

Summary of BMC Hill Walking Symposium, Sat 24th November

The day opened with 2 presentations outlining what the BMC do at a strategic and local level for hill walkers, ranging from liaison with the APPG Mountaineering and consultation responses, to objecting to more local issues such as the Thirlmere zipwire. The second presentation outlined some of the access and conservation campaigns we have run over the past few years, more recently culminating in Mend Our Mountains: Make One Million.

Open Discussion

- Chair encouraged delegates to start attending their local BMC area meeting
- Agreed that area meetings do need to be more relevant to hill walkers and need better advertising / membership engagement
- Possibility of single issue topics being discussed at area meetings to draw more people in
- BMC do liaise with other user groups but discussion was had on the pressures of multi-users (e.g. mountain bikers) on the same paths etc. and the damage of off-roading (particularly in Little Langdale). However, we should also allow people to enjoy the countryside in their own way. Also recognised the difficulty in managing areas that are incredibly popular.

<https://www.thebmc.co.uk/illegal-offroad-driving-peak-district>

- Agreed that no one is currently dealing with ROW issues as a result of Government cuts / financial pressures and lack of resources. BMC happy to pass on these types of issues to the relevant person with Ramblers / at Local Authority level

<https://www.thebmc.co.uk/your-path-awaits-ramblers-campaign-launched>

- Value of making more partnerships with organisations such as the DofE and enabling path repair projects as well as getting younger people involved
- Guidelines on how to organise a litter pick etc. would be useful on the BMC website
- What are the BMC currently doing to make ourselves more attractive to the 2.4 million hill walkers that exist in England and Wales?

Workshops

- 1 Clean-ups, path repairs and upland conservation work - fixing our uplands & making a lasting difference, Kate Worthington, RAW Adventures
- 2 Led walks - leading a great BMC hill walk, Chris Stone & Peter Judd, BMC Hill Walking Representatives
- 3 Protecting and celebrating the upland landscape - today's biggest environmental challenges, Carey Davies, BMC Hill Walking Officer
- 4 How to deal with hazards and incidents in the hills - a practical session, Claudia Sarner, Mountain Instructor
- 5 Navigation in the hills: skills, tips & guidance - a practical session, John Kewley, Navigation Instructor and multiple Mountain Marathon winner

Access legislation beyond the Countryside and Rights of Way Act

Discussion was had as to whether a Scottish Land Reform Act approach in England and Wales is something BMC members would like to see:

- Political 'nice to have' without being realistic?
- Agreed that there are areas of open access etc. that need joining up and the path network isn't perfect (not always 'leisure' focussed) but perhaps other legislation could help with this (e.g., forthcoming Agriculture Bill)
- ROWIPS – not all of these are being implemented
- Large areas of land in Scotland that are effectively 'unmanaged' and land ownership / management is very different in England and Wales
- Responsible access and the Scottish Outdoor Access Code etc. are embedded into the culture in Scotland with some areas welcoming wild camping etc. – this is not the same in England
- Agreed that the BMC / hill walking members need to be clear about what we want in terms of 'better' public access and how we get it. By trying to get something more, we could lose everything
- Would need education if we move debate from rights to responsibilities, but what happens when people aren't responsible?
- Wider area access would benefit canoeists, wild swimmers etc. who currently only have access to 4% of waterways
- After a show of hands, delegates indicated that the BMC should not pursue a campaign for a Scottish Land Reform Act approach to access in England and Wales but we could perhaps support / be part of the conversation if another organisation were to lead
- BMC members were interested however, in wild camping and how this could perhaps be improved.

Wild camping

- Should wild camping be permitted on open access land – many felt that it should
- However, a clear definition of the meaning of 'wild camping' is needed (e.g.; no more than 1 night camping in an area / distance from road)
- Certain areas of the country (e.g. Lake District) are popular with wild campers but certain parts are now polluted / have poor water quality
- A number of delegates felt they couldn't wild camp as they were intimidated by the current situation or felt obliged to 'follow the rules'
- The idea of out of sight is out of mind seems to function in practice. There is a risk that by seeking official recognition for accepted but unofficial practices, any campaign to get formal recognition, may, by bringing attention to it, force the agencies concerned to stand behind the law and stop turning a blind eye
- No clear outcome of discussion.

<https://www.thebmc.co.uk/wild-camping-winners?s=2>

<https://www.nationaltrust.org.uk/features/wild-camping-in-the-lake-district>

Volunteering

- Potential for more work parties with other organisations such as the Ramblers and National Trust as well as the Mountain Bikers and other users
- Agreed that the Spring Summit edition that goes out to Clubs needs more hill walking content.

Please do fill in the feedback form to enable us to gauge the success (or otherwise) of our first hill walking symposium and to understand what content to include in the next event.