



BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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Minutes of the SW Area Meeting

(Held on Saturday 8pm on Saturday 6th October 2012 @ the Dolphin Inn, Dolphin Square, Bovey Tracey, Devon. TQ13 9AL)

Present:

Matthew Goater (MG) - Chair	Philip Wilson (PW) - Sec
Richard Moss (RM) - BMC Rep	Nick Donahue (*BMC Rep)
Iain Peters (CC)	John Willson (CC)
Hannah Woolley	Emma Grant (SDMC*)
Tim Reynolds (SDMC*)	Pete Merrick (SDMC*)
Mark Gardner (SDMC*)	Sarah Welsh (SDMC*)
Mark Wilson (SDMC*)	Alexis Bailey

* South Devon Mountaineering Club (SDMC)

Note: There were also 4 attendees from North Devon, whose names I did not unfortunately record (apologies to them). If they become known they can be added to the above attendance list,

1. Welcome & Apologies for Absence

MG welcomed everyone to the meeting. Apologies for absence were received and accepted from Dave Hillibrand & Anne Satow.

2. The Previous Cornwall Meetings Minutes & Any Matters Arising

A quick summary of the minutes and action points from the previous Cornwall meeting were reviewed by **MG**, including:

- a. Bosigran Lower Path Repair: Des Hannigan reported that he had spoken to Jon Brookes National Trust Manager for West Penwith regarding this. Jon has agreed to gather opinions from within the National Trust and get back to Des regarding what needs doing here. Des said that he will continue to push for an appropriate answer.
- b. Replacement of the Abseil Point Middle Fin Lower Sharpnose: Iain Peters CC, said that he had not yet done this, but would do so.
- c. Avon Gorge Project Steering Group Meeting: Matthew Goater and Philip Wilson briefed the group about what occurred at this recent meeting on the 26th September 2012. The following summary of these proceedings was given:
 - i. Project Aims: To promote the value of climbing at a strategic level with the powers that be. Re-popularise climbing at Avon and in so doing secure it for the future (by scrub clearance, loose rock removal and peg replacements). It was also hoped to open the car park under Main Wall.

- ii. Appointment Of A Project Officer (PO): Martin Crocker has been appointed as PO for this project. This post is part BMC sponsored for 5 paid days per month. The rest of the hours for this (at times full time post) being made up voluntarily e.g. non-paid.
- iii. Rotten Peg replacements: The peg replacement costs are not being sponsored by the BMC (due to the legal ramifications of replaced pegs failing with age and the BMC being sued for these injuries or fatalities). Instead this is being funded by anonymous voluntary contributions from within the climbing community (£1500 collected to date via collection pots with £2000 required).
- iv. Project Branding: A 'ClimbBristol' brand name and the slogan 'The Best Urban Crag in the World' (or something similar) is to be adopted. Logo and PR posters are to be drawn up.
- v. Project Promotion to Interested Parties: A top down political approach is to be taken to elicit support, interest and funding from Bristol City Council Executive Members, local MP's and climbing celebrities with South West connections. A Facebook page has also been set up and the BMC press officer is to help with PR. Links are also to be made with relevant committees, steering and community groups who manage or own the relevant land surrounding the gorge.
- vi. Volunteer Involvement: The legal implications and liability of 'hands on' volunteer work for gear replacement and scrub and rock removal was debated at length. Training for individuals (with the relevant transferrable skills) and procedures are to be drawn up by the PO for worst case scenarios. These include fatalities or injury to any volunteer carrying out the work, or to members of the public. A gear fund administrator was also appointed to document how these funds are being spent on replacement pegs (route names and dates replaced).

Note: The full minutes of this 3 hour meeting can be found in the BMC Community site.

- d. National Council (NC) Business: Colin Knowles (SW Area BMC NC Member) has contacted us to draw attention to a recent meeting held with the Mineral Products Association (MPA). This resulted in the BMC inviting a MPA rep onto the BMC Quarries Working Group meetings. The MPA also agreed to invite Graham Richmond (MPA representative) to one of their regional meetings, to explain the significance and importance of quarry climbing. The BMC has also offered to write an article for the MPA in-house magazine and has invited an MPA representative to attend the BMC Liability conference, to be held on the 1st November 2012.
- e. Feedback From The Cornish Climbing Festival: This event was held at Treen, Cornwall in September 2012. It raised around £200 for the lifeboat fund charity. It was attended by around 60 people, who all enjoyed free bacon and egg butties for breakfast on both the Saturday and Sunday. The camp site fee was also discounted, as was a Saturday evening get to know you session and meal held at the local pub. There were problems with both the camp site venue having to be changed at the last minute, as well as the withdrawal of the mystery speaker with very little notice. There was also a nearby all night council sanctioned 'rave' with house music karaoke sing along! The organisers were sufficiently

encouraged to say that they would repeat this event in the future (the climbing festival and not the rave!).

3. Review & Discuss BMC Ethics, Style & Drilled Equipment

Before the start of this review, the meeting was led to understand that a major revision of this policy was already under way by Dave Turnbull (BMC CEO), This followed feedback from some of the regions. The need to review this document at all was therefore questioned by some. It was pointed out and agreed that despite this we should carry out the review and feedback to the BMC, as we might well raise valid points not yet considered by the other regions. This provoked lively contributions from all as follows:

Comments on the Original 1992 Policy Wording:

- a. Most liked this, as it was sufficiently vague to be more all- encompassing than the suggested replacement.
- b. References to limestone should not be made as many bolted venues exist that are no longer restricted to this rock type.

Comments on the New Draft Policy Wording:

- c. Some thought the old policy was the new one (until they found and read the second page) which was confusing.
- d. The 1st three paragraphs were deemed as 'history' and although valuable it was felt should not be part of the policy wording. These could be made into explanatory notes attached to the policy.
- e. The policy wording does not start until the 4th paragraph.
- f. Everyone agreed that the new policy wording should be crisp and un-ambiguous, which this draft was not.
- g. People liked the 1st paragraph. The word traditional could be replaced with the climbing term 'trad'.
- h. The terms 'sport' and 'trad' climbing could be defined in the wording as they apply directly to this policy, unlike scrambling, soloing and bouldering that does not (as it does not involved fixed gear protection or descent). Some felt that scrambling, soloing and bouldering should not be part of this policy.
- i. Ascensionist is spelt incorrectly (no 't' should be in it) in paragraph 4. Note: I have investigated this and found the spelling to be 'ascensions' or 'ascents' e.g. 'a balloon ascensionist' (source Merriam Webster online dictionary).
- j. The new policy should could define the terms 're-equipping' and 'retro-bolting' and offer procedural advice to BMC regional meetings as to how to apply these as follows:
 - i. These two terms are different. In the first case this means like for like replacement and in the second case it means altering the character of the route substantially e.g. changing the route from trad to sport (in which case the permission from the first ascensionist should be sought).
 - ii. This sparked a debate as to whether a first ascensionist owned a route. It was decided that this was not the case, as any route is the joint property of all climbers to enjoy and safeguard for posterity.
 - iii. Others wondered how to respect the first ascensionists wishes if they were deceased.
- k. Abseiling and lower off points could be separately defined as they are relevant.
- l. Include abseil stakes in the policy.

- m. Sub divide the policy into 'bolts' and 'pegs' to protect the ascent and take into account whether the route is 'trad' or 'sport' climbing.
- n. Include, bolts, pegs and tat lower-off and/or abseil descent as all these seem relevant.
- o. The second paragraph is too long (it is the longest paragraph in the new policy) and appeared to some a 'little BMC head officy'.

See the appendices of the original Agenda for this document presented to the meeting by Matthew and Philip.

4. Fixed Gear on the Atlantic Coast – A Policy Proposal

This proposal was presented by Iain Peters (CC), who stated that a policy on this did not exist for North Cornwall / Atlantic Coast. John Willson (CC) pointed out that it did as he had drafted one in the 1990's. He however raised no objections to Iain presenting this new proposal.

Iain stated that he wanted these procedures to be agreed before work started on the new North Cornwall CC guide (that he and Mark Kemball were producing). This guidebook work would then be carried out in step with this policy if passed.

The following points were then made by Iain:

The Problem:

- a. There is no place for drilled gear on the Atlantic, Culm and Exmoor Cliffs (including Baggy) sea cliffs.
- b. A draconian ban on pegs already placed in this area is not desirable or practical as for the Cornish sea cliffs. This is due to the more fragile nature of the rock and the absence of other forms of adequate protection.
- c. Not all existing pegs can be maintained (due to their large number). But where no natural protection option exists, pegs should remain.
- d. Where adequate natural gear exists, pegs should be removed e.g. Wreckers Slab (where at least 6 pegs remain in various states of decay).
- e. Pegs over 2 years old are potentially dangerous and will not perform to the levels of newly placed pegs by the first ascensionist e.g. they could fail with no outward signs.
- f. It is not practical or desirable to ask people to replace pegs prior to their ascents (most climbers have not got the level of skill to do so).
- g. Many worthwhile routes are no longer climbed (or climbed less) due to missing or deteriorating pegs e.g. Eroica (although peg replacement here is not possible). On routes where pegs are maintained many more ascents are made e.g. Crimtyphon (5 or 6 pegs). Crucial peg removal therefore discourages/stops many attempts/ascents.
- h. The deterioration or absence of lower offs and belay stakes (where sanctioned in the guide) discourages ascents.
- i. There is therefore a real danger that such climbs and in some cases whole crags will continue to fall into disuse and be lost to future generations of climbers.

The Solution:

Iain then outlined his proposed solution as follows:

- a. Replace necessary decaying tat with chains and maillons e.g. Middle fin Lower Sharpnose and request BMC support for replacement (already granted).
- b. Replace necessary decaying belay stakes with long lasting solid ones e.g. Carn Gowla Black Walls Area and request BMC support for replacement.
- c. Monitor condition of fixed gear via a Climbers Club database (linked to UKC and other forums) and hold information regarding them e.g. fixed protection type (peg protection, belay stake or lower off), route name, route location, last date checked & comments on condition until replaced, date replaced and comment on its condition on removal. This database would be compiled (and maintained) by local activists as part of the new guide book work to the area. It would be used to monitor condition. This source could be used by any climber to determine the condition of fixed gear on particular routes and from this make a judgement as whether to climb the route (knowing the possible state and age of the fixed gear in question).

Note 1: Philip Wilson (SW Area BMC Sec) stated that the BMC would not sponsor peg replacements due to legal reasons (as stated by Dave Turnbull (BMC CEO) in the recent Avon Gorge Fixed Gear Replacement steering group meeting minutes). This is due to their inevitable in situ deterioration e.g. the BMC may be sued if they fail and that their direct involvement could invalidate their insurance. Iain stated that this would be overcome by peg replacement not being BMC funded.

- d. Replacement would be carried out anonymously at recommended fixed intervals as indicated in the database.
- e. Remove all unnecessary, dangerous pegs and abseil stakes where and when safe alternatives are in place.

The issue was then discussed at length and a vote held. The vote was passed unanimously, with two abstentions, pending BMC approval.

See the appendices of the original Agenda for this document presented to the meeting by Iain.

5. Replacing Fixed Equipment - Berry Head Quarry & Long Quarry Point

This proposal was presented by Nick Donahue (SDMC BMC Rep) following recent SDMC club meetings. Nick explained that the SDMC passionately wanted to re-popularise climbing at both these venues and carry out this work.

In the process of circulating his proposal, just prior to the meeting, he first stated that his original initiative had been amended (in consultation with Philip Wilson (BMC Sec), Matthew Goater (BMC Chair), Iain Peters (CC) and Pat Littlejohn. He explained that Pat Littlejohn was consulted as he was in many cases the first ascensionist of many of the routes at Long Quarry Point, for his views). The points raised by Pat caused the team to then revise their proposal. The points that Pat made were then presented to the meeting. They were as follows:

1. Happy to see some routes sensitively bolted on Berry Head Quarry and the quarried wall at Long Quarry Point.
2. Against rapidly bolting the whole cliff.
3. Retro bolting these climbs should be gradual and carefully thought out and agreed before doing them.

4. Bolts should not just replace existing pegs in every case.
5. St Gregory's The Wonder Worker (Ansteys Cove) could be a very popular Severe or Hard VD if properly bolted. Gilded Turd could become a popular VS.
6. Take routes in order of first ascent to preserve the integrity of the original line **Note:** People were not exactly sure what was meant here, Nick agreed to find out and apply it to his proposal.
7. Much less happy with retro-bolting the slabs at Long Quarry Point as they are only partially quarried. The main problem here is vegetation rather than poor protection. These routes could be cleaned and pegs replaced. Many pegs are unnecessary and can be superseded by small wires and cams. The area would benefit from a Tremadog style clean up.
8. Consult with the first ascensionist on a route by route basis as far as possible, if alive.

We wish to whole heartedly thank Pat for his support, sensible advice and prompt response albeit at the 11th hour!

See Appendix A for Pat Littlejohn's email response back to us.

The proposal was then discussed in the meeting. It was unanimously agreed that the SDMC should formally redraft their proposal to incorporate the above points made by Pat. Nick accepted that his current document was more of a consultation paper than a proposal. He agreed to draft this proposal with help from this area meeting (if needed). This was agreed and supported by all at the meeting. The following key points were raised in this debate:

1. It was suggested that the project could be split into Berry Head Quarry, The Quarried Walls At Long Point (incl St Gregory's...) and The Long Quarry Wall Slabs and run as two or three projects in succession.
2. It was desirable to establish a mixed area with both trad and sport climbs.
3. Berry Head Quarry, The Quarried Walls At Long Point (incl St Gregory's...) could be bolted and made into sports climbs.
4. The Long Quarry Wall Slabs would be cleaned and where necessary have old pegs replaced, with safe lower offs on unstable top outs and belays. This area should remain adventure trad e.g. we should not alter the character or difficulty of the routes in question.
5. First ascensionists should be consulted and their views respected.
6. The case for each route should be made individually e.g. no blanket retro bolting.
7. This proposal arrived too late for considered support from the BMC Better Bolts fund 2012 (deadline is the 15th October 2012).

Note: Philip Wilson (SW Area BMC Sec) I have attempted to draft this proposal incorporating the main points made and agreed at the meeting for consideration. This seems better than reporting the discussion verbatim (which was disjointed at times). This first draft is contained in Appendix B entitled 'Suggested Policy Wording For Replacing Fixed Gear At Berry Head Quarry/ The Quarried Walls At Long Point & The Long Quarry Wall Slabs.'

6. Access & Any Local Issues

- a. Peregrine Nests at Long Quarry Point: It was pointed out that this should be considered when work starts at this crag e.g. carry out the work when the birds are not nesting and inform/agree with the appropriate parties in advance.
- b. Hazard Quarry: Philip Wilson (SW Area BMC Sec) agreed to talk to Rob Dyer (BMC Access) about access following a fatality for which the landowner was being blamed and climbers were therefore banned and whether this is likely to be lifted.
- c. Vixen Tor Access: Iain Peters (CC) has a relative who is high up in South West Planning. His view is that we should force a compulsory purchase order of the land from the current owners with interested parties (£150K), but in order to do so this must have overriding public support and therefore be in the public interest. There is a precedent for this in Bethesda valley North Wales where this happened. The fact that the Ramblers association failed in their attempt to force footpath access via their legal challenge strengthens this case. Ian is to talk to Dave Turnbull (BMC CEO) to put the case for this public campaign approach.

7. Any Other Business.

- a. Avon SW Area Meeting Dates & Times: Matt Goater (SW Area Chair) was asked whether some of the Bristol meetings could be held at the weekend in the future. It was explained that this would enable people to more easily attend from outlying regions such as Devon and Cornwall (who wanted to see their suggestions and proposals moved forward). It was also pointed out that this might not encourage local Bristol climbers to attend as they may be away climbing in other areas at the weekend. Matt agreed to look into this to see whether this could be done with some of these meetings (perhaps in the winter).
- b. SW Area Meetings Start Times: It was felt that 8pm was too late a time to hold the meeting and that this should be at 7.30pm in the future. Matt Goater (SW Area Chair) to take note.

8. Next Meeting Date: Thursday the 22nd November 7pm @ The Nova Scotia Inn Bristol.

Action Point:

1. Philip Wilson agreed to feedback to Dave Turnbull the points raised in the review and discussion of the BMC Ethics, Style & Drilled Equipment document.
2. Iain Peters to organise the install of the BMC sponsored abseil point at Lower Sharpnose (agreed in the past Cornwall meeting).
3. Philip Wilson to ask the BMC about sponsoring the Carn Gowla Black Walls Area & co-ordinate with Iain Peters.
4. Philip Wilson is to help Nick Donahue to draft the Berry Head Quarry/ The Quarried Walls At Long Point & The Long Quarry Wall Slabs as required by Nick (the first draft is contained in Appendix B). Nick is to co-ordinate the detailed proposal on a route by route basis, with the help of the SDMC and members of this meeting as required. Nick is to find out what Pat means by point 5.6 (if relevant).
5. Philip Wilson is to speak to Rob Dyer, concerning (non) progress of climber access at Hazard Quarry.
6. Iain Peters is to talk to Dave Turnbull regarding his Vixen Tor proposal as a way forward.
7. Matt Goater is to investigate holding some Bristol BMC meetings at weekends.

Appendix A Pat Littlejohn's Email On The Berry Head & Long Quarry Point Proposal.

-----Original Message-----

From: patlittlejohn@alpin-ism.com [mailto:patlittlejohn@alpin-ism.com]

Sent: 05 October 2012 19:20

To: Philip J Wilson @ hotmail.com

Cc: matthewgoater@yahoo.co.uk; 'Nick Donohue'; iainpeters230@btinternet.com

Subject: Re: SW Area Gathering Dolphin Inn Hotel Bovey Tracey @ 8pm

Hello Philip

Thanks for getting in touch, even at the 11th hour! The SDMC has not contacted me. As is well known I'm a passionate devotee of traditional, adventurous climbing, however I have noted with concern the complete neglect of crags like Berry Head Quarry and the Quarried Wall at Long Quarry Point.

I'd be happy to see some routes on these crags sensitively bolted but would be against rapidly bolting the whole of these cliffs.

The routes there represent years of effort by different climbers and retro bolting them should also be a gradual and carefully thought out process.

I don't necessarily think that bolts should just replace existing pegs in every case - bolted climbs SHOULD be safe and unless they are they will still never be popular. Routes like St Gregory the Wonder Worker could be a very popular Severe (or even HVD) if properly bolted, while Gilded Turd could be a popular VS.

A good way to approach this would be to take the routes roughly in order of their first ascents, then the integrity of the original line is more likely to be preserved.

I'm much less happy about retro-bolting The Slabs at Long Quarry as they are only partially quarried and the problem on them is more vegetation than poor protection - they need a clean-up w/e like we have at Tremadog. Also pegs here could be easily replaced (in my view), and many are unnecessary anyway with small wires + cams.

So if this proposal goes forward I would support it in the context of the comments above but I would ask that whoever takes on this project consults me regarding routes (other than those mentioned above) when I have been involved in the first ascent.

All the best, Pat Littlejohn.

Appendix B Suggested Policy Wording For Replacing Fixed Gear At Berry Head Quarry/ The Quarried Walls At Long Point & The Long Quarry Wall Slabs.

Berry Head Quarry & The Quarried Wall at Long Point Quarry

- a. Crag Type & Character: Quarried limestone set within a post-industrial landscape.
- b. Current Situation: This crag is loose, fixed protection is awful and no ascents are made by climbers.
- c. Objective: To approve fixed gear renewal, loose rock and scrub removal in order to make this venue popular again with both local and visiting climbers.
- d. Sensitivity: All pegs replaced with bolts should be done sensitively so as not to alter the fundamental character of the routes.
- e. Solutions:
 - i. Bolt replacement for all peg protection and belay peg protection that is rotten and unsafe where no natural gear placement alternative exists.
 - ii. Creation of bolt lower offs on a case by case basis where top outs are dangerous.
 - iii. Clean routes e.g. remove vegetation and loose rock.
 - iv. Any solution will be proposed and agreed on a route by route basis within the framework of the SW Area Meetings and wider consultation. It is expected that this area will become a mixed sport and trad area in time.
 - v. Every effort will be made to contact the first ascensionists and take their views into consideration.

Long Quarry Wall Slabs

- f. Crag Type & Character: Non Quarried limestone set within a post-industrial landscape.
- g. Current Situation: This crag has become vegetated, so ascents are decreasing and will continue to do so if action is not taken.
- h. Objective: To approve sensitive fixed gear renewal (which is an appalling state), loose rock and scrub removal in order to make these venues popular again with both local and visiting climbers.
- i. Solutions:
 - i. Peg replacement for all peg protection and belay peg protection that is rotten and unsafe where no natural gear placement alternative exists
 - i. Creation of bolt lower offs where top outs are dangerous.
 - ii. Clean routes e.g. remove vegetation and loose rock.
 - iii. Any solution will be proposed and agreed on a route by route basis within the framework of the SW Area Meetings and wider consultation. This area will remain trad, but some routes may be converted to sport.
 - iv. Every effort will be made to contact the first ascensionists and take their views into consideration.

Author: Philip Wilson (BMC SW Area Sec) 10th October 2012 1st Draft.