

'Fixed Gear on Rock Climbs in North Wales' - Open Debate Report

Zoom, on-line, 23/2/2021.

Chair's Summary:

The issues being debated were not new, but provided the opportunity for a wide range of nuanced ideas to be clearly expressed. The ideas expressed followed a structured progression, and were exchanged without rancour.

No definitive conclusions were reached, but none had been expected.

The primary objective of all those contributing to the debate could be summed up as “a desire to maintain and develop the trad. ethic on rock climbs in North Wales for the benefit of climbers present an future”. However, the methods proposed for achieving that objective varied greatly from climber to climber.

It is now up to the local area (North Wales) to take this report, with its polling results, and to decide whether or not to develop any guidelines on fixed gear which could be acceptable to a substantial majority of climbers.

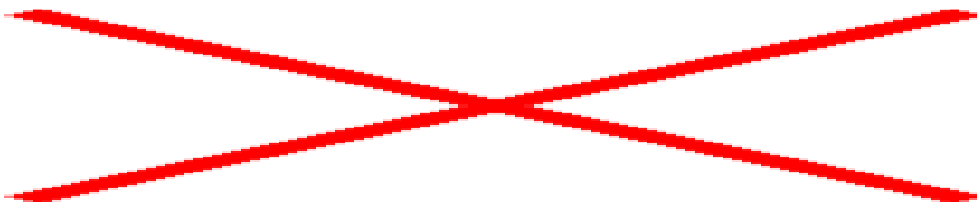
Attendance and Polling:

Approximately 50 people joined the debate at some point and most stayed logged on throughout.

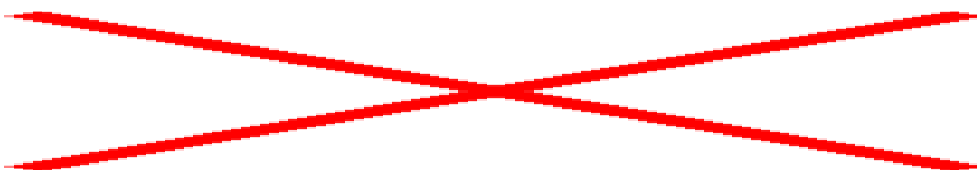
Poll 1 provides a breakdown by age, residence and membership.

NB. Voting figures are less than attendance figures due to hosts and BMC officers not being able to vote, and others choosing not to. Care therefore needs to be exercised when interpreting poll results. Results cannot be assumed to be representative of the climbing community as a whole.

Poll 1: Age distribution:



Poll 1: Residence and Membership



Background and Organisation:

This single-issue debate followed the advice outlined in the BMC's statement on Drilled Equipment (2014) and was prompted by recent discussions at local N. Wales area meetings at which there was insufficient time available for meaningful debate.

An agenda was circulated prior to the debate. That agenda was arranged around a series of polling questions, the results of which are tabulated below.

Chair's introduction:

The Chair outlined issues concerning the 'Need for the Open Debate', the likely 'Outcomes from the Open Debate' and the 'Scope of the Open Debate', all in the context of climbing in N Wales at the present time.

A presentation was used to introduce each topic and each poll.

Further details:

The Chair's presentation, which includes the agenda, and a technical paper produced by Andy Boorman are available on request.

The Starting Point for Discussion:

A 10-minute video, produced by Chris Parkin, was shown which explained the history of peg manufacture and use world-wide, culminating in the recent local development of a stainless steel 'peg' designed to be cemented into an existing, or an enhanced, hole of specific diameter and depth. The perceived benefits of such a stainless steel 'peg' are:

A sustainable protection point which, if properly placed, is very resistant to corrosion, won't need to be replaced, and thereby minimises further damage to the rock.

A protection point which eliminates the uncertainty of a corroding 'normal' peg and thus encourages more ascents in a trad. style of climbs (typically on Gogarth) which have become vegetated and rarely climbed.

The Controversy:

In essence, this open debate revolved around the definition of these recently developed stainless steel 'pegs'. Are they pegs, or are they bolts? And in either case, should they be used at all, and if they should, in what contexts?

The Discussion:

There is no recording of the verbal debate, but these are non-attributed notes which give a flavour of the discussion:

- It's a bolt due to glue, it only fits specific crack without glue.
- It's a bolt – crack-enhancement is the key.
- Hard steel pegs 'enhance' cracks as well. Most of these pegs are not drilled in. Bolts are put into solid rock. These pegs have gone into a crack/area of weakness. They keep the character of the route.
- It's both a peg and a bolt. Depends on where you put them.
- Most pegs at Gogarth 'enhance' the crack – they are hammered in hard. These stainless pegs will last potentially indefinitely. It's not about how placed; if you say it's about how its placed, most pegs at Gogarth are 'bolts'.
- Peg indicates a higher degree of uncertainty than a bolt.
- They are a bolt because the glue.
- It's the drilling that makes them into bolts. For me the issue is it's not the 1950s, why do we need pegs anymore? We have modern protection. Stainless steel pegs will rust they just take longer.
- Closer to a bolt. Resin, changing the placement with drilling. They are disguised in natural placements. Whenever you see pics of Yosemite – hundreds of pegs of diff sizes – but these are all same size unusual for a peg to fit every natural placement.
- Don't believe in convenience, we should aim for less fixed protection. Rhoscolyn – never

had a problem getting belay, never seen anyone belay off the wall. Not a problem there being routes that aren't climbed – for next generation.

- Unless you keep it to belays/cliff top anchors (or have none)– it will always be a judgment issue.
- Having lived in N Wales, and moved to Peak. Peak isn't necessarily perfect for ethics. Peg came out of London wall. Decision was made not to replace it. Even on Millstone (an old quarry). Yet Gogarth is bastion of traditionalism. Peak district setting ethical bar is a bad situation.
- I think if peg is crucial it's crucial. E.g. on Bells Bells. If it's crucial it should be replaced like for like, if that's a peg/bolt so be it. For belays, you have duty of care to your second, you've taken them there to belay you. So these should be replaced for second's safety's sake.
- Chair asked: Is 'crucial' is subjective?
- Yes, but on Bells, if you fall off you're dead.
- Belays are different. No pegs crucial are on route, if it's climbable it's climbable; we should be evolving, moving the sport forward.
- I'm ambivalent but to take what **** said – two lads were killed on Gauntlet when the leader fell, both ripped off, peg had gone. It's crucial. But it's only VS/HVS.
- Climbing has bent itself to push limits further; we should aim to push those limits further. But we need to avoid a tendency towards elitism.

We need to leave rock to be climbed by future generations of climbers, as we have had the privilege of doing over the last few decades.

The BMC Participation Statement already makes it clear that climbing can be dangerous.

- By email:

This whole process is a waste of time if it is ignored just as the 2014 BMC guidelines were ignored.

Since the 1960's grades have been changed by ascents in better style, whether its aid reduction or ascents with fewer/no pegs. Inevitably the routes become less 'accessible' but that is 'progress' in trad climbing, and in retrospect it has virtually always been seen as the right thing to have done. Who would dream these days of pegging their way up Citadel or over the main overhang at Bosigran?

The replacement of pegs, so that routes retain their original character and safety, is a good thing otherwise the routes stop being climbed.

A decision to re-peg a route should be put to a vote of a local board of elected climbers?

Tat on trees for lower offs can be unsightly and potentially dangerous for inexperienced climbers. Tat could be replaced by a single plastic-covered SS wire strop and stainless

maillon that would last for years .

The Chat Room:

Is a bolt a peg or something else?

- It's a bolt with strict rules about where it can and can't be placed?
- You can always enhance a crack with a traditional steel peg, which has been done in the past and probably still goes on.
- Not a bolt as it's not where you would necessarily choose to put one, but uses largely natural features. Not a peg as it's glued. Why does it have to be one thing or the other anyway? Can't we just acknowledge they're something different?
- Why would anyone place a bolt in an area of weakness?
- So they are basically shit bolts?
- So 'Bells' still has a poor peg which is pretty reliant for aiming towards and route finding. Tons of routes in Pembroke are similar. Where pegs can go in, modern protection still can't replace where knifeblades go.
- I agree with **** some pegs are way-markers and encourage an on-sight/ground up ethic.
- With a reduction in pegs, top-roping and head-pointing become more common. Pegs make a lot of routes amenable for on-sighting. Eg. on Craig Dorys, Pembroke, Lundy.
- I don't think top-rope practice is a step forward from on-sighting.
- Many guidebooks need to be re-written as they are full of references to pegs - most of these are rotten or gone?
- Elitism is relative. VS or E1; E5 or E6/7.
- Climbing is a partnership, there are many trad., thin ice routes on Ben Nevis, where both partners must accept the risk if they wish to climb the route. Should better belays be placed or should the climbers choose the risk?

Should crags be bolted/repegged?...(comments from the chat box)

- As discussion has gone one - a case by case approach should be adopted.
- I think that getting agreement at a local area meeting would be impossible for any fixed gear, unless its done by majority vote, as there will always be a range of opinions. It seems to me that if we reject a sustainable type of peg, logically, we should reject all new pegs as they only really serve the first ascent or people with first hand beta from the person that placed the peg.
- The problem with the case by case approach is that it is more important to look down the road rather than what is in front of you.
- Agreed with *** earlier that the mystery and adventure that is attached to rarely climbed bold or esoteric routes is a major part of the attraction of our sport!
- I think that a number of active North Wales climbers have been consulted about the placing of some of these cemented, stainless pegs. The first ascentionists of these routes most probably did not consult anyone before belting in pegs that will rot.
- What about best technology of the day or nothing? Why compromise?
- Like for like = crucial, same place, same as or improved equipment.
- There are also some good environmental reasons for placing abseil points on some cliffs. Strand being a good example to avoid the upper areas, which is reverting to nature and is naturally rewilding part of an internationally important site of special scientific interest...the upper pitches of some of these routes are just vegetation scrambling for its own sake and

- highly damaging to nature conservation.
- Like for like with longer lasting replacement means it prevents need for regular replacement - regular replacement may /will damage the rock
 - Hard today is gonna be steady in 20yrs; it's not elitist. It is about legacy, we will have to stand by this in 20yrs.
 - Sooner or later a rusty peg that looks OK at the rock surface will kill somebody. I think that is a tragedy. A peg belay on Red Walls nearly killed Chris Parkin, which has probably influenced his decision making in this matter

Poll 5...(comments from the chat box)

- Locals + BMC
- no every climber is a member of the BMC
- It would need to be a vote rather than 100% agreement, otherwise nothing will ever get decided. These are very contentious matters, specially if you don't even know the route.
- Local area meetings are not necessarily representative of the wider climbing community.
- Combination of local activists and BMC MEETINGS

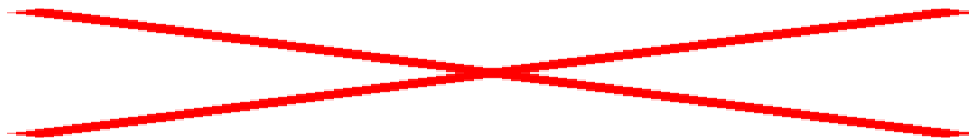
Poll 6 - Statement Thoughts...(comments from the chat box)

- Doesn't mention anything about style of ascent...on-sight, ground-up, top-rope etc.
- Looks very good, but could perhaps add that decisions need to be by majority vote of the local area group.
- Does this mean we can now bolt Crib Goch?
- Difficult because some people may not recognise the statement.
- To be fair I think regarding the new pegs I think they should be used very minimally but I'm often impressed when someone can be bothered to replace a peg.

The Poll Results:

Poll 2:

When used as described, this type of protection should be designated as

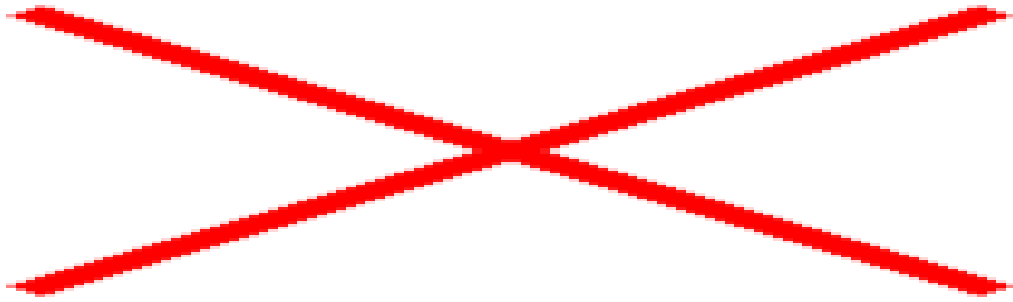


Suggestions for alternative designations:

Cemented Peg.

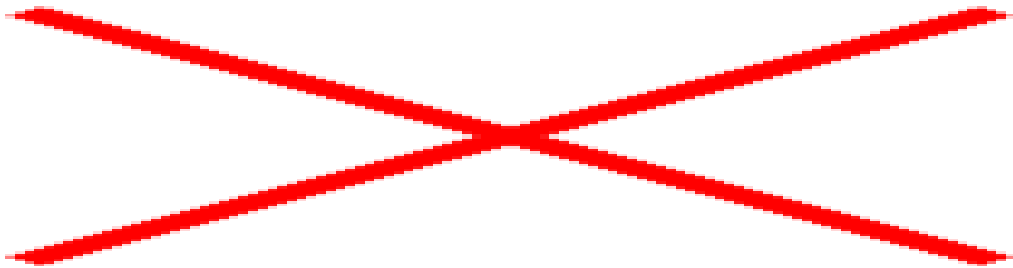
Poll 3:

Assuming these stainless steel pegs/bolts are chosen to replace corroded metal protection in an existing, but drill-enhanced, and resin-cemented, peg scar, within a natural feature (crack or hole), I could approve of their limited use



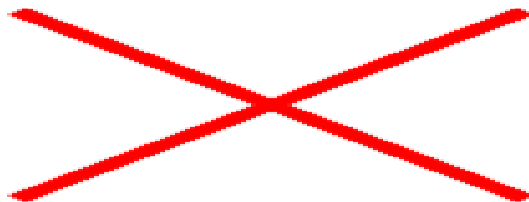
Poll 4:

Replacing corroded or worn fixed gear should be done on the understanding that it is



Poll 5:

If there is an element of decision-making Case by Case, should decisions be made by:



Chat Room suggestion: Combination of local activists and BMC meetings. x2

Poll 6:

Does the following statement have value?

Sustaining the variety:

BMC Cymru (North) greatly values the rich history of rock-climbing in North Wales which has resulted in an unrivalled variety of world-class rock climbs covering the full spectrum of climbing styles from multi-pitch adventure climbs to single-pitch sports climbs to

bouldering.

Climbing in North Wales provides opportunities for climbers of all abilities to experience a wide-range of environments, encounter a wide-range of rock types, and appreciate a wide-range of climbing styles.

A critically important aspect of climbing in North Wales has been the acceptance of strong ethical principles setting limits on the placement of fixed gear, typically pegs, bolts and slings.

These ethics maintain the adventurous character of climbs which can be protected by leader-placed, removable equipment.

Before placing, replacing or removing any piece of fixed gear, BMC Cymru (North) urges resident and visiting climbers to consider very carefully the local, often complex, ethics which currently preserve the unique history, traditions, values and variety of climbing in North Wales.

Thank you!

