

# **Aldery bolt lower off proposal**

## **Background:**

Tree removal, rock scaling and bolt placement work carried out by an individual in 2017 without BMC permission. The bolts that had been installed were removed following advice from the BMC's Technical Officer that they did not follow BMC bolting advice and could not be guaranteed as safe for use in a climbing application.

The crag has always had a reputation for having somewhat difficult top outs due to many of the routes finishing on steep earth/vegetated slopes for a few metres before reaching the top of the crag. Over the years, these top outs had been tamed with the installation of fixed rope/slings around a number of trees at/near the top of the good quality rock which allowed climbers to lead the routes on trad gear and then lower off rather than having to top out.

The removal of many of these trees which previously provided these lower offs, as well as the bolts that had been installed to replace them has meant that climbing at the crag is now a different proposition. It is worth adding that the crag is perhaps best known for being a good venue for evening cragging in the summer, particularly suiting low-mid grade climbers as it is one of relatively few limestone trad crags with a good selection of routes at E1 and below.

## **Area meeting and online debate**

Discussion about the change in nature of the venue and anecdotal accounts of fewer visits on UKC Forums prompted a discussion at the June meeting of the BMC Peak Area. During a wide ranging discussion, comments were made in particular that the top of number of routes (including Carmen and Mitre Crack) now seemed looser than they had been before – possibly due to the crag being climbed on less regularly and ongoing minor scaling taking place. Following a discussion, the meeting voted on the principle of whether bolt lower off/abseil stations should be placed at the top of the crag where possible. The results were:

- 6 against
- 15 for
- 29 abstentions (with a number of abstentions stated to be because full details of proposed work weren't available to discuss and vote on.)

## **Site visit**

Following this Martin Wragg (Chair of the BMC's Land Management Group) and Rob Dyer (BMC Access & Conservation Officer) visited the crag on 27/06/19 to get re-acquainted with the crag and assess what could potentially be done. During this visit, we observed two teams climbing at the crag, one had used a very long extra rope to rig a top rope from one of the large trees at the top so as to avoid having to top out. The other was leading Mitre Crack and having some difficulty due to vegetation on the route low down, as well as having to top out up loose and vegetated more broken ground.

We noted a number of things in summary:

- The crag is owned and managed by the BMC with the intention that it is used by climbers – there is little point in the BMC owning it if it is infrequently visited and goes back to nature.
- It has primarily been popular in the past as a crag for lower grade climbers, who by their nature are likely to be less experienced and able or willing to deal with the now more adventurous top outs.
- There is an expectation that lower offs exist, given they are marked in the BMC guidebook.

- It is probably appropriate to install bolt lower offs in strategic positions on the crag so as to allow routes to be climbed in a similar style to how they were before. This is providing good quality rock can be found to install bolts.

**Proposal:**

Double bolt lower off/abseil stations to be installed (where rock quality allows), using stainless steel resin bolts in accordance with BMC bolting guidelines at or near the top of the routes marked as having in situ lower offs in the guidebook to replace the previous lower offs. These would involve 10 separate bolted lower off stations which would service the following routes:

- Therianthropic
- November Wall
- Carmal/Timber/Rentaghost
- The Mitre Area
- Carmen
- Nettlerash
- Central Arete
- The Fly
- The Spider
- Right Arete/Gard Labour/A Pig in the Middle