# Black Canyon of the Gunnison

**National Park National Park Service** 

**U.S. Department of the Interior** 



# **Interim Climbing Management Plan**

# **Current Climbing Ethics**

"The Black Canyon has long been established as a traditional area where bolts are kept to a minimum, if used at all. The Black is one of the last refuges for a wilderness experience. Before vou drill, think twice and make sure it is absolutely necessary. Just because a route cannot be done today without bolts doesn't mean that someone won't be able to do it tomorrow. Clean climbing is often possible; try spending just a little more time to find a secure placement that will not permanently scar the rock. Everyone venturing into the canyon should give their best effort to climb routes as cleanly and quietly as possible."

Black Canyon Rock Climbs by Robbie Williams

#### **Goals of an Interim Climbing Management Plan**

- 1. Preserve the natural resources found in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park while providing for recreational climbing activities.
- 2. Set forth a clearly defined set of regulations for climbing within the park that will allow for continued climbing activity.
- 3. Supply a set of written regulations that park employees can use in the education of climbers visiting the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.
- Supply Law Enforcement Rangers with written regulations to conserve the 4. climbing environment in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

#### **Topics covered in Interim Climbing Management Plan**

- 1. Wilderness Use Permit
- 2. Fixed Gear
  - A. Fixed Anchors
  - B. Belay/Rappel Station Installations
  - C. Bolts and Bolting Practices
  - D. Pitons
  - E. Fixed Software
- 3. Development of New Routes
- 4. Development of Approach Trails
- 5. Rock Alteration
- 6. Vegetation Alteration
- 7. Visual Impacts
- 8. Human Waste
- 9. Gear Caches
- 10. Bouldering
- 11. High Lines and Slack Lines
- 12. Climbing Activities Directly Effecting Developed Overlooks and/or Trails
- 13. Rescue Considerations

# **<u>1. Wilderness Use Permit</u>**

A) Wilderness Use Permits are required of anyone traveling into the inner canyon for any reason, climbing included.

# 2. Fixed Gear

**Definition:** For the scope of this document, fixed gear shall be deemed any man made article, either hardware or software (webbing, rope, cord, etc.), that is used to aid ascent or descent, or as protection, and is left on the route by a climbing party after the completion of the climb.

# A. Fixed Anchor Hardware Requiring Rock Alteration for Installation

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, "fixed anchor hardware requiring rock alteration for installation" refers to manmade hardware, specifically bolts that require the drilling of rock for installation and is left in the rock by a climbing party after the completion of the climb.
  - (1) The placement of new fixed anchors requiring rock alteration for installation will not be allowed when the ability to place removable protection is available, although a special exception to this regulation will be considered by park staff, if the site for the proposed fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation) is such that overall climber use and safety would justify fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation). To be approved for a special exception to this regulation, climbers will notify park staff of the site of the proposed fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation) and a written statement as to why they feel that this site warrants fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation).
  - (2) The placement of fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation) shall be allowed on established routes only to replace existing fixed anchors that are deemed unsafe or in the event that the first ascensionist has supplied park staff with a written request that an additional fixed anchor (requiring rock alteration for installation) be placed on a route for safety reasons. Written requests from first ascensionist that an additional fixed anchor be placed on a route for safety reasons will kept on file at the North Rim Ranger's station and at the Gunnison Point Visitor Center and will be made available to climbers upon request.
  - (3)The use of non-climbing specific hardware (i.e. concrete anchors, home manufactured equipment, etc.) is prohibited within the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.
  - (4)Since all climbing activity occurs within the Black Canyon of the Gunnison Wilderness, and since the Wilderness Act of 1964 prohibits the use of motorized equipment, all drilling will be accomplished by non-motorized means only.

#### **Recommended Hardware for Anchor Replacement and Improvement**

Modern climbing specific five piece bolt (that can be removed with a wrench for inspection and maintenance) of a length adequate for rock conditions at the installation site.

Climbing Specific hanger.

#### **B.** Fixed Belay/Rappel Station Installations

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, a fixed belay/rappel station shall be deemed any configuration of fixed anchor hardware (requiring rock alteration for installation) placed at the top of a pitch for the purpose of belaying or placed for the sole intent of rappelling.
  - (1) The placement of new fixed belay/rappel stations will not be allowed when the ability to place adequate removable protection is available. However, a special exception to this regulation will be considered if justified after evaluating overall climber use and safety concerns at the site proposed for fixed anchor(s). To be approved for a special exception to this regulation, climbers will notify park staff of the site of the proposed fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation) and a written statement as to why they feel that this site warrants fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation).
  - (2)New fixed belay/rappel stations shall not be installed in areas where their presence would visually impact the park i.e. within obvious view of any overlook.
  - (3)New fixed belay/rappel stations installed within the boundaries of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park shall be constructed of 3/8 in. or larger modern climbing specific bolts that can be removed for inspection and/or replacement with the only exception being first ascensionist developing new routes.
  - (4)Bolt placement for the purpose of fixed belay/rappel stations shall be kept to a minimum and shall not exceed three bolts.
  - (5)New fixed belay/rappel stations within the boundaries of the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park shall be constructed using hardware which has been painted a color similar to the natural rock color in the surrounding area.
  - (6)Chains used in the construction of belay rappel stations should be kept to a minimal length to avoid visual impacts.
  - (7) The use of webbing and accessory cord shall not be allowed in the construction of new fixed belay/rappel stations.

#### C. Bolts and Bolting Practices

**Definition:** For the scope of this document, a bolt shall be deemed any man made article that requires a hole to be drilled into the rock for its placement.

- (1)All drilling within the Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park will be by a non-motorized means as directed by the Wilderness Act of 1964.
- (2)Bolting shall be allowed on currently established routes only under the guidelines set forth under the sections: A. Fixed Anchors and B. Fixed Belay/Rappel Station Installation.
- (3) When replacing fixed anchors deemed to be unsafe, recommended hardware will be used whenever possible, a reasonable effort to remove the existing hardware will be made and existing drill holes will be used in the installation of replacement fixed anchors whenever possible.
- (4)Bolting shall be allowed only in the development of new climbing routes and only in sections of the route that have no rock features adequate for the placement of removable anchors.

# .D. Pitons

- (1) The installation and removal of pitons does permanent damage to the rock. Pitons will only be used when any other reasonably safe means of protecting the climbing party is non existent.
- (2) When pitons are used in the development of a new route that would be expected to receive regular traffic in the future, it is recommended that the pitons be left fixed to reduce future damage to the rock.
- (3) When a rock feature exists that would allow for another means of protection besides pitons and the climbing party simply does not possess the needed type of gear, the climbing party should retreat from the route, and obtain the necessary gear.

#### E. Fixed Software

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, fixed software will be deemed to be rope, cord, and/or webbing placed to aid in the ascent or descent of a route and remains in place when the climbing party is not on the route.
  - (1) The placement of fixed software (specifically fixed rope) for the purpose of retreating from a climb may be allowed under the following conditions: (1) the climbing party intends to return to continue the climb; (2) the placement does not exceed a period of 14 days; and (3) either the climbing party remains in the park during the 14-day period, or they receive approval from park staff after notifying them of their intention to return and their return date.
  - (2) Webbing used when gear is fixed for the purpose of retreating from a climb, when the climbing party has no intention of returning to the climb (bail gear), shall be

of a natural color similar to the rock color in the area being climbed, **if available**. The color of webbing need not be a deciding factor when retreating due to an emergency or the inability to climb the route.

#### **<u>3. Development of New Routes</u>**

**Definition:** For the scope of this document, a new route shall be deemed any route traveling across previously unclimbed terrain.

- A. It is strongly recommended that climbers planning the development of a new route discuss their plans with park staff prior to undertaking the development of the route.
- B. Climbers will note the location of any intended new route development in the comments section of the wilderness use permit. (Example: Right of Journey Home or Left side of the third buttress downstream of SOB Draw.)
- C. Climbers will submit a topo and/or route description of the new route to the park within 30 days of completion of a new route.
- D. If a first ascensionist feels that any fixed anchors should be added to the route they have completed for safety reasons, they will submit a written description of the proposed fixed anchor location to the park with the topo. After review, park staff will either approve (or not) the placement of fixed anchors during a subsequent climb. This information will be kept at both the North Rim Ranger's Station and the Gunnison Point Visitors Center and made available to climbers upon request.

#### Fixed Anchor Placement during New Route Development

The placement of fixed anchors (requiring rock alteration for installation), during new route development, will not be allowed when rock features capable of accepting adequate removable protection are present.

Due to special demands encountered during new route development, the type of fixed hardware to be placed shall be left to the discretion of the party developing the route, although it is strongly recommended that 3/8 in. or larger modern climbing specific bolts that can be removed for inspection and/or replacement be used.

#### 4. Development of Approach Trails

- A. The intentional development of approach trails is prohibited. Climbers will use Leave No Trace practices and take every precaution available to ensure that the wilderness area remains in a natural state.
- B. Do not build cairns or in anyway mark approach trails.

# 5. Rock Alteration

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, rock alteration will be deemed any removal of rock from its natural position, drilling, chipping, or gluing of holds.
  - A. The removal of rock from its natural position will be allowed only when the rock to be removed poses a significant risk to the climbing party or a future climbing party.
    - **Note:** Due to fall lines that are affected by multi impacts with the wall, removing rock from a route is extremely dangerous to other canyon users below.
  - B. Chipping or the gluing on of holds is strictly prohibited.

#### 6. Vegetation Alteration

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, vegetation alteration will be deemed any removal of vegetation from its natural position, destruction, or damage of vegetation.
  - A. Removal of vegetation from the base of climbs or belay ledges is prohibited.
  - B. The removal of vegetation from cracks to allow the crack to become more climbable is prohibited.
  - C. When using trees as natural anchors, padding will be placed in between the rope and bark surface to prevent damage to the tree.

#### 7. Visual Impacts

- A. Webbing being used to replace worn webbing in existing anchors will be of a natural color similar to the color of the rock or vegetation in the surrounding area.
- B. New fixed anchors being placed under the guidelines of <u>A. Fixed Anchors and B.</u> <u>Fixed Belay/Rappel Stations</u> will be painted a natural color, similar to the color of the rock in the surrounding area (gray or black).

#### 8. Human Waste

- A. Parties climbing routes expected to be completed in one day (no bivouac) shall abide by standard Leave No Trace practices.
- B. Parties climbing routes expected to take longer than one day will have in their possession during the climb, a container sufficient to contain human waste without the possibility of leakage or breakage, and such container and its contents will be removed from the park upon completion of the climb.

# 9. Gear Caches

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, a gear cache will be deemed any supply of gear left unattended in the wilderness area for future use or the future use of another climbing party.
  - A. The caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb in the event of a retreat due to weather, injury, or illness shall be allowed for a for a period not to exceed 14 days so long as the climbing party remains in the park or notifies park staff prior to leaving the park of their intended return and receives approval from park staff.

#### 10. Bouldering

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, bouldering shall be deemed to be the climbing on rock formations unroped and within a safe distance of the ground that requires the use of specialized equipment (rock climbing shoes, chalk, crash pad, etc.).
  - A. Park staff shall be notified prior to any sustained bouldering activity in any area other than the Marmot Rocks area. Park staff will then approve bouldering activity in the proposed area based on:
  - The likely impacts to park resources within and adjacent to the proposed bouldering area.
  - The likely impacts to park resources along and adjacent to the proposed access route.
  - The likely impacts to other visitor activities and the overall visitor experience.

#### **11. Highlines and Slacklines**

- **Definition:** For the scope of this document, a highline or slackline shall be deemed any rope, webbing, or other material tensioned horizontally between two points for the purpose of walking or travel suspended above the ground.
  - A. All highlines and slacklines shall meet the following requirements, and all highlines and slacklines shall require a special use permit except for slack lines erected within designated camping areas.
  - B. Due to the accessibility and attention that highlines and/or slacklines attract from non-climbing visitors, high lines and/or slack lines shall not be left unattended other than in an individual's designated camping area.
  - C. The installation of fixed anchors for the purpose of the constructing a highline or slackline will not be allowed within Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.
  - D.The use of vegetation and/or park property for the anchoring of highlines and/or slacklines is prohibited within Black Canyon of the Gunnison National Park.

- E. Highlines and or slacklines spanning any portion of the canyon require a special use permit.
- F. Highlines and/or slacklines of a length or height, that would reasonably be expected to effect the normal operations of the park, require a special use permit.

#### 12. Climbing activities directly effecting developed overlooks and/or trails

Any climbing activity that directly affects visitor use of developed overlooks and/or trails require a special use permit.

#### **<u>13. Rescue Considerations</u>**

Section 8.2.5.3, Search and Rescue, of the National Park Service Management Policies (2001) states: "To provide for the protection and safety of park visitors, the Service will make reasonable efforts to search for lost persons, and to rescue sick, injured, or stranded persons. This responsibility may be fulfilled by Service staff or by qualified search-and-rescue organizations or agencies that are capable of responding to life-threatening emergencies pursuant to the terms of a formal agreement. Deceased persons will be evacuated unless the level of risk to the rescue party is found to be unacceptably high."

Consistent with this policy, park staff will undertake rescue operations for those in need, unless it is deemed that the risk would be too great to rescue personnel. The park will seek additional resources to assist at any time the incident commander believes it is in the best interest of the park, safety of employees and visitors, and/or the injured or stranded party. Activating outside resources adds to the response time, but in cases must be done in order to safely respond to some situations. Efforts will be made to provide necessary treatment and services to the sick, injured and stranded consistent with the policy above and the resources available to provide assistance. In all cases, the safety and well being of rescue personnel and the public will be of upmost importance.

Being overdue simply because a climbing party underestimated the time required to complete a route does not warrant initiation of a rescue operation. Be aware that cell phone reception and transmission is generally not available within the canyon or along the rim. Rangers may attempt to contact climbers that appear to be having difficulty. In such instances, the climber should raise one arm if he/she does not require assistance, and both arms if assistance is requested.