

CLIMBING MANAGEMENT PLAN

July 1997



ACADIA

National Park • Maine

INTRODUCTION

PURPOSE AND NEED

An increase in rock climbing and climbing impacts at Acadia National Park (ANP) over the last fifteen years and a National Park Service climbing management initiative prompted the development of a climbing management plan for ANP. Diversification of climbing styles and advancing technology have contributed to the increase in impacts to park resources. For the most part, climbing has not been managed in ANP until now. This Climbing Management Plan will provide guidance for park managers and climbers for the next three to five years.

GOALS

The primary goal of climbing management at Acadia National Park is preserving park resources. A secondary goal is providing high quality experiences for climbers and other visitors.

AUTHORITIES

Authority and direction for managing ANP and its recreational use comes from the legislation and policy documents described below.

Legislation

Legislation creating the NPS in 1916 defined its purpose as "... to conserve the scenery and the natural and historic objects and the wild life therein and to provide for the enjoyment of the same in such a manner and by such means as will leave them unimpaired for the enjoyment of future generations" (16 USC 1).

ANP was created in 1916 as Sieur de Monts National Monument. The initial legislation (39 Stat. 1785) mentions the history of the area, its topography, geology, flora, and fauna, as being of great scientific interest and specifically protects its features and objects from injury, destruction, or removal. In 1919, the monument was reclassified and renamed Lafayette National Park. This legislation (40 Stat. 1173) dedicated the park for the benefit and enjoyment of the people. The park was renamed Acadia in 1929 (45 Stat. 1083).

Natural resources are also protected by the Endangered Species Act (87 Stat. 884), the General Authorities Act (84 Stat. 825), the Redwoods National Park Act (92 Stat. 163) and others. Historical and cultural resources are protected by the Act for the Preservation of American Antiquities (34 Stat. 225), the Archeological Resources Protection Act of 1979 (16 USC 470), and the Historic Sites Act of 1935 (49 Stat. 66) among others.

Policies

NPS policies for recreation are found in NPS Management Policies (1988) and NPS 77, the Natural Resources Management Guideline (1991)

RESOURCE AND VISITOR USE DESCRIPTION

ANP consists of about 35,000 acres on the coast of Maine in Hancock and Knox Counties (Figure 1). Most of the park is on Mount Desert Island (MDI), with outlying portions on Isle au Haut, Schoodic Peninsula, and other coastal islands. The park preserves a glaciated coastal landscape of granite mountains with many small cliffs suitable for climbing. A moist climate supports a diversity of vegetative communities in the park, and includes many wetlands. A typical northeastern U.S. assemblage of mammals and an exceptional abundance of bird species are found in the area.

The park recorded about 2.7 million visits in 1996. Park use has generally increased at the rate of 2.5% per year for the past six years. Park managers have observed an increase in rock climbing use also, although reliable figures are not available. Voluntary climber register data show that most climbers are from the New England area, and that Otter Cliffs is the most popular climbing area followed by the South Wall of Champlain Mountain (Figure 2). Commercial climbing businesses were reestablished in Bar Harbor in 1994 after several years absence.

REGIONAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

ANP became an important and widely recognized regional climbing destination during the 1980's due to the nationwide increase in climbing and occasional publicity. The sea cliff climbing in the park is unique for the United States, and is notable for its accessibility and variety of climbing routes. The nearest other climbing areas are in Camden, Maine and Clifton, Maine. Each is about a two-hour drive from ANP. Clifton provides a contrast to ANP. It is privately owned, used mostly by Maine climbers, and overall has more difficult routes. It has mainly face climbs that require fixed protection for safety. New Hampshire's White Mountains is the premiere climbing area in New England with many more cliffs and much higher and more challenging routes than those found at ANP.

HISTORY OF CLIMBING MANAGEMENT

Current management of climbing at ANP includes closing areas to protect nesting peregrine falcons (*Falco peregrinus*), a federally listed endangered species. The seasonal closures have been made every year since 1988 and climbers respect them. In addition, climbing and bouldering is prohibited on carriage road bridges, but not bridges along the Park Loop Road. Finally, business permits are required for commercial climbing enterprises. Business permits for climbing in ANP limit group size to 12 persons, including guides or instructors.

FIGURE 1: ACADIA NATIONAL PARK AND VICINITY

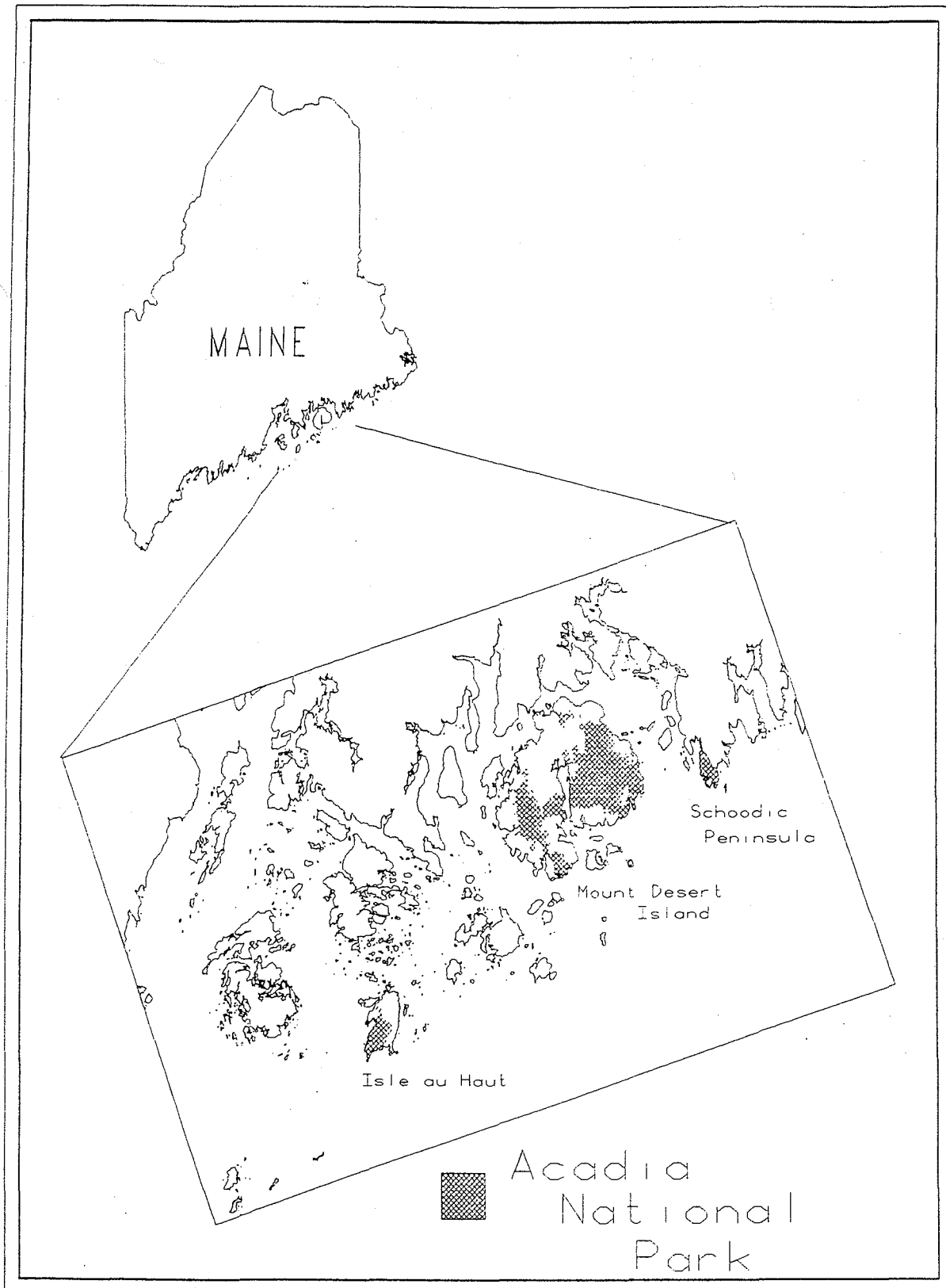
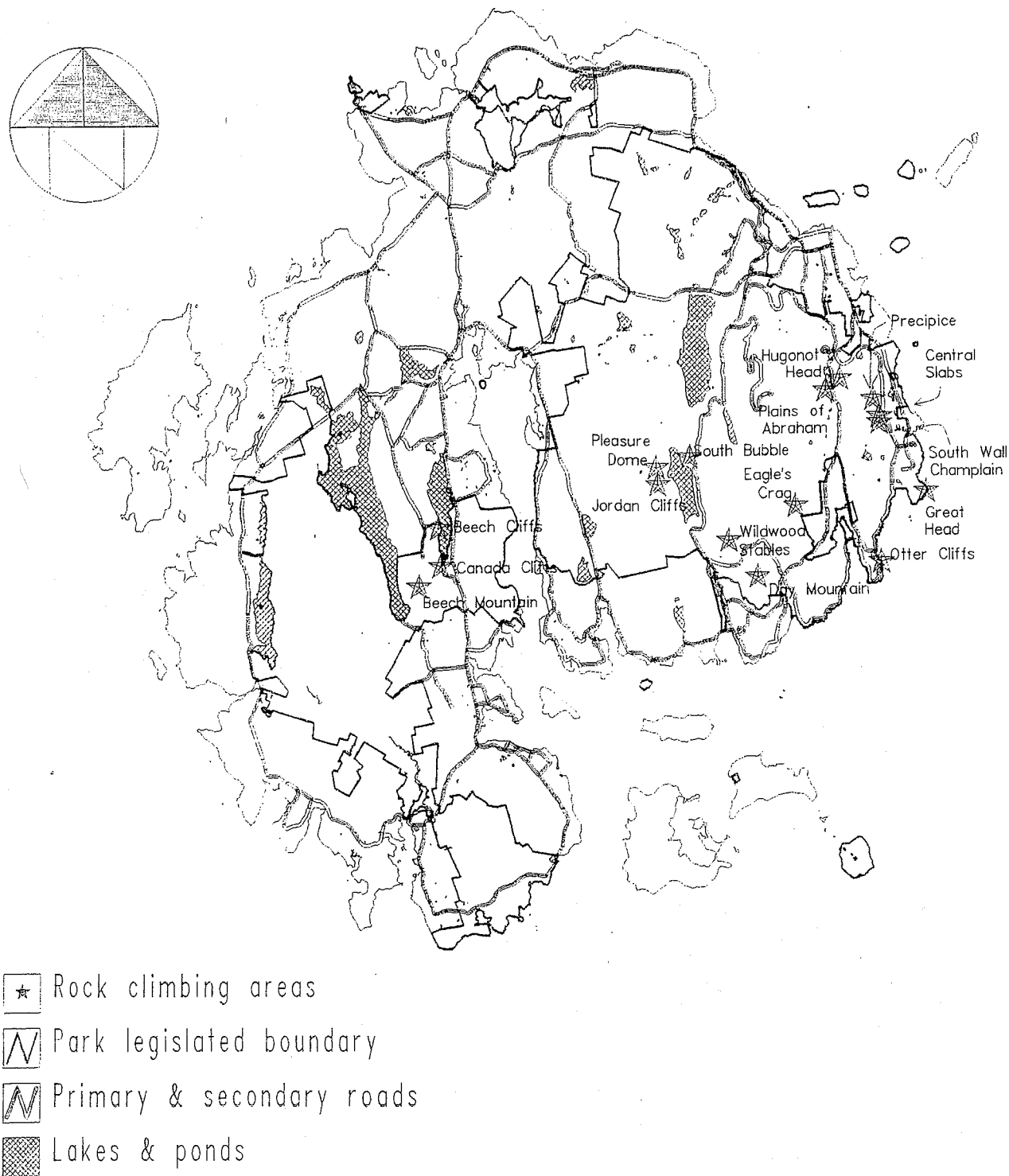


FIGURE 2: ACADIA NATIONAL PARK ROCK CLIMBING AREAS



THE PLAN (SELECTED ALTERNATIVE)

Climbing will be managed in Acadia National Park as described in the following sections. A summary of these sections is in Table 1. The plan for climbing management is largely the preferred alternative from the Draft Climbing Management Plan and Environmental Assessment with some modifications based on public comment.

CLIMBING ADVISORY GROUP

An important part of ANP climbing management will be the formation of an advisory group of climbers, park staff, and others to make recommendations to the superintendent on climbing issues. The advisory group will work through the existing Acadia National Park Advisory Commission. Broad representation will be sought for this group. The details of who will be on it, how many will be on it, etc. have yet to be worked out. The major functions of this group are described in the following sections.

NEW ROUTE DEVELOPMENT/FIXED PROTECTION

New routes with fixed protection (including pitons) or route cleaning will be permitted only in climbing areas where such activity has already commonly occurred. A determination of exactly what these areas are will be made in consultation with the climbing advisory group. The establishment of new routes with fixed protection or route cleaning will be prohibited outside these areas.

With the help of the climbing advisory group, the NPS will inventory fixed protection. The location of all bolts, anchor stations, and pitons will establish a baseline from which to judge the legitimacy of any particular piece of fixed protection.

The climbing advisory group will review proposals for new routes and make recommendations to the park superintendent as described above. Park staff will also review new route proposals for effects on resources and visitor experiences and advise the superintendent, who will decide.

The climbing advisory group will also review replacement or removal of existing fixed protection.

A permit will be issued for all approved fixed protection actions; it will include the use of a power drill. Climbers will usually install all fixed protection.

More specific guidelines and specifications for installing and replacing will be developed with the help of the climbing advisory group.

New routes without fixed protection and route cleaning may be established freely anywhere in the park.

The park reserves the right to install or permit the installation of fixed protection for belay stations at any site to protect natural resources and provide for continued climbing.

Table 1: Summary of the Acadia National Park Climbing Management Plan

New Route Development	New routes with fixed protection or route cleaning will be permitted only in climbing areas where such activity has already commonly occurred. The selection of these specific areas will be made in consultation with the climbing advisory group. The climbing advisory group will review all proposals for installation, replacement, and removal of fixed protection and make recommendations to the superintendent through the Acadia National Park Advisory Commission. The park superintendent will decide. A permit will be issued for all approved fixed protection actions; it will include the use of a power drill.
Individual Use	Individuals intending to climb at ANP will be required to register annually. Registration is for education and to gather use data. No fee will be charged and there will be no restrictions on the number of registrants. Registration cards will be widely available at park headquarters, visitor centers, campgrounds, and some climbing areas. Daily Use Logs will continue to be used at some areas. Climbers must sign these logs, where they exist, each day they climb.
Group Use	Organized climbing groups are limited to a maximum size of 12 persons. Registration guidelines for individuals, as described above, apply to group leaders. Group reservations for Otter Cliffs will begin in 1998. Reservations will be required from Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day. Reservations will be made for a full day for only one group of not more than 12 persons. Organizations will be limited to the equivalent of 10 full days of climbing between the above dates, or about 10% of the season.
Commercial Use	A decision about managing commercial use will be deferred for now and addressed as one component of a Commercial Use Plan. Development of the Commercial Use Plan is scheduled to begin in 1997.
Cultural Resources	Climbing or bouldering on all park bridges is prohibited.
Natural Resources	ANP climbing areas will be closed or climbing otherwise restricted according to NPS regulatory procedures. Actions will be based on available scientific information, preferably quantitative information from research and monitoring programs, showing adverse effects to natural resources such as flora, fauna, soils, or rocks.

INDIVIDUAL USE

All climbers will be required to register annually and have registration cards in possession while climbing. No fee will be charged and there will be no restrictions on the number of registrants. Registration cards will be widely available at park headquarters, visitor centers, campgrounds, and some climbing areas. Daily Use Logs will continue to be used at some areas. Climbers must sign these logs, where they exist, each day they climb. Registration and Daily Use Logs help communicate with climbers and estimate use.

GROUP USE

The NPS intends to manage *organized* climbing groups - commercial and noncommercial. The following actions are not intended to apply to groups of climbing friends.

Definition of Group: Organized groups will be defined by a minimum size of six persons including any guides or instructors. Maximum group size with instructors or guides will be 12.

Registration: Registration guidelines for individuals, as described above, apply to group leaders. All groups meeting the above definition must register to climb. Reservations will be required for groups to climb at Otter Cliffs as described below.

Reservations, Otter Cliffs: Group reservations for Otter Cliffs will be required from Saturday of Memorial Day weekend through Labor Day, beginning in 1998. Reservations will be made for a full day for only one group of not more than 12 persons. Organizations will be limited to the equivalent of 10 full days of climbing between the above dates, or about 10% of the season.

COMMERCIAL USE

Commercial climbing use must be managed, but it should be managed consistent with other commercial recreation activities in the park. Therefore, major decisions about managing commercial use will be addressed as one component of a Commercial Use Plan, currently under development.

The NPS can begin to address one commercial use issue now. Suitable qualifications for instructors, guides, or group leaders are appropriate and necessary to assure park visitors (clients) of a safe, high quality climbing experience, and to assure familiarity with ANP climbing regulations and guidelines. The NPS will consult with the climbing advisory group to help establish these guidelines.

CULTURAL RESOURCES

Carriage road and Park Loop Road bridges will be closed to climbing and bouldering.

NATURAL RESOURCES

ANP climbing areas will be closed or climbing otherwise restricted to protect natural resources according to NPS regulatory procedures. Actions will be based on available scientific information, preferably quantitative information from research and monitoring programs, showing adverse effects to natural resources such as flora, fauna, soils, or rocks. For all actions, the quality of the resources affected, such as unique resources like threatened and endangered species, special communities, or unusual geological formations, will be an important consideration. Another important consideration will be the quantity of the resource affected. For example, widespread change or damage to a resource common in the park or region may result in appropriate protection actions. Areas closed to climbing and climbers might be closed to other visitors if their impacts are similar.

OTHER ACTIONS IN THE SELECTED ALTERNATIVE

The following actions, mostly related to inventory, monitoring, research, education, and mitigation, will be implemented to manage climbing, protect natural and cultural resources, and preserve the experiences of climbers and other visitors at ANP.

Climbers will be educated about park policies through a climbing brochure, posters, and on-site

signs. Clean and low impact climbing will be encouraged, including camouflaging fixed protection and using natural colored chalk and slings. Education efforts will reduce some effects of climbers on soils, vegetation, rocks, other climbers, and other park visitors. The climbing advisory group will play a key role in designing and executing these education efforts.

Climbing areas and access trails will be inventoried for federal and state listed threatened and endangered species, other species of concern, and special habitats. These inventories will better enable managers to protect these populations from climbing activity.

Climbing use will be monitored with the best available methods. Monitoring climbing use levels may allow managers to relate use levels to climber effects on natural resources and the visitor experience, and provide background information if use limits are needed in the future.

Biodiversity of cliff areas in the park will be studied in comparison with other habitats. Biodiversity studies will tell managers the importance of cliff habitats for park flora and fauna compared with other habitats.

Climber and other visitor attitudes and interactions will be studied. Social science studies of climbers and other visitors will provide quantitative information to managers about visitor knowledge, attitudes, behavior, and preferences that will be used to help manage climbing.

Severely impacted climbing areas (trails, vegetation, etc.), will be restored where and when possible and managed to prevent subsequent effects. Rehabilitation of soil and vegetation in climbing areas and subsequent management will allow climbing to continue with minimal additional effects. The climbing advisory group will play a key role in devising and implementing restoration strategies.

Climbing areas will be patrolled to enforce existing laws and climbing plan policies.

Funding support will be sought from cooperators such as the Access Fund. Funding support from cooperators will allow further implementation of actions recommended in the climbing plan.

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

SUPERINTENDENT

The superintendent has the overall responsibility for managing visitor use of the park. The role of the superintendent is to review plans, strategies, and proposed action alternatives and select preferred alternatives.

DEPUTY SUPERINTENDENT

The deputy superintendent has decision making authority in the absence of the superintendent, and has

line authority over the division chiefs.

CHIEF, NATURAL RESOURCES

The chief of natural resources is responsible for preparing or reviewing plans, strategies, objectives, and action alternatives regarding visitor use and its effects on natural resources. The chief recommends management alternatives to the superintendent and then carries out the approved actions to reach the stated management objectives through his or her staff and other park staff as appropriate.

NATURAL RESOURCE SPECIALIST, RECREATION

The resource management specialist for visitor use is responsible for visitor use inventory and monitoring programs and for recommending and coordinating research, education, and protection programs to assure the integrity of natural resources in light of visitor use. He or she also maintains contacts and relationships with user interest groups.

CHIEF, INTERPRETATION

The chief of interpretation is responsible for integrating natural resource management and visitor use issues into the interpretation/education programs of the park.

CHIEF, VISITOR PROTECTION

The chief of visitor protection is responsible for enforcing all applicable laws regarding visitor use of the park and patrolling park areas to monitor effects from visitor use. The chief or his or her staff also checks incidental business permits and enforces any special regulations.

PLAN REVIEW AND UPDATE

The plan will be reviewed and updated at least every three years, and annually if needed.



IN REPLY REFER TO:

United States Department of the Interior

NATIONAL PARK SERVICE

Acadia National Park
P.O. Box 177
Bar Harbor, Maine 04609

July 22, 1997

Dear Climbing Enthusiast:

For the past several years Acadia National Park has been developing a Climbing Management Plan. I am pleased to tell you this plan has now been completed. Enclosed for you are copies of the final climbing plan and associated documentation. This final package is sent to all persons receiving or requesting copies of the draft plan.

If you participated in this planning effort by offering comments on the draft plan or participating in meetings, we thank you for your contributions. Public input is a very important part of this process.

The climbing plan sets clear direction for climbing management for the next several years. However, several details have yet to be worked out, and we look forward to meeting with the climbing community about these issues. If you have questions about climbing management, please direct them to Resource Specialist Charlie Jacobi at charlie_jacobi@nps.gov or 207-288-5463.

Thank you again for your interest in climbing at Acadia National Park.

Sincerely,

Paul F. Haertel
Superintendent