

Draft Bolting Policy - October 2015

There is a rich heritage of 'adventure' or 'traditional' climbing in Ireland and Mountaineering Ireland endorses the view, widely held among Irish climbers, that traditional climbing is the primary ethic of climbing in Ireland.

The objective of this policy is to protect traditional values and venues (including those venues still to be discovered) while recognising that the development of some sport climbing sites is acceptable to the Irish climbing community – within the context of a clear overall ethical framework.

The popularity of indoor wall climbing (and its obvious affinity with sport climbing) has led, for many people, to a casual familiarity with bolts as part of the overall climbing experience. For some it has led to a questioning of the lack of bolt facilitated crag climbing in Ireland. Over the last number of years there has been some confusion regarding where bolts might be deemed acceptable. This policy aims to provide clarity on this question by presenting some of the broader climbing context and by detailing the variety of issues that relate to bolting.

The ethics and values of traditional climbing on this island grew out of the strong mountaineering heritage shared with Britain. While these ethics and values have evolved over the decades it should be borne in mind that Ireland, unlike England, Scotland and Wales, has a very limited stock of climbable rock and an even smaller stock of rock presenting the characteristics usually associated with sport climbing crags.

Traditional climbing venues:

It must be recognised that placing bolts alters the rock permanently and may limit the aspirations of future generations of Irish climbers. Established **traditional climbing venues should be bolt free**. Self-rescue and descent without fixed equipment are all part of the adventurous nature of trad climbing and the placing of a bolt on a route or on a belay devalues the trad climbing experience for others. Newly discovered crags with the potential for adequate natural protection should be developed as trad venues e.g. bolt free.

Sport climbing venues:

Bolting has environmental, legal and access implications not generally associated with traditional climbing. Attention needs to be paid, in particular, to the legal situation in Ireland.

Crags where there is an overall lack of natural placements for protection could be agreed as suitable for development for sport climbing, provided that the following conditions are met:

- The landowner is made aware of the legal situation and gives informed consent. [See 1 below]
- The development of the crag is carried out in an environmentally sensitive way to minimise any adverse effect on flora and fauna. This is particularly important where there is a nature conservation designation on the site. [See 2 below]
- There is consultation with interested climbers at local and national level before any action is taken.
- The bolting follows current best practice.

Personal Responsibility and Self Regulation:

Mountaineering Ireland recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants should be aware of these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Safety in climbing is a self-assessing and self-regulating system. The quality of in situ bolts on a sport climb can vary and climbers should make their own risk assessment of any in situ protection they choose to use.

Styles of climbing are developed by climbers themselves. This development is not organised, regulated or governed but has evolved within the climbing community. The safeguarding of the heritage and core values of climbing and mountaineering is strongly supported by Mountaineering Ireland.

[1] The legal situation:

Mountaineering Ireland has received a considered legal option which makes a distinction between bolted sports crags and traditional crags. A series of bolts permanently fixed to the land could in law be regarded as a 'structure'. The 1995 Occupiers' Liability Act imposes a duty on landowners to maintain any structures on their land in a safe condition. Therefore the bolting of a crag could increase the landowner's legal responsibility towards climbers using that crag. This additional burden of responsibility is something most landowners would not wish to undertake; to impose this on a landowner without their full understanding of the situation would be unfair, and could result in adverse publicity for the climbing community and the loss of access at this and other climbing venues.

The landowner(s) permission should be sought; they should be made aware of the additional legal responsibilities associated with bolted routes on their land, and arrangements should be put in place to relieve the landowner(s) of this responsibility.

[2] Environmental considerations:

Republic of Ireland - Contact the National Parks & Wildlife Service ranger in your area for advice about environment sensitivity, see:

<http://www.npws.ie/sites/default/files/general/Regional%20contacts%20Sept.2013.pdf>. To identify if an area is designated for nature conservation, go to www.npws.ie, choose the 'Maps and Data' tab then select an area on the Map Viewer, or search by county and townland.

Northern Ireland – Contact the Biodiversity section or the Conservation, Designation and Protection section within Northern Ireland Environment Agency, see <http://www.doeni.gov.uk/niea/index/about-niea/where2findus.htm>. For information on areas in Northern Ireland that are protected for nature conservation go to www.doeni.gov.uk/niea and choose the 'Protected Areas' tab. A detailed map viewer is available on <http://maps.ehsni.gov.uk/naturalheritage/default.aspx>.