

## **Why Hoghton Quarry needs a good cleaning**

Hoghton is the highest and arguably the most impressive grit quarry in the North West of England. Although there are many classic routes at HVS and above, there is also some worthwhile climbing in the lower grades. When it is in condition and the sun is shining, the climbing at Hoghton is second to none.

Although there are thousands of BMC members in the North West (not all of them rock climbers) and also many climbers who are not in the BMC, route cleaning is always left to a small number of local climbers (I estimate that this is less than about 100). However, all Lancashire climbers benefit from climbing on cleaned crags and organised clean-ups are actually quite social gatherings, so besides putting something back into our sport, most climbers I have spoken to on clean-ups say that they are very rewarding.

Although there is only a three-month window for climbing at Hoghton, I can assure all climbers that the de Hoghton Estate has a very positive attitude towards climbing. They have made a genuine attempt to balance the interests of the Estate, nesting birds and climbing. I believe that a proposed annual climbing season gives a reasonable compromise which in reality means that we get about 10 of the best weeks in the year. In the sixties I visited Hoghton at all times of year and I can confirm that between October and March it was generally pretty miserable weather and green rock.

Unfortunately the 2015 season was lost due to an insurance problem and the 2016 season was then completely lost due to an intransigent person who was undertaking the bird monitoring. However, in 2017 we got a new bird monitor called Richard Waddington, who although passionate about birds also understands the importance of the quarry for climbers. Last year he was very fair to climbers without endangering the peregrines, and I have no doubt that we can rely on him continuing to strike a good balance. Nevertheless, because of the loss of two successive climbing seasons and a hangover effect from this, the quarry was not very visited in 2017. This has all meant that much of the rock has now become badly overgrown.

In view of the above, if we can get the quarry in good condition now, followed by more climbing this coming summer I am sure that we can turn the tide and get some memorable climbing days at the quarry. However, this is not something that can be done by a handful of climbers. I estimate that it is necessary to remove rhododendrons, grass and moss on routes between:

- Demdike (4) and Luddite (18);
- Bowker's (37) and Rhododendron Buttress (43);
- Highway Star (51) and Slime Corner (53); and
- Route One (82) and Goulash (90).

This gives a total of up to 34 routes. Where the routes are overgrown they will need to be cleaned by abseil. In some cases it will be possible to clean more than one route on an abseil, but other routes may need two climbers working together. If you do the maths you will see that this project depends upon a high turnout of volunteers.

Les Ainsworth  
BMC Access Representative - Lancashire