

MIND CONTROL – MORE THAN A CLIMBING ROUTE



Chris Frick rebolting the *Mind Control* route in Oliana, Spain. (Photo: William Barcelo)

In the heart of Catalonia, at the foothills of the Pyrenees, lies Oliana. A limestone crag perched above its namesake village attracts climbing enthusiasts from all over the world. This climbing hotspot is home to some of the most challenging and famous sport climbs.

Also Chris Frick is under Oliana's spell. Except he's on a different mission than other climbers - Chris rebolts climbing routes. His project: the rebolting of the iconic *Mind Control* route. A matter close to his heart that took a dramatic turn of events.

On January 6, 2022, Chris Frick sends an email to Mammut. It's a matter very close to his heart: Rebolting the route *Mind Control* in Oliana, Spain. For this, he needs equipment such as bolts, fixed quickdraws, and a lot more. Mammut is instantly on board. Like Chris, it is also essential to Mammut to ensure the safest possible climbing experience for all and to help keep iconic routes such as the *Mind Control* accessible and preserved.

Armed with the necessary gear, Chris ascends the wall in Oliana for the first time just a few weeks later. He spends four days vertically suspended in his harness, entirely focused on rebolting the world-famous route. A firsthand account of his experience:

Streaks of black, various shades of gray, and even white and maroon run across the massive waves of limestone. Exposure to water and sun has created a sea of sinters (limestone deposits). Artfully, these range from fine filaments to magnificent columns. Its depth has a mesmerizing effect. The void, coupled with light and shadow, creates a seemingly infinite space. Breathtaking is the sight of a human figure in motion within it. Graceful, yet powerful. Climbing dimensions that are hard to grasp. Thus, the photography of a route in Oliana had etched itself into my consciousness, **resonating like a promise. Akin to fulfilling the dream of finding the perfect climb.**

Photo as inspiration

The image was titled *Mind Control*. This route - opened in 2009 by Chris Sharma has become a classic, and rightfully so. Standing 50 meters tall, it is incredibly demanding in terms of stamina and climbing technicality. **For my generation, a grade 8c still sounds as unrealistic as a trip to Mars.** If the records are accurate, to date, the oldest person to climb *Mind Control* at the time of their ascent was 42 years old. Would my 54 years be a liability? A while back, I lacked both the courage and climbing skills to align fantasy with reality. However, the photo mentioned above dwelled relentlessly within my climbing heart.

Give and take

The inner fire still burns. Playing artfully with movement on natural rock remains my source of strength, my meditation, and above all, my source of inspiration. Why should I retire when I still have dreams - especially when I now think I can attempt *Mind Control*? Climbing keeps me alive, and there is so much to discover! Oliana is impressive. The vibe at the crag is so welcoming. Regardless of ability or background, there is nothing but support for each other. There's no bitterness here, no way! An ideal basis for a project such as *Mind Control*.

It is my philosophy to give something back to those climbing areas where I experience a lot of good vibes. Whether that involves building paths, picking up litter, or replacing old equipment. Right away, I knew I would return to Oliana and rebolt *Mind Control*! Chris Sharma, who set the route, agreed immediately.

I can't do it entirely on my own. In Mammut, I found an invaluable and passionate collaborator. Together with the Mammut team, the equipment list was put together swiftly and uncomplicatedly. Attention was also paid to my safety by providing me with new gear. Especially important, as an overhanging and diagonal line, such as *Mind Control* can cause unexpected loads on the harness, hardware, or rope due to pendulums. Mammut's involvement in such a project is a powerful and amazing signal for the entire climbing community!

Rebolt first, then climb

Finally arrived in Oliana, I started my work at once, continuing into the night with the help of a headlamp. Vacation time is precious, so, no second was wasted by obstructing the popular route for too long. However, the effort required was more significant than expected, despite local climbers assisting me as a kind of ground crew. Since this wasn't just any route, the goal was to make it as perfect as possible. The rebolting took four days. After that, I couldn't lift a finger. Therefore, "La vida tranquila" in the Spanish sun was the order of the day.

The route is now safe. I can confirm that. More involuntarily, but still, for the entertainment of the Oliana family, some of my attempts ended with a massive whipper. Thanks to the Mammut Sender rope I was tied to, I was confident enough to expand my limits. At this point, I had reached the famous rollover move, a technically tricky crossover that marks the way to the final section. It was an exciting and intense time. Encouragement came from everywhere, which boosted my motivation all over again! Indeed, I could not yet climb the route because of the acute time pressure. **However, it would be much worse to never have attempted it.** I would do it all over again. There is still no reason to give up on *Mind Control*. The moves and the ambiance are perfect. The photographs told the truth. **Venga! Fuerte! A muerte!**

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A devastating turn of events

In June, no sooner is the route rebolted when the shocking news of a major fire in Oliana reaches Chris back in Switzerland. During his visit to the Mammut headquarters in Seon, he informs us of how the fire affects Oliana's freshly rebolted route and the climbing cultural heritage in general.



When did you first hear about the fire?

I first heard about it on Sunday evening, June 19. I was able to follow the whole thing, mainly on Instagram. Toni, a local who has made it his business to photograph the climbing in Oliana, owns a beautiful terrace overlooking the wall in the nearby village of Peramola. Before the fire even reached the wall, he posted the first videos.

How did the images make you feel?

It was horrific to watch. Especially with the knowledge of the effects, a fire can have on the rock. Just four months earlier, I had rebolted *Mind Control*. This world-famous line may now have been lost forever. The entire wall can be compared to a famous art museum. Some of the most beautiful and renowned routes are found there in rare proximity to each other. Paradoxically, the firebreak was just as wide as the wall. Bearing witness to the fire was hard. Not just because of the routes but also because of my personal affinity for the area. As soon as I put the drill to work at the beginning of the year, I formed a special connection with the rock face. Rebolting brought me closer to the climbing site and the locals.

What are the conditions of the rock face and route now?

Classic routes such as *Crimptonite*, *T1 Full Equip*, *China Crisis*, and the popular nameless warm-up route at grade 7a have been lost. The entire rock face there is charred. The rock is crumbling on the surface, and the bolts are in a miserable condition. It is no longer certain whether it is still possible to climb there. *Mind Control* has not yet been closely examined by anyone. I have set resin bolts. However, almost all adhesives on the market should not be

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exposed to temperatures above 100°C. Whether the route is climbable at all remains to be seen. Climbing routes in the concave area of the wall may not be affected as much. To evaluate this, an expert would have to test the load-bearing force and tap the rock to check for weaknesses. But so far, nobody has done any of that.

Would a temporary closure of the routes or a warning sign make sense?

Yes. Due to fire risk, there is a ban on entering forests in Catalunya anyway until the cool of autumn. Everyone is responsible for themselves when they climb a route, but sometimes there is a lack of safety awareness. Therefore, it is vital to point out the dangers. I would like to contribute here, but I need a single point of contact to coordinate the situation on the ground. It is also a matter of evaluating whether the area can still be saved and finding out what the locals want. The best solution appears to be forgoing climbing temporarily on the entire wall.

At least until another rebolting effort - if possible. Were there any special challenges when you rebolted the route in spring?

Even though the area was established as current as 2005 to 2009, it was done with very cheap bolts. The rock face in Oliana is a work of art, and climbing, for me, is about aesthetics. Seeing such a beautiful route scarred by rusty pitons and bolts pains me. Such a route deserves the most beautiful quickdraws and the best bolts on offer. To do the route justice, I took my time and rebolted it up to the highest standard. Not everyone places resin bolts, and not everyone aims for an aesthetic result. *Mind Control*. However, I wanted to be perfect. Accordingly, I invested a lot. It was a massive workload to take out the old bolts and replace them with new ones. It required precise drilling, rebolting, applying the right amount of resin, and thoroughly filling the old bolt holes.

How did you get into rebolting routes?

I started making first ascents 40 years ago as a teenager. I quickly realized it was about putting my own visions into practice. It's a creative process for me and a way of expressing myself. For a while, I bolted from dusk to dawn. But at some point it came to me **if you bolt, you have to rebolt**.

What is particularly important to you when rebolting?

Precise work and consequently reliable results. Safety in climbing is a tremendous concern for me. Only if safety is guaranteed can we enjoy climbing to the fullest. Personally, I need to leave something productive behind so that others can climb the route. The social aspect of the work is also central to me. Rebolting stirs up emotions among climbers, conversations arise, and sometimes friendships are formed. Hopefully, again soon in Oliana.

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REBOLTING – RESTORING ROUTES

Equipment required

A distinction is made between adhesive/ mortar and expansion bolts. Often fixed quickdraws can be found on the routes.

New bolts

New bolts are normally placed at a sufficient distance next to the old bolts. In some instances, it may be necessary to change the route's trajectory slightly. As a rule of thumb, the first ascensionist has the last word.

Old bolts

Are removed. Depending on the type of bolt, these procedures may vary.

Identify routes in need of rebolting

Signs such as rust indicate the condition of the route. It is distinguished between surface rust and deep rust. However, the two types of rust are very similar. Itsometimes difficult to tell them apart. A clear warning signal is when the plate is still in good condition, but the material underneath is crumbling.

Responsibility for route maintenance

Routes are often rebolted on personal initiative. In Switzerland, the association ReBolting has assumed certain responsibilities for re-equipping routes. The Swiss Alpine Club's "[Sanieren und Erschliessen](#)" expert commission coordinates rebolting in the respective areas.

Report routes in need of rebolting

Routes can be reported to [regional representatives](#). Rebolting can then be financed.



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About Mammut

Mammut is a Swiss outdoor company founded in 1862 that offers mountain sports enthusiasts worldwide high-quality products and unique brand experiences. For 160 years, the world's leading premium brand has stood for safety and pioneering innovation. Mammut products combine functionality and performance with contemporary design. With its combination of hard goods, footwear, and clothing, Mammut is one of the complete suppliers in the outdoor market. Mammut Sports Group AG is active in around 40 countries and employs approx. 800 people.

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