

Minutes of Meeting:

Date: 27th January 2021

Time: 1900

Present:

<b>Mark Kemball</b>	<b>Chair: BMC (SW Region)</b>
<b>Alan Dovey</b>	<b>Secretary BMC (SW Region)</b>
<b>Helen Wilson</b>	<b>BMC National Council SW Area Representative</b>
<b>Philip Wilson</b>	<b>BMC National Council SW Area Representative</b>
<b>Rob Dyer</b>	<b>BMC Rob Dyer – Access &amp; Conservation Officer (England)</b>
<b>Dave Turnbull</b>	<b>Head of Access, Conservation &amp; Environmental Sustainability</b>

The meeting was conducted using 'Zoom'. There were 94 attendees. Unfortunately names were not recorded.

#### **Introduction to the Minutes:**

Minutes are recorded in the third person and references to individual contributions or personal activities are not specified. The purpose being to establish the principal concerns, identify key stakeholders and the agreed points for action.

There is frequent reference to 'the Owners' (The Torbay Coast and Countryside Trust', TCCT) and The Regulators (Natural England, NE). This is referred to in the minutes as 'O/R' for the sake of brevity.

#### **Introductory Statement by the Chair.**

1. I draw attention to the agenda. The meeting has been called due to the BMC (SW) becoming aware of the landscape alterations that had been made in the area generically known as Ansteys. The changes look to be significant however it is not for this meeting to deliver a view as to the quality, value or otherwise of these changes. Should all be well this would form part of the discussions with the O/R. It is requested that any opinions are forwarded to the BMC (SW) Chair where they will be recorded for future reference.

Any changes to an SSSI require formal authorisation and as far as is known, neither consultation nor permissions were sought or granted. It is possible that this activity may have been unlawful and it is beyond the remit of this meeting to engage in commenting on, or being seen to endorse changes to designated areas.

2. There is no access agreement for these climbing areas and the owners/managers of the land have not actively banned climbing but there are notices that prohibit access. In practice these prohibitions have not been enforced. It is important to

understand that it is only climbers who access this area in any significant numbers and the 'evidence' to date would indicate that it is a member/s of the climbing community that has made the changes.

The BMC has always looked to work with and agree access to many areas of varying levels of environmental sensitivity. We also look to be trusted by these organisations to be seen as responsible and to encourage reciprocal behaviour from our members. As the BMC (SW) we have brought this issue to the attention of the BMC nationally. To this end Rob Dyer is in attendance.

**Opening Statement: Robert Dyer: Access & Conservation Officer (England)**

Noted:

1. As climbers we frequently operate within areas that are either owned by, managed or regulated by others. Anstey falls into all three categories. In this instance it would seem that some of the changes merit discussion with the landowners/regulators.
2. Many in the meeting may feel that the quality or the value of these changes should be discussed by the climbing community. However the judgement as to the 'quality or validity' of the changes is not within the gift of the BMC, this meeting, or even the local climbing community. Indeed it may not even belong to the landowner as the view of Natural England as regulator could take precedence.
3. The experience of the BMC is that when any work, (which is almost always conducted with the best of intentions) is conceived, it is better to consult, agree a program with all the stakeholders before any physical work commences. This may feel bureaucratic, tiresome even. The BMC will always look to encourage a local group to meet with and discuss, agree and hold a stake in the outcome.
4. Local group initiative is always the preferred approach as the BMC nationally nor within the regions simply does not have the resources to manage on a long term basis the meetings, minutes and management of any long term plans that may be agreed. It requires local climbers to not only engage but also be part of the long term process.
5. The BMC has always looked to represent the interests of climbers and mountaineers and this will be uppermost in the minds of those engaging with Ansteys stakeholders. It is always ultimately dependent however upon the goodwill of owners and land managers. We should be aware that they have the power to make legally enforceable sanctions.

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## Minutes of Discussions

Noted:

1. The agenda states that 'discussion as to the quality/ validity of the work at the site would not be addressed'. It is not the intention of the BMC nationally or regionally to avoid or suppress such discussions. They would be key to any discussions with O/R, however the final judgement as to 'quality/validity' is not within the gift of anyone attending here. This is solely the preserve of the landowner/regulator.
2. As with all climbing areas there is no formal record of numbers using the crag. It's development has continued tacitly with no formal agreements in place. Historically this is not unusual. Anecdotally, it was mainly local climbers who had used the crags. This seemed to change during the Covid/lockdown period as possibly those who used indoor facilities or with more time for climbing outdoors had generated higher numbers.
3. There was therefore already an increasing pressure on this local environment and changes to the landscape were noted and recorded on a forum. It was this that has accelerated the need to formalise an engagement with the O/R.
4. Informal initial approaches to the owners have been made by the BMC nationally. Within the constraints of Covid it is hoped a dialogue and a meeting can be arranged. Initial feedback is that TCCT has not recently visited / inspected the site, they have therefore no formal comment to make. They have however been open to such discussions. No approach has yet been made to Natural England as regulator. It may be more appropriate for this to be made after consultation with the owners.
5. After any initial discussions, it is vital that local climbing representatives engage and ultimately become responsible; working with the BMC and the O/R to create the consultation process. This has in the past included terms of reference, a structure for gathering opinions and an ongoing process to manage /agree any changes that would gain the full support of TCCT and NE. The BMC nationally and regionally would look to assist in the setup but neither has the resources or staff to manage this on an ongoing basis.
6. Climbing is of course uppermost in the immediate approaches of the BMC and its members. The greater issues of environmental stewardship cannot however be ignored. That is particularly relevant here, experience of the approach and methodology has been gained in Bristol under the auspices of

the 'Climb Bristol Project'. This should be reviewed as a useful guide to the way forward in this instance

**Agreed:**

1. That a locally based working group should be established to begin the process of working with the O/R. The BMC nationally/regionally will assist in the setup but experience shows that to be effective in the long term the local climbers:
  - understand the issues
  - know the environment
  - Can evaluate the compromises that almost inevitably occur
2. Ansteys became an issue of discussion after the creation of a thread on a national climbing forum. An update should be provided by the BMC (as a formal statement) to ensure the community is aware of the full discussion and actions that have been taken.
3. The Climb Bristol Project has been successful in gaining working agreements that take the views of stakeholders. With this experience and (it is hoped) a good outcome in this area a model education and engagement process for future access/ environment management proposal should be proposed to the National Council.