

DRAFT NZAC POSITION ON BOLTING

DECEMBER 2009

The New Zealand Alpine Club is proposing to adopt the following position paper on bolting, with the aim being to assist in decision-making on whether bolting is acceptable.

Background

Over the last 35 years, bolts have become widely used as anchors on climbing routes at many New Zealand crags and at some alpine rock climbing areas. Their use for those purposes is now widely accepted. The term 'bolting' refers to placement of expansion bolts, or glue-in bolts, on rock, to enable clipping by carabiners. More recently, bolts or other permanent anchor points utilising wire slings have begun to be used on descent and access routes in the mountains, including in National Parks. This has been contentious. Arguments for and against the use of bolts fall into two distinct categories. One concerns their permanent impact on the natural environment. The second concerns their impact on the way climbers practise their sport. Typically, this means that discussions around the use of bolts within and outside the climbing community can involve a range of very different issues.

Rationales for placing bolts for protection include:

Impact on environment	Impact on climbing
Bolts reduce the amount of slings and other gear festooned at some sites, and hence maintain or enhance aesthetics.	Bolts enable creation of new climbs that are valued by climbers, and would not otherwise be feasible with acceptable levels of risk.
	Bolts enable quicker descents from crag climbs and mountains. They can reduce congestion at key stances.
	Bolts increase safety and reduce risk for climbers, trampers and guides.

Reasons for opposing the use of bolts include:

Impact on environment	Impact on climbing
Bolts modify landscapes that should not be modified.	Climbing is about adventure, risk assessment, and experiencing nature on its own terms. Using bolts interferes with these fundamental values.
Placing bolts is noisy.	Use of bolts on a new climb prevents a future climber completing the route without them.
	Retro-bolting diminishes the achievements of earlier climbers and reduces the variety of climbing experiences.
	Adding bolted routes to a crag or mountain where previously there were only trad climbs changes their character. This may detract from the existing climbs.
	Bolts alter climbers' behaviour. Bolts may entice some climbers into situations they are not equipped to handle.

Values

Climbing embraces a wide spectrum of activities and values based on physical and mental challenge.

Intrinsic to mountaineering and traditional crag climbing are adventure, risk assessment and management, and experiencing nature on its own terms.

Intrinsic to sport climbing is the pursuit of technical difficulty in an environment where risk is kept to a minimum.

NZAC recognises, values and supports all forms of climbing, from mountaineering to sport climbing.

Discussion

We seek to preserve the adventurous nature of climbing and mountaineering where possible. The uncertainty of the outcome is a key part of the overall experience.

Mountaineering requires skilled risk assessment and risk management. To remove the need for sound judgment from the equation is to lessen the experience as a whole and can have the unintended consequence of raising the level of risk.

The mountain environment is a place where people can experience nature on its own terms. Fundamentally, the mountains should not be made 'safer'; rather, people should be encouraged to learn the skills and judgment required to keep them safe.

This in turn will make their experiences far more rewarding.

These core values must be protected and should not be undermined by creeping acceptance of bolting in the mountains or on rock climbs where good natural protection is available.

This is not to reject the use of bolts. In sport climbing areas and on alpine rock climbing crags, where no natural protection is available, they are clearly appropriate. In some mountain situations, the advantages that bolt anchors can provide to safety, reduced congestion and/or aesthetics will outweigh their disadvantages. It is also recognised that limited bolting on some mountain climbing routes enables people with less skill or ability to achieve high climbs.

NZAC believes that the weight of opinion in local and national climbing communities must be considered before deciding if bolting is acceptable. Each situation is unique, and the issues outlined above will have differing degrees of importance. It is not possible to satisfy every user group at every site or on every route.

Where bolting is acceptable, climbers should strive to minimise their impact on the natural environment by judicious use and placement of bolts.

To aid decision making, we propose the following principles:

Bolting Principles

1. Bolts should not be placed on climbing routes where good natural protection is available and the rock is sound.
2. Unless there is solid justification, climbs should not be bolted or retro-bolted.
3. Bolts are only justified if they provide significantly greater benefits than costs to the climbing community.
4. Bolts on frequently used mountain routes may be justified if they provide safety benefits for the predominant user groups and/or ease congestion.
5. Representative views of the relevant climbing community and other stakeholders can and should be sought to determine if bolts are justified.
6. Prior consultation with and approval from the first ascensionist is essential before any route is retro-bolted.
7. Bolting on private land should only occur with the approval of landowners or their agents.
8. Bolting on the conservation estate and other public land should be in accordance with the relevant management strategy and/or plan.
9. If bolts are used, they should meet NZAC bolting practice standards of the time.
10. Climbers assume personal responsibility for the safety of any bolts that they use.

Implementation

1. NZAC will provide leadership on bolting in the mountains and at crags in New Zealand by the following actions.
2. NZAC will work with climbing clubs, NZ Mountain Guides Association, Federated Mountain Clubs and the Department of Conservation in order to foster wide support for the bolting principles listed above.
3. NZAC will be at the forefront of establishing bolting standards and work with climbing clubs, NZMGA, FMC and DOC to develop and review bolting standards. Current NZAC bolting policy which sets standards for bolting practices and choice of hardware is located at: <http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>
4. The NZAC will actively advocate on bolting principles and issues to DOC. For example, NZAC will make submissions on bolting provisions in National Park Management Plans.
5. NZAC advocates climber representatives in relevant areas meet as needed from time to time to debate and decide if bolts or retro bolting is justified in their area. NZAC will facilitate those meetings where the need arises.
6. NZAC will actively support bolting angels who replace low quality, aged bolts by carefully placed, quality bolts in line with NZAC bolting policy.

Current/recent bolting issues

Below are a number of current/recent bolting issues that the climbing community have asked to be addressed, and a response to them in light of the comments and principles above:

- **BOLTING OF EXISTING MOUNTAINEERING ROUTES** (e.g. the North West Ridge of Tititea Mt Aspiring)
Response: No solid justification for bolts at this time. The route has been climbed safely for over 100 years without bolts. Bolts diminish the 'adventurous' nature of the climb and diminish the need for climbers to develop good skills and judgment. A significant percentage of climbers on the North West Ridge are guided and bolts would assist guides, but natural protection is available on the ridge for guides and amateur climbers alike to use.
- **BOLTING EXISTING TRADITIONAL TRAMPING ROUTES AND ACCESS ROUTES**
NB: Two separate issues: 1) Alpine tramping routes (eg, Rabbit Pass/Wilkin waterfall route), and 2) Routes used for access to mountain rock or ice climbing areas (eg, Barrier Knob traverse/Gifford's Crack).
Response: For routes that have been used as traditional tramping routes safely for many years without bolts, there is no solid justification to place bolts.
For frequently used mountain access routes bolts may be justified at high risk sites (on the Barrier Knob traverse and Gifford's Crack). Discussion and feedback should be encouraged from members and other interested organizations (DOC, NZMGA, CMC, FMC etc) before a decision is made. Any bolting must meet accepted NZAC bolting standards.
- **THE REPLACEMENT OF CERTAIN EXISTING FIXED SLING ANCHORS WITH BOLTED STATIONS**
NB: Two separate issues: 1) Wire slings can be placed (e.g. Summit Rocks Aoraki Mt Cook) because they are preferable to bolts in that location, and 2) Frequently used anchor points on descent routes where numerous nylon slings are left in-situ (e.g. Mt Haidinger).
Response: There is a possible justification for replacing existing fixed anchors (slings) with more reliable fixed protection (bolts) in high use areas where climbers are all using the same anchors for abseil descent. Fixed anchors exist anyway so they might as well be reliable and tidy ones. Discussion and feedback should be encouraged from members and other interested organisations (DOC, NZMGA, CMC, FMC etc) before a decision is made. Any bolting must meet accepted NZAC bolting standards.
- **THE USE OF BOLTS IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF NEW TECHNICAL ALPINE ROCK ROUTES IN THE MOUNTAINS** (e.g. The Darrans, Twin Stream, Mt Somers, Balfour Glacier).
Response: There is justification for the use of bolts on 'alpine crags' in the interest of furthering sport climbing opportunities, where their use is clearly justified and only when there is no reasonable natural protection available. Any bolting must meet accepted NZAC bolting standards. National Park Management Plans must be consulted to see if bolts are permitted in specific parks.
- **BOLTING ISSUES AT ROCK CLIMBING CRAGS** (e.g. Paynes Ford, Wanaka crags).
Response: There is justification for the use of bolts to open up new rock routes where there is no reasonable natural protection available. Would be new routes should confer with local climbers before drilling in order to learn about any local environmental or other sensitivities. Any bolting must meet accepted bolting standards.
- **NEW SPORT ROUTES AT TRADITIONALLY 'TRAD' CRAGS** (e.g. Charlestone).
Response: There is possible justification for the use of bolts as long as the new routes are worthwhile, don't detract from the experience of the crag and definitely don't cross over or otherwise interfere (provide new bolt protection) to existing naturally protected lines.

The NZAC will actively co-ordinate discussion amongst climbers on these issues, particularly when controversy arises.

Please send us your feedback on this draft policy by no later than 1 February 2010. E-mail: boltingpolicy@alpineclub.org.nz
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