



## British Mountaineering Council SOUTHWEST AREA

Zoom Meeting held On Tuesday 9th May 2023 @ 7pm

Chair: Mark Kemball, Secretary: Philip Wilson

### ORDINARY MEETING

If anything discussed at this meeting gives rise to a conflict of interest for anyone, please declare it at the start of the meeting.

**Attendees:** Mark Kemball, Philip Wilson, Colin Knowles, Pete Salenieks, Iain Peters, John Alcock, Mark Davies, Trevor Smith, Adam Lowe, Ben Darby, Dave Turnbull, Dave Hillebrandt, Ian Butterworth, James Mann, Jon Bentley, Julio Franco, Mark Courtiour, Mott Kerne, Owen Wynne Griffiths, Mark K & Brian.

- Welcome Introductions & Apologies for Absence:** Mark welcomed members including Pete Salenieks (BMC Board) & Dave Turnbull (BMC Staff). Apologies for absence were received from Dan Donovan. Best wishes were also extended to Dave Turnbull (BMC Office) who attended this meeting, regarding his ongoing recovery from his life changing near death illness.
- Minutes:** The previous minutes for the Ordinary General Meeting were agreed & signed off.
- Actions:** Previous Meeting (held on the 24<sup>th</sup> January 2023 were reviewed). The only outstanding issue being the fixed gear review which was debated in this meeting (see next point).

#### Local Issues:

- Avon Gorge Fixed Equipment Review (last reviewed in 2012):** Colin Knowles opened by running through the current Area Bolt (Drilled Gear) Policy contained in Appendix 1 and then stating this was now required as times had changed with fewer trad climbers and more sports climbers operating locally, Ash tree die back, issues in obtaining pegs and the in-situ deterioration and replacement of these. He went on to say that the current guidelines in the current Avon Gorge guide were impenetrable and not easy to interpret in an online guide format accessed by today's Smartphones. He concluded that this now needs bringing into today's climbing environment. He identified that presently there was no clear route to resolving issues; and that sustainability had not figured highly in these guidelines.

Meeting participants were then invited to comment as follows:

- Pegs placed 10 years ago are in a bad state on Central Buttress and cannot be easily replaced. Pegs are not sustainable for the future (Ian Butterworth).
- If peg replacements were not implemented on popular climbs that are tricky to protect or rely heavily on this type of protection, then a massive regrading of these climbs would have to take place, which would result in fewer ascents and the danger that these climbs fall into a vegetated state with loose rock and fewer ascents (Julio Franco).
- Categorise routes climbed rarely, frequently & of national importance (John Bentley).

- Need to see continued traffic on national / historically important routes to stop vegetation / loose rock.
- We do not want unauthorised bolting and need to avoid free for all or “rogue bolting” (Brian).
- This policy can be hugely simplified to fit in with and incorporated into today’s digital guide format.
- Any bolting should be to a safe modern standard.
- It might not be possible to place bolts to this standard due to hollow loose rock as recent Avon Gorge rockfalls testify (Philip Wilson).

It was agreed that these guidelines now need reviewing, adapting and amending to bring them up to date by a series of meetings.

Colin Knowles then closed the debate adding that any further thoughts could be provided to him by email at [colinrichardknowles@gmail.com](mailto:colinrichardknowles@gmail.com). He added that he would be looking to organise a local Bristol meeting to sort this policy out.

- **Dartmoor Access Court Case & Bye Laws Update:** The [Dartmoor Preservation Association](#) (an independent member organisation) has launched a fund-raising campaign. Trevor Smith asked that we all contribute to the legal fund which stood at £57k. He added that it would be difficult to maintain public and BMC members interests in this as it would happen over an extended time period. Dave Turnbull agreed that we should give more publicity to this to try to keep it current and would look at doing so moving forward.
5. **Skeleton Ridge:** No progress reported from Marti Hallet on this issue.
  6. **Vixen Tor:** Access allowed rumours were fuelled by climbers asking permission at the nearby farm. Unfortunately, these are not the land-owners.
  7. **Carn Gowla:** Iain Peters outlined that the bird ban and voluntary restrictions due to Peregrine nesting were still in place with Mercury being out of bounds due to birds nesting on the top traverse out, which means that this whole section of cliff remained bird banned. He stated that we need to respect this ban to not ruin access. He is confident we will see progress. He added that the BMC is trying to be part of the conversation on policy going forward and is aiming to build key relations. He added that this may have ramifications for other areas owned by the National Trust. Dave Hillebrandt asked whether drones could be used to survey the cliffs. Iain replied that as a model airplane club had been banned from flying near the cliff with prosecutions pending! He therefore did not think so. Colin Knowles added that there are differences in Peregrine reactions to noise that differs between individual nesting birds with some ignoring it and others being greatly affected.
  8. **Wintours Leap:** Julio Franco reported that all routes have re-equipped to E3 and lots above this grade. He stated that they are now tackling Shorncliffe metal stop lower offs and is seeking volunteers to do this work. Kit is available for anyone wanting to undertake this task.
  9. **Fairy cave Quarry:** Mark Davies reported that lower off bolts sanctioned in a previous meeting placed to replace dying Ash trees have been removed.
  10. **Board Report:** This was presented by Pete Salenieks. See Appendix 2.

### Any Other Business / Matters Covered Not Raised Elsewhere:

1. Maillons should not be used on sea cliffs for lower offs as these corrode shut needing an angle grinder to remove. Use old crabs instead (Mark Courtiour).
2. Cheddar Gorge lower road is closed for 2 weeks. Access is by the top in (Mark Courtiour).
3. The roof of Kaiser Wall in the Wye Valley is on the ground which will alter this route.
4. The meeting attendees personally thanked Tony Ryan for helping the SW Area with our meetings. He will be sorely missed (Mark Kemball).

5. Atlantic Coast guidebook: Can Spider Monkey get in touch with Mark Kemball, as we need to know who he is in order to include his routes in the new guidebook.
6. The second pitch of Doorpost has nesting birds, please avoid (James Mann).
7. Mark Kemball expressed his intention to stand down as chair at the Nov 2023 AGM.
8. Date of Next Meeting: To Be Agreed.

## **APPENDIX 1 Area Bolt (Drilled Gear) Policy**

### **Appendix 3: The Area Bolt (Drilled Gear) Policy**

The current local policy on bolts was agreed in 1994, through the BMC Area Committee, as amended substantially and incrementally by the BMCSW Area.

**Aim:** To preserve and maintain the integrity, spirit and ethos of climbing in the Avon and Cheddar locality. Objective 1: To safeguard the original character of established climbs and therefore to preserve the local climbing history.

**Action 1:** No retrobolting (i.e. the placing of bolts on climbs in locations where they did not exist previously).

**Objective 2:** To acknowledge and maintain the historically accepted mix of climbing styles in the locality (the preservation of the status quo of ethics).

**Action 2:** To ratify the cliffs, crags and quarries or crag sector where: a) bolts have been used and accepted in their densities. b) bolts are unacceptable.

**Objective 3:** Not to hinder the development and progress of the sport locally, and thereby recognise and accommodate the need for new routes in the mould of sports climbs, projects, or bold/adventure climbs at appropriate venues.

**Action 3:** Monitor and review development and effect control by consensus if necessary in cases which blatantly stray outside the operating area ethic.

**Objective 4:** To maintain (or improve if practical) the safety standard of individual pieces of accepted fixed gear on established climbs (within the constraint of Action 1).

**Action 4:** To support the funding of local re-equipping campaigns (like-for-like gear replacement). Objective 5: To sanction fixed gear placement to help alleviate local access problems or to make a genuine contribution to the environmental integrity of a cliff, crag, or quarry.

**Action 5:** To identify the venues where abseil stations, in particular, should be provided and as funding permits carry out a programme of installation using trained volunteers.

### **Acceptability of bolts in Avon Gorge**

Existing (minimal) bolts accepted, although:

- New Quarry: high density bolting accepted.
- Suspension Bridge Buttress: bolts unacceptable.

In an area with contrasting operating styles and degrees of bolting, terminology is crucially important to prevent inadvertent transgression. For example, one could not prescribe 'bolts acceptable' at Avon for inappropriate bolt ladders materializing amidst traditional routes. 'Bolts accepted' simply reflects established consensus opinion, those bolts which have proved unacceptable having been removed.

In relation to Avon Gorge, the policy was supplemented in 1996 by a resolution that the BMC has no fixed gear replacement policy for Avon Gorge', but this was replaced by two resolutions in 2002 which are reproduced below.

### **2002 BMCSW Area Resolutions**

For belay placements where the belay is reliant on fixed protection, it is acceptable to replace current gear with bolts if the fixed protection is rotten. Bolts should not be placed unless the fixed gear is seriously defective and cannot be

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replaced with new pegs and there are no adequate natural gear placements at or near the stance. For runner placements if there is no natural protection available and the current fixed gear is rotten, like-for-like replacement of fixed gear is acceptable.

No replacement should take place if it is not possible to replace like for like.

### **2011 BMCSW Area Resolution**

The 2002 resolution was augmented at BMCSW January 2011 in relation to belays on Main Wall with existing bolts (authorizing their renewal in the specified cases) and the North Wall of Suspension Bridge Buttress (authorizing various first-time bolted belays to compensate for the loss of tree belays in conservation work).

### **2012 BMCSW Area Resolutions**

Remit of ClimbBristol Project Steering Group (PSG) in connection with drilled gear approved at BMCSW 25.1.2012:

- To make decisions about drilled and other fixed gear in line with the like-for-like bolt policy for Avon Gorge, as amended at BMCSW meeting January 2011. To make decisions about drilled and other fixed gear where the effects of those decisions lie outside what is permitted under the Avon Gorge bolt policy but where there is a tangible benefit to conservation or public safety and therefore to the sustainability of Avon Gorge climbing; e.g. provision of bolt belays in place of: (a) vulnerable trees (b) trees lost through conservation or rock safety work and (c) exits or belay methodologies that cause a threat to public safety (i.e. to that of users of Portway). It is not envisaged that any such decision would sanction retro-bolting (protection bolts) but – if circumstances were so limited that such action was considered necessary – the consent of the first ascensionist to be sought before any action is taken.
- In order to implement a successful fixed gear renewal programme for the New Quarry, which was subject to a resolution at BMCSW January 2011, to authorize the placing of what is expected to be no more than a small number of additional protection bolts, provided (a) the character of any so-affected climb is maintained and (b) the first ascensionist has consented. (This, in effect, to be a crag-specific dispensation to the Avon Gorge bolt policy.)

### **Drilled Gear Policy Principles (Decision Rules)**

The following seven policy principles were agreed by ClimbBristol Project Steering Group (PSG) on 6.11.2012 after debate. A number of them had already been approved by BMCSW as a guideline framework within which the PSG could exercise its delegated authority to make decisions on appropriate bolting issues for the purposes of the ClimbBristol Project.

- Where a crucial tree belay has been lost or is ailing and unsafe the CBPSG will approve a first-time 2BB if there is no equivalent or sustainable alternative, e.g. above Thanatos, above the Stranded slab, above Troillus, on Breakfast Ledge.
- Where there is a fixed belay which serves as an abseil point for multiple single pitch routes the CBPSG will approve a new or first-time 2BB if there is no sustainable alternative or if the fixed belay already contains a legitimate bolt, e.g. above Kranz & Magic Theatre, the Krapp's Last Tape/ Think Pink belay.

- Where a significant improvement to public safety will arise the CBPSG will approve a first-time 2BB, e.g. atop the left-hand end of Upper Wall to serve the routes left of New Horizons.
- Where vegetation or dangerous rock has completely closed down the exit of a route, and it is highly unlikely that these conditions will be adequately managed, the CBPSG will approve a first-time 2BB if there is no alternative reasonable means of descent.
- Where a peg on a pitch containing multiple protection bolts cannot be replaced the CBPSG will approve a first-time protection bolt in place of the peg, e.g. Tremors, Defining Limits. (It is implied by the area policy that retrobolting is not permitted without the first ascensionist's consent but — in this scenario where a pitch already contains multiple bolt protection that was present on the first ascent or first free ascent — the CBPSG does not consider the view of the first ascensionist to be paramount.)
- The CBPSG considers drilled pegs to be a form of bolted protection. Therefore in relation to pegs inserted in holes drilled by a climber the CBPSG will approve the replacement of the drilled peg with a suitable bolt. In relation to pegs inserted in existing holes (e.g. engineer-driven) the CBPSG will approve replacement of the drilled peg with a bolt only if the original peg cannot be extracted and replaced with a suitable peg.
- The CBPSG considers there is a case to plan for dealing with the quarrying industry's iron spikes that are degrading and which will become progressively unsafe. For those spikes that perform the function of protection or an abseil anchor the CBPSG will approve the addition of a suitable bolt or bolts, e.g. the Depravity-Steppenwolf belay. However, the CBPSG also recognises that iron spikes represent part of the industrial heritage of the Avon Gorge and, while there will be cases where they are complemented with bolts to ensure their safe use, the CBPSG does not approve their removal.
- The CBPSG does not approve the renewal of bolts that are relics of original aided ascents and which have not become of critical use as protection bolts since alternative protection is available, e.g. M1, Pigeons Nest (bolt 2).

## APPENDIX 2

### **Summary from Board Activity Late January to early April 2023**

#### **For Members' Council – April – May 2023**

#### **1. Context**

During the 1<sup>st</sup> Quarter of this year we have had 2 Board Meetings.

Major focuses this quarter has been how best to take Competition Climbing in all of its disciplines forward, understanding and starting to improve the Safeguarding regime within the BMC, and framing improvements in Governance which the BMC needs to put in place over the course of the next 12 to 18 months.

## **2. Quarterly Performance Review**

The review of 4Q 2022 performance was included in the February Board Meeting

We have moved to having a set of numeric key performance indicators (KPIs) and a set of more operational measures all of which link back to the Strategic Action Plans (SAPs). Whilst it is anticipated that the KPIs are robust and are unlikely to change much, we do expect the operational measures to evolve.

There has been a considerable amount of very high quality work:

- Creating some exciting sponsorship opportunities which are expected to materialise during the middle of 2023
- Developing a HillWalking WebSite which is going live during the 2<sup>nd</sup> Quarter of 2023 and which has been co-created with the Hillwalking Group.

## **3. Financial Performance and Planning**

The financial outturn for 2022 is very close to plan, albeit with some underspends and some overspends.

The underspends are due to completion of the planning process extending into 2022 as a result of the delays at the end of 2021. This then led to a slow start to committing to activity in 2022. In addition, the phasing of the activity and thus funds supported by Sport England was delayed because of the very extended process associated with putting in place the contracts.

The overspends are within GB Climbing due to the high level of International Competition in 2022 and from hosting the IFSC World Cup at Ratho, where the anticipated funds from UK Sport did not materialise. The Public Relations material from Ratho has directly contributed to our ability to land the sponsorship opportunities and the overspend is expected to be recouped through this sponsorship during 2023.

## **4. Safeguarding**

During the 1<sup>st</sup> quarter of 2023 the Board has undertaken Safeguarding training – via the Ann Croft Trust.

It is essential that if anyone has a concern around Safeguarding that it is reported to the BMC Safeguarding Team, which is being led very ably by Helen Murphy. Without good reporting it is very difficult, and often impossible, for the BMC Safeguarding Team to respond to individual cases and to take learnings from those cases across the wider organisation.

The leadership of Safeguarding within the BMC along with the Chair will be reporting to the Board in May on the current state and level of risk to the BMC.

#### **5. GB Climbing (GBC) and the Competition Climbing Performance Group (CCPG)**

The Review of the CCPG and by inference GB Climbing reported just before Christmas 2022 in a succinct and thoughtful report which highlighted the challenges associated with the competition sports.

What the report did not do was specifically to recommend how to move the organisation forward. As a consequence, at the February meeting of the Board it was agreed to put in place a small Task and Finish Group, which would take the Review and recommend how to move forward. This group reported at the March meeting of the Board and identified that there continues to be a gap around how best to organise "*Grassroots – Participation Sport*". The Board requires that it receives a report on how the BMC will organise "*Grassroots – Participation Sport*" at its meeting in May.

In addition, the Chair of CCPG, President and Chair of the Board are engaging with SkiMo Scotland in order to understand how the BMC can support them and their athletes in the run up to the Winter Olympics which are to be held in Northern Italy in 2026.

#### **6. Sport England (SE) Funding**

In Place

During the first week of February the Association of British Climbing Walls (ABC) signed the contract which enables their very important work on wall accreditation to move forward.

#### **7. Supporting the Outdoor Sector of our activities - sports**

Ongoing

We have had a follow up meeting with Sport England around supporting both the large community that enjoy our hills and mountains and improving the communication of safety messaging. We are waiting for a response

#### **8. Board Agreement**

The Board approved or Supported

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- Approved: A new Code of Conduct for the Directors ..... the associated disciplinary processes require further work and will come back to a future meeting of the Board
- Approved: The Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Policy and the associated Diversity and Inclusion Action Plan
- Supported: The Climate and Sustainability Action Plan, which is to come back to the Board later in the year when there is more depth and detail behind how the plan will be delivered

## 9. Governance

As a condition of accepting the funds from Sport England the BMC was audited by a professional auditor – BDO, during 2022.

There were 2 parts to the audit – Finance and Governance.

The Governance Audit report was received just before Christmas 2022 and the organisation has to respond back to Sport England with a plan for implementation. The report has some similarity to that delivered by Campbell Tickell in 2021

In February the Board decided to set up a small Task and Finish Group which would propose the response. This group comprised 1 Independent Director, 1 Nominated Director, 1 Council Nominated Director, A member of the Senior Leadership Team and the Company Secretary. The Group reported at the March meeting of the Board and have been asked to rethink some of the responses and timelines. They are required to report at the May meeting of the Board.

## 10. Sector Leadership and Partnerships

It has become apparent that whilst the BMC strategy states that a key pillar is to lead the sector, the BMC has a way to go before it is possible to declare that the BMC genuinely does lead the sector.

Unlike other sports and activities, the mountain, crag and wall sector has grown up with many organisations, all of which are playing important roles.

It has become apparent to the Chair and the Board that delivering the BMC strategy and providing a high quality service to the membership requires the BMC to work with these organisations and make a

step change in how it works with its partners – be they funded, in the conservation and access sector or within indoor and competition climbing.

Going into the next 2 years the BMC must address how it becomes a better partner and steps up to Sector Leadership.