

BRITISH MOUNTAINEERING COUNCIL

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BMC SOUTHERN SANDSTONE OPEN MEETING

Minutes of the BMC Southern Sandstone Open Meeting held at the Junction, Groombridge on Sunday 12 May 2002 at 19:00 hrs.

Present: John Galloway (Chair), Bob Moulton (HRMG Chair), Clare Bond (BMC), Jon Bibby, Chris Boylan, Sarah Cullen, Miriam Denney, Steve Durkin, Mike Eden, Anna Gregory, Joe Griffiths, Robin Mazinke, Andrew Meyers, Andrew Meyham, Paul McCarten, Andrew McLellan, Paul Norris, Charlie Pickin, Tim Skinner, Rebekah Smith, Chris Tullis (Soft Rock), Graham West,

Actions

1. Welcome

JG opened the meeting by welcoming everyone to the open meeting. He introduced himself as the BMC access rep for the area, Bob Moulton (chair of the Harrisons' Rocks Management Group (HRMG)) and Clare Bond (BMC Access and Conservation Officer). A total of 22 people attended the meeting.

2. Meeting chair

JG asked if there were any offers to chair the meeting. As there were no offers JG undertook to chair the meeting as BMC access representative for the area.

3. Minutes of Last Meeting

The Minutes of the last meeting 13 May 2001 were agreed as a true and accurate record.

4. Harrisons' Rocks – report by Bob Moulton

4.1 Erosion Work and Woodland Management

BM advised that no new ground erosion work had taken place over the past year, but that the work had focussed on woodland management, maintenance and follow-up work.

4.2 Cement Work

Much work had been done at Harrisons' over the past year on cement work to fill in rope grooves at the top of the crag. Joe, Leland and Chris had undertaken cement work along the entire edge requiring a significant effort to complete the work. BM reported that over the year the mix for the cement had been improved and that the more recent cement work had far less visual impact.

4.3 Resin Work

Mike Vetterlein had completed some more resin work this year, although the work had been mainly maintenance.

4.4 Bolts

There are continuing efforts to obtain a stock of bolts that can be used for both new sites and replacement of existing bolts. DMM had originally indicated that they could not provide the required type of bolt. However, it now seems likely that they will be able to. CT indicated that he was waiting for DMM to get back to him, but would chase them up if he didn't hear back soon. **CT**

4.5 Land Purchase

BM indicated that Sport England had now purchased the area around North Boulder, securing future access for climbing to that part of the site.

4.6 Toilet Block Refurbishment

The refurbishment of the toilet block by Sport England has now been completed. The toilet blocks had been refurbished at a standard that was hopefully 'smart enough' to discourage vandalism - whilst remaining practical.

4.7 Car Park Resurfacing

Sport England is still looking into the re-surfacing of the car park.

4.8 Notice boards

New notice boards are being designed for the entrance to the rocks and the car park.

4.9 The Campsite

BM reported that the Sandstone club are hoping to hand over the management of the Julie Tullis Memorial Campsite to the BMC via the HRMG. The BMC would also take over the management of the Memorial Fund. A meeting between the BMC and the Sandstone Club has been arranged.

4.10 Spa Valley Railway

Finally BM reported on the proposal by the Spa Valley Railway to extend their existing line to Groombridge to a halt below Harrison's Rocks. BM said that the HRMG were concerned both about the noise of the steam trains and the potential increase in access to the Rocks by picnickers and casual visitors which could increase litter and erosion problems, with knock on effects for the BMC's time and management costs for the rocks.

The HRMG had expressed these concerns to Spa Valley Railway and were hoping to continue a positive dialogue with the Railway company as their plans developed.

BM asked for comments and thoughts from the open meeting on the subject. The consensus seemed to acknowledge that the general plan to extend the railway was OK. It was suggested that predicted passenger numbers were obtained and that a dialogue continued with the railway company.

5. Stone Farm

5.1 BMC Purchase

BM reported that the BMC's purchase of Stone Farm Rocks had been completed in December 2001.

5.2 Erosion Work

BM reported that erosion work had started at Stone Farm prior to completion of the purchase. *Croydon MC are thanked for their efforts and contribution to this work.* Chris Tullis has also undertaken the second phase of the erosion work. BM reported that the erosion work had been funded by the Climbers' Club Colin Kirkus Fund, Mid Sussex DC and English Nature – all were thanked for their contributions.

5.3 Wardening

BM reported that in 2001 a system of wardening to monitor the state and use of Stone Farm Rocks had been set-up. The wardening scheme had generally been unsuccessful.

5.4 Belay above Stone Farm Crack

There was discussion over the robustness of the tree belay at the top of Stone Farm Crack, and how long it would remain as a viable belay. The suggestion of a new bolt placement at the top of the crack was dismissed, as the rock was deemed too fragmented to place a reliable bolt. Concern was also voiced of ropes crossing the footpath where belays were considerable distances behind the top of the crag.

It was decided that the issue should be left for the time being and that individuals should make their own assessment of the safety of the tree belay.

5.5 Car Park

BM explained the problem of fly tipping in the car park and the concern that this led to a negative attitude to the adjacent rocks. The concern is that litter generally breeds more litter, in the car park, but potentially also at the Rocks. It was suggested that the farmer was approached and offered a contribution towards clearing the litter. It is the farmers responsibility to clear the litter. Options for other car parking were discussed, but these were not seen as a way to solve the problem.

JG

5.6 Dedication of land as access land under the CROW Act (item moved forward on the agenda)

BM explained that land could be dedicated as access land under the Countryside and Rights of Way (CROW) Act. He explained that the BMC was keen to dedicate all the land it owned as part of the scheme. In the SE area this would include Stone Farm and the BMC through HRMG could also advise Sport England to dedicate Harrisons' Rocks.

The issue would be discussed at the HRMG meeting the following day.

5.7 *Rope Grooves*

GW reported that there were two rope grooves on Stone Farm Pinnacle that were getting very bad with the prospect of chunks of rock breaking away. English Nature were known not to be keen on cement work on geological SSSIs. BM undertook to look at the rope grooves and to consider options.

BM

6 *Other Sandstone Crag*

6.1 *Bowles*

Nothing reported.

6.2 *Bulls Hollow*

It was noted that the notice boards at Bulls Hollow had been vandalised and were in disrepair. It was reported that these notice boards would be replaced along with the notice boards at Harrison's and Stone Farm Rocks when the Sandstone Code had been revised.

There was some concern about the trees at the top of the crag.

6.3 *Eridge*

It was reported that groups were using Eridge that appeared to have no knowledge of local ethics and that some of the group instruction appeared to be poor. It was noted that group use was not allowed under the agreement with Sussex Wildlife Trust.

6.4 *High Rocks*

Rebekah Smith reported that there was to be a meeting about the Rhododendron bushes at High Rocks, with Pauline Harvey from English Nature, as part of the Kent and High Weald project. The idea would be to get a small grant and volunteer support to clear back the area. Rebekah was asked to report back to JG with developments.

6.5 *Other Crag*

No known problems were reported for the other crags.

7. *Sandstone Code Review*

JG explained that when the sandstone code had been published, that Derek Walker, the then BMC president, had agreed that it would be reviewed in 2 years. The code was to be reviewed because complaints had been made questioning the equitable nature of the 'no abseiling' clause in the code. The other options, such as down climbing were discussed by the meeting, the general consensus was that the 'no abseiling' part of the code was important for conservation of the rocks. JG explained that an equity and disability consultant had seen the code and that Sport England had also indicated that they saw no equity issues with the code.

AMcL asked whether the BMC's equity officer had looked at the code. Clare B explained that the officer had in fact resigned from the BMC, but that Cathy Woodhead who also worked on BMC equity had looked at the code and had made some pertinent points with respect to dyslexia.

There was a unanimous vote by the open meeting to keep the 'no abseiling' and 'no lowering-off' clauses within the code.

There was some further discussion of wording of the code - particularly with regard to the use of non-stretch slings. It was agreed that JG would change the wording slightly and would check the wording with Bob Moulton (HRMG), Miriam Denney (London and SE area chair), Mike Vetterlien (CC guide book editor), and Sport England.

JG

8. *Dedication of access land (dealt with earlier)*

9. *Any Other Business*

Membership of HRMG

BM explained that there are normally 2 representatives from the open meeting on the HRMG. One of those representatives was going to be co-opted as a special member and this left a vacancy. Volunteers for membership were asked for. Sarah Cullen was duly nominated as a representative.

Meeting minutes

Clare B said she would put the meeting minutes on the BMC website. **CB**

Clare Bond
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