

Crag Lough Clean-up Festival notes

Background to the clean-up

The crag is an extensive North facing Whin Sill Dolerite escarpment offering over 100 recorded routes the majority of which are in the perennially popular HS to HVS range. Although north facing the rock is generally clean, extremely hard wearing and does not tend to polish. The crag was one of the earliest to be developed in Northumberland and the classics at this fine crag bear comparison with the best outcrop routes anywhere. However over the last few years the crag has fallen out of fashion, with many climbers tending to focus on sandstone outcrops further North in The County. The relative neglect of the Whin Sill crags resulted in increased vegetation on all but the very most popular routes resulting in the familiar cycle of less attention and further encroachment of vegetation. Last year's restoration brought many routes back into condition but there are many that time did not allow for.

The vegetation of concern tends to be grass and small shrubs encroaching on ledges and in cracks; unlike on sandstone, lichen formation in the winter months is not a significant problem. The timing of the clean-up towards the end of the season is to allow for the departure of any nesting birds. The winter months will help to clean away any debris and vegetation will not return during this time. As has been found this summer the benefits should be enjoyed throughout next year and beyond.

The Plan

The plan is to clean routes on the Saturday and enjoy the fruits of our labour by climbing on the Sunday. The BMC is laying on a barbeque at Winshields Farm Campsite on the Saturday evening as thanks for your efforts. There is a decent pub a very short walk away.

Accommodation

The [Winshields Farm Campsite](#) is 400 yards west of the Twice Brewed Inn on the Military Road (B6318). Cost is £8 per person for camping, 50 p per car; there are approximately 60 pitches, so space is not an issue and booking probably not needed. They even do breakfasts on site! If you don't feel like camping there is also a bunkhouse which sleeps 12. I would suggest advance booking if you plan to use the bunk house. There is also a [Youth Hostel](#) near the pub.

The Crag

[The crag](#) is situated 35 miles West of Newcastle upon Tyne about half a mile off the Military Road (B6318). Cars can be parked at the [National Trust Steel Rigg car park](#); the crag is about a twenty minute walk from the parking.

The crag sits immediately below the Roman Wall (UNESCO World Heritage Site) on land owned by the National Trust, which is fully supportive of the clean-up. The crag is also an SSSI. The scientific interest is in the geological formation itself rather than any flora or fauna living upon it, consequently removal of vegetation has a positive impact on this aspect of the crag environment. Formal approval has been given from English Nature.

The crag is a nesting site for birds, primarily Peregrines and Ravens. Whilst the birds have long since departed for this year, one or two ravens' nests will still be present. These nests are often quite large and the Ravens typically return to them each spring. If you find a nest in the middle of a climb it should not be removed, however obstructive it may be.

On the day

We will be meeting at the Steel Rigg car park at 9:30. There will be a short briefing from the BMC and/or myself at around 9:45. A short risk assessment will be provided which you will all be asked to read and sign. The assessment is really a matter of common sense. We will then head off en masse to the Crag at 10:00.

Litter is not a significant issue at the crag; the purpose of the clean-up is to remove vegetation from holds, ledges and cracks. The problematic vegetation is most commonly sods of turf which can be removed on abseil safeguarded by a prussik.

What to bring

Standard climbing gear:

- Rope
- basic rack for setting up anchors (including long slings)
- prussik loops
- helmet

Gardening kit:

- gardening gloves
- small trowel (for ledges/flat holds)
- a patio knife (for narrow cracks; a nut key will work nearly as well)
- small nylon bristle bush (for cleaning away dirt and soil)

Anything which you bring for gardening and cleaning on abseil should have an attachment loop of some kind so it can be clipped to your harness with a krab.

Don't worry if you don't have everything on the list above. We will have goggles, gardening gloves, trowels, patio knives and brushes for you to borrow on the day. We should also have some static abseil ropes which you can borrow if you don't fancy getting your nice shiny new sport climbing rope dirty.

Camera:

Last year we took photographs of routes before and after cleaning, thus providing a visual record of what had been done for any interested parties such as English Nature and the National Trust. They were also used to illustrate the state of the climbs after cleaning and to spread the word amongst the wider climbing community after the event.

Could anyone who is intending to participate email me so we have a rough idea of numbers for food and any extra kit required on the day. Also let me know if you are a vegetarian or have any dietary requirements not compatible with a barbeque.

If you have read this far, thanks! I don't think there is anything else, but if you have any questions please get in touch – mark_anstiss@hotmail.com

Hope to see many of you on the 7th September, Mark Anstiss.