

sandstonebulletin

WINTER/SPRING 2012

Produced by the Steve Durkin Sandstone Trust

Hanging around or dogging as we know it



Not dogging, good top rope practice on Judy 6c, High Rocks

Ok at the climbing wall, but not on sandstone. Dogging is an everyday or evening practice at the climbing wall. It is part and parcel of testing our technical capability and extending our strength and mental endurance. It maybe ok at the climbing wall because the repetitive action and falling exertion can be tolerated by the durable man made materials that walls are made of. But on sandstone we have a natural material that is simply not able to withstand the pressures of dogging.

On sandstone dogging causes unnecessarily prolonged belaying activity and as a consequence increased potential for erosion at the top of the rock. But more important, is the affect of repeated moves, sometimes clumsy, usually on the crux of the route, which wears away parts of handholds and footholds, and more often than not leads to small sections of routes getting plastered in chalk. A prime example of this is Wailing Wall 5c at Harrison's. Look and see how much chalk there is at the crux, and how little if any there is above the crux. That tells you how much this route gets dogged.

Also look at the horrendous rope groove at the top caused by some inconsiderate climbers. The holds on this fine route have changed noticeably in just the past two years. So if you don't think you can get up a sandstone route without dogging it, try something you are reasonably confident you can climb clean, or at worst with just a



couple of falls. Sandstone is not for dogging, it is for climbing with purer ethics, and if you are lucky a bit of style. There is nothing more satisfying than a well executed swift ascent, and if you like trad climbing elsewhere, or aspire to it, then that ability is what you will need.

WHY A SANDSTONE BULLETIN?

There has never been one before, so why not produce one? The Steve Durkin Sandstone Trust (more of which on the back page) thinks one is needed to bring climbers and boulderers together so that we all understand what is so precious about sandstone, and what each of us should and should not be doing. The year 2011 saw some unusual events on sandstone, and those events need to be reflected upon. There are bad things going on, and we need to do something about them. Out of circumstance this bulletin is a bit of a 'downer', but we hope you will agree many of its messages need to be made. The next bulletin will contain more upbeat articles, so look out for that one!



SLACKLINERS RIP OUT BELAY BOLT

Unbelievable but true. Slackliners anonymous managed to explode the rock at the top of West Wall at Harrison's by tensioning a slackline from one bolt to another. It was always going to be simply a case of which bolt came out first, and it was the one at the top of West Wall which failed.

This maybe a case of accidental vandalism, but should have been predicted by the guilty persons. Nothing like this had been foreseen by those responsible for the rocks, and it was thought that perhaps a climber of more than moderate physique had taken a fall on to a belay with a low set karabiner thereby creating a high falling force on the bolt. Even so, if this had happened the bolt should still have held, so the fact that it had not was of major concern. In a way it was a relief to hear that something else had happened, albeit completely stupid and irresponsible, because it meant there was no longer a concern about the integrity of the bolts from a climbing perspective.

Chimaera hits the video clips

One of the ultimate test pieces on sandstone attracted the attention of Jon Partridge and a camera team in April 2011. The resulting footage amply illustrated the extremely technical and powerful techniques required for success on this most demanding of routes and there it was on computer screens up and down the country for all to see.

It could be said that Chimaera is actually the ultimate test piece on sandstone, for it has only had a very few complete ascents yet was first climbed way back in 1990.

First ascensionist Dave Turner was an exponent of technical mastery in his heyday and was undoubtedly the top man on sandstone at the time. So impressive was Dave's feat that although much tried, Chimaera remained unrepeated for sixteen years and then it was by the extremely talented James Pearson, now recognised as one of the UK's very best climbers.

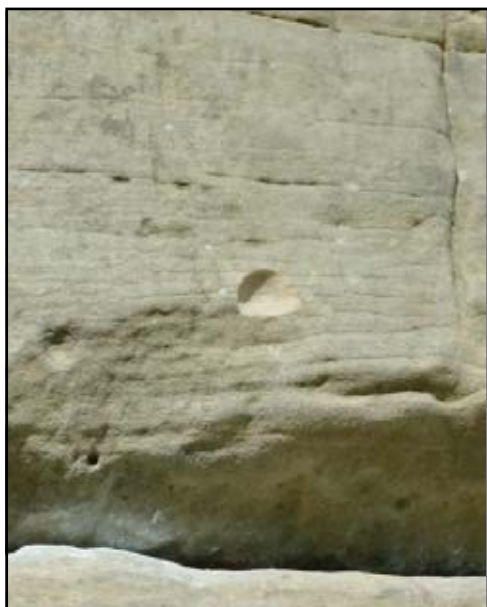
Tony Musselbrook managed the third ascent in 2007 and then it was another four years before Chimaera was successfully climbed again, this time with a video camera to record the impressive moves Jon Partridge managed to execute to fine effect.



Jon Partridge on Chimaera.

Picture courtesy of Nick Brown www.outcropfilms.com

THE PHANTOM HOLD CUTTER



Not enough holds on the route for you? Holds not big enough for you? When you find a move you cannot do why not make another hold, or make a hold bigger, ludicrous, outrageous, preposterous isn't it? Well unbelievably no, for that is exactly what somebody did early in the summer last year. It was not even discrete, or on a little climbed route. No, this happened on one of the most popularly climbed 6a's at Bowles. The climb Hate is one of the top 6a's on Sandstone with a fine combination of delicate and then powerful climbing. Somebody it seems could not do the delicate bit for lack of (in their eyes) a foothold, so they simply cut one instead. Assuming this then enabled them to reach the powerful bit where a lot of people struggle, they presumably fell off anyway because this is where the route really earns its grade. Thankfully holds were not cut on this section as well. Any action that leads to any form of hold improvement is clearly an absolute no, no. And actual hold cutting is just wanton vandalism, and shows a complete lack of respect for the environment and other climbers. At outcrops which are SSSI it could be unlawful and liable to prosecution, and if that happened the SDST and no doubt the BMC as well would assist in bringing about justice. If hold cutting happens again, the climbing fraternity will be entitled to bring the culprits to task – and rightly so.

CHOOSING A GRADE

We all know it is subjective, and some climbs are infuriatingly undergraded. Of course we like the flatteringly overgraded climbs, good for the ego and all that. But if you are mostly used to the climbing wall grading system, do you really know how to interpret your normal climbing standard to sandstone?

When you first touch the sandy stuff the often rounded handholds and sometimes slopy footholds can be a very different experience from those nice sticky out coloured holds at climbing walls. So firstly, get familiar with the traits of sandstone holds and the climbing techniques which can be unique to sandstone by going for a climb graded slightly under what you are used to at the climbing wall.

You will more than likely get up it and start to like the stuff. If you begin by choosing a climb graded at your wall standard, you stand a good chance of getting pissed off with sandstone pretty quickly. Of course you knew climbing wall grades are different from sandstone anyway. If you are happy on 6a's at the wall for instance, you should be looking at 5a/5b on sandstone. A major cause of rock erosion is climbers spending too much time on routes they can't get up, a style known as dogging, and definitely not good. It also leads to the hogging of routes, again very unpopular at our crowded crags. So get to understand the grades, find climbs that are right for your ability, get up the routes in good style, and enjoy a great days climbing.



Please wipe your feet

Finding the footholds sandy and giving you grief? Well that is most probably because the climber before you did not clean their boots before setting foot on the rock. How annoying and inconsiderate. But there is a much more important reason why boots should be clean and free of sand before they touch their first footholds, that is because if they are not, your boots have an abrasive affect more akin to brushing the rock with sandpaper. That abrasion wears the outer parts of the footholds and makes them even more slopey and difficult to use. So for those of you that tend not to wipe your boots before heading vertical, please make sure that you do, because you will find the footholds more positive and the climbing more enjoyable. You will have seen climbers using mats and rags for the purpose, it is all part of the scene that is the sandstone climbing ethic.

Clean feet, starting the Mank, Harrison's

You've climbed at the rest Why we pay for the best

The garden of the High Rocks Inn, once a hotel and now a 'function' venue, contains some of the most inspiring sandstone climbs.

It undoubtedly has some of the longest and greatest challenges such as Infidel, Krait Arete, Second Generation and Chimaera.

High Rocks also stands out as a fine crack venue and is also popular for its bouldering. So why would anyone want to jeopardise access to this paradise? It's a good question. Climbers are historically in the rambler's camp, free open access to everywhere.

The BMC, having owned Stone Farm Rocks and Harrison's for a while has designated both outcrops as Open Access land. Bowles and High Rocks though are accepted as anomalies to the free access ideal.

Bowles is a private outdoor centre, and charges for its facilities and that is not a lot different from climbing walls. High Rocks has always charged for access to its fine historic gardens, most of its visitors being tourists.

Naturally climbers have paid too, and this has generally been accepted. There have however been times when access to climb at High Rocks has come perilously close to being lost, largely due to the actions of a small minority of climbers who have entered through a hole in the fence (either existing or created by themselves) and by doing so avoid having to pay.

Season tickets have proved popular, even at the current rate of £45 for a year.



Chris Arnold on Moving Staircase, High Rocks

However, problems have still occurred with climbers ignoring the access arrangements, damaging the fencing, and being abusive to High Rocks staff. This has put access to climbing at High Rocks under the spotlight. The access arrangements have been carefully negotiated by climbers for years, and climbers are asked to respect those access conditions. Failure to do so will simply result in access being put at risk. The owner of High Rocks is quite capable of banning climbing there and has the resources to enforce it.

The climbing community has a good relationship with the owner and hopefully we are a long way from that occurring, but it could eventually happen if even a handful of climbers persistently abuse the access arrangements. So please, do not put access at risk... call in

at the bar when you arrive and get a ticket, if you are planning to climb there a lot take advantage of a season ticket.

It is fairly simple really, ignoring the access arrangements is effectively sticking two fingers up at the local climbers who have negotiated with the owner and who constantly work to ensure sandstone's ultimate test pieces are there for everybody. If you do not like the concept of paying to climb, there is plenty of good climbing to be found for free at other outcrops.

Read also the article on UK Climbing

<http://www.ukclimbing.com/articles/page.php?id=2624>

The Steve Durkin Sandstone Trust launched

The Steve Durkin Sandstone Trust is an innovative creation to safeguard the future of Southern Sandstone and will seek to protect both the crag environment and the right to climb on it.

The sandstone of the Central Weald is extremely fragile and climbers have long respected and cared for the rock and its natural environment by joining forces with organisations such as Natural England, English Heritage and local Wildlife Trusts.

Climbers in the south east regularly visit around twenty or so key outcrops but have unfettered access to only two, Harrison's Rocks and Stone Farm Rocks both of which are owned by the BMC. Other crags are situated on land where climbers do not have free right of access and these include popular and important outcrops such as Bowles, High Rocks, Eridge Green and Bull's Hollow.

By developing good relationships with landowners over a few decades access to these fantastic outcrops continues and will hopefully do so for many years to come. There is, however, no guarantee this happy relationship will continue forever.

The Trust was set up following a unique event when a firm of solicitors administering a will presented BMC Harrison's warden Chris Tullis with a cheque for a significant sum and at a subsequent open meeting, local sandstoners decided to set up a charitable trust that would aim to encourage similar bequests and fund raising to support continued conservation and access work. No doubt the person who made that original bequest had a great appreciation of the tranquillity, beauty and unique qualities of Harrison's Rocks and probably its peaceful setting meant something special to them.

The grand idea got the impetus it deserved when a recently retired local climber Steve Durkin applied his skills. In March 2010 the inception of the Sandstone Charitable Trust was announced to a large audience at a BMC dinner organised to celebrate its purchase of Harrison's and to laud local volunteers.

The administrative burden of forming the Trust was diligently carried out by Steve Durkin, known to locals as Buzzard, tragically he died following a short fight against cancer before the Trust was finalised.

When Buzzard agreed to help with setting up the Trust, he could not possibly have imagined he would be the first to provide for it in his will and of course a whip round at his funeral also boosted the coffers. It was quickly decided that the Trust should be renamed to honour him.

The Trust will establish an initial fund mainly to finance minor works typical of previous conservation projects.



Steve 'Buzzard' Durkin

As the fund grows, it is anticipated more ambitious ventures can be undertaken, perhaps even leading to securing permanent access to certain outcrops. The hope is that when climbers hear about the Trust and recognise the good work its doing, they will make financial donations on a regular basis. For many it will be a way of putting something back in to a world which has been a fundamental part of their lives.

The Trust which is an accountable legal entity is administered by five local climbers on a voluntary basis. They have a long history of being involved with the conservation of the rocks and preserving access. The Trustees are Graham Adcock, Nigel Head, Tim Skinner, Sarah Cullen and Tim Daniells. Graham spearheads much of the conservation work on Sandstone. Nigel has been climbing on Sandstone for over forty years and is a long serving member of the

Harrison's Rocks Management Group (HRMG), Tim Skinner is chair of HRMG and an active local club member, Sarah is a local instructor and Tim Daniells is a former Sandstone guidebook writer, a former Chair of the BMC London and South East Area and was heavily involved in the successful access agreement at Eridge Green. The Trust is independent of other bodies, but will naturally work closely with the British Mountaineering Council. All of the Trustees climb regularly on sandstone.

The future of sandstone climbing at some outcrops is uncertain and it is imperative that we look after our precious and fragile crags. Money from public bodies is going to be hard to come by for the next few years, maybe forever. It is now time to be resourceful and independent by creating a fund that will go a long way to protecting the crags we hold so dear. Eventually the Trust may have enough money to underpin longer lasting access arrangements, even possibly going as far as actually acquiring outcrops.

If you like the idea of being part of this initiative, then please do make a contribution to it. Large or small, it doesn't matter, even a fiver will make a difference. Simply write a cheque made out to the Steve Durkin Sandstone Trust and send it to Nigel Head at Gaythorne, Wilsley Pound, Cranbrook, Kent, TN17 2HR.

Or even easier, make a one off standing order payment to Barclays Bank a/c no. 33895521 sort code 20-88-13.

And don't forget to visit the website – www.sdst.org.uk for all the latest information.

