



CRAG & HABITAT MANAGEMENT

climbers and conservation working together





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Exposed cliff faces form part of many inspirational landscapes – they create breathtaking viewpoints and provide the chance for people to appreciate our rich and varied geology.

Cliff faces also present many opportunities for physical activities such as scrambling, outdoor instruction, and rock climbing. However, climate change and climbing trends have resulted in once-popular cliffs becoming neglected, overgrown and inaccessible. After much debate in the climbing community, the BMC decided to produce this guidance for people wanting to restore their favourite crag without damaging its wildlife features. Lets make sure our historic routes remain available to all.

Achieving a sustainable balance between recreation and conservation can seem a daunting task. Cliffs often provide safe havens for wildlife and support many rare species, and the conservation value of crags should never be underestimated. But if your local crag is being lost to invasive trees and scrub and would benefit from being 'opened-up', this leaflet will guide you through the main considerations.

You will find information on the important planning stage of any management work, an explanation of scientific designations and conservation law, consultee lists and illustrations of what can be achieved. The leaflet has been produced in collaboration with statutory conservation bodies, so you can be sure the guidance and information is accurate and up-to-date.

The case studies included are examples of work undertaken by BMC members together with nature conservation bodies. All projects have proven beneficial to landscape, wildlife, geology and climbing, and helped to develop strong partnerships between climbers, conservationists, and landowners.

Wildlife and the law

Many British wild plants and animals are legally protected by the *Wildlife and Countryside Act* (W&CA) 1981, amended by the *Countryside and Rights of Way Act* (CROW) 2000 (England & Wales only). Animals relevant to crag and habitat management work are all bats, tree-nesting birds, native dormice, red squirrels and pine martens.

It is against the law:

- intentionally to uproot any plant from the wild without permission from the landowner;
- to pick, uproot or destroy or collect flowers or seeds of any protected plant;
- intentionally or recklessly to disturb a protected species or their place of shelter, such as a bird's nest or bat roost.

The parts of the law relevant to crag and habitat management around crags are outlined below.

Site designations: There are strict laws for the protection and management of areas where threatened species occur. Wildlife legislation is stronger in these designated sites, where any work must be discussed beforehand with Natural England (NE) or the Countryside Council for Wales (CCW). The majority of cliffs in England and Wales are

found in areas with one or more of the following designations; Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), National Nature Reserve (NNR), Special Protection Area (SPA) and Special Areas of Conservation (SAC). Other site designations applicable at your crag could be, National Park, Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Local Nature Reserve (LNR) or Scheduled Ancient Monument. In the latter case English Heritage or CADW (Welsh built heritage) should be contacted about any proposed work.

Felling licenses: A licence is required for felling more than 5m³ (about 2 large trees) in any 3-month period, and these are available from your local Forestry Commission (FC) office. The FC will also advise you if there are Tree Protection Orders on site and may have grants available for the work – definitely worth asking!

Biodiversity Action Plans: The United Nations *Convention on Biological Diversity*, 1992, requires the UK to take action to conserve its threatened species and habitats. To achieve this, the UK Biodiversity Action Plan and Species & Habitat Action Plans were drawn up. Your local crag could be covered by one of these plans, and funding or resources may be available to help with the work.



Bob Moulton (BMC southern sandstone volunteer) on the Bulls Hollow project

Useful websites

British Mountaineering Council	www.thebmc.co.uk
Natural England	www.naturalengland.org.uk
The National Trust	www.nationaltrust.org.uk
Countryside Council for Wales	www.ccw.gov.uk
The Forestry Commission	www.forestry.gov.uk
English Heritage	www.english-heritage.org.uk
CADW	www.cadw.wales.gov.uk
Joint Nature Conservation Committee (wildlife legislation)	www.jncc.gov.uk
UK Biodiversity Action Plan	www.ukbap.org.uk
Magic (information on site scientific designations)	www.magic.gov.uk
The Woodland Trust	www.woodland-trust.org.uk
BTCV (for free crag & habitat management handbooks)	www.btcv.org.uk
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	www.aonb.org.uk
National Parks	www.nationalparks.gov.uk
Wildlife Trusts	www.wildlifetrusts.org
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	www.rspb.org.uk
Plantlife (for information on invasive species)	www.plantlife.org.uk

The Black Chipper area, Brimham Rocks

Location: North Yorkshire.

Landowner: The National Trust.

Site description: Fantastic landscape with gritstone boulders, pinnacles and edges set in grassland, scrub and semi-ancient woodland. Very popular with tourists, locals, and climbers.

Conservation designations: Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) in the Nidderdale Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB), Regionally Important Geological Site (RIGS).

Background

Work identified by the National Trust.

Consultation: The area is covered by Tree Preservation Orders and permission was required from Harrogate Borough Council (HBC) planning department before work could commence. The surrounding woodland is part of a Woodland Improvement Scheme grant aided by the Forestry Commission.

Project objectives:

- To improve public access to an overgrown climbing area.

Other bodies involved: Natural England, Forestry Commission, HBC, The National Trust conservation and access advisors.

Funding: The National Trust contributed staff time and volunteer refreshments.

The Work

Who did the work? The National Trust felled 20+ trees and BMC volunteers helped move timber and clear scrub.

Benefits

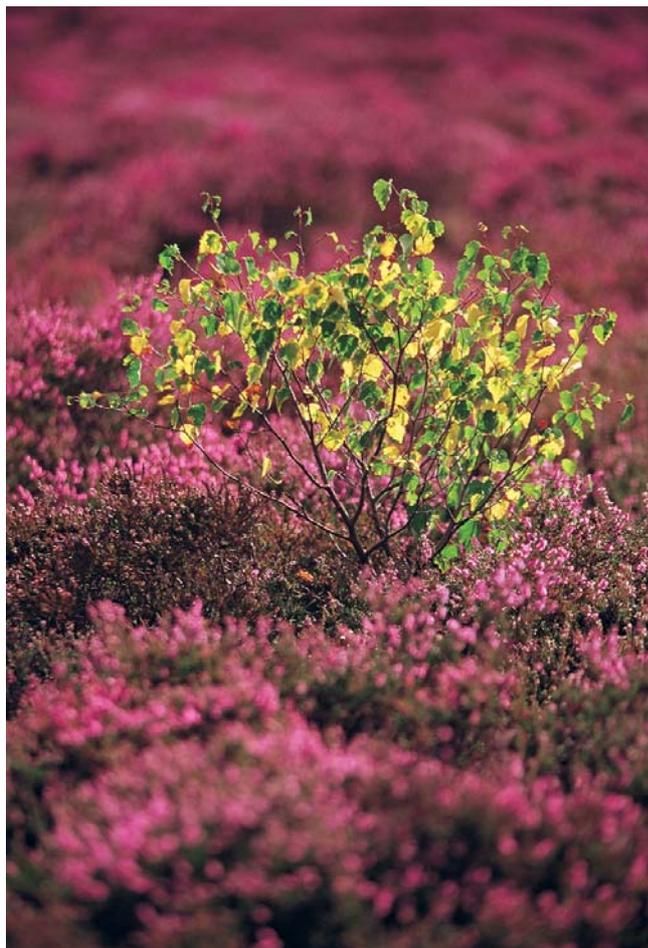
'This project was beneficial to the Trust and the climbing community. An enthusiastic group of BMC members provided the muscle power to clear trees from an overgrown classic Brimham climbing area – improving access and enhancing the local wildlife. It was demanding work and the volunteers achieved much more than we could have hoped for.'

Jeremy Tuck, Property Manager, National Trust.

Landscape & biodiversity: The work conformed to a site conservation management plan by enhancing biodiversity and promoting floral/faunal variety.

Recreation: Conservation and encouraging public access are two of the main aims of the National Trust. The project improved access to the historical route 'The Black Chipper' and the area remains frequented by climbers and other visitors.

Other: Brash was chipped for organic mulch and logs were split and stored.



Heather and birch – a typical Brimham habitat

Future

Clearing the area made it more popular with climbers – keeping invasive scrub in check.

Cheddar Gorge Climbing Project

Location: Cheddar Gorge (south side), Somerset.

Landowner: Cheddar Caves & Gorge (CC&G).

Site description: Britain's biggest gorge, one of SW England's most important ecological and geological sites, and a major natural tourist attraction for over 200 years. Home to many rare species and habitats: lizards, adders, grass-snakes, horseshoe bats, rare grassland with flowers such as harebell, rock rose, Cheddar pink, marjoram and eyebright, whitebeam trees and old hazel coppice woodland supporting a significant population of dormice. Peregrine and raven often nest on the cliff face, and a herd of managed goats keep the scrub and ivy under control. The area experiences very high visitor numbers, especially in summer.

Conservation designations: : Geological and biological SSSI, AONB, Special Area of Conservation (SAC).

Background

The Gorge represents a nationally important climbing site, despite its historic winter-only climbing regime. By 2003 many climbs had fallen into a neglected state, but West Country climber Martin Crocker saw the opportunity to restore the best climbing following a £1m land management and conservation programme undertaken by CC&G. The landowner had removed ivy, scrub and loose rock from cliffs and – crucially for the climbing project – installed rock-catch fencing to reduce the risk of rock falling into the road and car parks.

Project objectives:

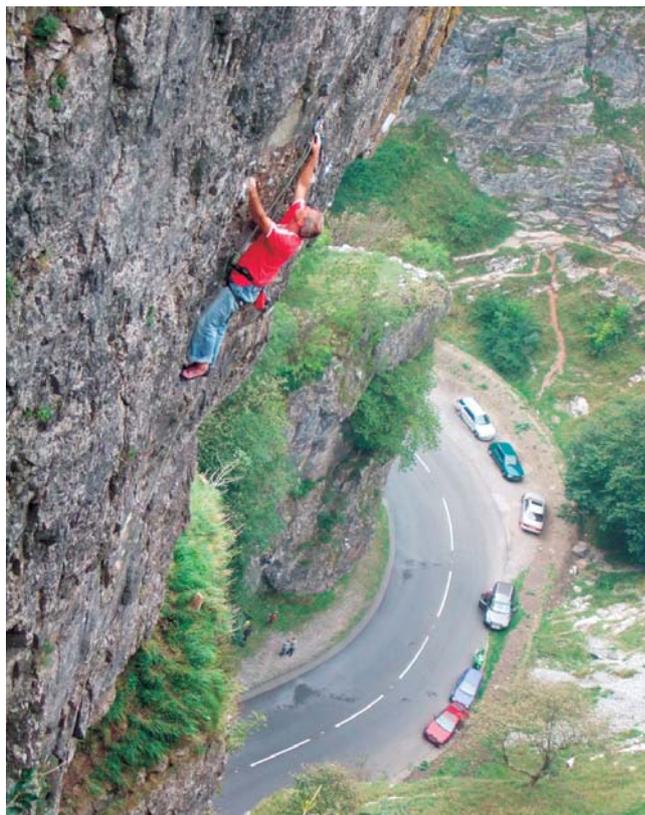
- To restore some of the best quality climbs in the gorge.
- To seek an extended summer access period for agreed sections of the southern cliffs.
- To fulfil the potential of the gorge as a vibrant climbing venue – without compromising other interests, land uses, and public safety.

Other bodies involved: The Climbers' Club.

Funding: The BMC and the Climbers' Club Colin Kirkus Guidebook Fund provided the funding to employ the project manager – which was also matched by a huge amount of unpaid time – and CC&G provided in-kind support. Donations to the Cheddar Gorge Climbers' Bolt Fund were made by local climbers, the Bristol Climbing Centre, Sedgemoor District Council and local clubs and businesses.

Cliff & route assessment: Cliff sections were assessed using a systematic risk assessment approach, endorsed by CC&G. The primary assessment criteria were public safety, climb quality and potential for restoration. Additional factors were conservation and aesthetics. Areas of the highest botanical interest were excluded. Approach and descent paths were assessed.

Extended climbing proposal: A written proposal was made to the landowner to extend the agreed climbing on



Mark Glaister on Beverley's Wall F6b+, Spacehunter Wall, Castle Rocks – a great route restored by the project



The Cheddar Pink – a rare species that is benefiting from scrub removal



Cheddar Gorge in all its glory

selected restored climbs. A 'Code of Conduct' for climbers was agreed and adopted by the BMC and CC&G.

The Work

Who did the work? Organised, managed and carried out by Martin Crocker, on behalf of climbers and the BMC. Project built on heavy volunteer commitment from the project manager and a small group of experienced local climbers. Work carried out in two phases during the winters of 2004 and 2005.

How? Climbs were brought to a 'best practicable condition' by removing loose rock, invasive vegetation (including ivy, red valerian, 'pellitory of the wall' and ash), and installing abseil stations and/or re-equipping (including approved bolting). Removal of loose rock from routes and access paths was carried out in collaboration with CC&G under managed conditions.

Consultation: Due to the complex nature of the site, thorough consultation was key to the project. Each stage of the project involved close discussion with CC&G, Natural England and The National Trust. The views of local climbers were sought with a questionnaire survey, which steered the process. Regular reports were made to the BMC's SW Area Meeting, and 'open days' for climbers were organised in the gorge.

Benefits

'The BMC deserves the admiration of other regulatory authorities, climbers, special interest groups and landowners, for exploring and understanding a myriad of competing needs, especially in regard to claims for recreational access, public safety, biodiversity & rock conservation, and local employment. For our part in Cheddar Gorge, we would like to see much more climbing on the 300 climbs restored by the BMC and its members and would like to see new climbs added – provided the BMC's access solution delivers for all parties.'

Hugh Cornwell, Director, CC&G.

Recreation: Climbing activity has increased significantly since 2005 including during a trial year 2006/07 when climbing was permitted all-year round except for the busy spring and summer school and public holidays. The climbing community has enthused about the project and the basis for an improved relationship between climbers and the landowner has been developed.

Landscape & biodiversity: By removing some remaining ivy and scrub, the project has built on the landowner's restoration work to reveal Cheddar's distinctive high limestone cliffs.

'As well as enhancing the recreational value of Cheddar Gorge, the climbing community have made a significant contribution to sustaining the area's special wildlife and landscape.'

Simon Lee, Land Management Officer, Natural England.

'Climbers get into places which are largely inaccessible – and by removing or preventing the growth of scrub species such as ivy, small rare plants like the Cheddar Pink benefit.'

Libby Houston, Botanist.

Geology: The geology of the gorge was protected by removal of de-stabilising vegetation during the landowner's major work programme as supplemented by the Cheddar Gorge Climbing Project.

'Invasive vegetation, particularly ivy, penetrated the rock and caused enormous damage. The removal of vegetation from the cliffs, coupled with scaling of loose rock, has greatly reduced the risk of rockfall and revealed the spectacular geological features of the gorge.'

Dr John Beck, Consultant Geologist.

'The work carried out under the BMC project has had some significant benefits for the Trust's conservation work in the Gorge and helped contribute toward managing some difficult health and safety issues. The installation of lower-offs means climbers no longer need to top out – this helps protect rare plants like the Cheddar Pink, which thrive on the cliff tops, from being damaged and eliminates having to exit through unstable rock. The removal of loose rock from individual routes has also helped reduce the risk of rockfall onto people and traffic.'

Mark Courtiour, Head Warden, National Trust.

Future

The trial extension was monitored by CC&G and by the BMC through its project manager/volunteer on-site. It has proved very successful and the aim is to develop a responsible, self-managing regime to maintain climbing at the gorge.



A Cheddar goat

SOUTHERN SANDSTONE

The sandstone outcrops described here are located in SSSIs and in or near the High Weald Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB) – a diverse landscape of flower-rich meadows, heathland, and wooded ravines with a variety of wildlife. The outcrops are often found in sheltered environments and provide a valuable niche for rare species such as ferns, mosses, liverworts and lichens.

High Rocks

Location: High Rocks Hotel, Tunbridge Wells.

Landowner: High Grades Ltd, Hotel & Tea Gardens.

Site description: Extensive sandstone outcrop and natural tourist attraction. The site is also a prime climbing venue with some of the hardest climbs in the region.

Scientific designations: SSSI, Scheduled Ancient Monument.

Background

Project origins: Historically, High Rocks had an open aspect with traditionally coppiced oak and yew woodland. By the 1990s, management had ceased and the rocks had become overgrown, obscured, and suffered a severe decline in quality. Local climber Oliver Hill proposed a restoration project for the crag, and the BMC Sandstone Volunteers Group (SVG) came up with an action plan.

Project objectives:

- To restore the crag into a pleasant, climbable condition
- To enhance the scenic grandeur and beauty of High Rocks
- In accordance with SSSI management views – to reverse the increasing woodland cover and improve the visibility of rock faces and passageways.

Funding: The BMC Access and Conservation Trust (ACT) and the Climbers' Club Colin Kirkus Guidebook Fund. The landowner provided free season tickets to volunteers working for two days or more.

The Work

When? November 2004 – Spring 2005.

Who did the work? Large swathes of scrub and rhododendron were removed by a sustained volunteer effort, 10 crown lifts and 63 sycamore and beech trees were felled by a professional tree surgeon. All oak and yew trees were retained and habitat piles created with the timber and scrub.

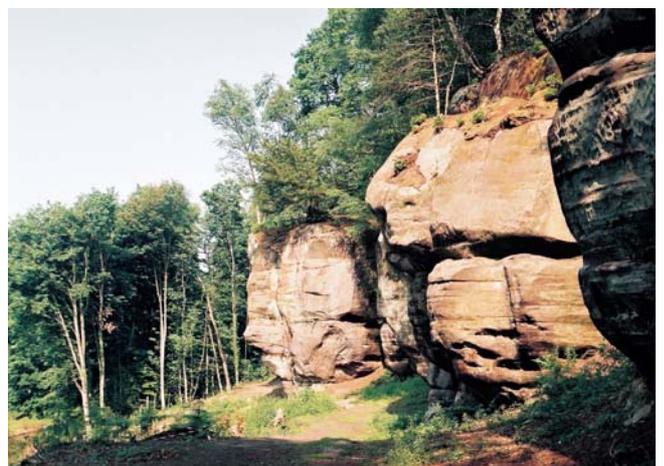
Other bodies involved: Natural England for the SSSI consent and bat survey work, the Forestry Commission for felling consent, and Wealden District Council. After submission of a detailed written report, all parties were



High Rocks, 2004 – overgrown and unclimbable



High Rocks – work in progress



A sun-drenched High Rocks in 2006

satisfied the project would benefit the local environment and SSSI.

Further Consultation: Project website created and a publicity brochure distributed to all associated public bodies; Wealden District Council, Tunbridge Wells District Council, Frant Parish Council, Natural England, High Weald AONB Group, all local residents.

Benefits:

Landscape: Aesthetic appeal of High Rocks greatly enhanced.

'Your work has given me exactly what I wanted: a more attractive view of the rocks.'

'I was born just 2 miles away. I played here as a young lad over 50 years ago and have been coming back ever since. The Rocks had really deteriorated in the last 15 years. The work has been fantastic; it's back to how it used to be.'

Local residents

Recreation: Crag transformed into an open and appealing site enjoyed by many climbers and local visitors.

Geology: Rock architecture and sedimentary structures much clearer to see and now protected from damage by overhanging tree branches.

Biodiversity: The removal of invasive rhododendron has contributed to a more diverse floral structure.

Note of Caution: As work started, the climbers were unaware part of the site was owned by the Woodland Trust and that High Rocks was a Scheduled Ancient Monument. This led to problems later on, since the Woodland Trust and English Heritage should have been consulted from the start. This highlights the importance of a full awareness about site designations and land ownership before starting any practical work.

Future

Site remains monitored to see if future maintenance is required.

More info on both projects is available from the following websites:

www.sandstonevolunteers.nildram.co.uk
www.twcommons.org; www.sandrock.org.uk

Bulls Hollow Restoration Project

Location: Bulls Hollow, Rusthall Common.

Landowner: The Manor of Rusthall – managed by Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators.

Site description: A disused sandstone quarry within Rusthall Common which had been climbed on for many years – even featuring in H. Courtney Bryson's 1936 publication 'Rock Climbs Round London'.

Conservation designations: Rusthall Common SSSI.

Background

Historically, Rusthall Common was a lowland heath with limited tree cover, but in the early 20th century the grazing regime ceased and scrub woodland developed. Tree and shrub growth meant the crag seldom dried-out and the quality of the climbing had severely declined. The impetus to do something was provided at the BMC Southern Sandstone open meeting in May 2003.

Project objectives:

- To restore the crag to a climbable condition by managing the surrounding woodland.

Other bodies involved: Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators, Natural England, local residents.

Funding: BMC Access and Conservation Trust (ACT), Climbers Club Colin Kirkus Guidebook Fund. Support from Down to Earth Professional Tree Management to the tune of £3000 worth of free labour.

The Work

Who did the work? Local volunteers surveyed the site and cleared scrub, the large-scale tree work was undertaken (free of charge) by a local tree surgeon – Down to Earth Professional Tree Management.

How? After scrub clearance, the mature sycamores were felled and beech, ash, oak and other species crown lifted/reduced. The work occurred between August 2003 and January 2004.

Benefits:

Biodiversity: Weald heathland is a unique habitat, occurring mainly on the sandstone ridges. Many rare species of birds, reptiles and plants are found on the heath e.g the nightjar and the rare marsh gentian.

'This was a fantastic project proving beneficial to all. The Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators are trying to restore the lowland heath lost when grazing stopped around 100 years ago. Remnant heathland at the top of the crag was being overgrown by scrub, and climbers had the equipment and knowledge to safely remove it. The project fitted in perfectly with our overall aims for the site.'

Tunbridge Wells Commons Conservators.



Bulls Hollow, 2003 – Yuk!



A popular Bulls Hollow club meet in 2004

Geology:

'Thanks to the climbers who took part in clearing vegetation from Bulls Hollow. Natural England's objectives in managing geological SSSIs are to ensure the rocks are visible and accessible – this work definitely contributed towards these goals.'

Natural England

Recreation: The quality of the climbing has been hugely improved and the crag is now regularly frequented by local climbers and residents. Local surroundings have been enhanced by increased light and air, encouraging local residents to use the hollow and discouraging vandalism and fly-tipping.

'At one time you'd be lucky to see anyone else at Bulls Hollow, but last summer, I climbed there with five other independent parties.'

Local climber and project manager, Graham Adcock.

Future

The Sandstone Volunteers Group monitor the crag and supply volunteer labour when necessary. There is regular contact between the Tunbridge Wells' Conservators and Bulls Hollow climbers.

Tremadog Revival Project

Location: Craig Bwlch y Moch, Tremadog, Gwynedd, North Wales.

Landowner: BMC

Site description: Dolerite escarpment overlooking Tremadog Bay

Conservation designations: Conservation designations: None at present – the land shares a number of common features with the National Nature Reserve (NNR) and SSSI at neighbouring Craig Pant Ifan.

Background:

The vegetation varies from open woodland (containing oak, ash, hazel, rowan, holly and hawthorn scrub), to diverse cliff-ledge plant communities. In the 1980s the Tremadog cliffs were very popular for climbing. Since then changing patterns of use, mild winters and floral growth have seen the demise of many routes. The idea to clean the climbs emerged from the BMC-supported North Wales Climbers Action Group in 2006.

Consultation: The BMC worked closely with Countryside Council for Wales (CCW) rangers and conservation staff.

Project objectives:

- To manage the woodland and improve access.

Other bodies involved: Snowdonia National Park Authority, CCW.

Funding: Funded by the BMC.

Incentives for volunteers included:

- Prizes donated by local equipment suppliers and businesses, including DMM, Pete's Eats, Joe Brown's and V12 Outdoor.
- Free accommodation in Eric's bunkhouse/campsite.
- BMC funded Tremadog Climbing Festival.

The Work

Who did the work? 25 BMC volunteers over 3 days (2006) and during the two-day Tremadog Climbing Festival in March 2007.

How? Access points/paths and buttresses were cleared of encroaching scrub and ivy, and cliff-face trees were trimmed to allow sun penetration. The BMC arranged for a local tree surgeon to thin specific trees and fell others – particularly dead elm trees and invasive sycamores. The dead wood was stacked into habitat piles.



Kamala at work, Tremadog

Benefits

Access was greatly improved and many routes were returned to their original state.

'Removing encroaching ivy was important to open up the climbs, but equally important was the management of the woodland itself. Management of access routes and descent paths prevents damage to the vegetation and soils, and retaining the dead wood is important for insects, birds, lichens and fungi. This project is an excellent example of how sensitive management can benefit conservation, wildlife and recreation'
Dr Barbara Jones, CCW.

'I loved the work so much, this in my second day'
Kamala Sen, Deganwy.



Volunteers equipped and 'ready to go' at Tremadog



Reinette, 2005 – rapidly disappearing under scrub and ivy



Reinette, 2007 – climbable again

Future:

A tree management plan has been produced and funding sought from the Welsh Forestry Commission to continue the work. Natural Woodland Regeneration Scheme projects can receive 75% funding under the Welsh Assembly scheme *Better Woodlands for Wales*, which are favourable towards the recreational use of woodlands for footpath work, interpretation boards and signage.

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Ancient trees are important to the woodland environment because they create gaps in the canopy for sunlight to pass through. This stimulates seed germination, growth, and flowering plants which increases the diversity of food for invertebrates, animals and birds. It also has the knock-on effect of benefiting climbers by encouraging overgrown or damp crags to dry out, making them more appealing to climb, and in turn keeping the routes in good condition.

It is possible to reproduce natural succession with woodland management techniques such as traditional coppicing or selective thinning and felling. Many species are known to exploit the sunlight and warmth provided by the gaps, including birds, flowers such as primroses, oxlips, anemones and bluebells, butterflies such as fritillaries and brimstone, hoverflies, wood ants and other invertebrates.

Management options

The appropriate management of any woodland or vegetation depends on many factors such as; aspect, size, soil type, tree type, and the variety of wildlife present. Therefore, actions taken at one site may not be applicable elsewhere. It is vital not to disturb rare plants and animals or fragile cliff habitats and making the right decisions can be complicated. Always check with local experts before removing any significant areas of vegetation or starting management work – sensitive work can be very beneficial for wildlife, but ill-informed actions can be destructive and even illegal.

Examples of the type of work that can be carried out around crags are outlined below. For more detailed information on crag and habitat management please see the websites listed on the back page.



It's in there somewhere! Gardoms Edge, Peak District – just one crag where habitat management would be beneficial.

Creating gaps, thinning woodland and managing invasive plants

Removing cliff-face trees/invasive species or creating openings in the canopy can stimulate regeneration and areas of flourishing diversity.

Advantages: Non-native, invasive species such as rhododendron are capable of crowding many of our native species. Removing rhododendron creates gaps and has proven beneficial to landscape and wildlife diversity – the High Rocks project is a good example.

Creating gaps in the canopy and making woodland edges wavy or scalloped makes a site more wildlife-friendly and biodiverse.

Caution: It may be necessary to protect a recently thinned area from grazing animals to encourage regeneration. This does not always have to involve expensive fencing – it can also be achieved with hedges of cut wood or scrub.

Removing shade from a cliff face

As illustrated by the Bulls Hollow project, reducing the amount of shade on a cliff face can really improve the climbing experience.

Advantages: The routes gradually become cleaner, more enjoyable to climb and more accessible to a wider range of climbers. In addition, too much shade can limit certain rare cliff-dwelling plants and habitats, e.g. the Cheddar Pink has benefited from opening-up parts of Cheddar Gorge.

Caution: The moist, shady conditions on certain cliffs are important for ferns, mosses, liverworts and lichens. These species can be damaged or destroyed by too much direct sunlight.

Removing Scrub

Advantages: Scrub can be quick growing and very invasive – blocking access routes and damaging the conservation features of a site. The selective removal of scrub can encourage the desired habitat to spread.

Caution: Scrub does provide a wildlife habitat and it may not be appropriate to remove it completely. Scrub will re-grow and require cutting every few years.

Old trees and deadwood

Ancient trees are vital in the woodland and rare species often inhabit the niche cavities of a dying tree. Mosses, liverworts, algae, lichens and ferns are often found on trees in humid, shaded sites like ravines, gorges or north facing woodlands. The oldest trees tend to support the richest communities and when the trees die, natural processes recycle the wood back into the system.

Advantages: Dead or drying trees can be very biodiverse and should always be retained on site wherever possible. Ideally, all felled trees should be left to decompose in situ, if this is not possible then felled timber should be stacked into habitat piles.

Caution: Working in or around veteran trees is very hazardous, and should be avoided unless absolutely necessary.

De-vegetating routes

Due to a changing climate and trends within the climbing community, many cliffs are becoming overgrown with scrub and invasive species.

Advantages: Ivy and other vigorously growing vegetation can out-compete rare cliff species and habitats. Their removal can therefore be beneficial to wildlife and rock climbers.

Caution: Rare cliff-ledge habitats and plants may take a very long time to recover if disturbed or removed. Ivy and thick vegetation can provide nest or shelter sites for wildlife.

Improving paths

In addition to improving recreational access, the sensitive management of approach and descent paths can minimise ground erosion and damage to surrounding vegetation.

Advantages: Paths guide people away from sensitive habitats or unstable ground and should ideally be established diagonally across a slope – this reduces erosion.

Caution: Keep the number and width of paths to a minimum by discrete signing of the main paths, improve the main paths by building steps and trimming vegetation, and place piles of brush across paths that should not be used. Path improvements should always accommodate the effects of run-off and drainage on the area, and local experts should be able to advise how to achieve this.

Minimise damage to fence lines or dry-stone walls by erecting stiles or directing people to a nearby gate.

Helsby



Volunteers (including former BMC President Derek Walker) hard at work

Devils Gorge



Members of Clwyd Mountaineering Club display the results of a clean-up at the gorge



Removing gorse bushes



Rope skills being put to good use



ACT www.thebmc.co.uk/act

ACT is a charity focused on providing sustainable access to cliffs, mountains and open countryside. One of its main aims is to support conservation projects protecting access and promoting the sustainable use of these areas.

You may be eligible for a grant from ACT, so why not get in touch with the BMC?

Bulls Hollow



A restored Bulls Hollow in 2004

Penalta



Clearing a grass filled ledge



Elspeth Yates enjoying the sunshine during the Penalta clean-up



Local volunteers hard at work



Project Checklist

1. Plan your work

Find out as much about the site as possible.

- **Who is the landowner or manager?**
Landowner permission is for any work. Remember, access to a crag can often depend on good relations with the landowner.
- **Is the site designated for its conservation value?**
If so, **Natural England** or the **Countryside Council for Wales** must be involved from the start.
- **Archaeological interest? Scheduled monument?**
You can find out from **English Heritage** or **CADW**.
- **Do you need a felling license?**
Contact your local **Forestry Commission** office for advice.
- **What wildlife is present? Are there protected species or Biodiversity Action Plan habitats/ species present?**
Consider all wildlife when planning your work. Remember – it is illegal 'recklessly or wilfully to disturb' protected species and important you take the necessary steps to avoid this.
- **What wildlife and vegetation is present in surrounding areas?**
It is vital not to fragment patches of habitat.
- **Other groups?**
Conservation bodies, other recreational groups, local people or adjacent landowners may have useful information and wish to be involved.
- **How does the cliff fit into the landscape?**
Landscape is an important part of our heritage and local geology, plant life and historic management all contribute to local distinction. Will your work add to the traditional features of the landscape – for example by re-exposing a crag for people to appreciate?
- **History of past management.**
Most of the UK's woodlands have been managed at some point – your local conservation bodies may have information on historic site conditions.

2. Consultation and consents

Compile a list of all interested parties and decide on the level of consultation required e.g. involving a statutory conservation body during the planning stages.

Start your consultations early and ensure everyone has the opportunity to comment – this should help to avoid potential conflict once work has started.

3. Work in winter

All scrub clearance and tree work should be undertaken during winter. Working at other times of the year can disturb nesting birds and destroy food resources.

Also, try and work during dry periods to minimise damage to the ground.

4. Think about the future

Do not to make any changes that are unsustainable. Plan ahead.

- **How will you know your efforts have been successful?**
Before/after photos are useful for monitoring the effect of your work.
- **Will the work need repeating in the future?**
If so, when? Who will do it?

5. Health and Safety

Remember that working around crags and trees can be dangerous. You may need to use roped access professionals or tree surgeons to crown lift or fell larger trees. Make sure volunteers are fully briefed, trained in the use of tools or equipment and aware of all on-site hazards. Always carry a good first-aid kit and mobile phone.

**If your local crag would benefit from a clean-up,
and you need further advice from the BMC,
please contact the Access & Conservation team:**

BMC

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Fax: 0161 445 4500

email: access@thebmc.co.uk

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