & Give Financial Support & Advocate Policy to ensure public access to these areas.

Appendix B SW Area Briefing April 2024 Main Points

The following 5 main topics of BMC Finance, GB Climbing Restructuring AGM Resolution, NEC/CC Roles For Election & Local Area Reps were covered. More details for each point are also outlined below:

1. Finance:

- Completed accounts for 2023 with the Auditors
- External Accountant Review & Reassessment with SE & UKS
- Significant Causes...
 - Membership failed to grow as planned
 - Loss of Travel Insurance sales in July
 - Large accounting error with UK Sport grants
 - Large overspend in non-grant funded competition activity
- Special section within the AGM Annual Report

2. GB Climbing Restructure:

- Change the way that this is managed
- Change the way finance is accounted for
- Focused to deliver:
 - GB National Teams (for funded disciplines)
 - UK Sport Programme
 - Sport England Talent Pathway
- Contribute to BMC Overheads
- No cost to BMC Members

3. AGM Resolution:

- Submitted by Simon Lee
- Two parts:
 - 1- Full disclosure of BMC finances
 - 2- Consider separating GBC from the BMC
- Difficulty with how it has been organised
- Need discussion amongst members & Uncertain if a vote will take place

4. NEC/CC Roles for Election:

- Members Council Roles due for election at the AGM
- Nationally Elected Councillors for....
 - Mountaineering
 - Rock Climbing (Indoor Climbing 2025)
 - Hillwalking
 - Constituency Councillors elected by:
 - Club Members
 - Mountain Training Candidates
- And the BMC President
- Google 'Jobs at theBMC'

5. Local Access Reps:

- Essential boots on the ground
- Represent the BMC on Local Issues
 - Access
 - Bird bans
 - Fixed equipment
 - Local conservation activities
- North & East of the Area – Avon, Wye Valley, N. Somerset, Dorset adequate
- North Coast of Devon - need more help

- N. Cornwall coast & W. Cornwall – need more help
- S. Devon, coast, inland crags, Dartmoor, S & E. Cornwall, Bodmin Moor
– no effective cover