



Strategy Document

The Eagle Ski Club Strategy Document sets out how the club operates now, and its direction for the next few years. This document is normally reviewed and updated every 3 years (typically when a new President takes office). It has been discussed and agreed in committee, however any feedback is welcomed, and the nature of a Club Strategy is such that it will never be completely fixed or mandatory.

OBJECTIVES

What is the Club for? What are we trying to achieve?

The club rules state that:

“The object of the club is to encourage ski touring, ski mountaineering, Nordic skiing and associated activities”

The Club exists to promote and encourage ski touring and ski mountaineering - that is travelling (uphill and downhill) through, or to the summits of, hills and mountains on skis (whether Alpine, Telemark or Nordic) or other similar equipment (e.g. Snowboards). The scope of the club does not include track skiing (although some members may participate in this aspect of skiing).

The current wording of the Club Objectives specifically mentions Nordic skiing (by which it means the use of Freeheel skis), and this is something of a hangover from the days when there was a big division between the disciplines. Nowadays, there is much crossover and it isn't particularly relevant what type of equipment is used for ski touring and ski mountaineering - whether Alpine, Nordic / Freeheel or Snowboard.

At some point (although this may not be worth the time expended on discussion at an AGM!), the objective may be better worded simply as *“The object of the club is to encourage ski touring, ski mountaineering and associated activities”*

By “encourage” we do not mean simply increasing the number of participants – or even UK participants – but to provide an environment in which those who practise, or wish to practise, the sport can do so in a safe, sustainable and companionable way.

What do we need to do in order to achieve this?

The main outputs of the Club are to:

- Provide an environment in which the UK based ski touring community can share information, through written publications, Internet technology or face to face meetings.
- Help members to meet one another (either in person or electronically) to safely set up and plan ski touring activities.
- Provide information and facilitate training to introduce new participants to the sport.
- Provide training to improve the skills and safety of club members.
- Offer, directly or indirectly, a range of tours suitable for a large proportion of members.
- Provide a supply of Club Leaders who can lead member-led tours.

The activities which meet these goals are described in detail in the sections below.

What makes the Eagle Ski Club special?

Many other organisations do some or all of these things, however the Eagle Ski Club:

- Primarily supports UK based ski tourers.
- Provides information in English, about places readily accessible from the UK.
- Caters for all levels from beginner to expert, cautious to adventurous, guided to unguided.
- Emphasises the value of adventurous, unguided ski tours through a progression from instruction, guided tours and easier routes.
- Is big enough to support a wide range of activities but not so big as to become impersonal.
- Encourages members to share their experience and knowledge.

ACTIVITIES

The Club's main activities are:

Touring programme

The touring programme is the heart of the club's activities. Although less than a quarter of the membership attends a club tour each year, most have done so at least once and read tour reports for information on areas, other members etc. The touring programme must be both interesting and balanced in order to meet the wide range of members' interests and aspirations – containing classic tours in well known areas for newcomers, and more esoteric tours for experienced members who are looking for variety. The programme must cover the range from easy to adventurous and guided to club-led (unguided).

Two key principles have unpinned the touring programme in recent years, and these will be maintained:

- After taking out training courses (which are naturally all run by professionals), there should be a 50:50 split between professionally led (guided) tours and amateur led (club) tours.
- The number of tours should be planned so that there is sufficient capacity for most of the membership who would like to take part in a club tour, but not over capacity – so that the great majority of the tours are full (or nearly full), and no (or very few) tours are cancelled due to lack of demand. It is very frustrating for both club leaders and guides if a tour has to be cancelled through lack of demand.

In recent years these 2 principles have meant that there have been just over 50 tours on the programme.

One of the challenges of maintaining the touring programme is ensuring there are sufficient club leaders willing to lead tours.

Club leaders receive a subsidy (currently £250 for a one week tour) - this is designed to offset some of the costs associated with the activity. The level of the subsidy will be reviewed periodically, but it should never be seen as a payment for leading.

The Leaders' Meet is held over a weekend (normally the first weekend in October) and this provides an opportunity for prospective leaders to meet established leaders and discuss what is involved, and for all present to exchange ideas and take part in some training activities. The club subsidises the accommodation costs (in a bunkhouse) and a pub meal on the Saturday night, and this will continue.

Prospective and established leaders are encouraged to apply for grants (see below) to help with training to gain or maintain the skills necessary to lead.

"Club Meets" are trips on the Club Touring Programme which have a club member as organiser, but typically have more participants, so there may be multiple groups skiing separately, with each of these

groups led by a different club member. (These can be compared with a normal Club Tour - where the Club Leader will normally be leading all the members of the tour on the mountain each day). These “Club Meets” provide a good opportunity for larger numbers of club members to meet and ski together and should be further encouraged (e.g. perhaps organising a larger scale Club Meet as an extended Alpine Dinner Weekend in an easily accessible location such as Chamonix).

Member to Member Tours

Although many members will make informal arrangements to tour with other members, the club can assist with this process through the “Member to Member” section of the website, which allows members to look for other members to organise tours outside the formal Club Touring Programme.

Expeditions and Adventurous Trips

The club has a long history of running high profile and successful expeditions (e.g. to Antarctica in 2012). Historically, a single expedition grant was awarded, however from the 2013 season, a policy was introduced to allocate funds for expeditions as Adventure Fund Awards, and this has allowed a greater range of trips to be supported (not just a single expedition) – from full blown expeditions to adventurous trips (which allow members to build experience to undertake more committing expeditions). This policy will continue.

It is understood that such trips will only appeal to the more adventurous members of the club who have the skills required and the time available to commit to such trips. However, these trips raise the club’s profile in the overall ski mountaineering community and can provide aspiration to the overall club membership.

Scottish Winter Meets

The Club runs a series of five or six weekend / long weekend meets in Scotland throughout the winter (January to March). Although the Scottish weather means that skiing isn’t always possible, the meets always go ahead with other activities taking place. The meets have a good following and are generally well attended - mainly by those resident in Scotland, but with a good representation from south of the border.

Summer Weekend Meets

In recent years there have been 4 “summer” (May – Oct) weekend meets (in addition to a training weekend and the AGM weekend). A couple of meets are well established and have a good following, particularly amongst longer standing members. Despite trying a range of venues and formats, other meets have been less well supported, and some have been cancelled through lack of support.

Summer meets are a way for existing members to meet outside the touring season, and for new members to be introduced to the club. Summer meets aren’t a core activity of the club, but they provide a useful adjunct to other activities, and the programme will be maintained roughly at its current level of 4 meets per year.

AGM Weekend (Pre-Season Weekend Meet)

Since 2009, the AGM has been held as part of a weekend meet at a youth hostel or similar, normally on the second weekend in November. This allows members to get together for a longer period, and has been better supported than when the AGM was held on a Saturday evening in London, so will continue in this format.

This weekend provides one of the best opportunities for members to meet together. Further effort will be made to encourage more members to attend, by renaming the weekend to “Pre-Season Weekend Meet” to indicate that more takes place than just the AGM. Also, it might be useful to extend the range of organised activities to make the weekend more welcoming for newer members – currently a training activity is organised for the Sunday, but it might be possible to organise walks etc for the Saturday, and one or more slide shows.

Lectures

For many years, the club has held a lecture in London on a mid-week evening in June. The format works well and the event is normally well attended.

Lectures on ski mountaineering and ski touring subjects provide an excellent way for existing members to meet, to allow new members to be introduced to other members, and to promote the club. Further effort should be made (as volunteers and resources allow) to extend the number of lectures – both in London and at other locations across the country e.g. Bristol, Hathersage, Reading (RISC?), Edinburgh? It may also be possible to co-ordinate with other clubs who have existing lecture programmes and run a joint lecture e.g. Alpine Club, Austrian Alpine Club, University ski / mountaineering clubs.

Other Social Events

Other social events have been held from time to time (e.g. London dinners, informal pub evenings in London and day walks in the London area).

These events provide a useful way for members to meet, but the focus of limited resources should probably be placed on organising events which have a specific ski touring and ski mountaineering focus (e.g. lectures).

Ski Mountaineering Symposia

Ski Mountaineering Symposia have been held every few years – the last at Plas y Brenin in Dec 2011. These events have been very successful, bringing together the whole UK ski mountaineering community, and should be run every 3 or 4 years.

The next Ski Mountaineering Symposium will be organised for Dec 2015. Previous symposia have been organised in conjunction with the Alpine Club and the Alpine Ski Club, but it will probably simplify organisation of the event if it is run solely by the club, and there are no real drawbacks to doing this.

Training

The training and instruction programme is a key part of the club's activities to:

- Introduce new participants to the sport.
- Improve the off-piste skiing skills of members.
- Encourage members to acquire the skills to become safer and more proficient ski tourers.
- Enable members (who wish) to make the transition from guided to un-guided touring.
- Encourage members (who wish) to become club leaders.

Training is currently provided as follows (each year):

- As part of the Weekend Meets programme:
 - Weekend course covering one of First Aid (REC), Navigation, Crevasse Rescue etc (in rotation).
- As part of the Touring Programme:
 - Introductory Ski Touring Course
 - Advanced Ski Mountaineering Course
 - Leader Training Course
 - Advanced Avalanche Training (long weekend – most years)
- As part of the Leaders' Meet:
 - Training on a subject of interest to leaders

The courses currently provided seem to provide sufficient opportunities for training, but the situation should be monitored.

Grants are available (see below) to support training for younger members (under 35) and for prospective or existing club leaders.

Grants

The club awards grants for 3 basic purposes:

- Memorial Fund Awards – to help younger skiers under 35 (whether or not members) get established in the sport.
- Leader Training Grants – for existing or potential leaders of club tours (members only).
- Adventure Fund Awards – to support expeditions and adventurous trips (members only).

The budget for grants is determined by the amount of money available from investment income or surplus from general club funds. The system is generally working well, although further publicity for the grants would be useful, to secure a greater flow of applicants.

Library

The club still has an official librarian, even though the contents of the library are very old, and very rarely used. The club doesn't have the resources to maintain an up-to-date, comprehensive library of maps and guidebooks and in any case this is becoming less important as information moves online.

In the near future, the contents of the library should be reviewed and either moved to the club archive, or sold (or otherwise disposed of).

COMMUNICATIONS

Yearbook

The Yearbook remains the flagship of the Club's communications effort; this high-quality product is something members both enjoy and are proud of. The production cost reflects the value members attach to it.

A recent project has started to put the content of past yearbooks onto the website, however a rule has been put in place to ensure that content is *first published in the yearbook*, to ensure that the pre-eminence of the printed yearbook isn't diminished.

Newsletters (Circulars)

The Club currently sends out three paper mailings a year, with the following content (in addition to any "news" items):

- New Year / Spring Circular
 - Summer Weekend Meets Programme
 - Lectures and AGM details (for remainder of year)
- Summer Circular
 - Touring Programme for the following year
 - Scottish Winter Meets for the following year
- Autumn Circular (with Yearbook)
 - Agenda for AGM (mandated by the club rules)

Some members appreciate receiving communication from the club in paper format – especially the touring programme. For members who are not subscribed to updates from the website, and rarely visit it, the newsletters represent their main contact with the club. However, there is also an increasing proportion of members who are happy to receive notification by e-mail and view the circular on the website.

Investigation should be made to see if it is possible to attach the circular to the e-mail (thus saving members the effort of downloading it from the website).

It can be assumed that all members have access to the website, and this is the best format for any urgent communication (e.g. changes of meet details etc), or to provide more detailed information. Given this background, the function of the paper newsletters is as a reminder to those members who are less fully engaged with club activities and don't regularly visit the website.

Website and Forums

The current website was launched in August 2010 to replace a much more basic site. The site is generally working very well. The website holds the touring programme (with tour leaders able to update details of their own tours), details of all weekend meets and other events as well as more general information. The system of different access permissions which allow the relevant individuals to update their own content is working well, and this reduces the workload on the webmaster.

The "Eaglenet" e-mail list has been de-commissioned and successfully replaced by 2 features in the website:

- News items (posted by committee members) appear on the front page of the website and are e-mailed to all members.
- Forums allow members to post messages and replies. Only members who are subscribed receive notification of posts in these areas. The forums seem to be working well, and in particular the "For Sale" section is very popular. It would be useful to promote the use of Forums across more of the membership.

A project started in 2012 and is well underway putting the content of Yearbooks onto the website (working back through the years). This will allow an incredibly valuable resource to be easily accessed and searched (for members only). The club will continue to support this work.

Given the relative lack of information on ski touring in English, and the depth of knowledge within the club, it would be useful to extend the range of information which is held on the website, so that it can be shared amongst the membership. Further information could be usefully added on gear and routes / areas.

Given the wide geographical spread of the membership and the intermittent nature of many members' contact with the club, the website forms a key element in the identity and functioning of the club.

The club will continue to support improvements to the website e.g. upgrading to the latest Drupal 7 technology.

Facebook Page

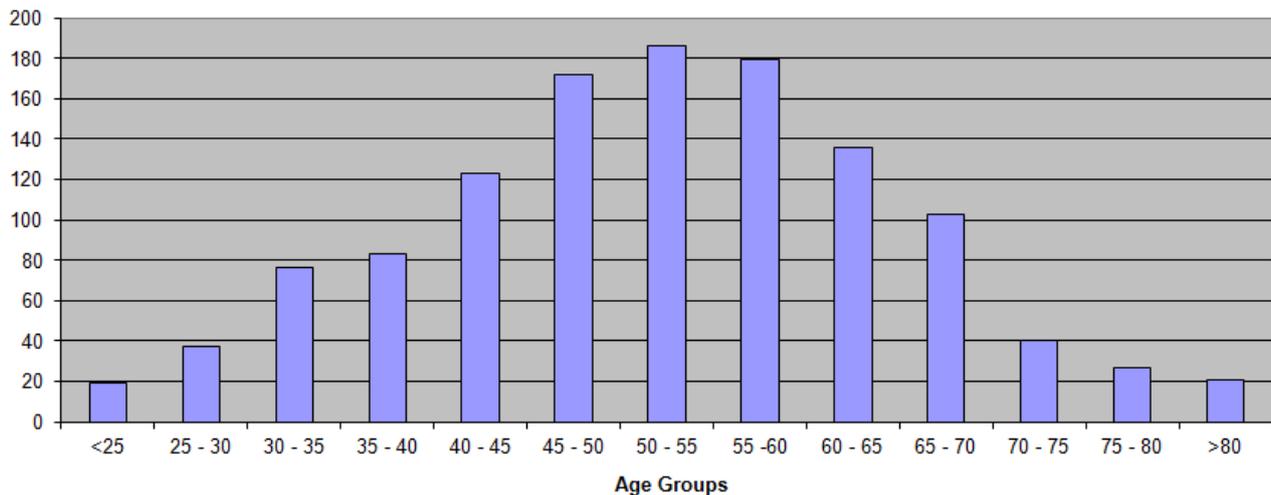
The club's Facebook page was put up in Nov 2012, motivated to some extent by the idea that it would be odd in this day and age *not* to have a Facebook page. The page has received over a hundred likes and a reasonable number of posts. The intention is not to replace the website (which will still remain the primary mechanism for distributing and sharing information), but rather provide a forum for those members who use Facebook regularly, and it seems to be meeting these goals.

RECRUITMENT AND MEMBERSHIP

The club has over 1200 members, and has been growing in size by about 5% annually over the last decade or so – reflecting the increasing popularity of ski touring as a sport. The club has never advertised or otherwise tried to recruit members – all new members join through word of mouth or possibly via searching on the Internet.

It is important to the ethos of the club to keep subscriptions affordable and to continue to use volunteers for nearly all tasks. Occasionally the committee may sanction expenditure for specific professional expertise on a commercial basis; however this will be seen as a one-off and not an ongoing expenditure. This approach will inevitably mean that there is a limit on the size of club which can be supported by volunteers, however, it is not clear what this limit is, and it seems unlikely to be reached in the next few years.

EAGLE SKI CLUB - Age distribution 2013
Average 52 yrs

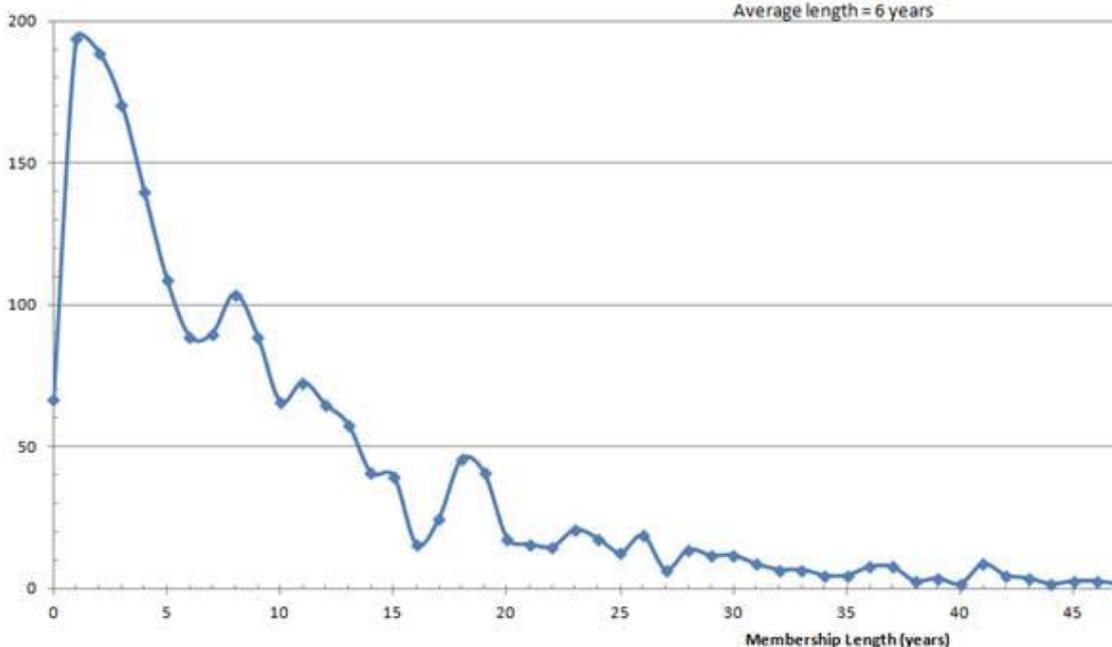


The average age of club members is around 52, and although this has remained constant over the last few years (reflecting the growth in membership), there is a need to encourage younger members (particularly under 35s) to join the club. Activities which can be undertaken to encourage younger members include:

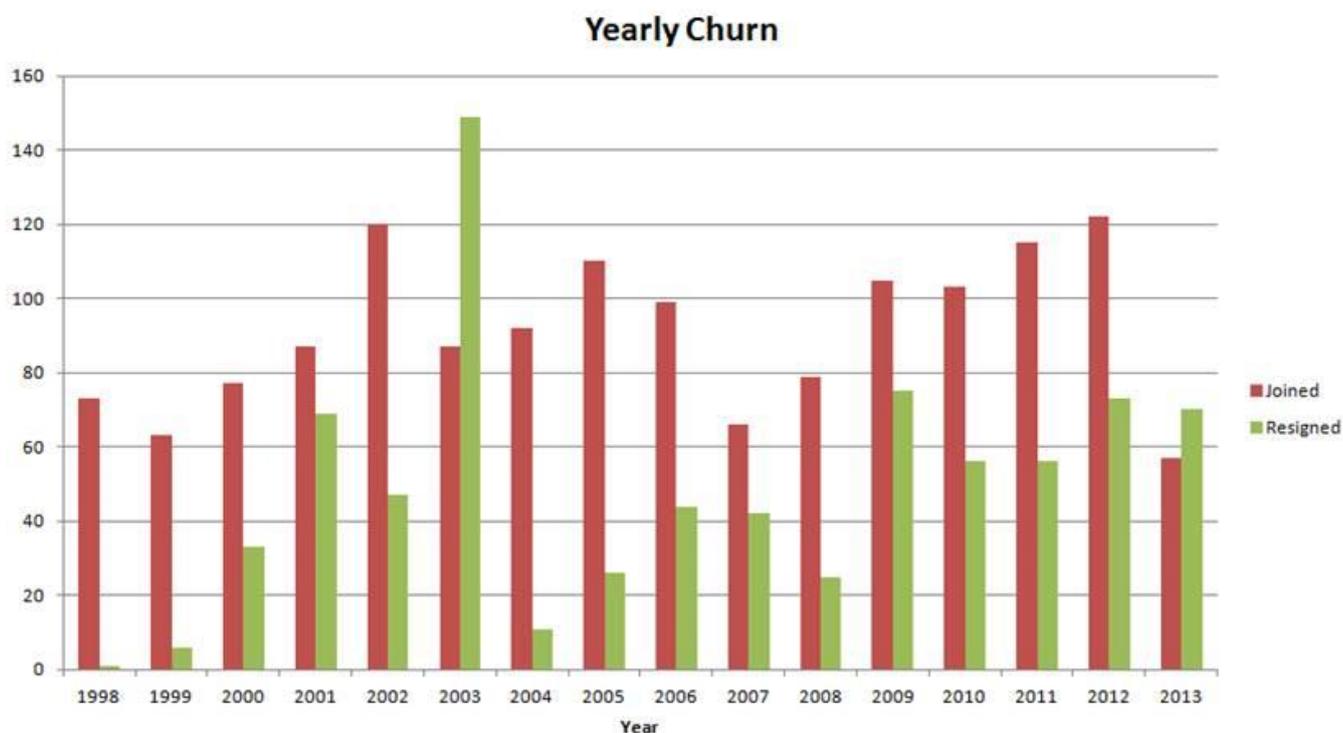
- Provide low cost tours.
- Liaise with university ski and mountaineering clubs.
- Circulate information in forums etc which attract younger members e.g. UK Climbing.

The average (mean) membership length is 6 years – although there are a significant numbers of members with much longer durations e.g. we currently have 54 members with 40 or more years membership.

Membership Length
Average length = 6 years



Over the last 10 or so years, there have been no particularly obvious trends in the rate of new recruits to the club – which has averaged about 100 a year. Similarly the resignation rate has remained reasonably constant (apart from 2003 when direct debit was introduced). The overall club size is slowly increasing because some of the new recruits become very loyal to the club and remain members for significantly more than the average of 6 years.



The club currently has 20.8% female members and 79.2% male members. It isn't clear whether this reflects overall participation in the sport, or if more needs to be done to make the club more welcoming to women.

ADMINISTRATION

Committee

As the club grows in size, there is a need to constantly review the workload of the club's officers and key members, and where possible divide the work up, or allocate to sub-committees, so that no one person is carrying an un-reasonable burden.

Modern Internet and automation technology should be used as much as possible to reduce overall workloads; however this shouldn't require club officers to be more than averagely competent in IT.

Job descriptions should be kept up to date, to guide new officers in their roles and responsibilities. Succession to all posts should be considered openly and discussed well in advance, to allow time for handover between roles.

In order to ensure that Committee Meetings are conducted efficiently, there will continue to be a differentiation between:

- Administrative matters which can be dealt with by report only. Issues and decision-making delegated to sub-committees (the Touring Subcommittee and other short term review groups) should be reported to the main Committee and not become items for prolonged discussion at the main Committee.
- Policy matters which require full discussion such as new expenditure and relations with other clubs, which should be debated at Committee. Papers relating to policy issues must be circulated well in advance of meetings, so that they can be studied before the meetings.

Although it is possible to use e-mail, phone conferences and website forums for committee communication, the primary focus for committee discussion and decision will remain the twice yearly face-to-face committee meetings.

The club rules (particularly with amendments in 2013) allow for work to be delegated to sub-committees, and this provides a useful mechanism to spread the workload as the club grows, whilst still retaining the main committee at a manageable size.

Finances

The club is currently in a very sound financial position. In many recent years, income has exceeded expenditure, resulting in an increase in the club's total assets. These assets are invested and used to generate income which is used amongst other things to fund grants.

Relationships with other Clubs and Bodies

The ESC is affiliated to Snowsport England as its Governing Body, and this relationship provides the third party insurance covering club activities. However ski touring and mountaineering are cross-discipline activities and it is important that links are retained with the British Mountaineering Council, the Mountaineering Council of Scotland and the Alpine Club, as well as the Ski Club of Great Britain, the Alpine Ski Club, and the UK section of the Austrian Alpine Club.

FEEDBACK

Members are encouraged to use the website to give feedback on any aspect of the Club's activities, including this strategy document.

A comprehensive survey of members will be undertaken in the near future, so that the views can be understood of the very large number of members who don't have regular contact with the club.

Pete Lancaster
President
Nov 2013