

Pant Quarry Access Update

Introduction

For those who are not familiar with Pant Quarry, it is by all accounts a treasure. The main feature of the quarry is a 100m long, 100m high stretch of soft grained natural sandstone. It dries quickly after rain, faces south, and is unlike anything else offered, certainly in Wales, but potentially in the UK, holding clear national significance.

In addition to climbing significance, it is a site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) due to the presence of 'Jurassic Clay Infill', which has yielded some remarkable fossils of primitive mammals from around 200m years ago. As the rock is quarried here, the clay infill is stored and examined by geologists.

Development occurred here to my knowledge in the early 2000s and there is a high density of unique and fantastic routes on the main wall especially. Steve McClure has visited, and asked to comment said "In a word it was awesome", as well as a unique asset with long hard technical routes. He said he'd be happy to share these thoughts and would love to go back.

As access rep, "Pant Quarry" is literally the only issue that's been brought to hand. It's clearly a place that inspires strong feelings from many in the South Wales climbing scene, and learning more about it, it's easy to see why.

The following is a summary and update of the situation (currently and going forward) of this venue, to the best of our knowledge as access reps. Information was mostly provided by Elfyn, and others whom have provided information to us in the last month or so.

Current Ownership

Pant Quarry is currently leased and maintained by the company 'Tarmac' (formerly 'Lafarge Tarmac'), an English company based in Solihull. Their annual revenue comes out to around £1.8bn and they have 10,658 employees.

Legally, the quarry is still a working quarry, with active planning permission. According to Tarmac, the quarry is 'Rested' but all of it remains technically active, and therefore it is covered by the **1999 Quarries Act**. This means that as the effective owners, Tarmac legally must provide and maintain an effective barrier to prevent the public from gaining access to the quarry from a health and safety perspective. Failure to do so would result in prosecution.

The usual legal premise for climbers is usually that we as climbers "willingly take a risk onto ourselves"/"*In volenti non fit injura*" (Occupiers Liability Act). This is apparently not applicable to an active quarry covered by the 1999 act, and the quarry manager could be held personally and criminally liable to injuries sustained by climbers here. The law is unequivocal here and it means they can't turn a blind eye to climbers who trespass.

De-Registration of a quarry from the 1999 act can only be made by the landowner in combination with the Health and Safety Executive and the Local Authority Planning Department.

Long Term

In terms of the long term plan that Tarmac has for the Quarry, according to the South Wales Operations manager, they very much see its status as an active quarry continuing despite the current lack of activity. He has stated that there are 'a few years' worth of quarrying reserves remaining worth many millions of pounds of aggregates, which may become particularly valuable when/if an M4 diversion is built. There may be as much as a million tonnes here, which goes at around £25 per ton as a minimum. That's not a small amount of money.

They currently have **no interest** in allowing public access or even discussing future ownership of the site for at least a decade.

Elfyn has spoken to local authorities about what happens when the planning permission expires, and it seems that planning permission extends til **2042**, originally dating from 1948 but having been extended or amended multiple times.

The land officially is officially leased from the Duchy of Lancaster Estate (The Queen..).

Our Options as Climbers

- ***Purchase by BMC***

The key objective of the BMC land acquisition policy is to 'encourage, promote, and develop access to crags and cliffs for all mountaineers'. Purchase is only considered when dialogue has failed. For consideration, the following conditions must be met as a minimum:

a. The site must be of national or regional significance due to either or both of the quality of the climbing, the venue being very popular or there being few alternative venues.

b. The proposal must have the strong support of the relevant BMC Area and of local volunteers willing to assist with maintenance of the site.

c. Acquisition can take the form of freehold purchase, lease or licence, each of which has advantages and disadvantages. Each case will be considered on its own merits, but the landowner's requirements may be paramount.

It's difficult to argue that there isn't merit for discussion here at least, but it's likely to be the case that the willingness of Tarmac to sell, and also in the case of willingness, an unrealistic asking price would be a stumbling block in the case of any purchasing. The recent purchase by the BMC of Crookerise in Yorkshire cost £18,000, for comparison.

Another reason why this may not work is that under the terms of their lease, Tarmac cannot sub-let or part with any part of the site.


- ***The Waiting Game***

This is far from the most desirable or satisfying of options, but it's possible that in around 10 years the quarry will no longer be active. It could be a priority for climbers and access reps/the BMC to

attempt to protect the main wall from quarrying, as something valuable that can't be replaced and is therefore worthy of protecting and preserving.

The statement of 10 years is vague, and in truth it could be much longer than this, since it doesn't seem to be in the interest of Tarmac to pull their finger out and finish their work at the site.

- ***Appeal to Royalty***

Does anybody here have some very high up connections ?

Conclusion

It's probably fair to state that the situation regarding Pant Quarry is rather bleak. Tarmac do not want to sell, they can't sell or lease a part of the quarry, and they are not even interested in discussion.

Time will be a solution (it's unclear how long it will take), but the community has already waited nearly 20 years since initial route development.

We may need some out-side-the-box thinking on this one.