

From Stephen Goodwin 5.1.16
Report to AC committee on the UIAA general assembly
Held in Seoul, S Korea 20-24 October 2015

*** What's in a name? Is subtle UIAA name change a demotion for mountaineering?**

*** Skyrunners admitted to UIAA**

*** UIAA support for Nepal earthquake victims**

*** NMA makes case for return of trekking peak cash**

*** Mountain Protection Award announced**

*** UIAA joins lobby of climate change summit**

The 2015 UIAA general assembly in Seoul was a success in terms of excellent organisation by the Korean Alpine Federation and the fruits of another year's positive work by the various commissions. However there are worrying issues of a more political nature that the AC should be at least aware of.

Thirty-three countries were represented at the GA by 95 participants. I participated on behalf of the AC, Anne Arran was there for the BMC. Anne is also on the UIAA management committee. David Hillebrandt was present as president of the Medical Commission and Steve Long, as head of the Training Standards Panel.

Disturbingly, the **GA was boycotted by the Germans (DAV) and Austrians (principally the ÖAV)** - together representing more than 1.6 million members. The trigger for their absence was a series of changes to the UIAA's Articles of Association (AoA). This sounds pretty arcane, clarifications and textural tidying up maybe, but look closer: barely below the surface smoulders the long-running turf war between the UIAA and the International Federation of Sport Climbing.

The game is given away right from the start, on the title page, where the word order English translation of the official UIAA title (Union Internationale des Associations d' Alpinisme) is changed from the International Mountaineering and Climbing Federation to the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation.

The assertion by UIAA president Frits Vrijlandt that this isn't a name change because the legal title (the French version) remains unaltered is disingenuous. He states that the reason to review some of the UIAA Articles was a change in the AoA of the IFSC in 2014 "on the instigation of the DAV, implying it is now also the governing of general climbing ('climbing for all')."

Arguing against any name change (by letter prior to the GA) the DAV and ÖAV said it was "not logical" as the UIAA is principally a mountaineering federation. They also objected to an assertion in a pre-Seoul draft that the UIAA was the "sole competent authority for climbing and mountain sports throughout the world and is recognised as such by the International Olympic Committee". However this was amended by the

UIAA management committee immediately prior to the GA, deleting “sole competent” and substituting “global”, bowing to the German argument that the UIAA represents national associations at an international level, “nothing else”. A further grandiose claim removed from the final draft was that it was the UIAA’s mission: “to govern [my underline] climbing and mountaineering throughout the world.”

The DAV/ÖAV believe Frits Vrijlandt is determined to “do everything” to reintegrate competition climbing and ski mountaineering into the UIAA. Indeed the final draft of the Articles included a new addition extending the UIAA’s mission “to govern [that word again!] climbing and mountaineering competitions throughout the world.”

The Germans cite also the president’s enthusiasm for admitting to the UIAA fold the sport of “**sky running**” (fell running to you and me, with a bit more scrambling maybe.) “Sky running is not a mountain sport. They just hold some competitions in mountain areas,” say the DAV/ÖAV.

Nonetheless the **International Skyrunning Federation** now has the status of a unit member of the UIAA - no vote on the GA but a non-voting seat on the Executive Board. The agreement between the UIAA and ISF defines skyrunning as: running in the mountains above 2000m altitude where the climbing difficulty does not exceed II grade and the incline is over 30 percent. Unease about the impact of skyrunning events on fragile mountain environments are countered by the argument that having the ISF inside the fold gives some safeguard.

Is the AC position close to that of the DAV and ÖAV in believing the UIAA should be first and foremost a mountaineering federation? While most of us might not be against competitions ‘in the right place’, so to speak (for example on artificial walls), I for one would not want the UIAA devoting a disproportionate amount of time and money pursuing a competition agenda rather than on the much broader interests of recreational climbers, mountaineers and hill goers worldwide.

Our administrators at times seem dazzled by the idea that one day, somehow, they may be permitted a slither of the great Olympic cake, not a dish that those who think of climbing as the antidote to a corporatised world find particularly palatable.

It should be pointed out that the AC has no vote on this type of issue; as an associate member we can only vote on financial matters, not policy. The BMC wields the big vote. But we do have a voice, if it is thought that any of the above is something we should speak out about.

It’s regrettable that the DAV and ÖAV were not present at Seoul; it would have been interesting to hear what they really want from the UIAA and the IFSC - in recent years their support for the former has seemed highly conditional.

At the start of the GA, participants stood in silence in memory of the victims of the **Nepal Earthquake**. The UIAA is supporting the World Food Programme (WFP) and Nepal Mountaineering Association (NMA) response. Following the quake, WFP set up a Remote Access Operation to reach survivors with food, medicine and shelter. This reportedly employs more than 15,000 Nepalese who are assessing villages and

remote communities, clearing access trails and conducting mule and porter convoys to bring food and relief items to those in greatest need.

According to UIAA secretariat, in addition to opening access for humanitarian relief, this operation provides employment for people who would otherwise be unemployed because of the drop in tourism. More than 100,000 people are said to be benefiting from this operation “thanks to the alliance formed between WFP, the NMA and the Trekking Agency Association of Nepal”.

Subject to funding, the porters will continue work supporting communities in need, particularly those whose crops have failed and who are considered to be at risk of food insecurity. National associations can join the UIAA in supporting the WFP and the NMA response by donating via the link: <https://give.wfp.org/5698/?step=country>

Ang Tshering, president of the NMA, spoke at length about the above. However this was not the issue uppermost on the NMA’s agenda at Seoul. Its main aim was to try and persuade the UIAA and member associations to lobby the new Nepal government to “return” the NMA its business (and therefore income) of **issuing permits for trekking peaks**. However, this issue has moved on since Seoul. On December 8 Nepal's Supreme Court returned the trekking peaks to the NMA. Ed Douglas was in Kathmandu in early December and will shortly provide a follow-up report on this issue.

A couple of less controversial items:

A Nepal-based project KTK-BELT (in full *Koshi Tappu Kangchenjunga Biodiversity Education Livelihood Tera Studio*) was announced as the winner of the **2015 UIAA Mountain Protection Award**. The project, centered on the hill region south of Kangch’, covers all facets of mountain stewardship, from the educational value, to the livelihoods of people and the preservation of biodiversity and natural resources. KTK-Belt was chosen from 22 projects from mountainous regions worldwide nominated to receive the US\$5,000 award sponsored by Western University and Golden Rock.

On climate change, the UIAA called on the forthcoming **UN climate summit in Paris** to achieve a legally binding agreement from all nations to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to limit the global temperature increase to 2C above pre-industrial levels. Mountaineers, as witnesses, could play an important role in raising awareness of the impact of global warming.