

UIAA POLICY ON THE PRESERVATION OF NATURAL ROCK FOR ADVENTURE CLIMBING

Last updated: 11 July 2012

The reasons for this document

In May 2000 the UIAA Council approved a policy, embodied in the document 'To Bolt Or Not To Be', on the use of fixed equipment – notably bolts and stanchions – on mountain crags and cliffs. It set out what was assumed by Robert Renzler then President of the Mountaineering Commission, and his team of advisors to be “an acceptable compromise” between the preservation of some rock in its natural state suitable for traditional climbing and the bolting of cliffs for sport climbing and the securing of mountain routes.

This was a brave step forward, however the results have not been to everyone's satisfaction. In some mountain areas the drill has continued to be used so indiscriminately as to still virtually overwhelm the possibility of climbing traditionally with an adventurous spirit. In some countries, such as Hungary, all available rock for climbing has been drilled and bolted into sport climbs.

Twelve years on, it is clear that the May 2000 policy on bolting needs reiterating and further guidance issued to assist Climbing Federations in deciding the balance between the preservation of rock in its natural state and its taming with bolts and other fixed equipment. Countries that are only now developing their rock climbing are particularly interested in receiving guidelines on drilling and traditional climbing from the UIAA.

There is no doubt that a small group of climbers armed with cordless drills can have an influence out of all proportion to their numbers completely changing the character of a crag all in one weekend of bolting. Changes made too fast leave the past behind since the local consensus has no chance to act in time to stem the tide of change.

Definitions -

Adventure Climbing, Traditional Climbing or Trad Climbing is the style that was adopted in the early days of rock climbing in which the leader places all the equipment necessary to prevent a long fall; this equipment is then removed by subsequent members of the party. Protection has changed over the years from country to country. In Britain the first protection was simply putting a sling on a spike or around a chock stone inserted into a crack. In other countries pegs were used and later just about everywhere chocks and spring-loaded camming devices are used. The exception to chocks and cams being used is on the soft, Bohemian sandstone where the mobile protection there is jammed knots. **The common feature was and is that the “traditional” climbing team leaves no trace of their passage**

*** The policy document 'To Bolt Or Not To Be' appears as an appendix to this paper. (The title comes from the name of a sport route established by J.B. Tribout in 1986 at Smith Rock, the first 5.14 in the United States and up a seemingly blank wall.)

and is thus considered environmentally friendly. The problem with the word “traditional climbing” is that in some countries the tradition was to rig the mountain with ropes attached to stanchions as on the Dent de Geant and Matterhorn.

Other labels for this style of climbing are “minimum impact climbing”, “natural climbing” or just “climbing”. Currently the preferred option is “adventure climbing” which 30 years ago referred to virtually all climbing.

Sport Climbing is rock climbing characterised by permanently fixed, generally bomb-proof anchor points which are typically a bracket and bolt inserted into a drilled hole and usually glued into place. Since the climber no longer has to worry about protecting his or her own life the climber can concentrate more on the actual climbing moves with the opportunity to reach a higher standard. In some countries where climbing is in embryo the bolts are not always inserted properly and all bolts, especially those in sea cliffs should not be taken entirely for granted.

Bouldering is mentioned for completeness. It is a style of rock climbing usually less than five metres without rope and with just climbing shoes, a chalk bag and a mattress-like crash mat. This style of climbing can be very dynamic requiring power, strength to make short sequences of moves.

The importance of this document is to help to avoid conflict by prompting climbers to organise and make provision for all styles of climbing rather than leaving it to other agencies to sort out disagreements. There have been so called “bolt wars” on many crags throughout the climbing world. In most instances a settlement was brokered through the national federations such as the BMC in the UK or the NZAC in New Zealand. In other cases agreement could only be reached after the intervention and pressure from National Parks, Conservation Lobbies, Mountain Rescue Groups, Health and Safety, Town Councils, even Law Enforcement Agencies.

Striking a balance between those climbers who prefer, on the one hand, mainly bolted rock, and those who prefer only to climb on rock that has been left in its completely natural state is more feasible when the diverse attitudes are known to the decision makers.

Climbing is a broad church- the value and significance given to climbing varies a great deal from one person to another. This may be reflected in the importance given to climbing, and particularly rock climbing, by the president and committee members of the various federations. It is recognised that not all federations elect active climbers to run their organisations as does the BMC and the American Alpine Club. It may be that in some federations those receiving this information will be mountain walkers and not sport climbers or adventure climbers. Nevertheless the UIAA hopes that after considering all the information given Federation leaders and administrators will grasp the importance of this document and disseminate the information to all relevant members of their climbing Federation. To this end the UIAA office will assist wherever possible with identifying suitable recipients of this document and help with distribution.

There are those who slot in a few hours climbing at the local indoor climbing wall or easily accessible crag between work and home, or at weekends between other sporting and leisure activities. Such climbers may have little knowledge of the traditions of climbing and its development nor of the debate that takes place between sport and 'trad'.

At the other end of the spectrum there are those who organise their whole life around climbing, domestically, socially and in their choice of job. These climbers care passionately about the direction their climbing takes since they eat, sleep and drink climbing.

It may well be that there is a silent majority of climbers around the world who favour preserving rock for adventure climbing and will be encouraged by this document. Pat Littlejohn, director of the International School of Mountaineering, notes that many climbers have "been cowed into silence by a rapacious and rather aggressive bolting fraternity who tell them their views are outdated and reactionary."

It is obvious that there is still great concern in the climbing world about the use of the bolt as evidenced by recent activity on Cerro Torre. If climbers spoke out against the indiscriminate use of the drill on their local crags as vociferously as they did when a film crew left bolts on Cerro Torre then there would be far more rock for adventure climbing.

The attraction of sport climbing

1. Opportunity to improve climbing standards and techniques is more likely on a climb with fixed protection since the climber concentrates fully on the climbing moves, unburdened by a rack of gear and without the worry of having to fit it into place he can concentrate and revel in facing up to absolute difficulty and pure movement.
2. Sport climbing is more likely to enable the climber to experience the pure fun of climbing, free of the fear of falling.
3. Sport climbing enables young climbers starting out indoors to take the first step out onto rock in complete safety. The young climber can then go on to widen his climbing experience by learning all about adventure climbing, providing there is rock left in its natural state for this purpose.
4. The popularity of sport climbing brings employment to mountain areas. Those who mainly benefit financially are Hut Wardens and Guides but also everyone that normally benefits from mountain tourism.
5. Various organisations find sport climbing a help in achieving their aims, such as mountain rescue groups, educationalists and others using climbing as an antidote to anti-social behaviour, the fight against obesity etc.

The benefits of adventure climbing – where the climber has to protect his own life it is claimed that favourable conditions exist for:

1. development of a sense of responsibility especially for young people. "Rock climbing routes with little protection require an especially measure of accountability by the climber for his own safety and that of his partner." (page 5, *To Bolt Or Not To Be*)
2. derive personal satisfaction from such climbs since there is a greater demand on the resourcefulness of the climber and in the exercise of his imagination in the

use of those limited resources since every act of self-protection is different from the last.

3. the gentle art of self-protection brings the climber into a more intimate relationship with the rock since out of necessity he becomes more creatively engaged with the rock medium. For the leader to have to fix his own protection, as the American John Long wrote is a “ more testing of the spirit ... it also offers greater rewards in terms of intensity and lasting memories. Climbers who limit themselves strictly to clip - and - go routes deprive themselves of the finest that climbing can offer” .
4. There are those who consider pioneering new routes in traditional style to be an art form. This is what Duncan Ferguson, a well-known Coloradan climber, was moved to write on hearing that bolts had been placed alongside a classic ice climb: “it is the nature of the climbing community worldwide that the vision and art of the first to ascend is respected and celebrated, because it is a tangible reflection of the potential of that human at that moment in time. It is up to us to live up to that or put it aside as a wondrous point of inspiration or a mirror for humanity - most often both at the same time.”
5. Those with a sense of history will appreciate climbing a classic route only if it remains untouched by the bolt, not devalued for financial gain or dumbed down by those who could not climb up to meet the challenge taken on by the courageous pioneers such as Mummery, Cassin, Bonatti, Andre Roche, Max Niedermann, Alex Huber whose routes shine like a beacon because of their originality of line and purity of style.

Co-existence

Readers of this document should know that everyone involved in producing it climbs on sport climbs as well as on adventure climbs. The authors share the hope expressed by leading British rock climber Dave MacLeod in his blog on the Torello Mountain Festival in November 2007 “ ...we agreed that sport climbing has a place in the whole sport that should grow along side, rather than at the expense of the other climbing disciplines.”

The Way Forward

With the advent of the drill and bolt and the surge of interest in sport climbing there is less rock left in its natural state that is suitable for adventure climbing. It is accepted that not all rock is suitable for leader-placed protection; it was for this reason that rock such as mica schist and blank walls of limestone first became bolted sport climbs. We are concerned here with the preservation of sufficient rock that will take leader-placed protection so that, in the interests of diversity, climbers still have the choice to climb either sport climbs or adventure climbs. It may be that the only way forward in some countries is to preserve suitable crags in their unsullied natural state where traditional climbing can still be experienced as it was practised by the pioneers of yesterday and will be practised by young climbers in the future. As it was stated in *The Tyrol Declaration (2002)* “without danger and uncertainty climbing loses its defining element - adventure”.

The UIAA, mainly through the Mountaineering Commission (MC) but also through the Youth and Access Commissions is exploring all possible ways of reviving interest and knowledge of traditional adventure climbing particularly for developing countries. It has therefore embarked upon a number of initiatives -

1. The provision of expertise and encouragement through the Training Standards Panel (formerly TSWG) of the MC is seen as a good way forward, especially for those Federations who consider adventure climbing dangerous and are therefore reluctant to support it. Guidelines will be produced where necessary to help assist route setters whether that be in the trad/adventure realm or in areas where only sport climbing can exist. Climbers who climb globally report back that in several countries the standard of bolting is neither safe nor ethical and it would seem could benefit from expert advice.
2. The UIAA is prepared to commission DVD films and literature about adventure climbing suitable for developing countries and young people.
3. The UIAA will offer support for climbers to attend international adventure (trad) climbing meets. Support and encouragement will also be given by way of instruction at youth camps in areas of need, mainly through the Youth Commission.
4. The UIAA will actively look at ways and means of enabling developing countries to obtain self-protection/trad equipment direct from manufacturers. It will also source funding to reduce the cost wherever possible.
5. It would be helpful if each federation identified those climbers who have an interest in adventure climbing to get behind this initiative by forming a separate committee. Such a group would benefit from the inclusion of the local rock climbing guidebook editors. If well-known older traditional climbers were encouraged to join then that would help too. Such a committee could then easily liaise with the UIAA through the MC on all the above initiatives.
6. The UIAA considers it advantageous to connect with initiatives already underway to tackle the problem of keeping rock unbolting such as the Mountain Wilderness supported 'Keep Wild Climbs' of Switzerland www.mountainwilderness.org and the French 'Terra Aventure'. The UIAA will endeavour to make their activities more widely known.
7. The dissemination of information is vital. Had the '*Bolt Or Not To Be*' document reached more active climbers, particularly of those federations just developing climbing, then there would be a greater opportunity to experience all styles of climbing. The UIAA will do all it can to distribute this revised document widely to ensure there is still choice and diversity in climbing. There are many famous names in climbing backing this latest initiative who intend to support the widespread use of this revised document once they have read and approved it.
8. The policy statements received from the climbing federations that have them are on the UIAA website, www.theuiaa.org. A summary accompanies each one of them to enable Federation committee members to more easily check them out for consideration. It is hoped that this opportunity will not be missed, especially by those countries only now preparing policies on drilling and trad climbing, to see what others have done. The BMC in particular but also the New Zealand Alpine

Club and FASA of Argentina, have produced very useful documents towards ensuring diversity as well as respect for the rock medium and the environment in general.

9. Federations are encouraged to produce a brief inventory of their rock environments under the categories 'natural' or 'bolted' – so the current state of play is known more accurately. A debate could then take place as to which rock should be left natural and what rock is suitable to bolt. This is something that could be of interest to national park authorities, environmentalists, conservation bodies as well as climbers. Some climbing federations have decided that ultimately the only solution to preserving natural rock is to extend a preservation order to the whole crag or even mountain range. Where this is envisaged by climbing committees an inventory of climbable rock would be a useful guide.
10. Many federations have created a bolt fund to ensure that worn out corroded bolts are replaced. It would be helpful if the bolt fund was seen to be working both ways – not only in ensuring good bolt placements but also to remove bolts that in the opinion of the local consensus have been inappropriately put in.
11. The UIAA at each General Assembly will present 'The Bill Putnam Golden Stopper Award' to the Federation that has been most successful in setting aside suitable rock for adventure climbing. There are funds connected to this award that have been donated by UIAA Patron Bill Putnam.

Contributors

Those that have contributed to this revision are:

Anne Arran (Youth Commission, Member Traditional Values Working Group [TVWG]), Clare Bond (Access Commission), Peter Farkas, (Executive Board), Pierre Humblet (President Mountaineering Commission), Steve Long (Training Standards Panel), Doug Scott (Management Committee, Chairman TVWG), Phil Wickens (Mountaineering Commission, Secretary TVWG),

John Arran, Nick Colton, Steve Goodwin, Pat Littlejohn, Roger Payne, Ken Wilson

Other contributors – t.b.a.

Afterthought

There is, in man, an essential paradox. On the one hand he seeks all ways and means to make his life more comfortable, safe and certain while, on the other, he knows intuitively that only by taking risks and facing up to uncertainty is he going to stretch himself, go beyond himself, arrive at a moment of truth when he sees into more of the unknown around him.

Instincts for adventure, so deeply rooted over the past millennia as man evolved in the unpredictable, natural environment, now lie largely dormant. They are only given expression by chance or by design in an artificial way. The rock face is such a medium where the climber concentrates his attention, creates for himself heightened sensibilities and an awareness verging on the extraordinary, summoning up areas of his being which are normally hidden. These are times when a little light is let into our lives and we remember those climbs so illuminated. So profound are these moments, even if they last only for a few

seconds, they are savoured with reverence. This is why every committed climber prefers to lead rather than follow. These experiences are the essence of traditional adventure climbing around the world.

A further appendix will be added of comments and opinion from concerned climbers.

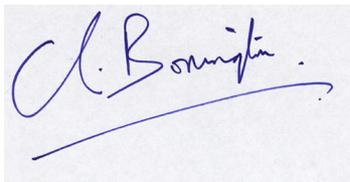
APPENDIX: Comments from concerned climbers

Below are comments received on 8 May 2012, from Sir Chris Bonington endorsing this document.

“The fundamental difference between “Adventure climbing and Sport climbing”, quite apart from the removal of risk which is the very essence of the game we play, is that in the former we accept the crag as it is, use our skill and judgment to find a way up it placing our protection in the cracks and crannies that are there and we leave the crag almost in the state that we found it, apart from a few chalk marks and the loss of a bit of grass or lichen. The climber is attuned to the environment, working with it. The Sport climber, on the other hand, is imposing his will on the environment, picking his line of choice, drilling the holes for the bolts, choosing just where they go and of course leaving a permanent man-made fixture.

“As has already been expressed, practically all of us have indulged in both forms of activity and there are arguments in favour of both. The challenge is to find a way for both styles to co-exist in a way that enables us all to continue to share the joy of climbing. We desperately need agreement between the Sport and the Adventure climbers as to which crags should be left in their pristine state – bolt free. It is alarming how many crags, particularly on the continent, have already been completely bolted up.

“In many ways, it is a metaphor for what mankind is doing throughout our planet, and whether it’s the survival of a way of climbing or of mankind itself, we have to find a reasonable balance between all these issues. This is why I strongly endorse this report.”

A handwritten signature in blue ink, reading "C. Bonington", with a long horizontal flourish underneath.

Below are comments received in May 2012, from Alexander Huber endorsing this document.

Climbing and Mountaineering is a more and more popular outdoor sport with high values for the human being as it involves nature, adventure and even exploring. But due to growing commercialism these values are in danger. Tourism and industry try to create a „safe“ sport out there in the wild nature and along this process the respect for the wild nature of the mountains and the rocks is getting lost. Basically alpinism and climbing is a sport with a long tradition, strong ethics and high ideals – people went out there to explore the wild nature as the high mountains of the Alps are one of the last refugiums of pure nature. But the radical plaisir-bolting of the last two decades put the long tradition in danger and today, in the most popular destinations climbing became already a bolted highway, which is of the same safety standards like on Indoor Walls.

Alexander Huber

Below are extracts from letters sent, April 2012, by Pat Littlejohn OBE, ex-VP BMC, requested during the preparation of this document.

I was very heartened last year when climbers at a BMC meeting in the south west voted by an overwhelming majority that Cornish sea cliffs should be free of fixed equipment. It may be that the majority of climbers and mountaineers around the world hold similar opinions, but they have been cowed into silence by a rapacious and rather aggressive bolting fraternity who tell them that their views are outdated and reactionary.

My position is that minimum impact climbing should be the norm and that bolting should be limited to certain areas/cliffs. The climbing fraternity simply doesn't have the right to impact on the natural rock environment in this way. Makes one ashamed to be part of it. A sports crag to me is about as sterile as a golf course, and about as natural. The crucial question is whether rock climbing should continue to be an adventure sport or not – if not then it loses its link to mountaineering and to its great heritage. Adventurous young people will turn to other outdoor sports like canoeing, surfing, diving, mountain walking (!) – all of which are more adventurous than sport climbing and a lot more careful not to impact on the environment.

When I learnt to scuba dive in the late 1970s every diver carried a knife for prizing things off the seabed, collecting samples etc. Nowadays knives have been virtually outlawed and even diving gloves are discouraged, so that people are discouraged from touching any marine life or corals. Caving is another outdoor sport that has cleaned up its act. I did quite a bit in the 60s when we used smoky carbide lamps, dumped spent carbide everywhere and went anywhere we liked in the cave. Even in the late 70s when I had another spell of caving in S Wales there were people blasting underground to extend caves and trampling wherever they fancied. Nowadays cavers have a 'minimum impact' ethic where nothing is damaged, nothing is left behind and people follow specific routes through large chambers to minimise disturbance to the cave floor. Climbing seems to have moved in the opposite direction and this is something that no climber can be proud of. From the 'clean climbing' movement in the 1970s, when we realised the damage pitons did to the rock and made a big effort in most parts of the world to climb/mountaineer leaving no fixed equipment, we have moved to a situation where we drill/bolt cliffs and mountain faces on an industrial scale. Climbers leave vast amounts metalwork in the outdoors while comparable outdoor sports leave nothing.

The sad story of Poi, Kenya's premiere bush crag, is a good illustration of the problem we're dealing with here. Basically the Kenyan climbing ethic (established by people like Ian Howell, Ian Allen and Andrew Wielochowski (who did the first ascent of Poi) was ground-up adventure climbing. Andrew established his classic route on the east face of Poi in this style and attempted at least two other lines including a second one on the east face. Inspired by Andrews route Steve Sudstad, John Barry and I got half way up a new route on the north face, again climbing ground up with natural gear. We retreated due to John having an accident but completed it the following year (*Dark Safari*, E6, possibly still the hardest adventure climb in Africa).

Between these visits the late Todd Skinner and company got sponsorship from *National Geographic* magazine and flew into Poi equipped with a Maestri-style petrol-driven compressor. They hired about 40 porters to lug all their kit to the top and over two weeks bolted a 20-pitch route left of Andrew's – completely ignoring the local ethics.

This face was going to be my next ground-up objective (Andrew had got 500ft up it with no bolts) so I was a bit sickened by these tactics. Todd commented that he saw no need to pay any regard to the ethics of 'a bunch of ex-colonials'. After this precedent another (Slovenian) route was established by bolting top down. I climbed with one of this team in Wales a couple of years later and he told me he regretted doing the route in this style, but the damage has been done and Kenya's ultimate adventure crag, which had the potential for some of the world's most challenging adventure climbs, is now considered fair game for bolting, basically due to the actions of climbers with corporate sponsorship acting with no regard to (even contempt for) the established ethic and the crags history.

Respect for the rock is becoming lost - rock is just a commodity to be exploited for the creation of sport climbing venues (or, even worse, bolted climbs in wild mountain terrain). We had a sport with high ideals, unlimited adventure, and (at its best) harmony with the natural environment (where it left few traces). Now rock climbing is in real danger of becoming a tame sport which relies on an artificially modified environment, risk-free and adventure-free. Pretty much indistinguishable from climbing on an artificial wall.

I'm really glad you are getting your teeth into these issues and I stand, ready to help wherever I can.

Best wishes

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Pat Littlejohn". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Pat Littlejohn
International School of Mountaineering
www.alpin-ism.com

Below are comments received on 9 May 2012, from Charlie Sassara endorsing this document.

I am writing to summarize the American Alpine Club's (AAC) current position on Traditional Climbing preservation in the United States and around the globe and to offer our support. For many decades, the AAC has demonstrated its commitment to the preservation of natural rock resources and the environment. As such, we are in support of the UIAA's commitment to preserving the traditional climbing experience around the globe.

As a backbone to our mission of uniting the climbing community, the AAC endorses and promotes the key values of *Stewardship, Fortitude, Self-Sufficiency* and *Partnership*. These core values continue to guide our policy positions with respect to all styles of climbing including traditional climbing. Our organization continues to work with U.S. Federal land managers to ensure that their policies are consistent with our views on climbing ethics and style.

In 2002, we endorsed the Tyrol Declaration, which expresses the desired ethics and values of alpinism, climbing and other mountain pursuits.ⁱ In 2009, our Board adopted a further position on the use of fixed hardware in designated Wilderness areas in the United States.ⁱⁱ To summarize, the AAC opposes the use of power drills in Wilderness areas and supports the use of fixed anchors as a "tool of last resort" only for the purposes of safe descent or connecting lines of weakness in the rock face. We advocate for the utmost discretion when it comes to utilizing fixed hardware as a "tool of last resort." We see consistency in our position with respect to the UIAA's letter expressing the importance of protecting and preserving the rock resources around the globe.

The American Alpine Club stands ready to discuss and adopt additional policies as necessary. We remain committed to preserving and sustaining the places we climb, being self-reliant, responsible stewards and supporting the community at large with sound climbing ethics.

Sincerely,



Charlie Sassara President
American Alpine Club

Cc: Phil Powers, Executive Director, American Alpine Club
Mark Richey, North American Representative, UIAA
Leigh Goldberg, Conservation & Advocacy Director, American Alpine Club