

South West Area Meeting

19:00, Sunday 21st Nov 2010, Gloucester Warehouse climbing centre, Gloucester.

Present

Jerzy Wieczorek (Chair)
Dan Donovan
John Willson
Dick Houson
Al Randall
Gareth Cook
Frank Cannings
Scott Titt (BMC Executive)
Rick Sowards (Wye Valley Access Rep)
Mark Davies

Apologies

Sam Mayfield, Martin Kokcis, Steve Findlay, Steve Marriott, Brian Mullan, Matt Hammersley, Libby Houston, Colin Knowles, Phil Bond.

Minutes of the Previous Meeting – Matters Arising

John commented that he had been unable to download the agenda or minutes from the BMC website; Jerzy said he would raise this with Alex Messenger.

Jerzy said there was an action arising from the Cheddar meeting in April for him to speak to Steve Findlay about fixed gear at Avon. Although there had been online debates on the subject, nothing had been formally tabled; it was likely that an item would be on the agenda of the next meeting in Bristol.

Scott expressed his concern about the decision of the previous meeting in Cornwall to ask the National Council to consider splitting the South West area – it was agreed that this would be discussed under AOB.

Feedback from National Council

Scott reported that there had been no National Council meetings since the last Area Meeting.

Regional Development and Activities

The meeting considered the following draft resolutions:

- a) This meeting opposes the use of any documented rock-climbing crags in the Wye Valley, Forest of Dean, or Cotswolds for dry-tooling.**
- b) Amendment to the above resolution to extend it to cover the whole of the SW.**

Resolution (a) was proposed by John Willson; the amendment (b) was proposed by Dan Donovan; both were considered together. John said his draft resolution was provoked by a

UKC thread concerning the possible use of Cleeve Hill for dry-tooling, during which it was suggested that the views of the local BMC area should be sought; John thought that the area meeting should make a clear statement that it was not acceptable practise on documented rock climbing crags. Dan said that he had persuaded a pair of climbers not to use the New Quarry at Avon for dry tooling, and Scott said that cliffs at Swanage had been used for this practice. The meeting unanimously considered that dry-tooling on rock-climbing cliffs was not acceptable due to the damage caused to the rock, although it was not ruled out that cliffs (particularly quarried cliffs) which did not have rock climbs could be used for this purpose. There was discussion of what the BMC, clubs or climbing walls could help to inform new climbers why the practice was considered unacceptable. It was suggested a Summit article would be helpful. The amended resolution (covering the whole South West region) was carried unanimously.

c) Lower-offs at Staple-Edge (Ruspidge West) – decision to be taken following debate at May '10 meeting

Mark Davies introduced this item, which followed on from a debate at the May meeting which did not have a conclusive result. Mark said the crag had been developed as part of the Symonds Yat guidebook work, after a long gap from the original 2 routes done by Martin Crocker in 1988. The crag had been developed as an entirely trad crag, but unfortunately topping out was not possible for many routes due to an overhanging earth cornice. Mark had installed rope belays and lower-offs, but in some cases these were unsatisfactory as they were attached on a long rope to trees well back from the finish of the routes. Mark therefore proposed that for some routes bolted abseil stations should be installed as a more viable long-term solution. At the May meeting a vote had been taken on the same issue, with 9 in favour, 9 abstentions and 1 opposed. Mark also reported that Martin Crocker had cast a proxy vote in favour.

The question was raised as to whether this would create a precedent for Shorn Cliff, where descent from all the routes was by abseil from trees and in situ rope and rings were placed. Rick Swards said that he didn't think it did. It was always possible at Shorn Cliff for the climber to inspect the in situ ropes and rings and make their own judgements. At Staple Edge on the other hand, there were some anchors which consisted of a long rope going back to a tree above the climbable rock, and so it was not possible to inspect the rope for wear. It was agreed that bolted abseil stations should only be placed where absolutely necessary, and no bolts should be placed in positions where they could be clipped from other routes. The motion to allow a small number of bolted abseil stations in these circumstances was passed with 8 in favour, 2 abstentions and no votes against.

AOB

a) Proposal to ask the National Council to consider splitting the South-West area

Scott raised the issue of the proposal from the October meeting at the Count House that the National Council consider splitting the South-West Area; he was concerned that this decision should not be taken on the basis of one meeting in one area only. He said that in the past he had been in favour of splitting the South-West area, but now thought that there was a danger of the "breakaway" regions withering away through lack of active members – John Willson also thought a breakaway "South-South-West" region would not be viable. Jerzy said that there were around 7,000 BMC members or affiliated members in the South-West. Meetings

were rotated round the region to allow members from different regions to take part; there was little overlap between the members attending at meetings held in different locations. Frank Canning said he was opposed to a split, as he thought there was a risk of parochialism which might affect decisions on cliffs which were widely used by people living outside the immediate locality.

The meeting discussed the possibility of an informal split, along the lines of the arrangement for North and South Wales. Scott said that a formal split of the South West region would need to be approved by the National Council and the BMC AGM, and there would need to be a change in the Articles of Association. An informal split along the Welsh model would need National Council approval only.

Jerzy concluded that there was no support at the meeting for a formal split in the South West region, but the possibility of an informal split was not ruled out – Scott would discuss this further with the National Council.

b) Eroica

Scott raised the issue of the reported (on UKC) bolting of the crux of Eroica at Pentire Head. All at the meeting condemned any such action, which would be in clear violation of the Cornwall bolt policy, and Scott and Dan agreed to go down to Pentire to remove it – there was no dissent against such action.

c) Vixen Tor

Frank Cannings reported on the ongoing legal action by the BMC and the Ramblers' Association to designate a public right of way on the footpath through the field to the Tor. The County Council had agreed to designate the public right of way, and the landowner appealed against the decision. The case was to be heard by the Planning Inspectorate at Princeton on Tues 23rd November. The issue was whether there had been 20 years of continuous unfettered access. In 1976 a sign had been put up preventing access, and so the BMC and RA were concentrating on obtaining evidence of unfettered access from 1956-1976 – some 55-60 people had testified to unfettered use of the footpath in this period.