



Bolting policy – 2016

Mountaineering Ireland endorses the view, widely held among Irish climbers, that traditional climbing is the predominant climbing style on the island of Ireland. The ethics and values of traditional climbing have developed from a strong mountaineering heritage.

The objective of the Bolting Policy is to protect the traditional climbing style and venues of the Irish climbing community, while at the same time allowing for the development of sport climbing venues.

This policy was drafted in consultation with the Irish climbing community, and is representative of the general sentiment of that community.

Protection of traditional climbing style

The placement of bolts permanently alters the essential character of a climb; this may limit the aspirations of current and future generations of Irish climbers. It should be accepted that some rock will remain unclimbed by the current generation.

Self-rescue and descent without the placement and use of bolts are all part of the adventurous nature of traditional climbing, the placement of bolts alters this experience for other climbers.

Protection of traditional climbing venues

Established traditional climbing venues should be maintained free from bolts. This includes the placement of bolts on already established climbs (retro-bolting), the placement of bolts on newly established climbs within the venue and the placement of bolts for the purpose of descent.

Newly discovered crags with the potential for adequate natural protection should be developed as traditional climbing venues, that is without the placement of bolts.

Development of sport climbing venues

Rock which is suitable for climbing is a limited resource on the island of Ireland. Within this limited resource there is an even more limited stock of rock which presents with characteristics suitable for the development of sport climbing venues.

The development of sport climbing venues requires consideration of additional environmental and legal issues beyond those associated with traditional climbing. A potential climbing venue where there is an overall lack of natural placements for protection could be deemed as suitable for development as a sport climbing venue, provided that the following conditions are met:

1. The landowner gives informed consent for the development based on an understanding of:
 - a. The nature of the development.
 - b. The legal situation pertaining to the placement of bolts. [See Appendix 1 below]
 - c. The potential for increased demand for access to the land due to the development.
2. The development of the crag is carried out in an environmentally sensitive way to minimise any adverse effect on flora and fauna, this includes checking with the nature conservation authority as many potential climbing areas, and the species that live there, are protected by legislation. [See Appendix 2 below]
3. There is consultation with interested climbers at local and national level (Mountaineering Ireland) prior to any development.
4. The placement of bolts is consistent with current best practice given the specific environment in which the bolts are placed.

Personal responsibility

Mountaineering Ireland recognises that climbing is an activity with a danger of personal injury or death. All climbers should be aware of these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

Mountaineering Ireland recognises that the reliability of bolts on a sport climb can vary. All climbers make their own risk assessment of bolts they choose to use.

All climbing should be conducted with respect for the rock itself, the crag environment, landowners and other users of the area.

Appendix 1 - Legal considerations

All land is owned, and as recreational users we use that land with the goodwill of the landowner, not out of legal right. It is important therefore that all climbers help to protect this goodwill. Much greater consideration is required in the development of sport climbing venues.

Mountaineering Ireland has received a considered legal opinion which makes a distinction between bolted sport crags and traditional crags, and could increase the potential liability of landowners and occupiers. This is the legal advice in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland.

Section 4.4 of the 1995 Occupiers' Liability Act imposes a duty on 'occupiers' to maintain in a safe condition any 'structures' on their land which have been provided for use primarily by recreational users. The 'occupier' is the person(s) exercising control over land, so the landowner is almost always an occupier. While it is untested at this time, a series of bolts permanently fixed to the land could be argued to be a 'structure'. 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 be aware of or 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. Traditional crags will never constitute a 'structure' in this sense and are free of this particular legal risk.

Appendix 2 - Environmental considerations

These apply to all climbing venues.

Republic of Ireland - To check if an area is designated under nature conservation legislation, go to <http://www.npws.ie>, choose the 'Maps and Data' tab, then select an area on the Map Viewer, or search by county and townland. Contact the National Parks & Wildlife Service Ranger in your area for advice about the environmental sensitivity of climbing venues (designated or non-designated), see: <http://www.npws.ie/contact-us> for list of local NPWS contact numbers.

Northern Ireland – To identify areas that are legally protected for nature conservation go to <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/topics>, choose 'Land and Landscapes' and then 'Protected Areas'. A detailed map viewer is available on <http://maps.ehnsi.gov.uk/naturalheritage/default.aspx>. Alternatively contact the Biodiversity section or the Conservation, Designation and Protection Unit within Northern Ireland Environment Agency, see <https://www.doeni.gov.uk/>.