



BMC GREEN GUIDE TO THE UPLANDS

The good practice
guide for Walkers,
Climbers and
Mountaineers.



ADVENTURE. COMMUNITY. ACTION.

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Image: Emma Travers

The Green Guide Series

The BMC produces a number of good practice guides for climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers. These give a wide range of essential information on topics from how to minimise your impact while in the hills to how to spot rare species. There are Green guides for specific areas but also Green guides for Groups, Challenge events, Habitat management and the White series that looks at similar issues in the winter. To view and download these please visit our website at thebmc.co.uk/bmc-green-guides.

INTRODUCTION

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

Mountain areas are 'wild' recreational escapes. Hill and mountain walking is now one of the fastest growing activities and has led to a big increase in the numbers of people visiting the uplands of Great Britain, there is also an increased awareness of the need to preserve and conserve these fragile landscapes.

The British Mountaineering Council (BMC) is committed to supporting access and conservation for the mutual benefit of all. Through a network of volunteers and staff it works continuously to ensure public access to the uplands and crags of England and Wales.

This booklet highlights the BMC's commitment to protecting the natural environment and explains the types of impact climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers may have and suggests some simple, positive ways in which we can help minimise any adverse environmental effects.

The BMC is the representative body that protects the freedoms and promotes the interests of climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers, including ski-mountaineers.

The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death.

Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions.

Climbing, hill walking and mountaineering can provide life-long physical, social and mental health benefits through exercise and adventure in amazing environments.

Image: Veronika Melkonian from Women's Trad Fest

THE MOUNTAIN ENVIRONMENT

Millions of years of geological process and erosion through ice, wind and water have left us with the sensitive and special mountain environments we know today. Their fragility is a result of the harsh climate and landforms which affect the way in which plants and animals can survive.

The mountains of Great Britain support a number of rare species of plants and animals. Overgrazing, drainage, atmospheric pollution and in some areas fires have further reduced the extent of these rare species. Climate change is also having a greater effect each year and exacerbating the existing problems. Cliffs in particular are special, as they support many scarce arctic-alpine species that only manage to survive where there is limited grazing.

Birds and animals require specific habitat types to survive and are often limited to geographical ranges. Many of these species are protected in England & Wales under the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 and the Countryside and Rights of Way Act 2000. The geology and geomorphology of many sites is also protected through the former Act.

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

Image: Jim Langley

Image: Emma Travers

ACCESS

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

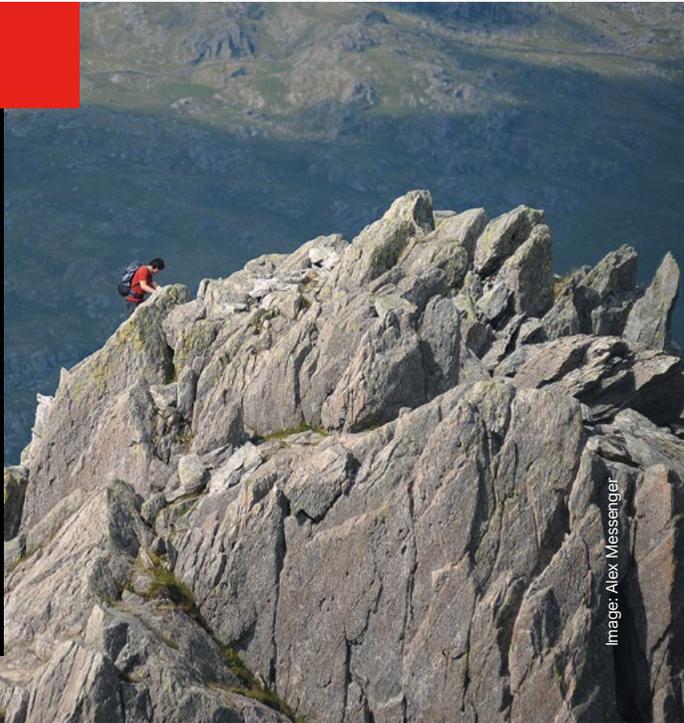


Image: Alex Messenger

Open Access Land

The Countryside Rights of Way Act 2000 (CRoW) gives recreational users a right of access to the uplands of England and Wales on foot. It covers areas of mountain, moor, heath, down and registered common land. These areas are designated as 'open access' and are marked on OS maps in a yellow wash.

Landowners must allow free use of open access land to recreational and educational users, but are allowed to charge for use by commercial users.

In practice this means that if the primary purpose of a group visit to open access land is for recreation or education (e.g. a club day out or a training course) then no charge should be made. Landowners can restrict or exclude access rights for up to 28 days per year.

Signs, similar to that in the right-hand image, are used to show where designated open access land starts and ends, and are usually attached to stiles, gates and fence posts.

Rights of Way & Access Land

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

The restrictions that are sometimes used on CRoW access land do not affect public rights of way (so you can walk along them even when surrounding access land is closed). However, public rights of way can sometimes be diverted, removed, created or have the rights suspended but only by the local highway authority. Official signs, posted by the authority, will be found on the route to tell you if there are any changes to the local network. Additional open access land can also be granted, and will remain in perpetuity, and can be arranged through the local authority.

Permissive access

The BMC liaises with landowners and conservation bodies where necessary to negotiate voluntary access arrangements. The BMC also has a network of over 50 local access representatives to ensure any access or conservation issues are resolved.

In Scotland and Ireland, access laws are different – see pages 36-38 of this booklet for more information.



Image: Niall Grimes

ACCESS

ACCESS IS ALL ABOUT BALANCING THE 'THREE Rs': RIGHTS, RESPONSIBILITIES AND RESTRICTIONS.

Where we enjoy a right of access, this must be used responsibly. On occasion, restrictions based on a least restrictive approach may be needed to protect conservation interests and for public safety. The BMC works to ensure successful access management, where all parties recognise and respect the legitimate interests of others and where recreation and conservation benefit mutually.

And in practice...

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

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

Gates and fences

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

Dogs

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

CONSERVATION

Conservation

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

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

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

- Wildlife and Countryside Act;
- Environment Act;
- Natural Environment and Rural Communities Act;
- Natural Habitat Regulations.

Plants

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

Under the Conservation (Natural Habitats) Regulations 1994, it can also be an offence to deliberately pick, collect, uproot or destroy a wild plant. For more information visit:

www.defra.gov.uk



Nesting bird restrictions

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

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

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

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



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

For more information on the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981 (amended) and Nature Conservation (Scotland) Act 2004 visit <https://jncc.gov.uk/>

In Scotland, conservation laws are slightly different – for more information see page 36 of this booklet. PAGE 11



HILL WALKING

Hill walking

When we head out walking in the hills we can all minimise our impact by planning ahead and preparing before going out. The weather, the relative fragility of the location and its popularity can all affect our impact.

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

- Scree slopes provide an important ecological habitat but can easily be eroded, please avoid crossing unless there is an obvious path.
- Try walking within an erosion scar rather than around it, thereby reducing the risk of enlarging the eroded area, or avoid eroded areas completely if there is an alternative.
- Think about your route. For example, repeated kicking of steps causes much of the initial damage on steep slopes; avoid this by zig-zagging across such slopes.
- Noise by groups or individuals can affect the hill walking experience for others and local residents – be considerate.

Footwear

While sensible safe footwear is essential for mountain walking, it is both less erosive and more comfortable to wear the lightest footwear that is suitable for the terrain. A pair of heavy boots may not always be appropriate for summer walking.

Fires

Both peat and vegetation which grow in many of our upland areas can become dry and flammable, particularly during the summer. Climate change each year is increasing this risk and accidental fires can destroy natural habitats and can kill animals and birds. Do not light fires on moorlands or use disposable barbecues (using gas stoves can minimise the risk when used correctly) and never stub matches or cigarettes out in the vegetation. Respect all warning signs and if you see a fire, don't assume that someone else has called the emergency services.

Paths

Paths have been constructed in many areas to protect and repair mountains from the erosion that is caused by the sheer volume of visitors. Stick to these paths wherever possible rather than taking shortcuts, or walking on the verges. Similarly, drainage channels and culverts are essential to take surface water away from paths, removing small amounts of debris can help drainage.

Cairns

The BMC does not support the use of cairns or other intrusive features, other than those of historic significance and those traditionally established on summits and path junctions. Some cairns are important landmarks, however building your own cairns exacerbates erosion and is the mountain equivalent of graffiti.

HILL WALKING

Memorials

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

Waymarks

New signs and posts are generally not supported within the uplands unless there has been specific consultation and they have been designed sympathetically to sit within the local landscape.

Boundaries

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

Litter

Litter can be a serious problem in the British mountains, and visitors can be unprepared for the lack of refuse facilities in wild places. Many people don't realise that food is litter too, with food waste taking much longer to decompose than you may think.

The best way to avoid litter becoming a problem is to avoid taking it with you.

- Take reusable water bottles, remove food packaging before setting off and use a lunchbox instead
- Take your litter home with you – if you've carried it in, you can carry it out.
- Where it is safe and not too unpleasant, pick up other people's litter (especially non-biodegradable material).
- Organic litter such as fruit peel takes longer to break down than most people realise so please take it away.

Shop locally

Spending in local areas, by climbers hillwalkers and mountaineers, is helpful to the economic wellbeing of many mountain regions. Wherever possible, shop and buy locally.



Image: Shutterstock

ROCK CLIMBING

Climbing and scrambling

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

The most important areas for nature conservation are often the vegetated and wetter areas of cliffs – usually north facing, dank and slippery slopes – but some popular areas are also important for their fauna and flora. So, if you are thinking of opening up new areas of cliffs by putting up new routes, check first and limit your

new routing to places that do not have valuable nature conservation interests.

If your local crag is being lost to invasive trees and scrub, the BMC can offer guidance on how best to open these up in collaboration with statutory conservation bodies. The removal of natural vegetation including mosses and lichens should be avoided without first obtaining permission from the landowner and appropriate conservation body.

Remember that if protected habitats are damaged or destroyed by climbing or abseiling, this could be a criminal offence and climbing may be banned as a result.

Gullies and ledges

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

Rock types

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

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



Image: Alex Messenger



Image: Emma Travers

ROCK CLIMBING

Fixed equipment

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

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

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

Abseiling

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

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



Image: Emma Travers



MOUNTAINEERING

Winter mountaineering

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

Climbing on frozen turf, thin ice or during a thaw can cause damage to vegetation. There are often rare species growing on mountain cliffs. Some arctic-alpine plants are shallow rooted in moss cushions and can

be damaged and easily dislodged by the tearing action of ice axes and crampons. Similarly, climbing in marginal snow and ice conditions can prise out roots or bulbs from cracks. Larger, more broken and vegetated cliffs may never have been disturbed before and the effect of removing vegetation or clearing out cracks for axe placements may destroy the last remnants of rare plant species.

Winter climbing

Winter climbing should not be undertaken unless the crags have a winter appearance with snow, hoarfrost, rime-ice or verglas covering rock, not just snow-covered ledges. Dry tooling should not be carried out except where local agreements allow.

In Eryri (Snowdonia) and the Lake District turf temperature sensors can be viewed on the BMC website to find the temperature of the soil.

This can provide valuable information to climbers when it's suitable to climb in these areas.

thebmc.co.uk/idwal

Further information can also be found in the BMC's White Guides for North Wales and the Lake District.





MOUNTAINEERING

WINTER CLIMBING GUIDANCE



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

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

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

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

Ski mountaineering

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

Winter walking

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

WILD CAMPING

Wild camping in the hills is a very special experience, bringing you as close to nature and wilderness as is possible. Wild camping is a very different undertaking from staying at an established campsite .

Wild camping is not permitted by right on open access land in England and Wales without the express permission of the landowner, however may be tolerated in some areas. In Scotland there is a right to camp responsibly and follow the Scottish Outdoor Access Code. With no facilities at hand you need to think carefully about your impact – both physical and visual.

- Whenever you wild camp remember to leave no trace.
- Keep your group small and as discreet as possible.
- Camp away from popular areas – your presence may attract other campers to your unofficial 'site'.
- Be inconspicuous. A green tent may blend into the landscape whereas a brightly coloured tent can spoil the view.

- Pitch camp at dusk and strike at dawn.
- Camp in one place for only 1 or 2 nights and on dry / well-drained ground that won't be easily damaged.
- Try to avoid picking a site that means you have to cross sensitive areas to collect water or go to the toilet.
- If the campsite is on soft or boggy ground pitch the tents further away from each other, this will minimise trampling between tents.
- Clean, pure water is a valuable resource relied upon by many people living in mountainous areas. The nutrient content of streams in most upland areas is low, and altering this by adding pollutants such as soap will kill local insect and plant life. If you have to wash with more than just water, dispose of soapy water well away from water courses. Always consider your impact downstream.
- Sanitation, litter and fires are critical considerations whilst wild camping.

Snow holing

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

- Remove all litter – do not bury or hide litter within the snow as it will eventually be exposed, can harm wildlife and offend those who visit after you.
- Take everything out with you, including wet clothing.
- Give a thought to the consequences when the snow has melted.

There is a difference between 'wild' camping and 'free' camping. If you just want to camp free of charge, spare a thought first for the support you could be giving to the local economy. Stay in a campsite if possible.

WHEN NATURE CALLS



Image: Niall Grimes

Wherever possible, come prepared to carry out your solid waste. It's not uncommon to get caught short on the hill. But on crowded paths, sanitation can become a real problem, creating unpleasant sights and smells.

Never forgo an opportunity to use a proper toilet and learn to value public toilets. If this is not possible, remember some simple guidelines:

- Firstly Waste Aggregation and Gelling (WAG) bags are available. These are treated to start breaking down human waste and made from puncture resistant material so you can carry it out safely.

- If this isn't possible. Pick a spot at least 50 metres from paths or water sources and carry a lightweight trowel to bury solid waste the same depth as the trowel head which will speed up breakdown.
- Carry out used toilet paper/baby wipes/female sanitary products in a ziplock bag instead of leaving them.
- Avoid going either in enclosed spaces (caves, ruined buildings etc), at the foot of crags, behind huts or burying beneath rock or boulder.
- In snow, dig down into the soil. Give a thought to the consequences when the snow melts!

Protect fresh water

A mountain stream is often seen as the epitome of purity and streams are a vital source of fresh water for hill farmers and for campers. It will also be a home to, or a water source for, wildlife. To help protect these areas:

- Ensure you are at least 50 metres away from running water when you defecate.
- When camping, defecate and urinate downhill from your campsite; collect drinking water from above your camp.
- When washing use biodegradable and eco-friendly soaps.

Managing periods in the uplands.

- If you have your period, ensure you take enough products with you for the day, ensuring you take all sanitary items including toilet paper away with you.
- Menstrual cups and period pants work well as a solution for longer days out adventuring.
- Make sure you have some period products in your rucksack (sanitary towels, wipes and waste bags) as well as hand sanitiser in case someone in your groups gets their period unexpectedly – these items can be part of your first aid kit.



Image: Niall Grimes

TRANSPORT

In common with the rest of the population, climbers, hill walkers and mountaineers love their cars. They get us to the crags and mountains quickly and in relative comfort. However, increasing car use is having an adverse effect on our lives and on the environment.

- If travelling in multiple vehicles, consider lift sharing as a way to reduce your impact on the environment and parking spaces.
- Use public transport as much as possible— not only as a means of getting to a destination but as part of a day out.
- Take your bicycle... whenever you can.



Image: Niall Grimes

If you need to use a car:

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

Car parking

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

Support the area

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

Perhaps suggest to your access authority that voluntary donation boxes would be a good idea in some areas.

Be warned

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

GROUPS OF CLIMBERS AND WALKERS

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

Plan your day, manage your group.

Thoughtful planning, effective group management and an awareness of good practice can nip many potential problems in the bud.

- Venue choice is crucial to ensure a good day out and minimise the impact on other users. Choose an appropriate crag or walking location which reflects your group's size, structure and needs with the size and environmental sensitivity of the area.
- Ensure that your group is a manageable size. Larger groups are more difficult to control. Consider spreading large groups over a number of sites – two groups of 6–10 people may be much less intrusive than one group of 15–20.
- Parking is an issue at many popular climbing and walking areas. Try and share transport more effectively with friends / family / others visiting the area. This is better for the environment and minimises the number of parking spaces needed
- Always use the recognised approach tracks and descent paths to crags rather than cutting across quiet countryside or over private land.
- Route selection and timing is crucial to ensure a good day for your group and minimise your impact on other users.
- Brief your group on the challenges that the hills present, but also on the environmental value of their surroundings. Highlight the 'dos and don'ts' for a day in the hills.
- Educate your group on the principles of the Countryside Code and how to follow it.



RAD app

Consider access to the area:

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

Access restrictions: Familiarise yourself with any specific group use advice already agreed between BMC and landowners – check the websites and any on-site information. Respect seasonal access restrictions and do not disturb wildlife or livestock.



GROUPS OF CLIMBERS

Top tips

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

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

- **Overcrowding:** Respect the needs of other climbers and do not monopolise popular cliffs, buttresses or bays. A system of rotating around different routes (rather than staying on one route all day) could add variety to your day and help to reduce possible conflicts.
- **Liaison with other groups:** Could you reduce overcrowding at the crag by agreeing that different groups will use different crags?
- **Brief your group on the challenges** that the crag presents and the environmental value of their surroundings.
- **Highlight the dos and don'ts** for a day at the crag.
- **Set geographical boundaries** for your group's activities.
- **Vacate routes as quickly as possible** after finishing your climb. Leaving top ropes unattended is poor etiquette – take them down when you're finished
- **Avoid top roping popular routes** for extended periods.
- **Be considerate to other climbers** who may wish to climb routes your group is top roping.
- **Make your group aware** of other users.

Sport Crag:

- Always check the Regional Access Database first. Some sport crags are unsuitable for groups. If in doubt, give the BMC access team a call before you go.
- Some sport climbing venues have recently been developed, with access for climbers problematic. A large group at such venues could cause problems.

Crag Etiquette

- **Talk to other climbers.** There are very few problems that can't be solved by chatting to your neighbours at the crag.
- **Avoid taking over whole sections** of crag – it's usually better to split into smaller groups and spread out.

GROUPS OF CLIMBERS

Leave No Trace:

The exposed escarpments, open moorlands and sheltered dales of many climbing venues are important to different people for different reasons. Many people visit these areas to escape the crowds and find peace and quiet away from the hustle and bustle of urban life. Noise, bad language, uncontrolled dogs and litter can all detract from other peoples' enjoyment of the countryside.

- Base camp: Establish a base camp area for your group. This should be a hard-wearing site (e.g. a cluster of rocks), which does not interfere with other users and is safe from falling objects. This will also help reduce the impact on surrounding vegetation.
- Respect: Explain the importance of respecting other climbers' equipment, 'do not trample on ropes' for example.
- Noise & litter: Keep noise to a low level and discourage bad language. Take all litter home with you – some groups take litter bags to the crag to make this easier.
- Toilet facilities: Few crags are close to proper toilet facilities. Ensure your group knows that there are no facilities at the crag and 'go before you go' is a good philosophy. See page 27 for more information on what to do 'When Nature Calls'.



SCOTLAND

The equivalent organisation to the BMC in Scotland is Mountaineering Scotland. If visiting Scotland, the general ethos in this leaflet applies, but the customary practices and legal basis are very different. You are advised to read the advice provided on the Access & Conservation pages of the Mountaineering Scotland, website www.mountaineering.scot, or contact them for advice. See page 40 for 'Further Information' and contact details.

Conservation

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

Access

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

An important difference, with respect to climbing, is that in Scotland, climbing comes under access rights and responsibilities, voluntary restrictions are applied to some crags during the bird nesting season. Check the crag alert list on the Mountaineering Scotland website. Greater onus is on climbers to assess the situation and make responsible judgements. Other important differences for mountaineers are about control of dogs, especially near livestock, and wild camping.

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



IRELAND

In Ireland access and conservation for hill walkers climbing and mountaineering is represented by Mountaineering Ireland www.mountaineering.ie. Similarly, to Scotland the advice within this booklet is applicable, however access rights are very different. Most of the land is privately owned and although there are public rights of way, there is no legislation to support the legal right to access in the same way as we have in England, Scotland and Wales, and even on marked paths permission from the landowner may be required.

Climbing Restrictions

Although there are climbing restrictions due to nesting birds, these are managed in an informal manner and climbers are expected to use sense and judgement before climbing routes that may have nesting birds.

BMC CRAG CODE

Access	Check the Regional Access Database (RAD) on www.thebmc.co.uk for the latest access information
Parking	Park carefully – avoid gateways and driveways
Footpaths	Keep to established paths – leave gates as you find them
Risk	Climbing can be dangerous - accept the risks and be aware of other people around you
Respect	Groups and individuals - respect the rock, local climbing ethics and other people
Wildlife	Do not disturb livestock, wildlife or cliff vegetation; respect seasonal bird nesting restrictions
Dogs	Keep dogs under control at all times; don't let your dog chase sheep or disturb wildlife
Litter	"Leave no trace" – take all litter home with you
Toilets	Don't make a mess – bury your waste
Economy	Do everything you can to support the rural economy – shop locally

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

FURTHER INFORMATION

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

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Nature Protection Designations:

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

Useful Links:

BMC Landscapes Charter	thebmc.co.uk/landscape-charter-launched
BMC Sustainability and Environment Policy	thebmc.co.uk/bmc-environmental-sustainability-policy

Useful websites:

Access & Conservation

British Mountaineering Council	thebmc.co.uk
Mountaineering Scotland	mountaineering.scot
Mountaineering Ireland	mountaineering.ie
Natural England	naturalengland.org.uk
Natural Resources Wales	naturalresources.wales
Nature Scotland	nature.scot
English Heritage	english-heritage.org.uk
Cadw	cadw.gov.wales
Forestry England	forestryengland.uk
Joint Nature Conservation Committee	jncc.gov.uk
UK Biodiversity Action Plan	ukbap.org.uk
Magic	magic.gov.uk
The Woodland Trust	woodlandtrust.org.uk
Wildlife and Countryside Link	wcl.org.uk
The Conservation Volunteers	tcv.org.uk
Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty	aonb.org.uk
National Parks	nationalparks.uk
Wildlife Trusts	wildlifetrusts.org
National Trust	nationaltrust.org.uk
National Trust for Scotland	nts.org.uk
Royal Society for the Protection of Birds	rspb.org.uk
Plantlife	plantlife.org.uk

Safety & Training

Association of Mountaineering Instructors	ami.org.uk
British Mountain Guides	bmg.org.uk
Mountain Training	mountain-training.org
Mountain Rescue (England & Wales)	mountain.rescue.org.uk
Scottish Mountain Rescue	scottishmountainrescue.org
Sport Scotland Avalanche Information Service	sais.gov.uk
Plas y Brenin	pyb.co.uk
Glenmore Lodge	glenmorelodge.org.uk

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HILL WALKING



ROCK CLIMBING



MOUNTAINEERING

Image: Shutterstock, Duncan Andison

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