

VERTICAL TIMES

The National Publication of Access Fund
Summer 18/Volume 112
www.accessfund.org



America's Deteriorating Climbing Areas

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“ If I have seen a little further it is by standing on the shoulders of Giants. ”

– ISAAC NEWTON

In early June, Brady Robinson gathered Access Fund staff and broke some big news: He was stepping down as executive director, after almost eleven years leading our organization to unprecedented growth and success, to begin work for Tompkins Conservation, a remarkable group conserving landscapes in Chilean Patagonia and beyond. It was one of those moments full of mixed emotions—happiness for a friend and colleague, sadness at his departure, and questions about the future.

Transition and leadership change are an inherent part of nonprofit life. It is not a question of when, but how. In my role as affiliate director, I've worked with local climbing organizations and often given this advice: Devote as much time to succession planning as you do to saving climbing areas. Why? Because the work must continue, because the work is more important than us. The only way our mission advances is by empowering other people, by passing the torch.

The Access Fund board and staff have handed me that torch during this time of transition. After working as the affiliate director and Southeast regional director for almost seven years, I am honored to step into the interim executive director role, on a temporary basis, and guide Access Fund through a critically important leadership transition.

I am happy to report that we could not be in a stronger position, which is a credit to Brady, to our staff, our board, and of course amazing supporters like you. A hallmark of Access Fund has been our laser focus on mission. We aren't perfect, and we are always striving to be better, but our mission and programs have held steady and kept us on route for almost three decades.

So, my message to our supporters and partners is this: We are navigating this leadership transition with the same clarity and focus we've dedicated to climbing access and conservation since our founding. We will work carefully and diligently to select the next executive director to lead Access Fund. And while we do this, we will stay on route, focused as

always on the climbing areas, the people, and the partners that drive our mission to protect America's climbing.

And while we keep up the intense fight for public lands, we need your help to re-engage on another, critically important piece of our work—climbing area stewardship. Many of our climbing areas are redlining. The impacts from a growing climbing population are putting many of our treasured climbing areas in peril. And we need your help.

Our work doesn't stop once access is secured. We are committed to the long-term sustainability of our climbing areas, and there's a pressing need to scale up efforts to manage the impacts from a growing climbing community. Check out the feature story in this issue of Vertical Times to learn more about the stewardship challenges and what you can do to help. It's going to take all of us working together.

Sincerely,



Zachary Lesch-Huie
Interim Executive Director



REMEMBERING CHARLOTTE FOX

It is with great affection that Access Fund remembers Charlotte Fox, who passed away earlier this year. An accomplished mountaineer, Charlotte was an influential contributor to Access Fund's early years. She contributed her wealth, shared her vast network of contacts in the climbing community, and served on the board of directors for two terms to help shape the organization. Charlotte was humble about her contributions, quietly making a difference for the climbing community, and at the same time her infectious laugh and desire to live life large ruled the day. Rest in peace, Charlotte. You will be greatly missed, but your legacy lives on.

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Northern Arizona Climbers Coalition

NACC is on a roll, taking steps to grow as a nonprofit and maintain a great record of stewardship and land manager support. The coalition recently received 501(c)(3) tax-exempt status and is expanding a great partnership with the Coconino National Forest to tackle management planning at Oak Creek Canyon. And in early June the organization led an Adopt a Crag at Priest Draw, a premier Arizona bouldering area, helping to address erosion and brush over old roads.



Friends of Trout Creek Protect Golden Eagles



If you live in the Northwest and like to jam, you know Trout Creek. From January to August, the cliff is also home to nesting golden eagles. Over five years ago, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) came close to closing the entire cliff to protect the nesting eagles. But Friends of Trout Creek worked quickly to forge a solid partnership with the BLM and wildlife biologists, and now they work together to ensure a balanced management approach that preserves eagle nesting sites while allowing for recreation. In May the BLM lifted the seasonal closure on the main wall, and climbers got back to jammin'. Cheers to FOTC for educating the community and showing that climbing and protection of cliff-nesting raptors go hand in hand.

Southeastern Climbers Coalition 25th Anniversary

Milestones are worth celebrating, and this year the Southeastern Climbers Coalition (SCC) turns twenty-five. SCC is one of America's largest and most accomplished local climbing advocacy and conservation organizations. Working in Tennessee, Alabama, and Georgia, SCC has purchased and protected numerous climbing areas, like Boat Rock, Jamestown, and Denny Cove, to name only a few. SCC is also focused on stewardship, rallying an always-psyched community of volunteers to give back through dozens of trail days and Adopt a Crag across three states. Access Fund and SCC recently teamed up to purchase and protect Hell's Kitchen and Dogwood Boulders access. Congratulations, SCC—here's to twenty-five more, and many more great projects together!



LCO 101: Replacing Bad Bolts

Heeding the call of the masses, local climbing organizations (LCOs) are beginning to step up and tackle bolt replacement in a systematic way. Here are a few suggestions for getting your LCO into the replacement game.

- **Do Your Homework**—Develop hardware standards and consult with an attorney to better understand the liability associated with undertaking replacement efforts. No model is perfect, and your board will need to figure out what works best for your LCO and community.
- **Keep Good Records**—Mountain Project and BadBolts.com are two good resources for getting reports on bad hardware from your local community. Some LCOs have also set up reporting mechanisms on their websites. Take the time to track and record your LCO's bolt replacement efforts to ensure this institutional knowledge isn't lost when volunteers move on or replace so many bolts that recalling the details for each replacement becomes impossible.
- **Find Skilled Individuals**—Only experienced, skilled rebolters should be leading your LCO's efforts. Make sure your volunteers know what they're doing by interviewing them, ensuring they have proper training, and always stressing the importance of following manufacturer's specifications, including using a torque wrench to hit torque specs when using mechanical bolts.
- **Educate Your Community**—Stress the importance of using quality stainless steel materials when placing or replacing hardware, and encourage your community to tackle simple maintenance issues such as spinning hangers or worn quick-links.



CLIMB LIKE A LOCAL: PACE BEND

In Texas, when it gets hotter than a snub-nosed .38 without serial numbers, the locals head to Pace Bend. Only forty-five minutes west of Austin, Pace Bend is home to miles of limestone cliffs perched high above Lake Travis, making it an irresistible spot for deep-water soloing. Expect a fair amount of hooliganism.

LOCAL VIBE: Pace Bend climbing is all about having fun. Even the most cantankerous Texas climber understands and abides by this one rule. It is not unusual to find fantasy animal pool floats or folks firing up battery-powered blenders for shore-side margaritas. The climbing ethic is fluid, and the feel of the place is transient. Locals understand that it's a privilege to climb at Pace Bend, which has been closed for years at a time due to drought conditions. But when it's open, it's a helluva good time.

CLIMBING BETA: Virtually all the climbs at Pace Bend are nameless and gradeless. All you need are a pair of old shoes, a flotation device, and some chalk (a dry bag for your personal items is highly recommended). Just put on your shoes, jump into the lake, and float around for a bit to survey the climbs until you find something that looks like fun. When you're ready to climb, swim over to the cliff and get after it. Sometimes the crux is just getting out of the water. Always check the landings for submerged obstacles.

AVOID THE CROWDS: Try to climb on a weekday during the summer months, or find a friend with a boat to take you to some of the more remote areas. That said, you'll still find places to climb at Pace Bend even on busy weekends. And if you own a wetsuit, you can have the entire park to yourself from November through March.

LOCAL PET PEEVE: Unrestrained dogs! There's nothing worse than a dog swimming up behind you and clawing at your back, or swimming underneath you just as you set up for that dyno crux. Also, don't sink empty containers in the lake. Someone once tried to sink a cache of stolen cars in the lake, and it didn't end well.

WATCH OUT: Water levels can fluctuate with rainfall and drought. Some areas may not be safe for climbing or cliff jumping. Check Bloodyflapper.com for water level reports before you visit.

Also, dehydration can be a killer in the Texas heat, and many folks don't think to stay hydrated when they're floating around on the cool, jade-colored lake. Bring lots of water (swallowing lake water after a big fall doesn't count).

Also, bring cash because Pace Bend Park doesn't accept credit cards. Entrance fees are \$10 per vehicle.

CAMPING BETA: Pace Bend Park has over 400 primitive campsites, including beach camping. There are also 20 campsites that have electricity, water, showers, and restrooms. It's one of the few parks that allow campfires, provided there isn't a burn ban in effect.

REST DAY/GOOD EATS: Austin is the place to go for a rest day and good eats, and it's only a forty-five-minute drive from Pace Bend Park. For a fixture of Austin Tex-Mex, check out Rosie's Tamale House on Highway 71 just west of RR 620. Or just stock up at the local H-E-B on meat, chips and salsa, and margarita-in-a-bag mix. Many folks barbecue right on top of the cliffs at Pace Bend.

WHO'S GOT YOUR BACK: Texas Climbers Coalition represents climbing interests at Pace Bend Park. ■

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THINGS TO KNOW BEFORE YOU CLIMB IN THE ALPINE

As the weather heats up, many of us will be heading into the alpine to get our climbing fix in cooler temperatures. The alpine zone, typically occurring above consistent tree line, is characterized by rocky talus slopes, dwarfed trees, and highly sensitive vegetation. The alpine environment is one of the most fragile places we climb. Shorter growing seasons, limited soil, and fragile plant life make it especially important for us to tread lightly and reduce our impact when alpine climbing. As an increasing number of climbers are heading into the alpine, land managers have growing concerns and are paying close attention.

Here are five things to keep in mind before you begin your next alpine climbing adventure:

- 1. Stashing pads and gear is illegal in most places and hurts wildlife.** We get it. Those alpine approaches can be arduous. If you're projecting, hauling all that gear is a drag. But stashing gear is not worth the price we'll all pay for access if a land manager finds it (and trust us, they are looking). It's also not worth the hit to your wallet or the health of wildlife if hungry marmots eat it. Mountain goats, marmots, and other wild critters crave salt, and they will munch on your sweaty pad, giving them an unhealthy mix of synthetic fibers and human salt.
- 2. Thin alpine soil lacks the micro-organisms needed to biodegrade human waste properly.** If you don't know how to pack out your own poop in a bag, it is time you learned. Bag systems like RESTOP or Cleanwaste

WAG Bags seal up tight with virtually no stink or nasty factor. Pack out that TP as well.

- 3. Plant species in the alpine will take decades to restore if trampled.** Don't pile on a bunch of extra crash pads, and be extra careful where you place your pads and gear. Limit group size to minimize your impact when alpine climbing. When traveling off trail, stick to durable surfaces like rock or talus slopes so you aren't crushing sensitive plants.
- 4. Many alpine areas require permits.** Do your research ahead of time. Many remote, backcountry areas in alpine environments have a permit system to limit the number of visitors in a particular area due to its sensitivity.
- 5. Marmots, pikas, and bears all want to steal your lunch.** Unless you want your favorite alpine area patrolled by hungry bears, take care to store your food so that critters can't get into it. Hang your food, pack out trash and food waste, and use a bear canister where recommended by land managers. Improperly stored food will attract wild critters, leading to food conditioning and increases in human-wildlife encounters.

The alpine environment can be one of the most spectacular places to climb. Thanks for doing your part to take care of this sensitive environment and ensure we don't lose access to all the incredible alpine boulders, walls, and towers. ■

New River Gorge: Damaged Goods Inspire Stewardship Innovation

The New River Gorge in West Virginia is among a growing number of climbing areas so popular and historic that they are being hammered, year after year, by climber foot traffic, large groups, rope bags, increasing hammock use, and a number of other climber impacts. The New's high-quality crags attract climbers from around world, and the climbing landscape is absorbing impacts at an unsustainable rate. Popular crags like Butchers Branch and Tattoo Wall are literally falling apart, with bases of the cliff eroding so badly that shade trees are dying and belay stances are nearly nonexistent.

But where there is great need, there is also room for great innovation and leadership. And the New River Alliance of Climbers (NRAC) has risen to the challenges facing its crags—in a big way. Four years ago, NRAC experimented with a novel twist on the typical one-day Adopt a Crag climber stewardship event. What if they brought volunteers together for an entire week to address the big, gnarly stewardship issues facing their crags?

Now in its fourth year, the annual “Not Work Week” is a seven-day, all-hands-on-deck volunteer event that tackles climbing area stewardship on a grand scale—all tied together with free food, daily raffles, and free camping. This year, NRAC partnered with local volunteers, the National Park Service (NPS), and Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Team to renovate the base of Butchers Branch and construct a bypass trail at Sandstonia.

Over the course of a week, 100 volunteers hauled gravel, fence posts, and some sixty-five 8x8 timbers over a half a mile to construct belay platforms at the base of Butchers Branch. They also installed terraces to halt erosion, prevent further root damage to shade trees, and give climbers an obvious spot to belay and hang out. They also spent time naturalizing heavily impacted areas where climbers shouldn't be venturing—mulching with leaf litter and branches to slow water runoff and give native plants a chance to bounce back.

While the Butchers Branch crew hauled timber and gravel, another set of motivated volunteers worked alongside our Conservation Team East crew and NPS staff at the popular Tattoo Wall to construct retaining walls and a new bypass trail to guide climber traffic away from sensitive plant species, limit congestion on the trails, prevent further root damage to shade trees, and improve the overall quality of the crag.

The annual Not Work Week is making a huge impact in creating a more sustainable set of crags at the New River Gorge, addressing decades of impact and helping to prepare these popular areas for the growing number of climbers. ■





AMERICA'S DETERIORATING CLIMBING AREAS - BY LAURA SNIDER

Eroding approach trails and beat-down, barren bases. Protruding tree roots that were never meant to see the light of day. Toilet paper flowers. “Bathtub rings” along the rock face, a reminder that once, before the people and the rope bags and the crag dogs and the packs and the bouldering pads, the earth had risen much higher.

The story is the same from California to North Carolina: The popularity of climbing has skyrocketed, but many crags were developed when the sport was still fringe. Haphazard approach trails that usually took the most direct, not the most sustainable, line from the car to the cliff worked well enough when a few dozen people might visit the area over a season. But dozens have swelled to hundreds if not thousands, and lightly used approach trails have been transformed into deeply eroded gullies.

“None of these places were designed as recreation sites—and yet that’s exactly what they’ve become,” says Access Fund Stewardship Director Ty Tyler. “Our numbers at these places are similar to that of an urban park where families go to picnic. The difference is that those parks were designed to handle the traffic. Climbing areas weren’t.”

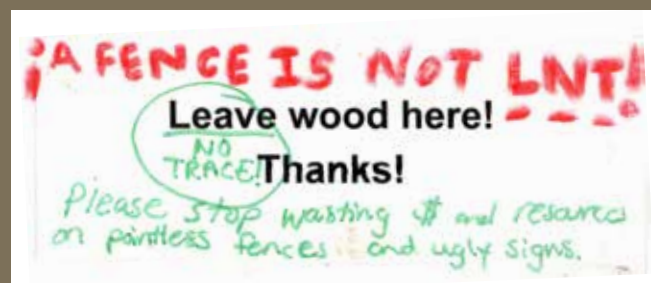
Access Fund is working with local climbing organizations across the country to address the problem with support from land managers, grants, and a whole lot of sweat. Climbers are building retaining walls, beefing up belay bases, installing port-a-potties at trailheads, and creating new trails that will last for decades. But the number of deteriorating crags is growing every day, while the number of volunteers and the funding to support them remain too scarce.

Recruiting help for these projects—in the form of money or labor—is sometimes made more difficult by the fact that many climbers don’t recognize the problem as a problem and, sometimes, don’t recognize the solution as a solution.

Take The Gallery in the Red River Gorge, for instance. Stacked with high-quality lines from 5.8 to 5.13, the crag attracts both new and experienced climbers—and lots of them. On a beautiful Kentucky weekend, every route is apt to have a line hanging on it by late morning. The crag is well loved and equally well impacted.

To address the conditions at The Gallery, the Red River Gorge Climbers’ Coalition (RRGCC) went big. With the help of three separate grants, including one from Access Fund, the group completely transformed the base area. It took 5,000 man-hours and 20 tons of rock, but they created two levels of terracing and built a fence along a retaining wall. The idea behind the fence, which has been used successfully at other climbing areas, is to concentrate the impact in the areas now built to withstand it, and restore the area on the other side of the fence, allowing for revegetation.

But the fence didn’t go over so well with everyone, and some climbers left the RRGCC some feedback on a nearby sign.



Curtis Gale-Dyer, land manager for the RRGCC, would dispute that the fence is a waste of money. Climbers are leaving a trace, with or without the fence, and the game now is to manage that trace.

“Back in the '90s, climbers would go in the woods and do their thing and leave,” he said. But in the intervening decades, the Red’s popularity has exploded.

“A lot of climbers are having a hard time wrapping their heads around the fact that climbing is big,” Gale-Dyer said. “It’s grown and it’s huge. Areas are getting destroyed.”

Land managers have to do active management, Gale-Dyer said, which in turn allows individual climbers to leave no trace. One of the seven core principles of leave no trace is to travel on durable surfaces. The RRGCC and other local climbing organizations are creating those durable surfaces in the form of beefed-up belay bases and bomber trails.

Gale-Dyer’s response to the vandalized sign was to buckle down and do some research. He wanted to make a case for why the RRGCC is doing what it’s doing, and he did it with numbers.

Here’s what he found:

- There are roughly 436 climbing gyms in the United States and Canada.
- 43 new commercial gyms opened in 2017—nearly double the number that opened in 2016.
- Based on liability waivers, between 1,000 and 1,500 people try climbing for the first time every single day in the U.S. (Within two hours of the Red, the number is 28.)
- In 2016, the RRGCC had an estimated 50,000 visits to its properties.

His point, of course, is that the Red cannot expect to see fewer climbers, or even a steady number of climbers. More climbers are coming, and land managers need to find a way to manage the flood.

RECOGNIZING THE PROBLEM

A little farther south, Cody Roney, executive director of the Southeastern Climbers Coalition (SCC), has also experienced climbers not understanding that a problem exists.

“People don’t know what issues look like; that’s probably the major problem,” she said. “People think, ‘This is fine to me. I don’t need to come out to these trail days.’”

But if she can get them there, Roney has seen their perspectives transform.

“When they come out to a trail day and do meaningful work, then they understand,” Roney said. “That’s what a well-built trail looks like. That’s what erosion is and how it’s caused.”

Andrea Hassler, one of the expert trail builders on the Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Team, has had similar experiences all over the country.

“Climbers go straight uphill to the cliff,” she said. “We’re strong and fit and capable, and we can navigate a super-eroded trail. So we don’t necessarily care that the trail is falling apart. What we care about is the climb.”

When Hassler works with volunteers on trail days, she tries to help them visualize how an area used to be, before it became a heavily visited crag.

“There are visual cues if you know what to look for, and you can reconstruct what a place used to look like,” she said. “If you’re at the base of a cliff or a boulder, the plants used to come all the way up to the cliff line. You can see tree roots that are exposed—they’re supposed to be under the soil. You can look for the bathtub ring, which can be a few inches or a few feet above the ground. That part of the cliff used to be underground; it was not exposed to the elements.”

MOTIVATING ACTION

So getting climbers out to trail days changes their perspective. But how to get them out? That’s a ubiquitous problem for Access Fund and local climbing organizations.

“The people who do show up for a trail day want to work hard,” said the SCC’s Roney. “It’s getting people to show up for a trail day that’s the hard part.”

Roney and others around the country have had success turning trail days into celebrations, with raffles, live music, beer at day’s end. She’s also been impressed with coaches of local youth climbing teams in the Chattanooga area, who encourage, prod, and sometimes require their team members to do trailwork service projects, making stewardship a part of what it means to be a climber.

Julia Geisler, executive director of the Salt Lake Climbers Alliance (SLCA), has also found it helpful to keep in mind that there is no “they” when it comes to protecting the places we love to climb to ensure access. We are the “they,” she says. No one is going to come along and fix an eroded trail or replace fixed hardware. It’s up to us.

Geisler said climbers also frequently don’t understand what stewardship actually entails.

“There is a misconception that stewardship is just picking up trash,” she said. “At the beginning, that’s what an Adopt a Crag was about, and we did it to build the trust of the land management agencies. What we’re doing now is legitimate stone masonry work with professional trail crews and highly skilled anchor replacement efforts. It’s recreation infrastructure that needs to accommodate our growing numbers.”



A newly constructed belay platform above a watercourse at Denny Cove gives climbers a safe and dry place to belay and protects the surrounding ecosystem from erosion and rapid degradation.

CRAGS OF TOMORROW

It's time to think about crag stewardship and development more holistically. It's about more than equipping routes with bolts or fixed anchors—it includes everything from appropriate parking and trailhead facilities, to sustainable approach trails and staging areas, to stainless steel hardware, and more.

While this isn't the way crag development has typically unfolded, that's changing, at least when it comes to new areas acquired by Access Fund and local climbing organizations. Some of these areas, developed from scratch, are demonstrations of what sustainable climbing areas can look like.

That's the case for Denny Cove, a 685-acre parcel of land outside Chattanooga with a several-mile ribbon of delectable Tennessee sandstone running along it. The property was purchased in 2016 by the SCC with support from Access Fund, the Land Trust for Tennessee, and others.

"It's the first area we ever bought that had no trails," Roney said. "We were able to cut new trail, and that trail is going to be sustainable forever."

Gale-Dyer has had a similar opportunity in the Red developing a new crag just opening this summer at Miller Fork Recreational Preserve, purchased by Access Fund and RRGCC in 2013.

"The bolting was finished about two years ago, but we kept it closed to put the trail system and the belay bases in place first," he said. "Hopefully we are able to stop the erosion before it's even an issue."

With thoughtful, careful planning, areas like these may look about the same to the next generation of climbers as they do to today's. And for Access Fund's Tyler, that's really what it's all about.

"It comes down to quality of experience, now and for the next generation of climbers," he said.

If we don't address today's deteriorating crags, the small, incremental impacts that we don't notice day to day will continue to mount over time: staging areas that keep getting larger, boulder landings that keep getting steeper, crags that keep getting sunnier as shade trees die, and first bolts that are higher off the ground than when they were placed.

"These impacts affect our experience in a negative way," Tyler said. "But they also degrade the natural environment, and that becomes an access issue. The impacts of climbers, unmitigated, will lead land managers to close areas down to protect natural resources."

HOW YOU CAN HELP

Notice the impacts: The first step to fixing the problem is recognizing the problem exists. When you're out at the crag, pay attention to the conditions around you. Are there exposed tree roots? How much plant life is around? How sloped is the base? Are your feet slipping on the dirt and disturbing the soil? These are signs that climbing is taking a toll.

Limit your impact: Now that you see the problem, work to keep it from getting worse. Put your gear close to the wall and move the belay closer in, not farther away from the cliff. Stay on the trail if there is one, or try to step on rocks and other durable surfaces.

Get involved: Step up with your back, your wallet, or both. Keep your eyes open for volunteer opportunities with your local climbing organization or with Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Teams. If you have financial resources, please consider donating to Access Fund or your local climbing organization. Adequate funding is a critical part of making these projects successful.

Climbers Move the Needle on Capitol Hill

Climbers from across the country made a strong showing on Capitol Hill this May during the 2018 Climb the Hill event. Hosted by Access Fund and the American Alpine Club, the event gathered over 60 professional climbers, outdoor industry leaders, and climbing advocates to participate in 62 meetings with Congressional representatives and federal land administrators.

The day before the Capitol Hill meetings, Climb the Hill participants attended a training session at the flagship REI store, where four DC insiders spoke about the Antiquities Act, the recreation economy, the Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF), energy policy, and tactics for effectively conveying messages across party lines.

The next day, climbers separated into lobby teams based on geography, and they were armed with specific strategies and goals for each individual Congressional representative. We educated Congressional members on how national monuments and LWCF benefit climbing, why the Recreation Not Red Tape Act is worth supporting, and how the current Administration's energy policies are hurting climbing resources and the recreation economy. Climbing advocates also met with the National Park Service (NPS) leadership team, including Deputy Director Dan Smith (acting as director), who commented that NPS is focused on expanding opportunities for climbers as well as sharing the positive qualities of the climbing community with NPS superintendents. Climbers left the meeting grinning ear to ear.

"I was both proud and honored to join forces with these awesome people in conjunction with Access Fund and the American Alpine Club to defend our public lands," says Lynn Hill, the first person to free-climb Yosemite's iconic El Capitan twenty-five years ago. "To listen to my fellow climbers speak so eloquently and passionately about public land to a room full of senators, journalists, and policy decision makers left me optimistic about our future."

In addition to the legendary Lynn Hill, participants included professional climbers Sasha DiGiulian, Quinn Brett, Tommy Caldwell, Margo Hayes, Alex Honnold, Geoff Unger, Chelsea Rude, Libby Sauter, Forrest Shearer, and Majka Burhardt, along with professional ski mountaineers Caroline Gleich and Brody Leven. Grassroots partners included Brothers of Climbing, Red River Gorge Climbers' Coalition, Brown Girls Climb, Latino Outdoors, The

Wilderness Society, Mazamas, Salt Lake Climbers Alliance, Outdoor Alliance, The Mountaineers, and Carolina Climbers' Coalition.

"We all need to stand up, speak out, and call our reps," says Bethany Lebewitz, founder of Brown Girls Climb and Climb the Hill participant. "Native history, black lives, and the brown experience are all critical voices for an ethical and inclusive approach to land management and environmental policies."



The long day on Capitol Hill wrapped up with a standing-room-only reception in the Russell Senate Building in which Senator Maria Cantwell (Washington), a climber herself, provided opening remarks, and professional climbers Tommy Caldwell, Alex Honnold, Sasha DiGiulian, Majka Burhardt, and Caroline Gleich spoke about their journeys as climbers/mountaineers and what public land has meant for their personal and professional development. Later that night, Climb the Hill participants, Congressional staffers, and local climbers celebrated at a raucous house party.

"Climb the Hill gets better each year, and it is evident that Congress values the climbing community and our role in the legislative and administrative processes that dictate the future of climbing on public lands," says Erik Murdock, Access Fund policy director. ■

Introducing Ben's Branch, Virginia's Newest Sandstone Crag

On the western flank of Virginia's Stone Mountain sits a hulking sandstone crag with everything from tiered overhanging walls topping out at 100 feet to technical and slightly overhung faces.

In the summer of 2017, Central Appalachia Climbers Coalition (CACC) explored the area and immediately recognized its potential for climbing. The coalition reached out to Access Fund, and the two organizations worked together to develop a climbing proposal, which we presented at the local city council meeting. The council and local citizens asked good questions about climbing management, and the sentiment was positive.

In February of this year, the town of Appalachia signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Access Fund and CACC, formalizing a cooperative partnership that officially opens the area to climbing. The town will work with CACC to manage the climbing area.

"We are very excited to add Ben's Branch to our growing number of crags throughout the region," says Brad Mathisen, CACC president. "While route development has just begun, the area could hold up to 50 routes with unbelievable roadside access. It's a beautiful place where the cliff feels secluded, but you can still get there easily for some after-work climbing."

"Ben's Branch is another great win for rural Appalachian climbing and outdoor tourism in an area that's historically been dependent on coal," says Zachary Lesch-Huie, interim executive director for Access Fund. "We applaud the town for their forward-thinking partnership in opening this fantastic cliff."

Climbing and outdoor recreation are catching on in this rural mountainous area. Just a few years ago, CACC and Access Fund teamed up with the town of Norton, just 20 minutes up the road, to open bouldering and climbing in that city's Flag Rock Recreation Area.

Communities like Appalachia and Norton are capitalizing on their mountain landscapes by expanding sustainable outdoor recreation opportunities like climbing, hiking, and mountain biking.

Ben's Branch is officially open, but the area is still under development. Please wear a helmet, as routes are fresh and the potential for rock fall is high. Interested in learning more or helping develop the area? Connect with CACC at www.climbcentralappalachia.com. ■



OTHER WAYS TO GIVE

There are many ways you can give to Access Fund to help protect America's climbing areas. We invite you to explore the various options, beyond membership and cash donations, to make an impact on the sport you love.

GIFTS OF STOCK

Gifts of stocks provide vital support to Access Fund while entitling you to considerable federal income tax benefits. Transferring stock can be a simple process, and our team can give you more information and walk you through the process.

VEHICLE DONATION

Access Fund partners with Vehicles for Charity to process donated vehicles. Simply call Vehicles for Charity at 866-628-CARS to guide you through the process. They can even arrange to pick up the vehicle from you directly.

EMPLOYER MATCHING

Many companies sponsor matching gift programs and will match charitable contributions made by their employees. This is an easy way to double your contribution to help protect and steward climbing areas.

WORKPLACE GIVING

Federal employees will find Access Fund listed as an option in the Combined Federal Campaign (CFC). We also participate in numerous state, county, and municipal campaigns. Many employers also offer a variety of payroll deduction giving options. Contact your human resources department to find out what your company offers.

MONTHLY GIFTS

Access Fund Monthly Senders are a group of dedicated donors who give monthly to sustain critical Access Fund programs. You can give as little or as much as you want on a monthly basis.

PLANNED OR ESTATE GIVING

Planned giving is not just for the wealthy or those skilled in financial planning. Rather, it can be a simple way to leave behind a gift of any value to support the work and mission of Access Fund through retirement income or a portion of your estate. Learn more about the Access Fund Legacy Society at accessfund.org/plannedgift. ■

LEARN MORE

Our development team is happy to walk you through the various ways you can contribute to protecting America's climbing. Visit www.accessfund.org/giving or contact our development staff at development@accessfund.org to learn more.

Over the past six years the Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Team has captured the hearts and minds of climbers across the country as a rugged icon of climbing area stewardship. This program would not be possible without the generous support of Jeep, a brand that continues to invest in the future of sustainable climbing areas. As an added bonus, Access Fund members are eligible for preferred pricing on most vehicles from Fiat Chrysler Automobiles, LLC.



These partners are businesses that put their money where their mouth is to support the future of climbing. Please consider the important contribution these partners make to your climbing future. They support Access Fund and you. We encourage you to support them!

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Clockwise, from left: Blake Herrington, the Gunsights, WA | Graham Zimmerman, Alaska Range, AK | Ruth Gorge, Alaska Range, AK © Forest Woodward

Forest Woodward

Forest is an internationally published and awarded photographer and filmmaker based in Asheville, North Carolina. Focusing on issues of social and environmental justice, Forest’s recent projects have led him from the fields of south central Florida following stories of migrant farm workers, to the side canyons of Lake Powell investigating the water wars of the American West, and most recently to the front lines of climate change in the South Pacific.

Throughout his work Forest seeks to document his subjects in a way that transcends politics and prejudice and offers the viewer an opportunity to see relevant contemporary issues through a humanistic lens. Forest’s photographs have been widely published, with notable appearances in National Geographic, Esquire, and The Atlantic. His films “Food Chains” and “The Important Places” have screened in dozens of countries, played at prestigious festivals, such as Tribeca and Berlinale, and earned an array of awards, including “Best Short Film” from Banff Mountain Film Festival and the James Beard Award.

Learn more about Forest’s work at www.forestwoodward.com.



Protect America's Climbing

Access Fund
PO Box 17010
Boulder, CO 80308

MEMBERSHIP Benefits

Many climbers wonder...what does it mean to be an Access Fund member? What sets our membership apart from other member organizations in the climbing community? The answer is simple—the most compelling benefit of Access Fund membership is open and protected climbing areas. We can't do this critical work without the support of the amazing climbing community, and we thank you for your generous contributions.

As a token of our appreciation, we hope you also enjoy some of these perks from our partners:

- **PREFERRED PRICING** on Chrysler vehicles, which equates to thousands off MSRP!
- **\$100 OFF** RoofNest campers
- **78% OFF** a one-year subscription to *Climbing Magazine*
- **50% OFF** a one-year subscription to *Rock & Ice Magazine*
- **25% OFF** at Film Festival Flix
- **20% OFF** Friction Labs
- **10% OFF** merchandise in the Access Fund online store
- And many more

Visit accessfund.org/memberbenefits for an up-to-date list.