

THE MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL OF SCOTLAND ANNUAL REPORT 2007-08

President's Overview - Chris Townsend

Following incorporation of the MCofS the last year has been one of consolidation, reorganisation and, frankly, learning how the 'new' MCofS should work and how it can best serve the interests of both members and the wider mountaineering community. This has meant considering a whole welter of paperwork - plans, statements, projects, frameworks - out of which should come a better and more efficient organisation. Significant in all this are the research with members and stakeholders and the Mountaineering Development Framework, which will all guide the MCofS in the next few years.

Personally, I was particularly pleased with the membership survey. Obviously, to know that members feel the MCofS is doing a good job is welcome but I was also delighted that conservation and access came at the top of members' concerns as I feel that these issues encompass the biggest challenges to mountaineering. With access it is a question of ensuring that the superb legislation that we have is not overridden by landowners wishing to develop private enclosed safari parks or other commercial schemes that restrict access in our hills. As regards conservation the threats to the mountains are greater than ever, particularly from wind farms, pylons and bulldozed tracks. Anyone who has looked towards Glen Affric from the Creag Meagaidh hills will know how intrusive wind farms are as a new giant construction above Glen Moriston now draws the eye and destroys what was once an expansive and glorious Highland vista. Campaigning to prevent more developments in the mountains is essential if we are to preserve the magnificent Scottish mountain landscape for the future. The slow process of attrition that has been ongoing for many decades is speeding up and the next few years will be crucial for the preservation of the hills. The MCofS should be at the forefront of campaigns for the mountains.

A clear message from our surveys and reports is that communication is very important and we have been working to improve this in every respect - between the Board, Executive, staff, non-executive volunteers, members and non-members with mountaineering interests. This year has seen the launch of the new website, which should aid communication, and there are other plans being developed. Communication is a two-way process of course and anyone - member, volunteer, staff - who has concerns or wishes to comment on some aspect of the MCofS is welcome to contact me.

Mountain safety is also a prime concern and there has been much valuable work in the last year, especially the securing of funding for the excellent Mountain Weather Information Service. There is and always will be a continuing need to provide information, advice and training to enable us to act as safely as possible without compromising the freedom that is essential to mountaineering.

The work of the MCofS would be impossible without our team of dedicated staff and volunteers and I would like to thank all of them for the huge amount of work undertaken, something I did not fully appreciate until I became President. There is not space to name everyone but I would like to mention Mary Webster, Chair of the Mountain Safety Committee, as her term of office ends at the AGM. As a Vice-President and Board Member Mary has done an astonishing amount of work that reaches far beyond mountain safety and she deserves all our thanks. Peter Willimott and Susan Jensen end their terms on the Executive and Derek Edge, who has also served as Honorary Treasurer, is standing down as Company Secretary. All three have devoted much time and effort to the MCofS and deserve our gratitude. I hope that they will continue to be involved with the MCofS for many years to come.

Treasurer's Report - John Irving

This new Treasurer has been fortunate to inherit a healthy set of accounts from Derek Edge who, with the help of Denise Logan, has set up an efficient accounting system. I am grateful to Denise for her diligence and to David Gibson for support and help during the year. Denise and David, together with Jane Anderson, run a very effective office. Last, but not least, my grateful thanks to the officers and volunteers who have been most careful in their expenditure during the year.

A summary of the main features of the finances has been prepared, based on the full accounts for the period 17th June 2007 to 31st March 2008. Accounts for the period 1st April 2007 up to the incorporation on 17th June 2007 were published in the *Scottish Mountaineer* in the autumn. As the turnover is below the statutory threshold, the accounts do not need to be formally audited but have to be certified as true and accurate by an independent accountant. The accounts are currently with Johnston & Co. of Bo'ness and their appointment as the MCofS's accountants remains to be confirmed at the forthcoming AGM.

Income

Overall income has increased by just over 10%, the main contributions coming from increased investment by sportscotland, a 3% increase in individual membership income and a 50% increase in bank interest.

With incorporation, access to a high interest bearing account is available. Two bank accounts are now held with the Bank of Scotland, a 'working' deposit account with the balance of funds in a high interest account. Internet banking is now available for payments and inter-account transfers. Invoices will increasingly be paid electronically.

Expenditure

The increased income from sportscotland is reflected in the increased expenditure, e.g. the Mountain Weather Information Service. Salaries increased by 3% but other costs were significantly less - committee expenses reduced by £2,000, officers' expenses by about £2,000 and there was no AGM cost in this period (£4,000).

It had been anticipated that further investment would be required for the membership database. However, the Executive decided to withdraw from participation in a joint database project involving the mountaineering councils and training boards in the UK with a resultant estimated saving of £10,000. Alternative membership database software is being considered.

Reserves

Under good practice guidelines, limited companies are expected to hold reserves of about 30-40% of turnover. The current level of reserves (£80,000) is satisfactory.

Budget for 2008/2009

Increased costs are anticipated in the next financial year with a projected overspend of £40,000. The main drivers for this are computing costs, restructuring as per the Strategic Plan and the loss of the SNH grant for the Access and Conservation Officer. The survey of members showed strong support for access and conservation work. This indicates that members might wish to pay for this rather than accept funding from government agencies. Potential conflicts of interest have occurred in the past.

Club per capita fee income has been decreasing (-5% in 2007/2008). The disparity - £17 per year - between individual member and club member subscriptions has increased to a level that I believe to be unfair.

The suggestion, sent to all club secretaries in April, is that the club per capita subscription should increase to £13 from September 2008. Whilst recommending this increase, I am pleased to report that following an assessment of risks, particularly those relating to club activities, we

shall provide an increase in civil liability insurance cover up to £10 million per incident as from the policy renewal in September 2008.

Finally, on behalf of the Board I wish to convey our thanks to sportscotland, the Scottish Mountaineering Trust, Scottish Natural Heritage and the BMC for their investment in our activities.

The summary accounts can be found on page 8

Senior Officer's Report - David Gibson

As you will read elsewhere in this report, the last year has seen a good deal of research, planning, change and development. This work lays strong foundations for the future of the MCofS and the Strategic Plan, approved by the Executive in March 2008, is the cornerstone.

A key part of the strategy - the Mountaineering Development Framework - will focus on enabling the MCofS to support those who wish to develop their experience, skills and knowledge in all mountaineering disciplines. It will also aim to assist clubs to be sustainable and recognise that clubs provide an environment where individuals may achieve personal progression and enjoy the companionship that clubs provide for those who enjoy the hills.

The past year also brought a number of notable achievements, which demonstrate that the MCofS is making some real progress. These include:

- The launch of the new website - now achieving over 23,000 visits a month.
- Real growth in membership to over 10,000.
- Working with the Scottish Mountain Safety Forum to secure investment for the Mountain Weather Information Service, worth £125,000 over three years.
- Developing the Mountaineering Development Framework plans for mountain walking, climbing and ski-mountaineering.
- Providing clubs and every individual member with a certificate of insurance.

Following approval of the Strategic Plan, the officers are now implementing an Operating Plan that was endorsed by the Executive in June. Much progress has been made in the last 12 months and there is good reason for optimism, but it is worth remembering that plans alone don't accomplish anything. Our plans will succeed or fail because of the people involved.

My thanks, therefore, go to the volunteers, staff and stakeholder representatives who have made this progress possible. We have a small but committed team of knowledgeable paid staff who all work very hard at achieving their individual goals. Volunteers make a tremendous contribution to the management and activities of the MCofS. The Executive, members of the various committees, and particularly the Board, put in a tremendous amount of unpaid work on behalf of you, the members.

The MCofS Articles of Association require that your elected representatives stand down after a period in office. This means that the MCofS has a continual need for members who are willing to volunteer their time to support and develop our services for members. Please consider whether you can make a personal contribution to the work of the MCofS on behalf of your fellow members. There is a wide range of interesting opportunities available and a wide range of experience and knowledge is always required. Time is a precious resource and your time will be precious to the MCofS. If you think you can help in any way, please do not hesitate to contact me at the MCofS office.

Membership Services Committee - Brenda Clough

In my last report as the new Chair of the Membership Services Committee I referred to the need to undertake further research to find out what you wanted from us as your representative organisation. During the course of the year we have undertaken research not only into members'

views but also into the views of those organisations with which we work most closely and whose opinions matter to us.

The membership research told us a lot about who you are and what type of activities you undertake. It also told us that the *Scottish Mountaineer* and civil liability insurance are regarded as important membership benefits. However, the most important benefit identified was the work that we do on your behalf - the work we do on promoting conservation of mountain environments, together with safeguarding access and other landscape issues. Our lobbying on these issues with government and other agencies is work that you fully endorse and we have taken this on board in putting together our new Strategic Plan. Promoting safety also came out high on your agenda but you also consider that providing you with information is one of our most important roles and that is an area of work that the Membership Services Committee will continue to take forward.

Most of you were aware of the website but it seems that it is presently not widely used by members, so the site has had a complete makeover during the year. Duncan Gray, the webmaster of our old site, assisted by Peter Willimott, the MCofS staff and Image Logistics (the website designer and host) collaborated closely on creating the new site and transferring material from the old site. MCofS staff have been trained in the use of the content management software and regularly update the site contents. We hope that the website will be used more in the future as the main source of information for members.

The research with stakeholder organisations also provided food for thought and made us realise that we have still a long way to go before we become *the* influential central mountaineering body in Scotland. Both pieces of research indicated that we need to appeal more to casual hill users and over the coming months we will be undertaking research with this group to find out why most hill users are not members and if they have even heard about us.

Research is not all that we have done through the year. We have set out a fundraising strategy and produced a leaflet to try and persuade mountaineers to think about leaving a legacy to one of our two associated charities. A small group has also taken on the task of organising the annual gathering and I hope that many of you will come to what we hope will be an enjoyable social occasion.

The Huts Working Group continues to do excellent work and over the next year we hope that a newcomer to the committee, Gail Crawford, will take forward our project to achieve the Equity Standard. So my thanks to all the committee members and volunteers for their work over the past year.

Access & Conservation Committee - Hebe Carus

Access and conservation (A&C) work has external funding guaranteed until the end of December 2008. Thereafter we await confirmation of any future external funding. As this report goes to press Richard Spencer, Chair of the A&C Committee, is seeking further funding from a number of sources to support A&C work beyond the end of 2008.

Access

Although functional from February 2005, the Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003 and the associated Scottish Outdoor Access Code are still bedding-in and suffering somewhat from lack of resources, which has meant considerable work to place pressure on access authorities to act on issues of importance to mountaineers. They have been put in a position where they have had to prioritise core path planning and hence resolution of some issues has been slow. 130 unique enquires were raised and the majority of these have been dealt with but there are a number of longstanding issues that are being tackled through a more involved process, particularly Glen Lyon, Glen Dessary, Braemore and Glen Doe. Some of these issues are being dealt with at the local level, and others at the national level. This has involved Local Access Forums (LAFs) and the National Access Forum (NAF) respectively. The A&C Officer presented to NAF a paper on

provision of stalking information, and Beryl Leatherland participated in a subgroup dealing with camping. A workshop was held in order to support those involved in representing mountaineering interests on LAFs.

The Hillphones service continues to be an important area of work, a key aspect of which is monitoring of message content. Many thanks are due to Dougal Roy for assisting with monitoring and he has also put in much work this year on preparing a partnership bid to Scottish Natural Heritage for a web version of *Heading for the Scottish Hills*.

Conservation

The Beaully-Denny enquiry hearing was eventually completed at the end of 2007 and the outcome is expected about the end of 2008. We are indebted to the many individual members and clubs whose contributions helped raise funds to fight our case against the developer's proposals. Other developments to which the A&C committee has responded have included a number of renewable energy projects, the prime mover being Beryl Leatherland to whom we offer many thanks. Reports also continued to come in regarding bulldozed tracks in the uplands. It appears that the planning authorities see these as low priority unless in designated areas and, despite pressure from us, there is little that can be done without a change in legislation. The A&C Officer is currently seeking ways to influence this through raising the profile of the value of wild land.

All responses to consultations have been posted on the website, together with current consultations. We urge all mountaineers to involve themselves in these consultations. 21 responses were made to local and national issues that would potentially affect the mountaineering environment. We contribute to other responses through Scottish Environment LINK in order to increase our sphere of influence and MCofS is represented on LINK task forces: Biodiversity and Access (Hebe Carus), Landscape (Beryl Leatherland) and the Scottish Environmental Funding Forum (Richard Spencer).

With assistance from a committee subgroup, the A&C Officer has been working on making the 21 pages of policies inherited from the unincorporated MCofS into a shorter, more succinct and digestible A&C Position Statement. A start was made on updating all the advice leaflets and numerous articles were written for the magazine and the website. Writers from organisations of interest to mountaineers were invited to contribute articles to the *Scottish Mountaineer* on various aspects of access and conservation.

Representation on other bodies

MCofS is a small organisation with many interests; members of the committee and the A&C Officer represent the MCofS on a wide range of external bodies. In addition to LINK, mentioned above, these are: Access and Conservation Trust, Deer Commission for Scotland Round Table, Local Access Forums (Argyll & Bute, Fife, Loch Lomond & Trossachs National Park, Ross), MoD Scottish Liaison Committee, Montane Scrub Advisory Group, National Access Forum, National Trust for Scotland Council, Nevis Partnership, Perthshire Alliance for the Real Cairngorms (PARC), Scottish Natural Heritage Non-Governmental Organisation Liaison Group, Traprain Law Advisory Group, Upland Path Advisory Group, Upland Path Trust.

Mountain Safety Committee - Mary Webster

Regarding 'mountain safety' - we do not aim to make the mountains 'safe' for users or expect users to be completely 'safe' on the mountains. There can be no adventure without risk. We uphold the right of mountaineers to participate in a risk sport. The aim is to help mountaineers to develop self-reliance, awareness of hazards and improvement of their technical skills as they seek wider adventure on the hills.

For this purpose various initiatives and events take place during the year. As a first step the five navigation courses (with 12 participants per course) in the autumn provide an introduction. A first aid course, three weekend winter skills courses at Glenmore Lodge, three

avalanche awareness courses and a crevasse rescue course give more serious progression. The university students' autumn weekend seminar attracted 59 students and, together with the safety talks to university clubs, balances an enthusiasm for adventure with practical reminders of the skills and techniques required. In February an additional winter skills course for 68 students took place to enhance awareness of winter conditions and associated skills. We are indebted to the Catherine Smith Memorial Trust for providing funding to subsidise this course. We also thank the Mill Cottage Trustees for their continuing support of mountain safety initiatives.

The Clachaig Inn lectures provided an insight into the joys of mountaineering together with serious comments on the weather and the skills and equipment required.

A number of radio, television and press releases highlighted the need for a progressive approach to adventure and an awareness of conditions. The Mountain Safety Adviser (MSA), Roger Wild, also provides advice on safety issues to club and individual members.

The new website displays a range of accessible information and is regularly updated by the MSA. After considerable work over the years, funding was obtained in July 2007 for the Mountain Weather Information service. In May 2008 the Scottish Mountain Safety Forum (SMSF) received a report and is pleased with its implementation and the large amount of website traffic. There have been a million forecast downloads in the last twelve months.

Filming took place in June for a *Hill Walking* DVD jointly with the BMC and MLTE and editing is presently underway. This extends the series of DVDs: *Alpine Essentials*, *Winter Essentials* and *Water Hazards*. The *Avalanche Aide Memoire* card, *Emergency Procedures* card and *Winter Check List* card continue to be promoted and distributed. The information sheet *Safety and Liability - Guidance for Clubs* has been updated and is now on the website.

After four years as Vice President and Chair of the Mountain Safety Committee, I come to the end of my term at the AGM in September. The achievements during this time are due primarily to our knowledgeable and efficient Mountain Safety Adviser, Roger Wild, to whom I offer sincere thanks for his hard work, especially in arranging well-organised and successful events. I have also greatly appreciated the time and the expertise provided by all the members of the MCofS Mountain Safety Committee - my warm thanks to all of them. I also thank the members of the Scottish Mountain Safety Forum, which acts as a liaison group between the MCofS and other bodies with a key role in mountain safety, for their advice and assistance during my time as Chair. Together, the MCofS can promote good practice on the Scottish mountains.

Representation on other bodies

Mountain Leader Training Scotland: Three members of the Executive are on the MLTS Board and MLTS is a paper member of the Executive and welcome to attend any committee meetings. Our two Scottish mountaineering bodies work closely together. The training for Mountain Leader awards is a recognised way to acquire and improve mountaineering skills.

Mountain Leader Training UK: A member of the Mountain Safety Committee represents the MCofS on this UK-wide organisation. Its four meetings per year bring together the four home nation Training Boards and the mountaineering councils, BMC, MCofI and MCofS, providing a sharing of ideas.

The MSA also represents MCofS on the British Association of Mountain Guides, the Inland Consultative Committee of the UK Search and Rescue Operators Group, the Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland and the Snow and Avalanche Foundation of Scotland.

'Get Active' Initiatives - Kevin Howett

The Executive Committee decided that the year would be one of transition for sports development initiatives pending the outcome of the Mountaineering Development Framework consultancy

report and the Sports Development Committee was stood down. In the meantime, the Development Officer (DO), Kevin Howett, oversaw completion of a number of ongoing projects.

After the setting up of a National Source Group of the Mountaineering Co-ordination Group (MCG) for the UK and Ireland to investigate coaching in our sport, the DO attended a series of discussions with the BMC, MCofI, training boards, national centres and climbing coaches. To help deliberations two studies on coaching in rock climbing (funded by a sportscotland grant) from two acknowledged experts, Dave MacLeod and Scott Muir were commissioned. A report to the MCG is currently being compiled.

The MCofS expedition grants for 2007/8 were awarded to the British Ruth Gorge expedition, the Scottish Dan Beard expedition, the Scottish Mountaineering Club East Greenland expedition and to Jonathan Stocking for competition training and attendance at the World Youth Competitions in Sydney in 2008.

It was agreed in principle some time ago to change the expedition awards scheme to encompass a greater range of disciplines. This was changed to a 'bursary' and the amount available (from sportscotland) increased to £3,500.

The DO continued to liaise with supported climbing walls at Inverness Leisure and the Edinburgh Indoor Climbing Arena (EICA), Ratho. Funding was secured for a new international competition wall at EICA and the DO gave advice on the changing design specifications of the newly formed International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC). The wall is due for completion in August 2008 and support was given to applications to the IFSC for a series of future international competitions. Liaison with sportscotland continued with regard to funding a new wall design at Perth and the MCofS also helped and advised a developer on research for fulfilling strategic aims for a potential wall in the Borders area.

The MCofS Youth Climbing Series Competition (YCS) 2007 final at EICA in June 2007 saw the best ever results for the Scottish regional teams. For 2008, administration and organisation for the Scottish rounds was transferred from the BMC to the MCofS. There was an increase in the number of competitors in the regional rounds and in the British final in June 2008 Scottish kids gained three first places and the consistently high scoring of the Scotland South Team took them to 2nd place.

Following the example of Wales, Scott Muir inaugurated a Scottish Championship for the YCS children to find the Scottish champions. Supported by MCofS, this was hugely successful and thanks go to the staff at Extreme Dream and the MCofS Area Youth Co-ordinators, Ruairidh Mackenzie and Neil McGeachy.

Through the winter six climbing coaching sessions were set up at Extreme Dream and EICA using elite level climbers and coaches and funding came from a sportscotland grant via the MCofS. More than 40 children attended each session and many parents blamed these sessions for their children doing so well in the YCS final and the British Championships! Scottish children dominated the British Lead Climbing Championships and took four of the top five places, with Jonathan Stocking gaining first place.

A pilot scheme for weekend versions of the MCofS REALRock initiative was thwarted by the exceptionally bad weather last summer. But one REALsport weekend event took place with ten children and five volunteers braving the rain.

The MCofS and BMC endorsed five Scottish climbers to enter various European Ice Master Competitions as individuals. Steven Addison (aged 10) from Inverness became the youngest ever to compete and was a great ambassador for Scots climbers.

The DO worked with the BMC on the 3rd edition of the Walls Manual and wrote a Scottish-specific chapter on legislation, funding and support. The Association of British Climbing Walls Youth Climbing Scheme (NICAS) was endorsed by the MCofS and was launched in May 2008.

The MCofS Visually Impaired Course 2007 saw 10 people engage in canoeing, climbing and walking, along with an equal number of sighted volunteers. Thanks go to Norma Davidson

for co-ordinating the course, Glenmore Lodge for administering and hosting it and the Scottish Mountaineering Trust for providing grant support.

As part of the changeover to the new website the DO designed a 'Get Active' section, amalgamating all previous development news and articles into a more user-friendly format.

Finally, the Mountaineering Development Framework for climbing was completed, which confirms the MCofS's continued support for youth development.

The Mountaineering Council of Scotland		
Summary of non-certified accounts to 31/03/2008		
Income		£
Affiliation fees	Clubs	71,085
	Individual members	48,608
	Associates	1,387
Donations		2,035
Bank interest		4,906
Grants	sportscotland	112,150
	SNH	12,005
Sales and courses		2,392
Less costs		(4,278)
Miscellaneous		1,045
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		<u>£ 251,335</u>
Expenditure		£
sportscotland	Mountain safety	40,000
	MWIS (part year)	21,150
	Expedition grants	3,250
	Research fees	10,972
Expenses	Officers	1,804
	Committees	2,991
Office	Rent/insurance	7,674
	Heat/light/etc	7,216
	Printing/computing	7,727
	Copier	3,829
Civil Liability Insurance		17,994
<i>Scottish Mountaineer</i>		7,741
Salaries + pensions + NIC		87,885
Miscellaneous (marketing, subscriptions, fees)		3,678
Contingency funds		22,500
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		<u>£ 246,411</u>
	Excess of income over expenditure	<u>£ 4,924</u>
*accounting period 17/06/2007 to 31/03/2008		