

Ontario Alliance of Climbers (OAC) Meeting

Date & Time: July 11, 2019 at 7:00pm ET
Location: Climbers Corner, Collingwood
Meeting Lead By: Leslie Timms, Randy Kielbasiewicz
& Mike Penney (OAC Representatives)
Meeting Minutes By: Cassandra Dell'Aquila



1. OAC Community Discussion Introductions:

- Leslie Timms, Randy Kielbasiewicz and Mike Penney (representing the OAC) were introduced to everyone
- The Collingwood area has been fairly disconnected from the OAC to date
- The purpose of this meeting is to attempt to bring more local community input into the OAC moving forward
- The next OAC meeting will be held on July 24th at Grand River Rocks in Kitchener

2. Devil's Glen (DG) History & Access Issues:

- Randy Kielbasiewicz began by stating that he has been working on a DG portfolio for ten (10) years
- The sensitivity with climbing at DG stems from the fact that it is one area that is managed by multiple groups
 - On climber's left (of the famous climb *Nutcracker*), the land is Crown Land and is owned by the MNRF (Ministry of Natural Resources and Forestry)
 - One climber's right, the land is owned by the province and is known as Devil's Glen Provincial Park
- Randy noted that climbing is not permitted in Provincial Parks (it is a non-conforming activity), with the exception of Bon Echo Provincial Park
 - Someone asked why climbing is permitted at Lion's Head and the point was raised that the majority of climbing at Lion's Head is actually outside of the Provincial Park (Nature Reserve Class) and takes place on a small piece of land owned by the MNRF

- Randy also mentioned that it is important to realize that at DG, the MNRF won't do anything to step on the Provincial Park's toes
- Up until now, the Provincial Park has been, for the most part, turning a blind eye on the climbing that takes place at DG
- However, because climbing is a non-conforming activity in Ontario Parks, Provincial Park staff cannot meet with and talk to climbers about access issues and concerns
- Approximately six (6) years ago, Randy was involved in the preparation of a management plan for DG
 - This plan addressed parking, trails, the rope decent on the (climber's) right side of the cliff, an evacuation plan, and more
 - This plan has still not been approved
 - Within this plan it was suggested that a parking lot be created at the abandoned residence at the top of the (climber's) left side of the cliff
 - An engineer was brought in to conduct the necessary studies and work for this
 - The OAC has the funding available to build this parking area
 - Even with all of this, the MNRF would not approve the plan because they did not want to step on the toes of the Provincial Park
- Another concern at DG is the fact that in the future, the MNRF lands may be rolled into the Provincial Park land, meaning that climbing would no longer be allowed in all of DG

3. Crag Etiquette:

- Leslie Timms lead stating that, as locals we need to act as stewards and ensure that we respect the environment we climb within
- Craggs have become increasingly busy ever since the guidebooks were created
- Self-policing is going to become very important as crags become busier
- The following OAC Principles were listed to be employed and enforced at all climbing areas:
 - We cannot cut down, and should avoid using trees for any reason.
 - Do not bring hammocks to climbing areas (this is infuriating Parks' employees and damaging trees)
- We need to do our part to minimize erosion at the base of the cliff by:
 - Being considerate of vegetation, and
 - Standing and placing bags and gear in already trampled areas so as not to further disturb the vegetation
- No fires in climbing areas

- During the meeting it was confirmed that the fire pit at Metcalfe is on MNRF land, not University of Toronto lands
- Regardless, fires should not be permitted
- During the meeting it was brought up that a local climber actually happened upon a fire in the fire pit at Metcalfe that campers has not completely put out
- This is obviously a concern
- No camping in climbing areas, parking lots, etc.
 - There are plenty of designated campsites in the area that can be used
- No tailgating
- All climbers should make it a practice to bring a garbage bag with them to the cliff
 - This should be used to pack-out their own garbage and any litter they come across at the crag, in the parking lots and along access routes
 - Mike Penney mentioned that he feels climbers are more aware of their environmental impact than most recreationists – but we need to show others this
- Climbers should follow these standards when dealing with human waste/feces at the crag:
 - Always use the provided bathroom facilities (if available)
 - If there are no bathroom facilities provided, Wag Bags should be used
 - A Wag Bag is defined as a bag with deodorizer in it so that any human waste in the bag can be packed out and disposed of properly
 - The OAC mentioned that they would look into a deal/partnership with MEC for these
 - Climber's should make it common practice to always bring a Wag Bag to the cliff
 - Wet wipes of any kind are not biodegradable and are made with plastic materials. Just because they say "disperse-able" , or "dissolve in water" does not mean they are bio degradable
 - If you do not have a Wag Bag and have an emergency, Leave No Trace principles apply:
 - Walk as far away from trails, climbing areas and water sources (downstream) as possible and dig a hole at least 12" (30cm) deep to go to the bathroom in and then bury your waste
 - No matter what, toilet paper must always be packed out
 - Reminder: Wipes are not biodegradable
 - The improper disposal of human waste/feces is becoming an increasingly major problem at Lion's Head – especially between the Latvian Ledge and Ladyslipper climbing areas
- Dogs at the Crag:

- The impact of dogs on the environment at the crag is very real
- Dogs barking disrupts adjacent landowners
- Dog urine and feces can actually drive away wildlife and interrupt mating and migration habits which is detrimental to their survival
- Dogs at the crag has become an increasing concern as the crags become busier
- The OAC does NOT support bringing your dog to sensitive, non conforming and at risk climbing areas such as Lions Head, Devil's Glen, The Turtle.
- As climbers we need to look out for one another
 - We must all keep each other safe, respect one another and do our part to inform one another
- Climbing in Groups:
 - Climbing has become a much more social activity recently, and people have been climbing in larger groups because of this
 - Climbing in large groups is not an issue purely because of the number of people, but rather because of the impact those people have on the environment when in large groups
 - Wanting people to climb in smaller groups of two (2) or three (3) does not discount the desire to have people carpool to the crag
 - It just means that groups should spread out while climbing so that they minimize their impact
 - Erosion at the base of the cliff is a major concerns that is only being exacerbated by people climbing in large groups
 - There is a climbing area at Nemo being closed because of this – it is a real issue that can no longer be ignored
 - This is something that we need to regulate ourselves so that crags aren't closed
 - The question was asked if the OAC encourages formalizing facilities within climbing areas such as benches and trails in order to encourage people to use these specific areas instead of having spider trails and increased impact?
 - Yes, this would be good – but a park management plan must be agreed upon and put into place first
 - We need park cooperation and involvement before this becomes a possibility
- Do not leave fixed gear anywhere at the crag
- Brush your tick marks and chalk off of the wall
- No music, yelling or other loud noises that could be obnoxious to others
- No route development at DG and Lion's Head
 - These areas are in a very sensitive state and this would create more issues
- Proper communication is key

- People are more receptive to respectful interactions
- Don't be abrasive or combative
- Be sensitive to the fact that other people may not be aware of climbing ethics and the issues the sport is facing
- Refer to Rock Respect (<https://www.rockrespect.ca/>) and the OAC Code of Ethics (<https://www.ontarioallianceofclimbers.ca/our-story/code-of-ethics/>) for more information on how to be a responsible and respectable rock climber

4. Parking at Devil's Glen (DG):

- Parking options that currently exist:
 - Parking along Simcoe County Road 124 across from the access trail
 - Parking along Nottawasaga Concession 10 N and walking along CR 124 to get to the access trail
 - Parking at the DGPP (Devil's Glen Provincial Park) parking lot and walking along CR 124 or bushwhacking to access the crag – not a realistic option as there is only parking for a maximum of 12 cars here (there is regularly 30-40 cars at DG on weekends)
- Simcoe County Road 124
 - Primary arterial road
 - Approximately 3,000 – 5,000 vehicles/day
 - It is very dangerous for people to be walking along the side of the highway
 - It is also dangerous for cars to be parked along the side of the highway
- Nottawasaga Concession 10 N
 - People parking on both sides of the street and leaving doors open, socializing at their cars, etc. makes this increasingly dangerous
 - People were asked to park here to get them off of the busier road (CR 124) but now adjacent residents are not happy
 - It is dangerous to park here as it is just beyond the crest of a hill and visibility is very poor
 - During the meeting it was mentioned that perhaps we should ask people to park on the other side of the crest in the road so as to increase visibility and safety with parking along this road
- Acquiring a property to use for a parking area is not currently a feasible idea at this time with the risk of the crag being closed at DG (if the MNRF land becomes part of the Provincial Park)

- The point was made that maybe it is best to let people park where they want to and to keep the cars spread out instead of telling everyone that they must park in a specific location
- Technically climbers have the legal right to park on both CR 124 and Concession 10 N
- During the meeting a general vote was taken to gauge where meeting attendees preferred to park at DG
 - A slight majority of the climbers voted that they prefer to park along Concession 10 N
 - A slight minority of climbers voted that they prefer to park along CR 124
 - A few climbers voted that they were indifferent/impartial to the issue
- The questions was raised/asking if trail access could be implemented from the Concession 10 N parking to the crag to eliminate the need to walk along the side of the highway
 - This has already been brought up and is not an option
 - New trails cannot be made within parkland without an agreement with the land manager
- The OAC currently suggests climbers continue to park on Concession road 10.

5. OAC News:

- The Beaver Valley Climbing Festival will be taking place the weekend of August 17th
 - The OAC is looking for volunteers for this
- The OAC is always looking for new volunteers
 - If you have a specific skillset that you think may be of use to the OAC, or would simply like to be involved however possible, email the OAC directly

6. Questions/Feedback:

- What is the land at DG worth?
 - There is no value associated with the park. Parkland is not for sale.
- Why is climbing permitted in Bon Echo Provincial Park?
 - This questions was redirected, however, it was stated that this is the case because climbing predates the park itself in this location
- Can we develop facilities for climbers at crags where climbing is allowed and there are good relationships in place?
 - Yes – a Stewardship Program is now in the works

- Could we implement permits to climb in parks, like the FQME in Quebec (where you must be a member to climb in certain areas)?
 - It is a possibility, but enforcement becomes a serious issue
 - Who polices this? Volunteers? Parks staff?
- Does the OAC have a standard pamphlet to hand out to people at crags who are not following the rules/etiquette?
 - This neutral approach would take the pressure off of the individual and reduces the likelihood of an argument
 - The OAC was interested in exploring this idea
 - A similar idea has been in-place at Halfway Log Dump and climbers have been very receptive so far
 - Litter would be a concern
 - This idea/form of stewardship could be introduced at the Beaver Valley Climbing Festival
 - This pamphlet (indicating outdoor climbing etiquette and general information) should also be at all climbing gyms for people to take with them when they try climbing outside
- If we are trying to reduce the number of climbers in sensitive areas, should we not just reduce the number of easy climbs? Or all of the 5.10 and 5.11 climbs (because there are so many of them)?
 - The problem is not that there are too many 5.10 and 5.11 routes, or that there are too many easy routes for beginners to climb on
 - A primary problem is the smaller number of easy routes and an increasing number of moderate climbers, therefore concentrating ecological impacts on smaller areas.
- What is the parking situation at Old Baldy?
 - Currently there is a parking lot at the trail access where you can pay with an online parking app that is monitored by Grey Sauble Conservation Authority
 - There is no parking along the access road /laneway when this lot is full because it is technically an easement from the landowner
- What is the Stewardship Program that is in the works?
 - Bob is currently working on a Stewardship Program with the OAC for the Swamp Climbing Area (pilot project)
 - It has been presented to the MNRF and the OAC may have written approval as early as the 17th
 - This program looks at increasing crag stewardship by OAC Volunteers
 - The steward would be an obvious, identifiable and informative person
 - The role of these “stewards” would be garbage pick-up, erosion retention work, clean-up and much more

- Part of this program is the implementation of facilities for climbers such as benches
 - The MNRF has stated that this is possible but no foreign materials may be used in their construction (only deadfall, rocks, etc. can be used)
- During the meeting it was brought up that instead of this pilot project being presented for the Swamp, that it should be presented for the Kolapore Uplands so that it can include the Swamp, Metcalfe, Al Qaeda, etc.
- Does the OAC communicate with other climbing access coalitions?
 - Yes, on a regular basis
- Is the water safe to drink at DG?
 - No, it is recommended that the water at DG not be consumed
- How is someone supposed to climb a trad route without an anchor and not sling a tree (as it is no longer acceptable)?
 - The OAC stated that ideally all trad routes should have fixed anchors at the top to prevent wear and use of trees.
 - From an ecological standpoint, the most environmentally sensitive area of the cliff ecosystem is the top cliff edge
 - Topping-out and slinging trees should be avoided as much as possible
- Can properly trained climbers add anchors at the top of trad routes that don't already have them so that they don't have to sling trees?
 - Yes – this would be doing a service to fellow climbers and the environment
 - This does not mean that anyone can go and put up anchors, as this requires a very specific skillset
 - Climbers need to realize that they should only do this if they know what they are doing, or else this could be dangerous
 - There are people within the climbing community who are capable of this – ask them to mentor you or help you with this
- Has Campden Crag been reopened?
 - No, they are currently going through the process of creating a park management plan
 - They aren't against climbing at this park, however, climbing must be listed as a conforming activity in this management plan if the crag is to be reopened
- What is the mentoring program at Rattlesnake?
 - This pilot project was more successful than expected
 - The OAC is eager to further develop this program
 - Instruction was given on how to approach people
 - The OAC will look into a potential way to integrate this program at the Beaver Valley Climbing Festival

- After the pilot program, it was determined that there must be more of a focus on mentoring the attendees rather than teaching them how to be a mentor to others
- Suggestion to incorporate more specific climbing best practices into the program
- Mike Penney asked if OAC members feel like they have gotten a return on their \$5 lifetime membership fee?
 - General consensus on this was yes
 - Mike then asked (unofficially) if people would be interested in paying for a \$50/year membership if it had perks
 - Potential hypothetical perks included a free calendar, discount day at MEC, once yearly discount at Arc'teryx and Patagonia (with a cap), etc.
 - People were generally receptive to this idea, however, the point was made that there must be different incentives for people because not everyone finds value in the same type of incentive
 - This question was raised because the OAC is looking for ways to bring in more money

Every effort was made to ensure that these meeting minutes are complete and comprehensive. If there are found to be any errors or omissions within these meeting minutes please contact an OAC representative.