

1 | Introduction

This booklet is for all those who visit the mountains, uplands and crags of Britain. It contains essential information on the mountain environment and how you can care for this fragile upland landscape. Many of the principles are also applicable to the wider countryside and the coast.



Mountain areas are 'wild' recreational escapes. While there is an increase in the numbers of people visiting the uplands of Great Britain, there is also an increased awareness of the need to preserve and conserve these fragile landscapes.



The British Mountaineering Council (BMC) is committed to supporting access and conservation for the mutual benefit of both. This booklet highlights the BMC's commitment to protecting the natural environment and explains the types of impact we may have and suggests some simple, positive ways in which we can help minimise any adverse environmental effects.

The BMC is the representative body that protects the freedoms and promotes the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, including ski-mountaineers. The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions.



2 | The mountain environment

Millions of years of geomorphological process and erosion through ice, wind and water have left us with the fragile and special mountain environments we know today. Their fragility is a result of the harsh climate and landforms which affect the way in which plants and animals can survive. They are also special because they are largely protected from human developments and contain a wealth of environmental and cultural history.

The mountains of Britain support a number of rare species of plants and animals. Overgrazing, drainage, atmospheric pollution and in some areas wild fires have further reduced the extent of these rare species. Cliffs in particular are special, as they support many scarce arctic-alpine species that only manage to survive where there is limited grazing or disturbance. Once these have disappeared, there is little possibility of re-growth, especially if the disturbance continues.

Mountain areas offer sparse food sources, and birds and animals require specific habitat types to survive and are often limited to particular geographical ranges. Many of these species are protected in England & Wales under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* and the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000*. The geology and geomorphology of many sites is also protected through the former Act.

As climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, we naturally cherish these relatively untouched summits and cliffs. However, our activities can affect the ecology of these important refuges which we are all trying to protect. Whether it is ground-nesting birds, arctic-alpine flora, blanket bog or the fragile montane heath on the very highest summits, there is a need to be aware of, and to protect, the special features of the environment we use and enjoy.



Purple Saxifrage – a fragile alpine plant



Peregrine Falcon – a protected, cliff-nesting bird

3 | Access

Mountain landscapes may seem vast and our presence in them inconsequential. However, all land belongs to someone, even common land and open country. In enjoying access to it we must all act in a considerate and responsible manner.

Access legislation

The *Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW)* is the main piece of legislation governing access to the uplands of England and Wales. The CRoW Act defined areas of mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land as open access land. If you are unsure of your rights and responsibilities or where you can go, please visit www.countrysideaccess.gov.uk and www.openaccess.gov.uk in England, and www.ccw.gov.uk in Wales.

Public rights of way

The *Public Rights of Way (PRoW)* network in England and Wales is a unique asset, and it is important to understand what types of PRoW may be used for different activities, these are:

- Footpath – access on foot only.
- Bridleway – on foot, horseback or bicycle (although cyclists are obliged to give way to other users).
- Restricted byway – on foot, horseback, and non-motorised vehicles (e.g. bicycles and horse-drawn carriages).
- Byway open to all traffic – as for restricted byway but including motorised vehicles.

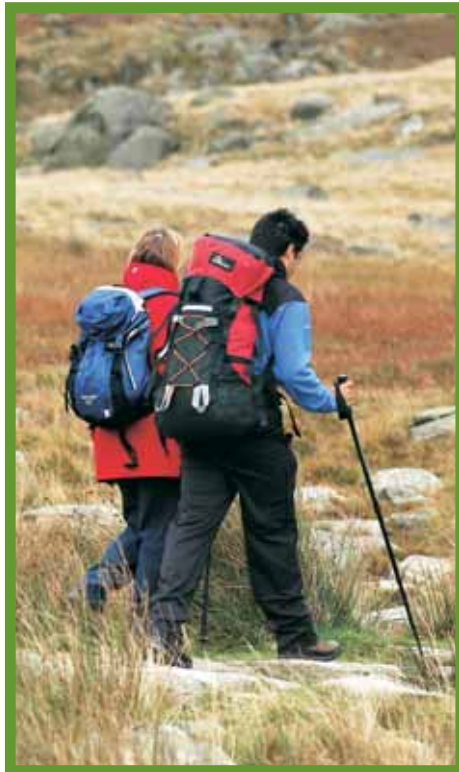
The restrictions that are sometimes used on CRoW access land do not affect public rights of way (so you can walk along them even when surrounding access land is closed). However, public rights of way can sometimes be diverted, removed, created or have the rights suspended but only by the local highway authority. Official signs, posted by the authority,

will be found on the route to tell you if there are any changes to the local network.

Permissive access

The BMC liaises with landowners and conservation bodies where necessary to negotiate voluntary access arrangements. The BMC also has a network of over 30 local access representatives to ensure any access or conservation issues are resolved.

In Scotland, access laws are different – see section 15 of this booklet for more information.



Hill walking across open access land

Access principles in England & Wales...

Access is all about balancing the 'Three Rs' – rights, responsibilities and restrictions. Where we enjoy a right of access, this must be used responsibly. On occasion, restrictions based on a least restrictive approach may be needed to protect conservation interests. The BMC works to ensure successful access management, where all parties recognise and respect the legitimate interests of others and where recreation and conservation benefit mutually.

And in practice...

Restrictions on access are often agreed to protect important species of plants or animals and must be observed. If you have any doubts about these, abide by them while you are in the hills and then contact the BMC to discuss the reasons for them.

In some situations access is only secured by years of sensitive negotiation with landowners and conservation bodies. The BMC always ensures that the least restrictive option is achieved. Ignoring restrictions could aggravate a delicate situation and at worst lead to access being withdrawn for everyone.

Gates and fences

These are usually erected to control the movement of stock and prevent overgrazing of sensitive areas, not to keep people out. Please leave gates as you find them and use the gates and stiles provided rather than risk damage to walls and fences by climbing over.



Rock climbing on the moorland edges of Derbyshire

Dogs

It is a criminal offence to allow your dog to worry stock. On open access land in England and Wales dogs must be kept on a short lead from 1st March to 31st July and at all times when in the vicinity of livestock. They may be excluded at all times on some grouse moors. In fields of adult animals they must be kept under close control on a short lead. Landowners are legally empowered to shoot any dog that is causing distress to grazing animals if they believe this is the only way to stop it. Dogs can cause other problems – disturbing wildlife, barking, disrupting other users, defecating near paths or along the bottom of cliffs. Always consider the interests of others who use the land – not everyone will love your dog as much as you do.



4 | Conservation

The BMC has worked hard to negotiate access to areas of high conservation as well as high recreational value in England and Wales, and always manages access in a way that is of mutual benefit to recreation and conservation. Check the BMC website in advance and take account of any restrictions when planning which crag you are going to visit – www.thebmc.co.uk/bmccrag

If there are signs or leaflets at the approach to the crag, please take note of the information these provide and follow advice given. Restrictions are put in place to protect rare species of plants and birds. However, if it becomes clear that there are nesting birds at an unrestricted site, contact the BMC.

Various conservation laws are in place to protect our wild plants and animals. These include:

- *Protection of Animals Act;*
- *Wildlife and Countryside Act;*
- *Environment Act;*
- *Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act;*
- *Natural Habitat Regulations.*



Cryptogramma Crispa, found throughout the uplands

Plants

It is illegal under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act (1981)* to intentionally uproot any plant from the wild without the permission of the landowner or occupier. There is a list of plants that receive special protection under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act* which includes many rare flowering plants, some ferns, mosses and liverworts and numerous lichens.

Under the *Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994*, it can also be an offence to deliberately pick, collect, uproot or destroy a wild plant of a European protected species. For more information visit: www.defra.gov.uk



©Simon Norris

Nesting bird restrictions

The BMC publishes an annual list of agreed climbing restrictions in England and Wales to protect nesting birds. It is vitally important to adhere to these. These are seasonal and if they are ignored, conservation bodies may want to impose more severe and legally-enforceable restrictions. Lack of an agreed restriction does not necessarily mean that there are no nesting birds.

If unsure, contact the BMC who have local Access Representatives with up to date local knowledge.

Wild birds are legally protected under the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981*, revised every five years. This lists the birds that qualify for special protection. It is against the law to take birds, their eggs or other protected wild animals from the wild and intentionally kill or injure birds or other protected wild animals or to destroy birds' eggs.

Climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers have an excellent reputation for respecting bird nesting restrictions – better than other groups. It is essential that this is maintained.

For a full list of over 500 records of climbing restrictions in England and Wales visit the BMC *Regional Access Database (RAD)* – www.thebmc.co.uk/bmccrag

For more information on the *Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981* and *Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004* visit www.jncc.gov.uk

In Scotland, conservation laws are slightly different – for more information see section 15 of this booklet.



Restrictions are in place to help protected species during breeding



The BMC Regional Access Database



The Raven – a common cliff-nesting bird

5 | Hill walking

We can all minimise our impact by planning ahead and preparing before going out onto the hills. The weather, the relative fragility of the location and its popularity can all affect our impact.

Much can be done to minimise erosion and disturbance by applying common sense:

- Scree slopes provide an important ecological habitat but can easily be eroded – so keep off them unless there is absolutely no other route.
- Try walking within an erosion scar rather than around it, thereby reducing the risk of enlarging the eroded area, or avoid eroded areas completely if there is an alternative.
- Think about your route. For example, repeated kicking of steps causes much of the initial damage on steep slopes; avoid this by zig-zagging across such slopes.
- Noise by groups or individuals can affect the hill walking experience for others – be considerate.

Footwear

While sensible safe footwear is essential for mountain walking, it is both less erosive and more comfortable to wear the lightest footwear that is suitable for the terrain. A pair of heavy boots may not always be appropriate for summer walking. If you are using walking poles, ensure that these have rubber tips on their ends to avoid damaging any rocky surfaces.

Wild fires

Both peat and vegetation which grow in many of our upland areas can become dry and flammable, particularly during the summer. Accidental fires can destroy natural habitats and can kill animals and birds. Do not light fires on moorlands – not even gas stoves or barbecues and never stub matches or cigarettes out in the vegetation. Respect all warning

signs and if you see a fire, don't assume that someone else has called the emergency services. Note your location and dial 999.

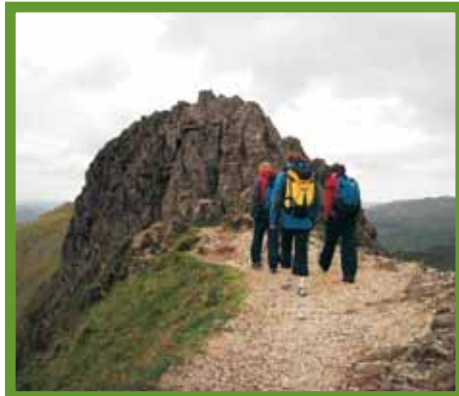
Paths

Paths have been constructed in many areas to protect and repair mountains from the erosion that is caused by the sheer volume of visitors. Use these paths wherever possible rather than taking shortcuts. Similarly, drainage channels and culverts are essential to take surface water away from paths and should not be blocked or dammed in any way. Paths are often only the width of one person; walkers should walk in single file on such sections.

Cairns and memorials

The BMC does not support the use of waymarks, cairns or other intrusive features, other than those traditionally established on summits and path junctions.

Some cairns are important landmarks but most are an unnecessary intrusion and detract from the character of a wild and remote setting. Building cairns exacerbates erosion and is the mountain equivalent of graffiti, so don't do it. While we sympathise with the



Upland path work can contain erosion and preserve landscape quality

grief that the bereaved feel, memorial artefacts should not be a feature of the mountain landscape and nothing should be done without formal landowner consultation and agreement.

Boundaries

Boundaries such as dry stone walls are traditional structures that can be historical features in themselves and important aspects of the landscape. Climbing over boundary walls and fences will damage them; walls are very expensive to repair and fences are often damaged when we step onto the galvanised wire. Use stiles and gates wherever possible and if you need to climb over, do so near to fence posts or where the wall appears strongest.

Litter

None of us like seeing discarded wrappers and plastic bottles in the mountains. Both wild and domestic animals may injure themselves on discarded litter. Landowners can also restrict access onto private land as a result of littering.

- Take your litter home with you – if you've carried it in, you can carry it out.
- Where it is safe and not too unpleasant, pick up other people's litter (especially non-biodegradable material).
- Organic litter such as fruit peel takes longer to break down than most people think. It also attracts certain predator species, so take it home.
- Reduce the litter you need to carry out with you by repackaging your food before you set out.

Shop locally

The local spending of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers is vital to the conservation and development of many mountain regions. Wherever possible, shop and buy locally from independent stores (e.g. groceries, technical equipment, local cafes and restaurants).



Some cairns are important landmarks

6 | Climbing and scrambling

Rock climbing and scrambling give the visitor unique access to very special areas, often unaffected by human or grazing activities. For this reason many cliffs are a final refuge for rare plants and animals, which may be unique to the region.

The most important areas for nature conservation are often the vegetated and wetter areas of cliffs – usually north facing, dank and slippery slopes – but some popular areas are also important for their fauna and flora. So, if you are thinking of opening up new areas of cliffs by putting up new routes, check first and limit your new routing to places that do not have valuable nature conservation interests.

If your local crag is being lost to invasive trees and scrub, the BMC can offer guidance on how best to open these up in collaboration with statutory conservation bodies. The removal of natural vegetation including mosses and lichens should be avoided without first obtaining permission from the landowner and appropriate conservation body. Remember that if protected habitats are destroyed by climbing or abseiling, this could be a criminal offence and the continuation of climbing might be at risk.

Gullies and ledges

Whilst these may offer attractive locations for belaying, try to find less vulnerable alternatives and, if they cannot be avoided, take care to prevent damage to the vegetation.

Rock types

Some rock types can be particularly susceptible to damage and routes can be permanently affected by inconsiderate use. For example:

- severe erosion can be caused by climbing on sandstone in wet conditions, or by the use of wire brushes to clean soft rocks such as gritstone;
- damage can be caused by repeated top-roping of routes – such as cutting grooves in sandstone and polishing the rock, especially limestone;
- work with the rock as you find it; chipping or defacing the rock is cheating, as well as damaging;
- never carve your name etc into the rock – there are better ways of achieving immortality.



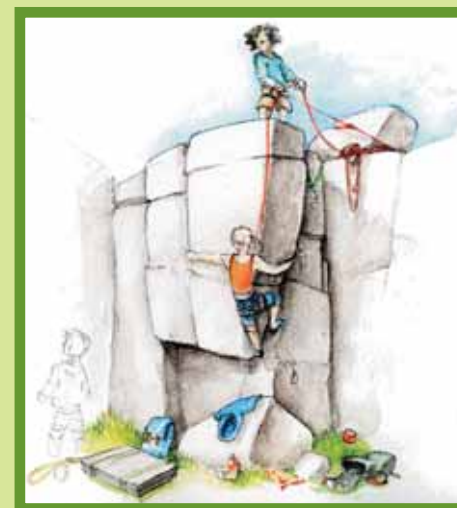
Rose Root is a characteristic plant of mountain ledges and sea cliffs

Fixed equipment

The BMC has a fixed equipment policy. At BMC area meetings, local ethics and policies are agreed. Anyone considering placing new fixed equipment or replacing existing equipment should take careful account of local climbing ethics, whether bolts are absolutely necessary, the environmental sensitivity of the area and public safety factors.

Climbers should also be aware that bolting restrictions are sometimes made because of the landowners' wishes, and the insertion of bolts in such cases could lead to a loss of agreed access. Cord and tape threads can also be visually intrusive – try to avoid these or use a similar colour to the rock if possible.

The use of cliff-top belay stakes should also be kept to a minimum, especially in popular or scenic areas where walkers have access to cliff tops. Think about liability – who is going to maintain the fixed equipment that you place and who will carry the blame if someone gets injured as a result of the gear failing?

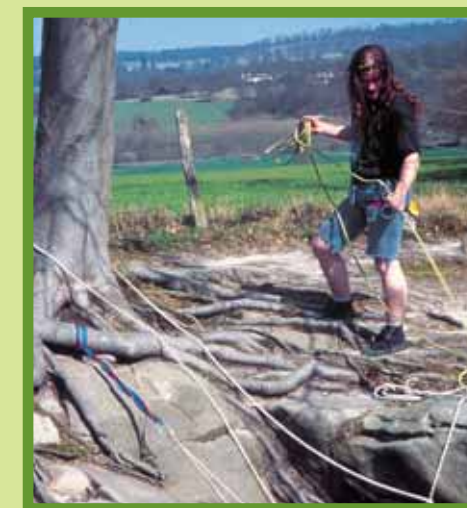


©Simon Norris

Abseiling

Abseiling can be a very convenient and quick way off a cliff but consider the effects on vegetation and on fellow climbers.

- Abseiling down established routes can damage and polish the rock and may inconvenience other climbers.
- At some crags there is an agreement with the landowner that climbers should use fixed abseil stations to descend. This may be necessary to avoid areas of loose rock, or to protect descent routes from further erosion. Follow the advice given in the guidebook and the BMC *Regional Access Database* (RAD) – www.thebmc.co.uk/bmccrag
- Trees can be put under stress from being used as abseil anchors and roots may become exposed or damaged, resulting in the possible death of the tree. If abseiling from trees is unavoidable, use tree protectors and avoid trampling on roots.



Avoid putting trees under stress

7 | Winter mountaineering

Winter mountaineering in Britain is carried out in a variety of snow and ice conditions. The variability of cover means that we often climb or ski on only a thin cover of snow and ice.

Climbing on frozen turf, thin ice or during a thaw causes most damage to vegetation. There are often rare species growing on mountain cliffs. Some arctic-alpine plants are shallow rooted in moss cushions and can be damaged and easily dislodged by the tearing action of ice axes and crampons. Similarly, climbing in marginal snow and ice conditions can prise out roots or bulbs from cracks. Larger, more broken and vegetated cliffs may never have been disturbed before and the effect of removing vegetation or clearing out cracks for axe placements may destroy the last remnants of rare plant species.

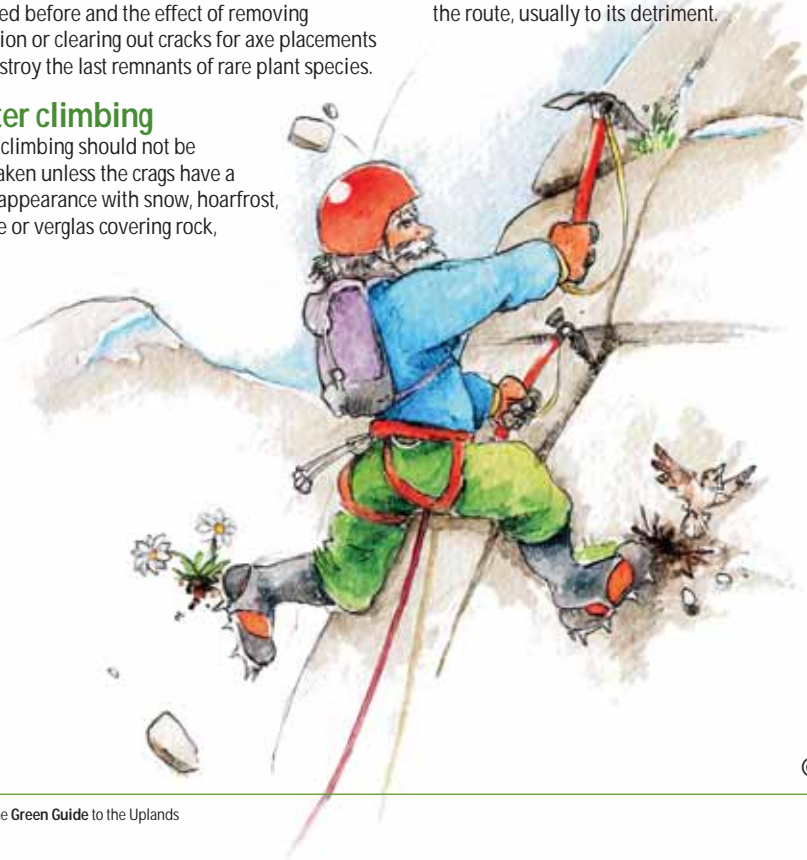
Winter climbing

Winter climbing should not be undertaken unless the crags have a winter appearance with snow, hoarfrost, rime-ice or verglas covering rock,

not just snow-covered ledges. Dry tooling should not be carried out except where local agreements allow.

Many of the best winter climbing venues are north-facing cliffs, which hold considerable amounts of vegetation. Some are home to rare alpine plants, which are not found anywhere else in the UK. It is therefore important for their conservation that vegetation is completely frozen to minimise damage.

Winter ascents of summer rock routes with the use of crampons, peg placements and axes in cracks can cause substantial damage; in particular chipping of the rock. This potentially changes the nature of the route, usually to its detriment.



©Simon Norris

Climbing routes should only be attempted in winter when fully coated with snow and/or ice in order to prevent damage to the underlying rock.

In some quarries, local agreements have been reached for bolted, dry tooling routes – if you are unsure please contact your local access volunteer or contact the BMC.

Ski mountaineering

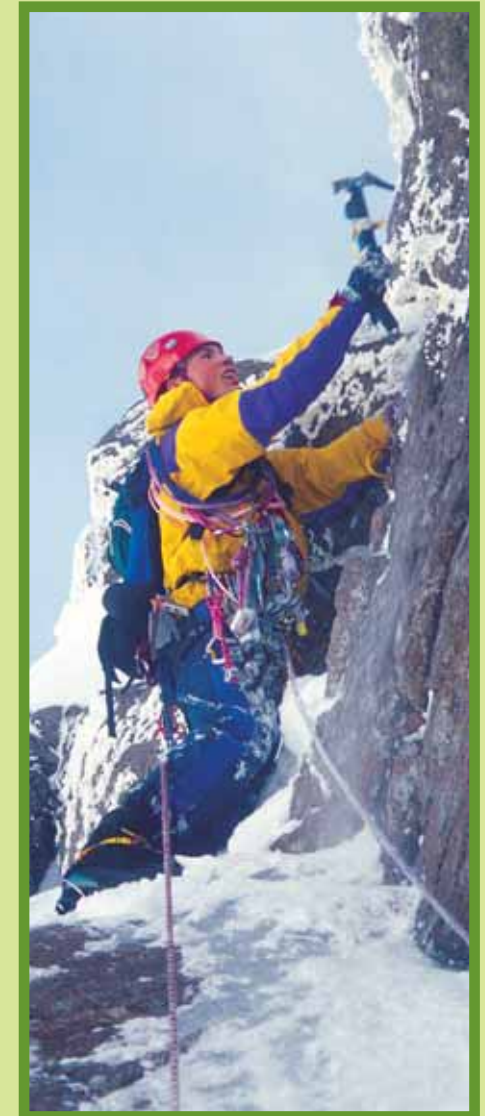
Ski mountaineering in Britain is similarly afflicted by our weather, with incomplete snow cover and thaw often frustrating the enjoyment of a good day. In these conditions, the effect of our skis in slicing through the vegetation and compacting remnants of snow can be great, particularly to fragile upland heath which may take years to regenerate. Damage to plants like heather when they are frozen can result in their destruction. So, only ski when you are sure conditions are good, and keep to stretches of complete snow cover.

Winter walking

Snow accumulating along the path itself often makes winter walking along paths more difficult. Where this snow has compacted into ice, it can be difficult to walk along, but avoiding the path and walking on the (usually) boggy ground to the side will increase erosion. So, use crampons on long stretches of icy paths – it will stop you falling over and reduce erosion!



Use crampons on long stretches of ice



Mixed climbing in good conditions

8 | Camping

Camping 'wild', snowholing and bivvying are very different undertakings from staying at an established campsite. Wild camping is not permitted by right on open access land in England and Wales without express permission of the landowner, but it is permitted in Scotland on the proviso that you follow the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code (SOAC)* and provided that you do so responsibly as explained in SOAC. With no facilities at hand you need to think carefully about your impact – both physical and visual. Here are some suggestions.

Wild camping

- Whenever you wild camp leave the site as you find it.
- Keep your group small and as discreet as possible.
- Camp away from popular areas – your presence may attract other campers to your unofficial 'site'.
- Be inconspicuous. A green tent may blend into the landscape whereas a brightly coloured tent can spoil the view. It is best to remove your tent during the day, especially where other walkers are likely to pass by.
- Camp in one place for only 1 or 2 nights and on dry / well-drained ground that won't be easily damaged.
- Pitch the tent in a way that avoids having to cut drainage ditches or move boulders. If you do have to move large stones replace them later.
- Try to avoid picking a site that means you have to cross sensitive areas to collect water or go to the toilet.
- If the campsite is on soft or boggy ground pitch the tents further away from each other, this will minimise trampling between tents.

- Litter – plan ahead. If you brought it all in you should be able to take it all out! Carry out all litter – even biodegradable material is slow to decompose in the mountain environment and may be scattered by animals. Do not dig rubbish in to the ground or try to hide it under boulders. Try to take away any other litter left by people less considerate than yourself.
- Fires can be highly destructive. Apart from the risks to you, wild fires can be very damaging to vegetation. Heathland fires on blanket bog can burn into the peat and destroy the habitat. The limited amounts of dead wood in the uplands are also essential habitats for the insects on which birds and other animals feed. Charred fire sites are also unattractive. Use a stove for cooking and put on more clothes, or snuggle down in your sleeping bag, to keep warm.
- Clean, pure water is a valuable resource relied upon by many people living in the mountain regions. The nutrient content of streams in most upland areas is low, and altering this by adding pollutants and soap could kill local insect and plant life. If you have to wash, dispose of soapy water well away from water courses. All toilet areas must be at least 30 metres from water (see section 9 – *Sanitation*). Always consider your impact downstream.



Camp with care and consideration

Snow holing

The creation of a snow hole in a snowdrift or area of snow can be protective but the consequences can be great. Don't do it unless you can do it environmentally.

- Remove all litter – do not bury or hide litter within the snow as it will eventually be exposed, can harm wildlife and offend those who visit after you.
- Take everything out with you, including wet clothing.
- Give a thought to the consequences when the snow has melted.
- Make sure if you use a shovel that it is brightly painted so you can find it in the snow.



Leave no trace after snow holing



Carry out all litter

There is a difference between 'wild' camping and 'free' camping. 'Wild' camping in the hills is a very special experience, bringing you as close to nature and wilderness as is possible. If you want to camp free of charge, spare a thought first for the support you could be giving to the local economy. Stay in a campsite if possible.

9 | Sanitation

There is a reluctance to talk about what is one of our most natural functions! And yet by not thinking carefully about this we can endanger human health and potentially poison the mountain environment. Never forgo an opportunity to use a proper toilet. If this is not possible, remember some simple guidelines:

Protect fresh water

A mountain stream is often seen as the epitome of purity – so don't pollute it. Streams are a vital source of fresh water for hill farmers and for campers. It will also be a home to, or a water source for, wildlife.

- Ensure you are at least 30 metres away from running water when you defecate.
- When camping, defecate and urinate downhill from your campsite; collect drinking water from above your camp.



Drinking from a mountain stream

Leave no trace

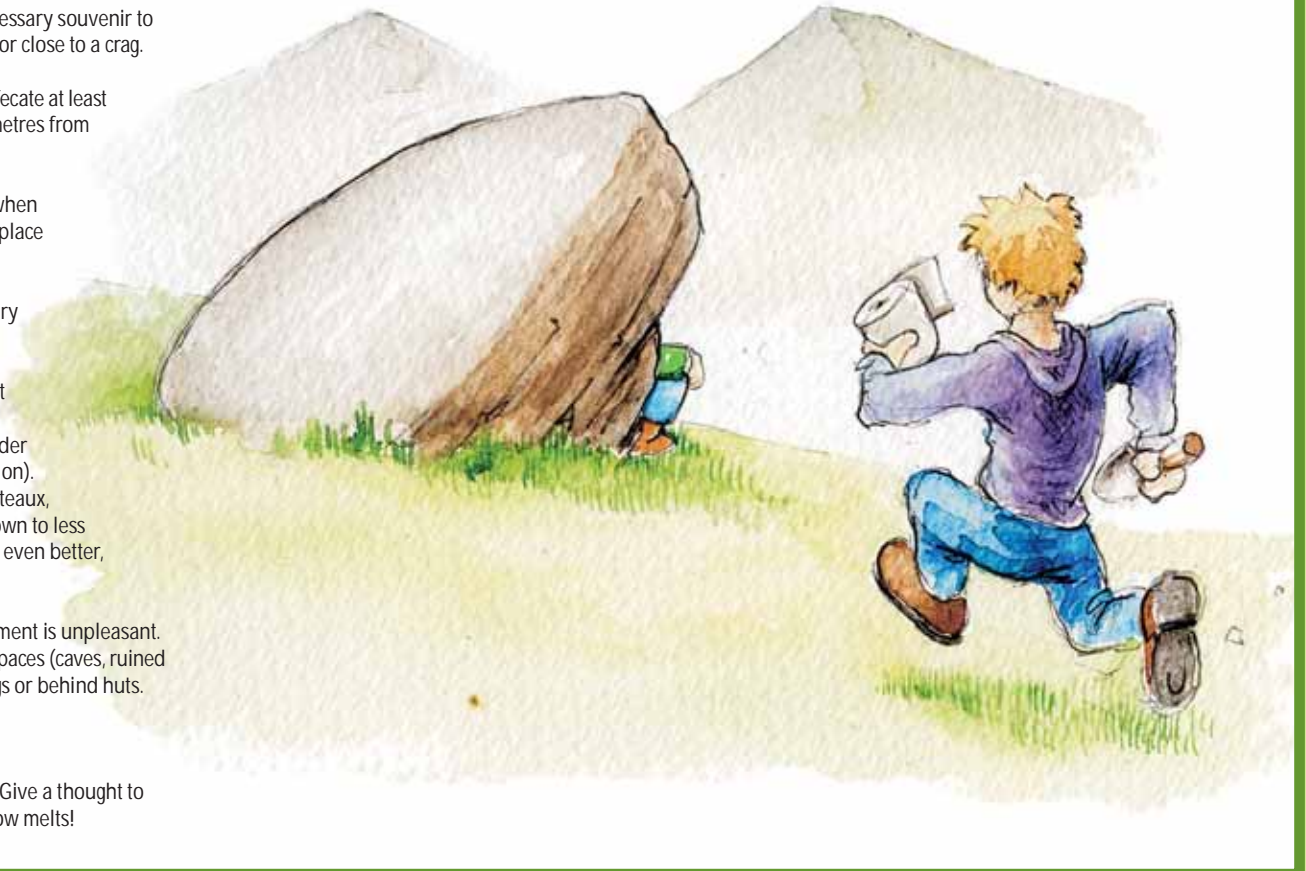
It can be an unpleasant and unnecessary souvenir to encounter human waste on a path or close to a crag.

- Be considerate of others and defecate at least 50 metres from paths and 200 metres from huts and crags.
- Carry a lightweight trowel and when digging, carefully cut out and replace the top turf.
- Dig a hole 15 cm (6") deep to bury your excrement. If this is not possible, keep well away from paths and spread the excrement thinly to increase the rate of its decomposition (squashing it under a boulder will slow decomposition). On especially sensitive high plateaux, excrement should be carried down to less sensitive locations for burial, or even better, carried out.
- The smell from urine and excrement is unpleasant. Avoid doing either in enclosed spaces (caves, ruined buildings etc), at the foot of crags or behind huts.
- Consider using a 'pee bottle'.
- In snow, dig down into the soil. Give a thought to the consequences when the snow melts!

'Accessories'

Toilet paper and female sanitary towels are slow to decompose and may be dug up by animals.

- Carry it out if possible. Come prepared with plastic bags – dog poo bags are ideal for the purpose. Tampons and sanitary towels should be carried out – plastic screw-top containers are convenient.



© Simon Norris

10 | Transport

In common with the rest of the population, climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers love their cars. They get us to the crags and mountains quickly and in relative comfort. However, increasing car use is having an adverse effect on our lives and on the environment. How can we, as concerned users of the mountains and hills, reduce our impact? How much are we willing to do in order to preserve the upland environment which we enjoy?

Here are some ideas;

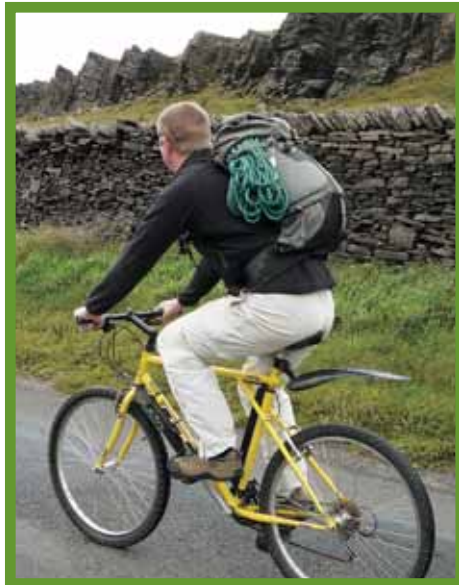
Use public transport – not only as a means of getting to a destination but as part of a day out. This frees you from only doing circular walks and is more relaxing than sitting in a traffic jam. Visit www.nationalrail.co.uk or www.traveline.org.uk

Take your bicycle... whenever you can.

Car share – this has always been a big part of mountain activities. Investigate car share through friends, clubs or web sites. If there are more than a couple of car loads, consider hiring a mini bus or organising a coach. It can be a lot more fun travelling together than separately and is cheaper. See www.liftshare.com



Countryside congestion



Consider cycling to your local crag

If you need to use a motor vehicle:

Reduce the need to travel. Find alternatives to busy sites. Other suitable crags or areas of the countryside may be closer to home, quicker and more economical to get to and less crowded, while being just as enjoyable.

Car parking

Use designated parking places – these will reduce the visual impact and reduce conflict with other users. They may also have useful facilities. If you are the first to arrive, park carefully to allow space for others. If you do need to park in a remote spot, park carefully and considerately. A lane may not be used frequently but it could well be a farmer's only access. Respect local residents – park in designated areas or off the road away from gateways and residential properties, and if you have to change clothing, do so discreetly.

Support the area

A pay and display ticket may be the only money you put into the local economy for a whole days visit. Think of the fee in the context of what you have paid for your gear or will spend in the pub and you can share the cost if you take a car full of people. Money from car parks is often used for environmental work in the area. Car park attendants are usually local people needing jobs, and they can also offer some security for your car and belongings. Perhaps suggest to your access authority that voluntary donation boxes would be a good idea in some areas.

Be warned

Make sure you lock your vehicle. Don't leave valuable gear on view in the front of the car, or better still plan your day beforehand and leave it at home.



The bus stop at Stanage, Peak District

11 | Sustainable crag use – background

Climbing and walking groups come in many shapes and forms, even a small gathering of friends could be called 'a group'. Outdoor activity centres, schools, universities, youth groups, club meets and the armed forces often take groups to the mountains and crags, and an awareness of others and the environment is essential. The 'plan, do and review process', used widely in outdoor education, can work extremely well when developing a group's relationship with the natural environment.

Plan your day, manage your group

Thoughtful planning, effective group management and an awareness of good practice can nip many potential problems in the bud. Choosing an appropriate crag should always be a primary consideration and this should balance your group's size, structure and needs with the size and environmental sensitivity of the crag. If necessary, the BMC Access Reps can advise group leaders on the suitability of their intended venues in England and Wales.

Here are some issues to consider:

Access information: Ensure you are up-to-date with current access arrangements and advice. Guidebooks provide the primary source of access information although they are never absolutely up to date. BMC Access Reps, the BMC Regional Access Database and local outlets (shops, climbing walls, outdoor centres etc) should be contacted if you are in any doubt about current access arrangements.

- **Access restrictions:** Familiarise yourself with any specific group use advice already agreed between BMC and landowners – check the websites and any on site information. Respect seasonal access restrictions and do not disturb wildlife or livestock.
- **Education:** Make use of environmental education opportunities such as signs or countryside interpretation boards at crags. Timetable a group briefing session into your schedule.
- **Footpaths:** Always use the recognised approach tracks and descent paths rather than cutting across quiet countryside or over private land.
- **Codes of practice:** Some crags have specific good practice advice and codes – read any notices/leaflets at the site carefully before taking your group onto the crag.



Plan, Do & Review

Venue choice and options: Large numbers of climbers at certain cliffs can increase the impact on wildlife as well as detracting from the experience. Some landowners have restrictions on group size, and dominating an area may antagonise other climbers.

- **Site selection:** Select cliffs or routes of an appropriate standard for your group. Do not abseil down popular rock climbs or climbs of recognised quality (always check the guidebook first). Would artificial structures, less popular crags (e.g. minor quarries or outlying crags) or the indoor wall satisfy your needs?
- **Timing visits:** Avoid taking groups to the most popular areas at weekends.
- **Group size:** Ensure that your group is a manageable size. Larger groups are more difficult to control. Consider spreading large groups over a number of sites – two groups of 6–10 people may be much less intrusive than one group of 15–20.
- **Overcrowding:** Respect the needs of other climbers and do not monopolise popular cliffs, buttresses or bays. A system of rotating around different routes (rather than staying on one route all day) could add variety to your day and help to reduce possible conflicts.
- **Liaison with other groups:** Could you reduce overcrowding at the crag by agreeing that different groups will use different crags?
- **Transport and parking:** Traffic congestion and limited parking facilities can often present problems. Ensure there will be sufficient parking at the crag you intend to visit or consider a longer walk-in option. Is there the possibility of taking public transport? (see section 10 of this booklet)
- **Commercial activities:** The CRoW Act 2000 places some limitations on commercial activities taking place on open access land. For more details check the Department for Environment and Rural Affairs website, www.defra.gov.uk



Respect others and do not monopolise popular crags

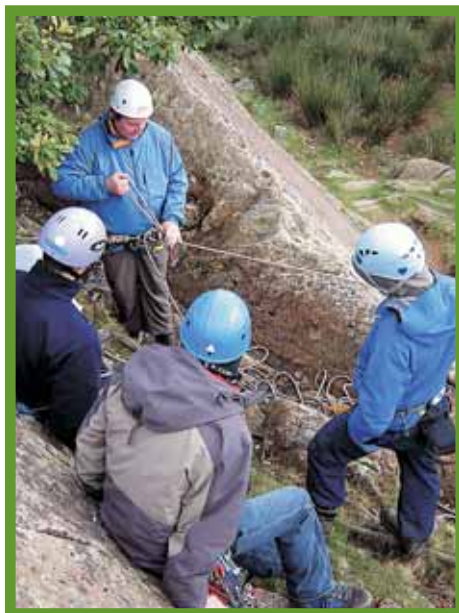
12 | Sustainable crag use – good practice

Leading, abseiling, top-roping and bottom-roping can all offer tremendous challenges and rewards to groups. Good practice is essential to ensure group safety, to minimise rock damage and ground erosion and to reduce conflicts with other users.

Abseiling and top-roping can neutralise large sections of popular cliffs for long periods of time, preventing other climbers from climbing particular routes. Repetitive top-roping can cause irreparable damage to high quality rock climbs. Through a combination of careful site selection and planning of the day's activities, many of these problems can be avoided.

- **Briefing sessions:** Brief your group on the challenges that the crag presents but also on the environmental value of their surroundings. Highlight the 'do's and don'ts' for a day at the crag.
- **Boundaries:** Set geographical boundaries for your group's activities.
- **Skills training:** Carry out any rope work/harness training away from the crag, perhaps in the car park.
- **Belay techniques:** Ensure that ropes do not run directly over rock surfaces – even gritstone erodes quickly once the surface layers are worn away, particularly when lowering climbers on a tight rope. Use long slings and avoid top-roping with ropes running directly around trees to minimise root and bark damage.
- **Repetitive use:** Prevent excessive rock wear and polishing by avoiding repetitive abseiling, top-roping or continuously trying the same move over and over again on the same route.

- **Unused ropes:** When not using routes do not leave ropes hanging down them – other people may wish to climb the route.
- **Footwear:** Always use soft-soled footwear and encourage group members to clean their shoes before abseiling or climbing.
- **Chalk:** Chalk is not needed for beginners and should be used sparingly by experienced climbers
- **Falling rocks:** Do not throw stones over the cliff edge and be careful about dislodging loose rock whilst climbing or moving around the cliff top.
- **Descent routes:** Always use the recognised descent paths to minimise ground erosion and avoid the creation of new paths.



A small group being briefed at the crag

Leave no trace: The exposed escarpments, open moorlands and sheltered dales of many climbing venues are important to different people for different reasons. Many people visit these areas to escape the crowds and find peace and quiet away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Noise, bad language, uncontrolled dogs and litter can all detract from other peoples' enjoyment of the countryside.

- **Base camp:** Establish a base camp area for your group. This should be a hard-wearing site (e.g. a cluster of rocks), which does not interfere with other users and is safe from falling objects.

- **Respect:** Explain the importance of respecting other climbers' equipment, 'do not trample on ropes' for example.
- **Noise & litter:** Keep noise to a low level and discourage bad language. Take all litter home with you – some groups take litter bags to the crag to make this easier.
- **Toilet facilities:** Few crags are close to proper toilet facilities. Ensure your group knows that there are no facilities at the crag and 'go before you go' is a good philosophy. Perhaps schedule toilet breaks or if there is no alternative ensure a hole is dug to bury any excrement and toilet paper is removed (see section 9 – *Sanitation*).



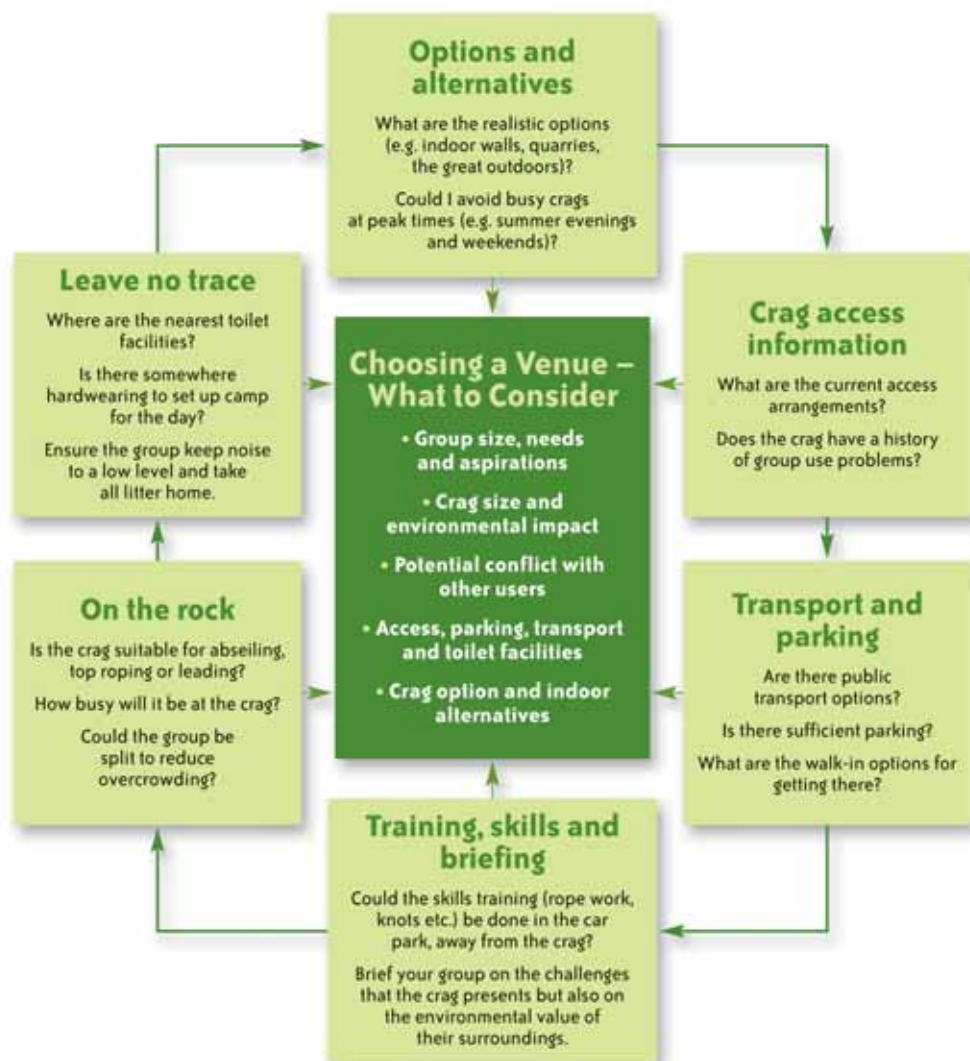
When walking over sensitive vegetation, spread out to minimise impact



Where possible, try to walk on durable surfaces

13 Sustainable crag use – at a glance

Planning a day with a group



14 Organised events

Events such as 'challenge' or sponsored events are increasingly popular for fundraising. They often involve large numbers of people and can cause significant damage and disturbance to the environment as well as local residents and other users. The mountain environment is fundamentally unsuitable for this type of event.

These events are often attended by inexperienced participants who can find themselves in situations they cannot cope with. They also put unnecessary demands on the rescue services. The BMC does not encourage these.

Anyone contemplating organising an event needs to:

- Consider the appropriateness of the mountain environment – avoid sensitive landscapes and habitats.
- Ensure all participants can competently deal with mountain situations they may encounter
- Plan very carefully – consider the number of potential participants, how to brief them all, the need for site specific information, how to manage the traffic and so on.
- Ensure minimal disturbance to people living locally and other users of the mountains.

If any of these points cannot be achieved, the event should not go ahead.

Permission must be obtained well in advance and the local rescue services need to be informed.

If an event is planned in a National Park, check with the Park Authority for any guidance or factsheets.

At the end of the event, there must be no evidence that it has taken place. It is essential that the area is cleared, and any evidence of large numbers of people is removed. Events should only take place if they are organised in accordance with approved guidance.



Challenge and sponsored events are increasingly popular

15 | Scotland

The equivalent organisation to the BMC in Scotland is the *Mountaineering Council of Scotland (MCofS)*. If visiting Scotland, the general ethos in this leaflet applies, but the customary practices and legal basis are very different. You are advised to read the advice provided on the Access & Conservation pages of the MCofS website (www.mcofs.org.uk), or contact them for advice (details in the section 17 at the end of this leaflet).

Conservation

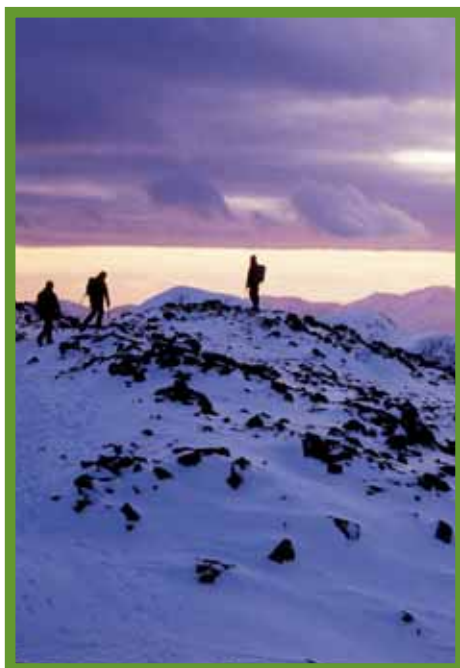
In addition to the *Wildlife & Countryside Act 1981*, in Scotland there is the *Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004*. This strengthens the legal protection afforded to threatened species. The species protection afforded to wild birds, animals and plants is extended to include 'reckless' acts. All birds are protected in this way and certain threatened bird species benefit from protection when they are 'near' a nest in use.

Access

In Scotland the access legislation and associated guidelines are very different from England and Wales. There is a freedom of access across almost all land in Scotland as long as it is conducted responsibly. These rights were made statutory through the *Land Reform (Scotland) Act 2003*. If an access user is not behaving responsibly then access rights do not apply. Guidance of where access rights apply, and what being responsible entails, can be found in the *Scottish Outdoor Access Code* at www.outdooraccess-scotland.com. It is further explained on the MCofS website, and advice can be obtained direct from the MCofS.

An important difference, with respect to climbing, is that in Scotland restrictions cannot be negotiated. This means there is not an equivalent to the annual BMC Bird Nesting Restrictions list, and a greater onus on climbers to assess the situation and make responsible judgements. Other important differences for mountaineers are about control of dogs, especially near livestock, and wild camping. What constitutes wild camping and how to deal with sanitation is different in Scotland.

Remember, when you visit Scotland the extensive rights of access are dependent upon you acting responsibly within the definition of the access code. You are advised to familiarise yourself with these when visiting Scotland by seeking further information.



16 | BMC Environment Policy

As climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, we practise our sport on relatively untouched summits and cliffs. We have the potential to affect those environments that are so valuable to our experience. We need to be aware of, and to protect, the special features of the environment we use, whether it is cliff- or ground nesting-birds, arctic-alpine flora, blanket bog or the fragile montane heath on the very highest summits.

The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering impact on the environment, and acknowledges responsibility to take reasonable measures to safeguard the environment for both the present and future generations. The BMC will improve its own environmental performance and provide assistance and advice to climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers on environmental issues relating to their activities. These policies will be regularly monitored and subjected to audits at appropriate intervals to ensure that the policy objectives are achieved.

The BMC has determined the following key areas of impact for action:

In the office

In its day to day operations and processes, the BMC has a significant impact on the environment, through the resources it uses such as paper, power, fuel and also through the waste products it produces, such as solid wastes and emissions from heating and transport.

We will seek to quantify these effects and implement measures to ensure day to day office practices have as small an impact on the environment as is possible. This will be achieved through improvements in; purchasing practices, transport use, energy efficiency, waste practices and reduced use of chemicals.

Transport and travel

In common with the rest of the population, climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers are often reliant on their cars. However, increasing use of cars is having an adverse effect on our lives and the environment. In particular being a major contributor to CO₂ emissions. We will encourage our members to:

- reduce the need to travel, by promoting use of local crags and walking routes;
- reduce the need to fly to foreign destinations;
- use public transport;
- car share, particularly through club promotion;
- park considerately and use public car parks where provided.

Energy use

The BMC recognises that climate change will increasingly lead to changes that threaten to significantly affect our members' recreational interests. A Sustainable Energy position statement has already been adopted in regard to proposed major renewable energy sites in the upland areas of England and Wales, and other areas valued for their wild land character. The BMC will also actively promote and help climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers to understand how their activities contribute to climate change and provide practical advice and support to help them reduce their impact.

Enhance and protect the environment

A number of nationally and internationally protected flora and fauna species are found on crags, the mountain environment and other areas valued for their wild land character in England and Wales. The BMC actively supports the protection of these species and will work with conservation bodies to ensure that appropriate restrictions are designed to have the least impact on member activities. The BMC will promote adherence by its members to such access restrictions through its Regional Access Database (RAD). On particularly sensitive sites, the BMC will support research and monitoring to ensure conservation programmes are effective. The BMC will actively promote good practice to climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers.

Sites owned by the BMC are actively managed as exemplars of good practice. This links the recreational interest of BMC members with an increasing improvement in the biodiversity of these sites.

Reducing the impact of users

The BMC advocates that all climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers should aim to create minimal impact on the environment and should respect the needs of people who live and work there and those of future generations. The BMC will continue to promote this core message to its members and work with other relevant agencies to ensure the quality of the environment is not degraded through recreational activities, advocating the Leave No Trace Principles.

Activities by other parties

The BMC does not oppose all development in the upland and coastal environment. Such development should only be located where it does not destroy or detract from the natural environment. The BMC advocates local, sustainable development next to existing settlement when appropriate. It will participate in the planning process at regional and national level having regard for the type of development proposed, the scale, visual impact and design of proposals, the recreational importance of the area, the ecological effects of new developments and the social and environmental value of new development or land management.

Supporting mountain economies

Hill walking, mountaineering and climbing have brought economic opportunities to previously isolated and undeveloped areas of the UK. The economics of hill walking, mountaineering and climbing are vital to the conservation and development of many mountain regions. The BMC will continue to promote the local, economic benefits of hill walking, mountaineering and climbing and encourage members to contribute to the economies of local communities.

17 | Further information

For more information on any of the topics covered in this booklet, please contact the British Mountaineering Council (England & Wales) and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland for further details.

BMC

177–179 Burton Road, Manchester M20 2BB
T 0161 445 6111 F 0161 445 4500
E office@thebmc.co.uk

MCofS

The Old Granary, West Mill St, Perth PH1 5QP, Scotland
T 01738 493 942 F 01738 442 095
E info@mountaineering-scotland.org.uk

Useful websites: Access & Conservation

- British Mountaineering Council www.thebmc.co.uk
- Mountaineering Council of Scotland www.mcofs.org.uk
- Natural England www.naturalengland.org.uk
- Countryside Council for Wales www.ccw.gov.uk
- Scottish Natural Heritage www.snh.org.uk
- English Heritage www.english-heritage.org.uk
- Cadw www.cadw.wales.gov.uk
- The Forestry Commission www.forestry.gov.uk
- Joint Nature Conservation Committee www.jncc.gov.uk
- UK Biodiversity Action Plan www.ukbap.org.uk
- Magic www.magic.gov.uk
- The Woodland Trust www.woodland-trust.org.uk
- Wildlife and Countryside Link www.wcl.org.uk
- British Trust for Conservation Volunteers www.btcv.org.uk
- Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty www.aonb.org.uk
- National Parks www.nationalparks.gov.uk
- Wildlife Trusts www.wildlifetrusts.org
- National Trust www.nationaltrust.org.uk
- National Trust for Scotland www.nts.org.uk
- Royal Society for the Protection of Birds www.rspb.org.uk
- Plantlife www.plantlife.org.uk
- Upland Path Trust www.uplandpathtrust.org
- Best of Both Worlds www.bobw.co.uk
- Central Council of Physical Recreation www.ccp.org.uk

Safety & Training

- Association of Mountaineering Instructors www.ami.org.uk
- British Mountain Guides www.bmg.org.uk
- Mountain Leader Training UK www.mltuk.org
- Mountain Leader Training England www.mlte.org
- Mountain Leader Training Wales www.mltw.org
- Mountain Rescue (England & Wales) www.mountain.rescue.org.uk
- Mountain Rescue Committee of Scotland www.mrcfs.org
- Sport Scotland Avalanche Information Service www.sais.gov.uk
- Plas y Brenin www.pyb.co.uk
- Glenmore Lodge www.glenmorelodge.org.uk

Nature protection designations

SSSI (Site of Special Scientific Interest)
NNR (National Nature Reserve)
SPA (Special Protection Area)
SAC (Special Area of Conservation)
Ramsar Sites (Wetland areas)

This publication was funded by the Access & Conservation Trust – www.thebmc.co.uk/act

This booklet has been prepared with the co-operation of Mountain Leader Training, the BMC Access, Conservation and Environment Group, the Upland Path Trust and the Mountaineering Council of Scotland.

Thanks are also due to Barbara Jones, Joe Roberts and Ken Taylor for their contributions.

Photos: The BMC, Alex Messenger, Ana Jolly, Danny King, Liz Asquith, Pete Walkden's Bird Photography (www.petewalkdensbirdphotography.fotopic.net), Plantlife (www.plantlife.org.uk), Nick Stewart/Plantlife and Chris Gomersall (www.rspb-images.com).

18 | The BMC Crag Code

Access

Check the Regional Access Database (RAD) on www.thebmc.co.uk for the latest access information

Parking

Park carefully – avoid gateways and driveways

Footpaths

Keep to established paths – leave gates as you find them

Risk

Climbing can be dangerous – accept the risks and be aware of other people around you

Respect

Groups and individuals – respect the rock, local climbing ethics and other people

Wildlife

Do not disturb livestock, wildlife or cliff vegetation; respect seasonal bird nesting restrictions

Dogs

Keep dogs under control at all times; don't let your dog chase sheep or disturb wildlife

Litter

'Leave no trace' – take all litter home with you

Toilets

Don't make a mess – bury your waste

Economy

Do everything you can to support the rural economy – shop locally

BMC Participation Statement — Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.