



New Zealand Alpine Club POSITION ON BOLTING

A role of the New Zealand Alpine Club is to advocate for climbers and for access to the New Zealand mountains. As the Club is often looked to for guidance on bolting matters, a Bolting Position is considered useful and necessary. It should be noted that NZAC is not a regulatory body. It advocates for informed, responsible decision making by climbers. Using the Bolting Position, NZAC can facilitate discussion amongst climbers and other parties. The Bolting Position can assist local climbers, landowners and the wider community to make decisions on bolting. Applications to the NZAC bolting fund will be considered with reference to the Bolting Position. The Bolting Position will also be used to assist the Club in formulating a position and making submissions on National Park Management Plans, land use and planning policies, and on bolting issues as they arise.

Background

Over the last 35 years bolts have become widely used for protection 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.

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.

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 maintains or enhance aesthetics.	Bolts enable the development of new rock climbs that 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 can increase safety and reduce risk for climbers, trampers and guides.

Reasons for opposing the use of bolts include:

Impact on environment	Impact on climbing
Placing bolts can adversely impact plants, birds, reptiles, invertebrates.	Mountaineering and trad climbing are about adventure, risk assessment and experiencing nature on its own terms. Using bolts interferes with these fundamental values.
Bolts modify landscapes. Their impacts are significantly smaller than the impacts of mining, huts, bridges and tracks.	Bolting a trad route reduces the variety of climbing experiences available. Bolting a trad route typically means most climbers who follow will clip the bolts.
Placing bolts is noisy.	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. They require less skill and judgement than alternative protection methods, and thus skill levels may decline in the future.
	Retro-bolting can diminish the achievements of earlier climbers.

Discussion

NZAC seeks 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 and rock climbing require skilled risk assessment and risk management. To remove the need for sound judgment from the equation is to lessen the experience as a whole. Mountains and crags are places where people can experience nature on its own terms. While specific sites in the mountains and crags can be bolted to reduce risk, safer climbing fundamentally requires that climbers acquire the skills and judgment required to assess risk and make informed decisions. 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 appropriate. In some mountain situations, the advantages that bolt anchors can provide to safety, reduced congestion and/or aesthetics will outweigh their disadvantages. 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:

1. Bolts should not be placed on climbing routes where good natural protection is available and the rock is sound.
2. Bolts and retro bolting are only justified if they provide significantly greater benefits than costs to the climbing community.
3. Bolts on frequently used mountain access routes may be justified if they provide significant safety benefits and ease of access.
4. Representative views of the relevant climbing community and other stakeholders must be sought to determine if bolts are in harmony with the values of an area.
5. Prior consultation with the first ascensionist is advocated before any route is retro-bolted.
6. Bolting on private land must only occur with the approval of landowners or their agents.

7. Bolting on the conservation estate and other public land must be in accordance with the relevant management strategy and/or plan.
8. If bolts are used, they must meet NZAC bolting technical guidelines of the time.
9. Climbers assume personal responsibility for the safety of any bolts that they use.

Implementation

NZAC will provide leadership on bolting in the mountains and at crags in New Zealand by the following actions:

1. 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.
2. 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 technical guidelines for bolting practices and choice of hardware is located at:
<http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>
3. The NZAC will actively advocate on bolting principles and issues to DOC. For example, NZAC will make submissions on bolting statements in National Park Management Plans.
4. 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.
5. NZAC will actively support bolting angels who replace low quality, aged bolts by carefully placed, quality bolts in line with current NZAC bolting technical guidelines:
<http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>

Current/recent bolting issues

Below are a number of current/recent bolting issues that the climbing community have asked to be addressed, and 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: Consultation with other climbers must occur before bolts are placed on a very popular route. There are divergent views amongst climbers on the benefit of bolts on this route, which has been climbed safely for over 100 years without them, However bolts diminish the adventurous nature of the climb and diminish the need for climbers to apply or develop good skills and judgment, therefore bolts would seem to be inappropriate in this case. A significant percentage of climbers using the route are guided and bolts would assist guided parties, but natural protection is available on the ridge for guides and amateur climbers alike to use.

Discussion and feedback must be sought from climbers and other interested organisations (DOC, NZMGA, CMC, FMC etc) before any similar bolting occurs in the future. Any bolting must meet current NZAC bolting technical guidelines <http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>

- **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 climbers and other interested organizations (DOC, NZMGA, CMC, FMC etc) before decisions are made. Any bolting must meet current NZAC bolting technical guidelines <http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>

- **THE REPLACEMENT OF 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 climbers and other interested organisations (DOC, NZMGA, CMC, FMC etc) before a decision is made. Any bolting must meet current NZAC bolting technical guidelines <http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>

- **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 rock climbing opportunities, when there is no reasonable natural protection available. Any bolting must meet current 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 routers should confer with local climbers before drilling in order to learn about any local environmental or other sensitivities. Any bolting must meet current NZAC bolting technical guidelines <http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>

- **NEW SPORT ROUTES AT TRADITIONALLY 'TRAD' CRAGS** (e.g. Charleston).

Response: There is possible justification for the use of bolts to create distinct new climbs as long as the new routes are worthwhile, don't cross over or otherwise interfere (provide new bolt protection) to existing naturally protected lines, and don't detract from the experience of the crag. Discussion and feedback should be encouraged from local climbers and other interested organisations (DOC, NZMGA, CMC, FMC etc) before a decision is made. Any bolting must meet current NZAC bolting technical guidelines <http://alpineclub.org.nz/default/314>

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