

**3rd SEMINAR ON PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS AND MOUNTAIN SPORTS**

**"ROCK CLIMBING IN PROTECTED NATURAL AREAS"**

*1978 Spanish Constitution*

- *Spaniards have the right to travel in the national territory. (Article 19)*
- *Everyone has the right to enjoy an environment suitable for the development of the person, as well as the duty to preserve it. (Article 45)*
- *The public authorities shall foster physical education and sport. Likewise, they shall facilitate adequate utilisation of leisure. (Article 43)*
- *The public authorities shall concern themselves with the rational use of all natural resources for the purpose of protecting and improving the quality of life and protecting and restoring the environment. (Article 45)*

1. Rock climbing is a traditional sports activity, practised in a natural environment, which contributes towards a person's all-round development in close contact with nature. It develops the values of cooperation and team spirit amongst the climbers and fosters appreciation and interest for the preservation of the environment, so as to ensure that it is done in a sustainable and respectful way.
2. The Spanish Federation of Climbing and Mountain Sports and, through derivation, the regional federations integrated in this organisation, have powers enshrined in their Statutes with respect to climbing issues. The conservation measures adopted by order or through these federations, especially during the various formative and informative facets, will have special repercussions on climbers. Furthermore, given the fact that climbers have their own communication networks and carry out the sport in different autonomous regions, measures designed to integrate such people in the joint responsibility of environmental conservation will obviously be much more effective.
3. Conservation of the natural environment must form an integral part of the objectives adopted by climbers, who can become privileged partners in implementing strategies for conservation and sustainability. Rock climbing can stimulate sustainable development processes that have a multiplier effect when harnessed to other uses and activities. For this to be the case, it will be necessary to seek consensus so as to reconcile the right to practise climbing with protection and conservation of the ecosystems.
4. Climbing regulation must take the principle of freedom as its starting point and then address the measures required to control this activity based on the notions of science, logic and participation. Restrictions established for the protection of animal and plant life (such as nesting), or of the rock itself, the scenery, etc. should be clear, adapted to the area and reversible – being removed when the cause that originally brought them into being has disappeared. Rock climbing has to be considered a traditional sports activity in many natural areas, as in some cases it was practised long before such places were declared to be protected areas and thus demands a different type of treatment from other more recent sporting activities it has sometimes been associated with. It is essential to strive for regulation based on collaboration so as to prevent systematic bans. Where such principles are applied, it will be possible to regulate the opening up of new routes, the provision or removal of equipment on existing ones, or stipulating the temporary use of certain routes to protect the environment. It is desirable that any legislation be based on clear zoning regulations and standards of conduct.

5. The impact of climbing on the natural environment must be considered in the correct proportion. While there may well be localised problems for the flora and fauna, the landscape or the rockface itself, their impact is very small when compared to other activities that have repercussions on the natural environment (housing estates, roads, etc.) and in the case of climbing, the situation is generally reversible. Specific instances of deterioration in climbing areas will basically be due to other bad practices associated with the activity (camping, parking, litter, etc).
6. Rock climbing has positive effects on a nearby towns' economy and, to a certain extent, encourages the growth of tourism. It is necessary to ensure that climbers get on well with the local population. In particular, climbers should show respect for the cultural identity and traditional values of the villages where they do their climbing. Respect must inevitably be extended to property.
7. It would seem appropriate to draw up a code of conduct in consonance with the "Tyrol Declaration on Best Practice in Mountain Sports" adopted at the "Conference on the Future of Mountain Sports" held in Innsbruck in September 2002. Climbers should respect any limitations imposed for conservation or safety reasons, with regard to the equipment, restoration or maintenance of roads, or the opening up of new routes in areas not previously used for climbing. More specifically, it seems necessary for certain basic measures to be put in place:
  - Avoid any deterioration of the ground in climbing areas along with their access points, respecting parking spaces for vehicles, roads and paths, avoiding the use of shortcuts and new sections on the approach routes to the rockface.
  - Minimise noise made by human presence. Unless justified on the grounds of safety when communicating with one another in hazardous areas, climbers should avoid making sounds that might disturb the animals or make them bolt from the area.
  - Collect any waste generated during the activity, and either take it home or leave it in bins provided in a nearby town.
  - Not only respect but also protect plant and animal life, both at the start of the climbing route and all the way to the top. It is particularly important to preserve bird nesting areas on the rockface at certain times of the year.
  - Use the criteria of minimum intervention when opening up new climbing routes. The leader must show maximum respect for the morphology and natural characteristics of the rock when clearing a path for climbing and should avoid chopping or adding artificial holds.
  - Be careful with other practices like trying not to leave painted marks or material behind, endeavouring to use mimetic material, always keeping pets under control, observing the rules for camping near climbing routes, etc.

8. Administrative measures should also serve to raise awareness and educate the general public. It is the responsibility of the public authorities and, where appropriate, the regional federations, to inform the public about sensitive areas that are in need of protection, along with the causes that justify regulations at visitor centres, information desks, different facilities offering accommodation or their own publications. Information must be a priority for the federations and public authorities that manage the Protected Natural Areas and this is especially important on beginners' routes and for teaching purposes. Making such information public requires formats that can be adapted to the different circumstances. The authorities and federations must ensure that the guides published include environmental information on the areas, along with recommendations for their use, and refrain from publishing routes that are located in areas where the activity is not permitted. Climbers will be informed of such regulation at the various information panels, normally located at the bottom of the route, but also near access points, mountain refuges, car parks and tourist accommodation.
9. Regulations concerning rock climbing should be perfectly justified by appropriate scientific reports based on arguments for the conservation or recovery of the ecosystem. Public authorities should encourage studies to be made of climbing areas so that a bank of reliable data can slowly be built up from the constant monitoring and evaluation of such areas. It is desirable that climbers should take part in all such studies, along with collaborative support from public authorities, technical experts and federations in joint programmes. Likewise, it is also advisable to establish protocols for acting in certain situations such as fixing safety devices or the use of routes for teaching purposes. Federations, clubs, associations and other entities may suggest possible courses of action to public authorities that will enable this sport and its relation with research work to become more widely known among the general public.
10. In order to implement the proposals mentioned above, it is necessary to have lines of communication open between the public authorities and the mountaineering federations, which can be articulated through agreements or other methods of cooperation, giving special importance to the integration of federations in the organs of all Protected Natural Areas where rock climbing is practised. It would seem reasonable that the federations and public authorities responsible for managing Protected Natural Areas in mountain regions should reach an agreement on the creation and dissemination of a "Handbook on good climbing practices".
11. To date there has been no general debate on the regulation of rock climbing. The only legislation that has been enacted in recent decades is specific and limited to each Protected Natural Area. It may indeed be necessary to encourage the negotiation of a general framework that can serve as a starting point when specification regulations are put forward. This document can provide that starting point.