

## Mountaineering Scotland

Annual Report 1 April 2021- 31 March 2022

### What we do

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Mountaineering Scotland is the nationally recognised representative and membership organisation for hill walkers, climbers, mountaineers and ski tourers in Scotland, and the governing body for competitive climbing in Scotland. We aim to represent, inspire and develop Scottish mountaineering in all its forms, to protect the mountain landscapes and access rights we all cherish, and promote responsible access in the outdoors.

Through our mountain safety program, we offer training and information to promote safety, self-reliance and the enjoyment of the hill and mountain environment. Our ClimbScotland program, funded by sportscotland, aims to support children and young people to get involved in climbing through outreach work and competition.

Find out more at [www.mountaineering.scot](http://www.mountaineering.scot)

### Roundup of the year

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**April:** There was a long-awaited return to the hills for all following the post-Christmas lockdown, and the Mountaineering Scotland board started work on a new strategic plan for 2022-25.

**May:** Mountain Safety courses resumed and we launched Sofa 2 Summit, our seven-part online guide for anyone heading to the hills over the summer.

**June:** The 2021 Member survey and Walk Climb Ski survey for non-members went live with the responses used to help shape the new strategic framework.

**July:** The #RespectProtectEnjoy campaign was launched to raise awareness of responsible access and mountain safety, and sport climbing made its debut at the Tokyo Olympics.

**August:** Closure of the level crossing at Dalwhinnie makes the headlines with Mountaineering Scotland supporting a campaign by Ramblers Scotland and Scotways to reopen it.

**September:** The Youth Climbing Series 2021 got underway at EICA Ratho after a year off in 2020, and the first 'Club Month' took place to highlight the benefits of being part of a club.

**October:** Membership of Mountaineering Scotland reached over 15,000 for the first time, as we presented our investment proposal to sportscotland for the next three-year cycle.

**November:** Our 2021 AGM was held online, with members voting for changes to the Articles of Association to allow volunteer board members to continue for an additional 2 years after their 4 year term.

**December:** The fourth annual ThinkWINTER! campaign was launched in collaboration with our Mountain Safety Group partners.

**January:** Heather Morning delivered her last course as Mountain Safety Adviser and Director for Mountain Safety Nigel Clark lead an internal review of our mountain safety programme to build on the legacy that she leaves behind.

**February:** Staff and members were consulted on the draft strategic plan for 2022-25, while the ClimbScotland team were at the opening of one of four new climbing walls that they supported in 2021-22.

**March:** All Covid restrictions were finally removed, we celebrated the decision against the development of the Glenshero wind farm and Director Ilona Turnbull shared an inspiring blogpost for International Women's Day 2022.

## President's Introduction

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*by Brian Shackleton*

Mountaineering Scotland ended the financial year with an increased membership in both individual and club members and a surplus of income over expenditure thanks to the work done by CEO Stuart Younie and the team. This put the organisation in a stronger position than many other similar bodies, both financially and in terms of its reputation, a situation that could not have been anticipated at the onset of the Covid pandemic. My thanks on behalf of members and clubs go to all the staff team for their enthusiasm and hard work and to the board for the support they provide.

The period from April 2021 to the end of March 2022 was one of change, as remaining Covid restrictions were removed with a resumption of activities for the members, clubs, staff and board of Mountaineering Scotland. There was a welcome return to The Granary for Stuart and the office team, a restart of training courses for members and clubs and a return to a full range of climbing activities, including RealRock and competition climbing, for young people through the ClimbScotland program.

The pressures on the outdoors due to increased visitor numbers continued, even as Covid measures were relaxed, and saw several difficult issues emerge, including some related to access which will take time to be resolved and additional leverage by working with other bodies. There was also ongoing vigilance and review of planning applications to look out for inappropriate developments with the potential to impact on hills and mountains, once again working in collaboration with other organisations, where appropriate, to oppose such proposals.

Continuing the theme of change, we bade farewell to Mountain Safety Adviser Heather Morning who took up the post of Chief Instructor at Glenmore Lodge. We wish Heather well in this important role. This brought forward the planned review of our mountain safety programme resulting in a reconfiguration of the team and their responsibilities, including additional support for the Mountain Safety Group. At board level, Kat Jones stepped down at the AGM in November 2021, having completed her 4-year term as a volunteer Director Member Services and Communications. Our thanks and best wishes also go to Kat.

An important focus for the board and staff this year was the development of a new strategy for Mountaineering Scotland, with a key theme of equality, diversity and inclusion. This supported our successful application for funding from **sportscotland** from 2022-25 and includes an initiative to improve upon how we engage, with not just our members and clubs, but beyond into the wider community. The new strategy will lead to some changes in how we work in mountain safety, in ClimbScotland and across all the work that we do through a new operational plan for the period 2022-2025.

In conclusion, I can report that Mountaineering Scotland is in good health both financially and organisationally but caution that there are challenges ahead for us. Our three year agreement for public liability insurance ends in 2022 with the prospect of greatly increased premiums in future to maintain the same level of cover. We also face increasing costs to provide members with Scottish Mountaineer magazine in its present format, as well as inflationary pressures elsewhere in the organisation. I am confident we can address these challenges by exploring the options open to us and being clear and honest about the best and most sustainable ways forward for everyone involved with Mountaineering Scotland.

Brian Shackleton

President, Mountaineering Scotland

## **Our membership**

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Membership grew significantly throughout the 2021-22 financial year, exceeding 15,000 members for the first time in October 2021 and ending the year with a total of 15,630 members, an increase of 11% compared to the previous year.

Club membership also recovered well (+15%) after a challenging year in 2020-21, with student and youth climbing clubs resuming activities and many hill walking clubs attracting new members as people enjoyed the benefits of the outdoors following the lockdowns.

### **Support for members**

- Feedback from the member survey 2021 was used to inform the development of our new strategy for 2022-25.
- Worked with our supplier, Herald & Times Group, to ensure Scottish Mountaineer reached members in both print and digital formats.
- Surveyed members' views on the future of Scottish Mountaineer in early 2022.
- Upgraded JustGo, our members portal and database, to make full use of new features including simplified family membership.

### **Support for clubs**

- Annual club survey in Feb 2022 provided feedback from clubs, their priorities and support needs.
  - Facilitated club networking and dialogue through quarterly online club calls and the Club Organisers Facebook group.
  - Celebrated affiliated clubs and raised awareness of the benefits of club membership through social media during the first ever 'Club Month' in 2021.
  - Consulted with clubs on the development of a club code of conduct and guidance for dealing with complaints within a club.
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## Our communications

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**48,500** Website visits/month

**19,049** E-zine subscribers

**31,025** Facebook page likes

**19,900** Twitter followers

**9,750** Instagram followers

**9** Online events

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2021-22 was a very busy year for our Member Services & Communications Team, as the surge in popularity of outdoor activities, and particularly hill walking, continued. Visits to our websites increased by 37%, with more young people (18-24) accessing information on the Mountaineering Scotland website.

With many more people getting out into the hills came some inevitable challenges especially around safety and access. In response to this, we adapted our seasonal messaging to align with national campaigns and devised some innovative new ways to engage with people and provide relevant information to help them enjoy the outdoors safely and responsibly.

### **Sofa 2 Summit**

Launched in June 2021, Sofa 2 Summit is our free seven-part online guide for people new to hill walking. The aim was to provide basic, relevant information for people new to hill walking, making it accessible, fun and engaging. 450 people took part in the program between June and November 2021. Of these, 30% were existing members of Mountaineering Scotland and 70% were non-members.

### **Webinars**

Our spring 'Skills for the Hills' talks moved online, with Mountain Safety Advisor Ben Gibson presenting two webinars in April 2021 attended by 384 people, far more than we would

ever reach through the usual in-store talks. An 'Introduction to rock climbing' webinar in partnership with Glenmore Lodge attracted another 86 people and two winter skills talks in January 2022, which ran alongside a return to instore talks at Tiso, Craigdon Mountain Sports and Cotswold Outdoor stores, were attended by over 600 people. The webinars also proved very successful in reaching non-members, who accounted for more than half of the 1,111 who attended.

### **#RespectProtectEnjoy and #ThinkWINTER!**

Through our involvement in visitor management groups and the National Access Forum, we supported the 'Respect Protect Enjoy' campaign launched by Nature Scot and other national agencies, which encourages visitors to respect other people, protect the environment and enjoy the outdoors responsibly. By using the #RespectProtectEnjoy hashtag and a similar style of graphics with simple messages relevant to hill walkers, climbers and wild campers, there was a consistency of style and messaging that people recognised and engaged with. This was so successful we continued the theme into our 2021-22 ThinkWINTER campaign, which a reach of over 1 million on Facebook alone.

# Respecting Scotland's Mountains

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## Championing access rights

- Of the **104 access enquiries** we received in 2021-22, a significant number were related to vehicular access and accessibility for walking and climbing, rather than access obstructions themselves. Car parking availability and roadside verge parking were matters high on the rural agenda, with restrictions imposed in places to limit the number of visitors.
- While not strictly an access issue, accessibility to the countryside is clearly a matter of national importance for visitors and residents alike.
- We met with Perth & Kinross Council about the parking restrictions on some rural roads which were designed to deal with roadside camping but have had the unintended effect of restricting parking for routes to popular Munros and Corbetts. The Council are now aware of the key points and have agreed to look at solutions when resources are available.
- Matters not compliant with the Scottish Outdoor Access Code were reported to local authority Access Officers, but these can take time to resolve due to limited local authority resources.
- Nesting bird updates continued, with some discussion with raptor study groups about early precautionary notices on long-established crags.

## Strathfarrar winter vehicle access

After the Covid-19 travel restrictions were lifted, we sought the opportunity to revisit the winter vehicle access arrangement to Glen Strathfarrar for Mountaineering Scotland members, to balance the commercial interests of the estate whilst enabling mountaineers and hillwalkers to access the hills responsibly.

Estate staff proposed some restrictive conditions on vehicular access which we felt were unacceptable. A meeting in December 2021 highlighted a difference of opinion about some aspects of the access agreement, although there was constructive discussion about the suggested terms of access proposed.



Slow progress in negotiations after Christmas hadn't reached any final agreement, but we were hopeful that a conclusion would be forthcoming in the summer of 2022 following further discussions.

### **Leanachan Forest and access to Aonach Mor**

We continue to press for foot access to Aonach Mor from the north through Leanachan Forest, avoiding the downhill mountain biking trails. A site visit with the local Forestry and Land Scotland manager was arranged to discuss the situation and options available, with a report being produced stating the case for creating foot access up and down the hillside. Forestry Land Scotland is now discussing foot access with the Nevis Range ski resort.

### **Reiff, near Achiltibuie**

Climbing at the popular sea cliffs has been difficult to access due to blockage of the roadside verge – where climbers traditionally park – with agricultural machinery by a local crofter. We raised this with The Highland Council who informed the crofter that the machinery must be removed, but removal has been slow and may continue to cause parking problems for both climbers and residents. We also contacted the elected Councillors for the area requesting their assistance in seeking a solution, firstly to clear the obstructions and reinstate the traditional parking space, and secondly to find dedicated parking space to avoid this happening again in future. The Councillor representing the area is in discussion with the Community Council on this matter.

### **Climbing in Newtyle Quarry**

Following discussions with Perth & Kinross Council and the quarry operator on the landscaping of Newtyle Quarry, Dunkeld, it was agreed that climbing routes there would be reinstated after rock extraction is finished.

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## Forestry and access to hills and summits

- Representations were made on **23** forestry proposals, either new planting schemes, or felling and restocking of existing forest plantations.
  - The main focus of comments was consideration for informal routes up and down hillsides. Many schemes undertake a desk study of Core Path and Rights of Way, but often overlook lines taken through woodlands to nearby summits. Munros have been included as a destination in recent plans, but there are also the other hill tops that are more popular than consultants may realise when drawing up their plans for crossing points.
  - There were **14** enquiries about deer stalking and forestry plantation issues regarding high deer fences crossing informal path, with no gates, and locked gates on tracks with no easy way over.
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## Representing mountaineering interests

- Regularly attended and contributed to National Access Forum meetings and participated in reviewing the guidance on managing camping with tents, and future funding for upland paths.
  - Active member of the Scottish Outdoor Recreation Alliance, an informal group of organisations with common interest in outdoor recreation matters.
  - Met with Scottish Forestry, Forestry and Land Scotland and Confor, the industry body, to discuss recreational access provision and consultations on new forestry planting proposals.
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## Protecting mountain landscapes

**117** development planning cases reviewed in 2021-22. Some required a quick review and no action, others required detailed assessment and a considered response. They were predominantly windfarm proposals with some associated powerlines, and forestry plans.

**52 windfarm cases** at different stages of the planning process were reviewed this year. A trend that was noted was schemes granted consent but not built, then subsequently resubmitted back into the process for more turbines or taller turbines once the principle of a windfarm at that location was accepted.

**10 objections to windfarm proposals** have been submitted by Mountaineering Scotland in the past 3- 4 years as having an unacceptable impact on mountain landscape. Many thanks to the volunteers who have put in a huge amount of time and effort into reviewing proposals and submitting formal

## Mountain safety & skills

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- **699** places on **57** mountain skills courses
  - **244** members learned basic navigation skills
  - **136** attended winter skills, winter navigation or avalanche awareness training
  - **More than 50%** of course attendees were women
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### Supporting Clubs

#### Club skills training

- **31** training days delivered to
- **16** affiliated clubs for
- **141** club members

#### University and college clubs

213 University and College club members benefitted from mountain skills and safety training through our student courses and the St John Scotland Mountain Safety Program

<b>St John Scotland program</b>	<b>SMART weekend</b>	<b>Student winter skills</b>	<b>Student winter climbing</b>
90 students 10 weekends	70 students	40 students	13 students

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### Talks and online events

- **641** people reached through 2 winter skills webinars
  - **384** people attended 2 online spring 'Skills for the hills' talks
  - **86** people joined an 'Intro to rock climbing' webinar
  - **6** winter skills talks at Tiso, Cotswold Outdoor and Craigdon Mountain Stores
  - **Over £1600 raised** from ticket sales for local Mountain Rescue Teams and SARDA
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## **Review of Mountain Safety**

2021-22 year saw some changes in the Mountaineering Scotland Mountain Safety team and our mountain safety program. Heather and Ben did a great job adapting our courses to comply with Covid restrictions and continued to deliver quality mountain skills training for members throughout the year. There was great demand for support in upskilling new club members and refreshing the skills of the longer standing members to combat 'skill fade', with Ben delivering 31 training days for 16 different clubs, covering a wide range of mountaineering skills including basic navigation, winter skills, scrambling and ropework.

Some of the headlines for the year include the number of women outnumbering men on our mountain skills courses, and especially so in our St John Scotland Mountain Safety program, where 55% of participants were young women. Our online talks in winter and spring proved an excellent way to reach non-members and were well attended, with nearly 1,000 people joining the webinars.

Our work in partnership with the Mountain Safety Group (MSG) continued to address key safety issues, delivering seasonal mountain safety messages through campaigns such as ThinkWINTER! and engaging with the public through radio, TV, social media and press releases.

During the preparation of the new strategic plan for 2022-25, it was recognised that a comprehensive review of mountain safety provision was required and this was accelerated by the departure of Heather Morning after 13 years at Mountaineering Scotland to a new role with Glenmore Lodge. Thanks to the work by volunteer Director for Mountain Safety Nigel Clark, and supported by the staff team, we were able to complete the review and deliver draft recommendations to the board for consideration early in the new year 2022.

The main change has been a move to increase our in-house capacity by creating a new staffing structure, with Ben Gibson increasing his hours as Mountain Safety Adviser and the creation of two additional part time posts which have been filled by Kirsty Pallas as Mountain Safety Adviser to support the delivery of our courses, and Ross Cadie in the senior role to manage the team and lead our strategic support for the work of the MSG.

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## **Quotes from mountain skills course participants:**

*“The quality of the teaching and the use made of the conditions to provide learning opportunities was fantastic. I came away with greater confidence to head out in winter and in my skills and abilities.”*

*“I absolutely loved the course. I’ve been really worried about my skills for navigating and lack confidence. After my course yesterday I feel like I could take the plunge and go it alone.”*

*“I thoroughly enjoyed the course, great content very well delivered.”*

*“We are excited about the changes ahead following the review and delighted to have such a well-qualified and experienced team in place to drive our mountain safety programme forward.”*

## ClimbScotland

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- **8479** downloads of the ScotRock podcast in over **40** countries world-wide
  - **130** young climbers took part in **4** rounds of the Youth Climbing Series 2021
  - **23** members of the Scottish Youth Climbing Team took part in the 2021 Youth Climbing Series Grand Final in Southampton
  - **48** young people to learn to climb outdoors at **17** RealRock climbing sessions
  - **18** adult members attended 4 Ready to Rock sessions to make the move from indoor to outdoor climbing
  - **15** Fundas coaching workshops delivered for **135** participants
  - **4** new climbing walls opened with support from ClimbScotland
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### Our work with Urban Uprising

Our partnership with Urban Uprising is one of our most important and influential, providing the opportunity for young people, from all backgrounds, to climb.

Urban Uprising run indoor climbing sessions in 10-week blocks at various centres in Scotland, including The Climbing Academy, Eden Rock and Transition Extreme. Sessions are offered to local schools and community support groups for children from all ethnic, social and educational backgrounds, and additional support needs. During the 2021 season we worked closely with Urban Uprising to expand on their brilliant work and offer something new and sustainable to their program – an outdoor climbing session at the end of each block at an appropriate local crag such as Bennybeg, Blackford Quarry or Auchinstarry Quarry.

During this pilot program, we met with Urban Uprising 3 times and offered that outdoor climbing experience to 20 children between the ages of 10 and 17. For all of these young people this was their first experience of outdoor climbing and they found the experience exhilarating. Following from this success we plan to expand further and offer these sessions to all Urban Uprising groups in 2022. We look forward to working more with them and helping to make an impact on the lives of young people.

## **RealRock 2021**

RealRock outdoor climbing sessions for the under 18's were one of the first activities re-introduced by the ClimbScotland team in 2021. The program has been running for over two decades now and has never failed to inspire the next generation, myself (Robert MacKenzie) included, offering young people the chance to try different forms of climbing and introduce the variety of pathways in this sport.

Every year, hundreds of young people take part in indoor climbing competitions and coaching events, but these are not for everyone, and we see many dropping out over time. If young people don't have experience of anything else that climbing can offer, we may end up losing them from the sport altogether, which impacts on our goal of lifelong participation. Offering outdoor climbing is one of the most important ways to do this, as its so far removed from what they may have experienced before.

In 2021, we took the opportunity to shake things up and offer a much more progressive program that encompassed all of what outdoor climbing has to offer, from taster sessions for first timers, to learning to lead climb on Sport and Trad, to multipitch days in the mountains. With sessions at 12 different climbing venues, we introduced 48 young people to climbing on 8 different rock types, giving an introduction to the full range of what Scottish climbing has to offer. 62% of these attendees were girls who we hope are inspired to continue climbing and go on to inspire the next generation of female climbers.

“Still buzzing from it” – Quote of the year!

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## **Developing the sport of climbing**

- Supported Scottish Disability Sports and Active Stirling to deliver their ParaSports Festival
- Achieved a 50:50 gender balance in our route setters development pathway
- Reintroduced the Scottish National Bouldering League using the Griptonite app
- Worked in partnership with BMC and Mountaineering Ireland to develop and launch the all-nation boulder and lead climbing series



- The ClimbScotland Fun Comp made its post-covid return at 11 host walls across Scotland
- Supported the development of the Scottish Dry Tooling Club
- Created and launched a series of 'AutoBelay safety' and 'Myth-buster' videos on YouTube

## Our organisation

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Mountaineering Scotland have once again delivered strongly against both the organisational objectives and the financial strategy, finishing the year with a strong surplus of £39,763 to help bolster the global financial pressures felt by the organisation, while remaining committed to freezing membership subscriptions for a third year.

A conservative budget had been prepared as many uncertainties around the impact of Covid remained and continued to affect through 2021 and early into 2022. The budget was closely monitored throughout the year and forecasts adjusted to reflect the changing landscape.

### Income and Expenditure

<b>For the period 1 Apr - 31 Mar</b>	<b>2021-22</b>	<b>2020-21</b>
<b>INCOME</b>		
Membership	£333,768	£312,114
Grants	£225,350	£231,100
Other income	£32,513	£14,567
<b>Total income</b>	<b>£591,631</b>	<b>£557,781</b>
<b>EXPENSES</b>		
Staff costs	£379,357	£376,920
Civil liability insurance	£79,596	£64,477
Magazine costs	£17,940	£11,800
Other costs	£74,975	£75,291
<b>Total expenses</b>	<b>£551,868</b>	<b>£528,488</b>
<b>Net Surplus/(Deficit)</b>	<b>£39,763</b>	<b>£29,293</b>

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### Our Income

Membership subscriptions (51%):	£333,767
Sportscotland grant (34%):	£225,350
Income from events (14%):	£26,180
Other (1%):	£6,334
<b>Total:</b>	<b>£591,631</b>

- As a not-for-profit organisation we rely on your subscriptions to support the work we do on behalf of all our members. A growth in individual memberships (+ 8%) and a

strong return of club memberships (+15%) has boosted income, making up 51% of our total income this year.

- SportsScotland investment was slightly higher than the 2020-21 investment at £225,350 (+2%) but that included some unbudgeted further funding secured to support inflationary pressures. This funding supports our Mountain Safety programme, ClimbScotland and our member services, and represents 38% of our total income for 2021-22. By way of comparison, the previous year's **sports**scotland investment of £221,100 represented 40% of income.
- Other income includes surplus from Mountain Safety courses and ClimbScotland events, sponsorship and donations from members.

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## Our Expenditure

Office and administration costs:	£188.4k
ClimbScotland and sports development:	£160.2k
Liability insurance:	£79.6k
Landscape & Access:	£70k
Mountain safety program:	£53.6k
<b>Total:</b>	<b>£551,868</b>

- Increased operating costs, insurance premiums rising beyond forecast and the ramping up of operations since Covid restrictions were eased have all added significant pressure to the accounts.
- Office and administration costs were tightly controlled amongst rising utility, factoring and administrative costs alongside some savings in maintenance and office service contracts to offset this (2% increase from 2021).
- Costs for civil liability insurance increased from £64,477 to £79,596 (23% increase).
- Expenditure on mountain safety and ClimbScotland activities returned to levels similar to pre-Covid (2019 comparison).

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Additional investment in our IT ensured day to day operations have been sustained through the lockdown periods and allowed for hybrid working for staff as we made a gradual

return to The Granary. Staff wellbeing has continued to be an ongoing concern over the last year with an emphasis on flexible working to accommodate individual circumstances and the impact of Covid itself on the team. Despite all the challenges the team have worked hard to ensure services have returned to normal and the board have recognised the dedication and effort of all our staff and volunteers in delivering positive financial and membership results, and also a wider range of activities and services on behalf of our members.

A major focus for Mountaineering Scotland during 2021 was the development of a new strategic plan to guide the organisation over the next three years. This formed the basis of our investment proposal to Sportscotland which was submitted in September 2021 and presented to the review panel on 20 October by Brian Shackleton (President) and Stuart Younie (CEO).

Early in the new year the request for additional investment from sportscotland was confirmed, allowing us to redirect existing resources into the provision of additional support to clubs to help get more children, young people and families participating in climbing and hill walking and enable us to build our performance pathway for competitive climbers. This will also mean we can provide further support for under-represented groups to widen participation and address equality, diversity and inclusion in mountaineering. We have also committed to establishing a Climbing Advisory Group which will support the development of outdoor climbing in both summer and winter.

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## **Our people**

- **15,630** members
- **7,929** Individual members
- **7,701** Members of affiliated clubs
- **148** Affiliated clubs
- **83** Associate members
- **12** Staff
- **10** Volunteer Directors

## Our thanks go to...

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- All the members and freelance instructors who support our mountain safety and skills courses.
- The many dedicated volunteers that support youth climbing clubs, competitions, affiliated clubs and club huts.
- All the members of the Scottish Climbing Wall Network, especially those that host competitions and events.

Our partners: **sportscotland**, DMM, Scottish Mountain Rescue, Glenmore Lodge, Mountain Training Scotland, Association of Mountaineering Instructors, St John Scotland, Police Scotland, Mountain Weather Information Service, Met Office Aberdeen, Mountain Skills and Safety Scotland, Scottish Avalanche Information Service, Herald & Times Group, Snowsport Scotland, Developing Mountain Biking in Scotland, Mill Cottage Trust, The Munro Society, Scottish Mountaineering Trust, The Winter Sports Legacy Trust, NICAS, Association of British Climbing Walls, GB Climbing, BDO, BMC, Mountaineering Ireland, Tiso, Cotswold Outdoor, Craighon Mountain Sports, Rab Equipment.



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