




CLIMB BRISTOL BMC

The Avon Gorge Regeneration Project:

reviving Bristol's renowned
climbing site



No other UK city but Bristol has a wild landscape right at its heart: The Avon Gorge. It is a geological wonder and a site of great historic and scientific interest. The remarkable Clifton Suspension Bridge spans the River Avon, connecting ancient woods and steep cliffs where climbers from Bristol and all over the UK cling to the rock in search of a sporting challenge. They are among the half a million who live here and cherish the Gorge as a key site for recreation and wildlife - and as an emblem for their city.

➤ What is ClimbBristol?

ClimbBristol is a project initiated by the local climbing community who want to see a regeneration of this superb and unique climbing venue. In an exceptional move, the British Mountaineering Council (BMC) has funded an officer to lead this two year project. In doing so the BMC is bringing to bear its 70-year experience of working with landowners and conservationists, both nationally and locally, and is actively

supporting the long-held belief that the Avon Gorge is the most significant 'city crag' in Britain and possibly anywhere in the world.

ClimbBristol is seeking to raise the profile of Avon Gorge as a unique climbing site, to improve the physical conditions of, and create easier access to the rock face. It also intends to strengthen existing partnerships as well as forge new ones with other key users.

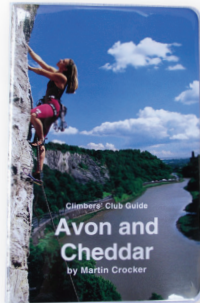
► Why is the Gorge so significant to climbers?

Climbers choose to move to Bristol because of its climbing opportunities. It is estimated that within the wider Bristol area there are some 5,000 people who go climbing. Many of them will want to climb in Avon Gorge and take advantage of the improvements **ClimbBristol** has started to secure.

Where else can you be 'on the rock' within 15 minutes of work, or spend a Sunday with friends pursuing what is one of the UK's fastest growing sports? There are 750 routes to scale on the 80-metre high limestone cliffs (all described in a definitive climbers' guidebook). Each of these routes has a bit of history and some are so physically and mentally demanding that they've only ever been climbed once.

Avon Gorge has an enviable historical climbing pedigree. By the end of the nineteenth century the quarrymen had left the gorge in peace and quiet and it was only a few decades later that climbing began on the steep faces: In 1936 Graham Balcombe conquered the famous Piton Route - and brought the neighbourhood to a standstill as the crowds flocked around. Many other history-making climbers learned their art here including **ClimbBristol** patron Sir Chris Bonington who - through his climbs in the 1950s - made Avon Gorge the most progressive limestone climbing site in Britain.

ClimbBristol believes that climbing is an intrinsic part of Bristol's sporting heritage.



'We have already shown locally that we can contribute to vital conservation programmes, to public safety, and to visitors' experience. We plan to do much more of the same.'

Martin Crocker
ClimbBristol Project
Officer and
Guidebook Author

*'Against a background of huge pressures on the Avon Gorge, **ClimbBristol** is all about securing the long-term future of climbing and making our unique city climbing experience shipshape and not one to be missed.'*

Martin Crocker

► Creating Partnerships

Collaboration with the landowners and conservationists has always been considered a priority by the local climbing community. **ClimbBristol** believes that these relationships can be made stronger still, and it wishes to work with partners to make Avon Gorge as popular as it deserves to be without compromising other interests – adding to the vibrancy and personality of Bristol.

Avon Gorge is a Site of Special Scientific Interest, supporting unique species of flora such as Bristol rock-cress and the Bristol whitebeam. Over the years climbers have collaborated with conservation groups and Bristol City Council to help clear parts of the cliffs of scrub and ivy - vigorous plants that smother and squeeze out the rarities if left unmanaged. Annual 'crag clearance' days have been arranged through the BMC and are always well attended by local climbers eager to give something back.

In January 2013 Natural England authorised an expert **ClimbBristol** volunteer work party to remove loose rocks and damaging scrub

from a key climbing cliff in Avon Gorge. They worked with local botanist and climber Libby Houston who believes this type of clearance is 'valuable for conservation as well as climbing'.

Avon Gorge is also home to a pair of peregrines – the sheer cliffs provide a haven for this much-revered bird of prey to breed. Since 2009 volunteers from the climbing community have provided vital practical help to the British Trust for Ornithology for the annual ringing of the peregrine chicks. And during the breeding season climbers keep well clear!

ClimbBristol is on the road to becoming recognised as an important stakeholder by landowners Bristol City Council and the Society of Merchant Venturers, and by Natural England and conservation groups. **ClimbBristol** offers its assistance and ideas to improve public access to Avon Gorge and to help enhance and conserve this unique resource. In doing so it hopes to make a valuable contribution to the 'Management Plan for the Bristol Side of the Avon Gorge' and its successors.





› Chris Bonington
climbing on Great Central
Route, Avon Gorge 1955

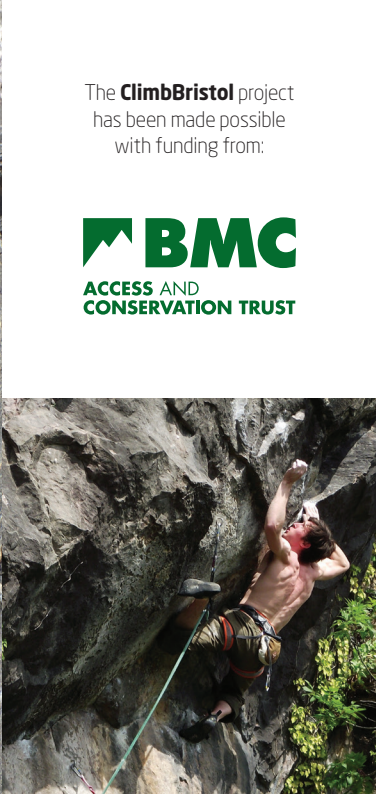


'I did some of my best pioneering in the Avon Gorge while I was at RMA Sandhurst in the mid-fifties, particularly in opening up the Main Wall. I have many great memories and it's really important not only to maintain access to the finest "city" crag in the UK but also for it to be looked after, and this needs the support of the City Council - it's a real asset not just to the climbing community, but the community as a whole.'

**Chris Bonington,
ClimbBristol Patron**



▶ Hazel Findlay, the UK's foremost female climber, rising to the challenge in Avon Gorge.



The **ClimbBristol** project has been made possible with funding from:



Visit our Facebook page for up to date progress reports www.facebook.com/Climbbristol
W: www.ClimbBristol.com E: office@thebmc.co.uk T: 0161 445 6111

ALL PHOTOS: MARTIN CROCKER