



Forks of the Sky State Park Index Town Walls

Technical Rock Climbing Management Plan

Prepared by the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission and the
Forks of the Sky Climbing Advisory Committee

Approved by

Director, Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission

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Date

Management Plan for Technical Rock Climbing at Forks of the Sky State Park (Index Town Walls)

I. Purpose

This climbing management plan (Plan) is to implement WAC 352-32-085 and the statewide technical rock climbing policy (see Appendix 1) at the Index Town Walls (Forks of the Sky State Park Property). This Plan provides site-specific management guidelines for rock climbing that will result in adequate resource protection and accommodation of other park activities.

II. Climbing Area Description

Located almost entirely within Forks of the Sky State Park Property, the Index Town Walls are widely considered to be Washington's premier rock climbing area. They are also considered by many to be one of the premier granite climbing areas in the United States. Numerous cliffs of high-quality rock offer challenging routes up to 600 feet long in a stunning setting. The walls have been featured in a number of guidebooks and magazine articles, with one British magazine listing the Town Walls as one of the "10 Best Crags in America." Mountain No. 117 (September/October 1987).

The Lower Town Wall is the most accessible and popular cliff. It is approximately 350 feet tall. A portion of the Lower Town Wall was quarried in the first half of the twentieth century and the quarry scar separates the main Lower Wall from an area known as The Country. The Great Northern Slab, an area on the left side of the main Lower Wall, offers a number of lower-angled routes of moderate difficulty. The steeper main Lower Wall offers a few moderate routes and a high concentration of hard to difficult routes, mostly following crack systems. The Country offers a few crack routes and a relatively higher proportion of bolt-protected face climbs than the rest of the Lower Wall.

The Upper Town Wall is a larger, more extensive cliff system than the Lower Wall. It is approximately 600 feet tall. The Upper Town Wall features both routes following crack systems and bolt-protected face routes, with many multi-pitch routes. Most of routes are in the moderately hard to difficult range. In addition, the Upper Wall has a number of routes that are typically climbed using aid climbing techniques, sometimes employing overnight bivouacs. These routes have been a historic proving ground for climbers preparing for big wall climbing around the globe.

A number of smaller, satellite cliffs adjacent to the Lower and Upper Town Walls are also utilized by climbers. These include the Inner Walls; the Middle Wall; Blues Cliff; Rhythm Cliff; Little Elvis; Shady Lane; Rattletale Wall; Lookout Point; and Private Idaho.

Bouldering at the Town Walls has become increasingly popular in recent years, especially in the area below Private Idaho, where a number of boulders have been discovered (or re-discovered).

State Parks has owned most of the Index Town Walls, including the Upper Town Wall and the Country area, since 1993. Until 2010, however, the main Lower Town Wall remained as a private in-holding. In 2010, the Washington Climbers Coalition (WCC) purchased the Lower Town Wall. The WCC intends to donate the

Lower Town Wall property to State Parks, which has designated the property as the “Stimson Bullitt Climbing Reserve.”

The Lower Town Wall donation will be accompanied by several deed restrictions. These deed restrictions apply only to that portion of Forks of the Sky State Park that was donated to the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission by the Washington Climbers Coalition. These restrictions include a condition that the primary purpose of the reserve property is to “provide a high quality venue for technical rock climbing and bouldering, together with associated activities”; that recreation management conflicts should be resolved in favor of the primary property purpose; that all portions of the property shall be open to the public year-round, unless an emergency condition precludes such access; and that activities to promote and enhance the quality of the climbing experience on the Property shall be allowed, provided that the manner of such activities may be regulated under a climbing management plan pursuant to WAC 352-32-085(6). These activities include, but are not limited to: 1) the removal of loose rock to ensure safety; 2) the removal of cliff vegetation (e.g., mosses and small brush) as necessary to provide a clear and enjoyable line of ascent; 3) the use of chalk; 4) bivouacking; and 5) the use of fixed anchors (e.g., bolts and rappel stations) for safety, to be maintained by the climbing community using such methods of placement as that community deems appropriate (e.g., hand or power drills). A complete listing of the restrictions is provided in Appendix 2.

III. Management Plan

Advisory Committee:

There will be a climbing advisory committee for Forks of the Sky State Park to be made up of climbers, the park manager, and others deemed appropriate by State Parks. The climbers will be representative of the types of climbing that occur at the park. The committee will meet at least once a year or more often as the State Parks considers necessary. This Plan will be reviewed at least annually or as the advisory board determines.

Management Plan Issues:

Approved climbing areas: All cliff areas and boulders within Forks of the Sky State Park are approved for climbing, unless specifically closed pursuant to this Plan.

Overnight bivouacs: Overnight bivouacking is allowed at the Town Walls.

Chalk: Chalk may be used.

Route Development and Maintenance:

Route cleaning: Loose rock and cliff vegetation (e.g., mosses, lichens, small brush and vascular plants) that are not from species that are considered sensitive, threatened or endangered by the Washington Department of Natural Resources (DNR) Natural Heritage Program may be removed as necessary to provide or maintain a clear and enjoyable line of ascent. Such cleaning should be minimized to the extent necessary to provide a clear and enjoyable line of ascent. If future

discoveries/vegetation surveys identify species of conservation concern, State Parks will work with the climbing community to provide appropriate protections.

Hold addition: The addition of holds onto the rock face by any means, including gluing, chipping, or bolting is prohibited.

Stabilization of holds: The artificial stabilization of natural holds with epoxy is strongly discouraged unless deemed necessary to preserve a natural line of ascent. If employed, such stabilization must be visually unobtrusive.

Fixed anchors: The use of fixed anchors (e.g., bolts, pitons, slings, and chocks) is allowed for safety. Fixed anchors will be maintained by the climbing community. State Parks does not monitor fixed anchors and takes no responsibility for fixed anchors.

Rappel/belay stations: Fixed rappel/belay stations are allowed for safety. Rappel/belay stations should be as visually unobtrusive as practical (e.g., the use of chain anchors is encouraged over brightly colored webbing). State Parks does not monitor rappel/belay stations and takes no responsibility for rappel/belay stations.

Drills: Power drills are allowed for bolt installation and replacement.

Trail Development and Maintenance: Existing trails and already established cliff base areas, as shown in Appendix 3, may be utilized and maintained. Because of the density of vegetation in the Park, clearing access trails to cliff areas, clearing cliff base vegetation, and maintaining sunlight access to cliffs is necessary in order for climbing to continue as a viable recreational activity. Such activities may be undertaken subject to the following conditions, which shall constitute a resource conservation plan for the purposes of WAC 352-28-010(2): Climbers may utilize pruning (including selective de-limbing) and vegetation removal within established trail corridors not to exceed 3 feet on each side of the center line of the trail and within already established cliff base areas, as shown in Appendix 3, to maintain such areas for recreational use; provided, the removal of "significant trees" as defined by WAC 352-28-010(1)(a) (i.e., living or dead standing trees greater than 10 inches in diameter at breast height [4.5 feet above the ground]) is not permitted without prior approval of State Parks and is only to be done by a qualified, experienced person with the proper safety equipment. Selective thinning of significant trees may be periodically necessary to permit sunlight to reach cliff and boulder areas.

Any removal of trees, limbs or vegetation outside of the areas shown in Appendix 3 will only be done with approval of State Parks and carried out by an appropriately qualified, experienced person with the proper safety equipment. In evaluating vegetation removal, park staff will balance recreation needs against long term cultural and natural resource protection and conservation values including consideration of the DNR Natural Heritage Program and Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) priority habitat and species recommendations, as well as potential liability issues including tree risk, erosion potential and other legal requirements.

Resource Protection/Special Use Designations: None at this time.

Closures: Pursuant to WAC 352-32-085(3), a closure may be instituted when the director or his or her designee determines a closure is necessary for the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the public, park visitors or staff, or park resources.

Discovery of any new plant or animal species of conservation concern within an existing or proposed climbing area may result in a full or partial closure. For the purposes of this Plan, “species of conservation concern” means a threatened or endangered plant or animal species, or a species that, while not threatened or endangered, is of limited distribution, habitat use, or population size such that it is impacted by climbing at the Index Town Walls. The action taken in this case will be at the level necessary to ensure adequate protection for the species until a study can be completed to determine its location, condition, and the level of protection required. The management plan will then be amended to provide for that required protection. Following approval of the amended plan, the climbing closures may be reviewed and areas reopened if allowed by the plan.

As of the summer of 2012, one active peregrine falcon nesting area has been identified on the right side of the Index Upper Town Wall, on the Beach ledge of the Cheeks area. At least two nesting scrapes have been historically utilized on this ledge. To encourage successful nesting, a seasonal closure of the general nesting area will occur each year beginning on March 1 and ending on July 1. These dates may be adjusted based on actual observation of nesting activity. If no nesting activity is confirmed (with the confirmation to be made by WDFW, if possible, by no later than April 15), or if nesting is observed to be completed prior to July 1 (i.e., fledging has occurred), the seasonal closure will be lifted. The closure area is visually depicted in Appendix 3. In narrative terms, the closure area includes all routes beginning and ending at the Beach ledge, starting from *Engines of Archimedes* on the west and including the *Perverse Traverse*, with the exception of the following routes, which remain open during the closure: 1) *The Boneyard*; 2) *Clay* (first pitch only); 3) *All Dogs Go to Heaven*; and 4) one-pitch climbs in the *Zipper* area, beginning with *Fiction* and ending with *Pedal to the Metal* (including *Zipper* first pitch, *Active Boys Puke A Lot*, and *Attractive Nuisance*). Hiking along the base of the wall is not affected by the closure and remains open during the closure period. The closure area may be adjusted depending on actual observation of nesting activity.

At least two weeks prior to the closure start date (unless actual observation of nesting behavior precludes such a notice period), State Parks will post, or arrange for posting of, signage informing climbers of the closure at the Lower Town Wall bulletin board and in the vicinity of the closure area. If the closure period is lifted early, notice of the decision will be posted as soon as possible after the decision is made. If the closure is extended beyond July 1, then as soon as possible after the decision, State Parks will post, or arrange for posting of, signage informing climbers of the closure extension. State Parks will notify the Washington Climbers Coalition of all closure related decisions as soon as possible.

Rescues: To the degree possible State Parks staff will participate in rescues within the scope of their training and abilities. State Parks staff is typically not trained for climbing rescue and climbers should dial 911 and contact local emergency service providers.

Group activities: Organized groups/climbing classes larger than 10 people will contact State Parks and obtain a special activity permit. Commercial ventures must obtain a valid Commercial Use Permit from Washington State Parks and provide proof of liability insurance.

Volunteer support: State Parks encourages volunteer activity (e.g., clean-ups) at least annually.

Public education: Information boards will be maintained at main entry points to climbing areas (e.g., Lower Town Wall trail) to, as appropriate, provide information about approved climbing areas, climbing rules, climbing safety, environmental concerns, emergency phone numbers. On-site signing will be maintained to indicate climbing area boundaries (where appropriate) and any special restrictions or closures.

Liability: State Parks assumes no responsibility for monitoring or managing the manner in which climbers practice their sport, or the hazards of climbing in what is acknowledged to be a geologically active area (rock fall potential). Climbers are responsible for their own safety, as provided in RCW 4.24.210. This Plan is to solely manage the impact of climbing on State Park resources.

Violations: Violations of this Plan are punishable as provided in WAC 352-32-085(10).

Appendix 1: Relevant WAC and Commission Policy

WAC 352-32-085 (Technical rock climbing):

(1) Whenever used in this section, technical rock climbing shall mean climbing while using such aids as pitons, carabiners or snap links, chalk, ropes, fixed or removable anchors, or other similar equipment. Technical rock climbing includes bouldering and free soloing (respectively low and high elevation climbing without ropes).

(2) Technical rock climbing will be allowed in state parks except it is:

(a) Not permitted in natural area preserves;

(b) Conditioned in heritage areas, natural areas and natural forest areas;

(c) Not permitted where the director or designee has closed the area pursuant to subsection (3) of this section;

(d) Limited in state park areas without climbing management plans pursuant to subsection (6) of this section to the use of routes with established fixed protection, new routes that do not use fixed protection, nor require gardening/cleaning with any type of cleaning tool;

(e) Not permitted in state park areas closed to public use.

(3) The director or designee may, permanently or for a specified period or periods of time, close any state park area to technical rock climbing if the director or designee concludes that a technical rock climbing closure is necessary for the protection of the health, safety and welfare of the public, park visitors or staff, or park resources. Prior to closing any park or park area to technical rock climbing, the director or designee shall hold a public meeting in the general area of the park or park area to be closed to technical rock climbing. Prior notice of the meeting shall be published in a newspaper of general circulation in the area and at the park at least thirty days prior to the meeting. In the event that the director or designee determines that it is necessary to close a rock climbing area immediately to protect against an imminent and substantial threat to the health, safety and welfare of the public, park visitors or staff, or park resource, the director or designee may take emergency action to close a park area to rock climbing without first complying with the publication and hearing requirements of this subsection. Such emergency closure may be effective for only so long as is necessary for the director or designee to comply with the publication and hearing requirements of this subsection.

(4) The director or designee shall ensure that any park area closed to technical rock climbing pursuant to subsection (3) of this section is conspicuously posted as such at the entrance of said park area. Additionally, the director or designee shall maintain a list of all parks and park areas closed to technical rock climbing pursuant to subsection (3) of this section.

(5) The director or designee shall establish a committee of technical rock climbers, to advise park staff

on park management issues related to technical rock climbing for each state park area where deemed necessary by the agency.

(6) Each state park area with an established advisory committee of technical rock climbers will have a climbing management plan which will specify technical rock climbing rules concerning overnight stays on climbing routes, bolting, power drills, stabilization of holds, group size and activities, gardening/cleaning of routes pursuant to chapter 352-28 WAC and RCW 79A.05.165, chalk, special use designations for climbing areas, protection of sensitive park resources, and other such issues required by the director or designee. Climbing management plans that relate to natural forest areas or heritage areas must be approved by the commission. The director or designee shall ensure that any technical rock climbing rules contained in a climbing management plan are conspicuously posted at the entrance of the affected park area.

(7) Bolting will be allowed as specified in climbing management plans.

(8) The use of power drills will be allowed only if the park climbing management plans specifically permit under specified conditions for bolt replacement and bolt installation on new routes. They are otherwise prohibited.

(9) The addition of holds onto the rock face by any means, including gluing, chipping, or bolting is prohibited.

(10) Except as provided in WAC 352-32-310, any violation of this section and rules contained in the park management plan and posted at the park is an infraction under chapter 7.84 RCW.

Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission's Technical Rock Climbing Policy (65-95-2)

It is the policy of the Washington State Parks and Recreation Commission to allow technical rock climbing in state parks, other than Natural Area Preserves and only as conditioned by the Commission in Heritage Areas, Natural Areas and Natural Forest Areas, in such a way as to assure protection of park resources and compatibility with other public activities in the parks. These assurances are best achieved by establishing forums at each climbing park to seek advice from climbers for appropriate accommodation of the activity, maintaining acceptable levels of impact on park resources, assuring compatibility with park visitors, and continuing the education of agency staff. Public review of this policy will be done periodically to keep it current with trends in technical rock climbing and consistent with related agency policy.

Appendix 2: Stimson Bullitt Climbing Reserve Deed Restrictions

A. Primary Property Purpose. The primary property purpose is to provide a high quality venue for technical rock climbing and bouldering, together with associated activities.

B. Name. The property shall be identified with the name of Charles Stimson "Stim" Bullitt (1919-2009).

C. Public Access. All portions of the property shall be open to the public year-round, unless an emergency condition precludes such access. In the event of such closure, the property shall be reopened to public access as soon as possible after the emergency condition has been resolved or abated.

D. Recreation. Passive recreational activities, including hiking, photography, nature viewing, and environmental/cultural education and interpretation, shall be allowed on the Property, with any recreation management conflicts resolved in favor of the primary property purpose.

E. Climbing Management Activities. In order to effectuate the primary property purpose, activities to promote and enhance the quality of the climbing experience on the Property shall be allowed, provided that the manner of such activities may be regulated under a climbing management plan pursuant to WAC 352-32-085(6). These activities include, but are not limited to: 1) the removal of loose rock to ensure safety; 2) the removal of cliff vegetation (e.g., mosses and small brush) as necessary to provide a clear and enjoyable line of ascent; 3) the use of chalk; 4) bivouacking; and 5) the use of fixed anchors (e.g., bolts and rappel stations) for safety, to be maintained by the climbing community using such methods of placement as that community deems appropriate (e.g., hand or power drills).

F. Forest Management. Forested areas of the Property shall remain in a natural forested state, except that trees may be felled to: 1) optimize the primary property purpose, including selective thinning in order to permit sunlight to reach cliff and boulder areas; and 2) mitigate any potential hazard to public health or safety, to promote forest health, restoration, and regeneration, or to create safe, inviting environments in which the public can recreate. Invasive nonnative plants may be removed.

G. Trail Maintenance. Trails necessary to provide recreational access may be constructed on the Property, provided that the design and location of any construction, renovation, expansion, replacement, and maintenance of trails do not adversely impact the primary property purpose.

H. Improvements. Any other improvements to the Property shall be limited to those that are consistent with the property remaining substantially in its natural state and that are not in conflict with the primary property purpose. Such improvements may include: sanitation facilities, benches, fences, and noncommercial signs that advance the primary property purposes, with materials used for such improvements to be substantially of a natural character, both in texture and finish, so as to blend unobtrusively with the natural character of the area. Such improvements may not include, as an example, manicured lawn areas.

I. Prohibited Uses. Any activities inconsistent with the primary purpose of the property shall be prohibited, including mining/quarrying, hunting, and the use of motorized vehicles outside of designated access roads unless required by emergency.

Appendix 3. Existing Access Trails and Climbing Areas

