

"To Bolt Or Not To Be"

by the UIAA Mountaineering Commission

Foreword

Most mountaineers and climbers regard our activity as a freedom sport, in other words it is free of rules and regulations, we are free to do it where we like, when we like and with anyone we choose. But this is not quite correct. We have a code of ethics and behaviour in mountains involving respect for the natural environment and consideration for others involved in our sport. Although strictly speaking these are not rules but concepts that have been accepted by most of us for many years and largely they are respected and work well.

Debates between mountaineers and climbers about the ethics of the use of protection techniques have been continuous and I am proud that the UIAA Mountaineering Commission together with the German and Austrian Alpine Clubs have clarified these concepts on their use. We hope that this will find a common ground between climbers who want most climbs bolted to climbers having a more purist approach discounting any use of bolts.

We are a tolerant society and I hope that these suggestions offer an acceptable compromise that we can all use in the future.

Good climbing.

Ian McNaught-Davis, UIAA President

Preface

" You, who are on your road
must have a code
that you can live by
and so become yourself

because the past
is just a goodbye. "

Graham Nash

The message of the popular Crosby, Stills, Nash & Young song "Teach" could provide a suitable background for implementing this document. The "Recommendations for the redevelopment and first ascents of rock climbing routes in alpine regions" are based on the principle of voluntary participation. They represent a compromise between the factions supporting and opposing the use of bolts and are meant to be future-oriented guidelines for dealing with the resource "mountain".

The following people cooperated on this project:

Stefan Beulke, German Mountain Guide Association
Alexander Huber, professional climber
Nicholas Mailänder, DAV
Andreas Orgler, climber and mountain guide
Robert Renzler, OeAV
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I would like to thank them for their enthusiasm and perseverance during the extensive discussions - especially Nicholas Mailänder, who served as the "spiritus rector" in our work group. Many thanks also to Michael Olzowy, chairman of the DAV-section Bayerland, for organising two public discussions on the topic which brought together leading climbers from various countries and included such celebrities as Reinhold Messner.

Robert Renzler, President of the UIAA Mountaineering Commission, project-coordinator

**Recommendations for redevelopment
and first ascents of rock climbing
routes in alpine regions**

1. Introduction

This document was produced in response to requests from national mountaineering associations for advice on the use of fixed equipment. The views held on this subject are strong ones (see UIAA Bulletin 3/98 "Mountains in Steel and Iron"). Some organisations were becoming concerned that without a clear consensus between climbers and mountaineers, other institutions would attempt to impose regulations on our activities. In some alpine regions major disputes arose between "plaisir " climbers and "purists", climbers favouring a traditional style of mountaineering and climbing. The dispute sparked off a vicious circle of bolt chopping, retrobolting and repeated chopping on certain routes. At the request of the UIAA Mountaineering Commission, in 1998 the Austrian and German Alpine Clubs, who were already discussing the topic, set up a work group to a draft position paper. A wide range of views were considered by the group. Also, information was presented at meetings like ENSA in Chamonix on November 12-13, 1998, about the use of bolts in the Mont Blanc range. The document was then presented to the 1999 International Winter Climbing Meet and Seminar in Aviemore, Scotland. This meeting was attended by over 100 climbers from 28 countries, who unanimously supported the paper. It called on climbers world-wide to consider the paper in detail so that a firm consensus based on good practice could be established and the freedom to pursue our activities protected.

The document was finally adopted by the UIAA Council in May 2000, during the meeting in Plas y Brenin, Wales.

2. Preamble

Climbing is a popular lifetime sport, characterised by lasting human relationships, direct contact with nature and the intensity of the physical activity. Climbing is a stabilising factor for many people providing a sense of meaning. From the sociopolitical point of view, climbing contributes to public health by counteracting the effects of a lack of physical activity. In addition psychologists and educationalists have recognized that climbing in the outdoors promotes positive character traits like reliability, a sense of responsibility and the ability to work in teams.

Climbing in the mountains provides a chance - especially for young people - to develop their sense of responsibility. This aspect is more or less pronounced, depending on the style of climbing involved. The degree of responsibility called for during a climb depends on the amount of protection on route: rock climbing routes with little protection require an especially high measure of accountability by the climber for his own safety and that of his partner.

Coupled with respect for natural surroundings, free access to the alpine wilderness areas is a fundamental right. Sufficient possibilities to exercise the sport of rock climbing can only be guaranteed if this right to freedom of movement remains intact and is restricted only in isolated, well-founded cases when agreed as being absolutely necessary.

Like hiking, rock climbing in Europe is a significant economic factor in the low and high mountain ranges. Because of the economic nature of many of these regions, climbers and the family members travelling with them, are often an essential source of income, both for the catering trade of the areas visited and the accompanying retail businesses.

In this document redevelopment measures refer to the placement of fixed protection on rock climbing routes according to current technical safety standards.

3. The redevelopment of rock climbing routes

In the evolution of climbing in low mountain ranges as well as in the lower areas of the high ranges, many climbers have developed a liking for well-protected sport climbs or fun routes. A large number of alpine climbers prefer having good bolts on the pitches and on belays on popular rock climbing routes.

On the other hand, a good number of the climbers who frequent the mountains are interested in retaining the original character of rock climbing routes and areas. They prefer to do without bolts, either partially or entirely.

The extent and quality of the equipment of a rock climbing route with fixed protection is an effective instrument for influencing its popularity: well-protected routes are done more frequently than poorly protected ones. Thus, in ecologically sensitive areas permanent protection should be reduced to a minimum. On the other hand, in less sensitive areas possibilities for the climbing activity of a greater number can be created by the development of well protected rock climbing routes. Climbing areas developed along these guidelines pose no threat to the natural environment.

A pluralism of the various climbing games is desirable and is welcomed as an expression of the legitimate individual preferences of climbers. To permit this kind of pluralism we make the following recommendations:

- a. The redevelopment measures should be limited to a selection of frequently climbed routes.
- b. Certain alpine areas, mountains, or parts of mountains can be excluded from these measures in order to retain their original character.
- c. Rock climbing routes that represent particular milestones in alpine history (for example, the North Face of the Eiger/Heckmair-route, Lalidererverschneidung, Marmolata South Spur, Pumprisse, Grandes Jorasses-Walker Spur, Dru North Face, Traverse of the Grepon or Meije), must be left in their original state. This principle also applies to rock climbing routes with local significance (e.g. Gelbe Mauer Direct on Untersberg, Battert Crack on the Gehrenspitze).
- d. A basic principle of the redevelopment of rock climbing routes is that the character of the route remains intact:
 1. The line of the first ascent is not to be altered.
 2. Routes and single pitches done "clean" on the first ascent (using only nuts, friends, threads, etc.) should not be retrobolted.
 3. No bolts will be placed on sections of routes that may be done clean by climbers of the grade of that route.
 4. Runouts may not be neutralized by additional bolts (don't take the edge off a runout).
 5. The difficulty of a route should not be altered through redevelopment measures. Aid passages left by first ascensionists should be aidable after redevelopment. The amount of permanent protection in a redeveloped route should be less than the original number of pieces. For example,

several regular pitons can be replaced by a single bolt.

6. For all redevelopment measures, only material that fits European and UIAA standards should be used. The redevelopment is to be carried out at recognised standards under the auspices of the responsible stewardship organisation.
 7. A route should not be subject to redevelopment against the will of the first ascensionist.
- e. The valid mode of the redevelopment in a climbing area is defined - on the basis of these recommendations - by the locally knowledgeable climbers together with the local climbing groups, if necessary, in cooperation with the responsible authorities. Decision-making power on the local level guarantees every area its own independent character.

The activities of the local stewardship organizations will be coordinated by a supraregional committee in order to guarantee the horizontal and vertical flow of information and to ensure a uniformly high quality of stewardship. The committee mediates in case of conflicts.

4. The first ascent of rock climbing routes
 - a. In alpine regions, first ascents are to be done exclusively on lead (no prefixing from above).
 - b. In the areas excluded from redevelopment measures, bolts should be limited to an absolute minimum, otherwise it is up to every first ascensionist to set the standard of protection on his/her own route.
 - c. There should be no detraction from the independent character of adjacent routes.

d. Particularly in zones close to the valleys or in other easily accessible parts of the mountains special sport climbing areas can be established - insofar as this can be done in an ecologically sound fashion and without obstructing other existing climbing areas. These measures need to be approved by the stewardship organisation responsible for that area.