

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland

Annual Report 2004-2005

President's Overview - John Mackenzie

This has been a year of steady growth and of diversity, perhaps nothing outstanding but one where closer contact with the BMC and MCofI has been showing results. As committed mountaineers, crag rats and hill walkers (not necessarily in that order) we can very easily forget that the big world outside may readily overlook us and regard us as a minority interest. This is, of course, not the case within Scotland anyway as hillgoing brings in more indirect cash to the Highlands than almost anything else.

One of the bonuses of working closely with the other organisations is to achieve objectives with their backing and to help each other by giving advice when called for. Through the medium of the Mountaineering Co-ordination Group (chaired by former MCofS President John Donohoe) we can talk about issues that affect us all, whether it be legislation, insurance, access & conservation or ethics. In practice this means that 'cross-party' issues are discussed and ways of resolving them reached in unison. Currently, both MCofS and BMC are concerned about the future of Ratho and it is hoped that sufficient pressure can be applied to save the climbing centre.

Earlier this year the BMC/MCofS International Winter Climbing Meet was held at Glenmore Lodge. This regular event is the only one in the world where climbers of many nationalities, hosted by the two councils, can experience the Scottish winter scene using traditional ground-up approaches with traditional gear. Glenmore Lodge provided bed, board and transport for the week and there were several envious comments from some of the guests about Scotland having such a superb centre. Guests had the opportunity to climb all over the country, reinforcing the status of Scottish winter climbing and taking, one hopes, its ethics abroad.

The members of staff, the officers and Executive have been working hard this year so I will take this opportunity to thank them publicly. The work can be difficult, requiring the qualities of diplomacy, patience and the need for firmness regarding difficult decisions and, of course, never enough time in which to do it all. Most of us are volunteers and though at times the meaning of the word is often lost when pressures grow, ultimately helping to run the show brings great satisfaction.

With the new access legislation in force, and with MCofS represented on the main Access Forum, the future implementation under the new chairman, Bob Reid (a former MCofS President), should be interesting and one which MCofS will follow through for the benefit of our members. Much will depend on how the Act is implemented and I expect the road ahead to have some bumpy stretches!

One facet of the MCofS's work is still not evident to enough people, despite *The Scottish Mountaineer* carrying most of the salient points. As with many voluntary organisations that are undergoing gradual transformation into truly professional bodies, our PR is not getting noticed and many folk really haven't a clue as to what we do on their behalf. Apart from reading the magazine, which will tell you, we are hoping to make some direct approaches to clubs where question-and-answer sessions will inform and, hopefully, enlighten. Ideally, we should have a Marketing/PR officer, but as we haven't could I ask that, having read this far, you continue and thus find out more of what we do and also to attend, if possible, our AGM at Glenmore Lodge.

I hope that the year brings you all successful walking and climbing and that the MCofS can be useful and helpful to you.

Honorary Secretary's Report - Nicholas Halls

The Finance & Administration Sub-committee continues to focus on improving the Council's administrative infrastructure, operational efficiency and financial control.

The IT system has been progressively upgraded and is now connected to broadband. E-mail has become the principal mode of communication. This has speeded up the transaction of business and improved communications but has greatly increased the quantity of incoming and outgoing information. Reducing the workload of administrative employees is proving to be an intractable problem, even with an extra part-time employee and help from volunteers.

Peter Willimott represented the Council during the development of the integrated UK IT system, which is nearing completion. It will see the MCofS, BMC and the Training Boards linked to a single UK membership database. This will greatly reduce our administrative load and facilitate more integrated working between the BMC & MCofS. The Council will bear 10% of the operating costs.

The Hon. Treasurer, an accountant, has implemented a computer-based accounts package, which greatly assists in the monitoring and control of expenditure.

Sportscotland was invited to undertake an audit of the MCofS operations as part of the Modern Sport initiative. A 'springboard' event followed this in December, attended by the majority of the Executive, during which issues arising from the audit were explored. The need for an Executive Officer with sole responsibility for effective administration, financial control and personnel management became evident. Such a post is presently beyond the means of the Council.

Arising from the 'springboard' event, and guidance from Lorna MacLeod of *sportscotland*, the MCofS Corporate Plan was made a more strategic document, which more clearly identifies elements that correlate with Scottish sports policy and are entitled to grant aid.

Government is becoming wary of giving public money to organisations that have no legal identity. Currently all contractual agreements are entered into in the name of the individuals making the agreement rather than the Council itself, leaving employees and officers individually financially liable. The Executive agreed that the Council should become a legal entity and will present a proposal at the AGM that the MCofS should become a Company Limited by Guarantee. If this is approved the Council will then begin conversion during 2005-6, and a Memorandum of Articles for the Company, mirroring the present constitution, will be presented for approval at the AGM of 2006.

The Scottish Mountaineer continues to attract individual members but the increasing premium for the civil liability insurance combined with the subscription to the MCofS is proving unpalatable for many club members who question the value for money they receive from the MCofS.

The recurring confusion over the terms of the civil liability insurance provided by Perkins Slade inspired a number of meetings with the company resulting in clearer explanatory documentation. Discussions revealed how comprehensive the cover is and what good value it is should an individual be pursued for damages.

Costs associated with the implementation of the access legislation have required SNH to withdraw the funding supporting the A&C Officer's post so the post has had to be cut. This post is critical to the effectiveness of the Council and if an A&C Officer is to be employed, in the long term the salary must be guaranteed from subscription income rather than grant aid. This can only be achieved by a substantial increase in subscription income.

Honorary Treasurer's Report - Derek Edge

The un-audited Income and Expenditure Account for the year ending 31 March 2005 shows a surplus of £8,945.

The total income increased by £20,949 which was largely due to an increase in individual fees of £11,131 and an increase in the club income of £7,761.

The total expenditure for the year has also increased by £17,948 due primarily to an accrual of £5,500 for expenditure on the UK IT project and an upgrade of computer equipment. There was also another increase in the civil liability insurance (£4,220 = 28.1%). Staff salaries have increased by £3,922 as a result of inflation, performance increases and also additional part-time staff. The professional fees incurred relate to part-time assistance in the office and also legal fees.

The mountain safety budget received additional funding from *sportscotland* that allowed full time employment of the Mountain Safety Advisor.

The Council acknowledge the grants received during the year from *sportscotland*, Scottish Natural Heritage and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust.

The office has been very busy this year with the start of the Direct Debit scheme, which has led to a change in some of the internal control systems.

I would like to thank Kevin, Pet and the office staff for their invaluable work and support in the office.

National Officer's Report - Kevin Howett

The focus of my work remains as Chief Officer to the MCofS, but with responsibility for the office, services to members and for sports development. However, during the UKsport modernisation exercise started this year, my post was assessed as having grown beyond the capability of one person and rationalisation took place, with less work to be undertaken on access, conservation and safety. I now retain involvement on the Nevis Partnership only as a Director.

We were approached this year to affiliate a club of predominantly young people and had to re-evaluate the criteria based on our current constitution. In so doing we have a blueprint advice note on how to organise a young persons club and we hope this will encourage more in the future.

The Scottish Mountaineer was published six times, but only two Club Secretary News Sheets issued. The magazine remains the main platform for attracting new members, being on sale at newsagents across Scotland.

The consultation we started two winters ago regarding bolts in Scottish climbing has continued, with major articles in the magazine.

Office Responsibilities

We made a plea on our website for volunteer help and several people came forward offering their expertise: Brian Dickson has helped with inputting data; Les Muggeridge and his son helped design a database for the Expedition Reports and David Smeaton continues to help out every day. We have taken on Adrienne Robinson as a part time assistant to complement the work done by Pet Thomas.

We remain indebted to webmaster Duncan Gray, who maintains the website on a voluntary basis. He has completely restructured the design of the site over the year, with the final section on sports development going live just recently.

Membership has increased a little with over 2,500 individual members. We have seen a few clubs disband, and one disaffiliate. However, several new small clubs have joined us.

SPORTS DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE

Overview - Fred Belcher

The Child Protection Policy has reached its final draft and is now ready to be submitted to and approved by the Executive Committee. Once approved, this policy will be available for use by all member clubs.

We have made a start on investigating the potential of mountaineering having a proper coaching programme especially for mountaineers and climbers that will eventually lead to our coaches being qualified to the standards required to achieve the UK Coaching Certificate. This award, specifically for coaching, is a giant leap forward and is totally different from the current awards for instructors.

Development Reports - Kevin Howett

Climbing Walls

Our National Climbing Centre at Ratho went into receivership and we have been helping in efforts to save it by lobbying MSPs and Ministers and have gained considerable political support. However, the bank has still to decide on its future. But at least it is still operational, although not currently as a National Centre! The centre is pivotal to our aims for the long-term development of our sport in Scotland.

Kinlochleven's Ice Factor has had a good first year and we continue to support it. The indoor wall at the new Robert Gordon University sports centre in Aberdeen has opened its doors. We supported it only as a 'small wall'. Meanwhile, I have been involved in negotiations for a Regional Centre for Aberdeen.

Youth Development

One of the major success stories for the past year was the popularity of the REALrock sessions held last summer with 42 individual sessions run all over Scotland. This gave many youngsters the opportunity to experience climbing outdoors on real rock. All those taking part learned a lot and enjoyed the experience. The AGM also attracted some young people to the 'coaching in climbing' and 'come and try it' sessions.

Competitions and Teams

The big news this year was helping the BMC organise the World Youth Cup finals hosted at Ratho. Although there were not any Scots climbers competing it did attract over 400 competitors from around the world and about 1,000 visitors. It was filmed by BBC TV and featured two of our most promising young climbers, Natalie Berry and Robert Mackenzie, who will be old enough to compete in the 2005 final in Beijing. In the British competitions Natalie managed a 1st place, whilst Robert gained 2nd place.

Expedition Grants

The following were supported: Dave Macleod & Scott Muir attempted to repeat the hardest alpine rock route in the world on the Tre Cima; Guy Robertson and friends made a return trip to Kyzyl Asker; Old stalwart Sandy Allen and others attempted Kalanka North Face with an international team; Des Rubens and Geoff Cohen and others climbed various peaks on the Scottish Cordillera Huayhuash Expedition; and finally the Anglo-Scottish Vilcanota Expedition

Courses

A further course for the visually impaired was held at Glenmore Lodge with a previous visually handicapped student, Norma Davidson, undertaking to organise and administer it.

Mountaineering Co-ordination Group

The 'MCG' is the forum for consultation and co-operation between the MCoS, BMC, MCoI, the BMC Committee for Wales and the MLTUK.

During the year meetings were held at the Council's respective gatherings and a teleconference meeting in January. Issues dealt with were the relations with sports councils, civil liability insurance, the UKIT modernisation project, the threat of wind turbines to mountain areas and 'expert witnesses' in legal cases. We also began to focus on the future role of the MCG.

ACCESS AND CONSERVATION COMMITTEE

Overview - Beryl Leatherland

Access

9 February 2005 saw new statutory rights of access come into being in Scotland through the activation of the access provisions in Part 1 of the Land Reform (Scotland) Act. This was the culmination of many years of hard work by the MCofS and other recreation bodies to change the access laws in Scotland, but it was merely a step along the road to having better access arrangements on the ground. Now that the statutory rights have been enacted we need to use them to resolve existing disputes and to demonstrate that what happens in practice reflects our claim that we now have the best access rights in Europe. Before the statutory rights came into force the MCofS worked with MSPs to make last minute improvements to the Scottish Outdoor Access Code and the Scottish Executive's Guidance to Local Authorities.

The MCofS Access Symposium in November informed the audience of developments regarding the development of a network of Local Access Forums (LAF) across the country. Since then we have nominated eight people for places on their LAF and are currently working on a training course for LAF members.

The Hillphones scheme expanded to include 17 areas in 2004, including the estates around Glen Strathfarrar.

The MCofS has continued its involvement in the Access & Conservation Trust along with the BMC & MCofI. The future management of ACT is currently under review.

A major ongoing project is to raise funds and develop a web-based access database. We are working with land management and tourism organisations with a view to launching the site later this year.

Conservation

The threat posed to our landscapes by wind farms and the associated need for pylons continues to dominate our work. We have objected to individual wind farm proposals as well as commenting on proposals for pylons from Beaully to Denny and Ullapool to Beaully. In addition we have had letters published in the press and attended meetings on this issue. We are also working with other voluntary sector partners to make a co-ordinated response to the threat that is now posed to our mountain landscapes.

Consultations

During the last year the Access and Conservation Officer and Committee responded to the following consultation exercises:

1. Draft guidance for local and national park authorities on statutory access rights.
2. Scottish Outdoor Access Code.
3. Rights of appeal in planning.
4. Proposed Beaully to Denny overhead transmission line indicative route.
5. Cairngorms National Park vehicle hill tracks policy.
6. Future management of Glencoe.
7. Western Isles transmission options.
8. Strategic review of SNH.
9. SNH guidance on land management signage.

The following people have represented the MCofS on the indicated committees during the past year:

Access and Conservation Trust
Angus Glens Management Group
British Upland Footpath Trust

John Mackenzie, Mike Dales
Dougal Roy
Nick Halls, Mike Newbury

Deer Commission for Scotland Round Table
Montane Scrub Action Group
National Access Forum
National Trust for Scotland
Nevis Partnership
Scottish Countryside Access Network
Scottish Countryside Activities Council
Scottish Environment LINK
Upland Path Advisory Group

John Mackenzie, Keith Miller
Keith Miller
John Mackenzie, Mike Dales
Beryl Leatherland
Kevin Howett
Mike Dales
Margaret Hodge
Mike Dales
Mike Dales, Mike Newbury

British Upland Footpath Trust - Nick Halls

It is generally agreed that it is essential for BUFT actively to represent the interests of mountaineers, and to promote the principle that the aim of path repair in wild uplands is to restore landscape rather than making access easier and introducing manufactured landscape scars. Also, BUFT must regain its credibility as an expert body in respect of path construction and the sensitive restoration of landscape. There is now a shortage of skilled path workers, and sufficient expert path work consultants, which is impacting on landscape restoration.

A resurvey of BUFT Award paths has been undertaken. A report on their condition will be presented at a seminar to take place in Wales in September 2005. Beverley Penney, Chairwoman, and Graham Lynch, BMC Access Officer, have taken things forward and Margaret Thomas has been employed to collate the evidence from the path resurvey, produce a report and organise the seminar.

Mike Dales, Mike Newbury and Nick Halls have attended site visits in Scotland, particularly on the Cobbler, and attended UPAG meetings including some on site in Glencoe and the Cairngorms.

Considerable European funding became available from the Forestry Commission (Scotland) for the development of the countryside for recreation by the public. A paradox has emerged: The setting of specifications by road engineers and the demands made for paths with a substantial life span are resulting in over-engineered paths in a number of locations, which threaten the landscape by introducing intrusive and unnatural linear features.

Access in the Angus Glens - Dougal Roy

The Eastern Cairngorms Access Project (ECAP) is currently funding repairs and improvements to paths in the Angus glens and Upper Deeside.

In the Angus glens, repairs to the Glen Mark path to Mount Keen are complete as is the first phase of the work on the Corrie Fee path in Glen Doll. Work on the next section is well underway and specifications have been agreed for repairs to Jock's Road and the path to Loch Brandy. Three new bridges will be constructed in Glen Doll, providing two new circular walks and a link to the historic Minister's Path over to Glen Prosen. The MCofS, through its membership of the Angus Glens Ranger Service Management Committee, has had an input to all these projects.

SAFETY AND TRAINING COMMITTEE

Overview - Mary Webster

This year we have seen the benefits of having a full-time Mountain Safety Advisor. The Scottish Executive increased this post to full time in April 2004. Included in this provision was a remit to investigate the potential for a comprehensive weather forecast for outdoor users in Scotland. In July a landmark meeting was held to further this issue, which brought together a wide range of representatives of both users and providers. General agreement was reached on the need to have access to the maximum information and for forecasters to have practical experience of the mountain environment. Proposals are now being prepared and will be submitted to the Scottish Executive.

After the popular *Water Hazards in the Mountains* safety video, a joint project with the BMC and MLTE to produce a *Winter Skills* DVD is underway. Filming took place in Glencoe earlier this year.

In the past year we have provided a wide range of training events, navigation courses, GPS training days, winter skills courses, avalanche awareness courses, fall-holding training sessions, first aid courses for climbers and walkers and winter mountain safety talks to clubs and universities. The Tiso winter experience lectures and Clachaig Inn winter experience lectures continue to be well received.

We repeated the weekend safety and good practice seminar for university clubs at Glenmore Lodge. This year we attracted 65 delegates from 10 Scottish university clubs. The seminar was much appreciated by the participants and we hope that as a result accidents will be reduced.

Last year 10,000 avalanche *aide memoire* cards were produced. These, and the revised *Winter Essentials* leaflet, continue to be promoted and distributed.

The HSE draft Work at Height Regulations still cause concern and we continue to liaise with and support MLTUK with relevant representations.

Considerable debate has taken place with regard to waymarking on Ben Nevis. The Mountain Safety Advisor has written articles explaining the safety pros and cons in this debate and collated responses of members. Opinions were mixed with no clear consensus. A final statement suggesting a minimalist approach was agreed by the MCofS Executive.

Our thanks are due to the hard work of our MSA, Roger Wild, for the delivery of a wide range of well-organised events. He has also written a number of articles in various magazines, including a series on navigation for *The Scottish Mountaineer* and navigation off Ben Nevis for *Climber*. I wish to thank all the members of the Safety and Training Committee who contribute their time and expertise. Together we keep the MCofS at the forefront to promote safety on the Scottish mountains.

Scottish Mountain Safety Forum - Mary Webster

This forum has a broad membership and contributes valuable input to mountain safety issues on which it advises the Scottish Executive. It was with the help of this group that the landmark meeting for discussing a comprehensive weather forecast service for Scotland took place.

The group also provided useful input to the debate on the issue of waymarking on Ben Nevis and other initiatives.

Mountain Leader Training UK - Mary Webster

As mentioned last year, the successful handbook *Hillwalking* has now been reprinted with revisions to cover Scottish access legislation. A second handbook entitled *Rock Climbing* was published in the autumn last year and has received excellent reviews.

The British Association of European Mountain Leaders has agreed to form the Union of International Mountain Leader Associations which will work with the MLTUK to develop the remit.

John Cousins, the MLTUK secretary, continues to respond to problems involved with the HSE draft Work at Height Regulations.

Mountain Leader Training Scotland - Mary Webster

Registration figures for the various awards continue to be healthy. Moderation reports showed that providers were running courses in different parts of the country for some groups. This was an interesting increase in availability.

The domain name mltsotland.org had been obtained and linked directly to the relevant page on the MLTUK website, which is proving useful.

HUTS

Huts Working Group - John Leftley

The group maintains a general overview of issues related to hut management and liaises closely with its sister body, the BMC Huts Group.

The third MCoFS mountain huts seminar was held in December. Legal issues dominated the agenda, particularly liability and the implications of the Disability Discrimination Bill, now enacted.

A formal management agreement for the Alex MacIntyre hut has finally been signed by the MCoFS and BMC, co-owners of the hut. It is hoped that this will eventually lead to a formal trust deed. Brian Rendall was chosen to replace the interim chair, trustee Nick Halls, who took over following the resignation of David Ellis.

A property at the foot of Lochnagar has been offered to MCoFS by the Balmoral Estate for use as mountaineering accommodation. A feasibility study is presently being carried out.

Alex MacIntyre Memorial Hut - Brian Rendall & Nick Halls

Work to upgrade the premises continues. During summer 2004 a major refurbishment of the dormitories was carried out. Dry rot in the walls of the warden's room has also been remedied. The next major item of expenditure will be the upgrading during 2005 of the toilet and shower block, including improved ventilation. The drying room is also to be revamped.

Bob Mackison, Maintenance Officer, occasionally assisted by the management committee, has undertaken many essential small tasks.

The charge remains at £3.50 per bednight, representing excellent value and a significant benefit of membership. MCoFS members are encouraged to use the hut as much as possible and are reminded that there is often spare capacity available at short notice.

Glen Brittle War Memorial Hut - Vaughan Hammond

The 40th anniversary of the opening of this building falls this year and will be marked by a gathering of the many people who have done such a great deal over that time to manage and maintain the property.

At the end of 2004 John Foster retired after a 13 year term as both a trustee and chairman of the management committee. This was marked by the presentation of a painting of 'The Ridge' and the thanks from fellow trustees and committee members for his years of conscientious and dedicated management.

During the year the management committee, with the approval of the trustees, reached agreement with the committee of the MacIntyre hut that the loan of £20,000 to the AMMH, originally granted in the early 1980's, would finally be annulled and gifted to AMMH.

To comply with the regulations, all incoming water now passes through a filtration and UV sterilization system. Rearrangements in the kitchen area have allowed for an additional fridge and extra shelf space for food storage has been provided. The dining room has been redecorated.

An overall operating surplus was made, but less than the preceding year due to the costs of the water treatment unit and a slight reduction in revenue due to a poor summer.

Mill Cottage - Vaughan Hammond

Patterns and levels of usage were similar to previous years with 1,450 bednights over the year. Paintwork was refreshed in the more tired and worn areas, otherwise no significant maintenance requirements were identified. Seating in the lounge is to be upgraded.

The trustees again provided a grant to the MCoFS to assist the provision of safety training during the year. Also, a small grant was provided for the professional survey of a building that potentially could serve the SE Cairngorms and Lochnagar area.