

# Ontario Rock Climbing Management: Partnerships & Strategies

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# Purpose and Rationale

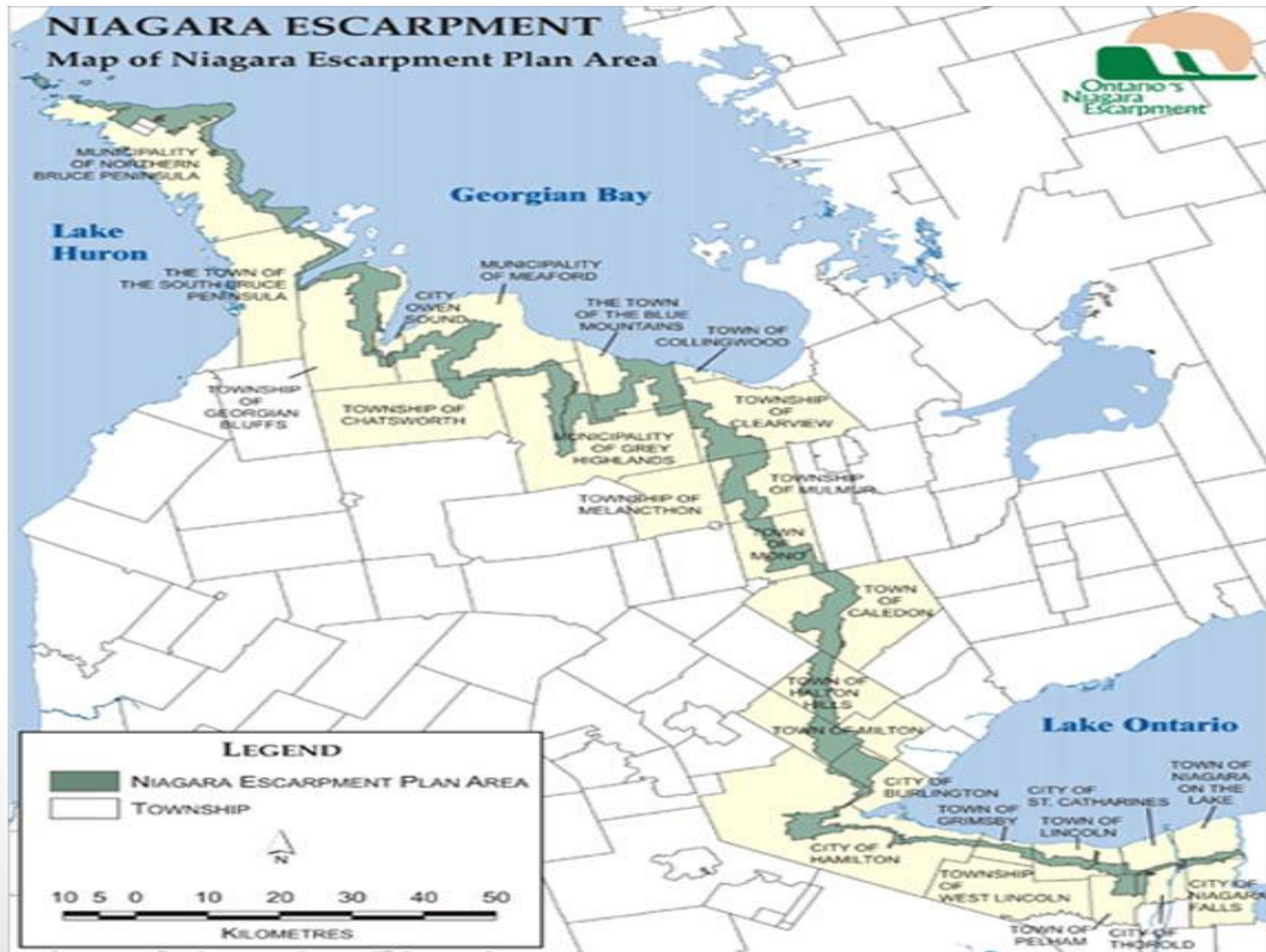
## **The purpose of this presentation is to:**

- 1) Highlight sustainability initiatives in southern Ontario rock climbing over the last 10 years.
- 2) Discuss challenges and further opportunities for collaboration from both climber and protected area manager perspectives with a view toward future management planning.

## **Rationale:**

- One of the largest and densest populations in North America
- Recent explosion of climbing popularity
- Niagara Escarpment UNESCO Biosphere Reserve

The Niagara Escarpment Biosphere Reserve conserves the Province of Ontario's natural and social capital by protecting prime agricultural lands, forests, water, wetlands, heritage properties and recreational spaces. (NEC, 2016)







# Ontario Access Coalition

## Mission Statement

The Ontario Access Coalition is an independent Provincial, volunteer non-profit organization that works diligently to keep climbing and bouldering areas open and helps to conserve the climbing environment by resolving access issues quickly as they arise and by proactively engaging with and educating the climbing community. Our team is committed to and passionate about working with the community, land owners, conservation authorities, and other property managers to educate, mediate and negotiate on behalf of climbers, in order to bring all parties together in a manner that is mutually respectful of one another's needs.





# Environmental Impacts

- **Bouldering**
- **Sport climbing**
- <http://www.bing.com/videos/search?q=ontario+climbing+%2b+a+season+%2b+vimeo&view=detail&mid=5DDE5B9F3508CEF03A855DDE5B9F3508CEF03A85&FORM=VIRE1>

Photo courtesy of Dennis Barnes



# Research on Climbing

Research for the Province: Cliff Ecology Research Group, University of Guelph (CERG), Quantitative

1. **Regarding climbed versus unclimbed cliff faces: “The differences in vegetation were not related to climbing disturbance but rather to climber selection of cliff faces with specific microsite characteristics that naturally support different vegetation” (Kuntz & Larson, 2005, p. 295).**
2. **“Discourage the closure of currently climbed areas in southern Ontario” (McMillan & Larson, 2002, p. 397).**
3. **“The creation of a policy that allows sport climbers to establish new climbing routes at difficulty levels of 5.10 and above. Such a policy will receive more compliance than blanket restrictions on all new development of climbing routes” (Kuntz & Larson, 2006, p. 832).**
4. **Supports the use of permanent anchors to keep people off the tops of cliffs and direct people away from fragile vegetation.**

# Research on Climbing

Research for/about climbers: Action Research, Qualitative (Thompson, 2010)

- Climbers in southern Ontario have lots of ideas about how to solve their own sustainability challenges.
- Climbers are interested in building community and in self-regulation.
- Climbers sometimes deflect ownership of climber-related impacts.





# Research on Climbing

## Collaborative research between climbers and managers

Rock Climbing and Talus Vegetation on the Niagara Escarpment: Impacts and Management Implications.

### **A collaborative effort between:**

- University of Toronto's Faculty of Forestry
- Ontario Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry
- Ontario Climbing Access Coalition (OAC).

### **Results and Recommendations:**

- Baseline understanding of vegetation communities at a climbing site
- Invasive species education and control

(Foster, 2015)



# A Collaborative Approach





# Good News Story 1

Niagara Glen Nature Reserve Near Niagara Falls, Ontario.  
Managed by Niagara Parks Commission

\*Photo courtesy of Dennis Barnes





# Good News Story 2

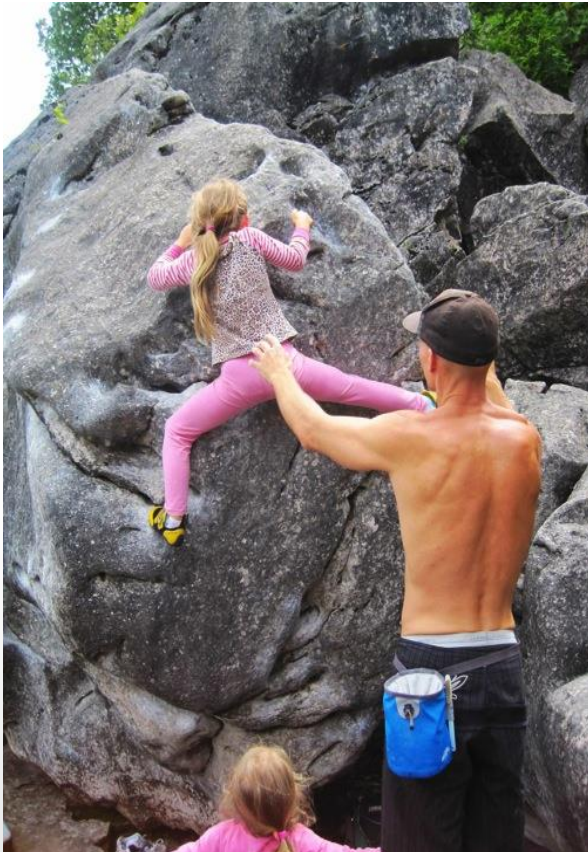
Old Baldy near Kimberly, Ontario. Managed by Grey Sauble Conservation Authority. Photo courtesy of Mike Penney



# Good News Story 3

Halfway Log Dump within Bruce Peninsula National Park .  
Managed by Parks Canada. Interpretive Guide.

[http://www.ontarioaccesscoalition.com/downloads/HWLD\\_OAC\\_2011\\_Interpretive\\_Bouldering\\_Guide\\_v2.pdf](http://www.ontarioaccesscoalition.com/downloads/HWLD_OAC_2011_Interpretive_Bouldering_Guide_v2.pdf)





# Community Outreach

## Online Media:

- Facebook – 1118 likes (and growing), posts reach ~1300 people.
- Twitter – 204 followers (and growing)
- Ask the OAC (newsletter) – just launched - 78 subscribers (growing fast)
- Website – ~1400 page views/month - [www.OntarioAccessCoalition.com](http://www.OntarioAccessCoalition.com)
- OAC Crag Calendar online photo contest
- Annual climbers survey

## Events:

- Beaver Valley Climbing Festival
- Clean & Climb events
- Volunteer Socials
- Movie Premiers
- Annual General Meeting
- Host Information Sessions & fundraisers

**Magazine publicity:** Gripped, Mountain Life

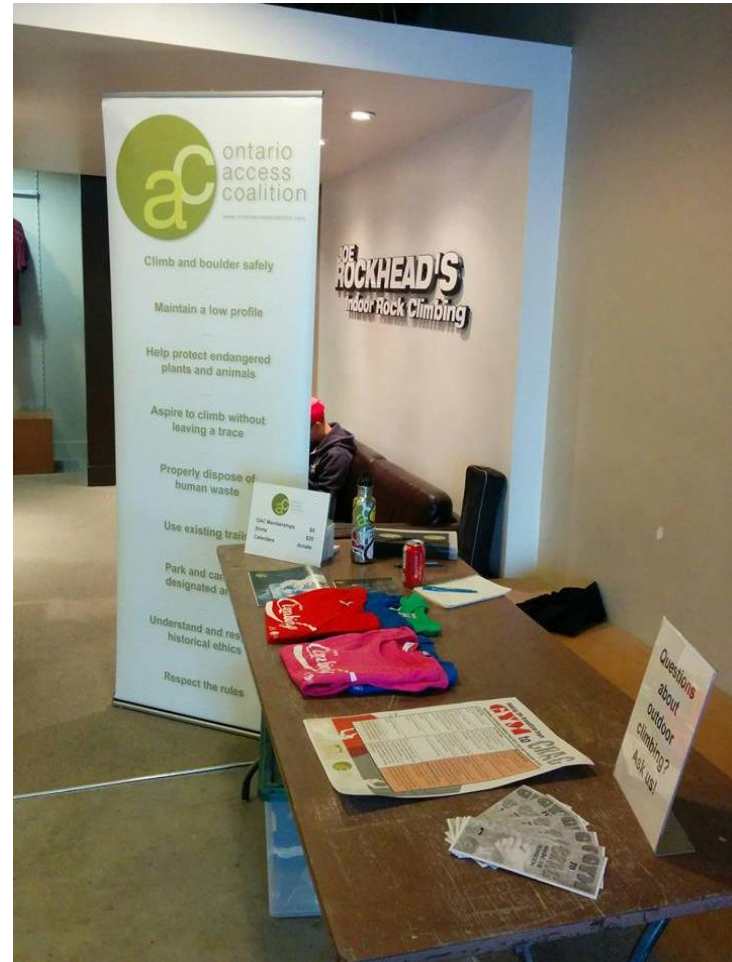




# Community Outreach

## OAC Gym Rep Program:

- Educate climbers on leave no trace practices, outdoor climbing safety, the mission/role of the OAC, drive membership, etc.
- Volunteers set up tables at gyms across the GTA to share information from our organization.
- Educational materials are shared.
- Merchandise is sold to drive donations.
- Representatives recruit new members and volunteers.



# Future Management Planning

- OAC Template for Climbing Management Plans

1. Introduction
2. Climbers as stewards of the natural environment
3. Climbing Management Plan
  - a. Approach
  - b. Objectives
  - c. Description of Climbing Area
  - d. Overview
    - i. *Access Trails*
    - ii. *Parking*
    - iii. *Signage*
    - iv. *Natural Heritage Protection*
    - v. *Safety*
4. Publication, Training and Continued Education
5. Conclusion
6. Partners

# Lessons Learned

- **Success stories should serve as frameworks for the future.** Greater effort needs to be put into sharing “what works.” Collaborative management needs to happen between agencies.
- **Further collaborative research and initiatives** will be helpful and will increase trust between climbers and managers.
- **Park and climbing objective alignment** – Climber led sustainability initiatives should stress best practices that match the needs of what protected area managers want to see.



# A Final Good News Story

“The Ontario Access Coalition (OAC) has worked closely with us to reopen bouldering at Halfway Log Dump in Bruce Peninsula National Park. Using the ‘Recreational Activity Assessment Process,’ together we developed a plan that has resulted in a great bouldering opportunity for the climbing community, **and helps meet our national park objectives** to provide memorable experiences that support the protection of the park. The OAC has been responsive and accommodating.

**They are ambassadors for the sport and for the national park.** We look forward to our continued partnership.”



Frank Burrows, Park Superintendent  
Bruce Peninsula National Park

# References

Foster, S. (2015). Rock climbing and talus vegetation on the Niagara Escarpment: Impacts and management implications. Unpublished capstone project, University of Toronto: Toronto, Canada.

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McMillan, M. A., & D. W. Larson, D. W. (2002). Effects of rock climbing on the vegetation of the Niagara Escarpment in southern Ontario, Canada. *Conservation Biology*, 16, 389-398.

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