

Notes from the “Future of BEG” presentation evening – 6 October 2008

Venue – Townhouse Hotel, Melrose.

Present – Jim McPherson, Christine Duncan, Pam Hunter, Ron Sutherland, Nan Lyle, Vicki Moyes, Scott Smellie, Angela Cumming, Allan McGee, Laura Shackleton, Clare Smillie, Carolyn O’Docherty, Margaret Russell, Hannah Dalgleish, Peter Smith, Geraldine Bouglas, Andrew Tullie, Mariel Briggs, Adam Bouglas, Pippa Simmonds, Michele MacDonald, Jono Ellis, Kev Murray, Rachel Elliot, Neil Minton, Ruth Norman, Gayle Tomlinson, Simon Bell

Apologies – Stuart Ruffell, Robert Clifford, Nancy Anderson, Rosie Stewart, Sheena Leslie, Kevin Stewart

Background

At a BEG meeting held on 25 August it was decided that there was a need to have an open discussion about Border Exploration Group, its current set-up, membership and its future. It was agreed that this discussion / meeting would be held on the 6th October in Melrose.

At a “think tank” session in January of this year, it was highlighted that BEG is heavily reliant on the small and committed group of people who are all prepared to make things happen for BEG but for some, this current situation has become unsustainable.

The meeting held on 6 October was to discuss the issues and challenges that BEG is facing at present, and to hopefully come up with some solutions. Although it was a meeting that was open to all, and new members will be made very welcome, it is not a publicity evening as such.

This document covers the points raised during the presentation. The following headings are covered, with more detailed information contained under the topics –

- Introduction to BEG
- Main discussion –
 - Do we want BEG to continue?
 - What are the positives about BEG – what does it do well?
 - What are the negatives about BEG – what could it do better?
 - What can BEG do in the future, to continue to operate and attract more people?
 - What are the potential barriers to delivering these future enhancements?
 - What would make people more likely to get involved in BEG?
 - Of the people who attended the presentation which category(s) do they fall into?

Introduction

The presentation was opened by Vicki Moyes (chairperson of BEG). In her opening comments Vicki gave a brief reminder / introduction of why BEG was founded, and what its principle aims are.

Vicki also provided details of previous expeditions, both International and European, and other local and national events that BEG has organised.

There was then an introduction to the structure of BEG, its members, their roles and those of the committee. Vicki then explained how the pool of people on the committee and those providing help and support had diminished, which had resulted in the same core people doing most / all of the work. This has in turn led to the current issues facing BEG and the need for the evenings presentation.

Main discussion

After the introduction by Vicki, she handed over to Ruth Norman (committee member). Ruth continued with facilitating a discussion session, by asking a series of questions, and then co-ordinating the points raised and answering some questions. The questions posed by Ruth and the points raised during the discussion are detailed in the following pages –

Do we want BEG to continue?

The first question Ruth asked was “Do we want BEG to continue?”. Everyone present agreed that they wanted BEG to continue.

What are the positives about BEG – what does it do well?

- Provides the opportunity to meet new people.
- Can change people’s lives.
- Provides people with the chance to travel.
- It can make people appreciate different cultures.
- Can highlight environmental concerns.
- Gives things back to the local communities visited during expeditions.
- Provides people with personal development.
- Introduces people to new experiences.
- It can be challenging.
- A chance to be part of a team.
- Fundraising, both for individual and group funds.
- It involves the local Borders community.
- It inspires people to do more.
- Takes people off the beaten track.

What are the negatives about BEG – what could it do better?

- It is quite modular – a large group of people come together for an expedition, but after that there is a big drop off in numbers.
- There is not sufficient advertising.
- Lack of awareness in some schools, although this does vary a lot from school to school.

- Doesn't attract a broad range of Venturers with differing levels of skills – it could be perceived that it only attracts high achievers, who would probably go and travel of their own accord anyway.
- Poor communication both within BEG itself and externally.
- The selection process should be reviewed as it could be putting some people off who we would want to attract.
- Needs to sell itself more / better.
- There is a steep learning curve for new leaders. There could be a “starter pack” to introduce them to what is expected of them as a leader, and in their specific roles on the lead up to and during an expedition.
- Too focused on expeditions, could provide other opportunities for people, and a forum for people to discuss other issues.
- There are too few people involved in the day-to-day running of BEG.
- The International expedition could be too long at 5 weeks, and the duration of it should be reviewed to see if this attracts more people (Leaders).
- There is too much administration discussed at BEG meetings. This can get in the way of people discussing the other aspects of BEG.
- People can be intimidated by their perceived “lack” of their own skills.
- It is difficult for people to make long term commitments to be part of the training teams, could people just dip in and out rather than having to commit to all training weekends.
- It appears that people are expected to have an almost “all or nothing” commitment to BEG and its events.
- People are unsure of what is expected of volunteers.

What can BEG do in the future, to continue to operate and attract more people?

- Separate the administration from the activities. Some people felt that the administration gets in the way of the activities.
- A more prominent role of Venturers in the promotion of BEG and the recruitment of others. It was suggested that potential Venturers would pay more attention, and be inspired / motivated by their peers rather than older BEG members.
- There should be a presentation to sponsors after expeditions.
- The introduction of walks / social events to attract future members and keep existing members interested in BEG out with the expeditions.
- Attract more members.
- Come up with some new ideas.
- Provide more details of what is involved in BEG and what roles / responsibilities there would be for people.
- For expeditions, choose the leader team first and see if someone evolves into the chief leader role.
- Provide mentoring for members of the leader team to help them develop and ensure they know what their role is and help them fulfil it.
- A review of the 2 expedition rule. This is a rule within BEG that states that once a Venturer has been on one expedition they are not eligible to go on another one. It is felt that potential Venturers are not applying for the European expedition as this would prevent them going on the International one.
- Provide more local events rather than focusing so much on the main expeditions.
- Provide non-expedition based training weekends to keep members involved and attract new members.

What are the potential barriers to delivering these future enhancements?

- There is not enough time, people who are involved in BEG also have other commitments that limits the amount of time they can devote to BEG.
- People not knowing what to do or what is expected of them.
- Focusing on projects that are too large in scale.
- There is a lack of people to run things.
- The timescales / duration involved in committing to BEG.
- People don't know what they can commit to as they are unsure of what help is needed and what skills are required.
- A need for a discussion form.
- Not adopting technology to help communicate between one another and deliver BEG to others.

What would make people more likely to get involved in BEG?

- Mentoring for people to help them develop their skills and knowledge.
- Documentation to help introduce people to their roles and responsibilities as part of the leader team. This could also help them to fulfil their roles within the team and in the preparation for an expedition.
- An online wish list of help needed, so people would know what they could commit to.
- A welcome pack for people to introduce them to BEG, its aims and objectives. Also provide details of the benefits of being a BEG member, i.e. discounts.
- Get our name 'out there', using website; advertising; schools; churches; other societies etc.

Of the people (26) who attended the presentation which category(s) do they fall into?

- BEG committee – 10 people
- Active in BEG – 13 people
- Non-active BEG members – 2 people
- Former Venturers – 11 people
- Former Leaders – 16 people
- Parents / friends / family – 9 people
- Possible future Leaders – 23 people
- People interested in non expedition events – 26 people