

Introduction

An initiative has been proposed by a group of interested local climbers to review the condition and where appropriate replace the fixed gear (belays, lower offs and occasional protection) for climbing at Wintour's Leap. The BMC is being requested to support the initiative.

Following informal discussions with local climbers, Gloucestershire Mountaineering Club, and the BMC, the proposal is being routed through the BMC South West (BMCSW) for wider discussion amongst climbers and approval sought at an open meeting. Subject to the outcome of the meeting and the BMC's approval, the initiative will be adopted, actioned, and monitored by the BMCSW through an appointed Coordinator in conjunction with an initiative Steering Group attached to BMCSW.

The Steering Group will be constituted at the meeting, and volunteers with a sound knowledge of climbing at Wintour's Leap are welcome to put themselves forward as members. How the Steering Group will operate is set out in the Appendix. In addition anyone wishing to express an interest in volunteering assistance of some form to the Initiative is very welcome.

VOTE 1: The Proposed Wintour's Leap re-equipping proposal

Aims of the initiative

- To improve the physical condition (reversing any neglect) of the climbs of Wintour's Leap, having full regard to statutory constraints (e.g. conservation, SSSI) and ethical constraints including the current Wye Valley Drilled Gear Policy (2000).
- To proactively demonstrate the responsible profile of climbing in the Wye Valley with the landowners (e.g. Gloucestershire Wildlife Trust (GWT)), RSPB and others, as necessary. In so doing to enhance relationship regarding access and safety.
- To maintain climbing at Wintour's Leap and ensure it remains a vibrant climbing venue with a level of climbing usage befitting a site of such national importance.
- To instil the importance of the Wintour's climbing site and its climbs with conservation bodies.
- To gain a full understanding of the state of the cliffs and climbs in conjunction with the voluntary guidebook work well underway by the Climbers' Club (which will help inform the initiative and the carrying out of its objectives)
- To attract partners and resources to the Initiative including volunteers, thereby also promoting a wider appreciation of the climbing site
- In order to implement a successful fixed gear renewal programme for Wintour's Leap to authorize the placing of what is expected to be no more than a small number of belay and protection bolts where pegs cannot be replaced, provided the character of the given climb is not substantially affected.

Objectives

Targets will be firmed up when the resources are known and agreed by the Steering Group. The provisional objectives outlined below assume the initiative will be undertaken over a period of approximately 2 years, but this will be dependent on securing adequate resources.

Provisional Objectives

1. Make a representation to conservation bodies to highlight the historic and continuing importance of Wintour's Leap as a climbing site and to determine how the presence of climbers interacts with known or possible conservation interests
2. Establish a means to contribute to and participate in any known negotiations or discussion arising from the intended change of ownership of the cliffs insofar they may affect climbing access or the integrity of the climbs
3. Create a task force of volunteers able to provide physical assistance towards achieving the objectives.
4. Establish a crowdfunding scheme and seek funding from official bodies (e.g. BMC ACT) for fixed gear replacements and make appropriate arrangements for that fund.
5. Within with the current Wye Valley Drilled Gear Policy: (Appendix 2 'The Authority and Roles of the Initiative Steering Group' Item 4)
 - a. Renew any pegs that appear seriously worn (and which are *capable* of being renewed) and replace missing vital pegs. Where there is alternative natural-protection equivalent to the peg at that position, the peg is not to be renewed.
 - b. Renew any legitimate bolts / abseil points that appear worn, damaged, or otherwise defective to an approved, nationally acceptable specification.
6. Gain agreement for a limited exception to the Wye Valley Drilled Gear Policy to allow the following
 - a. To install bolt belays as approved by the initiative Steering Group where there is no alternative protection equivalent to any seriously worn pegs at that position. (Appendix 2 Item 5: 'The Authority and Roles of the Initiative Steering Group').
7. In conjunction with conservation bodies, GWT and cognizant of the SSSI status that covers parts of the Wintour Leap climbing areas, remove any invasive species that seriously interferes with a climb or access to or from that climb (such as Ivy, Bramble, Buddleia, Red Valerian and common Stonecrop; trim small trees/ limbs from ash die back).
8. 'Establish and conduct the business of the steering group in accordance with its constitution, authority and roles as set out in Appendices 1 and 2.

VOTE 2: Replacement of protection

In addition, agree to:

To install bolt protection as approved by the initiative Steering Group where there is no alternative protection equivalent to any seriously worn/defective peg near as possible to that position and it is deemed essential. (Appendix 2, 'The Authority and Roles of the Initiative Steering Group' item 6).

Initiative Management

The management of the Initiative will be achieved by:

- The recognition by the BMC (via the SW area meeting), of a initiative Leader/Coordinator to execute the Initiative on behalf of the climbing community and the BMC in collaboration with interested parties and statutory authorities.
- The formulation and operation of a Steering Group to refine the plan and to support the initiative, as defined in the Appendix to this report.

Appendix 1: The Constitution of the Wintour's Leap Re-equipping Initiative Steering Group

1. The Steering Group to comprise no less than six and no more than ten members, one of whom shall be the initiative leader.
2. Aspirants to nominate themselves at the BMCSW meeting, and the nominees will be voted in at the meeting. (In the event of there being more nominees than seats on the Steering Group, the nominations to be agreed between the nominees, or – if no agreement is reached – by a vote taken at the meeting in relation to the nominees).
3. Aspirants should have knowledge and experience of Wintour's Leap climbing and be in a position to commit time and to respond effectively.
4. The Initiative Leader to coordinate communications between members of the group and organise any meetings and record and disseminate notes of those meetings and the decisions of the group. The corresponding records to be forwarded to the BMC head office or by use of a shared document facility.
5. The Steering Group to report to BMCSW including via written progress reports from the Initiative Leader to any BMCSW meetings held while the Initiative is still live
6. Decisions to be carried out by a process of discussion and – where necessary - voting within the group.
7. If a member leaves the group, any replacement member's confirmation is subject to approval at the next BMCSW area meeting.

Appendix 2 The Authority and Roles of the initiative Steering Group

1. To act on behalf of BMCSW for the purpose of supporting the initiative
2. To support the operational work of the initiative Leader who will service the Steering Group
3. To support the development, viability, application, and promotion of the initiative and its aims above.
4. To make decisions about drilled and other fixed gear in line with the like-for-like bolt policy for the Wye Valley.
5. To make decisions about drilled and other fixed gear where the effects of those decisions lie outside what is permitted under the Wye Valley bolt policy but where there is a tangible benefit to conservation or safety and therefore to the sustainability of climbing at Wintour's Leap, e.g. provision of bolt belays in place of:
 - (a) irreplaceable pegs, (b) vulnerable / dead trees, (c) trees lost through conservation or rock safety work and (d) exits or belay methodologies that cause a threat to safety.

and if VOTE 2 is passed

6. To authorise the placing of what is expected to be no more than a small number of additional protection bolts, provided that:
 - (a) existing pegs are seriously worn and irreplaceable, (b) the character of any so-affected climb is maintained and (c) the first ascensionist has consented (where it is possible to do so).
7. All discussions regarding points 4-6 will be formally recorded and made available to the BMCSW area chair.

This, in effect, is to be a Wintour's Leap specific amendment to the Wye Valley fixed gear policy for the duration of the initiative.