

# VERTICAL TIMES

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## Inside the Black Box: Access Fund Policy Work

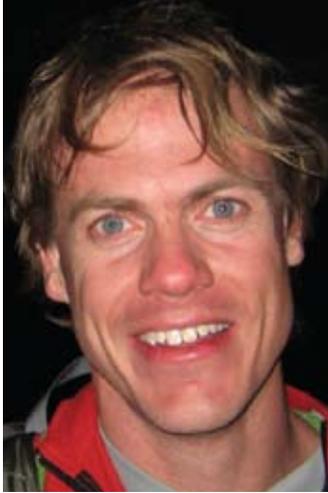
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“Eighty percent of success is showing up.”

— Woody Allen

As I sit in my office composing this letter, Jason Keith, our policy director, is in Washington, D.C., doing his best to “show up” despite two major winter storms that have paralyzed the region. At the moment he is stuck on a stalled Metro train en route to the few congressional offices that are still operating. Knowing Jason, though, the weather won’t hamper him for long. A tenacious advocate, he has spent nearly a decade representing climbers’ interests in D.C., building relationships with decision makers, and negotiating land management policies.

Thanks to Access Fund’s work in the nation’s capital, we are getting closer to a future in which climbing and access to climbing resources are viewed as legitimate, valued, and positive uses of the land.

Policy work is a little bit like combating terrorism in that if you are successful, nobody really notices. So it can be difficult to talk about. Much of our policy work is dedicated to complex, multiyear issues that may not have a definitive resolution. Fixed anchors on public land, managing wildlife and human interaction, and mitigating liability concerns are just a few of the issues we’ve been working on for well over a decade. I hope our article, *Inside the Black Box: Access Fund National Policy Work*, in this issue helps shed some light on this critical work.

Of course we do more than just policy work. Your 2009 membership dollars allowed us to not only maintain our presence in D.C., but to also fund four acquisition projects through the Access Fund Land Conservation Campaign and support record numbers of local climbing organizations and Adopt a Crag and TeamWorks events. Economically it was a tough year for everyone, but, thanks to you, we had one of our most successful years to date. We are a stronger organization and have a greater network than ever before. Thank you for your consistent support.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Brady Robinson". The signature is fluid and cursive.

**Brady Robinson**  
*Executive Director*

### Membership Policy Changes

We’ve changed some of our membership policies in order to better serve you. A one-year membership to the Access Fund now costs just \$35. And, instead of expiring exactly one year from the day you join or renew, memberships now expire on the last day of the month in which you renew, giving you a few extra weeks of great benefits!

Questions? Contact Leici Hendrix, membership and development manager, at [leici@accessfund.org](mailto:leici@accessfund.org) or **888-8-MEMBER**.

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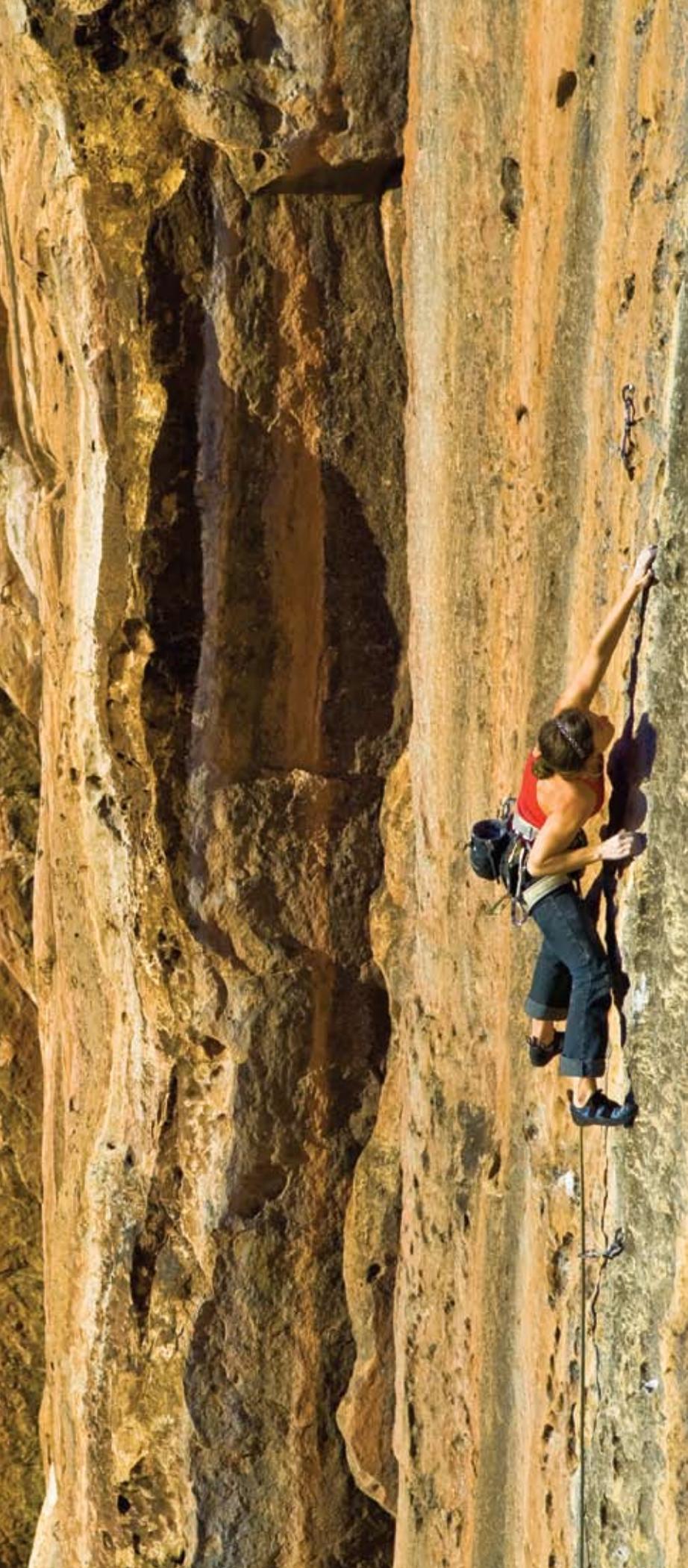
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Chris Archer



Katie Brown on Justice for All in Lower Mill Creek, UT | © John Dickey

## Visa Card Questions

I'm interested in applying for the AF Visa Platinum Card; however, there are several details missing from the application page. For example, how much will the "ongoing contributions" be and how frequently? Are those contributions taken from the bank or my account? Also, how many "points" are determined from each purchase?

— LEAH MILLER,  
Thornton, CO

**AF:** Leah, good questions! The ongoing contributions are one-third of a percent of all purchases you make with the card. They are donated to the Access Fund by the bank, not you. To determine how many points you earn from each purchase, please contact UMB Customer Service at 800-821-4115.

## Thanks for the Loan

I just wanted to say we are so excited to have AF's support at Rumbling Bald! Y'all are helping us make it happen, and we are psyched (to say the least).

— ZACHERY LESCH-HUIE,  
Carolina Climbers Coalition

**AF:** Zachery, we're excited to be able to put the Access Fund Land Conservation Campaign money to work at Rumbling Bald. The Carolina Climbers Coalition is doing an amazing job. Keep up the good work!

## Stick to the Charter

As a lifelong climber, conservationist, and supporter of the Access Fund, I find it a bit disturbing that you've strayed into the quagmire of global climate change. It is controversial at best and does not really address the charter function of the AF. If the AF continues to expend resources in the position stated in the November E-News, I will need to reconsider my financial support.

— THEO BARKER, Loveland, CO

**AF:** As you know, our mission is to keep climbing areas open and conserve the climbing environment. One of the ways we achieve this mission is by lobbying in D.C. That is part of the reason we were a founding member of the Outdoor Alliance (OA). By combining forces with the boaters, mountain bikers, hikers, and backcountry skiers, we can now go into a meeting in D.C. and state that we are part of an alliance of human-powered recreation groups that represent 1 in 3 Americans. Once we began coordinating our policy efforts, our clout on national policy issues increased greatly. Climate change and climate change legislation could have a big impact on human-powered outdoor recreation. Since the OA has a unique perspective on how climate legislation could affect the human-powered outdoor recreation community, we support the OA initiative through our own communications channels. However, we are not spending Access Fund staff time working on climate change. There are other organizations better suited to address this important issue. Our time, energy, and resources remain focused on initiatives that directly keep climbing areas open and conserve the climbing environment. Thanks for your feedback and we hope you continue to support the Access Fund.

## We Want Your Artwork!

It's that time again. The Access Fund is in search of artwork for the next membership T-shirt. If we select your design, you'll get more than 15 minutes of fame—you'll get a gift package and your artwork will be sent to every Access Fund member for the next year. Submissions should reflect climbing or mountain views and be formatted as PDFs or presented in an online gallery. **E-mail submissions to [holly@accessfund.org](mailto:holly@accessfund.org) by April 30.**



The Access Fund wants to hear from you. Share your thoughts, ideas, and perspectives on access issues. Tell us what we're doing well. Tell us where we could improve. E-mail your comments to [holly@accessfund.org](mailto:holly@accessfund.org).



### Las Vegas Climbers Liaison Council

The Las Vegas Climbers Liaison Council is busy organizing Adopt a Crag events (fully equipped with helicopter equipment drops), cohosting the *Opening the Gates on Public Lands* summit with the Access Fund this March, and providing feedback to the BLM for the new draft of the wilderness management plan that is expected to be out in October. For more information, contact

[lvclc.admin@gmail.com](mailto:lvclc.admin@gmail.com).

### New Regional Coordinator in Arizona

We are happy to announce Kevin Keith as our new regional coordinator in Central Arizona. Kevin is developing relationships with private landowners in hopes of opening new climbing areas. For more information, contact Kevin at [kevininprescott@yahoo.com](mailto:kevininprescott@yahoo.com).

### Southern Sierra Climbers Association

The Southern Sierra Climbers Association is working hard organizing several Adopt a Crag events this year, including ones in Joshua Tree, New Jack City, and Sequoia National Park. Their most recent Adopt a Crag was held in the Alabama Hills. For more information, visit [www.southernsierraclimbers.org](http://www.southernsierraclimbers.org).



### Vertical Mulching?

*Buttermilks Adopt a Crag Report* from Amy Ansari, Access Fund grassroots coordinator

As I wandered through the crowd of volunteers trying to figure out where I was most needed, I heard a team leader yell, “Follow me if you are interested in

vertical mulching.” Vertical mulching? This I had to see. When I crested the hill, several people were already hard at work vertical mulching—planting dead logs, vegetation, and brush into the ground. The goal of vertical mulching is to deter people from making new trails. It is a very effective method used in the desert Southwest at places like Joshua Tree, Red Rocks, and the Buttermilks.

## Local Climbing Organization 101: Securing an Option Agreement

An option agreement is a powerful yet underutilized tool in the conservation world. If a privately owned climbing area is closed and initial conversations with the landowner regarding liability protection and other solutions have gone nowhere, purchasing the land may be a possibility. If so, consider asking the landowner to sign an option agreement.

An option agreement is only a means to an end. The landowner remains in possession of the property, but the agreement gives the option holder the sole right to purchase the property. This can allow climbers a set period of time (generally one to two years) to fundraise for an acquisition while the property is temporarily secured. The agreement is recorded in the county’s public records, legally preventing the landowner from selling or transferring any portion of the property during this “option period.”

The details in these agreements will vary based on the project, but the framework is simple. Please contact us at [joe@accessfund.org](mailto:joe@accessfund.org) to learn more.



To submit an update for your local climbing organization or area, contact Amy Ansari at [amy@accessfund.org](mailto:amy@accessfund.org).

# How to tread lightly to Protect Climbing Access

**C**limbing, once an obscure activity with few participants, has become a mainstream form of outdoor recreation. And our impact on the environment and others around us is under increasing scrutiny. As climbers, we must show a healthy respect for the places and policies where we climb. This mindset helps assure continued climbing access by showing landowners and managers that we take care of the places where we play.

Slip into stealth mode and follow these easy guidelines to help protect climbing access every time you're at the crag ...

**Stay on established trails** – Even if the trail is not the most direct line to the base of a route or boulder, avoid the temptation to blaze your own path. Hiking off trail promotes erosion and destroys vegetation.

**Keep a low profile** – We know that route you're working requires a lot of moxie, but yelling, swearing, screaming beta at your partner, and even playing music at the crag can seriously disrupt those around you, including the landowner.

**Clean up excess chalk** – Chalk is a necessary part of climbing, but it also creates visual evidence of climber impact. Clean up spills and brush off tick marks after each session.

**Respect closures** – Respecting the wildlife (e.g., nesting birds) and cultural resource (e.g., petroglyphs) closures will help ensure that they don't turn into unreasonable closures. Visit [www.status.accessfund.org](http://www.status.accessfund.org) for an updated list of closures and restrictions across the country.

**Keep tabs on your dog** – Dogs at the crag can have a serious impact on climbing access due to their ability to disturb the peace of those around them, including that of the landowner. Consider leaving Fido at home. If you must bring your dog to the crag, keep it with you at all times, control its barking, and clean up after it.

**Pack it out** – Don't trash the crag. Carry an extra plastic bag and pack out your own trash (yes, even climbing tape counts). Human waste counts too—do your business away from cliffs, boulders, trails, and water sources and pack it out. For AF

member discounts on Restop bags, visit [www.accessfund.org/membersdiscounts](http://www.accessfund.org/membersdiscounts).

**Pad and tread lightly** – We know you're focused on sending that sweet boulder problem, but remember to think about the life on the ground around you. Avoid trampling or throwing crash pads on vegetation.

**Educate others KINDLY** – If you see someone hiking off trail, blaring music, or throwing trash on the ground, kindly let them know that their actions could threaten access for everyone. In many cases people simply don't recognize that their actions might negatively impact the environment or access to the area.

For more information on stealthy climbing practices, visit [www.accessfund.org](http://www.accessfund.org) or contact [amy@accessfund.org](mailto:amy@accessfund.org). ■

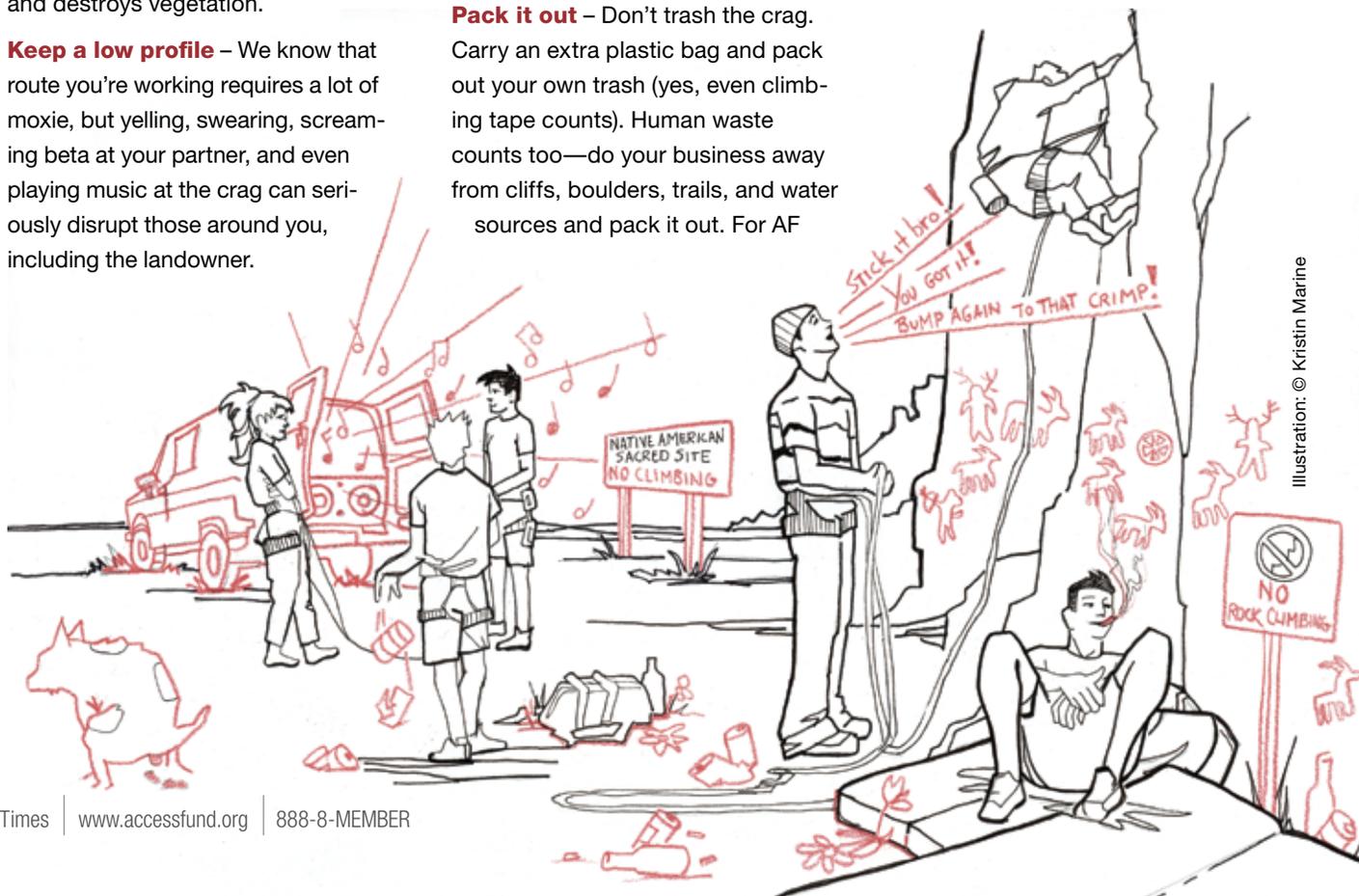


Illustration: © Kristin Marine



## Adrenaline Snags Coveted Golden Toothbrush Award

There's something in the water in Georgia. And whatever it is, it sparks a burning flame of competition.

In 2008, Adrenaline climbing team of Suwanee, Georgia, placed second in the Access Fund TeamWorks youth stewardship competition, missing the coveted Golden Toothbrush award by a narrow margin to the neighboring Escalade climbing team from Kennesaw, Georgia.

Not ones to be bested by their Georgian rivals, Adrenaline started off 2009 absolutely gunning for the Golden Toothbrush. And they got it. The kids took the competition with three events that drew hundreds of

volunteers who contributed nearly a thousand hours of volunteer work to local conservation and stewardship.

"It's the competition that gets them stoked," says team coach Trey Johanson-Smith. But the desire to win took a backseat for the 40-plus members of the A Team. "We had a blast every time we were out there working and climbing together. The camaraderie and sense of accomplishment became more important than the competition."

The team hosted two events this year at Sand Rock in Alabama, each drawing over a hundred volunteers to help revitalize the area. "Since Sand Rock is right next to the road and it is so easy to get to, the trails get really worn

down and the area gets trashed," says team member Victoria Nabb. During these events, Victoria and her teammates built rock barriers and shoveled mulch for erosion control.

When asked what the defining moment of the TeamWorks experience was for her team, Johanson-Smith says, "This year after we'd finished one of our Adopt a Crags, one of the new members of the team took on his first outdoor climbing route. He got a taste of that paralyzing fear and pushed through it, with the whole team shouting encouragement. It's an experience I don't think he'll ever forget. And he got to learn it hand-in-hand with stewardship work. That's what it's all about."

Adrenaline took home the Golden Toothbrush Award, the \$1,000 top-prize grant (which will be put toward an Espresso Lessons clinic for the team), and serious bragging rights in the Southeast. Already looking forward to the 2010 competition, the Adrenaline kids are ready for more friendly competition this year.

The Access Fund would like to thank all of the TeamWorks members who participated in the 2009 program. These kids embody everything that is good about young climbers today—lots of heart, energy, and a sense of responsibility for the places they play. We're proud to have them in the Access Fund's corner and look forward to seeing what they're made of in the 2010 competition. ■

*TeamWorks is made possible by the generous support of our corporate sponsors:*

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### **GOLDEN TOOTHBRUSH**

Adrenaline climbing team  
– Suwanee, Georgia

**SECOND PLACE**  
Vertical Endeavors  
climbing team –  
St. Paul, Minnesota

**THIRD PLACE**  
Urban Core climbing  
team – Atlanta, Georgia

# inside the black box:

## Access Fund National Policy Work

By Jay Young

It's not sexy work, this policy stuff. But one of the Access Fund's key roles is developing and maintaining relationships with national policy makers so that the interests of climbers stay on their agendas. It's rare that you get to the end of an issue and it's fixed. It's all about process and relationships ...

Meet Access Fund Policy Director, Jason Keith.

You might call him a lobbyist, but in reality he is much more than that. Congressmen, public land administrators, and conservationists alike all know Jason Keith as the face and voice of America's climbers. He has arguably the single most important role to play in climbing access on public lands, and he carries that responsibility like Aretha Franklin carries a tune—easily and naturally.



Jason and Executive Director Brady Robinson make the trip to D.C. to represent climber interests.

Recently, I had a chance to speak with Jason about his work. Most people know so little about it, and yet it is crucial to maintaining the access that we as climbers currently enjoy on public land in the U.S.

**Jay:** *I imagine most climbers you meet have a fairly positive impression of the AF and what you do, but do you ever run into people who criticize you?*

**Jason:** *I run into strong opinions from climbers all the time.*

*Climbers are really independent-minded folks ... They want to be sold that you're representing their interests accurately and adequately.*

**Jay:** *Go figure!*

**Jason:** *Climbers are really independent-minded folks, and they don't always just hook-line-and-sinker agree with the notion that you're their representative until they talk to you. They want to be sold that you're representing their interests accurately and adequately, and that's a very fair point. Sometimes it will come down to different opinions on the underlying policy, but that's pretty rare. In those cases, we try to get our critics to work with us and improve our strategy.*

**Jay:** *Who do you meet with when you go to Washington, D.C.?*

**Jason:** *I've got a regular list of people whom I try to maintain relationships with, including folks on the Hill, congressional offices that have a role in public lands. It could be the oversight committees for land agencies or the House Resources Committee. And then I meet regularly with lead recreation officials in all the land management agencies: Forest Service, Park Service, and BLM are the big three. The third category is all the interest groups in Washington.*

**Jay:** *So these policy makers in D.C., ... what is their impression of climbers?*

**Jason:** *At first blush, climbers can be painted as just fun hogs that only care about our particular activity, not conservation minded at all.*

*The easiest way to deal with management challenges like climbing is [for land managers] to ignore them or just close the area down.*

**Jay:** *Which is one of the biggest reasons to be there in front of them, changing that perception ...*

**Jason:** *Exactly. Especially now, land management offices are starved for resources, both human and financial, and the easiest way to deal with management challenges like climbing is to ignore them or just close the area down. They will usually restrict*



Jason, no doubt pondering his next lobbying trip, on the summit of Incredible Hulk in the Sierras.

things as a first reaction. It's about them covering their own butts. We have to be an aggressive watchdog, while balancing that with a positive, solution-minded perspective.

**Jay:** When you meet with these folks, do you ever walk away thinking, wow, this person is just not sympathetic to our cause at all?

**Jason:** Oh, yeah, no doubt. I've walked out of offices where I've thought those guys are just not with us. But you're there to get your message across, not to make friends. You're there to let them know that you represent a certain interest group that has strong opinions about the way a certain area of land ought to be managed or a certain policy ought to be implemented across the country.

**Jay:** How often are you in D.C. meeting with them? Eventually they must get to know you.

**Jason:** I'm there four or five times a year. And, yes, they do get to know us. They know us as "the climbing guys." Is there an issue with climbing?

Oh, Jason, he comes in here every four months. Let's give him a call.

**Jay:** Let's talk about the issues. What are you in D.C. to address?

**Jason:** There's a whole laundry list of issues for which climbers need representation in D.C. Generally, they fall into two categories: regulatory issues and legislative issues.

On the regulatory side, we lobby to represent climbers' interests on public lands in everything from fixed anchors in wilderness to user fees to how wilderness planning and user capacity issues impact access.

On the legislative side, we lobby on land exchange proposals like the AZ land exchange bill and the law that established Castle Rock State Park. There are always bills in front of congress involving public lands, for example recreation fee proposals that would institute a pay-to-play policy on public lands. We work to help congress understand our interests and how to effectively manage climbing.

*It's very likely there would be a ban on fixed anchors in every wilderness area in the country ... If you think about the scope of that, it's pretty astonishing.*

**Jay:** Hypothetically, if the Access Fund were not out there advocating for climbers on a national level, what would climbing on public land look like in the U.S. today?

**Jason:** It's very likely there would be a ban on fixed anchors in every wilderness area in the country. (That's new fixed anchors. I'm not going to say they would have pulled all the bolts off El Cap.) If you think about the scope of that, it's pretty astonishing: Black Canyon, Yosemite Valley, Tuolumne, and a lot of places that are managed as wilderness, like Zion, Rocky Mountain, Grand Teton. All the routes that have been developed since 1998 or so, those would have been put in illegally. And we still



Much of the Access Fund's policy work since the 1990s has preserved wilderness climbing opportunities at places like The Sierras.

*have a long way to go on the issue! We still don't have national policies from the Park Service or the Forest Service, and we have what we view as a problematic policy from the BLM right now.*

*At a higher level, if we weren't in the policy conversations, we'd be reactive to every issue that comes down the pike. Without the relationships that we've worked so hard to build, there would be controversy and some amount of chaos over every bill or regulation that negatively impacted climbers.*

*Thankfully, that is not the case today. We have collaborative relationships in place that give us channels for addressing potentially controversial issues. Policy makers even come to us proactively.*

**Jay:** *What about at the local level? Without holding you to some crystal-ball vision, comment on some of the differences between climbing now and what it might be like without the AF's efforts.*

**Jason:** *We've opened new areas like Idaho's Castle Rocks State Park, and*

*preserved countless wilderness climbing opportunities at Yosemite, Black Canyon, Zion, and Rocky Mountain national parks. AF's work has reduced the size of many proposed restrictions at dozens of climbing locations around the country—like the New River Gorge, Devils Tower, Thompson Creek, and Indian Creek—where local land managers considered closing large areas using dubious legal authority. We've made sure that land managers implement appropriate policies that allow climbing access while also protecting natural and cultural resources. AF's policy work has also kept alive the hopes of reopening closed climbing areas at City of Rocks in Idaho and Williamson Rock outside Los Angeles.*

*Forming the Outdoor Alliance did more than any other single thing to elevate the profile of the climbing community in D.C.*

**Jay:** *The Access Fund is also a founding partner of the Outdoor Alliance, right? How does that factor into your policy work?*

**Jason:** *Forming the Outdoor Alliance did more than any other single thing to elevate the profile of the climbing community in D.C.*

*The OA is an alliance of the six largest human-powered recreation interest groups in the country: Access Fund, American Hiking Society, International Mountain Biking Association, American Whitewater, American Canoe Association and Winter Wildlands (that's the backcountry skiers and snow-sports folks). A lot of the motorized recreation community was speaking on our behalf, claiming to*

*represent our interests, when a lot of times they really didn't. We decided to form a coalition and work on issues of mutual interest. It was pretty amazing when we started doing this about three or four years ago. It increased our clout significantly.*

**Jay:** *When it comes to national climbing policy, what do you want to see done in your lifetime?*

**Jason:** *There are a lot of misperceptions out there that are tied to climbing issues. With better communication, land managers will understand climbing better and be less reactive. It's so important to have land managers understand climbing better, and have a network of people to go to for solutions to climbing issues they might have.*

By the time I finished speaking with Jason, it was obvious to me how important the Access Fund's role in American climbing is. Imagine if every bolt, fixed pin, fixed rope, and sling around a tree had been left there illegally. Now, imagine you managed such land and had little or no inkling about the realities of climbing. What would be your first reaction to such widespread criminal activity? Would you shut it down summarily? Would you seek to prosecute—find someone to be your example? Would private landowners follow suit?

What would your climbing life be like as an outlaw?

Of course, those are all just hypotheticals and rhetoric. It's not the reality, and we can enjoy climbing on most public land without having to worry so much about legal consequences.

If you ever run into Jason Keith at a rendezvous or at a crag someplace, you might want to thank him and tell him to keep up the good work. ■

# 2009 SHARP END AWARDS

Each year the Access Fund recognizes individuals and businesses that go above and beyond to volunteer their time and efforts to preserving climbing access and the climbing environment. These recipients stand out in their commitment to the American climbing community, and we are honored to present this year's awards to a worthy group of volunteers and activists.

## Bebie Leadership Award

### ANTHONY LOVE

We are proud to recognize Anthony Love as America's outstanding activist for the cause of preserving climbing access and the climbing environment. Anthony has illustrated his leadership with the recent acquisition of the Rumbling Bald West Side Boulders in North Carolina and has been instrumental in climbing management planning for Laurel Knob and continued access to the privately owned Asheboro Boulders. Anthony leads the Carolina Climbers Coalition with perseverance and passion, helping to build partnerships and a strong community of climbers dedicated to protecting the places we cherish.



## Reese Martin Coordinator of the Year Award

### THOMSON LING

We honor Thomson Ling for his outstanding leadership as an Access Fund regional coordinator.



Thomson founded the Mid-Atlantic Climbers Coalition in 2002. After attending the AF congressional meeting in 2003, he became a regional coordinator. With his support, Mid-Atlantic

Climbers Coalition has organized dozens of Adopt a Crag events during the past seven years. The events have drawn hundreds of volunteers to areas such as Shenandoah National Park, Carderock Recreation Area, and Great Falls National Park. Thomson is now a regional coordinator in New Jersey.

## Sharp End Award CLIF BAR & COMPANY

The Access Fund is proud to award Clif Bar & Company



a Sharp End Award for its dedication and support of local volunteerism and long-term stewardship of climbing areas. Since 2004, Clif Bar has been a contributing sponsor of the Adopt a Crag program and, in 2008, became a contributing sponsor of the Team-Works youth program. Clif Bar strives to bring local communities together to take care of the beautiful places where we all play. For this, we would like to say thank you!

## Sharp End Award BRIAN SABOURIN

We are pleased to present a Sharp End Award to Brian Sabourin, our first regional coordinator



in the state of Ohio. Brian has illustrated his leadership in climbing activism by forming the Northeast Ohio Climbers Coalition, spearheading an effort to open climbing access at the Breckville Reservation, and volunteering countless hours to build relationships and collaborate with the Cleveland Metro Parks. He also organized the first Adopt a Crag at Whipp's Ledge. We look forward to working with Brian for years to come.

## Sharp End Award PAUL MORLEY

We are honored to present a Sharp End Award to Paul Morley, who shows the climbing community



that activism and protection of our climbing areas may be hard work, but the rewards are worth the effort. Paul worked tirelessly over four years to acquire Yellow Bluff in Alabama, and has been an instrumental player in building a network of supporters among the Southeastern Climbers Coalition and Access Fund. Paul's contagious enthusiasm for climbing access spreads to everyone within arm's distance, and we are proud to have him in our corner.

## Sharp End Award AARON GIBSON

We honor Aaron Gibson, co-owner of the Rocktown Climbing Gym and coach of the Oklahoma Climbing Team, for his leadership in climbing management planning and trail projects throughout his home state of Oklahoma. Aaron has been an Access Fund regional coordinator since 2004. He has played an integral role in helping to preserve climbing access at the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge by working with local climbers and meeting regularly with Refuge managers on climbing policies. Aaron also provided lobbying support for the Access Fund's meetings with Oklahoma's congressional delegation in Washington, D.C. Thanks to Aaron, climber interests are well represented in Oklahoma. ■



THE LONGSTANDING DEBATE ON

# YOSEMITE VALLEY

# CAPACITY

Winding a swift course from the Sierra Nevada to the Pacific Ocean, the Merced River lays claims to carving out the world-famous Yosemite Valley. In 1987, Congress designated the Merced River a Wild and Scenic River to preserve its natural, cultural, and recreational values.



Photo courtesy of Buck Forester

Under the Wild and Scenic designation, Congress directed Yosemite National Park to establish a user capacity program to protect the river's unique values while allowing public recreation and uses that do not degrade those values. The directive ignited conflicts among users of Yosemite Valley and created what is now a longstanding debate over how many people the Valley should accommodate.

Why is this important to climbers? The Merced River corridor contains many world-class climbs on Rostrum, Cookie Cliff, and Middle Cathedral Rock. Furthermore, climbers must travel

through the river corridor to access almost all of the climbing in the Valley, including El Cap and Half Dome.

In 1999, the Park began developing a river protection plan that would reduce traffic, restore developed land, improve facilities, and create a user capacity program. The Park proposed an adaptive process that continually monitors and evaluates "desired conditions" of cultural resources, natural resources, and visitor experiences. If indicators reflected that conditions were falling below a certain standard, the plan required management action before unacceptable impacts occurred.

The scientific community, including experts in the areas of resource protection and visitor use, supported the Park's plan.

The Access Fund and several national conservation organizations, including The Wilderness Society, Friends of the River, National Parks Conservation Association, California Trout, Yosemite Fund, and American Alpine Club, also supported the proposed Park Service user capacity program.

However, a few small local interest groups sued the Park Service, claiming its proposed user capacity program would not protect the river because it failed to require visitor caps in Yosemite Valley and the Lower Merced Gorge.

In this lawsuit, the Park Service argued that resource impacts result from several factors, including the

time and type of activity. And forcing a quota system would be arbitrary and result in the most restrictive management action that may not actually prevent river impacts.

Despite support from the scientific, conservation, and recreation communities, Yosemite lost the lawsuit after several rounds of litigation. The court ruled that the Park must prepare a new plan and establish numeric limits for visitor use in the Merced River corridor. As precedent, this litigation will likely also guide quota systems at other Wild and Scenic River areas, such as Zion National Park in Utah, the Red River Gorge in Kentucky, and the Obed River in Tennessee.

The Park Service is working on a new Merced River Plan to address the user capacity issue in the river corridor, as well as travel through the management area. The Park's new user capacity plan could restrict climbing access and camping in Yosemite Valley and the Lower Merced Gorge.

The Access Fund continues to work with Park Service planners and other interested conservation and recreation groups to steer Yosemite's plan toward a reasonable solution that will both protect the river and allow responsible climbing access. Yosemite should have a final plan by 2012, but in the meantime, the public will have several opportunities to comment. Stay in touch via the Access Fund's E-news for more details.

Questions or comments? E-mail [Jason@accessfund.org](mailto:Jason@accessfund.org). ■

## Access Fund Land Conservation Campaign

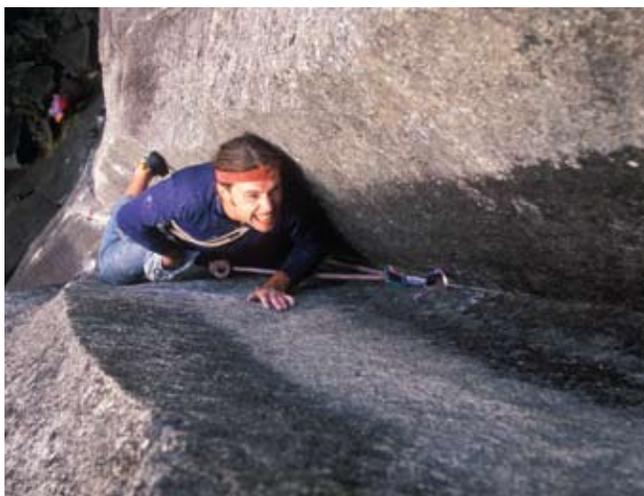
# A HUGE SUCCESS IN FIRST YEAR

Launched publicly in July 2009, the Access Fund Land Conservation Campaign (AFLCC) is the first-ever revolving loan program that provides local climbing organizations and other agencies with the funds and expertise needed to act quickly to save threatened climbing areas.

In its first year of operation, the AFLCC helped conserve over 50 acres of land in four different areas across the country: Lower Index Town Wall in Washington, Steele cliff line in Alabama, Rumbling Bald West Side Boulders in North Carolina, and Farley Ledge in Massachusetts.

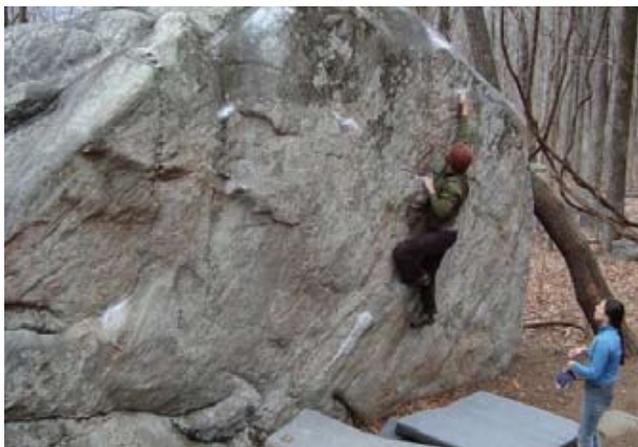
In May of 2009, during the “quiet phase” of AFLCC fundraising, the Access Fund began putting AFLCC dollars to work. In its first project, the AF partnered with the Washington Climbers Coalition (WCC) to save the popular Lower Index Town Wall from being lost to a quarry operation. The AFLCC provided a bridge loan to fund an option agreement that gives the WCC the sole right to purchase the 20-acre Seattle-area cliff. The WCC is currently fundraising for the purchase price.

The second AFLCC loan went to the Southeastern Climbers Coalition (SCC) to help fund the purchase of a cliff line in Steele, Alabama. In late July, the SCC was set to close on 25 acres of the Steele property using money from its own fundraising efforts when it learned that an additional 4-acre tract containing cliff line was up for sale. The AFLCC loan enabled the SCC to close on the original tract and positioned it to pursue the additional parcel.



Lower Index Town Wall | Photo courtesy of Ben Gillkison

Then in early December, the Carolina Climbers Coalition (CCC) announced its intent to purchase and conserve the Rumbling Bald West Side Boulders in North Carolina. CCC was granted an AFLCC bridge loan to finance 90% of the purchase price for the 6.12-acre tract. The sale closed in early January, saving the area from private development.



Rumbling Bald West Side Boulders | Photo courtesy of CCC

In its most recent project, the AFLCC helped Western Massachusetts Climbers' Coalition pay off an existing bank loan on 7 acres of land at the base of Farley Ledge in Erving, Massachusetts. The AFLCC loan allowed the coalition to refinance at a much lower interest rate, saving thousands of dollars in interest and fees that can be invested in other projects that benefit the Massachusetts climbing community.

Stay tuned for more great successes from the Access Fund Land Conservation Campaign. You can help put more land in climber-friendly hands by donating to the Access Fund at [www.accessfund.org/support](http://www.accessfund.org/support). ■



LAND  
CONSERVATION  
CAMPAIGN

*Placing land in climber friendly hands*

*The Access Fund would like to extend its heartfelt thanks to the AFLCC's founding partners who have made this work possible: Black Diamond, Cascade Designs, Mammut, Mountain Gear, Outdoor Research, Petzl, prAna, and The North Face. The Access Fund also thanks supporting partner, metolious, for its generous contributions.*

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The Access Fund would like to recognize **Mad Rock** for its leadership in promoting Access Fund membership. The company spearheaded an initiative to bring all of its 100+ athletes on board as Access Fund members. Mad Rock is the first company to have every one of its athletes an individual member of the Access Fund. Way to go, Mad Rock!



Jason Kehl working his project in Hueco Tanks | © John Dickey

# John Dickey

Lucky for us, this issue's featured photographer John Dickey decided against a career as an accountant in favor of pursuing his passion in photography. Born in Indiana, John was raised in Italy until the age of six when he moved to San Antonio, Texas. Countless friendships, cameras, and adventures later, John now lives in the quirky village of Eldorado Springs, Colorado, where he plots his adventures for art, work, and play.

"I love my work and my lifestyle, and all the mayhem that comes along with being an adventure photographer," says Dickey. For John, the lines between self and work are blurred, as they are for many artists. He describes his influences as the sum of *The Jungle Book*, *Rocky*, and the Muppets. If you ever have the pleasure of meeting John, you'll know exactly what that means.

John will be chasing a variety of partners around Canada and Rocky Mountain National Park this spring, trying to capture the "alpine madness" and bring back an intimate view of the life and times of local alpinism.

To see more of John's work, visit [www.dickeyphoto.com](http://www.dickeyphoto.com). ■



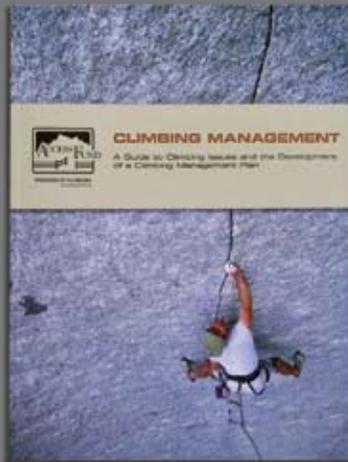
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