

Access and the Crag Environment in the North West

When I started climbing in the mid-sixties there were only nine climbs in Lancashire described in any guidebook. Now, in the area covered by the recent reprint, there are well over 3,000. This is a valuable recreational resource for climbers in the North West, but unfortunately, many of the climbs and crags in our area need constant attention in order to prevent them becoming overgrown. The impact of this can be disappointment when climbers find a '*starred*' route wet and choked with vegetation, and as such climbs become neglected, the situation becomes steadily worse.

In the past, attempts to organise crag clean ups have been patchy and limited, so that the rate of attrition has far exceeded the rate of restoration. This is a great pity, for it means that we are steadily losing some valuable climbing (or at least losing some of its quality). However, when one looks at the underlying logistics, it appears that we should have ample resources to deal with this problem very effectively. For example, it is estimated that there are over 15,000 climbers in the North West, so that if 50% of the climbs need cleaning up (a very, very pessimistic estimate), this could be achieved if only one out of ten climbers cleaned up one route.

Whilst past performance on maintaining our crag environment may have been poor, I am very pleased to note that there have recently been some very successful clean ups during which large numbers of climbers have spent a couple of hours of their time to improve the climbing at several crags. Those that participated appeared to enjoy the work and felt that they had contributed to improving Lancs climbing. The results have been impressive and some of the improvements in the past year are listed below:

- Egerton: Trees removed from large areas in front of the rock to give more light and generally dry out the rock. Several routes cleaned up and new climbs established.
- Wilton 2: Routes cleaned, overgrown top-outs cleared, rubbish removed
- Fairy Steps: Trees removed from foot of crag and parts of crag cleaned up. Some additional climbs on previously overgrown walls. Crag much drier.
- Warton Pinnacle Crag: Trees and bushes removed from foot of crag to greatly improve aspect of the climbs.

I would like to ask for the help of all climbers in the North West in building on these successes. Accordingly, I would like to mention six ways that climbers could support our efforts to improve the environment in which we climb. **Please play your part and don't just leave it to others, and don't rely on other climbers to maintain the crags for your benefit.**

1. **Keep to access arrangements:** We have an excellent record of keeping to voluntary access restrictions, but in some respects we could do better. This is particularly true for arrangements that have been made to protect the crag, such as abseiling restrictions to prevent erosion. I would also like to ask you all to be proactive in asking other climbers to follow any access rules that have been developed. Otherwise, the few selfish climbers spoil it for the rest of us. For example, last year when we were struggling to keep Witches

Qy open, climbers who asked others to keep to the parking rules were subjected to abuse, when they should have been supported by the other climbers in the quarry. Climbers should note that Witches is a sensitive site and it took several years and a lot of hard work to re-establish climbing after previous problems.

2. **Don't leave litter:** Even biodegradable items such as banana skins or orange peel take several months to disperse, so please take **ALL** your litter home. Better still, put a plastic bag in your sack and pick up the odd item.

3. **Clean as you climb:** By far the easiest way to keep climbs clean is to remove small bits of vegetation **before** they take hold. So, if you come across a muddy ledge, or a bit of vegetation on a hold, remove it, or give your second a tight rope and whilst he clears it. It is particularly important to remove self seeded saplings etc. at the earliest possible time. An innocuous sapling at the foot of a route this year, may become a major problem in a few years. Most importantly, if left, seedlings in sandy breaks can eventually lead to substantial rockfalls as a tree becomes too heavy to be sustained.

4. **Come along to one of our clean up days:** Currently we have plans for two clean ups in June:

- Saturday June 2nd at Wilton 1: To clean up the Allotment and Pitface Areas
- Saturday June 30th at Egerton: A major clean up in the morning, followed by climbing in the afternoon and then a barbecue, during which there will be a relatively informal area meeting.

5. **Do your own clean up:** There are several things that need doing in the area, including route clean ups and litter drives. However, please do not undertake any major works, or the removal of any trees that are more than 4" in diameter, without first talking to me, so that I can get the landowners consent. The following are things that need doing for which we have permission. However, could you please give me feedback if you do any of this work:

- Anglezarke: Clean up of Whittaker's Almanac after rockfall.
- Anglezarke: Removal of tree that is hanging on the cable in Supai Corner.
- Anglezarke: Moving cut down wood below Left Walls and forming habitat piles.
- Anglezarke: Clean up of tops above Nowhere Man
- Lester Mill: Removal of saplings at foot of climbs.
- Wilton 1: Removal of sapling at foot of The Prow.

6. **Replace rusting pegs:** Many of the pegs that have been placed in the Lancs quarries are now decades old and some are paper thin, but it is difficult to keep track of these. Furthermore, it becomes costly and very time consuming if pegs are only replaced by a limited number of climbers. So, if you come across any such pegs, it would be really helpful if you would either return and insert a replacement peg, or else let me know that replacement is needed.

Les Ainsworth