



BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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BMC South West Area Gathering

Meeting held on Thursday 14th November 2013 @ The Nova Scotia Inn,
Harbourside Bristol @ 7pm

Present:

Matthew Goater (MG) - Chair
Gareth Palmer (GP) - National Council
Richard Nadin
Dan Donovan (DD)
Gordon Jenkins (GJ)
Gareth Greeves
Simon Fletcher
Mary Davies
Colin Scott

Philip Wilson (PW) - Sec
Colin Knowles (CK) – National Council
Brian Mullen (BM)
Martin Crocker (MC)
Ian Butterworth (IB)
Nancy Jones
Jonathon Percival
Mark Stevenson

1. Welcome & Apologies for Absence.

(MG) welcomed everyone to the meeting. He asked members whether they minded the secretary recording the minutes electronically for later paper transcription. There were no objections to this. Apologies for absence were accepted from Dick Hall.

2. Minutes of the Previous Meeting & Matters Arising.

The minutes of this meeting held at the Dolphin Hotel, Bovey Tracey on Saturday 14 September 2013 were reviewed section by section for accuracy and completeness.

The following was then reported on and discussed as follows:

- a) Meadfoot Quarry: No contact name in the council has been forthcoming to (PW) regarding someone to talk to about stake renewal, despite appeals. (PW) said he would take this off the agenda until he was given a good contact name in the council for Rob Dyer (BMC Access Rep) to talk to.
- b) BMC Angle Grinder: Rob Greenwoods request to return the BMC angle grinder by email was unsuccessful.
- c) Bolt Removal: (PW) reported best practice for bolt removal would be:
 - Resin: The procedure of sawing off the bolt head and using a core drill to drill around the stump to set it below the rock surface and then resin over the hole was suggested. Point confirmed by (DD), (GJ) and (MC).
 - Expansion Bolts: These are best tapped below the surface and the hole smoothed over with resin. For this to work the bolt hole needs to be drilled deeper than the length of bolt when the bolt was first placed. Point confirmed by (DD), (GJ) and (MC).

The minutes were then signed off as present and correct with no objections.

3. Feedback from National Council (by our National Council Rep).

(CK & (GP) reported the following:

- a) Drilled Equipment: The revision to take account of the unique nature of South West climbing (formulated in a previous SW Area meeting in May 2013) was drawn up and presented by (CK). It was pointed out that Appendix A was an example offering one possible solution to this problem. The revisions made by the SW Area meeting contained in the main draft were accepted by council.

(CK) said that the National Council now understood the complexities of drilled equipment as applied to our local area and that it was now up to the BMC to outline how this will be overseen and bring this back to the members for debate and the National Council for approval.

- b) Dry Tooling: Broadly speaking dry tooling should take place in designated venues and not on rock climbs. In some cases this might include separate dry tooling areas in sections of a quarry that also contained some climbs.
- c) Endorsement of National Council Member: (GP) was formally proposed by (CK) and seconded by (MG) & (PW) as SW Area National Council rep, with no objections.

4. Cheddar Gorge.

- a) Civil Liability Insurance: (MC), in his capacity as seasonal BMC-funded climbing warden, reviewed how the access arrangements had been going in 2013. He brought to the attention of the meeting the issue of civil liability insurance, which is a core ingredient of the access agreement with the Longleat estate (the south side cliff owners) e.g. all climbers are required to carry it.

(MC) then reported that this trend (since the agreement was first piloted in 2008) was for an increasing proportion of people climbing on Longleat land, without having or carrying BMC (or other equivalent) civil liability insurance.

He explained that this level has risen from 6% in 2008 to almost 20% in 2013 (based on people he had challenged while policing the agreement for the BMC). (MC) stated that this was unacceptably high and climbing uninsured on Longleat land had the potential to cause a major fall-out that could jeopardise access.

He said that he had formally reported the situation to the BMC who confirmed a warning would be posted on their web site. **Action Point:** (PW) to confirm this with the BMC.

- b) The Illegal Placing of Bolts: The issue of bolts placed on some National Trust crags within the landowners' 5-year bolting moratorium agreed by BMC SW was raised.

It was reported that "local activists" were so concerned that this breach would cause the loss of access to climbers in Cheddar, that they had raised it with the BMC. (The BMC has agreed that they would post a warning on their web site).

It is thought that there are around 20 new bolts in total, on 4 to 5 direct starts & link-ups, together with some re-bolting.

The meeting agreed that anyone who wished to bolt during the current moratorium should have raised and discussed this issue with the landowner(s) first (especially since the landowners have made it known that they are always prepared to talk with climbers). Furthermore it was agreed that the BMC should demonstrate to the landowners that the climbing community is sticking to the agreed bolting moratorium.

After discussion it was unanimously agreed that an opportunity should be given to the transgressor(s) to apologize to The National Trust and to make good the illegal bolting, by permanently disabling the bolts (and therefore the routes) in the process. It was agreed that the best way to do this, would be for the BMC Head office to make this request directly to those concerned.

A deadline for completion of 2 to 3 months was agreed before deciding any further action on sanctioning the removal of these bolts at a future BMC SW Area meeting (to be held locally to Cheddar if possible – see point 4f). **Action Point:** (PW) to report this meeting decision to the BMC.

In addition the following items were discussed:

- c) Access to Lion Rock: (IB) reported that some climbers had been seen by Longleat staff to be crossing directly from the Costa car park to Lion Rock. This route crosses private land. He asked that climbers use the correct access route. **Action Point:** (PW) to ask BMC to publicise this.
- d) BMC Continued Policing at Cheddar In 2014: (MC) reported that Cheddar Caves & Gorge very much appreciated the BMC providing (and funding) a 'warden' to check whether climbers had liability insurance.
- e) The Cheddar Cable Car Proposal: It was reported by (MC) that this project was under review following the resignation of Longleat Estate's Chief Executive.
- f) Ending of The 5-Year Bolting Memorandum (late 2014): (GJ) said that the existing bolting moratorium runs out in November 2014, and suggested that now would be a good time to start to review it, ready for the re-negotiation in late 2014. He suggested that the matter should be discussed fully at a future BMC SW area meeting to establish and agree our position, in order to then re-negotiate this with the land owners. This plan was accepted at the meeting. (CK) suggested holding this meeting in Cheddar. **Action Point:** (GJ) and (PW) to table this item in the next available SW Area meeting in 2014 (we would like this to be a Cheddar meeting).

5. Update on the Avon Gorge Regeneration Project (by the ClimbBristol Project Officer).

(MC) outlined progress (over halfway through the project). He stated he felt that satisfactory progress has been made. He outlined the following key areas:

- a) Networking/Influencing People: (MC) outlined that this was a challenging crucial element of the project and that we have developed important relationships including with the following organisations and parties: The Downs Committee, Conservation Officers (BCC), Sports Officers (BCC), The Avon Gorge Management Plan Steering Group, The Highways Agency (rock scaling), The Mayor, The National Trust, Natural England, The Society of Merchant Venturers, The Clifton Suspension Bridge Trust, and Charlotte Leslie MP (who we took climbing) among others. (MC) outlined that ClimbBristol is now turning its attention to creating a lasting legacy post project (from late 2014). He said that this point was vital, irrespective of what might happen with future project funding. One way forward indicated was for the BMC SW Area meeting to try to obtain a seat on the Avon Gorge Management Plan Steering Group, or another body that can exert influence in future planning for Avon Gorge. He also said that the current management plan expires in 2015, and the climbing community – possibly through BMC SW should ensure climbing is fully represented within it.
- b) Practical Cliff Works: (MC) outlined progress as follows:

- I. Achieved Rock Scaling Works: The difficulties that had been overcome in carrying out our rock scaling works in a SSSI, to remove loose rock that had the potential to kill climbers e.g. the 2x2metre and 3x2 metre flakes that needed little persuasion to remove from Amanita Muscarina and Drang respectively. In most cases root action was a factor (e.g. ash saplings, red valerian). He stressed that politically it was quite an achievement for ClimbBristol volunteers to have been permitted to work alongside Bristol City Council engineers and contractors..
- II. Future Scrub Clearance: (MC) outlined that this had been set for the Lower Amphitheatre Wall on Dec 8th (back-up date 15^{th Dec} 2013); and that more work was planned for Main Area.
- III. Fixed Gear Replacements: (MC) reported that overall this has been slow, which was to be expected since few volunteers would feel they have the expertise to participate. He added that this work has to be done outside of the project i.e. ClimbBristol will supply pegs and ropes, but cannot conduct this work itself due to liability issues identified by the BMC. It was confirmed to would-be volunteers that the necessary gear was held at Dick's Climbing, and by (MC) & (CK). (MC) added that peg replacement would probably continue to be carried out on an ad hoc basis as and when volunteer climbers were in the specific areas. (CK) also suggested working in pairs (safer and less boring).
- IV. PR Sub Group: (CK) confirmed that the Avon Gorge Regeneration Project PR Sub Group will also get involved with PR for the Bristol Climbing festival.

6. The Bristol Climbing Festival (Set for the 26th July 2014).

On behalf of the ClimbBristol Project Steering Group (MC) outlined the main points of the proposed 'Climbers' Festival for Climbers, by Climbers'. Details were discussed as follows:

- a) Festival Date: The date for this has been set for Saturday 26th July 2014, pending our application (21 pages required) that needs to be submitted to Bristol City Council in early 2014.
- b) Funding: There will be financial contributions from the BMC for this event as it also ties in with the BMC 70th Anniversary Celebrations in 2014.
- c) Council Permission, Venue & Site Preparation: the Downs Ranger has said that he would support in principle the holding of this event in the Main Area car park. However the decision would be for the Downs Committee.

ClimbBristol is not seeking to close the Portway for the event (only justify doing so if 5000 or more attendees were expected!).

Issues with parking could be partly solved by opening the car park for the day and closing it afterwards (mini-digger or possible JCB clearance of the Main Area Car Park is required for this).

Huge issue scrub clearing and digging out and (the day afterwards).re-instating the entrance bund (MC) said this will need lots of forward planning.

A rare plant clump growing in the car park tarmac needs protecting (Libby Houston, ClimbBristol botanist to advise)

An appeal for volunteer help with festival preparation was made as we can't proceed without more help.

- d) The Proposed Events: The festival needs to be rain proof e.g. it needs to be successful if it rains, so needs a marquee with power, sound system, bouldering facilities, events and stands. One idea would be to try to get late Avon greats to attend (e.g. Ward Drummond, Chris Bonington and Steve Monks were mentioned).

A sound system (to compete with road traffic noise) is required.

An evening party event is to be held. Venues have been discussed. The current favourite venue is on the John Sebastian Lightship located in the Bathurst basin. This idea is currently being cost reviewed.

- e) Scrub Clearing Days: In order to prepare the site, the annual scrub clearing days will very important. Dates for clearing scrub were set as follows: 2nd Feb 2014 and the 23rd February 2014. An appeal to bring extra tools was also made by (DD).

7. Access & Any Local Issues.

(IB) reported on the following:

- a) Fairy Cave Quarry: Presently there are roadside parking spaces for approximately 12 cars. He has been asked whether it is possible to have a climber's car park as cavers have their own locked car park. Especially as climbers currently park on the road with limited spacing. He confirmed that he has investigated whether climbers could park inside the quarry gates with the owners. He reported that the owners are not at all enthusiastic about this due to the risk of travellers and others accessing the site. Another investigated possibility is for parking to be created for 5 or 6 cars behind the gate at the top of the hill, but common consensus is that this is too far away (500 metres). The other option investigated is to knock down the dilapidated Quarry Manager's office to make room to park cars. He added that we would have to get BMC funding for this. He added that he was not sure that parking here has become a real issue. He did however concede that large lorries did pass through lane from the local haulage firm down the road, but has not had reports of any damage to cars resulting from this. He added that any car park would also need considerable funding beyond the £90 left in the Fairy Cave Development Fund (mainly raised when the quarry was first opened up for climbing).
- b) Vallis Vale Quarry Re-Opening: Work here on the footpath should have finished last Friday, but has been delayed due to rain for a week.
- c) Curious Holes Quarry (also known as White Hole Quarry): North facing mossy quarry in a right state. Someone unknown had dropped the quarry floor level and done a lot of work here. Trying to find out through the council who is doing the work
- d) Sandford Hill Quarry: (BM) said that he had been investigating a climbing access agreement to this quarry (which contains a few regionally important routes). He said that although the quarry is owned by Hobbs (who also own Fairy Cave Quarry), they in turn lease it out to the Avon Ski Centre and through them Mendip Outdoor Pursuits. Mendip Outdoor Pursuits themselves use it for their outdoor pursuits. Having spoken to these parties, he confirmed that climbers were welcomed here informally if they get permission from the Avon Ski Centre. The owners are not however willing to allow open access. He added that Mendip Outdoor Pursuits is installing abseil\belay bolts for customers' group use.
- e) Wood Lane Quarry: (IB) reported that he had contacted North Somerset County Council about climbing access to this quarry near Weston-Super-Mare, which has been fenced off for the past 5 years. He confirmed that he had spoken to the council seeking a Fairy Cave Quarry type agreement, but had been rebuffed. This is due to council fears of being liable for injuries to climbers and the general public (children used to carry out geological field studies in the quarry). He added that this action was taken on the advice of a consultation report. The council in response had then erected the fence, de-scaled the cliff of loose rocks and trimmed back the overhanging trees at the top. He added that the quarry was not presently in a fit state to climb in. On talking with the council their view was that they remained generally in favour of the climbing community. (IB) suggested a petition by local climbers (ideally North Somerset council tax

payers) as a way forward. (MC) made the point that a combo lock on gate would exclude the general public and allay the council safety fears. He also said that on reading the report he had found it to be generalised and non-specific to climbing in the quarry. He added that there was nothing in the consultants' report to indicate the past historic use by both climbers and locals alike. He added that the Council appeared to have acted unilaterally in closing the quarry, a comment made to him by residents. **Action Point:** (MC) agreed to find out the details of the North Somerset Councillor directly responsible for leisure/recreation/parks. Both (IB) and (MC) agreed that they could then schedule a meeting (possibly involving Rob Dyer the BMC Access & Conservation Officer).

- f) Bector Wood Quarry: (IB) mentioned that the owner had cleared the dry side of this quarry of scrub vegetation. This was stopped due to damage to protected species. He added that there is still another 18 months left on the owner's planning permission to develop the quarry.
- g) Portishead Quarry: A two-bolt top out bolt belay/lower-off station, was suggested for the top of Highway One (even though this route is a hybrid). (MD) said that some people lower from old bolts at the top, which are likely to be unsafe. (MC) said that there were problems with hollow rock, so finding a sound two-bolt belay would be difficult to implement. (GJ) suggested chopping this bolt if it was dangerous, and gardening the exit.
- h) Carn Gowla 3x Bolt Removal: This has been sanctioned with the National Trust rep via Rob Dyer (BMC Access Rep). **Action Point:** (GP) to remove the bolts.

8. Any Other Business.

- a) BMC Area Briefing Notes: The good works carried out by the BMC in the past year (as received from BMC Head Office) were read out by (MG).
- b) UIAA Safety Commission: This organisation is holding its next summer meeting in Bristol for around 50 delegates on the 4th to 6th June 2014:(PW) outlined that he (and (MG) had been approached to take interested delegates climbing on Saturday 7th June 2014. (CK) added that this will help to showcase ClimbBristol internationally. (PW) added that the BMC Head office were also impressed that we had offered to take interested delegates climbing. The numbers are awaited from the organiser Rob Foster, but are currently estimated as 4, requiring 2 climber volunteers.

9. Date of Next Meeting:

- To be held at the The Quay Climbing Centre, Haven Road, Haven Banks, Exeter, Devon, EX2 8AX @ 7pm. [View Link In Google Maps](#)