

## Kingdom Heritage Lands

DRAFT

### Climbing Resource Management Proposal

*Revised April 2022*

In the fall of 1998, Champion International Paper Co. announced the sale of 300,000 acres of land in Vermont, New Hampshire and New York of which approximately 130,000 acres were for sale in Vermont, primarily in rural Essex County. The Champion sale led to the eventual conservation of its properties through the combined efforts of the State of Vermont, the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Essex Timber Company (presently owned by Weyerhaeuser), the Nature Conservancy and the Vermont Land Trust.

The arrangement protects the timber, wildlife and recreational values of the land while ensuring that the public is be able to continue, in perpetuity, such uses as hunting, fishing and dispersed recreation. The 2014 *Long-Term Access Plan for the Private Timberlands Portion of the Kingdom Heritage Lands* requires all 'corridor-based' recreation uses such as bicycling, snowmobiling, horseback riding and hiking be managed by designated Corridor Managers. The Vermont Climbing Resource Access Group (CRAG-VT) has partnered with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR), to develop this proposal for designation as the Corridor Manager for climbing activities on the Kingdom Heritage Lands (KHL) as set forth in the public access easements and Long-Term Access Plan.

For the purposes of this proposal, the Corridor Manager designation shall only apply to the private timberlands portion of the Kingdom Heritage Lands (Weyerhaeuser). While the Long-Term Access Plan explicitly encourages Corridor Managers to *"take advantage wherever possible of opportunities to provide recreational links to adjacent or nearby publicly owned lands and private lands with guaranteed public access and to existing corridor systems traversing those lands"*, both CRAG-VT and ANR acknowledge that any trail development on adjoining parcels of private forest land encumbered by Forest Legacy easements or other privately owned lands are at the discretion of those property owners. Development and management of trails located outside of Weyerhaeuser lands is the responsibility of CRAG-VT and shall be conducted with permission of the landowners, though ANR will continue to be point of contact with Forest Legacy Easement holders to facilitate and collaborate in the development and management of such access.

In an effort to provide context and continuity across ownerships, the proposal for climbing at Black Mountain in Averill, in particular- which includes private timberlands managed under both the Kingdom Heritage Lands and Forest Legacy Easements- describes use under both land holdings.

## **I. History/Qualifications**

CRAG-VT is an established non-profit organization dedicated to preserving access and conservation for Vermont's climbing resources. CRAG-VT has successfully collaborated with state natural resource professionals to convey important climbing information to its members. ANR and CRAG-VT have developed and implemented climbing management policies and guidelines which provide for climbing activities on public lands in a responsible manner while protecting important natural resources and minimizing conflicts. Future resource conservation will benefit from a positive, on-going relationship between CRAG-VT, ANR, and their partners.

The mission of CRAG-VT is dedicated to preserving access and conservation of Vermont's climbing resources. They serve the climbing community of Vermont through a variety of mechanisms:

- Preserve and aid in the protection of climbing opportunities in Vermont by building and maintaining long-term relationships with landowners. Current and future access will be fostered through outright purchases of property, obtaining conservation easements, or securing landowner agreements.
- Serve climbers, land managers, landowners, and the general public as an educational resource for responsible climbing, access status, historical information, species and habitat protection, and legal matters.
- Promote responsible stewardship and reduce environmental impacts by conducting trail maintenance, volunteer clean-ups, and producing educational materials.

Since its founding in 2003, CRAG-VT has successfully managed rock and ice climbing areas in central and northwestern Vermont, including: Lower West (2003), Bolton Quarry (2004), 82 Crag (2008), Upper West (2009), Carcass Crag (2010), and Bolton Dome (2018)(all in Bolton), and Rock Point (2017) in Burlington. In 2016, CRAG-VT entered into a Cooperative Agreement with the Vermont Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) that formalizes the partnership with the intent of "providing environmentally sustainable climbing opportunities in appropriate locations on ANR lands" through education, management, and monitoring. In northeastern Vermont, CRAG-VT advocates for the responsible use and management of several Northeast Kingdom climbing areas, including Marshfield Ledges, Spice Mountain and Owl's Head in Groton State Forest; and Mt. Hor, Mt. Pisgah, Bald Mountain; and Wheeler Mountain in Willoughby State Forest.

Use of climbing areas on ANR lands is governed by the 2015 policy *Rock Climbing, Ice Climbing and Bouldering on Agency Lands*, as well as applicable Long-Range Management Plans (LRMPs) and/or other relevant ANR policies (i.e. Natural Areas Policy).

## **II. Purpose and Need**

The purpose of this Climbing Management Proposal (CMP) is to identify and preserve existing climbing routes and address potential environmental and use conflicts on the Kingdom Heritage Lands. Such a plan provides a formal mechanism for the management of rock and ice climbing on the Kingdom Heritage Lands, consistent with the applicable easements and landowner interests.

CRAG-VT, ANR, and the private timberland owners have recognized the need to manage the existing climbing areas at Black Mountain in Averill and to identify other areas of potential interest- situated on Kingdom Heritage Lands- that may require formal access management. Management considerations that need to be addressed include user education, vehicular access and parking, trail access, cliff site management, potential negative environmental or ecological impacts, rare, threatened and endangered (RTE) species, use conflicts, and landowner forest management activities, among others. Additionally, consistent with the Long-Term Access Plan, CRAG-VT contemplates the use of Corridors for multiple activities, including the use of trails, access roads, parking, and camping facilities by hikers, hunters, equestrians, and wildlife enthusiasts.

Updates to the CMP may occur by mutual agreement of CRAG-VT and ANR.

### **III. Goals**

1. Manage for climbing activities while protecting the natural and cultural resources of Kingdom Heritage Lands.
2. Clearly define a set of management objectives for climbing within Kingdom Heritage Lands that will allow for continued climbing related activities.
3. Establish management guidelines and best practices that land managers can use in decision making and in the education of climbers visiting Kingdom Heritage Lands.
4. Enable a productive and efficient working relationship between land managers, landowners, and the climbing community to address emerging issues and adaptively manage the area in a cooperative manner.

### **IV. Management Considerations**

The Access Fund, a non-profit climbing advocacy group, has developed a Guide to Climbing Management that, among other things, provides a climbing area assessment that addresses six (6) management issues typical of new or popular climbing areas.

This section provides an overview of the unique management issues related to climbing. The areas affected by a climbing visit can be split into six zones. Inspecting these individual zones can help clarify how, where, and during what stage of a visit climbing activity may affect rare plants, animals, or archaeological deposits. This scheme can also assist in distinguishing the effects of climbers from the effects of other less conspicuous recreation visitors, such as hikers, who may also frequent the various zones. The zone scheme of assessment and other information-gathering tools can help ensure that management responses accurately target the correct sites of impact and the use practices responsible for impact.

A typical climbing visit may be considered to pass through six zones:

1. **The approach to the climb.** The “approach” is the route used to travel from the parking area to the base of the rock or mountain. It may or may not include discernible climber trails.
2. **The staging area.** The approach ends at the “staging area,” typically the base of the cliff where climbers prepare to climb and sometimes leave backpacks which will be retrieved after the descent. In some cases, the staging area will be at the top of the cliff. Of all the zones used by climbing visitors, the staging area is typically the most heavily impacted.
3. **The climb.** The “climb,” often called the “route,” is the line of travel up the cliff or mountain. This zone is typically 6 to 8 feet in width, follows a line that may be straight or very irregular, depending upon the climbing terrain, and will extend from the base to the summit, or sometimes to a fixed anchor below the summit.
4. **The summit.** The “summit” is either the top of a mountain or the rim of a cliff, where one or more climbs terminate.
5. **The descent.** The “descent” is the route by which climbers return to either the staging area or to the parking area where their visit originated. In some cases, the descent will involve a climber trail, while in other cases it may entail a rappel down the rock face.
6. **The camping or bivouac area.** This zone is the area used by climbers for overnight stays during the climbing visit.

While not applicable to all climbing sites on the Kingdom Heritage Lands, this assessment mechanism provides a clear framework for identifying current conditions and potential impacts.

The Kingdom Heritage Lands include a mix of public and private lands governed by ANR policy as well as conservation easements held by the State of Vermont, Vermont Land Trust, Nature Conservancy, and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board. For the purposes of this plan, the Kingdom Heritage Lands are described as those private timberlands protected by the Champion International Working Forest Lands Easements as well as the state-owned West Mountain Wildlife Management Area (WMA) and the federally owned USFWS Silvio O. Conte National Wildlife Refuge (NWR). The private timberlands portion, currently owned by Weyerhaeuser, totals approximately 85,000 acres.

In addition, the plan creates a mechanism to identify and manage other potential climbing sites, pending ANR and landowner approval and consistent with applicable rules, policies, and easements.

## **V. Description of Present Conditions**

CRAG-VT is proposing to manage the existing climbing areas on Black Mountain in Averill, Vermont. Currently, use is focused on two climbing areas- Black Mountain North, located northwest of the mountain summit on lands owned by Peter Piper Timber (conserved by Forest Legacy Program easements), and Black Mountain Main Cliff, located southeast of the mountain summit on lands owned by Weyerhaeuser (conserved by the Kingdom Heritage Lands easements). Presently there are a few climbing routes on Black Mountain North and dozens of climbing routes on the Black Mountain Main Cliff. For up to date and detailed information and descriptions on Black Mountain Climbing routes, visit the Mountain Project: [www.mountainproject.com](http://www.mountainproject.com) or the Rakkup website: <https://rakkup.com/guidebook/vermont-rock-climbing/black-mountain/s20203>

**Black Mountain.** Black Mountain (elev. 2822') is an elongated northwest-southeast ridgeline with a pronounced ledge band on its southwest slope. It is situated in the southwest corner of the Town of Averill- at the northern edge of the Nulhegan Basin.

Black Mountain is part of the Averill Granite Pluton- a Devonian age medium to coarse grained gray to pink granite, granodiorite, and quartz monzonite. The southwest slope of Black Mountain includes two significant natural communities: *Boreal Acidic Cliff* (ranked S4 common in Vermont) includes the very steep and vertical cliff faces and *Boreal Talus Woodland* (ranked S3 uncommon in Vermont) includes the wooded areas of rock fall and talus below the cliffs.

### Black Mountain – Main Cliff

The active climbing area extends approximately 0.25 miles along the far southeast limit of the Black Mountain cliff band. It is primarily accessed via Gaudette Road, a public-private road on the south side of Vermont Route 114 in Norton that crosses onto private timberlands and generally follows the VELCO powerline corridor. A roadside log landing, located approximately 6.0 miles south of Vermont Route 114, serves as a trailhead parking area.

Below is a brief description of the Black Mountain Main Cliff area, broken into the six climbing zones, with notes on existing and potential impacts.

**1. The Approach-** Present trail conditions are fair to poor, with the most significant (or potential) impacts occurring on wet or fragile soils and excessively steep slopes. The Black Mountain Main Cliff is accessed by two trails with evidence of modest trail improvements (vegetation clearing, markings, cairns and corduroy). Use of this climbing area appears to be much more well-established than at the North site and both the approach trails and staging areas show signs of active erosion and degradation. Soils vary from stable to highly erodible.

For the purposes of this plan, the access trails at the Main Cliff are divided into lower, middle, and upper sections- each approximately 0.3 mile in length.

#### Lower Trail

The lower trail segment leaves the east end of a large former log landing and, turning north, follows logging trails over generally level terrain through a recent harvest area. Periodic (and informal) maintenance, including woody debris removal, trimming of berry cane, and marking with flagging tape and/or cairns, has taken place over recent years.

#### Middle Trail

The mid-section of trail climbs moderately through mixed hardwoods on fairly well-drained soils. It terminates with a somewhat steep climb near the ledge band where it enters the boreal talus woodland.

#### Upper Trail

The upper trail parallels the cliff face/ledge band and provides access to the various climbing routes as it continues northwest. Featuring a number of unique granite blocks- including one 'cave'- the trail is very scenic, if not challenging. The terrain becomes increasingly steep as the trail approaches the distal climbing sites, including a number of spur routes that lead steeply up to the base of

various cliff faces. Particularly where these spurs climb steeply up the slope, the soils are extremely prone to erosion and there is some evidence of resource damage. Although there are no markers, the trail terminates near the Jengarete climbing site. In the future, additional climbing routes may be explored further north on the cliff line; however, there is no trail beyond this point at the present.

**2. The Staging Area-** As indicated in the Access Fund Climbing Management Guide, the staging area (the base of the cliff where climbers prepare to climb) is 'typically the most heavily impacted'. This area typically sees the most traffic for the longest period, where climbers congregate, leave packs, belay, and spectate. With a few exceptions, most of the Black Mountain staging areas are situated on stable soils or rock. Evidence of the removal of trees- including those that have fallen as a result of rock fall or due to the thin, unstable soil conditions is generally limited to specific climbing routes.

**3. The Climb-** There are over 49 climbing routes on the Black Mountain Main Cliff. They include both traditional or 'trad' climbing, where climbers must place removable protection as they climb, and sport climbing, where climbers rely on permanent anchors fixed to the rock for protection. The climbs vary in height from 20 to 115 feet. Difficulty levels range from 5.5 to 5.12a.

*NOTE: climbing difficulty is based on the Yosemite Decimal System (YDS) which rates the difficulty of trails from Class 1 for a flat, established trail to Class 5 where climbing is technical and belayed roping with protection is required. Class 5 sub-categories are further broken down to describe climbing conditions; 5.1 is easiest (a steep section with large foot and hand holds) and 5.15 is most difficult (strenuous climbing that's technical and vertical and may have overhangs with small holds). Difficulty grades can be further described with 'a', 'b', or 'c' and, in some cases '+' or '-'.*

These routes are described in detail on the website [www.mountainproject.com](http://www.mountainproject.com) and included in the Appendix. An abbreviated list of climbs- indicating sport/trad, difficulty level, height, and first ascents- is included below (listed north to south). Names are typically given by the person who makes the first ascent. See Appendix for detailed description of climbing routes on Black Mountain.

Several climbs are designated 'sport' and have fixed anchors (e.g. Jengarete); however many have fixed anchors at the top of the cliff to facilitate descending. Scrubbing- the removal of dirt, lichens, and moss from rock surfaces, usually with a wire brush- has been observed on Black in limited areas.

**4. The Summit-** The summit refers to the top of the cliff or climb and typically includes an anchor- either a sturdy tree or more often a permanent anchor of two stainless steel bolts placed in the rock. Climbers at Black Mountain rarely, if ever, climb above the anchors at the tops of the climbing routes, and the summit area of Black Mountain remains largely unvisited and undisturbed.

**5. The Descent-** According to the Access Fund Climbing Management Guide, the descent from climbs 'may involve any combination of walking, down-climbing and rappelling' and 'descent by walk-off may destabilize loose-soiled slopes and gullies and accelerate natural erosion processes. At the present, all climbing route descents at Black Mountain are by rappel, and there is no descent trail from the top of the cliff. The characteristics of Black Mountain as a climbing area make it most suited for rappel descents, and the establishment of a descent trail and managing any potential impact on soils may not be necessary.

**6. Camping Areas-** Camping and overnight use increases the likelihood of environmental damage caused by trampling, fires, and noise. In addition, overnight use increases the need to address concerns such as water supplies and human waste management. There are no observed camping areas on Black Mountain, although overnight parking has been observed at the trailhead. CRAG-VT has contemplated developing a formal camping area and will work with ANR and landowners to select an appropriate location, gain the required approvals, and develop detailed management guidance, should this occur.

### Black Mountain North

The Black Mountain North climbing area is much more limited in scope and considerably less popular than the Main Cliff. The few established climbs in this area are located near a recent rockfall and are rarely repeated. The site is also accessed via the VELCO powerline corridor. A climbing trail leaves the roadway near a stream crossing, approximately 5.2 miles south of Vermont Route 114. Parking is limited to the roadside.

*NOTE: The Black Mountain North site is situated on private timberlands conserved through the Forest Legacy Program where corridor-based uses are permitted at the discretion of the landowner. Per conversations with the managing forester, the landowner is interested in working with ANR and CRAG-VT to address concerns over visitor safety, trail access, and parking- particularly where vehicles parked on a narrow bend in the road create a safety hazard to on-coming vehicles (including log trucks).*

*Due to its proximity (approx. 0.75 mi.) and relationship to the Main Cliff and the interest of CRAG-VT to manage both sites, information on the North Cliff is included below for reference.*

Below is a brief description of the Black Mountain North area, broken into the six climbing zones, with notes on existing and potential impacts.

**1. The Approach-** The access trail to the North Cliff appears to have been established much more recently. Similar to the Main Cliff site, the access trail has three distinct segments- lower, mid, and upper- that are generally varied in terrain and condition. The total length is approximately 0.2 miles.

#### Lower Trail

The low trail enters the forest and follows an old logging trace along a level grade for a short distance before turning east and beginning to climb. Although very short, this segment is poorly drained and seasonally very wet.

#### Middle Trail

The middle section of trail climbs through mixed hardwoods and, in places, is steep. Although the soils are well drained, several areas could be improved by incorporating sidehill alignments and climbing turns to reduce or eliminate short, steep pitches. Apparently due to its nascent existence, this trail shows little erosion, however there is a high likelihood-especially with increased pressure-that some areas may erode. There is evidence of recent vegetation clearing- particularly in areas of sapling regrowth.

## Upper Trail

The upper trail includes sections of boreal talus woodlands and, consequently, features large rocks, outcrops, crevasses, perched root systems and other features typical of this environment. Sections of this route require climbing over rocks and downed trees. The trail terminates adjacent to a large rockslide.

**2. The Staging Area-** As indicated in the Access Fund Climbing Management Guide, the staging area (the base of the cliff where climbers prepare to climb) is 'typically the most heavily impacted'. This area typically sees the most traffic for the longest period of time, where climbers congregate, leave packs, belay, and spectate. Two of the mapped routes on Black Mountain North are situated on talus and rock; one is on native soil.

**3. The Climb-** There are 3 climbs on the Black Mountain North Cliff. They are all 'trad', or traditional climbs, that require climbers to place their own removable protections as they climb.

The climbs vary in height from 25 to 40 feet. Difficulty levels range from 5.5 to 5.8.

These routes are described in detail on the website [www.mountainproject.com](http://www.mountainproject.com) and included in the Appendix.

**4. The Summit-** Climbers at Black Mountain North rarely, if ever, climb above the anchors at the tops of the climbing routes, and the summit area of Black Mountain is largely unvisited and undisturbed.

**5. The Descent-** All climbing route descents at Black Mountain North are currently by rappel, and there is no descent trail from the top of the cliff. The characteristics of Black Mountain North as a climbing area make it most suited for rappel descents, and the establishment of a descent trail and managing any potential impact on soils may not be necessary.

**6. Camping Areas-** There are no observed camping areas on Black Mountain North, although overnight parking has been observed at the Black Mountain Main Cliff trailhead.

## **VI. Management Actions**

Through its 2016 Cooperative Agreement, CRAG-VT assists ANR with the management and development of climbing areas on ANR lands and seeks Corridor Manager status to the same on the Kingdom Heritage Lands. CRAG-VT will coordinate with ANR staff and may work with contractors, local climbers, and/or volunteers to develop and maintain the climbing areas according to accepted standards.

CRAG-VT seeks to provide optimal routes for all proposed climbing activities that will reduce environmental damage, minimize landowner and user conflicts, and maximize the efficiency of its management efforts. To this end, trails and climbing routes on private timberlands will be located in a manner that, where possible, avoids active forestry areas and provides maximum protection of sensitive soils, plants and wildlife habitats. CRAG-VT acknowledge the primacy of the working forest easement on the private timberlands. Activities that are in conflict with forestry operations, the protection of ecological resources, and/or other users will be evaluated for temporary closure or alternate routes and relocated accordingly to avoid and/or address conflicts.



The proposed climbing locations, generally described here, will be more specifically laid out after on-site assessments. Management actions will be reviewed by ANR, the private timberland owners/managers, and the KHL partner organizations/stakeholders (Vermont Land Trust, VELCO, VHCB, host communities) on a case basis with opportunities for discussion and evaluation. CRAG-VT will meet annually with partners to evaluate and/or discuss both past and future management actions and conduct on-the-ground site visits, as needed, to further review specific project details.

### **Parking**

- Trailheads and parking areas provide controlled access points to climbing areas and should be located at strategic points that provide optimal access, maximize the use of existing log landings, pull-offs and open areas, and, where possible, allow for shared access by other recreation users (i.e. hikers, hunters, snowmobiles in the winter).
- Trailheads should be marked and located in areas with adequate parking to accommodate visitation levels and allow vehicles to safely park off of roadways.
- CRAG-VT will work with project partners to locate and design parking areas so as to minimize conflicts with forest management activities. For example, signposts and/or kiosks will be located where they are less likely to be disturbed by forest management activities or in a manner where they are easily removed prior and replaced after such activities. Similarly, parking areas may be delineated by large logs that can be moved with logging equipment, rather than rocks or posts that are more difficult and costly to remove/replace.

### **Approach Trails and Staging Areas**

- CRAG-VT will use existing approach trails and staging areas when possible.
  - Climbers should limit impacts to vegetation and soils by using existing approach trails and avoiding creation of new approach corridors.
  - As conditions warrant, climbers and land management agency staff may identify specific improvement projects to address safety and environmental concerns along approach corridors and at staging areas. Improvements may require environmental analysis including biological and cultural clearances.
  - Where practical access trails may be developed and maintained in coordination with other Corridor Manager groups (i.e. Green Mountain Club).
- The intentional development of approach trails is prohibited except as follows:
  - Construction (e.g. improvements, structures, tool work) of new approach trails is not allowed without prior approval by ANR and the landowner.
  - New approach trails may only be constructed after identification, assessment, design, and environmental analysis are completed by CRAG-VT and ANR.
  - Improvement of existing approach/descent trails and staging areas:
    - After prior agency approval, access trails and staging areas of well-known and

more heavily used climbing routes may be identified, delineated, hardened and maintained by CRAG-VT in order to prevent further erosion problems, loss of vegetation, and to establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use. In certain instances, signs may be placed to direct climbers away from problem or sensitive areas in order to protect resources. Extraneous user created paths that have developed over long periods of time, or currently see infrequent use, may be rehabilitated to discourage or prevent future travel. Travel in higher use areas should be on durable established access trails and corridors.

- Dispersed travel to and from the base of climbs, and during descent, is generally encouraged in lower use climbing areas where established access trails do not exist.

## Wayfinding

- CRAG-VT will post information on its website ([cragvt.org](http://cragvt.org)) and, to the extent practical, coordinate with outside resources to post information on Black Mountain Climbing routes, including The Mountain Project ([www.mountainproject.com](http://www.mountainproject.com)) and Rakkup (<https://rakkup.com/guidebook/vermont-rock-climbing/black-mountain/s20203>)
- CRAG-VT will work with ANR and KHL partners to develop on-site wayfinding that is discrete, effective, and consistent with the rugged, undeveloped character of the land.
- Signs should be made of milled lumber with routed lettering, and will be only as follows:
  - Trailhead sign with name of trail and length to end destination.
  - Indication of private property as needed.
  - Trails that intersect should be marked with a small trail crossing sign that shows which routes are which trails, by name.
  - Trail length and distances may also be included on signs
- Blazes and trail markers should be minimized and used as necessary to make the trail easily followed by climbers. A well-defined trail – clear of brush and debris with a well-worn treadway – will require fewer blazes to direct visitors. Blazes shall be rectangular, two inches by six inches in size and placed no less than four feet high (approximately eye level). Generally, no more than one blaze shall be visible from any point (except in areas where the tread is difficult to follow). Blazes will be painted with water-soluble exterior latex paint in a color to be decided by ANR.
- Trail markers may be used, with permission of the landowner, as an alternative to painted blazes. Trail markers, made of plastic or aluminum, are circular, square, or diamond-shaped tags placed at regular intervals and attached with aluminum tree nails. They may include a printed climber icon or similar graphic but should be no larger than 16-inches square (4x4). Markers should be placed so that no more than one marker shall be visible from any point (except in areas where the tread is difficult to follow).

### **Vegetation Alteration**

- Removal of vegetation from the base of climbs, belay ledges, or bouldering areas is discouraged.
- It is understood that some limited loss of vegetation is likely to occur at established climbing areas. Where necessary, vegetation removal should establish a durable, sustainable, and safe pattern of use.
- The removal of RTE plant species is absolutely prohibited. CRAG-VT will work with ANR to identify RTE occurrences and to post appropriate signage to promote stewardship.

### **Rock Alteration**

- 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.
- Chipping, gluing, or attaching artificial holds is prohibited.

### **Fixed Hardware**

- CRAG-VT will monitor and maintain the placement of climbing aids in a manner that minimizes impacts to cliff resources and limits the proliferation of unauthorized routes.
- The use of non-climbing specific hardware (e.g. concrete anchors, home manufactured equipment, cables, etc.) is discouraged.
- Modern, commercially available climbing specific hangers and bolts of a length adequate for the rock conditions, and of a highly corrosion resistant metal such as stainless steel are required.

### **Gear Caches**

- Generally, the caching of climbing equipment at or near the base of a climb is not allowed.

### **Camping**

- Camping will occur in designated areas identified by CRAG-VT, ANR, and the landowners.
- Camping areas may be developed in coordination with other Corridor Managers (i.e. equestrian, hiker) with sites to be managed according to detailed, approved site plans.
- Camping is intended to be limited in scope, and CRAG-VT will ensure that proper site management ensures appropriate site design, group size, length of stay, waste management, etc., consistent with best practices.

### **Human and Pet Waste**

- Climbers should abide by standard Leave No Trace practices for rock climbing.
- Climbers should clean up after themselves and pack out all trash and garbage.

- Packing out human and pet waste is encouraged, especially in areas with moderate to high levels of use, and where appropriate means of disposal (e.g., catholes, privies) are not available or appropriate.
- Availability and placement of toilets should be considered in areas of higher use.

### **Seasonal Restrictions**

- Mud Season
  - Access roads are gated seasonally by the landowner to prohibit vehicular travel that would cause damage during spring and fall mud season. During these times access will only be permitted via non-motorized travel.
  - ANR, through its Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department webpage, will provide public road closure information. CRAG-VT will coordinate with ANR, landowners, and VELCO to notify climbers when roads have been opened and closed to motorized use.
  - CRAG-VT will provide educational signage indicating the timing and reasons for road closure during mud seasons.
- Hunting Season
  - Climbers should be mindful of fall hunting seasons, during which there is a higher likelihood for user conflicts. CRAG-VT will notify climbers of appropriate large game seasons and promote relevant safety practices such as wearing hunter orange clothing.
- Peregrine Falcons
  - Climbing activity can negatively impact peregrine falcon, which is a species of special concern in Vermont. Climbers (and other recreation users) have the potential to disrupt normal activity by altering species distributions, disrupting nest attentiveness patterns, causing abandonment of breeding territories, reducing productivity, and affecting foraging behavior. There is no documentation of nesting Peregrine falcons on Black Mountain, however, CRAG-VT will coordinate with ANR and Vermont Audubon to monitor and address potential conflicts should nesting occur.

### **Outreach and Education**

- CRAG-VT maintains an active website and engages the climbing community at the statewide and local level through organized climbs, events, and campaigns. Information pertaining to climbing on the Kingdom Heritage Lands such as access information, user expectations, and backcountry etiquette will be available through the CRAG-VT website and its publications. To the extent practical, CRAG-VT will share relevant access and stewardship information with non-affiliated websites and guide resources.

## **Risk Management**

- CRAG-VT will, to the extent practicable, promote climber safety through education and personal responsibility.
- CRAG-VT will coordinate with ANR, Vermont Search and Rescue (VSAR), and local first responders to develop a risk management and emergency response plan for sites location on ANR or KHL lands.
  - Emergency Response Plans will include detailed maps indicating the location of access roads, gates, trails, climbing routes, campsites, bivouac areas, staging areas, access classifications (i.e. foot travel, ATV, UTV, 4WD, Ambulance, etc.), and helicopter landing zones.
  - CRAG-VT and ANR will coordinate with landowners and VSAR to identify and develop an appropriate helicopter landing zone near climbing areas.
  - First responders will have access to current gate codes, combinations, and/or keys for emergency use.

## **Reporting**

- CRAG-VT will provide annual reports to ANR, which will distribute them to each of the Kingdom Heritage Lands landowners and partners to describe site conditions and maintenance efforts, including any additions to the previous year's climbing route count. Owners should also notify FPR immediately of access changes as needed (especially planned forestry operations), resource damage observed, road closure or maintenance activities, and other concerns. Reports should be sent to the St Johnsbury District Stewardship Forester (presently, Louis Bushey) or designated point of contact.
- CRAG-VT field staff and volunteers will meet in person with ANR at least once a year, to plan, discuss and evaluate climbing access areas on VTANR lands and the Kingdom Heritage Lands, and will notify ANR of each planned maintenance operation or work crew on the lands.

## **VII. Other Potential Climbing Opportunities**

CRAG-VT recognizes that other, potential climbing areas- suitable for sport and trad climbing as well as bouldering- may exist on the Kingdom Heritage Lands or other VTANR lands in the Northeast Kingdom. At present, CRAG-VT will focus its efforts on managing access to the Black Mountain cliffs. Other climbing resources may be addressed, in coordination with VTANR and landowners, as necessary or by request of the partners.

### **Brousseau Mountain**

Brousseau Mountain is a northern granite peak located in Norton, Vermont, approximately 2.0-miles north of Black Mountain. It is located on private timberlands. Brousseau Mountain features an extensive cliff and talus complex that includes several unique and rare natural communities, including nesting peregrine falcons. This portion of the mountain is conserved through the Forest Legacy Program. Presently, there are no documented climbing routes on Brousseau Mountain although signs of activity have recently been observed. CRAG-VT will periodically monitor use at Brousseau and, at the discretion of the landowner, coordinate with ANR to provide appropriate outreach to the climbing community related to the responsible stewardship of these areas.

## **Contacts**

For the purposes of this plan, the contact person for Crag- VT shall be:(name, email, phone)

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## Appendices

- I. Leave No Trace Climbing Ethics (<https://www.rei.com/learn/expert-advice/climbing-ethics.html>)
- II. Map: Black Mountain- Averill, Vermont; climbing areas and access routes

### Appendix I. Leave No Trace Climbing Ethics

#### Know Climbing Issues

Each and every climber represents the climbing community. You need to know and follow the [Leave No Trace](#) principles, plus any rules specific to your favorite climbing areas. If one climber does things that are outside the parameters of common courteous practices, we all start losing our rights to use these areas.

The biggest issues in the climbing world today include:

- Bolting practices.
- Climbing area maintenance.
- Climber relations with other users in shared-use areas.
- Climber relations with land managers.
- Continued access to public venues.

Talk to your fellow climbers about what's going on. Do some research online. And get involved.

#### Know Your Climbing Area

Some of the questions you should be asking:

- Where is the access? Is there a designated trail to the climbing area? Is it on public or private land? Where can I park my car? Get information from online sources, guidebooks, the local climbing shops or your climbing buddies.
- What is the color of the rock? Climbers are just one user of an area, so consider your visual impact. The color of the area's rock will influence what color chalk you use, as unsightly chalk marks detract from the visual experience of the next user. Rock color will also influence the color of your clothing and even your rope.
- What is the site's climbing ethic? Research whether or not there are site-specific guidelines about climbing free, using removable protection or leaving marks on rocks.
- Are there seasonal wildlife closures? Some climbing areas are closed periodically to protect nesting birds or other local wildlife. Find this out *before* you drive to the site.
- What about vegetation? Climbing has an impact on the plants and soils at the bottom and top of a climb, as well as on cliff-dwelling plants. The [Access Fund](#) identifies 6 zones impacted by a typical climb (see illustration below). Please minimize your impact on vegetation at all times but be aware of site-specific issues as well.

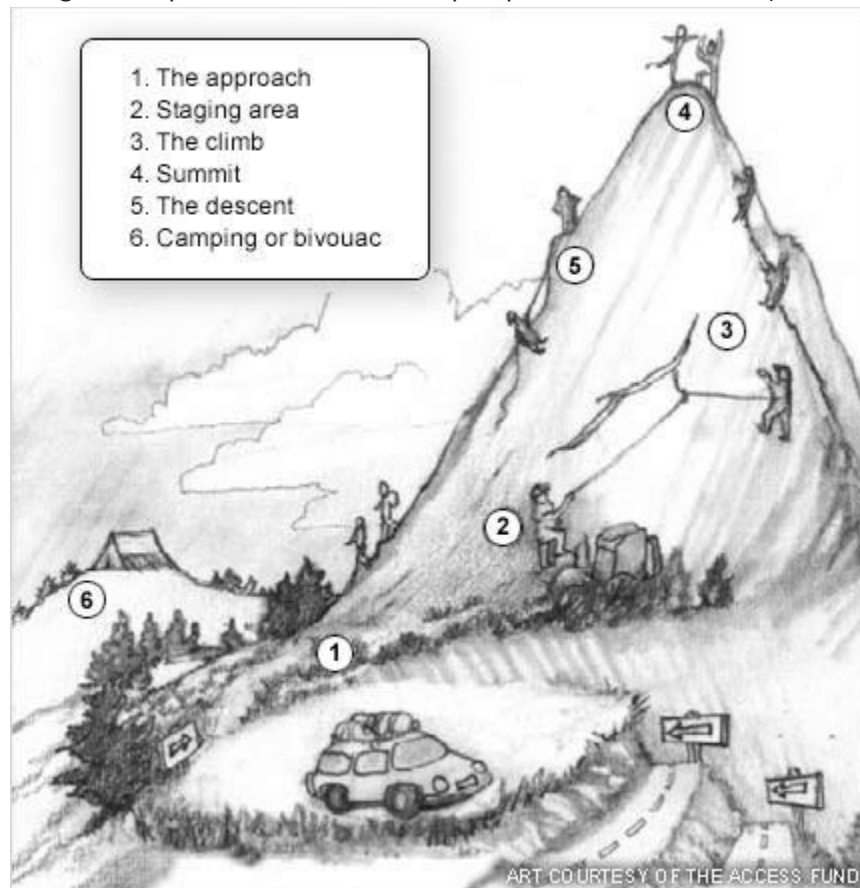
#### Reduce Your Impact

Leave No Trace is a philosophy that encourages you to make as little impact as possible while enjoying your outdoor activities. A common saying is, "Take only photos, leave only footprints." However, even footprints should be minimized.

The Access Fund's 6 zones of a climbing area:

1. The approach
2. Staging area
3. The climb
4. Summit
5. The descent
6. Camping or bivouac

Always practice Leave No Trace principles so you can minimize erosion to the land, reduce damage to vegetation, avoid negative impacts to wildlife and help to preserve the solitude (noise is pollution, too).



### Zone 1: The Approach

This is where you park your vehicle, grab your gear and start walking to the climb's staging area.

Leave No Trace actions:

- Carpool to the trail to save both fuel and parking spaces.
- Avoid use during peak times.
- Keep the group size small.
- Walk single file.



- Use existing trails and don't trample vegetation.
- Do not cut switchbacks.
- Walk lightly.
- Stay away from sensitive areas.
- Walk through mud, not around it, to avoid widening the path.
- Volunteer to do trail improvements—use wood chips, soil or gravel to help minimize damage to large sites.

### **Zone 2: Staging Area**

This is where you put on your climbing gear and get ready to climb, have something to eat, discuss the route, look at strategies and take a potty break before starting. The easier the access, the more a staging area gets used, but even more remote areas are impacted, too.

Leave No Trace actions:

- Make sure the staging area is large enough for everyone.
- Do not trample vegetation.
- Keep the noise down.
- Walk lightly.
- Pick up all lunch scraps.
- Properly take care of human waste.

### **Zone 3: The Climb**

This is why you are here—the ascent. Rocks are hard and durable, but they do naturally erode. With climbers scampering over them, pieces will break off and erode even faster, especially soft rocks such as sandstone.

While on the route, climbers can dislodge organic matter from cracks. Climbing shoes, ropes and your hands can damage plants, too.

Leave No Trace actions:

- Avoid cliff edges, cracks and ledges that are prone to erosion.
- Use a chalk bag and keep it close to you to prevent spills.
- Use as little chalk as possible, and use a color that is compatible with the rocks.
- If some chalk does spill, try to clean it up.
- If possible, avoid using trees for anchors.
- When using a tree is necessary, avoid harming the tree's bark by using a sling and carabiner to run the rope through, instead of wrapping a rope around a tree.
- Be careful where you place your hands to avoid wildlife. Bird nests can be in cliff faces, and other animals use them for shelter, too.
- If taking a new route, try not to leave a noticeable path. Avoid vegetation and areas that need "cleaning."
- Use earth-toned webbing.
- Place bolts or pitons properly for a less impacted route.
- Use removable protection whenever possible.

#### **Zone 4: The Summit**

This is the goal—reaching the top. Vegetation at the summit can be especially fragile because of its exposure and thin soil.

Leave No Trace actions:

- Leave behind what you find there; don't take any souvenirs except pictures.
- Take what you brought with you, including human waste.
- Walk lightly.

#### **Zone 5: The Descent**

Descents include walking, down-climbing, rappelling or any combination thereof.

Leave No Trace actions:

- Make sure the staging area is large enough for everyone.
- Leave behind what you find; don't take any souvenirs except pictures.
- Take what you brought with you, including human waste.
- Walk lightly.

Tip: If vegetation is fragile on the cliff edge, consider fixing anchors below the summit. The anchors let climbers rappel down instead of going over the cliff edge for the descent path.

#### **Zone 6: Camping or Bivouac**

If you have to travel a bit to reach your favorite climbing areas, it's likely you will be camping before and/or after the climb.

Leave No Trace actions:

- Use designated camping areas—don't make new ones. Camp at least 200 feet from lakes and streams.
- Be careful not to spill food during preparation. Pick it up if you do.
- Don't bury uneaten food; animals will dig it up. Pack it out.
- Store food securely when away from camp.
- Pack out all garbage.
- Avoid building fires. Use a backpacking stove instead.
- Cook on rock, gravel or snow instead of on vegetated areas.
- Pick up what others may have left behind.

Tip: Take part in the Access Fund's Adopt-a-Crag day held each September. This program brings climbers together with local land managers and landowners for conservation and stewardship. See the Access Fund website for details.

#### **Cleaning the Route**

A new climbing route will most likely require some "cleaning." Cleaning a route means clearing loose rocks and removing moss, lichen or debris from foot and handholds to make the climb safer. While necessary for climbing safety, cleaning should be kept to a minimum.

Where there are no records of a climb, there is likely to be more impact from climbers making their own routes. So whenever possible, be sure to input your data into new-route logs to help other climbers and to reduce the impact.

Tip: Before cleaning a new route, consider if the route will be used again and the cleaning is justifiable.

### **Practice Good Hygiene**



You may think of this as a personal thing, but we all need to consider our bathroom etiquette. Human waste is a problem in popular camping and climbing areas, especially on multi-pitch and big-wall climbs. For camp or staging areas, check beforehand for site-specific information. If there is an established toilet at the camp or staging area, use it—especially before you start your climb.

In most places it is acceptable to pee on the ground, but go 200 feet away from water sources, the trail and campsites. Try to go on mineral soil or rock so vegetation is not harmed. There is salt in urine, and the salt can attract animals that could damage the vegetation more.

One rule applies everywhere: Don't pee in cracks. It may seem counter-intuitive, but it's better to pee out on the open faces on rock. Your pee dries faster out on a rock face. Consider, too, that rainwater rarely gets into cracks to wash it out. This can lead to real stinky climbs. And who would want to stick their hands in those cracks, anyway?

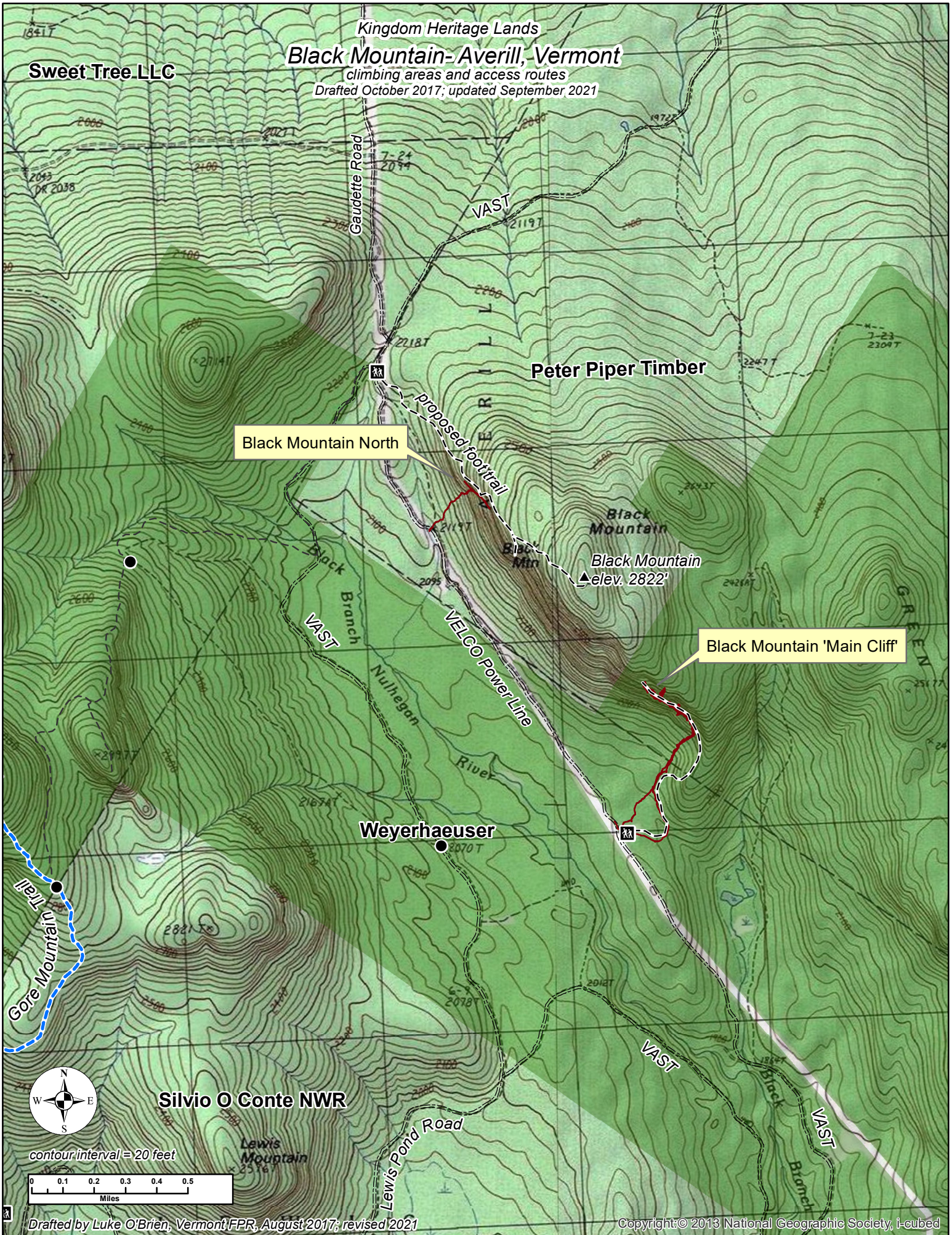
When nature calls for a "No. 2," you can use a cathole (dug hole) 6-8 inches deep and cover it with dirt when finished. Put a rock on top to deter animals from digging it up. When on the climb or in snow, pack it out. Some climbing areas have waste bags available. Otherwise you can buy waste bags and containers or bring your own.

Some waste bags have zip-style closures in a double-bag system with a special blend of polymers to break the waste down and turn it into a deodorized gel. This also makes it carrying easier. The bags are safe for landfills and can be dropped in the trash.

Any toilet paper and hygiene products should be placed in a sealable bag and packed out.

Kingdom Heritage Lands  
**Black Mountain- Averill, Vermont**  
climbing areas and access routes  
Drafted October 2017; updated September 2021

Sweet Tree LLC



Black Mountain North

Peter Piper Timber

Black Mountain  
Black Mountain  
▲ elev. 2822'

Black Mountain 'Main Cliff'

Weyerhaeuser

Silvio O Conte NWR

contour interval = 20 feet

