

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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South West Area Open Meeting preceded by Annual General Meeting

An Open Meeting of the South West will be held at 7.00pm on Wednesday 25th January 2012 at the Hen & Chicken, 210 North Street, Bedminster, Bristol, BS3 1JF.

The purpose of the meeting is to (briefly) hold the Annual General Meeting, immediately followed by discussion of the Avon Gorge proposal.

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

Agenda – AGM starting at 7pm

1. Welcome and Introduction
2. Apologies for Absence
3. Minutes of the previous AGM
4. Annual Report
5. Election of Representatives

Agenda – Open Meeting – The Avon Gorge Climbing Regeneration Project

Starting immediately after the AGM

1. Introduction to the Open Meeting
2. Avon Access Issues and Avon Climbing Project presentation by Martin Crocker
3. Discussion
4. Voting
 1. To approve the Avon Gorge Climbing Project Proposal
 2. To approve the constitution, authority and roles of the Project Steering Group
 3. To note that:
 - a) The Project is subject to approval by the BMC National Council and the BMC Access & Conservation Trust, and a satisfactory level of funding.
 - b) Subject to approvals in 1 and 2 (and those noted in 3a) there remains the capacity to make representations to the Avon Gorge Project Steering Group about any matter that might impact upon climbing in Avon Gorge.
 4. If Project approved: appointment of Project Steering Group and receipt of expressions of interest by additional volunteers
5. Any other business

Close

The Avon Gorge Revival

Proposed Avon Gorge Climbing Regeneration Project

Introduction

A proposal for an Avon Gorge Climbing Project to improve the conditions for climbing at Avon Gorge has been made by Avon Gorge guidebook-writer Martin Crocker; the BMC is being asked to support the Project.

Following initial informal discussions with local climbers, the BMC and Bristol City Council, the proposal is being routed through the BMC South West (BMCSW) for wider discussion amongst climbers and approval at this open meeting. If agreed at BMCSW the proposal will be considered for approval and funding-support by the BMC's National Council and its Access & Conservation Trust. Subject to the BMC's approval, the Project will be adopted, actioned, and monitored by the BMCSW through an appointed Project Leader/Coordinator in conjunction with a Project Steering Group attached to BMCSW.

The Steering Group will be constituted at the meeting, and volunteers with a sound knowledge of Avon Gorge climbing are welcome to put themselves forward as members. How the Steering Group will operate is set out in the Appendix. In addition anyone wishing to express an interest in volunteering assistance of some form to the Project is very welcome.

The climbing issues and opportunities at Avon Gorge, which the Avon Gorge Climbing Project ('the Project') will aim to address, will be summarised in Martin Crocker's presentation.

VOTE 1: The Avon Gorge Climbing Project Proposal

Project Aims

- To regenerate climbing in the Avon Gorge, and lay foundations for it to become once again a vibrant climbing venue with a level of climbing usage befitting a site of such national importance.
- To raise proactively the profile of climbing in Avon Gorge with Bristol City Council and others (including the owners of the cliffs as necessary). In so doing to optimise the strength of the climbing community's influence on plans for the site including actions planned in the Bristol Side of the Avon Gorge Management Plan (BSAGMP).
- To instil the importance of the Avon Gorge climbing site and its climbs with conservation bodies

- To gain a full understanding of the state of the cliffs and climbs in conjunction with the voluntary guidebook work well underway by the Climbers' Club (which will help inform the Project and the carrying out of its objectives)
- To attract partners and resources to the Project including volunteers, thereby also promoting a wider appreciation of the Avon Gorge climbing site
- To increase usage and accessibility by improving the physical condition (reversing any neglect) of the climbs of Avon Gorge, having full regard to statutory constraints (e.g. highways authority, conservation) and ethical constraints (the current Avon Gorge like-for-like bolt policy).
- To campaign on key Avon Gorge climbing access issues (e.g. for the purpose of reopening Main Wall car park and the improvement of pedestrian safety, parking and transport in the base of the Gorge), leaving in place a communication network that enables BMCSW to do so in the longer term
- To maintain a watching brief over the intended change of ownership of the cliffs, and respond and take opportunities to the benefit of the climbing community

Project Duration and Objectives

The duration and objectives of the Project depend on resources which are currently unknown. Resources include both the funding that could be made available for employment of the Project Leader/Coordinator and voluntary donations and assistance. It is hoped that provision will be satisfactory to enable the Project to run for a two-year period (on a part-time basis but with the flexibility to respond to issues arising across that period). Targets will be firmed up when the resources are known, and agreed by the Project Steering Group.

Provisional Objectives (assuming 2-year Project)

1. Make a substantive representation/presentation to the City Council (and other statutory authorities if appropriate) at a senior level to set out the importance of the Avon Gorge as a climbing site, its cultural and sporting heritage, and its climbing access issues.
2. Carry out a key discussion, subsidiary to (1), with each of the relevant City Council departments
3. Make a representation to conservation bodies to highlight the importance of the Avon Gorge as a climbing site and how the climbs inter-relate with known or possible conservation interests
4. Make a suitable contribution to the feasibility study and any proposals for bringing back into use The Main Area (Great Quarry) car parking area following further consultation with climbers as necessary
5. Establish a means to contribute to and participate in any known negotiations or discussion arising from the intended change of ownership of the cliffs insofar they may affect climbing access or the integrity of the climbs
6. Establish a seat to represent climbing interests on an appropriate local governmental liaison/management committee and link to the BMCSW framework for the longer term

7. Identify photographically the sites of trees that are of crucial importance to their corresponding climbs and furnish to relevant conservation interests
8. Create a task force of volunteers able to provide physical assistance including towards achieving Objectives 10, 11, 12, and 13 below (fixed gear provision).
9. Establish cash collections at suitable outlets and centres, and via suitable media, for fixed gear replacements and make appropriate arrangements for that fund
10. Renew all pegs that appear seriously worn (and which are *capable* of being renewed), and replace missing vital pegs. Where there is alternative natural-protection equivalent to the peg at that position, the peg not to be renewed.
11. In line with the current Avon Gorge like-for-like bolt policy (as amended 20.1.2011 in relation to the New Quarry and the provision of abseil points), to install bolt belays as approved by the Project Steering Group (item 5: 'The Authority and Roles of the Project Steering Group')
12. In line with the current Avon Gorge like-for-like bolt policy (as amended 20.1.2011), re-equip the New Quarry (item 6: 'The Authority and Roles of the Project Steering Group')
13. In line with the current Avon Gorge like-for-like bolt policy (as amended 20.1.2011), renew all legitimate bolts that appear worn, damaged, or otherwise defective to an approved, nationally acceptable specification
14. In conjunction with conservation bodies, and having had full regard to the AGBSMP, remove any scrub that seriously interferes with a climb or access to or from that climb
15. In conjunction with the statutory authorities, remove unstable rock formations from climbs that appear to be of immediate serious threat to users (item 7: The Authority and Roles of the Project Steering Group')
16. Carry out a climbing event in 2012 or 2013, incorporating a get-together for past Avon Gorge activists; and establish a framework to allow for repeat events to take place, say, every five years

Project Management

The management of the Project will be achieved by:

- The appointment by the BMC of a Project Leader/Coordinator to execute the Project on behalf of the climbing community and the BMC in collaboration with interested parties and statutory authorities. (The expectation is that this post will be a remunerated temporary contract with the BMC.)
- The formulation and operation of a Project Steering Group to refine the Project plan and to support the Project, as defined in the Appendix to this report

Appendix: The Avon Gorge Climbing Project Steering Group

VOTE 2: Constitution

1. The Steering Group to comprise no less than six and no more than eight members, one of whom shall be the Project Leader
2. Aspirants to nominate themselves at the BMCSW meeting, and the nominees will be voted in at the meeting. (In the event of there being more nominees than seats on the Steering Group, the nominations to be agreed between the nominees, or – if no agreement is reached – by a vote taken at the meeting in relation to the nominees).
3. Aspirants should have a sound knowledge and experience of Avon Gorge climbing and be in a position to commit time and to respond effectively
4. The Project Leader to coordinate communications between members of the group and organise any meetings and record and disseminate notes of those meetings and the decisions of the group. The corresponding records to be forwarded to the BMC head office.
5. The Steering Group to report to BMCSW including via written progress reports from the Project Leader to any BMCSW meetings held in the Bristol area while the Project is still live
6. Decisions to be carried out by a process of discussion and – where necessary - voting within the group, via a dedicated email/web-based forum and, as necessary, meetings.
7. If a member leaves the group, any replacement member's nomination is subject to approval at the next BMCSW area meeting.

The Authority and Roles of the Project Steering Group

1. To act on behalf of BMCSW for the purpose of supporting the Avon Gorge Climbing Project
2. To support the operational work of the Project Leader who will service the Steering Group
3. To support the detailed development, viability, application, and promotion of the Avon Gorge Climbing Project and its aims
4. 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 20th January 2011.

5. 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.
6. In order to implement a successful fixed gear renewal programme for the New Quarry, which was subject to a resolution at BMCSW 20th 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.)
7. To make decisions in relation to significant unstable rock features, the neglect or removal of which could have implications either way for the character of the climb or a climber's safety. Any rock stability issues considered to have the potential for a wider public safety impact (e.g. material risk of rocks landing in the highway) or conservation impact (e.g. loss of valuable botany or habitat) to be referred to the appropriate authority together with the climbers' viewpoint.
8. To receive and consider representations regarding any matter falling within the remit of the Avon Gorge Climbing Project and to action accordingly. For those matters that fall outside the Project's remit, either to consider revising the Project accordingly or to refer the matter to/liaise with the appropriate organization.