

## **BMC Southern Sandstone Open Meeting - 19th May 2019**

Present: Graham Adcock, Tim Daniells, Ben Read, Tim Skinner, Michael Phelan. Edwin Jenkins, Chris Stone, Richard Barlow, Simon Wilson. Tim Williams, Adrian Paisey (co-Chair), Mark Brewster, Malcolm McPherson. Zac Moss and Bob Moulton (co-Chair)

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

BM welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies had been received from: Sarah Cullen, Emma Harrington, Daimon Beail and Steve Jackson

BM explained that the meeting would follow its now standard format. 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. Minutes would be taken of this meeting and would be emailed round by GA and be available online from the usual websites.

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

#### **2.1 Harrison's**

**a. The Woodland Plan.** Last November's work weekend on the area below *Sliding Corner* had been successful with work also being done in other areas, including digging out the drainage channels below *St Gotthard's* and *The Vice*, work that probably needs to be done every year. Tim Skinner had planted a number of saplings in the slopes below the Rocks. There had been a good turn-out and thanks were due to all who attended. This had been the first year that we had made the weekend a formal 'BMC Event' with a Risk Assessment and briefings at the start of the day and for anyone arriving late - this meant that we had been covered by the BMC insurance. This seemed to work well without being too bureaucratic. The next stage, to be worked on this autumn is the area, below *The Vice*. and Mark Brewster really will be sorting out more saplings to put in from November onwards.

#### **b. Clearance work**

Daimon Beail and Emma Harrington had extended their clearance work at the top from the *Crucifix* area to the right of *Birch Tree Wall*, including clearing the tops of the climbs; it is hoped that this would take traffic from nearby climbs

**c. The Isolated Buttress.** Following the special meeting with members of the Land Management Group and the LMG's decision to endorse HRMG's decision to build a bridge, the BMC had been told by the local council that a fully detailed Planning Application must be made. The BMC were doing this, including a report from a structural engineer, and hoped to submit it in the very near future.

**d. Anchor Placements.** Daimon Beail and Emma Harrington had started on a programme of putting in new bolts, with 13 pairs having been put in to date with a further 21 bolts to be placed, including the bolt above *Wailing Wall* [this has now

been done]. They had been using a new type of bolt which should reduce the minor twisting that had been reported on for a number of the existing bolts (which had been noted and will be worked on). Full details and photos were on the Southern Sandstone Climbs website.

- e. **Resin work** The BMC had now issued a method statement and risk assessment for working at heights by people approved by HRMG and it was hoped that resin work would restart in the near future.
- f. **Cement work** HRMG's general view is to keep any cement work to the minimum in future but there is some work that needs to be done.
- g. **Strimming and the Southern boundary fence** A large area had been strimmed during the work weekend by professionals on a voluntary basis, during which some damage to the boundary fence was noted. The same people had then been contracted on a paid basis to strim all the bracken on both sides of the fence so that it could be inspected and then to make the necessary repairs.
- h. **The leaning tree in *The Sewer* area.** As reported at the last Open Meeting. HRMG had decided to take this down before it became dangerous. Contractors to do this work had now been taken on to do this, and it will be done on 23rd May.

## 2.2 Stone Farm

- a. Michael Phelan had drawn a Management Plan for the Rocks, which had been approved by HRMG and by Natural England, the site being a SSSI, with the latter having given a Consent for the work to be within the next two years. The plan included cutting back the holly, mainly along the edge of the bridleway, removal of the two trees stumps in the Stone Farm Crack area, and felling a small number of trees that were shading the rock, which should open up a new bouldering area. Also at English Nature's suggestion, Michael had arranged for a bryophyte survey of the mosses in the shaded areas to be done and he was looking into setting up a reptile hibernacula near the southern boundary. The East Grinstead CC had volunteered to remove the tree stumps and they and Michael were working the methodology and a Risk Assessment for doing this. When the stumps had been removed there would be no belays for the climbs in this area for a while, although it was planned to put bolts in when the rock has settled down. This should be taken as advance warning of this situation. - warnings would also be put on the usual websites in due course.
- b. Michael and his team would be clearing the extensive litter in the parking area, although this is not BMC-owned land.
- c. Michael together with Theo Parr would be doing the higher level resin work in accordance with the BMC working at heights requirements this summer

d. Following one of the signs having been vandalised. new BMC signs had been made up, which Michael would be arranging to put up. These were intended to be a template for new signs at Harrison's. Two features of the new sign are an emphasis on not using hard brushes and on keeping chalk use to a minimum. Currently we also have signs up at a number of non-BMC owned sites: Bulls Hollow, High Rocks and Bowles. A decision would need to be made as to whether to do the same for the existing signs at the crags not owned by the BMC.

**2.2 Bowles** Nothing to report

**2.3 High Rocks** Climbing remains 'suspended'. Graham Adcock and Tim Daniells were in the process of trying to set up a meeting with the owner.

**2.4 Eridge Green** A site meeting had been held in April with Alice Parfitt, the Reserves Manager of Sussex Wildlife Trust, who own the Rocks, attended by Tim Daniells, Ben Read, Michael Phelan and Bob Moulton. The only real area of concern to the SWT was the wear caused by bouldering in *The Thrutch* area, and it was agreed to encourage boulders and climbers to go elsewhere with a sign being put up to do this, the wording on the sign was being discussed and it was hoped that *Earthrise* would be excluded from this. If this didn't work, the SWT would almost certainly ban all climbing in this area. However, a possible trade-off for this is that Alice had undertaken to look into the possibility of reviewing the restrictions on the wall left of *Dusk Crack*, and we raised the question of climbers cutting down some of the extensive hollies had been raised. At the end of the meeting we had been approached by a local resident about the problems caused by cars parking in the lane going up from the car park when it was full, which were blocking access to and from the cottages. It was said that this was mainly caused by climbers, some of whom had been rude and had sworn at the residents. SWT are looking into this but please don't do this!

**2.5 Happy Valley** The following statement had been posted on the usual websites: "Bolts have been placed illegally without the agreement of the Tunbridge Wells Common Conservators. In consultation with the BMC, the TWCC have accepted that the bolts should remain on the Cheesewring Rock. The bolts are 'thought' to be safe but climbers should use the bolts at their own risk. It is suggested that the bolts are linked using a length of rope as a backup." The bolts on the mainland have been removed.

**2.6 Steve Durkin Sandstone Trust (SDST)** Nigel Head had recently resigned from the trust having served since its formation in 2011. The Trust was actively seeking a replacement and possibly looking to expand the trust members with Associates.

### **3 General Discussion**

**3.1** The frequency of the open meetings was discussed. The overall view was that we should continue with two meetings a year, but that the start time should be changed

particularly for the October meeting. It was agreed that the next meeting should be at 1 to 2pm to provide a lunch break for those climbing at Bowles. **Action AP/SC/BM**

CS explained that as Chair of the BMC London & SE Area, subject to discussion at its next meeting, he was hoping to hold one of the Area Meetings next year in the Southern Sandstone region, possibly at Bowles to follow the open meeting.

This led on to the idea of having a separate BMC Southern Sandstone Area; CS explained that this was possible and had already happened with a mid-Wales area being established (in addition to the North Wales and South Wales areas) but that area meetings met five times a year so that they could feed into National Council meetings. Subsequent discussion was inconclusive. BM said that one view against was that the current arrangement allowed us to concentrate on work that needs to be done and access issues, rather than talk about BMC organisational issues.

- 3.2** RH, SW & TW (East Grinstead CC) raised the removal of the tree stumps at Stone Farm, which the EGCC has taken on. There was some concern that the club might be criticised for this but it was made clear that any criticism should be direct to HRMG/BMC as it was they who had made decision. It was noted that the, stump above Stone Farm Crack still seemed quite stable whereas the stump above Pine Crack/The Face was much less so, but the decision had been made to remove both stumps and that the latter should be removed first. The scope for putting in bolts on the rock higher up was limited and better placements may be available once the stumps had been removed. **Action RB/MP**
- 3.3** TD reported further on the SDST: in addition to finding a replacement for Nigel Head, SDST were thinking of increasing the numbers on the committee and were seeking people for this. BR was keen to get involved. The Trust hadn't done much since it had been set up, but its funds were growing well, helped by regular contributions from Chimera, who gave a percentage of their course fees into the fund. SDST were planning to be more proactive and were looking for suitable projects to spend money on.
- 3.4** TD and GA reported on their contacts with the High Rocks owner. A fairly positive reply had been received from him, which they would be following up by offering to lodge a sum of money from the SDST with him for fence repairs. If successful, the most likely outcome would be a suggestion that the owner had mentioned before by which he would set up club of climbers who he would allow to climb at the Rocks.
- 3.5** TD reported on an increase in problems of climbers parking in Forge Road, particularly in the evenings when climbers were afraid of being locked in the car park. AP explained that it was being locked in the evenings only when a Forestry Commission volunteer was staying in his camper van in the car park, and that there needs to be notice to this effect on the gate. **Action AP/SC**
- 3.6** GA asked for clarification of a statement made at the open meeting on access to Isolated Buttress by Ian Nettleton about the unsuitability of installing Via Ferrata

type rungs and whether this brought into question the safety of the bolts above the climbs. It was thought that this was due to the difference between putting rungs into vertical rock and bolts into horizontal rock above climbs. BM undertook to seek clarification from IN. **Action BM**

- 3.7** While the bolting work that had been done this year at Harrison's was recognised, there was a general view that replacement of the back-up bolt above Wailing Wall should be a priority. **Action AP**
- 3.8** AP read out an email that had received from SJ about the resin work at Harrison's: SJ was happy to continue doing ground level resin work but felt unable to do the higher level work under the new working-at-heights arrangements that required him to be accompanied by another experienced person, Therefore HRMG are now looking for two people to take this on. There was also some discussion about the pros and cons of using resin and other solvents such as that being used on Northumberland Sandstone and the substance recommended to HRMG by Portsmouth University, which as yet had been unobtainable in small quantities - BM to chase up IN, who was following this up. **Action HRMG/BM**
- 3.9** The overuse of chalk and tick marks on Sandstone was discussed at some length . It was agreed that a campaign was needed on this subject using social media and high-profile articles, You Tube etc. **Action BR/MP**
- 3.10** The need to make sure that people were kept informed about what is going on in the Southern Sandstone area was discussed and the fact that the BMC now had an email list as well as the SVG list kept by GA. AP to discuss with GA. **Action GA/AP**
- 4** **Next Meeting** Sunday 20th October at Bowles.

*RDM and AP - 06/6/17*