



THE INTERNATIONAL MOUNTAINEERING AND CLIMBING FEDERATION
UNION INTERNATIONALE DES ASSOCIATIONS D'ALPINISME

Office: Monbijoustrasse 61 • Postfach
CH-3000 Berne 23 • SWITZERLAND
tel.: +41 (0)31 3701828 • fax: +41 (0)31 3701838
e-mail: office@uiaa.ch

"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 1995-2004

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
Karl Schrag, DAV
Pit Schubert, DAV-Sicherheitskreis

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

CONTENTS

| <u>CHAPTERS</u> | Page |
|--|------|
| 1. Introduction | 5 |
| 2. Preamble | 5 |
| 3. The Redevelopment of Rock Climbing Routes | 6 |
| 4. The First Ascent of Rock Climbing Route | 7 |
| | |
| <u>Discussions</u> | Page |
| Comments from "Overseas" – articles and comments | 8 |

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 draft a 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).
- f) 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.
- g) There should be no detracting 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.

Discussions regarding this paper:

COMMENTS FROM "OVERSEAS"

Steve Davis

Director (Alaska), American Alpine Club

I have read the paper "to bolt or not to be" and found it to be consistent with the guiding principles of the AAC, the Alaska Section of the AAC, and most importantly the Alaska climbing community. It describes an international policy that I whole-heartedly support. These guiding principles are being used both in Alaska alpine ranges as well as the local sport climbing areas. Our congratulations go to Robert Renzler and the other UIAA Mountaineering Commission members who developed this position paper over the past few years and got contribution from climbers such as Reinhold Messner and Alex Huber.

Yvon Chouinard

I have read over the paper and it looks fine to me. More than that - it looks great! Good work. I want to thank you for all the good work you are doing for climbing. I know how much time and effort this takes.

John Middendorf

I got the piece on bolting, and it looks good. It is interesting because John Bachar wrote a piece called "Coexistence Rules" way back in 1987 or so and it is similar statement of respecting the past as well as specific areas of ground-up climbing. I applaud the efforts at maintaining a "traditional" standard, and it is a good distinction to make about sport climbs having a certain place.

Letter from Ian McNaught-Davis, UIAA President 1995-2004

On 1st July 1936 a strong party of German climbers set out to climb on the east face Tryfan, a mountain in North Wales. Finding the routes rather below their standard they were pointed out a blank section of rock that had not been climbed. That day Hans Teufel and Heini Sedlmayr with J.R.Jenkins made history in British climbing. They put up a new and, at the time, quite a hard route which they named the Munich Climb, but to get up it they placed three pitons they had brought with them. This was regarded as quite unacceptable behaviour by the British climbing establishment who, up to that time, had avoided the use of ironmongery in their exploration of crags. When a plainly visible bronze karabiner and piton was pointed out to Menlove Edwards, a member of the Climber's Club, he could only see it as a challenge. Two weeks later he lead the climb without artificial aid and the offending pitons were extracted using a poker from a nearby Climber's Club hut. They have never been replaced despite the fact that, for many years, it was the hardest route on the mountain and there were a number of fatal accidents at the spot until modern protection techniques were developed.

This attitude of rejecting the use of pitons and bolts on high mountain crags has largely been accepted in Britain and there are few to be found in place today. The acceptance of this, as the standard of difficulty of climbs increased, is quite remarkable and it has resulted in many heated debates on where fixed equipment can and cannot be used. On most high mountain cliffs it is possible to climb in Britain and find very little trace that anyone else has done the route. There is no line of pitons to follow, no handy bolts at the belay stances and no fixed abseil points. It is as near a natural experience as is possible with the large number of climbers active today.

There were two consequences of this ethic. Firstly other forms of protection had to be developed that neither damaged the rock nor were left in place. At first these were pebbles or small pieces of rock that were slipped into the cracks and threaded with a nylon line. This was clumsy and time consuming and during the 1960's and 1970's chocks were developed that could be threaded on slings and finally the wired nuts and 'Friends' that are a normal component of a climber's rack today. Much of the rock was a hard granite or quartzite with friendly cracks that would allow good protection. This didn't work too well on softer rock such as limestone or sandstone, nor did it give experience of climbing Alpine routes which seemed to be unclimbable without pitons. The technique there for impoverished British climbers was to do classic routes and extract as many pitons as possible, these would then be used on harder or even new routes and also for abseil points on the descent. A hammer was an obligatory tool for the aspiring alpinist if for no other reason than to replenish his stock of ironmongery.

Debates on these issues have rumbled on for the last sixty years and have become more aggressive during the past five years with the pressure to conserve our mountains from the increasing damage being done by hikers, scramblers, climbers and mountaineers, (not to mention skiers)..

The issues are far from simple and the questions that need debating are many.

- Have climbers the right to bang in pitons or bolts wherever they choose on any crag, mountain or national park irrespective of the environmental damage they cause?
- Should popular and classic routes be fully equipped with bolts, pegs and stanchions, etc. under the excuse of greater safety or to make it easier and faster for guided parties?

- Is it critical to leave these routes alone to preserve, as much as possible, the first ascent experience and the aura of drama and discovery that accompanies a generally unrigged route?
- As much of the current installed equipment (which may be necessary to climb the route) is corroding away and becoming dangerous should it be replaced by corrosion free bolts or should climbers endeavour to use nuts and 'Friends' wherever possible?
- Should mountain hut managers be allowed to fully equip classic routes to make the use of their huts more popular? (Who would stop them?)
- Who is responsible if these artificial aids fail, the person that put them in, the sponsors or the national federation that supported the policy of re-equipping?
- Is it possible to have an international policy that would work or should this be left to each country to have their own standards?

These are some of the issues that we will discuss at the next General Assembly of the UIAA in October. We may not find a solution to all our problems but I hope we make some progress, however small, to protect our many activities for the future.

In the end, the quality of any climb is not doing it but how you actually did it.

I look forward to an exciting debate.

The Standing of Plaisir Climbing

An interview with Jürg von Känel, with an introduction from "Die Alpen" 4/1998", .the Journal of the Swiss Alpine Club. The Editor is grateful for the kind permissions of the SAC and Jürg von Känel to reprint the article. It is abbreviated and translated by the Editor.

"Plaisir Climbing"¹ has become a defined concept, at least in Switzerland. In other countries (e.g. France) there are also climbing areas with fixed equipment placed by using "Plaisir criteria", and they were started quite some time ago. They develop into ever more popular areas and attract the great mass of men and women climbers, who enjoy carefree, sport-type climbing in nature. Plaisir Climbing fills the needs of a popular sport, and without any doubt will continue to increase in importance.

Different viewpoints

It is exactly this popularity of "standardised" safety climbing, which has brought opponents into the arena. They complain, partly using arguments strongly reminding of the "heroic" alpine philosophy of past times, that a pastime of a few "outsiders" has developed into a "standardised popular sport for the whole family".

From this viewpoint, a full-length and, from the safety point, indisputably equipped route will become a mountain-ethical sin, and the used safety material, the bolt, an instrument at the disposal of tourism and climbing sports businesses interests, and possibly even a risk for the environment.

Jürg von Känel - founder of the Plaisir idea

Jürg von Känel is mountain guide and author of guide books. He has achieved first ascents with very daring belays. At the same time, he has been one of the first to recognise the growing interest in sports climbing and hence, the need for Plaisir climbing areas. In the frame-work of his selective climbing guide books he has created many new, perfectly safe Plaisir routes and has helped with the re-equipment of many other routes. The success of his guide books and the great interest of climbers in such routes is demonstrated in the enormous popularity of the Plaisir climbing areas presented in his books. On the other side, badly equipped routes are being climbed less and less. This may almost be called "Voting with the feet".

Talking to Jürg von Känel

Demands on Plaisir Climbing

ALPEN: From the introduction we know what Plaisir climbing means. What are the demands of Plaisir climbing men and women with regard to the equipment, and the protection in particular?

JvK: The demands have gone up in the recent years. But the decisive criterion is not that much a demand for a large number of fixed protection points, it is more the way in which these points have been set and how reliable they are. What people want is bolts at a regular distance corresponding to the grade of the route, and the bolts should be set in a way that virtually excludes the risk of injuries in case of a fall. Finally they should be easy to clip in (also for smaller people) and there should be no unnecessary pull of the rope.

¹ Plaisir Climbing is done on routes fulfilling some criteria, which may not be defined precisely in detail: They are well equipped with fixed safety points (in most cases bolts), so that additional safety means (nuts, pitons) are rarely needed, the routes are in solid rock and the difficulty is in lower or medium grade ranges

Plaisir Climbing: Importance in numbers and concept of adventure

ALPEN: *Do you have an estimate of the number of Plaisir climbers with a preference of well and completely equipped routes in comparison with those climbers, who for the sake of adventure are either accepting a higher risk, or even search for it?*

JvK: From the fact that badly or inadequately equipped routes are being climbed less and less or even not at all any more, whereas Plaisir climbing areas are very popular, it may be concluded that the share of plaisir climbers is very high. And in the higher grades, there are practically only optimally equipped routes. I believe that 90 to 95% of all those who wish to climb are preferring fully equipped routes. This is not necessarily the case for tours with only passages to climb (in particular combined tours).

If we talk about the search for "adventure", we must state that this term may be defined and interpreted in very varied ways. For some, it is already a gripping adventure to climb at a distance of two meters from the last bolt, whereas others fail to feel the "ultimate adventure kick", even if they climb an unstable ice-column or an unsafe hanging stalaktite.

I believe that most of the Plaisir climbers are prepared to experience some adventure in the sense of a calculable risk, but they would not accept consciously the risk of injuries or the exposure to a life-threatening situation - which may quickly happen in a route, which is not protected optimally.!

Critical Voices

ALPEN: *Repeatedly, there are critical voices on the development of Plaisir climbing, and quite different motives can be recognised. Criticism is mainly coming from rather "adrenalin-friendly" climbers who are looking for adventure for themselves and would like to have routes with minimal fixed protection. They put climbing-ethical considerations first and see Plaisir climbers in a certain sense as "mental cripples". Then, there are those who argue on environmental grounds. Their main interest seems to hinder further growth of the number of Plaisir climbers, if not to decrease it.*

What do you say to this criticism, and how realistic are these demand in your eyes?

JvK: There is very little criticism from extreme climbers! They represent exactly those who appreciate optimal protection, otherwise sport climbing would never have reached such a popularity. A few "outsiders" seem to be the exception, they wish to keep the mountain world and their climbing areas for themselves or, they would like to share the mountains only with those, who are fully backing their idea of "adventure". By outcasting of Plaisir climbers or by, at least concentrating them on a very limited number of areas, they hope to keep their hunting grounds for themselves.

In addition and particularly in Germany, there seem to be representatives of conservative mountaineering, who are up in arms against good route protection. While whole parties are dragged down to death by breaking old pitons, they are criticising the protection concept in Switzerland as overdone and unnecessary and discuss at great length how to handle fixed equipment in Austria. These vantage points, mainly based on self-designed "ethics", have always existed in the mountaineering sports. With similar arguments, firstly the use of pitons, then of bolts, then sports climbing were opposed.

And nowadays, optimal protection with fixed equipment has become a red rag for a few, who feel they are the leading exponents of "true mountaineering".

I judge the environmental reasoning as very questionable. Only those who go out into nature, will experience its beauty and will develop sensitivity. Nobody will protect nature who has no knowledge of it. Sometimes one cannot avoid the impression, that environmental concerns are used as a means to at least make the access to mountaineering and climbing experience more difficult for all those who have a less elitist understanding of adventure. If Plaisir climbers could only be excluded better, the mountains would again belong only to ourselves - a rather egoistic viewpoint. If this is of any help to the mountain areas, should be seriously questioned.

The carefree way to the top

ALPEN: Indoor climbing walls are mushrooming. More and more people learn to climb there and this means, they will never familiarise themselves with the use of self protection means as friends, nuts, pitons etc. What are your conclusions from this development?

JvK: It is exactly the fact that there is no need to carry own mobile protection means, which allows the carefree way to the top: The pleasure experience comes from climbing without friends, nuts and rucksack. Apart from the fact that the use of mobile protection means demands experience and in addition, will never offer the same degree of safety as a route equipped with bolts.

In a route with fixed equipment, a beginner has the chance to concentrate fully on the climbing moves. Later on, when he has acquired a better sense of safety, he may wish to learn how to protect himself with his own means. There will always be a sufficient number of routes to do this. In the future, the Plaisir climbing guide books will include some routes, where good additional protection can be achieved with mobile means. It will be interesting to find out, if there is really a demand for this.

Final question

ALPEN: Would you like to add to the questions raised here or is there a special point which you would like to emphasise in this context?

JvK: Of course, all viewpoints cannot be considered in an interview. There is still a lot to be said, to be differentiated, and perhaps to be put in relation. In summary, it is my impression that the supporters of Plaisir climbing, which is bringing pleasure to more and more active people, are not getting that much of a voice. A lot of room is being given to the critiques of equipment with fixed means - people and their needs tend to be neglected. The enormous popularity of Plaisir climbing areas is proving, that a vast majority is looking for their mountain and climbing experience in optimally safe routes with fixed equipment.

The Rotting Peg and Bolt Syndrome

K:J: Wilson, Baton Wicks Publications, England

As I understand it, Pit Schubert and the UIAA are seeking a mandate to replace old gear for better new gear, or at least to understand people's feelings before taking any action.

At first sight, the Schubert solution (already applied on crags in the Eastern Alps) seems logical and responsible, but is it?

If we go for a regime of officially placed fixed gear we will, in effect, be encouraging climbers to "unlearn" one of the key skills of climbing - that of taking responsibility for their own safe belaying. The presence of any fixed gear (good or bad) tends to induce sloppiness in this area. Any sensible climber backs up fixed gear with other anchors and these days nuts and friends are so quick to place that it is easy to construct one's own belays that are far more reliable. Obviously we could for a period, rig up the mountains and crags with safe stances that could be relied upon, but they would soon corrode.

In the short term a fixed gear regime would make for a superficial form of safety, but it would not be real safety as we would be encouraging a generation of climbers onto the mountains who would not know how to protect themselves.. In effect these people would not be real climbers as they would be incapable of moving safely in the mountains in the mountains without fixed gear.

This would in turn have serious implications for climbs in the newly developing ranges like Greenland, Patagonia et. Where, having relied on fixed pro at home, European climbers would then look to place it abroad.

In the past European climbers carried pitons and hammers and were proficient in their use and thus able to look after themselves: now they do not - it is considered unstylish. In this position it seems to me that the UIAA should be very firmly encouraging climbers to take nuts and friends with them in order to safeguard their progress. Probably a hammer and a few pitons as well on really big cliffs.

It may be that the odd stance and key abseil points might have fixed gear but these should, I believe, be the exceptions rather than the rule.

The real problem comes more from the waymarking than security. In the past, in the Dolomites in particular, we used fixed gear as much to ensure we were on route as for pro. Classic routes on big cliffs used by many nationalities are not like small British cliffs with highly detailed guidebooks. Climbers unversed in their regular use (e.g. once a year holidaying climbers) can easily lose the route. There may thus be a case for some sort of waymarking confirmation at stances (not paint but perhaps some sort of temporary metal marker. These might be placed where lots of old trash has been removed and there are perfectly good natural protection places. The flaw in this argument is the necessity in the Alps to make provision for rapid retreats in poor weather which tends to support a fixed anchor solution (in the past climbers would have relied on interlinking old pegs and tat).

This needs to be clearly thought through. Fixed abseil points on popular descent routes (e.g. Dülfer Couloir, off the top of the Grand Cap) have long been the norm and it is clear that repeat parties cannot reasonably carry enough gear to safeguard (and leave) on a long descent. Possible abseil anchors off-line for convenient belaying might be a solution that still encouraged self-belaying during the ascent. Nevertheless I am extremely concerned about any official body taking responsibility for too many fixed abseil stations, particularly in the high mountains - it opens far too many grey areas - not least the risk of litigation should any anchor fail. There may be a case for very selective gear replacement so that the odd key point on a climb has it -but in this we are sliding into exactly the same sort of self-serving

justification used by the Swiss for the stakes on the Gallerie Carrel on the Zmutt (though this is a mixed route and thus not quite the same). That argument sounds so reasonable, yet it effectively draws the teeth of a great route (why not have a fixed rope on the Traverse of the Gods? Should the fixed rope be left in place on the Hinterstoisser Traverse - without this how many would have done the Eigerwand?).

I note that in your article you mention the "high mountains" and the "sports climbing crags". These are, increasingly the only two types of climbing that Europeans know - and it is for this reason that we now seek the high mountains to be rigged up in the same manner as what they have always regarded as training cliffs. They should be encouraged to follow the British example on all traditional (e.g. cracked and vertical or less) crags. They should treat them too as places to be respected (rather than riddled with iron) and learn how to place protection so that when they visit the mountains both their skills and ethics are well-honed. Sports climbing should be a procedure reserved ONLY for steep and crackless cliffs used by top-performance athletic climbers already well-versed in the use of natural protection. It should be frowned on as a technique for the masses. If we fail to point this out, the only result will be that sooner or later ALL rock climbs will become bolt protected because the Europeans are no longer toting hammers and pitons and will not know (or wish to know) how to use nuts.

I believe that a totally bolted mountain environment is indefensible on environmental grounds alone (let alone the ethical concerns) - does the UIAA think its OK to bolt rig all mountains and crags - surely not? Thus I believe that you and your British colleagues on the UIAA should extol British leader placed protection techniques and draw them strongly to the attention of the others and commend them on environmental safety (a person who has mastered them is clearly far safer), and ethical grounds.

It is time to stress the importance of the full range of mountain skills and to point out that those who cannot move in the mountains without the possession of a power drill or a pre-equipped route cannot really call themselves "climbers" or "mountaineers" in the full meaning of those titles. It therefore follows that - with the demise of piton methods - all have a duty to learn and practise leader placed protection skills. We really have to start promoting the virtue of these techniques on environmental grounds alone. We can hardly proscribe the power drill in the Greater Ranges without pushing nut techniques at home.

WilsonBolts 142 W/ 5392 Z

The absolute freedom of climbing versus safety and prevention of mountaineering accidents

Every year at the end of August, European mass media present the body count of the „killing mountains“ and quote some famous elite climbers -usually without experience in rescue work- presenting their ideas about prevention of accidents in the mountains. Whether or not climbing routes or classical climbs should be equipped safely with bolts (or even fixed ropes e.g.Matterhorn, Eiger Mittelegi) is an ongoing and never ending discussion. There are very good arguments for both sides and probably every mountain range has to find it's own proper way of handling it.

The freedom of climbing

The absolute freedom of climbing consists of choosing to climb wherever you want and with whatever technical help one considers as necessary.

Every climber is free to choose a mountain or a route according to his experience, training and physical capabilities. In order to buy or rent equipment, divers have to present a certificate of training. For mountaineering there is no control at all. Every climber has the freedom to get killed if he has not been trained according to the standards of alpine federations and mountain guiding organisations.

Every climber (properly trained or not) has the choice to use fixed equipment or not. Climbing purists propose a clean climbing with the help of removable belayings only. The adrenalin seeking climbers have the freedom of ignoring all fixed belays or bolts.

The responsibility of mountaineering federations and the prevention of accidents

In the European Alps, most mountain regions live off the tourism and have a vital interest of offering safe routes and an efficient rescue system to their visitors.

Closing down mountain ranges for future preservation can add a maximum of prevention but definitely destroys the freedom of climbing .

For the time being, there is no evidence of an increased rate of accidents in fixed equipped routes. In contrary, the casualty rate has significantly decreased in the classical mixed climbs of the Swiss Alps where fixed belays have been installed.

Most mountain rescuers in the Alps - the people which have to do the very often dangerous dead body recoveries as well- propose a moderate number of safe belays for the classical routes.

The absolute freedom of climbing includes the need of having safe routes. In this regard, elite climbers must be more tolerant towards the preventive activities of mountain regions and rescue organisations.

Bruno Durrer
MedCom UIAA
28.6.1998