

BMC Southern Sandstone Open Meeting - 20th October 2019

Present: Sarah Cullan, Chris Stone, Michael Phelan, Simon Wilson, Ben Read, Richard Barlow
Emma Harrington, Daimon Beail, and Bob Moulton (Chair)

1. Welcome and Apologies

BM welcomed all to the meeting. Apologies had been received from: Graham Adcock, Adrian Paisey, James Bouchard, Laurence Reading and Steve Jackson

2. HRMG/SVG Overview BM and SC reported on:

2.1 Harrison's

- **The Woodland Plan.** The area to be worked on was below *The Vice*. After this, only five areas remain to be cleared in the 13-year plan! Date of the felling and the workday to be announced, which was likely to be in early November. Quotes were awaited for a couple of contractors before dates for this can be set.
- **The Isolated Buttress.** Some progress had been made towards putting in the Planning Application to Wealden DC. The current position as reported by the BMC was that: the survey that was needed had been carried out and the results had been sent to the architect. He was now drawing up the designs and would submit to the planning authority for the BMC, who were waiting to hear back from him once that is ready to go.
- **Anchor Placements.** Daimon Beale and Emma Harrington had completed the programme of putting in new bolts, including the bolt above *Wailing Wall*. They had been using a new type of bolt which should reduce the minor twisting that has been reported on for a number of the existing bolts (which has been noted and will be worked on). Full details and photos were on the Southern Sandstone Climbs website.
- **Resin work** As reported at the last meeting Steve Jackson 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 were now looking for two people to take this on - Graham Adcock would be happy do some of this work next year - more volunteers were needed.
(Note, since the meeting SJ has informed us that he wanted to give up the low-level work as well. Our thanks are due for the work that he has done over a number of years)
- **Cement work** Although HRMG's general view was to keep any cement work to the minimum in future but there is some work that needed to be done, and this would be discussed at the HRMG meeting in November.
- **Strimming and the Southern boundary fence** The bottom path had been strimmed a few weeks previously as it was severely over-grown. This would be repeated in the spring keep on top of the Himalayan Balsam before it flowers,

although eliminating it would be an impossible task as it is prevalent in the surround fields and lanes.

- **The leaning tree in *The Sewer* area.** This has now been taken down as had been reported to previous meetings. The tree had been found to be very rotten and no damage had been done to the rock.
- **Rescue Arrangements** Following the rescue at the Rocks on the day of the previous meeting, in which Daimon Beale and Emma Harrington had played leading roles, HRMG would be reviewing the Emergency Evacuation procedures.
- **Signs** New signs using the new sign at Stone Farm as a template were being made up by the BMC to replace the existing signs at the entrances to the Rocks.

2.2 Stone Farm

- The tree stumps above *Stone Farm Crack* and *Pine Crack* had been removed by MP and members of HRMG and the East Grinstead Climbing Club, and our thanks were due to the EGCC. This meant that currently there would be no anchors above the climbs in that area. The rock that has been uncovered was been kept under review with a view to putting in bolts as soon as possible.
- It was hoped that the relatively small numbers of trees to be felled in the Management Plan will be felled early in 2020 with a possible SVG workday to follow.
- MP would be organizing clearing the extensive litter in the parking area, although this was not BMC-owned land.
- MP together with Theo Parr would be doing the higher-level resin work in accordance with the BMC working at heights requirements.
- The new BMC signs had been put up at the entrance to the Rocks.

2.3 Bowles SC quoted an email from Laurence Reading: "Bowles is having an issue with a minority of climbers. We are having increasing incidences of climbers not respecting that we are a charity for young people and will always have young children onsite. The specifics are climbers that are coming in to Bowles and taking apart in antisocial activities, urinating in bushes and trees and allowing dogs to run loose and uncontrolled. These actions have caused huge problems with the school groups we have had in and are threatening our ability to provide a safe environment for the young people. We are taking a number of actions, anyone suspected of antisocial activities will be reported to the police and CCTV and number plates will also be handed over. Anyone urinating in bushes will be permanently banned from using Bowles, as will repeated offenders who refuse to control their dogs. If the issue continues, we will be forced to take further action which could include (at its most extreme) banning climbing when we have groups in. As this would mean no climbing for about 90% of the year and only open during a few weeks in winter, this is not an action we would like to take. We hope that a stricter approach and help from the majority of respectful climbers that this action will

not be needed. Bowles would like to ask climbers to spread the word that the above behaviours are not acceptable."

2.4 High Rocks. Tim Daniells and GA were still in contact with the owner but had made no further progress, the sticking point being insurance, and they were doing OK but an unknown climber annoyed the owner in August by insisting on climbing there as it was 'his right' and causing a scene during a wedding. This sort of behaviour was entirely counter-productive!

2.5 Eridge Green Following the site meeting was held in April with Alice Parfitt, the Reserves Manager of Sussex Wildlife Trust, as reported to the last meeting, SWT were having a sign put up below the Yew Tree Buttress area. The following message had been put up on the usual websites and social media "Further to a site meeting with the Reserves Manager of Sussex Wildlife Trust, the BMC have agreed to ask climbers not to climb or boulder on Yew Crack Buttress (SSC Rockfax Guide Page 130 - 131) due to the increase in erosion. This covers climbs/boulder problems between *Yew Crack/The Leaf* to *Earthrise Surprise*. *Earthrise* is not covered by this restriction. If there is damage increase then there will, unfortunately, be no option but to this to become a permanent restriction". The BMC Regional Access Database had been amended accordingly. The other matters reported to the last meeting were being following up.

2.6 Bulls Hollow GA had reported that Croydon MC would be working there on 16th November. Otherwise, the crag was in good shape back in August when he had last climbed there.

2.7 Happy Valley The use of the bolts on top of the Chesewring and the appearance of any rope grooves needed to be monitored.

2.8 Ramslye Farm Rocks GA had raised the question of doing some work here, as the Rocks were now quite overgrown and he saw it an ideal project for the SVG and would bring another crag back into use. Were there any volunteers to speak to the people in the house nearby and to discover who actually owns the crag? The alternative would simply do some discrete visits with loppers.

3 General Discussion

- 3.1** SC knew the people who lived in the house next to **Ramslye Farm** and undertook to ask them about the ownership. **Action SC**
- 3.2** Following the very low turnout for this meeting, the timing, frequency and the content of the open meetings were. The record low attendance at this meeting, with all but three of those attending being HRMG members, indicated that holding the meeting at this time of day was a failure. It was suggested that many people were expressing their views through social media with the result that there was a general lack of interest. Reverting to having the next meeting on a Sunday evening in May was discussed, as were the idea of having only one meeting a year, the difficulty of choosing a date when people weren't going to be away climbing, and the unpredictability of the weather. Given CS's intention of holding a London and South East Area Committee meeting in the area, it was agreed that the next meeting should follow an L&SE area meeting at Bowles together with a talk, film or whatever on the weekend of 13/9/20 and that CS would arrange the programme. Some said that they had not received GA's reminder email for the meeting - BM to raise with GA. The use of the BMC's email

service was also discussed; there might be some problems in using this just for Sandstone climbers but in the meantime sending a reminder to all those on the L&SEA list was agreed, especially for the next meeting following the above decision. **Action CS/BM**

- 3.3** In response to a question about the recent agreement at **Eridge**, BM and BR explained the background to the agreement and the importance of our maintaining good relations with the Sussex Wildlife Trust, who own the Rocks and who could ban climbing completely. BM said that he would follow up the Trust the ideas that had been discussed at site meeting: allowing climbing on the wall to the left of *Dusk Crack* and doing some limited clearance work at the Rocks. **Action BM**
- 3.4** Following on from the above, the idea of opening up **Eridge** to disperse some of the ever-increasing numbers climbing at Harrison's in particular and also Bowles was discussed at some length. It was suggested that this could include putting in bolts and more extensive clearance than discussed at the site meeting. It was known that SWT had in the past been prepared to consider our putting in bolts but that at that time the open meeting had discussed and been against the idea, and this view was still supported by some of those at this meeting, who expressed concern that Eridge would lose its current ambiance and could get 'trashed' and climbing be banned completely.
- 3.5** BR raised the question of opening up of the other minor crags, including approaching the owners who had in the past totally banned climbing say every ten years, during which there might have been a change of ownership. For other crags it was recognised that there were no problems with climbing and it was better to leave things as they are. Although this was not seen as doing much to disperse numbers from the major crags, BR's offer to draw up lists of the minor outcrops in these two categories, identifying ownership if possible, and to contact Rob Dyer at the BMC. BM commented that in the past we had asked RD to contact the Woodland Trust about climbing at High Continuation Wall and the answer was no, but that this not mean that we shouldn't do the same elsewhere. **Action BR**
- 3.6** SC spoke of her concerns as to the increase in numbers of climbers at Harrison's at weekends, including many climbing outdoors for the first time and using bad practice and using too much chalk, which in turn led to hard brushing. DB spoke of the advantages of ecoballs for bouldering, although some reported problems with their availability, and of placing micro signage by the bolts - to be discussed further at the next HRMG meeting, including following up on their request that the BMC should run a campaign(s) as discussed at the 19/5/19 meeting. BR mentioned the bouldering wall that he was opening in the East Grinstead area and whether he should actively discourage users from going outside: the general view of the meeting was that this was too extreme an approach, but that the best approach was not to encourage users to go outside but to give advice to those who decide to do so. **Action HRMG**

- 4** **Next Meeting** During the weekend of 13/9/20 at Bowles - date and time to be advised.