



The Front Range Climbing Stewards Scarface Approach Trail Project Report

March, 2019



View from Scarface Climbing Area during the wet 2019 spring, Indian Creek, UT

Overview of the Project:

During March of 2019, The Front Range Climbing Stewards (FRCS), in conjunction with The Access Fund's Conservation Team West and National (AFCT) and the Rocky Mountain Field Institute (RMFI) continued the restoration of the Scarface approach trail in Indian Creek. All groups worked in collaboration with Monticello BLM Field Office to continue this project started in 2018. The objective of the project was to address the impacts of rock climbing on the area, specifically on the approach trail by hardening the steep and eroded trail with natural materials. Costs of this project were shared amongst The Boulder Climbing Community (BCC), The Access Fund, RMFI, Montrose High School Outdoor Club (MHS), Fountain Valley High School (FVHS), Ohio State's Mountaineer Club (OSU) and the many volunteers who traveled here to dedicate to the project. This project was the primary focus of The FRCS for 12 days between March 14th and 31st, 2019.

This report is a summary of FRCS's involvement in the project and therefore represents only a portion of the planning, labor, overall cost, volunteer hours and outcomes that were involved. This report details the perspective only from the FRCS and not the Access Fund nor RMFI. FRCS is a stewardship program of the Boulder Climbing Community, a Boulder, CO based non-profit. The mission of the program is to provide innovative solutions to land managers in order to help mitigate the impact of climbing on lands in the Rocky Mountain region.

Overview of the Area and Impacts of Climbing:

Scarface wall is a popular climbing crag within the Indian Creek Recreation Area. Indian Creek is currently within the boundaries of the Bear's Ears National Monument. The nature of the climbing in Indian Creek is distinct along with its unique landscape. This draws visitors to the area from all over the nation and world. Climbers have visited Indian Creek for over 45 years, but climbing did not really take off until the late 1970s. The area is home to thousands of reported rock climbs of varying difficulty and accessibility. Since its inception in Indian Creek, nearly 40 years ago, climber visitation has increased exponentially and occurs throughout the year. Visitation is particularly high during the spring and fall when temperatures are more favorable to climbing and camping and has seen a recent upturn in use particularly in the last 10 years.

The continued increase of climber visits and camping has led to significant environmental impact. One of the greatest impacts related to climbing in this area is the erosion of the soils at the base areas and around the access trails to the crags. The base areas and approach trails are on loose and steep slopes, varying from 120 to 1500 feet up off the canyon floor. The desert soils on these slopes is very fragile and rely heavily on biological soil crusts, sparse vegetation and errant rock to maintain their structure. The landscape can be forgiving and restore itself passively once disturbed, but continual and chronic disturbances cause elevated erosion issues that exacerbate quickly and cannot return to original conditions without a larger effort of active restoration.

Overview of the 2019 Scarface Trail Maintenance Project:

The goal of this project is to mitigate the erosive impacts of climbing on the Scarface Wall access trail. The Scarface Wall sees similar use levels and visitation to other popular climbing destinations in Indian Creek and contains one of the most photographed and climbed routes in the region, the crag's namesake climb: *Scarface*. This popular climbing area is known for a consistently full parking area and roadside congestion signifying its popularity. Loose, sandy slopes that lack significant structure along the hillside contribute to the increasing effects of climber use and erosion impacts. Gullying, route braiding and vegetation loss continue and represent a critical need for restoration and stabilization efforts. Previously, due to little or no maintenance being done, the access trail was in a state of serious disrepair (**figure 1**). The trail was only moderately functional with numerous gullied out sections that channeled precipitation during storm events and exasperated severe erosion and trail braiding.



Figure 1 - Loose and eroded access trail to Scarface Wall

FRCS and RMFI worked with the Access Fund and the Monticello BLM Field Office to identify this project from a priority list of areas in need, then developed a general strategy to address the issues. This multi-year project was initiated in the spring of 2018 and also saw attention in the fall of 2018. For this leg of the project FRCS developed the project objectives and developed a strategy for how to efficiently tackle the significant amount of work that remains to be addressed on this trail. All organizations took part in training, supervising and managing the project's progress with the help of a variety of volunteers and volunteer groups. FRCS and AFCT teams directed the skilled rock work, quarrying and transportation that is central to this project's success. MHS, FVHS, OSU and a corps of individual volunteers dedicated additional labor to the project under the tutelage of all the participating project partners. The combined effect of workflow planning/coordination, stonework skills and volunteer labor result in the impressive amount of difficult work that was accomplished over only three short and very wet weeks (**Figure 2,3,4 &5**). Please see **Appendix A** for a listing of labor totals and sources.



Volunteer orientation - 606 vol. hours were leveraged



Skilled and at times, exposed rock work – 540 professional hrs of labor

Figure 2,3,4 & 5 – Examples of the variety of skilled and volunteer work that comprised this project



Stone Quarrying – 273^{3ft} of stone was quarried on site



Manual stone transportation – 449 stones were transported to worksites

Project Objectives, Outcomes and Observations for Future:

The scope of the project involved continuing to build a durable path that climbers can easily identify and follow approaching the Scarface Wall. This included continuing to build on structures that were begun during a three-week period in Spring of 2018. While the approach trail was generally functional for the majority of its length and users could follow a track without major braiding, the trail was loose, channeling water and deteriorating more each passing season. This leg of the project (spring 2019) identified six worksites on the approach trail to perform concentrated maintenance and build structures along the existing trail. This goal was accomplished by building retaining structures and stone staircases (**Figure 6 & 7**) and establishing a hardened tread that is easily identifiable to the user and dissuading travel on easily eroded terrain. Please see **appendix B** for a list project metrics for the six sites that were completed during FRCS's tenure on this leg of the project.

Unfortunately, this project was unable to address all of the maintenance required to update this trail in entirety. FRCS prioritized the work objectives and took on the highest priority or largest work objectives during this project in hopes of setting up for wrapping up the remaining work objectives during a smaller but significant project scheduled for the fall of 2019. Smaller and medium to low priority work objectives remain to be completed, as well as the need for continued maintenance of the whole trail in the future. It remains to be seen if all of the needed objectives will be able to be addressed by the end of the 2019 trail season.

Figure 6



Figure 7



Summary:

The successes of this project are significant and measurable. Not only did good sustainable work get accomplished on the trail but a strong message of the value of stewardship of our public lands was communicated to a new generation within the climbing community represented by the high school and college aged groups as well as the ample amount of individual volunteers who came out to help on the project. This is a great example of how a handful of organizations can collaborate to improve our climbing resources. FRCS would like to

thank all parties involved in this project. The Monticello BLM field office’s willingness to coordinate needed environmental assessments before taking on projects is pivotal to addressing these impacts. The Access Fund’s dedication to being the nexus of the stewardship effort in the area is extremely valuable and a project of this magnitude. Furthermore the project would simply not have been possible without the generous funders of BCC and the dedication of the FRCS crew members. Together we can address the impacts of the sport and lifestyle that we love.

Appendix A: Project Labor totals

(March 14th – 31st)

Labor Type	Hrs.
FRCS professional labor, planning & development	308
AFCT professional labor	216
RMFI professional labor	16
OSU volunteer labor	60
Montrose HS vol labor	168
FVHS vol labor	90
Other Volunteer labor	288
Total Hours	1,146
Total Paid Hours	540
Total Volunteer Hours	606



Before



After

Appendix B: Project Metrics

(march 14th -31st)

Outcome	Amount	Unit
Trail Improved	209	L FT
Rock Step	126	#
Retaining Wall/Structure	451	SQ FT
Rubble Wall/Structure	295	SQ FT
Crush material	129	CU FT
Drain Dip	12	SQ FT
Restoration-- Fill, Rock 50%	248	SQ FT
Rocks moved by Hand	449	#
Rock Quarrying	273	CU FT

Additional Before & After photos





