



BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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Minutes of the SW Area Meeting

Meeting held at the Nova Scotia Inn, Nova Scotia Place, Bristol, BS1 6XJ on Thursday the 22nd November 2012 at 7.00 pm.

Present:

Matthew Goater (MG) - Chair	Philip Wilson (PW) - Sec
Rick Sowards - Wye Valley Rep	Rob Dyer (BMC Access Rep)
Alan Howells – BMC	Sarah Flint - AMC
Mark Davies	Nigel Barry
Gordon Jenkins (CC)	Brian Mullan (BM)
Richard Nadin	Will Wykes - Clubs Rep
Dan Donovan	
Iain Butterworth - (BMC Access Rep Somerset & Mendips)	
Colin Knowles - (BMC National Council Member & ClimbBristol Project Chair)	

1. **Welcome & Apologies for Absence**

(MG) welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Jerzy Wieczorek (BMC), Iain Peters (CC), John Willson (CC), Martin Crocker (ClimbBristol Project Officer), Simon Fletcher - Avon Gorge Access Rep & Libby Houston (BMC).

2. **The Previous Devon Meeting Minutes & Matters Arising**

A quick summary of the minutes and action points from the previous meeting (Bovey Tracey - 22 attendees) was reviewed by (MG) as follows:

- a. Discuss & Review BMC Ethics, Style & Drilled Equipment: This 1990's issued BMC document was reviewed for a forthcoming redraft. These comments were fed back to Dave Turnbull BMC CEO (DT), along with comments from other regions.
- b. Fixed Gear on the Atlantic Coast: A very good presentation was made by Iain Peters (IP), regarding the re-gearing and safety monitoring of this equipment, via a collaborative UKC database.
- c. New North Devon & Cornwall CC Guidebook: (IP) reported that the meeting held last week had been a great success, with offers of help from over 20 people. A lot of crags had been 'adopted' for route checking and gear re-placement (abseil stations, stakes & fixed gear). (IP) was also contacted by a roped access worker, who offered to supply this gear at cost and supervise installation. Another meeting is arranged in North Cornwall for the 3rd March 2013. (IP) has also offered to provide a steady progress reports as this work unfolds.
- d. Replacement of the Abseil Point Middle Fin Lower Sharpnose: (IP) has said that this work will be carried out soon by local volunteers.
- e. Proposed Fixed Gear Replacement & Crag Clear Up At Long Quarry Point: This like for like replacement of gear and possible installation of abseil stations, was raised by the South Devon Mountaineering Club (SDMC). (SDMC) were asked to

present their proposals at a future meeting, detailing exactly what they were proposing to do. (SDMC) has since reported that further progress has yet been made. (SDMC) still await the interested parties behind the proposal to come forward regarding visits / cleaning / gear replacement.

- f. Proposed Bolting of Berry Head Quarry Routes: This replacement of rotten pegs with bolts, was raised by (SDMC). Since this time Pat Littlejohn (PL) reported that 'the seaward face' (where most of the climbing is), 'boasts several 3-star routes', put up by Bruce Woodley (BW). (BW) also reported that he was amenable to the idea of these routes being bolted and offered to help. (PL) added that he thought that this venue had the potential to be 'the best sport venue in Devon'. He also added that as it is 'totally quarried' and 'pretty much totally neglected, equipping it should be non-controversial' (from a climbing perspective). Liaison with statutory bodies (wild life interests, rangers and land owners) will also be required before any work commences. Several volunteers have also come forward via UKC interested in helping with this. Funding would also be needed. The (SDMC) position is awaited to carry this forward.
- g. Hazard Quarry Non Access: (MG) was asked to feedback to (RD) regarding progress, which he did. (RD) said that this was on-going.
- h. Carn Gowla Abseil Point Renewal: (IP) asked whether the BMC could sponsor this, in order to co-inside with the New North Devon & Cornwall CC Guidebook. (RD) reported that the BMC had these metal stakes available, which he would try to get to (IP), but wanted to speak to the land owner first.
- i. Vixen Tor Access: No further progress has been made so far, but (IP) has reported that he is to liaise with (DT) and (RD) about proposed plans involving the Ramblers Association.
- j. Path Erosion At Lower Bosigran: (PW) apologies for the typo in the agenda (Bath for Path) and said that part of this path had been eroded by the stream. Des Hannigan (DH) reported that he had spoken to the land owners (the National Trust (NT) rep), who had reported back that the (NT) had expressed an interest in this. They added that they would be happy to consider more specific details of what the Climbers Club/BMC propose regarding this repair. This information was passed to (RD).

3. National Council (NC) Business

(CN) reported the following points from the recent 23rd September 2012 BMC National Council Meeting held at Plas-Y-Brenin as follows:

- a. Representation From The Competitive Ski Mountaineers Group: This body (that comes under the BMC banner) gave a presentation. Their problem is funding in order to support their competitions. Their presentation was well received by the BMC. The group will receive BMC advice on seeking funding from 3rd parties. Their presence also re-affirmed that they remain within our mountaineering group and share our ethics.
- b. Dry Tooling Quarry For The Lancashire Region: The group was asked for their opinions on whether a dry tooling crag was supported by the South West area. The feedback was:
 - i. Any quarry good enough to dry tool in would also have traditional rock routes located in them.
 - ii. Dry tooling was not a sport but a technique that was carried out occasionally on Scottish mixed winter routes. It was felt that these skills could not be easily duplicated in a Lancashire quarry.

- iii. The South West area did not have any spare and appropriate crags for this purpose (although it was thought that a chalk quarry near Plymouth had been used for this purpose in the past).
- c. Sport England (SE): Our relationship with this body (who feel that as they are sponsoring the BMC financially, they should satisfy themselves that we are run and managed properly) was discussed. (SE) therefore asked for 4 outside directors (who are not Executive Committee members) to be appointed. This is in order that the appropriate checks and balances to the way that the BMC operates, is more robustly upheld e.g. the BMC is not run by people who are ingrained with BMC culture. This proposal was passed by the (National Committee). This allows the BMC to appoint people with appropriate experience for the posts.
- d. Innovation, Information and Communications Committee: (CN) and (RD) reported that the BMC was weak on communication. The group was then asked to comment. Feedback was:
 - i. Not all members had heard about regional meetings in time (with the appropriate emails being sent out, but not received by participants).
 - ii. Some had received emails that could not be opened and required a password.
 - iii. Others had emails containing the incorrect link to the appropriate agenda page e.g. the agenda for the last South west meeting held.
 - iv. Some emails were received only 2 days prior to this meeting.
- e. Hill Walking Officer To Be Appointed: The BMC was creating this post in early 2013. This is to address a traditionally held view that we do not effectively represent these members.

4. Access Update On Blackrock Quarry:

Ian Butterworth (IB), reported on a meeting he had held with the (NT) who owned this quarry, located in Velvet Bottom Cheddar, regarding climbing here as follows:

- i. A serious non climbing accident occurred here 2 years ago. This had resulted in climbing being banned.
- ii. The Somerset Wildlife Trust (the site managers) had then decided to ban climbing. They posted this decision on their web site (without consulting the BMC or IB).
- iii. A fence had been erected to secure the quarry.
- iv. The meeting had been positive with climbing access being re-instated (but only for the 4 traditional routes present).
- v. It was agreed that the crag should not be bolted (as this would increase the number of climbers using the quarry e.g. like Cheddar).
- vi. Rock contractors have carried out rock descaling. They will shortly remove the debris from the crag bottom.
- vii. The fence is to be removed to allow climbing to re-commence.
- viii. (IB) will publicise this on the BMC Access database (in consultation with (RD)). He will also post this on UKC.

5. Fairy Cave Quarry Combination Padlock:

(IB) asked that the combination padlock on the gate should be firmly locked on entry and exit to the quarry. He asked that climbers requiring the number for access should contact him at fcq@btinternet.com, via the BMC Access database, or by looking in the guidebook. He asked climbers to be vigilant for non-climbers accessing the quarry who risked injury. (IB) also re-iterated that large organizational or commercial groups should not use the quarry. It was also reported that the

combination lock had been difficult to open and close and may need replacing. He asked climbers to ensure that they closed the lock on entry and exit to the quarry (and jumbled the combination lock numbers).

6. Request For New Belay Stakes at Baggy Point

(MG) said that new stakes had been requested for above the Heart of the Sun and Ben Slab areas. (RD) replied that he had stakes that could be placed tomorrow, but wanted to check the position with the landowners (NT), as well as review the bird restrictions. (PW) said that (IP) may want to get involved in placing these stakes, as part of his new guidebook work.

7. Report On The ClimbBristol (Avon Gorge Project)

(CN) reported that this project had got off to a flying start, with 3 long meetings held since September 2012. He reported that the amount of business got through by the group was extraordinarily high; and that the decision making process within the group was very good. (CN) added that the project was being driven by Martin Crocker (MC) as Project Officer (PO), who is paid part-time but is effectively working full time by the Access and Conservation Trust). (CN) made the following points:

- i. Communication with the Climbing Public: A \ClimbBristol Facebook page has been set up. This currently has 296 friends, but needs boosting to 3000. He therefore asked members to invite as many friends as possible to join. He added that this is the type of numbers needed to impress the powers that be.
- ii. Straplins: These are 'the best city crag in the world' and a 'great place to visit and climb'.
- iii. ClimbBristol Web Site: This has just been set up by Dick Hall.
- iv. BMC ClimbBristol Group Forum: This has been set up for inter group communications.
- v. Build Relationships with Key Organisations: The main job the (PO), (MC) is to hold meetings with these interest groups. They include Bristol City Council, City Engineers, Clifton Suspension Bridge Master, National Trust, Merchant Venturers, Wildlife Trusts and the Downs Committee. (MC) is supported in these meetings by group members Simon Fletcher (BMC Avon Gorge Rep) and Libby Houston (Botanist).
- vi. Creating A Great Climbing Venue: This project is not just about renewing fixed equipment, but will also involve creating a welcoming environment for climbers have a good time. Presently climbers endure this environment, putting up with potential death from traffic when walking along the road and limited parking. In addition there are no bike lock areas, bus stops, toilets or café. The group wants to turn all this on its head by giving Avon Gorge a Tremadoc feel. It also is felt that Bristol is missing a trick here in ignoring this recreational area.
- vii. Talking To The Powers That Be: The group intends to involve the local MP's and Bristol City Council.
- viii. Fixed Equipment: (CN) said that (MC) has compiled lists of every Avon climb. These lists include every type of fixed gear that has been used in the gorge over the last 40 years, as well as every missing, tree, thread, nut belay, loose rock and excess vegetation areas. He had then challenged the group by asking us what we should do about this. The group moved forward by getting permission from the main players (Bristol City Council and Natural England) for us to carry out this work safely (with procedures in place to avoid death or injury to volunteers, the public and climbers). Some areas will require us to close the gorge in order to work. (MC) is intending to use small group of volunteers (highly skilled in fixed gear replacements). Other

volunteers will be used to police the work area to avoid injury or death in hazardous areas. All this is being tried out in a test day in early January 2013. Following this test, work will be rapidly carried out. Gear replacement is being set out in 7 guiding points or principles e.g. what to do if a bolt is a certain dimension or age, how should drilled pegs be treated from hammered in pegs or what to do with hammered in pegs. Point 7 by way of example, details what the policy will be regarding historic bolts used to set up aid routes that subsequently went free.

(CN) ended the briefing by stating that the group will soon be in a position to publicly publish their achievements.

ix. Questions & Answers:

- As the new major wants to make the Avon Gorge a world heritage site, would the group be contacting him? (CN) replied that the group would do this. His reservation is how we ensure that we are heard above the clamour for attention that the major will receive from groups on other issues.
- Is making a World Heritage Site not in conflict with climbing? Dan Donovan (DD) replied that this just affected the Suspension Bridge. (PW) added that the gorge already has triple SSI status. It was also pointed out that the Jurassic coast is a world heritage site where climbing was allowed.
- What is the policy on bolting and fixed gear? (CN) said that we are guided by the local policy and also the national policy guidelines. He added that broadly it is a like for like replacement. Cases where pegs have gone and cannot be replaced has also been discussed in fine detail. (CN) also said that the group had some leeway to steer solutions in the right direction e.g. Suspension bridge buttress lower offs.
- How can donations be made to the fixed gear replacement fund? Via the donations boxes at UCR, Taunton Leisure and Dicks Climbing. Credit card donations can also be made via Dicks Climbing web site, or the BMC e.g. for the Avon MC who want to make a sizable contribution.
- Has the group got funding for the full 2 years? Yes, funding is not just for the 1st year.

8. Nomination For BMC Honorary Membership

A long serving South West BMC member who has made a major contribution to climbing in the South West, was nominated for this award by (CN). The group agreed that he table this at the next BMC National Council meeting.

9. Discussion On Group Use Of Climbing Venues

(RD) asked us to discuss this issue. Feedback was as follows:

- i. Climbers are sympathetic. They have as much right to be there as individual climbers.
- ii. The group experience is often a first step for a climber into the sport. It should therefore be encouraged.
- iii. Guidelines are required (some groups are considerate, others are ignorant, arrogant and do not co-operate with climbers).
- iv. Try to publicise other charity challenges or ideas e.g. from the 3 peaks challenge. This is to even out the use and erosion in these areas. It was acknowledged that this might be difficult for large draw sponsorship events (as this was the wow factor to draw in charity funding).

- v. Publicise other crag areas not used by climbers for group and charity abseil (such groups were mainly concerned with the challenge of height or 'big air'.
- vi. The typical charity abseil participant is a well-rounded and pleasant member of society, who just happens not to be a climber.
- vii. Group organisers are often not familiar with the many climbing locations. They therefore always frequent the same known spots. Publicising further areas may help. The opposite view was to keep these events to just a few climbing areas that are already trashed.
- viii. Parking by groups can seriously aggravate the land owner (make part of the guidelines).
- ix. Discourage heavy wear (by boot use).
- x. Avoid classic climbing lines.

Anecdote: Tockington Quarry was discussed, which is in a nature reserve, is esoteric and not suitable for group use. A large organised group from Essex was found setting up top ropes up for 2 van loads of people arriving later. When asked why they were there, it was discovered that they had picked the venue after finding it on UKC (and being told it was group use suitable). After trying to set up top ropes on very loose vegetated rock, the group was persuaded to go to Seawall.

10. Next Meeting Date:

Saturday the 9th of February 2013, Swanage (the venue is yet to be confirmed).