

## **BMC Sandstone Open Meeting – 8<sup>th</sup> October 2017**

**Present:** Sarah Cullen, Adrian Paisey (co-Chair), Mike Parks, Mick Canning, Richard Barlow, Martin Walker, Simon Wilson, Mike Vetterlein, Steve Jackson, Lisa Payne, Rik Payne, Daimon Beail, Emma Harrington, Robin Mazinke, Sarah Goodman, Edwin Jenkins, Ian Butler, Frank Shannon, Kevin Silman, Malcolm McPherson, Rhys Whitehouse, Samael Taylor, Laurence Reading, Howard Peters

### **1. Welcome and Apologies**

SC welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies had been received from: Graham Adcock, Bob Moulton, Tim Skinner and Karen Vaughan.

SC explained that the meeting would follow the format established during the May Open meeting. Bob Moulton had prepared the following update which AP read out in his absence.

### **Sandstone Open Meeting 8th October 2017**

**Introduction** The format for these meetings as trialled at the last meeting (One hour meeting - no agenda, 10mins overview from HRMG/SVG followed by 50 minutes general discussion) was a success and we're using it again today, although as a one-off we can go on for another half hour when discussing the access to Isolated Buttress at Harrison's! Minutes are being taken of this meeting and will be available online from the usual websites but they won't be on the agenda for the next meeting.

**HRMG/SVG Overview** Please save any questions or comments on this for the general discussion part of the meeting.

#### **1.1 Harrison's**

- **The Woodland Plan.** The next stage, to be worked on this autumn is the area, below Unclimbed Wall. Once the tree surgeon has been booked, a weekend date will be announced for this. It is also planned to clear the ground at the foot of the north end of the Rocks. Advice is awaited from the Forestry Commission as to the most suitable species of small trees to plant in the areas that have been felled.
- **The Isolated Buttress.** Following a trial period this summer of not having a fixed rope in place and monitoring erosion and practices used, a decision on what to do next, which could be to build a bridge, will be made by HRMG. Rob Dyer has produced a pros and cons paper for and against building a bridge, and this has been widely distributed with copies being available here. Many thanks Rob!
- **Anchor Placements at Harrison's.** Relatively little work has been done over the summer, partly as we have been waiting delivery of the bonding agent

recommended in the report from Portsmouth University, however a number of the wobbly bolts have been fixed and these seem much better now. The pair of old bolts above Unclimbed Wall has still to be removed.

- **Resin work** has been carried out by Steve Jackson on a number of routes out, which brings the total to 27 routes treated in all. A list of the routes treated so far in 2017 is available [here](#). Steve now has a boson's chair to assist his work!

Adrian has been unable to progress his ideas for testing resin against PVA etc and is now thinking of a revised approach of following up to see how treatment by both resin and PVA stands up to wear.

- **Cement work** No work has been recently, and nothing is known of as needing urgent repair.
- **Signs at Entrances to the Rocks** Replacement signs were put up at the upper and lower entrances to the Rocks and a third new sign was put up at the Forge Farm entrance in June.

**1.2 Stone Farm** Steve has established that unfortunately Martin Walker has been able to do any resin work at Stone Farm because of back trouble, and Steve hopes to do some work there weather permitting.

**1.3 Bowles (Update given by LR as he was in attendance):** "There is the new area we dug out with about 8 brand new climbs. We are also playing some more bolts in October as well as some repair work in places." This is the area at the lower end of the rocks nearest the car park that was referred to at the May meeting. It is assumed that this includes he means putting in bolts above the climbs. The new climbs are all easy beginners' climbs and are being used by Bowles for their groups.

**1.4 High Rocks** As reported at the May meeting, there is enough support among local climbers for a work day to cut back the rhodies above and to some extent below the rocks. This will also include the bolt testing of the bolts on Hut Boulder. Once agreed with the owner and a date set, probably in December or early in the new year, volunteers will be sought from SVG. It is hoped that the owner will allow people in for free to do this work.

**1.5 Eridge Green** Nothing to report.

**1.6 Bolt Tests** The test planned to be done at the TWMC/CC Bulls Hollow Meet could not be done because of bad weather Graham Adcock hopes to arrange this if weather permits this year or failing that next year. See above re Hut Boulder at High.

**1.7 Happy Valley** Daimon Beale has not yet been able to follow up the owner's idea of putting bolts in on Cheesewring Buttress now that the felling of the leaning tree that provided a belay for the routes but still plans to do so.

**1.8 The Sandstone Code of Practice.** Copies of the new Sandstone Code of Practice/Bouldering Sense were available at the last meeting. Stocks have now being

distributed to most local climbing walls and shops with deliveries to be made to others, and kinks to it are on the usual websites. Copies are also being left out on the tables at Harrison's toilet block. The BMC design team have now prepared a poster to publicize the Code for putting up at climbing walls etc. A copy is up on the wall here.

**1.9 The SDST** Nothing to report.

*RDM - 7/10/17*

## **2. General Discussion**

**2.1.** SW raised concern about the situation at Stone Farm. He reported that the traverse underneath Belle Vue Terrace had been badly chipped and the tree stump belays above the far wall were increasingly rotten – Should they be removed / replaced with bolts? **Action: HRMG** - Further investigation required. – Update, HRMG will continue to monitor the situation.

**2.2.** MMcP stated that the previously agreed cutting plan at Stone Farm had not been fully completed. This will require a survey to identify the balance of the work outstanding and then to arrange its completion. **Action: HRMG**

**Update email from MMcP** – “There were two trees that Graham and I did not cut that was on the list. One was I think a Chestnut that was shading the Cat Wall part and another one opposite the fir tree.

There was a limb on an oak tree that we were supposed to cut but it was directly over the crag and we did not risk it as it may have fallen and smashed the rock. “

**2.3.** FS asked if there would be any further plans to revise the Code of Practice (COP) and whether we were open to input? FS raised concern about the use of portable speakers causing disruption at the crag and asked if a rule could be added to the COP to prevent their use. RP asked how much of a problem is it?

There was some mixed discussion within the group, SC noted that she had seen a rule about the use of portable radios in an older (pre 95) CC Southern Sandstone guide but that it had since been removed. There is a lot of information already in the COP and the consensus was the focus should be on the protection of the rock and there was insufficient room to add additional misc general behaviours. **Action: HRMG** to consider options

### 3 **Harrisons – Isolated Buttress Access**

The Isolated Buttress access situation was the major discussion point of the evening. There was a good level of debate / discussion with both sides presenting good arguments respective to their case which is summarised below. The output from this meeting, combined with all email feedback received will be fed into a pack for further review by the HRMG who will then make their recommendation to the BMC for approval.

There was a fantastic proposal not to build a bridge but to build a viewing platform (which could be used for climbers to step across onto the IB). To recap, the discussion is focusing on the only two options which are endorsed by the BMC. These options are, do nothing, or build a bridge. For more information, see the previous BMC report of access options.

- Less people have been observed climbing on the Isolated Buttress (IB) since the loss of the boulder and change in access. MMcP sees this as a good thing as the routes will be preserved for more advanced climbers (in terms of grade). MP suggested that it is increasing traffic in other areas of the crag that may have previously been neglected but were now in better condition thanks to the woodland management programme.
- The access traverse above Wailing Wall is suffering damage from highly increased use, which ultimately could further reduce access if not protected / treated and was to become unusable. It was noted that damage is increased by the blind shuffling nature of adjusting foot placements while on the traverse.
- RM suggested a treatment routine would be required on a 6 monthly basis to maintain a hard outer skin on the foot traverse in order to prevent extreme wear.
- LR commented from his experience in maintaining Bowles rocks in some cases conventional treatment fails if the rock becomes too damaged and the only way to harden the rock is to stop climbing on it (e.g. for 2 years) to enable the skin to naturally reform.
- The only damage currently observed on the IB is on the access traverse. FS and MMcP both commented that the routes themselves are in good shape and that the access traverse is merely an access ledge which itself is not a major feature on the routes underneath. SC made the counter argument that the ledge is already suffering damage which is a direct result of the change in access and that we should seek a solution which minimises all damage regardless of whether it is directly to the major established routes or not.
- LR commented that we always had easy access which FS reinforced by stating that there used to be commercial groups. MW raised concern that

this traffic has not been reduced at a crag level, but instead will be putting higher pressure on other popular areas, e.g. Unclimbed Wall.

- The conversation focussed on education. FS claims to be the driving force which was undisputed. The challenge is educating visitors at times FS or any other locals are not present. MW noted he had witnessed bad practice by visiting climbers.
- LR stated that in his time living and working at Bowles rocks he can speak to 5 people about bad practice every time he walks the length of the crag. Such is the turnover of newly visiting climbers, unexperienced in local access and ethics. FS noted this will be the case regardless of the bridge situation but LR's key point is that any system that relies on perfect practice, will always fail. This should be noted in the context that the current popular methods of accessing the IB without soloing are complex and hard to work out if not shown. Example below:

Example method of access:

1. Lead climber traverses above wailing wall belayed from above using a combination of the bolts and tree above the jammed boulder.
  2. Lead climber is protected from swinging back into the mainland face by a second belayer on the ground by Birchen Corner and a back rope.
  3. Lead Climber places a Tyrolean rope around the boulder above Birchen Corner which runs back to the tree on the mainland and the pair of bolts behind it. Note, its critical that the bolts on the IB are not used for rigging the Tyrolean traverse.
  4. Climbers can then climb routes on the IB and exit via the traverse, using the Tyrolean as a form of protection should they fall. Note, this method is not endorsed by the BMC and is untested.
  5. When finished, the last climber could dismantle the Tyrolean rope and reverse the traverse protected by two Belayers as per step 1 & 2.
- SC highlighted that in respect to everything above, Harrison's is one of the most popular crags in the country with its proximity to London and sees a lot of traffic from new visiting climbers.
  - FS stated that the people there more than most are opposed to a bridge. This was countered as being a vocal minority giving the example that of the 30 members in the East Grinstead climbing club, none of the members are against a bridge.
  - IB stated that in fact we did have a bridge in place before, just not a very good one (referring to the old step across). There is a perception or fear that building one now will cause much higher levels of erosion to the routes but this was not the case with previous very easy access.

Furthermore, the thrill of making the step may actually have enticed people onto the boulder. He added that a lot of the holds are Ironstone and were hardwearing, having survived the previous “reasonable” access. SC agreed.

- RP stated that with new generations of wall bred climbers, a bridge will entice people onto the IB whereas the step across would have stopped some.
- RW observed that those against a bridge are capable of managing their own access while those in favour of a bridge are not. RW sees the bridge option as dumbing down, creating a “clip and climb” environment. He cited other examples of difficult access in the UK which have been left untouched for climbers to identify their own solutions.
- LR referenced the BMC video method (which does not include the Tyrolean example given above) which works well for getting onto the IB, but requires climbers to reverse their route after climbing. He stated that often he would be too tired to down climb, so would attempt and then inevitably fall off and lower off. Therefore changing the argument that the options are “Build a bridge, or face people downclimbing / falling off / lowering off”.

This raised the question, is the potential wear / damage to routes with less climbers generally using the block, but potentially lowering off compared to unrestricted access via a bridge, and more climbers, but with less people lowering off (people may still fail while climbing up!)

- The stability of the currently jammed boulder bridge was highlighted / questioned. This was referenced in the BMC report and the situation is unchanged.
- The crux is not access to the boulder, but getting climbers off the boulder. It’s the best dry rock in winter, but the traverse wall has the worse aspect and stays damp in the winter months.
- DB raised the 2015 online survey which had shown 20% against a bridge and 74% for a bridge out of 178 votes. MW asked how this would be reconciled and SC confirmed it would constitute one piece of feedback in the larger decision process. More emphasis would be placed on written comments & Open Meeting discussion.
- RP asked if there was evidence of increased traffic at other popular areas? Is this detrimental? MMcP said that with the tree cutting programme and more areas coming into condition, spreading the traffic across a broader

spectrum of routes was a good thing. There was no evidence of detrimental traffic at other popular areas.

- RP was not interested in making access easier, his concern was damage. A bridge would favour more climbers who may be less able to climb. How do we deal with this? Is Harrison's a special case? MMcP asked, was some wear to the traverse ledge worth forfeiting in order to protect the potential damage to all the routes on the rest of the block?

The debate is polarised by two radically opposed options which is why we are in this period of extended review. At the end of the meeting there was a show of hands from the audience to gauge the views of the group. The vote was 10 against a bridge versus 9 in favour of a bridge (AP and SC did not vote + 3 others abstained)

4 **Next Meeting** 20<sup>th</sup> May 2018 at Bowles

*AP – 01/12/17*