

## **Bolt Policy for routes first climbed by Martin Crocker**

### Introduction

The purpose of publicising this policy is to enable any party to factor it in to any evolving ideas, proposals, or plans they may have to bolt climbs first ascended by Martin Crocker. As far as my direct interests apply as first ascensionist, the policy is aimed at limiting the unauthorised retro-bolting of these climbs, for the purposes of their preservation as traditional routes and for safeguarding heritage.

### Background

‘We will just take it to the BMC Area Meeting to supersede Martin’s view not to bolt his routes’

Now that you too have read this mischief from several experienced West Country climbers, I hope you’ll forgive me for believing there is something seriously wrong with the BMC-facilitated bolt policy process. It seems to compound all that I and others have evidenced as going wrong with managing bolting – more especially in South East Wales (presumably under the auspices of the corresponding Area). Such evidence in that area includes the unapproved retrobolting of many climbs (including some leading historic climbs), the systematic chipping and drilling of holds on existing as well as new climbs as part of the bolting process, and the terraforming of crags for sport climbing without the necessary consents (which has led to their being banned for climbing, for example Cefn Coed – one of my favourite crags while living in Cardiff in the mid-70s). In addition, core agreements on where bolts are permitted have been frequently ignored or are under constant threat of revision on an unrestrained spiral in favour of bolting, retrobolting, and the diminution of traditional climbs and traditional climbing sites. With precious traditional climbing sites like Llangattock subject to the increasing threat of bolting, there are serious implications for the area’s climbing heritage.

Take a step back. It’s obvious when it is thought through. A climb has no physical fabric: it is a combination of a set of body movements and a set of perceived experiences defined by the rock and its environment. It has a unique and distinctive ‘soul’. No one owns climbs, including first ascensionists. While somebody is climbing a route *they* define it, *they* ‘own’ it. This is why retrobolting an unbolted route is so impactful; the physical movements may remain more or less the same but the original set of experiences are erased and replaced with a completely different set – or nothing at all.

Inadequately managed retrobolting poses an existential threat to British rock-climbing. Through this modest little policy I am doing what I can to preserve the character of those climbs for which I feel I hold a responsibility and special affinity – those which I led or soloed on their first ascents.

I am strongly in favour of the use of leader-placed natural protection wherever possible i.e. using features of the rockface in which to place nuts, wires, cams, slings etc. to protect leading a traditional climb. This position is in line with a policy statement on climbing style published by The Climbers' Club. Traditional climbs present whole-person challenges, the character of which should be safeguarded for future generations. The erasure of existing climbs to satisfy any local lust for sport climbs should be avoided. Democracy should be more robust than to yield to interim votes by whoever turns up at an Area meeting. Measures should be instituted to encourage communities to safeguard our climbs e.g. through declaring bolt-free 'sanctuary' areas and crags.

That said it is relevant to note I am not solely a trad climber: I have established hundreds of sport climbs in both the West Country and south Wales and I fully understand why people enjoy sport climbing – because I do so myself. But I do not consider that sport climbing should be advanced or expanded at the expense of other climbing styles and history. There is still plenty of potential for new sport climbs on suitable undeveloped cliffs or undeveloped parts of sport-climbing cliffs, and I am all in favour of exploration to that end – assuming any necessary permission is in place beforehand.

#### The Policy

Bolts should not be placed on routes on which I made the first ascent. As first ascensionist I retain the right to remove any retrobolts on climbs I first led or soloed where the bolts have been placed without consultation *and* my agreement, regardless of how or by whom the decision to place the bolts has been made. I would gratefully ask any party considering bolting any climb of which I made the first ascent to consult with me. It could be that a reasonable case to place such bolts can be made if there are extenuating circumstances, though I would think these cases would be infrequent or rare. I would like to avoid conflict if at all possible, but I see no case for knowingly wasting time or misdirecting donors' money placing such retrobolts and then wasting my time and money removing them and trying to repair the associated damage their installers will have caused.

#### Applicability

This policy applies to routes of which I led or soloed the first ascent, as first ascensionist, anywhere in Britain. It does not apply to bolted sport routes i.e. routes where my first ascents were entirely or almost entirely dependent on regular sport-style bolt protection. And it does not apply to any proposal for the like-for-like renewal of bolt(s) on trad routes where my first ascents utilised the odd bolt runner ('minimalist bolt routes').

Martin Crocker

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