A woman is climbing a rock face. She is wearing a blue and white striped long-sleeved shirt, olive green cargo pants, a red and white helmet, and a climbing harness. She is smiling and looking upwards. A green rope is attached to her harness and runs vertically down the rock face. The rock is reddish-brown and has some small green plants growing on it.

Climbing in Disused Quarries:

a guide for landowners
& managers

Introduction

The quarry industry over many generations has unintentionally left a much valued legacy enjoyed by many thousands of people every year – a rich heritage of rock climbing venues throughout the country. Some of the climbs found in disused quarries are amongst the best in the country and they attract visitors from around the world.

Climbing in quarries is incredibly varied, ranging from the towering limestone faces of Bristol's Avon Gorge to the miniature gritstone walls of Brownstones above Bolton, and from the high moorland vantage of the Cow and Calf Rocks at Ilkley to the deep town centre ravine of New Mills Torrs.

This booklet aims to address some of the common questions and concerns raised by industry and quarry owners regarding climbing in disused quarries.

"One of the benefits of quarries is that they provide climbing opportunities in areas where the natural geology does not. Where rolling hills are the prevailing land form natural cliffs are rare, but wherever there was usable rock there are quarries. Having a quarry on your 'doorstep' in areas that wouldn't otherwise possess climbing locations is a fortunate legacy."

Llew H (Denbighshire)

 Llanymynech is a large limestone quarry on the Wales/England border. The quarry is a SSSI and Nature Reserve, managed by two Wildlife Trusts where climbing happily co-exists with conservation.
Pic: Jim Jones.

Why quarries?

Undiscovered natural rock outcrops are now few and far between in England and Wales, but the quarrying process leaves many new rock faces which could potentially be of interest to climbers. Quarries have the potential to provide a huge quantity of good quality rock climbing, often with easy access.

The style of climbing most often practised in disused quarries, known as sport climbing, is roped climbing using in situ fixed equipment to protect the climber should a fall occur. It is especially popular since it is convenient, comparatively safe and open to climbers across a wide range of abilities and experience levels.

Quarries can also often be found in areas where natural rock outcrops do not exist locally. If access can be gained to these prospective venues, they would become a valued amenity for local climbers, as well as becoming the closest outdoor climbing for visiting climbers from adjacent areas.

These factors combined give an opportunity to meet the demand for more outdoor climbing venues through imaginative restoration of worked out quarries. Quarrying techniques have changed over the years and tall finished faces are a thing of the past. With some simple forethought, restoration schemes at appropriate sites can result in valuable recreational resources which have a range of benefits for local people and visitors alike.

Restoration plans for quarries often require landscaping to return the site to a more 'natural' look, through back-filling and softening the appearance of quarry benches. Whilst this is laudable in many cases, we would encourage consideration of using appropriate rock walls revealed by the quarrying process for climbing as a relevant after use in quarry restoration plans, given the right circumstances.



"Quarries are great for practicing climbing as a novice and then honing skills at a more advanced level - also great social meeting points for local clubs."

Chris P (Lancashire)

📍 Ilkley Quarry a popular traditional climbing venue in Yorkshire.
Pic: Alex Messenger.

Liability

Many owners and occupiers of quarries are happy to give access for rock climbing but others are reluctant because of perceived concerns over legal liabilities. The BMC is confident that landowners or occupiers will not be exposed to any potential liabilities in the event that a recreational rock climber has an accident on their land.

Climbing is an adventure sport and the courts have regard to the principle that voluntary acceptance of risks by participants prevents a successful claim against others who have not committed any culpable act. In the absence of any causative act or omission by an owner or occupier, any claim against them by a climber injured in an accident would likely be defeated by the defence that the injured person willingly accepted the risks inherent to the activity.

Climbers are, as individuals, responsible for assessing and managing any risks that are ordinarily part of the activity – including loose rock, and the suitability of any protection equipment whether fixed or not. Indeed, this is part of the challenge of climbing. There should be no expectation in a climber's mind that an occupier or owner would be responsible or liable for risks they accept as part of the activity, or for the safety of climbers on the land. The BMC's Participation Statement sets this out clearly:

"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."

For more detailed information on this topic, the BMC produces a separate 'Climbing & Occupiers Liability' booklet, which is available on request or downloadable from www.thebmc.co.uk/bmc-publications

Partnership

Whilst the BMC owns quarries and manages others, there is an aspiration to work with owners and operators as well as sports and conservation organisations to help develop innovative solutions to worked-out quarry sites. Many quarry sites have the potential for multiple user groups to take advantage of their unique character and, depending on the venue, there may be potential for climbing to happily co-exist alongside conservation, other forms of recreation and possibly other interests (e.g. shooting clubs). The BMC can provide expertise in managing sites for climbing and other recreation on foot and will happily work in partnership with other organisations who can bring the necessary expertise needed in their areas if appropriate.

 Treherbert Quarry in the Rhondda Valley is one of many of quarried sandstone crags frequented by S Wales climbers providing tall faces, interesting rock features.
Pic: Mark Glaister.



The ideal climbing quarry

📍 The Cuttings is a very popular inland limestone quarried crag on Portland, providing many climbers in the south of England with their first experience climbing outdoors.
Pic: Mark Glaister.

Relatively little is needed from a landowner to make a quarry a successful and popular climbing venue. Climbers look at quarries for accessible and interesting routes on good rock in pleasant surroundings, and the climbing community will maintain these resources once developed. There are however some basic requirements for a quarry to become a viable climbing venue.

Access

Guaranteed and formalised access is the most important aspect of developing a quarry for climbing. Access agreements can accommodate any particular wishes the landowner may have regarding for example entry/exit routes or off-limits areas, parking limitations and so on. The BMC has experience of developing access agreements and codes of practice with landowners and effectively communicating these to climbers. Signage can also be provided by the BMC and placed on site to clearly explain what is permitted and what is expected of visitors. BMC online information would be maintained to inform visitors, using our Regional Access Database.

Rock faces

The following features and characteristics make a rock face attractive for climbers:

- In an ideal world, the higher the rock face the better, but anything over 8-10m is worthwhile for roped climbing and bouldering (unroped climbing) venues are typically 4-5m in height.
- Stable rock at a macro scale is required, although loose material is to be expected and can be cleared by hand by route developers.
- Cracks, edges, flakes, pockets and ledges are the features which make a rock face climbable and larger features such as ridges, corners and overhangs make for more interesting climbing.
- Varied steepness is also desirable (but not

essential) to provide less steep sections for beginners and steeper areas for more experienced climbers.

- Dry faces which don't suffer from water run-off or seepage are ideal.
- Soil and vegetation should be minimal unless in sections of the quarry where climbing is not undertaken (such as areas earmarked for nature conservation). Trees and shrubs should also not grow too close to the rock or provide excessive shading, which can encourage climbs to stay dirty or wet. Climbers can maintain a corridor between the rock face and vegetation if allowed by the landowner.

Parking

Climbers typically travel by car to their chosen venue as public transport often isn't available, so adequate parking within walking distance of the quarry is an important factor.

Equipment

Depending on the nature of the rock, in situ fixed equipment may need to be placed to provide protection for climbers as they progress up the face, or to descend having completed a climb. If required this would be placed and maintained by experienced climbers at their own expense and any climbers using fixed equipment would do so at their own risk.

"Quarries are an integral part of UK climbing, often offering a unique atmosphere. Whilst from a distance they may appear to be scruffy, from within they can often be places of hidden beauty where nature is starting to regain a footing."

Mark R (Gwynedd)





85,000

The BMC has 85,000 members and growing



BMC members spend on average £60 per day of a weekend visit to an outdoor destination.

Over £10 million per year if members took only one trip each. In reality much more as most will make multiple visits as well as non-member visits **

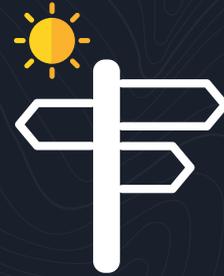


3.3 million

people in England go climbing or hillwalking twice a month or more*

Climbing and walking is the 5th largest participation sport in England*

More people go climbing & hillwalking than play football



255 million day visits

£2.6 billion on day trips involving outdoor recreation ****



45 million overnight trips involving outdoor recreation

£11.8 billion spent on overnight trips ****



8.9 million

people are active outdoors in the UK



of these

2.8 million

want to do more



18.2 million

not currently active outdoors want to re-engage and participate within 12 months***

*Source: Sport England Active Lives Survey 2019 **Source: BMC Outdoor Survey 2015-16

*** Source: Sport England & OIA "Getting Active Outdoors" **** Source: Visit England 2016

Case studies:

Horseshoe Quarry

Avon Gorge

Castle Inn Quarry

📍 Millstone Edge in the Peak District is the home to some of the country's finest and most iconic rock climbs. Towering aretes and corners abound along with numerous well-protected cracks of all widths. Once the home of the artificial climber, now a mecca for traditional free climbing. Pic: Pete Burnside.

"I like to think that these great routes are an unintentional gift to us from our ancestors who toiled in these holes, reclaiming these places, boosting the local economy and improving local people's quality of life."

Eben M (Gwynedd)



CASE STUDY 1: Horseshoe Quarry, Peak District

Horseshoe Quarry is a disused limestone quarry in Stoney Middleton in the Peak District National Park that successfully combines nature conservation with recreation to provide a much valued local asset.

Formerly operated by Tarmac, the site was acquired by the BMC in order to secure an excellent range of sport climbs which are not commonly available elsewhere in the area. It is sheltered, easily accessible and quick drying – a good venue serving the growing demand for this type of climbing.

It was recognised, however, that the site had a wider range of attributes and an inclusive approach to site development was adopted to maximise the value of the site. The quarry is part of Stoney Middleton Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI), designated both for its geological interest and its biological features. Management plans were drawn up by the BMC and Derbyshire Wildlife Trust with help from a Vision for Wildlife Project. Through habitat improvement work delivered with local volunteers Natural England has classified the site as being in ‘favourable or recovering condition’ – the highest category possible for a SSSI.

Although not essential, the BMC dedicated the land for public access in perpetuity under Section 16 of the CRoW Act. Path, boundary and scrub works were carried out to facilitate public access and enjoyment of the site by a wide range of people including climbers, dog walkers, ramblers, families seeking a peaceful picnic spot, naturalists and geology enthusiasts. With financial assistance from the former Derbyshire Aggregates Levy Grant Scheme the path works have linked the site to the public rights of way network. This has been of particular value to members of local communities including Eyam, Stoney Middleton and Foolow and the work has also been supported by local parishes in the area.

Far from being a dangerous liability attracting antisocial behaviour, the site provides a range of opportunities for recreation, helping support the national mental and physical wellbeing agenda, whilst maintaining the site’s geological and biodiversity interests.



PIC: ALEX MESSENGER.



PIC: NIAL GRIMES.

CASE STUDY 2: Avon Gorge, Bristol

A series of significant quarried limestone cliffs, located within the city of Bristol, in close proximity to the iconic landmark of Brunel's Clifton Suspension Bridge spanning the gorge across the River Avon.

Climbing in the gorge dates back to the 1930s and is unique in the size and quality of its cliffs, all sitting within the boundary of a major city. Different crags within the gorge offer different styles of climbing, depending on the features formed in the rock by the quarrying process. Where cracks occur, a style known as traditional climbing dominates; this is roped climbing using temporarily placed equipment to protect the climber should a fall occur. On crags where the rock is more compact, sport climbing routes using permanent protection bolts have been established. Bouldering (climbing small faces above portable safety mats without ropes) is also popular in a number of areas. Climbing is not the only recreational interest here either with cycling, running, walking, picnicking and more all being popular pastimes for residents and visitors alike.

The cliffs of the Avon Gorge are owned by a number of different landowners including Bristol City Council and The Society of Merchant Venturers as well

as private landowners. The Gorge is also a SSSI, supporting unique species of flora (such as Bristol rock-cress and the Bristol whitebeam) and provides nesting habitat for peregrine falcons. Over a number of years, climbers have worked in partnership with the landowners and Natural England to help remove loose rock and invasive vegetation from cliff faces, which not only benefits climbers, but also improves the cliff habitat for native flora and helps minimise the risk of rockfall which is beneficial for all users.

Set within a major metropolitan area, the assumption might be that climbing is in competition with numerous other recreational interests, conservation concerns and public safety issues, but the reality couldn't be further from the truth. The Avon Gorge is intrinsically linked with the city of Bristol and its residents, for whom the value of access to such an impressive arena, mere minutes from their doorsteps, is huge.



PIC: ROB GREENWOOD



PIC: SHUTTERSTOCK

CASE STUDY 3: Castle Inn Quarry, North Wales

Located on the edge of an urban area near Colwyn Bay, Castle Inn is also a Local Nature Reserve and a SSSI, owned by Conwy Council. Situated directly above a car park, it couldn't be more convenient or 'roadside' and has become very popular with both recreational climbers and groups under instruction.

The first recorded rock climbs were established in the late 1960s and were originally traditional climbs using temporary, leader-placed protection with a reputation for being a bit adventurous. In the last few years the climbs have been transformed into sport climbs protected by in situ fixed equipment.

The grassy areas and hollows below the cliffs are important breeding sites for the protected Silver-studded Blue butterfly. Climbers help to encourage this by keeping these areas clear of vegetation and also by having regular clean-ups to remove litter left by other users.

As this is a semi-urban environment there was a past history of unsavoury and antisocial behaviour at the site, including fly-tipping, arson and drug use. However, since becoming popular with climbers, these problems have disappeared, as the regular use of the crag by climbers, acting as unofficial guardians of the site, has dissuaded such behaviour.

In addition, any loose rock identified on the rock faces directly above the car park is removed by climbers, reducing the risk of cars being damaged or visitors being hit by falling rock.

Despite being a fair distance from the honeypot areas within Snowdonia, this little venue has now become one of the most popular and climbed-on locations in North Wales!



PIC: MICHAEL DOYLE



PIC: MICHAEL DOYLE



 Most recently quarried to provide 1.25 million tons of stone for the three upper Derwent dam, Lawrencefield is now a peaceful woodland haven teeming with newts, ants, and rock climbers.
Pic: Pete Burnside.



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