

Church Beck, Coniston User Agreement

This agreement outlines the key areas regarding access to, and use of, Church Beck for gorge walking activities.

Possession of this document does not provide any right to access in Church Beck. Entry to the Beck has only been agreed for those who have signed up to and abide by the User Agreement.

This agreement has the support of the:

- * Agents acting for the land owner
- * Association of Heads of Outdoor Education Centres
- * Impact Development Training Group
- * Northern Region of the Institute for Outdoor Learning

Background

In the last six to seven years, Church Beck has become increasingly popular as a venue for gorge walking activities. This has led to a very busy use of the area around Station Road in Coniston, where many groups park their transport, and in the Beck itself.

The Holywath Estate, owned by Major J W B Hext and his family, is the freehold owner of Church Beck, as shown shaded red on the access map. The Estate owns the adjacent land to the beck, shown red.

The access map indicates the extent of the Holywath Estate's ownership of Church Beck.

The land owner is not unsympathetic to the work of outdoor centres in using the Beck; however, several problems have developed.

Current Issues

Partly as a result of greater use, and partly as a result of inconsiderate behaviour, the following problems have become a real concern to the land owner:

- The land owner has suffered damage to some of his property. In particular this has been apparent at the entry point many groups use adjacent to the footbridge. The footbridge has suffered damage and now needs to be rebuilt. While accepting that it was not a brand new bridge one group was found to be jumping up and down on it and this appears to be the cause of it giving way.
- The dam and sluice gates part way up the beck have also suffered as a result of people climbing over them. These structures form part of the hydro-electricity scheme that the owner relies upon for part of their electricity supply. n.b. Users are not permitted to utilise the area of Church Beck where the dam and sluice gates are constructed as part of the hydro-electricity scheme for the benefit of Holywath. This area is OUT OF BOUNDS and indicated on the access map.
- The noise made by groups and the over use of Church Beck is a disturbance to the land owner.
- Private Centres are using a facility that does not belong to them to make money. The land owner has the costs of repairing damage to his property.

Action

Clearly these issues need addressing. This User Guide to Church Beck aims at providing a viable way forward for the benefit of everyone.

Representatives from the organisations listed above have met with the Land Agent to agree that use of the Beck is permissible only to those signed up to and following this agreement. On-going arrangements will be reviewed on an annual basis.

The cost of introducing and operating the User Agreement will be met by the various user groups.

Parking and Changing

There is parking in Station Road and on the old station site where there is a Pay and Display Car Park. These areas are congested at busy times with cars parked by visitors and Coniston residents. Vehicles parked here should not cause an obstruction or danger to other road users. Sensitivity is required in respect of people changing outside residential property and where members of the public are likely to be walking on the pavement. Parking and changing at Dixon ground is not permitted.

Access Points (see map)

Access into Church Beck at the bottom, is made on the south bank underneath the footbridge. At this point a sign is displayed on the foot bridge indicating that a User Agreement is in place and that entry to the Beck is only for those signed up to the Agreement. Groups descending the Beck, access from the Miners Bridge. These points are marked on the access map.

Egress Points (see map)

Egress can be made from the middle of the Beck, to the south, via the point marked on the access map. Exit from the Beck can also be made via the above access points.

Conduct In Church Beck

Groups should be briefed so as to ensure they do not climb over, along or in any way interfere with the footbridge at the bottom access point or the dam and sluice gates. Users are reminded that there is no access to either the footbridge, the dam, sluice gates or race. These are marked on the access map of the Beck. Signs will be placed at these points to indicate that it is part of the User Agreement to leave these structures alone.

The issue of noise has been raised and groups are asked to be aware of the nuisance caused by excessive shouting or cheering.

Do not climb on the retaining wall along the bank edges.

Conduct Towards Other People

The land owner, his family and any of his representatives should have no cause to complain regarding anyone's behaviour towards them. Inconsiderate, threatening, or abusive behaviour is completely unacceptable.

Assessing Risk

There are risks associated with gorge walking activities. Any group using Church Beck would be expected by law to have undertaken its own risk assessment of this activity.

It is not part of this agreement to indicate the levels of qualifications of staff, or techniques required by those managing groups in Church Beck. It is expected that each group will have addressed these issues in its risk assessment. It would be recognised as best practice that leaders of groups understand that water levels vary and this will have a considerable bearing on what approach to the activity is reasonable. To do this, risk assessments need to have been considered for the varying conditions that are experienced in Church Beck.

Self Regulation

All those signed up to this User Agreement will have a responsibility to assist with the self regulation of it. Groups not observing these guidelines should be challenged in a firm but friendly way to adhere to the agreement.

If it becomes clear that they have not signed up to the agreement it would be helpful to encourage them to approach IOL to enable a follow-up letter to be sent to them.

Maintaining the Site

Groups using the site will ensure the area is litter free.

To protect the flora of the gorge follow the Ghyll Scrambling Code:

- keep to the rocky bed of the ghyll
- groups should keep in line
- leave plants for others to enjoy
- avoid crumbling rocks
- follow established routes

Any obvious signs of damage or erosion should be reported to the Beck Access Officer.

Initial Repairs

As a gesture of goodwill and as a means of showing our commitment to make the agreement work, for the benefit of all parties, some initial repairs have been completed. This was to rebuild the damaged footbridge by Phil Poole and a team from Impact Development Training Group, from work already started by the landowner and materials supplied by him.

Annual Inspection

In order to monitor the ongoing viability of the User Agreement a site meeting will be held annually between representatives of the AHOEC, NRIOL and Impact Development Training Group with the Land Agent. This will determine the need for any site maintenance and agree how it is to be effected.

It will be the responsibility of all users to take part in any on-going maintenance. This will share the work load and ensure the agreement continues to work for the benefit of all parties.

Changes Of Staff

Where changes of staff occur in organisations, new staff should be made familiar with the details of the User Agreement. If the member of staff overseeing use of the Beck changes, the new member of staff needs to be identified on a new User Agreement form.

New Hydro-Electric Scheme

Plans to create a new hydro-electricity scheme, utilising Church Beck, are very likely to proceed. More details will become available in due course.

Details of Signup to Agreement

The following organisations have signed the Agreement at 21/06/04:

Emma Hoving	River Deep Mountain High
Andy Collinge	Baldon Recreation Centre
John Mason	Mere Mountains
Andy Murphy	Tower Wood OEC
Phil Poole	Impact DTG
John Wright	Symbiosis
Roger Ward	Water Park
Norman Beech	Priestley Centre
Janet Prier	Lane Head OEC
Scott Umpleby	Brathay Hall Trust
Charlie Shufflebottom	Low Bank Ground OEC
Andy Stubbs	Thurston OEC

The following organisations attended the Induction meeting but IOL did NOT receive a signed agreement:

Andy Salabank	Castle Head FSC
Andy Giles	Keppleway
Mick Waplinton	Borwick Hall