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Use of pegs in British climbing - BMC position statement

Background

In situ pitons (pegs) can be found on many sea cliffs and inland crags in the British Isles. In most cases pegs have been used to provide protection on rock with limited natural protection and where bolts have not been an acceptable option. Avon Gorge, Wintours Leap, Pembroke, North Devon & Cornwall and Gogarth are examples of venues where pegs are common. The majority of the pegs on our crags today were placed by new routing activists in the 1970s, 80s and 90s and they are often in an unknown or unreliable state of repair.

In December 2008 an article was published on the BMC website comparing the merits of different peg types and providing guidance on their use (see https://www.thebmc.co.uk/is-there-a-future-for-pegs-in-british-climbing). The view of the BMC Technical Committee at the time was that:

'…pegs should be considered as leader placed protection in the same way as nuts and cams. In other words, only the person placing the peg can have any real idea about how much security it provides. Obviously this relies on individual experience and judgement to have any great accuracy. Pegs should not be relied upon for semi-permanent placements because of their inherent unreliability and variability.'

BMC position

- In general climbers should be suspicious about the holding power of in-situ pegs. Pegs are not bolts, and they cannot be relied upon as such. Pegs on sea cliffs should be treated with even more suspicion than those on inland crags; salt water corrosion has a detrimental effect on most peg types.

- The decision to clip a peg is down to the personal judgement of the individual climber; individuals must take personal responsibility for their own safety and make a case-by-case assessment of the quality of a peg before placing trust in it.

- The holding power of a peg is determined by the quality of rock in which it is placed, the position and angle of the placement, the way the peg is placed (and the experience of the person who placed it) and the type of peg used (some pegs being stronger than others). Pegs in horizontal placements (i.e. horizontal cracks) are generally, but not always, stronger than those in vertical placements. Pegs placed in loose, soft, unstable or expanding rock will generally have lower holding power than those placed in harder rock types or on solid / stable cliffs.

- The strongest pegs are those made of hard cast, stainless or chrome-molybdenum steel; soft steel pegs generally perform poorly in test pulls compared to hard steel varieties. It is advised

that climbers attempt to gain knowledge of any pegs on a route before attempting the route. If a route is particularly reliant upon a peg(s) pre-inspection of the peg(s) may be advisable before attempting the route. Those not wishing to pre-inspect a peg(s) should approach the route on the basis that fixed gear may not be reliable and the route may be more dangerous than implied by the grade and description.

- Those placing new pegs for the first ascents of new routes are encouraged to be open, honest and explicit about the fixed protection used and its importance in protecting the route. This is especially important on sea cliffs where pegs corrode at a faster rate. In general the BMC would advise that new routes on sea cliffs should be established without pegs so that future ascentionists are not faced with an unfairly greater risk due to peg deterioration.

- When compiling and editing route descriptions guidebook writers and contributors should be mindful of the limitations of pegs and the reliance that climbers may place upon them.

Agreed by BMC National Council, 6 December 2014

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s/cod/manregs/BMC policy/pegs