

PRESENTATION

The Nature Access Committee of the Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports (FEDME)

The Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports (FEDME, Federación Española de Deportes de Montaña y Escalada) is a sports federation that was set up in accordance with the Sports Law as a private, non-profit-making legal entity, but with the remit to perform public functions relating to the practice of mountain and climbing sports.

In accordance with its Statutes, the Spanish Federation has been allocated the powers to oversee excursions and treks through the lower, middle and upper reaches of mountain areas, including the pursuits of mountaineering, rambling, rock climbing, canyoning, Nordic skiing, snowshoeing, camping for mountaineering purposes and competitions relating to such sports, including mountain races.

FEDME is made up of 17 federations, each coinciding with the territorial extension of an autonomous region (Andalusia, Aragon, Asturias, The Balearic Islands, The Basque Country, The Canary Islands, Cantabria, Castilla y Leon, Castilla-La Mancha, Catalonia, Extremadura, Galicia, La Rioja, Madrid, Murcia, Navarre, and Valencia) and a further two federations corresponding to the autonomous cities of Ceuta and Melilla.

FEDME has a person responsible for the Nature Access Committee on its Board of Directors. The Nature Access Committee designs the annual strategy and is composed of the people in charge of wildlife issues for all the regional federations, with meetings being held twice a year. The Technical Branch of the Nature Access Committee is responsible for setting up various projects that have been approved, and is composed of six representatives with special qualifications in this area. In order to carry out its activities it currently has a professional member of staff working on a part-time basis.

Traditionally speaking, the relations enjoyed by FEDME with the various administrative bodies responsible for sports management, both at state and regional level, have proved to be satisfactory. Nevertheless, the “playing field” for mountain sports is not regulated by the sports bodies but by the environmental authorities, with whom there never used to be any regular or satisfactory form of contact.

Between 1978 and 1998, Spain went from having around thirty Protected Natural Areas to more than 1000 such areas. This means that many Spanish mountains -our “playing field” - have started to see regulation in various aspects such as access, public use and the practice of mountain and climbing sports, without the people that practise such sports being consulted by environmental managers. The federations integrated in FEDME have 64 representatives serving on governing boards and trustees for Protected Natural Areas.

In 1995, the General Assembly of FEDME adopted the so-called “Declaration of Caceres” , drawing initial attention to the progressive restriction of access to the areas in which mountaineering is practised.

With the aim of mitigating the lack of dialogue between the different parties involved in the practice of mountain sports in protected areas, FEDME, together with The Canary Islands Mountaineering Federation, The Canary Islands Government and the Ministry of the Environment organised the 1st

Seminar on Protected Natural Areas and Mountaineering Sports on the island of Tenerife in December 1999. This brought together representatives from the Regional Organisation for National Parks (Ministry of the Environment), the Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports (leading a delegation of 14 regional federations), the Civil Guard and Ecologists in Action, for the basic purpose of opening up initial lines of communication between sportsmen and environmental managers. These had hitherto been non-existent with the exception of - precisely - the Teide National Park in Tenerife.

With all parties eager to work towards achieving an initial agreement, FEDME was the only party to set out an address in writing, focusing the debate of the Seminar, in which it invited people to reflect on the issue of practising sports activities in Protected Natural Areas from the point of view of the sportsmen involved. After the initial address, discussion moved to the five workgroups, who approved a total of forty-four conclusions. The points on which there was agreement between the mountaineers and the environmental managers seemed to be clear: there was a need to regulate sports activities, rather than banning them, and to do so with good robust arguments wherever these were based on the results of existing studies.

As a result of the 1st edition of the Seminar, talks commenced with the aim of reflecting the conclusions drawn from the conference in specific agreements. One of the lines of work that opened up was that of negotiations concerning mountain refuges to make accommodation facilities in the mountains compatible with the conservation of the environment. It is thought that whilst providing a service for sportsmen, these should also play a key role in conservation and in disseminating the objectives for conserving protected areas.

Representatives from mountaineering federations and managers of national mountain parks signed the Picos de Europa Declaration on "Mountain Refuges and National Parks" on 12 May 2001 in Cangas de Onís (Asturias). The first stone was laid to promote a new type of mountain refuge for the 21st century.

The Food and Agriculture Organisation of the United Nations declared 2002 to be the International Year of the Mountain, numbering amongst its objectives the conservation of mountain ecosystems, protection of mountain cultures and the promotion of sustainable development in the towns and villages in these areas. FEDME participated in the commemorative acts and study events by approving the creation of the Scientific Mountain Advisory Board at the first Assembly in 2003, formed by mountaineers specialising in biology, sociology, law, etc., to find out more about the reality of the mountains and to support mountaineering activities in natural areas in a sustainable fashion by organising studies and research work.

One result of the International Year of the Mountains was the historic appearance on 3 February 2003 of the Chairman of the Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports before the Senate Environmental Committee to examine mountaineering problems after the year dedicated to this sector had come to a close. FEDME's Chairman suggested the great problem affecting mountaineering in Spain was the lack of debate concerning the restrictions and limitations imposed on the practice of mountain sports in regulating Protected Natural Areas without any scientific grounds as justification.

The positive results from the Seminar held in Tenerife led to the 2nd Seminar on Protected Natural Areas and Mountain Sports from 17 to 19 October at the Residencia Universitaria de Jaca (University Halls of Residence in Jaca, Aragon) organised by the Club Alpino Universitario (University Alpine

Club), Aragon Mountaineering Federation, Organismo Autónomo Parques Nacionales (Regional Organisation of National Parks) and the Regional Government of Aragon, which also enjoyed the financial support of the Provincial Council of Huesca and the Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports (FEDME). Ninety people attended the seminar, half of whom represented Mountaineering Federations, with the other half being managers of Protected Natural Areas from the Autonomous Communities and the Regional Organisation of National Parks. Also invited to the seminar were representatives from the Civil Guard's Mountain and Nature Conservation departments and environmental organisations.

The organisation of this 2nd Seminar was based on previous experience and set up with two workgroups who discussed the issues presented in a paper produced by environmental experts and federation members. The aim was to reach an agreement that would actually signal a consensus and commitment between sportsmen and environmental managers. The scope of the seminar would be derived from the future actions of the representatives of the federation and administrative bodies involved.

In the technical group working on "Terminology in the Regulations governing Protected Natural Areas" an agreement was reached between those practising mountain sports and the managers of Protected Natural Areas to define the meaning of the terms and promote standardisation in their use. Amongst other issues, a resolution was adopted on the following terms: Mountain Sports, Mountaineering, Canyoning, Rambling, Waymarked Trails, Approved Trails, Classic Climbing, Sport Climbing, Via Ferratas, Nordic Skiing, Freeride Snowboarding, Overnight Stopovers, Camping, Bivouacking, Overnight Camping, Mountain Huts, Wardened Huts or Hostel Refuges.

In the technical group working on "Rambling in Protected Natural Areas" an agreement was reached to ensure that the design of the basic network of trails through Protected Natural Areas reconciled the potential corporate identity, the standardisation of trails and the regulations governing waymarking procedures, endeavouring to make the restrictions of use for the trails conform to a scientifically valid reason, along with the promotion of agreements and other mechanisms for joint action.

Continuing with a biannual tradition, the 3rd Seminar on Protected Natural Areas and Mountain Sports was held in the city of Granada on 5 November 2005. The seminar was organised by the Regional Organisation of National Parks, the Regional Government of Andalusia, FEDME and the Andalusian Federation of Mountain Sports. Of the one hundred people meeting at the Conference Centre in Granada, 40 were representatives from the state and regional mountaineering federations, and 40 were environmental managers for Protected Natural Areas, from both the Regional Organisation of National Parks and also the autonomous environmental authorities. These were joined by government specialists, academics and other guests, who played a very active role in the conference. Once again, two topics were selected for discussion in each workgroup culminating in a set of written conclusions that had been arrived at through the consensus of opinion.

"Rock climbing in protected natural areas" attempts to encourage respect for the environment on the part of the climbers, while at the same time environmental managers admit that legislation should be drawn up in keeping with scientific criteria that take account of the real impact of climbing.

"The contribution of mountaineering to sustainable development in Natural Areas" focuses on the role played by mountaineers in the development of mountain areas and nature conservation and lays the foundations for continued cooperation in the future.

Two years later, from 20 to 22 April 2007, the 4th Seminar on Protected Natural Areas and Mountain Sports was held in Covadonga, and attended by over 60 representatives from the Mountaineering Federations and Managers of Protected Natural Areas, belonging to 12 Autonomous Communities. The Seminar was organised in this case by FEDME, the Mountain Federation of Asturias, the Principality of Asturias and the Regional Organisation of National Parks. As in the previous seminars, two approved texts were adopted aimed at establishing guidelines for action in the immediate future.

The technical group on “Canyoning in Protected Natural Areas” tackled a similar subject to the one raised two years earlier on rock climbing. However, this time around the focus was on finding a solution to problems located in specific places, such as Asturias and Aragon, that do not occur in other autonomous communities, or at least have not done so for the moment. The technical group working on “Mountaineering and environmental education” takes as their starting point the agreement that mountaineering has been linked, since its origins in Spain and Europe, to a wish to explore and discover the natural environment through sports activities whose very essence involves respect for nature, plus learning values and positive attitudes for the individual and society, and also extends the mountaineers’ commitment to environmental awareness in the future.

With the aim of obtaining information and designing common strategies, since 2007 Meetings of Representatives from Federations have been held in Protected Natural Areas. This consists of annual meetings that may be attended by anyone that is in contact with managers of Protected Natural Areas where mountain sports are practised.

Throughout all these years, conferences have been held on specific topics through meetings of mountaineers with managers of Protected Areas. Hence, from 8 to 18 May 2008, the 1st Meeting of Mountaineering Professionals in Protected Natural Areas was held in the Sierra de Gredos Regional Park (Castilla y Leon). It was attended by representatives from the mountaineering and climbing federations, managers of Protected Natural Areas, mountain refuge wardens, active tourism agents, and mountain guides, from various autonomous communities, which culminated in the Declaration of Gredos.

The Conference “Glaciers as indicators of global warming: mountaineering and climate change” was held in Benasque (Aragon) on 20 September 2008, organised by the Scientific Mountain Advisory Board from the Spanish Federation for Mountain and Climbing Sports, which enjoyed the cooperation of the Government of Aragon, Barcelona Provincial Council, Benasque Town Council, and the Aragon Mountaineering Federation. The Conference was attended by 60 people associated with research, science and mountaineering from various autonomous communities, who were able to learn about the studies that have been carried out on glaciers in Spain and the rest of the world by distinguished scientists, ending with a proposal for FEDME recommendations on climate change.