



President's Report 2019

This is my first report as your President on the work of the officers and committee during the past year. More details are available in the officers' reports and committee meeting minutes (once approved) that are available on the website. **I would draw your attention to the sections highlighted, particularly the last section on Insurance and Affiliation, that provide essential background to Resolutions 5 & 6 on the AGM agenda.**

Tours and Meets

The 2019 season in Europe was the reverse of 2018 with high temperatures in February, stripping snow from south-facing slopes, so that ski-tours became challenging, although significant snowfall in April meant there was late season skiing after all. There were some great trips in an impressively varied programme that reflected the smooth transition as Peter Edgerton took over from Phil Jardine as Touring Secretary; thanks to both for a great job. A new meet at Gressoney preceded the usual long weekend at Argentiere, whilst the mix of training, guided and member-led tours explored Europe and as far afield as Greenland and Siberia. The more distant trips all offset the carbon emissions of their flights using the Club scheme and the rising numbers of members doing so generally raises the prospect of the Club becoming carbon neutral in future.

The Scottish season was also a reversal of 2018 with 3 of the 12 meets having to be cancelled and other activities substituted for skiing on others. Nonetheless members got together and enjoyed good company whilst making the best of the conditions. A highlight was the joint meet organised with St. Andrews University by Paul Karas and Emily Taylor in a bid to reach out to younger potential members. For the coming year Angus Armstrong will be handing over to Chris Watkins as Scottish Meets Co-ordinator and we thank him for all his good work.

This is what we do and details of all these activities are recorded in the excellent yearbook edited by Mike Hendry that goes from strength to strength, including this year features on Adventure, Leadership and Followership, guidebook reviews and an interactive avalanche awareness quiz. How did you do?

As a result of last year's review Steve Wright retains oversight of the Adventure fund awards whilst Paul Karas has taken responsibility for the Memorial fund awards to young people. The Club is planning to increase the number and value of such awards in future, see the report of the Youth and Diversity working party. Details are on the Awards pages of the website but will be revised in line with future developments. The closing date for applications is December 3rd so apply for an award quickly if you want one!

Training and Leader Development

The Committee strongly supports the training of all members to maintain the skills that underpin safe touring and equip them to participate fully in the collaborative approach which is the basis of our member-led tours. Training grants are available and Susie Amann, our Training Officer, has continued to organise a UK-based training programme covering First Aid, Avalanche Awareness,

Navigation and Ropework. Andy Perkins ran a number of short modular alpine skills courses attached to the Argentiere meet whilst other week-long courses on the Touring programme concentrated on off-piste skiing and touring skills.

The Leader Development Programme led by Brian Horn with the assistance of the Steering Group continues to support the emergence of potential tour leaders (PTLs) through mentoring, tailored training opportunities, and the Leader week that has run full again on the Touring Programme. Rob Greaves will be handing over the chair of the Steering Group to Mike Spencer and Rob deserves special thanks for taking an early lead in this initiative. Mike led a very useful training event for PTLs and mentors at the Leaders' Meet in October, which has now become a valued weekend in the Club training calendar. Whilst few of the participants are outdoor Professionals (apart from the guides), there was a highly professional approach demonstrated by all who attended sessions on avalanche awareness, and group management within a context of very useful networking. Peter Edgerton organised the programme with contributions from Brian Horn whilst Andy Perkins and Owen Day brought their professional expertise to bear on excellent practical sessions. Some PTLs have already led their first tours!

Regional Activities

The development of regional hubs facilitating a successful lecture programme has provided great opportunities for the members in those areas to network more easily and who knows what tours or adventurous trips originate in a chance remark at such events. Weekend meets were fewer this year in response to decreased demand but by including the committee weekend at Castleton, almost by chance they seemed to fall into the same regional patterns, with meets at Swanage, a full hut at Langdale, and there was a well-attended dinner organised by William Barney in London. In Scotland there is a healthy weekend meets programme and the yearly Burns night dinner whilst St. Andrews University MC has offered Eagles places on a joint meet in 2020. The committee is hopeful that more opportunities for regional events, open to all, will encourage more social interaction. One of the proposals from the Youth and Diversity working party is to reach out to young people in universities and colleges as well as local climbing clubs, offering talks, workshops, training events, etc. organised by ESC volunteers. The regional hubs offer us a way of doing that if members are willing to step up to take this on: contact your local organiser if you are! If any member wishes to establish a local group then the secretary can facilitate email circulation on a regional basis and Declan Phelan in London, Phil Jardine in Bristol, Max Huxham and Simon Watts in the Peak, Ali Bramall in the Lakes and Chris Watkins in Scotland would be able to give advice.

Membership

We now have close to 1500 members. There have been two initiatives this year: the gocardless project and the Youth and Diversity working party. Richard Davison, Brenda Clough, Andrew Kydd, Stuart Johnston and Sonia Panchen have done a great job to get the online membership process and new Direct Debit arrangement into place this Autumn. The system will make the work of the membership secretary much more manageable but Brenda will be standing down this year and Andrew Kydd will take over this position, subject to an AGM vote.

The Club has an aging demographic profile and whilst figures for recruitment of young people had been stable for some years there has recently been a slight decline. There had also been no sign of the rising numbers of women operating at all levels in many climbing, fell-running and cycling clubs. That was enough to stimulate a response in the form of a working party on Youth and

Diversity comprising myself, Declan Phelan, Emily Taylor and Paul Karas, and the report on measures to enhance recruitment in those areas, by reducing the cost of membership and enhancing grants in particular, can be found in the committee meeting papers.

Communications.

Richard Davison has chaired the Communications sub-committee through its first year, working to co-ordinate and improve IT provision whilst exploring ways of enhancing communication between members and the committee and officers of the Club. The newsletter is the most regular vehicle for such communications and all are welcome to use it, but there have also been moves to review the website and our public facebook presence. There is a clear and present need for involvement of additional members on this committee and it would be great to see more people coming forward to play a part in these and other developments.

Finances.

The accounts, audited by Marcus Senn are available on the website. Andy Helm, as treasurer, has reviewed transparency of transactions and consolidated investments this year. The increased cost of membership subscriptions more than balanced the books owing to two factors:

1. A higher than forecast number of new members.
2. A lower than anticipated outlay on training expenses.

This resulted in a healthy surplus but since the Club already had very healthy reserves, a decision was taken at the June Committee meeting to invest some of those reserves in the future of the Club. Plans to increase spending on training and to encourage younger members are in the pipeline but other options remain. We are also able to fund the additional affiliation costs in order obtain third-party insurance cover for our 2019-2020 touring programme. However, that cannot responsibly continue into 2020-2021, hence the AGM agenda item for an increase in subscriptions. See below, and the report on insurance and affiliation amongst the committee papers for more details.

Insurance and Affiliation

Most Clubs rely on affiliation to a National Governing Body (NGB) to supply third-party liability insurance for their members and the Clubs' officers. This relates not only to personal injury but also to officers of the Club involved in any contractual dispute that claims damages against them. This insurance underpins the activities of every mountaineering club that I know. For example, a club will not allow a guest to participate in a meet unless that guest has written evidence of third-party liability cover such as a BMC membership card.

In the past, the ESC has relied on affiliation to Snow Sport England (SSE) for our insurance but in 2015 SSE changed their underwriters and the policy no longer covered any off-piste skiing without a guide. Roger Upton successfully negotiated an extension to cover our normal activities, but in June this year the Committee decided to establish the ongoing validity of that arrangement by obtaining detailed assurances from SSE in writing and a working party comprising John Hayward, Declan Phelan and Peter Edgerton was established to do this. Another working party comprising myself, Andy Helm and Mike Hendry was set up to establish whether incorporation could contribute to a solution to the problem. After prolonged negotiations between John Hayward and SSE, it emerged that any assurances would not be forthcoming. The underwriters were not prepared to cover the ESC for off-piste skiing or ski-touring.

Anticipating this, Declan Phelan had explored other options and Andy Helm and I had been co-opted to the working party. There was no appetite for covering that level of risk evident in any bespoke insurers and Snowsport Scotland could offer nothing better than SSE. The Incorporation working party had found that all mountaineering clubs that had incorporated had taken years to manage the process and had continued to maintain their insurance through affiliation to an NGB so there was no solution from that quarter. We were left with only two options: affiliation to either Mountaineering Scotland (MS) or the BMC. In order to ensure continuity of insurance cover the committee needs to make a decision which to affiliate to before the AGM and act upon that decision so that the activities of the Club can continue during 2019-2020.

The cost of affiliating to either MS or the BMC is significantly higher and we are very fortunate to be able to smooth the transition by absorbing that increased cost for 2019-2020 from reserves, because any subscription rise will not become effective until May 2020. However, from that date we do need to balance the books so a resolution mandating an increase in subscriptions is on your AGM agenda. Without affiliation, the Club will be unable to operate and without a rise in subscriptions the Club will not be able to continue to fund that affiliation. I would urge you to vote for the resolution.

It is worth noting that affiliation to either of these NGBs enables members to access BMC personal insurance packages so it may be that members who have previously belonged to either NGB as individuals for that reason alone might wish to save that expense by discontinuing their Individual membership. Also, if a member belongs to two or more affiliated Clubs then they are entitled to a refund of the additional affiliation fees that will be repaid by the NGB concerned. So the change in affiliation might actually turn out to be a saving by no longer paying the SSE affiliation fee and receiving a refund of the MS/BMC fee!

It should also be noted that members not resident in the UK or Republic of Ireland will not be covered for third party liability under the new arrangement so will need to provide evidence of personal cover (eg Austrian Alpine Club membership) in order to participate in Club activities. Further operational details of how the new affiliation affects the Club will need to be addressed by working parties as the arrangement beds down during the coming year.

It remains to me only to thank all those who have contributed to the success of the Club over the past year: dedicated tour leaders and officers on the one hand and enthusiastic members who support the club by their very presence at Club events on the other. I look forward to meeting as many members as possible at ESC events over the coming year and the lively discussions that will undoubtedly result.

DWJ