

## **BMC Southern Sandstone Open Meeting - 20th May 2018**

Present: Sarah Cullen, Emma Harrington, Daimon Beail, Malcolm McPherson, Michael Bouchard, Graham Adcock, Martin Walker, Michael Phelan, Rik Payne, Tim Williams, Simon Wilson, Tim Daniells, Gwain Theobald and Bob Moulton (Chair)

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

BM welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies had been received from: Tim Skinner, Adrian Paisey and Steve Jackson

BM explained that the meeting would follow the format used for the last two meetings. It would only last for one hour: it would start with a 10-minute overview from HRMG/SVG and then be followed by 50 minutes of general discussion with no agenda.

### **2. HRMG/SVG Overview** BM reported on:

#### **Harrison's**

- **The Woodland Plan.** The next stage, to be worked on this autumn is the area, below *Sliding Corner*. The tree surgeon had been booked, and the weekend of November 10/11th was planned for the SVG work. Mark Brewster had taken on the job of identifying suitable species of small trees to plant in the areas that have been felled.
- **Clearance work**  
Daimon Beail had done and is continuing to do a considerable amount clearance above the area from *Crucifix* to *Scoop Arête* area wall to help with access and keeping the rock below in better condition; it was hoped that this will take traffic from nearby climbs. Daimon was also planning to do similar work in the *Bootless Buzzard* area.
- **The Isolated Buttress.** HRMG made a decision to build a bridge in December. However, following the BMC Land Management Group (LMG) on 19 April) LMG chair, Martin Wragg, had issued the following statement, which would also be on the BMC website:

'Following the removal of the loose boulder, previously used to step across from the mainland to the Isolated Buttress at Harrison's Rocks, climbers HRMG and BMC have been deliberating about the best course of action for future access to the buttress.

The issues are complex, and are summarised in the document prepared by Rob Dyer last autumn outlining the pros and cons of installing a bridge to access the Isolated Buttress. In December 2017 the HRMG, a group of keen local climbers who volunteer to help manage the Rocks, recommended that a bridge should be installed following a long period of analysis of arguments made from both sides, balancing these arguments against the BMC's legal responsibility.

The landowner is the BMC subsidiary company and charity, BMC Land and Property Trust, the directors/trustees of which are the BMC President and

two members of the LMG well as the BMC itself. They have ultimate responsibility in law in the event of any allegation of breach of duty under Occupier's Liability legislation or Health and Safety regulations and this duty cannot be avoided or delegated.

LMG manage the BMC land holdings on behalf of the Trust and BMC Land Holding Ltd. HRMG are a sub-committee and the chair reports to the LMG. Since the recommendation was made, concerns have been raised by a number of individuals. Having regard to potential legal implications, LMG members consider it necessary that they inspect the site and hear directly from climbers at a Sandstone Open Meeting in the autumn. The day after the Open Meeting, the LMG will meet and unless there are compelling reasons to come to a different decision, LMG will endorse the recommendations of HRMG. There are a number of construction, planning, legal and cost questions that need to be addressed prior to the Open Meeting, including Occupier's Liability and Health & Safety and these will continue to be investigated by the LMG as part of a feasibility study to ensure that if the decision is endorsed, installation is possible. The date for the Sandstone Open meeting has been provisionally set as Sunday 7th October 2018.'

- **Anchor Placements.** Daimon was planning to do some bolt work as soon as he could pick up the kit from Adrian Paisey who was currently on holiday. A bolt(s) for the easy version of *Two Toed Sloth* would be put in along with some bolts in the *Giant's Ear* area. He would not be replacing the bolt on *Wailing Wall* at this time due to the difficulty of access. The pair of bolts on *Unclimbed Wall* needed to be removed, and to do this and for future such work HRMG were purchasing an angle-grinder. The work would be tidied up with some resin. HRMG saw this as preferable to boring old bolts out, which could cause quite a lot of damage to the rock.
- **Resin work** Following advice from the BMC, HRMG were giving consideration to the best way to use volunteers to do this work, particularly as regards to working at heights. This means that there would be a temporary halt on the work, and it was hoped that this won't be for long. Fortunately, Steve Jackson had done most of the outstanding work at Harrison's. We were seeking volunteers to assist Steve/take on some of this work; however it should be noted that some training would be required, it was time-consuming and at times frustrating as the rock had to be dry. Adrian had 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 stood up to wear.
- **Cement work** HRMG's general view was to keep any cement work to the minimum in future.
- **Strimming** It was hoped that this will start on 1st June to clear some of the paths where the Himalayan balsam is growing and hopefully to make a start on clearing the area near North Boulder.

## **Stone Farm**

- Malcolm McPherson and others had completed the outstanding tree work that they were unable to do three years ago, had done a considerable amount of revetment work, had done a general crag clear-up and had opened up a new path alongside the fence from the stile below the main area to the entrance to the Rocks, which will take foot-traffic away from walking beneath the crag.
- As reported to the last meeting Martin Walker had been unable to do any resin work at Stone Farm because of back trouble, and Steve hoped to make an assessment of the work that needs doing together with Sarah, but any work would be subject to the same temporary halt as at Harrison's. As with Harrison's, we were seeking volunteers to assist/take on some of this work and were following up on two who have already volunteered.

**Bowles** Loz Reading had reported:

"We had our bolts tested as part of our regulations. These tests were done using an external company and we found that all our bolts can hold up to 10kn in an upward direction. We tried testing one to failure but the machine would not go high enough to pull it out, there was also no damage to the rock or metal work during this process. We have received some of the new bolts from HRMG and have placed these, we will test these this year when the bolt tests are due again and share the information with HRMG."

**High Rocks** Although agreed in principle by the owner the planned work day to cut back the rhodies above and to some extent below the rocks had not yet taken place. It is hoped to ensure that this would happen late this year/early next year. This could also include the testing of the bolts on Hut Boulder. Volunteers would be sought from SVG. It was hoped that the owner would allow people in for free to do this work.

**Eridge Green** Nothing to report

**Bulls Hollow** Bolt Testing here at and on Hut Boulder at High as above was still outstanding, and Graham Adcock planned to arrange this when weather permits this year.

**Happy Valley** Daimon had been unable to follow up with the owners, the Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators (TWCC) the idea of putting bolts in on the Cheeswring Buttress following the felling of the leaning tree that provided a belay for the routes.

Meanwhile, bolts of unknown provenance had been put in by persons unknown on the Cheeswring Buttress and above *Red Snapper* without permission of the owner. This action had endangered the good relationship between climbers and the TWCC, who also own Bull's Hollow. Graham Adcock was liaising with TWCC over this matter, which was likely to involve removing the bolts, and replacing them at some future date with proper bolts subject to agreement from the open meeting and the BMC. Meanwhile warning tags had been put on the bolts. If anyone knew or got to know who put these bolts in please would they contact Graham. It was stressed that such bolting on Southern Sandstone without permission of the owner and using bolts not approved for the purpose by the BMC was completely unacceptable.

**Steve Durkin Sandstone Trust** A committee meeting was planned for the near future

### **3 General Discussion**

- 3.1** While reading out the above BM suggested that HRMG should find out the details of the bolt tests that Bowles do from LR. **Action SC**
- 3.2** **The resin work at Stone Farm** was seen as a high priority. HRMG members explained the background to the temporary delay: although BMC officers had condoned the methodology used since 1991, the problem now was working at heights. It was understood that work by volunteers from ground level could continue, but that for volunteers to work at heights (i.e. from ropes), the BMC would need to pay for a method statement to be written by a suitably qualified person, which would require a second person to be present. Some training for all those involved would be needed. The alternative would be to employ professional rope-access persons to do the work. Enough volunteers were identified at the meeting to do the work voluntarily, including MW who was able to work from the ground. It was agreed that we should follow this option and to this end SC would make a site visit with MP and others to assess what work was needed and that she should ask Rob Dyer to arrange for the method statement to be prepared and the necessary training to be arranged as soon as possible. **Action on both points SC**
- 3.3** **The Bolts at Happy Valley** were discussed at some length as it was seen as a serious development that could lead to bolting at other crags without the owner's consent and contrary to the views of the Sandstone Open Meeting. GA had spoken to the TWCC representative, Steve Budden, who had told him that the conservators would be considering the matter at their meeting at the end of June. It was agreed that GA should inform Steve Budden of the meeting's view that the bolts should be removed as soon as possible both on the grounds of safety and to get over the message of the unacceptability of such bolting, and that local climbers, who have experience of doing this work, would be happy to do this. Although the majority was in favour there were different views as to whether we should subsequently ask the TWCC for permission to put in BMC-approved bolts, and in any case, there were insurance issues that needed to be clarified with the BMC - although the bolts at Bull's Hollow and High Rocks were covered by the BMC's insurance, it had been made clear to BM that this would not apply to bolts put in on any other crags not owned/managed by the BMC. Meanwhile, TD undertook to look into what he thought would be a way of top roping climbs on the Cheesewring without the necessity of using bolts, and if this worked he could ask Mike Brains to write it up. **Action GA and TD**
- 3.4** MMcP asked whether a warning tag had been put on the bolt above *Wailing Wall* (see above), and DB replied that he had done this.
- 3.5** GA asked where the New Climb Log Books were now that Evolution was closed; SC answered that they were currently with Mike Vetterlein, who was checking some of the entries re the climbs in the new Rockfax guide. There was then a debate as to whether the log books should be continued now that the majority of new routes were being recorded on UKC. Although differences of opinion on this were expressed, the majority view at the meeting was that the log books should be continued for those who wished to use them and that they should be kept at Bowles. During the discussion DB made it clear that the copyright symbol, ©, that appeared on the UKC website only applied to descriptions that were quoted from the Rockfax guide and *not* to the climbs themselves. **Action SC**

- 3.6** The meeting showed its appreciation of work done at Stone Farm, in which MMcP had played a leading part.
- 3.7** RP advised all of the need to vote on the BMC Organisation Review motions at the BMC AGM on 14 June, and he briefly explained what was involved. **Action All**
- 4** **Next Meeting** To be advised.

*RDM - 25/5/18*