



Climbing Development Guidelines





A first ascent on Camaderry, Wicklow.

**“
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Introduction

The Climbing Development Guidelines aim to inform climbers wishing to develop climbing areas.

For the purpose of these guidelines the development of climbing areas refers to the development of entirely new climbing areas, a significant development at an existing climbing area and the redevelopment of a previously used, but now unused climbing area. Essentially, situations where the development work may result in a significant increase to the number of climbers coming to the area.

Establishing new climbs as an integral part of the climbing experience can be considered separately from the more involved process set out in these guidelines. Given solid, clean rock, with adequate opportunities for protection, the process is straightforward – find a new line, climb it and record it.

The guidelines recognise that a balance must be struck between the development of climbing areas, the rights of landowners, the natural environment, and climbing ethics.

These guidelines are a gathering of the collective knowledge and expertise of those who currently develop climbing areas as well as practitioners in relevant legal and environmental fields. The information is not exhaustive, nor is it binding, it is only intended to assist. If at any point you require further information or assistance, please contact Mountaineering Ireland.

Research

Having found what you think could be a new climbing area, it is worth spending time doing some background research.

What is the climbing potential of the area?

How extensive is it?

How popular could it be?

Is it a new climbing area, or a previously used one that has become disused?

Why has it become disused?

Will not getting your name in a guidebook as a first ascentist matter to you?

Is the area used by other people for recreation?

Is there a parking area and paths?

How will climbing impact other users?

What is the landowner's opinion of recreational users?

Are you starting afresh or is there a history of access, good or bad?

Occupiers' Liability Legislation

It is a fundamental principle that climbers are responsible for assessing and managing the risks that are inherent in climbing – including loose rock and the suitability of any protection whether fixed or not.

Many landowners will be happy to provide access to develop a climbing area. Others may be reluctant due to concerns that they might be held responsible if someone was injured while climbing on their land.

The law recognises that people enter onto private land to engage in recreation activities and that this should not place a burden of responsibility on landowners. A study carried out on behalf of Sport Northern Ireland in 2011 on occupiers' liability case law, and cases settled out of court in Britain and Ireland over the previous twenty years, showed that not a single case has emerged of a successful claim related to the informal recreational use of the natural environment.

Mountaineering Ireland's insurance policy for members contains public liability cover that protects landowners against claims arising from the negligence of our members; it does not cover the landowner's negligence or protect the landowner against claims from those who are not members of Mountaineering Ireland.

The following is a summary of the legislation in each jurisdiction. It is for general guidance and does not claim to be an exhaustive statement of the law.

Mountaineering Ireland recognises that hillwalking, climbing and rambling are activities that can be dangerous and may result in personal injury or death. Participants should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.

The Mountaineering Ireland Participation Statement

Developers with a query relating to liability and insurance should contact Mountaineering Ireland.

Northern Ireland

In Northern Ireland, occupiers' liability issues are considered under two pieces of legislation:

OCCUPIERS' LIABILITY ACT (NI) 1957

The 1957 Act says landowners owe a "common duty of care" to all visitors who come onto land by invitation of the landowner or who are permitted to be there. The duty is to take care over the state of the land so that visitors will be reasonably safe in using it for the intended or permitted purposes. However, the Act also provides that this duty does not impose any obligation on a landowner to a visitor who willingly accepts risks – like the risks encountered by climbers.

OCCUPIERS' LIABILITY (NI) ORDER 1987

The 1987 Order concerns situations where there is no permission to be on the land. The 1987 Order provides that no duty is owed by the landowner to any person in respect of risks willingly accepted as his by that person.

Developers of sports climbing areas in Northern Ireland should be aware that Mountaineering Ireland has received legal advice that bolting is likely to create a liability for the occupier of the land.

Republic of Ireland

In the Republic of Ireland, the Occupiers' Liability Act 1995 provides that the landowners' duty of care to a recreational user is:

"not to intentionally injure that person or damage the property of the person, nor act with reckless disregard for the person or the property of the person".

It is worth noting that under the Occupiers' Liability Act 1995 the duty of care can be extended. For example, where a "structure" has been provided for use primarily by recreational users, the occupier has a duty to take reasonable care to maintain the structure in a safe condition. If any structures are put in place specifically to facilitate access to a climbing area, then a programme of inspection and maintenance should be agreed in advance with the landowner so as to minimise the landowner's exposure to risk.

Developers of sports climbing areas in the Republic of Ireland should be aware that Mountaineering Ireland has received legal advice that, in the context of the Occupiers' Liability Act 1995, bolts may constitute a "structure", and thereby require a maintenance regime. On the other hand, Mountaineering Ireland has also received legal advice that solitary pitons, stuck gear, in-situ abseil points, all common in trad climbing venues, would not constitute a "structure".



Access

Your actions will affect relationships with landowners. A good relationship with a landowner is essential in order to secure access to the area you intend to develop.

All land on the island of Ireland is owned, either privately or by the public sector. Climbers enjoy access due to the goodwill and tolerance of landowners.

There is no general right of access to land. Even if the land is unfenced and looks unoccupied, you do not have an automatic right of access. Some land is jointly owned by several people, this is known as a commonage.

For coastal climbing, sea-cliffs are generally owned by the owner of the land above the cliffs.

Prior to beginning any work make enquiries to find out who is the landowner. Ownership can be checked online:

REPUBLIC OF IRELAND

landdirect.ie

NORTHERN IRELAND

finance-ni.gov.uk/topics/land-registration/land-registry

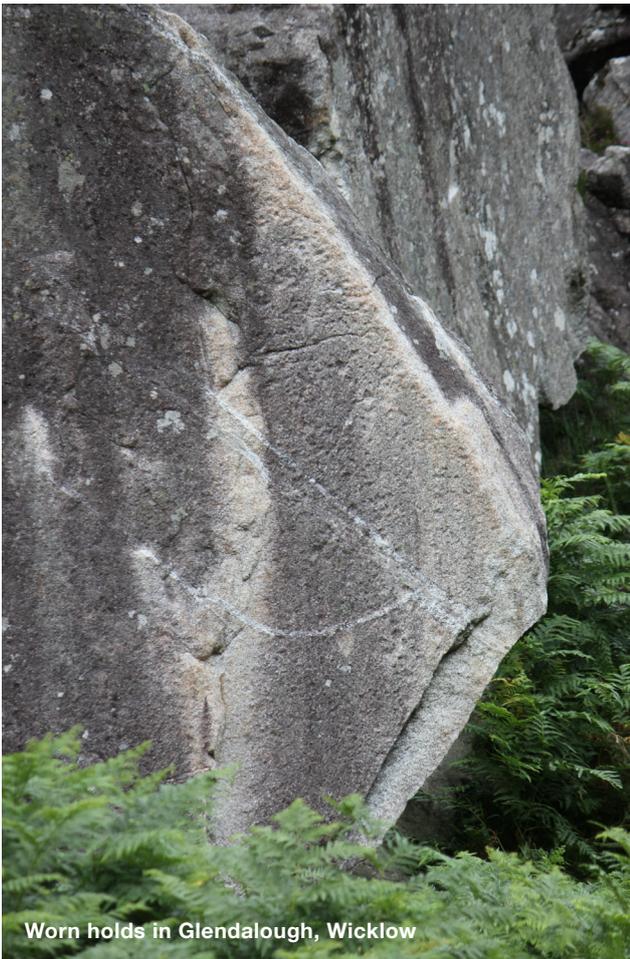
When meeting with a landowner, your aim is to secure informed consent for the development of a climbing area on their land.

The landowner gives informed consent for the development based on an understanding of:

- The nature of the development.
- The legal situation pertaining to the placement of bolts.
- The potential for increased demand for access to the land due to the development.

Your actions as a developer can affect relationships with other landowners. An open and honest relationship with the landowner is essential. Inconsiderate or dishonest actions may not only jeopardise access at the area you intend to develop, it also reflects on the entire climbing community and could result in a loss of access in other areas too.

It may be helpful to discuss your plans with the nearest Rural Recreation Officer (RoI), the Countryside Officer (NI) or with Mountaineering Ireland.



Worn holds in Glendalough, Wicklow



A nesting fulmar



The approach to Great Gully Ridge, Wicklow

Environment

You have the responsibility to be aware of and attempt to minimise the impact of your work and subsequent climbing on the environment.

Protected Sites

Due to their unique and/or sensitive nature, certain sites have designations which are intended to provide increased protection. These sites may contain legally protected habitats or rare or endangered species of plants and animals. Activity that negatively impacts on these sites is prohibited by law.

The location of protected sites is mapped on the following websites:

Republic of Ireland, National Parks and Wildlife Service, npws.ie/protected-sites

Northern Ireland Environment Agency's Natural Environment Map Viewer, apps.dpera-ni.gov.uk/nedmapviewer

Contact the relevant authority in advance if you

intend to carry out any work in an area which falls within any of these designations.

Birds

Your work may negatively impact on nesting birds. It is particularly important to avoid disturbance during the breeding season, generally accepted as being from the beginning of March until the end of August. It is illegal to disturb nesting birds regardless of the time of year.

When breeding birds are disturbed, they may exhibit behaviour such as circling around, dive bombing, calling or acting in an agitated manner. If you see any of these behaviours stop your work.

If parents leave a nest for an extended period, the eggs can fail, or the chicks may die.



Plants and Trees

It is worth considering the impact that your work may have on the plants and trees in the surrounding area.

Although a little pruning may be acceptable in certain circumstances, it is illegal to cut down any tree over 10 years of age without a felling licence, and it is illegal to cut trees or standing vegetation between 28th February and 1st September as it could affect nesting birds.

For advice on any environmental matters related to an area you intend to develop, you can contact your local National Parks and Wildlife Services ranger or the Northern Ireland Environment Agency, as appropriate.

For further advice and information, please contact Mountaineering Ireland.

Parking & Paths

Whether it is an entirely new venue without any parking or paths, or an existing venue with some facilities already in place, you should consider if there will be a significant increase to the volume of traffic.

A designated parking area that keeps impacts to a minimum and is sustainable over time is the goal, even if it adds some distance to the approach.

For existing venues with established paths, consider whether the path is robust enough to withstand any potential increase in foot traffic. At new venues, aim to develop a single path to help prevent habitat erosion.

By working with the landowner to determine the best solutions for them, the environment and other land users, it should be possible for the venue to be enjoyed sustainably by all for years to come.

Dogs

The climbing area may be on farmland, or you may have to cross farmland to reach it. The landowner's attitude towards dogs on their property must always be respected.

In wilder areas, animals often go unseen by people, but just because we do not see them does not mean that they are not there. Disturbance of wildlife by dogs should be avoided.



Climbing Ethics

For the purpose of these guidelines, we acknowledge three climbing styles; trad climbing, bouldering and sport climbing. Individual climbers will interpret each of the styles differently. A piece of rock that is a trad climbing route for one climber may be a high-ball boulder problem for another. One climber's potential sport climbing route may be considered a bold trad climbing route by someone else. How we choose to climb is largely our own decision.

We need to consult with other climbers where our personal actions will affect them. An example of such a situation is the placement of bolts for protection and descent.

Trad climbing is the default style. Only when trad climbing has been ruled out as an option can the placement of bolts and thus the development of a sports climbing venue be considered.

The placement of bolts at trad climbing venues for either protection or descent runs contrary to the accepted ethics of climbers on the island of Ireland.

If you are in doubt as to whether the area you intend to develop is more suitable as a sport climbing venue, you should seek the advice of other climbers. Mountaineering Ireland will also be available to give advice.



Cleaning a slab in Wicklow



Preparing a new route in Fair Head, Antrim

Preparing New Climbs

Once the important work of securing access, considering the environmental impact as well as factoring in parking and paths has been completed, the task of preparing the new climbs can begin.

Depending on the rock quality, vegetation, the style of climbing etc. the amount of work needed will vary significantly.

Here is a brief list of some of the factors and steps that you may have to consider and carry out:

CLEANING

Remove loose rock that could pose a safety risk to you as you clean the climb and to subsequent climbers.

Remove only as much soil as necessary from cracks to allow for climbing and placement of protection.

Do not remove trees; some pruning may be appropriate.

Remove plants only as necessary after checking to ensure they are not rare or protected.

Aim to identify the holds and features which may be necessary and clean these as appropriate.

Maintaining the texture and friction of the rock is critical.

IMPROVING HOLDS

Do not improve holds by chipping, filing etc.

GLUING HOLDS

Critical holds may be glued in place.

PITONS

Historically the placement of pitons has been accepted. However, as climbing equipment has evolved, they are now viewed as a last resort.



Brushing the chalk off a hold in Glendalough, Wicklow



A good example of minimal cleaning

BOLTS

The placement of bolts at sport climbing venues should follow current best practice.

For detailed information on the placement of bolts please read the BMC's Bolt Guidance Document Part 2: *An Installers Guide*.

Bolts are not to be placed at trad climbing venues.

Record details of bolting and put in place a schedule of inspection.

LANDINGS

Using multiple bouldering mats will give safe landings in most cases.

Any work on landings should be kept to a minimum. Only use materials, such as branches already on the ground, from the immediate vicinity that blend in with the natural environment.

DESCENTS

If an abseil descent is required, trees and boulders can be used as anchors.

A doubled-up length of static rope and a mallion provides a suitable solution for abseiling whilst minimising damage to the tree.

CLOSED PROJECTS

Having invested time, effort and sometimes money into developing a climbing area, it is generally accepted that you will be given priority on claiming first ascents if you request it.

If you do not climb all the routes or boulder problems immediately, you have the right to deem them as a 'closed project' for a limited period. By using any of the various communication methods available and leaving

a tag at the base of the climb, other climbers will know that the line is a 'closed project'.

RECORDING

When recording new routes and boulder problems, provide details of the location and brief details to allow identification, providing photographs where possible. Keep descriptions concise, but with enough information to find, climb, and descend.

When assigning a grade, it may be worth considering the style in which it was first climbed and the style in which subsequent climbers may attempt it.

New routes can be submitted to local guidebook authors or to Irish Climbing Route Database on climbing.ie.

New boulder problems can be submitted to local guidebook authors or to The Short Span website: theshortspan.com.



Bouldering in the Mourne, Down

Maintenance

When the hard work of developing a new area is complete, it is worth considering some maintenance in order to keep it climbable.

Here are some points to think about. How can you pre-empt any issues that may arise?

RELATIONSHIP WITH THE LANDOWNER

What is the best way to maintain a positive relationship?

CLIMBER BEHAVIOUR

Have there been any issues with people's behaviour at the venue, how can these be addressed?

PARKING AND PATHS

Is the parking area big enough, robust enough?

Are the paths in good repair?

CLEANING THE ROCK

Do any of the climbs need regular cleaning? Is there a build-up of chalk?

BOLTS

How often should the bolts be inspected?

PITONS

Do pitons need to be replaced?

ROPE ANCHORS

Do rope anchors used for descent need to be replaced?

LITTER PICKS

Is there any build-up of litter?

PROMOTION

Do people know about the area?

Mountaineering Ireland is here to help

The development an entirely new climbing area, significant development of existing area or the redevelopment of places that have become overgrown is of huge benefit to the entire climbing community. It is an undertaking that will often involve a lot of time and effort. Mountaineering Ireland is here to help and support this work which is so vital for the entire climbing community. If at any stage, you need some help or support please get in contact, we are here to help_