



Vulture patrol on the Howden moors.
Photo: John Coefield.

PEAK AREA NEWSLETTER



September 2020
peak.area@thebmc.co.uk

Rocking Chair

Andy Reeve



‘What, summer’s coming to an end?’, I hear you cry. ‘Already?! But it feels like it’s barely begun!’ Ah, but don’t worry, those of you who are lamenting the passing of warm days, late nights on the hill, and wildlife busying itself all around us (I only included this as a way to humble-brag that I saw the vulture, beard and all, soaring over Kinder one day). But fear not! For we have a news-brimming, issue-filled, fun-packed, September meeting for you all.

As lockdown eased, access issues grew; the office released a statement indicating

that there has clearly been a lot of trouble among the BMC board members; and as there was the odd cooler day, so Simon Lee did return to refamiliarise himself with the Oak, giving us all a much-needed sense that at least some things in the universe are constant.

Something which is more of the new than the old is that, following on from the success last time, we will use Zoom for our September meeting. I say success – I think it worked well – although I did miss seeing everyone’s faces. So, I hope to see you all there, for updates on access, the Stanage consultation feedback, organisational change, hill walking, and regular reminders between the hosts that they have forgotten to unmute themselves.

Register for the online Peak Area meeting by clicking **HERE**.

Next meeting: Wednesday 2 September, 7.30 p.m.
The Internet. Register **HERE**.

Access News: General

Henry Folkard

If the Covid-19 pandemic has affected us all in one way or another, sometimes tragically, it has also raised some stark and likely far-reaching questions about access, and more specifically, accessibility. Having a right to climb and walk in open country under CROW is great, but increasingly it is harder and harder to get to open country to enjoy that right. With all access issues, whatever the sport, two things that always directly affect what anyone can negotiate are volume and behaviour. To make things more difficult, it does not need to be climbers who bring a problem upon themselves because they can reap the unfortunate consequences of other people's actions.

Throughout the Covid-19 crisis, BMC access volunteers have been holding regular video/phone conferences with officers, and Dave Turnbull has been video meeting with some national park CEOs to keep abreast of developments. The position is pretty much the same all over the country. While it is possible to find places that are very quiet in the Peak (even near Sheffield), honeypot sites have been absolutely rammed. In many ways, it's great that all sorts of people are getting out and enjoying being out: the problem is that there is not the infrastructure to cope with the volume of people, and often the people themselves are unfamiliar with countryside codes and the like, and cause parking, litter, moorland fire and many more problems.

Many of the people who look after the countryside, and do a great job, have been furloughed by their employing organisations, and, where demand has been at its most acute, car parks and toilets have been closed because staff are not available to manage

them. On top of that, public transport has been non-existent or difficult, and for very understandable reasons, where there is some, the public have been reluctant to use it. The direct result has been an increase in parking restrictions and parking fines, and litter. These restrictions are likely to remain in perpetuity.

Around Longshaw the problem is particularly acute. Parking tickets carry a £100 fine and three penalty points, and a recent proliferation in yellow lines means the only option for parking for, say, Lawrencefield, is in pay and display car parks which may well be full. The same problem of more and new yellow lines is seen between Greenfield and Holmfirth, though the root problems here are actually different and are being investigated by local access reps and others. Apart from anything else, yellow lines have an undesirable impact on the landscape.

Climbers all over the country have flocked to sport climbing venues. Hotspots nationally have been at places like Dorset and Cheddar and Southern Sandstone where difficulties go beyond just parking, and have already cost access, while threatening to cost more where behaviour exacerbates parking problems. Examples are where climbers, perhaps unfamiliar with the outdoors, have caused actual damage to crags by climbing on wet sandstone and rigging top ropes incorrectly, or at Cheddar where seasonal restrictions agreed by the BMC and landowners have been ignored by climbers, perhaps unintentionally and innocently, but certainly at their peril if future access is to be retained. Nearer home, there have been particular problems covered elsewhere in this newsletter at Intake, Masson Lees, Harpur Hill (not principally a climber-specific problem here), and Stoney Middleton Dale.

Where sport climbing venues are in old quarries, almost without exception no

formal access arrangements exist. De facto arrangements only work when just a few people are ever there, and there are no – repeat no – associated parking issues. A few years ago now I visited Tarmac's headquarters, then in Dudley, to discuss access to Intake. They were totally adamant they never had and never would permit access there, for reasons of liability and because in their view, and that of their professional geo-technicians, the site was dangerously unstable. Since then low-key access seems to have been tolerated, but where, as at the present time, the whole access issue is exacerbated by bad parking, the result will be a total and absolute ban on all climbing access – and as Intake is not the only Tarmac property with de facto access, any such ban could all too easily be extended elsewhere with very dire consequences for sport climbers.

Conversely, trad climbing venues have not been under anything like the same pressure. The world of recreation is never static, and what people enjoy is changing. Many people come into climbing not via traditional clubs but via climbing walls, where the experience is different. If sport climbing and bouldering are what people enjoy, that's fine, but it does leave the BMC, and indeed us all, with a huge mission in terms of education and behaviour – both environmentally and technically in how you lower off, use bolts and judge their safety. It is too easy to take access, hard won, for granted. Don't!

As indicated above, I think the other key matter for the BMC to address is that of accessibility, especially for people who may have physical limitation to what they can do and where they can get, and where alternative means of getting to a venue just don't exist.

Here at area level we are not necessarily aware of all the work our officers do for us – access reps maybe more than others because we never stop harrying them. But I just want to pause to say that throughout

the crisis Rob and Cath have done a great job in England, as has Elfyn in Wales. And the support they, and we, have had from more senior people in the office, and from colleagues on the communications side, has been terrific. Having the whole of England for one person to look after is daunting, as is keeping abreast of all the hugely significant policy developments that Cath has miraculously kept on top of. Covid-19 continues to cause lots and lots of problems. Its repercussions may not be to our liking or convenience, not always through any fault of our own, but the Agriculture Bill, and the New Environmental Land Management Scheme on which Cath has made first-rate contributions, should not be overlooked either. In the longer term this may be more significant in determining how we can enjoy outdoor activities, and what we, the public, actually do get for our public money (not to mention what control we actually have over it or how we ask for what we want) than the repercussions of Covid-19. And on top of that there are the No Moor BBQs and the Hills 2 Oceans campaigns.

Finally, on the **Midhope Moor** matting, the appellant has been allowed an extension of time, to 17 August, in which to submit comments, while the date for the 'event', presumably the public inquiry, is now 8 December. I had better not write down what I think about that.

Area-Specific Updates

Northern Peak (Mark Warwicker)

The Northern Peak has been very busy since the beginning of lockdown, and this continues now. Notwithstanding people following advice and climbing at less-frequented crags (Rollick Stones anyone? 20 teams at Shining Clough on the same day?!), the huge increase is in the number of people out walking.

The major issue we've seen is with 'access to access'. There has been a long-standing issue with the car parks in **Chew Valley** filling up at the weekend, but currently this is happening on any day of the week when the weather is decent. To prevent roadside parking in what can be dangerous positions, Oldham Council have painted double yellow lines on both sides of the road all the way from the edge of Greenfield to the top of Saddleworth Moor – about four miles.

Combine this with the local landowner blocking all the off-road parking areas again and painting his own yellow lines in the lay-by opposite his farm (Upperwood Quarry – the council are investigating), and accessibility to the Open Access land, both crags and moorland, is very difficult. Negotiations with Oldham Council are underway.

Similarly, just over the hill near Meltham, the landowners at **West Nab** have replaced the original boulders preventing parking in the long-established areas with larger versions, plus dug deeper and wider holes. 'Access to access' is again impeded, but this time the council have no interest in helping despite many requests.

There are reports of similar tactics being used in the Lakes. If this strategy proves successful, expect it in an area near you in the not-too-distant future.

Stanage & Eastern Edges (Louise Hawson)

Stanage and the Eastern Edges have continued to be very busy over the summer, although issues here have not been as acute as at the Chew and Goyt valleys. In common with other trad venues, the edges and boulders themselves are relatively quiet, and the majority of visitors are infrequent or new visitors to the Peak and don't stray too far from the car.

Like other areas, we've seen a significant increase in litter (including some pretty indescribable things left in Robin Hood's Cave), night-time use, wild camping and dangerous parking. At the time of writing, the weather and midges are keeping numbers down, and rangers are able to take a breath again. The weather has also reduced the fire risk, but we continue to promote the BMC's No Moor BBQs campaign, which was namechecked in The Guardian last week.

Longer term, the options appraisal for **Stanage** has moved into its next phase, following publication of the consultation report. Many of the BMC's points were highlighted, and thank you to all of you who took the time to respond individually. It really does make a difference. PDNPA is now working up the favoured options for each asset, in consultation with the Stanage Forum. We've been assured that this will include consideration of options that were not in the proposal, but were favoured by respondents, such as use of the Cruck Barn as an educational and community resource.

More info:

<https://www.peakdistrict.gov.uk/visiting/places-to-visit/stanage-and-north-leees/whats-happening-at-stanage-and-north-leees>

Timelines are hard to predict, but we don't expect decisions until later in the year. We remain concerned that government cuts and pressure are making it more difficult for

PDNPA to manage the estate to its full potential, and we'll continue to push them to take a more strategic approach and look for external funding to support wider climate, access, health and education goals.

The **Stannage Forum Open Meeting** will be held as a virtual meeting on 31 October. Details will be circulated in September, and will be posted on the Stannage section of the PDNPA website. It will be a different format from normal, but the steering group is working on ways to make sure people still have an opportunity to ask questions and raise concerns.

Several people reported that the lay-by for **Yarncliffe** has now been painted with double yellow lines right up to the wall boundary, meaning that anyone parking there will be ticketed in the same way as those parking on the road. We're raising this with Derbyshire CC (the Highways Authority) directly and through the Local Access Forum. The crag may be an unintended victim of the wider double-yellowing of the roads around Padley, but the issue links directly to Mark's comments about protecting 'access to access' in the long term. Hopefully we'll have an update for the meeting.

Staffordshire & the Roaches (Andi Turner)

We've two issues in Staffs. Firstly, the age-old parking issue at the **Roaches**. The farmer is regularly opening his field for parking now, but folk are still not getting the message and continue to park illegally on the verges.

The second is the access land around the **Newstones**. Climbers were recently asked to leave the rocks by the landowner who doesn't seem to understand access rights. They've also put a new 'Private, keep off' sign to deter folk walking near the grave. Again, they can't do this, but we're trying to approach this softly. In the meantime, we're just asking climbers to respect the landowner's wishes and not cut the

corner past the grave until we sort things even though it's all on access land.

Matlock Area (Ian Milward)

We'd like to flag up issues arising at some previously less popular venues, in addition to other concerns exacerbated by the Covid-19 situation. In particular, in the Matlock area, parking problems at Intake and Masson Lees quarries have been flagged up.

At **Intake**, the message should be that the gravel track leading from the Middleton Top access road should no longer be used for access or parking. Alternative parking is available at Middleton Top (as for High Peak Trail visitors). The BMC RAD entry should by now have been amended.

Masson Lees is no doubt similar to many other venues currently being reported locally and nationally where limited parking space is being oversubscribed, and dangerous or inconsiderate abandonment of vehicles ensues, causing access and road safety problems.

It is also worth mentioning that most quarry venues, despite being popular for their low- to mid-grade bolted routes often pose greater risk than many other crags due to their inherent instability. As with parking, accidents and incidents at these venues attract unwelcome scrutiny by landowners and again threaten long-term access.

As Henry says, these situations are likely to have a negative and quite possibly long-term impact on the future of venues where a low-key approach for climbing has previously been tolerated.

Horseshoe Quarry (Colin Nave)

Horseshoe Quarry has been very popular since lockdown eased, but the climbing has not been too overcrowded perhaps due to parking limitations. Nearby Horsethief Quarry has also seen an increasing number of visitors. Any problems with litter are outside the main climbing areas.



Alport Heights Quarry.
Photo: Peter Judd.

Hill Walking News

Peter Judd, Austin Knott & Vikki Hughes

Mend our Mountains projects: Cut Gate and Great Ridge

The fundraising phase of the BMC's second Mend our Mountains campaign now seems an age away, and yet neither of the Peak District path repair projects have actually broken ground.

Past readers will know that work on Great Ridge required planning approval. I was pleased to learn, from the project team, that this was finally secured at the beginning of August. All that remains is to obtain approval for access from one more landowner, and then all hurdles will have been removed so that work on the ground can be scheduled. The project team seem confident that gaining such approval is now within reach.

At the time of writing the situation with our other MoM project on the Cut Gate bridleway is less clear (I'm still awaiting a reply to my email to the Cut Gate project

team). Readers may remember that work on the adjacent North America bridleway took place in early spring and it was hoped contractors would move straight on to Cut Gate, after the usual pause in work necessitated by bird nesting restrictions. I took a walk along a misty Cut Gate just yesterday and, while the so-called (by our mountain biker friends) 'bog of doom' is but a mere puddle in present summer dry conditions, I could see that no work has yet taken place up there either. I recall being told, back in the spring, that this work too required further landowner permissions, to facilitate access, and so I guess that it's possible that such permissions have not yet been granted.

Let's hope work on the ground will begin, in both cases, before severe winter weather arrives to bring a further delay.

Stop press – news just in from the Cut Gate project team: hope to start work on Cut Gate in November, aiming to finish by March 2021!

No Moor BBQs

Anyone familiar with the Peak District will know the devastation caused by wildfires, especially those that take hold on open moorland. In recent years there have been particularly damaging blazes on Big Moor, behind the Roaches, on Bamford Edge, above Dovestone Reservoir and on the moors above Howden Reservoir, to name but a few. Such fires, almost always human-triggered, cause devastation to wildlife, put lives in danger to fight, cost many thousands of pounds to put out and, when underlying peat is exposed (or worse still, set alight), release untold quantities of trapped carbon from one of the world's most important carbon stores (Britain's peatlands are said to store more carbon than the forests of Britain, France and Germany combined), further endangering our climate.

One of the most common ignition sources for such fires is the ultra-cheap, easily obtainable, foil tray disposable barbecue. They are particularly troublesome because their intense heat transmits easily through tray bottoms into the ground below. We'll all have seen the resulting rectangular burnt patches that speckle easy-access countryside locations after every particularly warm spell, more so than ever in the period just after lockdown restrictions began to be eased. They remain hot (and continue to emit noxious gases too) long after being used, so even those sufficiently caring to want to cart their waste home after eating out in the countryside will often not bother to carry their barbecue tray away, or, at best, tip out the still-smouldering coals on to the ground first!

It's to combat this menace that the BMC has launched its No Moor BBQs campaign. The campaign (linked to the BMC's Climate Project) seeks to call upon MPs to ask government to make the use of disposable barbecues on open moorland a criminal

offence, with a severe penalty attached for anyone in breach of this. The BMC has provided a super-easy web-tool to quickly email your MP with a template letter describing the campaign and calling the MP to action. All you have to do is provide your name and postcode and the tool finds your constituency MP and sends a template letter direct to them. It takes just 30 seconds to do this. Please join me in taking this one easy step to help support the BMC's call:

<https://thebmc.co.uk/disposable-bbq-moorland-ban-no-moor-bbq>

Oh, and please publicise the campaign on social media with hashtag #NoMoorBBQs and a link to the above website.

Area hill walk and a sphagnum planting opportunity

Readers of the last newsletter will know that we postponed an area walk in the spring and also hoped to organise a sphagnum planting day for this autumn. Both events may well be resurrected soon so please keep an eye out for announcements on our BMC Peak Area Facebook page or send an email expressing interest to us hill walking reps (details on page 10) and we'll keep you posted!

Climbing News & Gossip

Dave Parry

Right then, cards on the table; by now I am utterly sick of every aspect of the whole coronavirus thing (who's idea was it anyway?), so if you don't mind, rather than starting with an earnest appraisal of the impact on the global pandemic on climbing in the Peak, I'm just going to plough on as if nothing out of the ordinary has occurred and share some abridged highlights of a bumper summer season, OK? Let's never speak of this again.

Spring in the Peak this year was one of warm, fine and dry weather, unprecedented in recent times. However, rather bizarrely I was unable to find any evidence of any news, new problems, repeats or development of any sort occurring from roughly mid-March into May. Not even an unwelcome Blackwell Dale link-up, a Lancs-style lowball mantel on Houndkirk, or a grim-looking chossy Doncaster quarry unearthed. I can only assume the whole area's climbing population was gripped by some sort of collective mass apathy and literally couldn't be bothered to go out. Maybe there was something good on the telly. I don't know.

One of the biggest numbers to be reported just as this unexplained climbing vacuum was ending was Ned Feehally's uber problem at Yarncliffe. Named *The Boss* in honour of the sadly recently departed John Allen, the problem takes the lip of a steep cave south-west through the woods from the main quarry area, at a sort of viewpoint with a small stone bench under it. Ned gave it Font 8b+, but let's be honest, if this is a penny less than Font 8c then I'll go to the foot of our stairs. Which is incidentally where you'll end up if you fall off it too spectacularly.

On the limestone, Ned has also a few additions to the elusive Crag X, notably a straight-up Font 7c+ left of *Superman*,

starting low, and a traverse right from the *Superman* start to finish up *Jericho Road*. The latter is Font 7c with the back wall for feet and I can confirm is good and worthwhile, and Font 8a+ without the back wall and potentially better – *The Riddler*. It's also been done finishing up *Pink Indians*, *Silver Surfer* and *Tit For Tat* – Crag X aficionados will have no problem extrapolating the grades.

Also from Ned is a line in Blackwell Dale right of *Red or Dead*. *Take a Knee Bar* is Font 7b and follows the high, hanging rib on slopers and heels, and finishes with the tree roots. Ned also did the old bolted project at Griff's buttress. *La Lambla* features a big pull on a two-finger crimp, and as it eases before the top it was done as a highball problem instead of lead with a rope. Presumably this leaves potential for linking into it from all manner of traverses, with dubious lamb pun names? *Thanks, Ned.*

At the cathedral of hard climbing, the laboratory of movement, Raven Tor, Dawid 'Polish Dave' Skoczylas has come up with a solution to the old pocket project left of *Saline Drip*. Although *Exodus* doesn't actually use the pocket, it looks every ounce of the Font 8a+ grade. Starts sitting, no rules, finishes on high edges. Also at a more amenable pay grade, *Generation Game* is an overlooked addition by Dave and his son Joachim, starting sitting under the central *Powerband* pillar, pull up and left to a tight slot via the glued-up *Powerband* pinch, up to good undercuts, then work back right to finish on the *Rattle & Hump* jug. It's a good Font 7c and the link-up starts from *Powerband* and *Blueband* also exist. Again, you can take a stab at the grades and names.

Another old project done recently, this time on bolts, comes courtesy of evergreen 1990s powerhouse Ben Moon – probably the only person who can get away with writing his own name all over his clobber – who has made good on an old project on

Two Tier in Cheedale, right of *Orange Sunshine*. Ben's new line was recently bolted – but apparently not abandoned – by Ben Bransby (no relation). French 8b is a grade and *Lockdown* is the name, which I can only assume is a reference to something or other in popular culture or current affairs, but it's lost on me.

While he's not been getting his projects nicked, Bransby has been busy on the grit. He nabbed *Wade in the Water* on the Barrel at Froggatt while Ned was busy doing *The Boss*. This one goes at Font 7c+/8a. Also, at Baslow, Ben did a pretty highball 7c called *Chargers* which starts up *Poppers* and heads right. Bearing in mind this is the same height as *Poppers* the route which has gear ... take a few pads and a spotter or two – although having said that I've been struggling to get a decent close spot on ANYTHING of late. Anyone else finding this? Might have to change my deodorant.

And on that bombshell, I bid ye good day.

Get in touch

Send your Peak area news, gossip or article ideas to me at: peakarea@gmail.com



Ben Bransby on
Take a Knee Bar.
Photo: Ned Feehally.

Peak Area Meetings: 2020

2 September, 7.30 p.m., The Internet.
Register **HERE**.

4 November, 7.30 p.m., TBC

Forthcoming Events

<http://community.thebmc.co.uk/peak>

Due to the ongoing Covid-19 pandemic, most events have been cancelled or postponed. For the latest information on forthcoming events in the Peak Area, please keep an eye on the BMC's community pages.

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The British Mountaineering Council (BMC) is the representative body that exists to protect the freedoms and promote the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, including ski-mountaineers. Find out more: www.thebmc.co.uk/bmc-governance