

**DOCUMENTING SOCIAL TRAILS ALONG THE TRAPPS CLIFFS
IN THE MOHONK PRESERVE, WITH IMPACT COMPARISONS TO OTHER LOCAL
CLIMBING AREAS,
ULSTER COUNTY, NYS**

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Abstract:

The Trapps Cliffs climbing area is a valuable and sensitive resource that has seen a drastic increase in recreational use within the last several decades. Located in the Shawangunk Mountains near New Paltz New York, it is within a few hours drive of over twenty million people. Approximately 6500 acres including the Trapps, are owned and managed by the non-profit Mohonk Preserve. Every year more and more climbers come to the “Gunks” to get away from it all and climb some of the finest routes in the east. Wildlife and rare plant life found only in the unique environment of the quartzite cliffs is under constant pressure from the increased impact of human visitors. One of the obvious signs of this impact, are informal trails that form along the tops and cliff edges above the climbing areas. Climbers are constantly hiking back down to their gear at the base and there is no limit to the paths created by the increasing crowds.

Objectives:

1. This study will attempt to map all the obvious social trails at the top of these climbing routes and relevant “official” trails such as the Undercliff and Overcliff Carriage ways and
2. Draw comparisons of impact to other local climbing areas such as the Peterskill (recently opened by the State Parks System) and Skytop (Mohonk House), formerly a popular climbing area that was recently closed and is showing signs of revegetation.
3. By documenting the impact at the tops of the climbs, it is hoped that another facet of sound management policy might be developed to limit impact to less vulnerable corridors while still satisfying the desires of the Preserve’s users.

Approach trails, and roped off vegetation plots, at the base of climbs are a good example of concentrating impact to hardened, narrow footpaths that protect the remaining areas from being trampled. If time permits, the “Near Trapps” may also be included in this study.

Methods & Sources:

Social trails are identified through inspection of aerial photos, field work and documented with the Preserve’s Trimble handheld GPS unit. Data will be presented in an ESRI ArcView hill-shaded layout with spatial analyst extension. Base map data provided by UCCC. Vegetation data, and assistance provided by the Preserve’s Research staff, with the results being intended for their use.