



Stawamus Chief, Shannon Falls & Murrin Provincial Parks

ROCK CLIMBING STRATEGY

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Introduction	2
 Strategy Topics	
Trails	3
Signs	4
Cleaning.....	5
Fixed Protection and Bolting	6
Bivouacs	6
Safety	7
Falcons	7
Sensitive Areas and Inventories	8
Commercial Use	9
Historical Values	9
Role of Climbing Community	10

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INTRODUCTION

The Stawamus Chief Master Plan identified climbing as a key and important recreational activity within Stawamus Chief Provincial Park. The Master Plan (p. 24) set two objectives for climbing:

- ◆ To provide for a variety of climbing opportunities.
- ◆ To minimize the impact [of climbing] on the environment.

The Master Plan recognized that a number of issues arose from these two objectives and directed that BC Parks in cooperation with climbers develop a rock climbing strategy to address these issues. This strategy also covers Shannon Falls and Murrin Park due to their close proximity to the Chief and to the high use of these parks for climbing. This strategy is a cooperative effort to balance climbers needs with protection of the environment. The strategy will be used to direct BC Parks in the management of the park and climbing activities. BC Parks continues to be responsible for the management of park resources and the decision making involved in that management. It will be necessary to update this strategy in 3 to 4 years as more current and historical information is gained on climbing within these parks.

The climbing areas in Stawamus Chief, Shannon Falls and Murrin Provincial Parks are of regional, provincial and international importance. These areas have been climbed intensively for over 40 years and there have been significant increases in numbers of climbers using the area over the last decade.

There are over 1200 climbing routes in the Squamish area, including areas outside of the parks. About 100 of the climbs are of substantial length for a total of over 2500 pitches.

Climbing existing routes and developing new routes often will result in some modification of the park environment. This could include creating access trails, cleaning vegetation off climbing routes and placing fixed protection (e.g. bolts) along routes. With the long history of climbing in these areas much of this modification has already taken place. Due to the wet, relatively mild climate, vegetation growth on the cliffs is relatively vigorous. Wildlife in the climbing areas is limited primarily to bird species including the threatened Peregrine Falcon.

These parks are also intensively used for hiking, viewing, picnicking, swimming and other day use activities. In general, rock climbing takes place in areas that are physically separated from other recreational users. Exceptions to this are certain climbs at Murrin and on the Chief backside trails. It appears, based on past history, that the various recreational uses within the parks are compatible with each other.

The Stawamus Chief has significant historic and cultural value to the Squamish First Nation. At this time, specific areas of special cultural and spiritual value to the First Nation have not been identified. As more information becomes available it will be incorporated into an updated rock climbing strategy.

STRATEGY TOPICS

TRAILS

Background:

There are two types of trails within these parks. One type is hiking trails, which are used by both hikers and climbers. These trails are heavily used, generally constructed to a higher standard, and publicized through maps, signage and guides.

The second type are climber's access routes or trails. In general these trails have had little or no formal development, will not be constructed to a higher standard, are often very steep, are used primarily by climbers, and are not publicized on park maps or by signage.

Management Direction:

BC Parks will manage climbers' trails in cooperation with climbers, but will retain final management decisions.

Existing climbers' trails will be maintained primarily by climbers with assistance from BC Parks when feasible. Any trail work to existing trails which would involve significant work (e.g. chainsaws, brushing) or significant changes (e.g. routing) would be planned by BC Parks and climbers prior to work starting. Minor works (e.g. water runoff control) can be done on an as needed basis without prior consultation.

As new crags and faces are developed, climbers should access these areas by choosing existing access trails or low impact access routes and must not cut or remove any material. If the climbs prove popular and the need for trail planning and construction arises, climbers and BC Parks will evaluate, plan and implement a new trail as is feasible. In some cases, due to environmental concerns it may not be feasible to construct access trails and it may be necessary to close a climbing face due to a lack of access or unacceptable environmental impacts.

The use of climbing trails by non-climbers will be passively discouraged by limiting signage, by inconspicuous trail entrances, and by discouraging the inclusion of these trails in hiking guides or community maps.

Actions:

1. Develop inventory of existing trails. Monitor and measure development of new trails and changes in existing trails. Work toward developing a simple climbers' access trail plan. Complete by December 2000.

Responsibility: BC Parks and climbers.

TRAILS cont'd.

2. Perform maintenance on existing trails.

Responsibility: Climbers with assistance from BC Parks.

3. Make entrances to Petrifying Wall and Sugarloaf trails in Murrin Provincial Park less conspicuous.

Complete by June 2000

Responsibility: BC Parks.

SIGNS

Background:

Signs within these parks are primarily intended for non-climbing visitors. There are only a few signs which contain a climbing message (e.g. the map at Murrin parking lot). This lack of signs is to reduce risk to non-climbers by passively discouraging them from unintentionally entering climbing areas, and to retain a more natural experience.

There will be a need for signs aimed specifically at the climbing community. An example of this would be information on closures of routes due to the presence of nesting falcons.

Management Direction:

Signs and information for climbers will continue to be kept to minimal levels and will focus only on those messages necessary for management needs or safety issues. Signs such as these will be placed on the notice boards within developed areas or inconspicuous locations available to climbers, but not generally seen by other recreational users.

Actions

1. Monitor need for signs and other information and implement signs as required.

Responsibility: BC Parks with assistance from climbers.

CLEANING

Background:

Due to the climate, vegetation growth can be relatively vigorous on the cliffs in the Squamish area. In order to develop new climbs and maintain existing climbs, vegetation and loose rock often is cleaned or removed by climbers. The amount of cliff area impacted by cleaning is difficult to measure but is relatively low, restricted to little more than the width of the climb itself.

Management Direction:

At this time due to limited information it is difficult to develop final guidelines for cleaning of routes. As a preliminary direction, cleaning activities must follow these guidelines:

1. Minimize the impact of cleaning at all times.
2. Remove only the minimum amount of material, to ensure that the climb is safe and offers an appropriate climbing experience.
3. Remove no trees unless approved by BC Parks.
4. Think carefully about the importance and quality of the route. Will this route continue to be used and does it justify the amount of cleaning proposed? How significant will it be to climbers for it's length and grade of difficulty?
5. During any cleaning activities the climbers must ensure the safety of any other users in the area. This is especially important when developing longer climbs.

In combination with the development of inventories and potential sensitive areas, BC Parks and the climbing community will further discuss and refine cleaning guidelines.

Action:

1. In 2000 monitor cleaning activities.

Responsibility: BC Parks and climbing community

2. By spring of 2001, develop written guidelines for cleaning which can be posted and distributed.

Responsibility: BC Parks and climbing community

FIXED PROTECTION

Background:

Fixed protection has been used in the Squamish climbing areas since the Baldwin-Cooper first ascent of the Grand Wall in 1961. Although a general consensus has evolved over time within the climbing community on the use of bolts, contention over the appropriateness of bolting can arise as new situations develop. In general, the climbing community has been and will continue to be self-regulating in the use of bolts.

The three parks in this strategy are heavily used and located near a highway, a railway, secondary roads, and residential areas. They are not remote wilderness parks and the use of fixed protection should not be compared to their use in other parks.

Management Directions:

The use of fixed protection, rappel stations, and fixed belay stations will continue to be primarily determined by the rock climbing community. BC Parks will monitor trends or changes in the use of fixed protection.

Actions

1. Continue present situation. Monitor trends

Responsibility: Climbers and BC Parks

BIVOUACS

Background:

Planned bivouacs occasionally occur on the cliff faces on the Stawamus Chief. At this time, planned bivouacs create no issue.

Management Direction:

BC Parks will monitor any issues that develop from planned bivouacs and respond as necessary.

Action:

1. Monitor issues arising from planned bivouacs.

Responsibility: BC Parks

SAFETY

Background:

Climbers have generally relied on themselves and other climbers on safety issues. In some situations Squamish Search and Rescue (SAR) has been involved in rescues. It is recognized that relative to the high level of climbing activity, there is a low occurrence of safety related incidents.

Management Direction:

Safety will continue to be the primary responsibility of the climbers. As required BC Parks will assist Squamish SAR in rescue related situations. BC parks will monitor safety related issues.

Actions:

1. Continue present situation.

Responsibility: Primarily climbers

FALCONS

Background:

In the mid 1980's Peregrine falcons returned to nest on the southwest face of the Chief. To minimize human disturbance of the nesting falcons, climbers established a self regulated climbing closure from March 15 - July 31. Routes closed were mid elevation routes from Negro Lesbian to Freeway. At this time it appears the closure is effective as the falcons have continued to return and nest successfully. BC Parks supports and will enforce this closure.

Management Direction:

BC Parks began collecting systematic observations in 1998 and 1999 on the activities of the falcons including identification of nesting sites. In order to maximize protection of falcons and minimize the area of closure accurate and long term data must be gathered on falcon activities. Management decisions and openings will be conservative and will favor protection of falcons and their nesting habitat.

Action:

The traditional closed area will be enforced each spring beginning March 15. BC Parks will compile information from rock climbers, other observers and volunteers and its own observations and identify the falcons nesting location and high activity areas. In late May/early June, BC Parks will review the closure to see if it should be modified in size or location. All closures due to falcon protection will end on July 31, unless there is new information that would support a closure extension.

Responsibility: BC Parks and climbing community.

SENSITIVE AREAS AND INVENTORIES

Background:

At this time very little is known about the composition or the ecology of the plant and animal communities found in the cliff areas. To ensure protection of both conservation values and climbing opportunities, more information must be gathered on types and numbers of species present and on the sensitivity and ecology of the natural communities.

As well, an inventory of existing climbing routes and areas where future expansion of climbing might occur needs to be completed.

Management Direction:

Inventories of both plant and animal communities and of climbing routes will be gathered and analyzed. Areas of concern for environmental protection will be identified. BC Parks will discuss the results with the rock climbing community and will develop strategies to ensure protection of ecological values and recreational opportunities.

Action:

1. In 2000, an aerial survey will be conducted of the cliff areas and a photographic database will be developed. Future inventory and planning work can then be recorded onto this base.

Responsibility: BC Parks and Kevin McLane.

2. As is feasible, inventories and analysis will occur through 2000 and 2001

Responsibility: BC Parks and climbing community

COMMERCIAL USE

Background:

Commercial use has primarily involved climbing instruction or the film industry. Commercial climbing guides often are strong proponents for the parks and climbing activities.

Management Direction:

Commercial use within a provincial park is controlled by the Park Act and government policies. Commercial users must have a Park Use Permit prior to operating in a Provincial Park.

Action:

Foster a cooperative relationship between recreational climbers, commercial guides, other users and BC Parks.

Responsibility: All park visitors and BC Parks.

HISTORICAL VALUES

Climbing History Values

Background:

Three features which are of historical value to the climbing community are the small rock sculpture near the Grand Wall Trail, the original Baldwin/Cooper bolt ladder on the Grand Wall route and the Baldwin plaque at the top of the Apron. Other climbing historical features are difficult to define and there is a requirement for additional research in this area.

Management Direction:

Climbers and other users will be encouraged to protect the rock sculpture and the Baldwin/Cooper bolt ladder. BC Parks and the climbing community will gather additional information on potential historical values.

Action:

1. Further information will be gathered on potential values. The protection of these sites will be encouraged by informing and educating users about the value of these sites.

Responsibility: BC Parks and climbers.

ROLE OF CLIMBING COMMUNITY

For the last three decades members of the climbing community have been instrumental in the management, development and protection of the cliff areas. It is crucial that climbers continue their involvement within the park areas.

Management Direction:

An area of special interest to BC Parks is the development of “Climber’s Guidelines”. These guidelines would provide direction to climbers on protocol for climbing within these three parks and would eventually be in a form which could be published or posted.

Other areas climbers could actively be involved in include:

- Continued operation of Stawamus Chief Campground by Squamish Rockclimber’s Association;
- Maintenance and inventory of existing trails;
- Identification of historical features / values;
- Cooperation with falcon closure including gathering of information;
- Inventory of sensitive areas;
- Development of cleaning guidelines;
- Updating of rockclimbing strategy;

Actions:

A standing committee from the rock climbing community will meet with BC Parks once per year in the fall to discuss issues related to the parks and rock climbing. This committee will be relatively informal in nature and will include representatives from climbing organizations or clubs, two commercial guides and approximately five to six recreational climbers who represent a spectrum of the rock climbing community. BC Parks will coordinate the committee and the meetings.

The fall meeting will be used to develop joint projects between climbers and BC Parks. These projects would then be implemented with the involvement of specific BC Parks staff and climbers.