



BMC Peak Area General Guidelines on Fixed Gear **and Placing Bolts**

The issue of placing and replacing fixed gear is a can of worms, especially in an area as intensively climbed and rich in history as the Peak District.

The purpose of these guidelines is to provide the consensus view (as at 2013) of what is acceptable good practice, and to raise awareness of problematic issues and the alternative views of the environment, other climbers, visitors, landowners and other users.

In applying these guidelines you should attempt to use common sense, good judgement and consideration for other people whilst weighing up the various (and sometimes conflicting) environmental, access, aesthetic, ethical, historical and safety factors. These general guidelines are supplemented by crag-specific guidelines given in the crag introductions.

Environment and Access

First and foremost: if you are gardening or (re)gearing new or existing routes, you have a (potentially prosecutable) responsibility to be aware of the environmental impact and existing access arrangements. Craggs are owned by a diverse range of landowners, some of whom are conservation organisations. Many crags are located in environmentally sensitive areas and may be classified as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI). Such designation affords legal protection in the UK. SSSIs are so designated by virtue of the fauna, flora, geological or physiographical features in the area, e.g. a rare or special lichen or plant or rock feature. Whilst any activity that could harm the special interest should not be carried out within an SSSI, other non-harmful activities are not restricted. Note additionally that there may be special agreements regarding fixed gear negotiated by the BMC with landowners in some areas e.g. Cheedale, Water cum Jolly.

Climbing styles change with time and with them crags rise and fall in popularity. Routes may become overgrown and/or covered in ivy. Unless specifically 'banned' under conservation agreements, climbers should feel free to climb any established routes. Where they have become overgrown re-cleaning activities should be undertaken sympathetically. The Regional Area Database (RAD) on the BMC website tends to cover the major areas well, but if you are in any doubt about what is allowed - or for more esoteric locations - then contact the BMC Head Office before embarking on something that might jeopardise access not only for those routes but a whole crag! The BMC Access Reps are in regular contact with the landowners and can help you get permission for what you propose. Landowners may attach stipulations: for example, they may prefer the use of lower-offs to minimise the impact of trampling to minimise the impact of trampling at the top of a crag and on descent paths.

Act responsibly. Climbers contravening agreements about access, gardening and gear has resulted in landowners withdrawing permission to climb at crags.

Aesthetics

Most people - owners, visitors and climbers alike - usually prefer crags to look 'natural' and not noticeably disturbed. Consequently consider the visual impact of any fixed gear as it could stick out like a sore thumb to some people. Be especially conscious if a crag is owned by conservation organisations and in open view of a footpath. Consider painting bolts and pegs to match the rock. Brightly coloured in-situ threads can be especially intrusive, particularly where 'nests' of tat have built up over the years. When replacing threads therefore please remove old tat and avoid lurid colours. Where large threads or trees are used for runners or lower-offs wire strop and maillon belays are stronger, longer lasting and less visible than rope. In very sensitive areas the use of bolt-and-chain belays should be avoided: dual bolt lower-offs are preferred.

Leaving in-situ 'perma-draws' on long-term projects to all intents falls into the category of fixed gear and the same issues apply. If you encounter 'unattended' in-situ quickdraws or colourful karabiners in a place that you consider likely to offend non-climbing observers, then please act and take them out. You can return them to the owners via the lost and found boards on UKClimbing and/or UKBouldering.

Ethics and history

In general the coexistence of bolt and trad routes in the Peak is a triumph of common-sense and compromise – let's try to keep it that way!

With improvements in protection over the years, the vast majority of trad routes no longer rely on all the fixed gear they might contain to provide adequate protection. Many of these now 'historic' pieces of fixed gear are of negligible value as protection and merely serve to act as waymarkers and/or reminders of our local limestone-climbing heritage. A distinct lack of fixed gear on many routes is another form of reminder!

Gradually, items in this historic category are disappearing and, when they go, most will NOT need to be replaced. As always, climbers should carefully assess ANY fixed gear placements they utilise and be particularly aware that much old and rusty fixed gear can be notoriously unreliable.

Occasionally though, a piece of fixed gear is significant to the grade and character of a route.

Some examples of these might include the single bolts on Circe (Stoney) and Midnight Summers Dream (Chee Tor); pegs such as those on Splintered Perspex (Chee Tor) and Robert Brown (High Tor) and threads - like the resident one sported by Our Father (Stoney).

The absence of any of the above would be sorely missed by most leaders and would frustrate guidebook editors! Generally speaking, routine like-for-like replacement of fixed gear of this nature (where this can be adequately achieved) is welcome, but due regard should be had to any aesthetic considerations as mentioned earlier -particularly on those routes or buttresses where sensitivity exists.

Where like-for-like replacement is not possible, any replacement (with a bolt) - if considered necessary or desirable - would best be raised and debated at BMC Peak Area Meeting on a route- by-route basis. Drilling to protect a route previously climbed without recourse to such action is a significant step and should not be undertaken lightly.

Be considerate of the history of a buttress or route. It is generally not acceptable to detract from existing classic routes (usually, but not always, trad routes). This means that adding inferior new routes with fixed gear very close to, or crossing, classic routes should be avoided - especially if the new fixed gear can be clipped from the existing line. If you are re-equipping sport routes you should consider the original character of the route in terms of any run-outs or the belay position. Greyer ethical areas apply to retro-bolting neglected existing trad routes.

Whilst the first ascensionist doesn't have absolute rights to the original route they will undoubtedly have an emotional stake (however esoteric the route). Please be considerate and contact them for their views as your first point of call if you want to retro-bolt a route or re-equip it in a significantly different manner. Generally speaking if they approve of your plans this is likely to reduce objections. In this day and age getting in touch via social media is usually quite easy.

If the first ascensionist is un-contactable (they may no longer be with us!) then sound out your ideas with other experienced local climbers and at the BMC Peak Area Meeting. This might be a bit of pain when you are at the crag with a fully charged Hiltibosch, but in the longer term repeated placement and removal of fixed gear does nobody's *savoir faire* (or the rock!) any good. If you are considering something very ambitious, such as the wholesale retro-bolting of a large buttress of trad routes, then in the interests of gaining consensus support it would be wise for you to add this to the agenda for a proper debate at a BMC Peak Area Meeting.

The following climbs are examples of routes which are of either classic/historically significant status and therefore (according to current consensus opinion) should NOT be retro-bolted or crossed by new bolted lines despite being on crags which have substantial bolt-protected climbing (NOTE: this list is purely indicative and by no means exhaustive):

Chee Dale: Nettle Buttress - General Incompetence; Summer Wine; Terra Incognito

Chee Dale: Two Tier – Ninth Life; Mad Dogs and Englishmen

Chee Dale: Plum Buttress – Sirplum

Chee Dale: Chee Tor – Mortlock's Arete (a re-gearing of the top pitch would present an ethical dilemma if the pegs can't be replaced like-for-like!); Golden Mile; Ceramic; Tequila Mockingbird (no extra bolts)

Safety

In general, bolt spacing on sport climbs should make the routes safe with bolts placed in good rock and in the optimum places for clipping.

Only 316/A4 stainless steel (or better) bolts and pegs should be used. Substandard bolts corrode quickly necessitating early replacement: this leaves unsightly scars and in some

cases old studs in the rock. An example of particularly poor re-equipping is Too Old To Be Bold at Rubicon which is already on its second set of (rusty) bolts.

If you are unsure about the type and grade of bolt to use then please seek expert advice or refer to the Bolting Guidance on the BMC website. If using 'through' style bolts then over-drilling is highly recommend so that on (eventual) replacement the studs can be hammered flush with the rock. If you are re-gearing a bolt route then the equipment and metalwork can be provided free of charge by the Peak Bolt Fund. There is a long list of Peak sport routes with dangerous gear and a shorter list of people with the time, aptitude and psyche to do the re-gearing. Volunteers to help spread the load are very welcome.

Overstepping the mark

Taking into consideration these guidelines, if you see a new piece of fixed gear which you judge is unacceptable, what should you do? The first step is to directly contact the person that did it (if possible) to understand their actions and, if possible, reach an amicable resolution. If this is not forthcoming and you feel strongly that these guidelines have clearly been disregarded, removal of the offending item(s) may well be justified.

If you are not confident or sufficiently proficient to take such action, then to get a consensus view and assistance you could debate the incident online and/or put it on the agenda at the next BMC Peak Area Meeting. This kind of dispute potentially enlivens the evening and may boost attendance!

Useful websites:

BMC website: www.thebmc.co.uk

Peak Bolt Fund: www.thepeakboltfund.blogspot.co.uk

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