

# **Climbers' Perceptions Toward Sustainable Bouldering at the Niagara Glen Nature Reserve**

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# Purpose

The purpose of our presentation is to:

1. Share findings from a Masters Thesis Project about bouldering and sustainability.
2. Highlight Ontario Access Coalition (OAC) and Niagara Parks Commission (NPC) collaborative efforts, which give context to sustainability issues at the Niagara Glen.

# Overview

- What is Bouldering?
- Background
- Action Research
- Results
- Discussion
- Future Directions



# Background: The Glen Discourse

- In the past, boulderers and other recreation participants have been able to practice their activities of choice free from restrictions at the Niagara Glen.
- In recent years, sustainable outdoor recreation has become a central point of discussion at the Glen (Ritchie, 2002; Ritchie, 2008).
- Collaborative management works!
- The Niagara Parks Commission
- The Ontario Access Coalition
- “Users as stewards” – boulderers as an opportunity

# Background: The Glen Discourse

- Attarian (1991, 2003) and the Access Fund (2004, 2006) have long recommended that park managers be more involved in educating climbers on appropriate practices instead of creating restrictions.
- The NPC has become actively engaged in collaborative efforts with the bouldering community to improve recreation sustainability.

# Purpose of the Research

The purpose of this study was to describe perceptions of boulderers toward sustainable participation at the Niagara Glen, in order to help inform future environmental policies as well as to understand the rock climbing community's vision for future bouldering practices at the Niagara Glen.

# Methodology

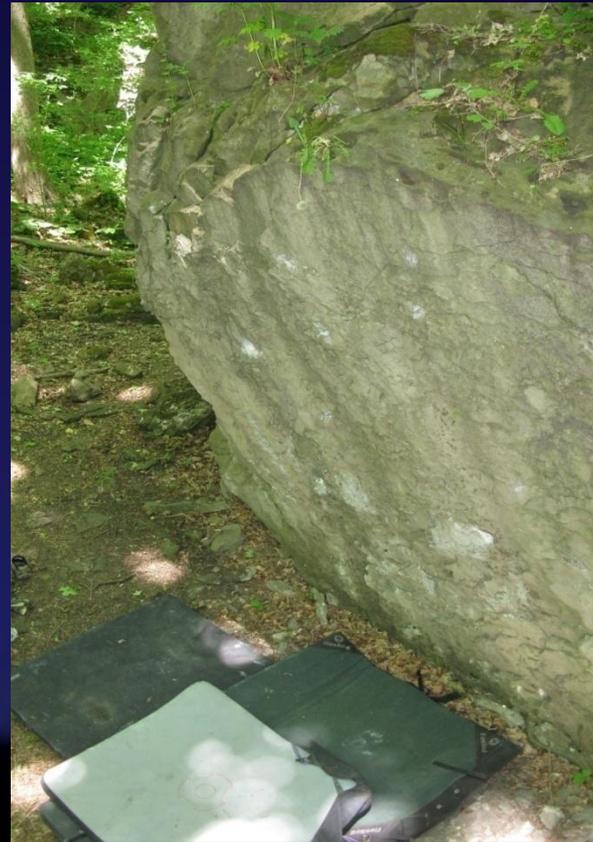
- “Action research aims at solving specific problems within a program, organization, or community.
- Action research explicitly and purposefully becomes part of the change process by engaging the people in the program or organization in studying their own problems in order to solve those problems” (Patton, 2002, p. 221).

# Data Collection

- Focus Group Interviews
- Participant Observation
- Historical Literature and Document Evaluation

# Selection Outcomes for Focus Groups

- Twenty-six individuals
- Nineteen Men
- Seven Women



# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

An emphasis on knowledge transfer

*I think it's just a matter of making sure climbers know... they'll respect the guidelines if they know about them. (Lucy)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

An emphasis on having the issues explained

*As long as you explain to people what the reasons are for having to behave in a certain way, they will take you seriously and they will respect the rules. (Karina)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

An emphasis on teaching one another

*I think it needs to be community-based, people teaching new climbers how to take care of the area, how to be stewards of the land. (Lori)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

Empowerment as the personal responsibility of boulderers

*I think the best way to stay empowered is to be proactive about it too, and you know, find out what we can do. (John)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

Taking responsibility for impacts

*So you know climbers need to watch their impact, they might not realize how bad it looks when throwing their tape (or chalk) on the ground it's almost as bad as beer bottles. (Tim)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

Group size

*My suggestion would be to keep it (groups) small and discreet. (Lori)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

## Self regulation

*Make sure that if people are doing stuff that they are not supposed to be doing, we make them aware of that, like you know when there's vegetation on top of that boulder so don't top it out, the problem ends at the lip...(Curt)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

## Introducing fees

*People might not agree, but you should probably have a fee for access. (Jason)*

*It (a fee) would weed out the people who just don't care. (Curt)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

## Volunteer opportunities

*Obviously climbers would want to help in some way and we are willing to do cleanup days and stuff like that... (Randy)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

Ideas on how to build community

Community empowerment is built. We should make sure that the focus is not based on being selfish and everybody being fixed on their sends (climbing) for the day, but rather focus at times on sharing the day with all of the people around them.  
(Julie)

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

Adding preservation to the boulderer's backpack

*If we add an element of preservation and sustainability into our community I think it will fit right in with all the other points on our 'to-do' list in terms of friendship and getting better and honing our skills...I think it would all go hand in hand. (Lori)*

# How can boulderers at the Niagara Glen promote sustainability and community empowerment?

Centralizing the Glen community

*I think there's a really dedicated core but I don't think the community can be separated.....I think we need to consider it the 'Glen' community. (John)*

# Discussion

- One of the major “findings” of this study was the process of getting boulderers together to discuss sustainability issues.
- The action of a focus group interview may bring clarity about issues and may change perception (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2005).
- Limitations

# Recommendations for Practice

- 1. Boulderers should follow current guidelines.**
- 2. The Ontario Access Coalition should continue to provide leadership in the development of the bouldering community's future vision.**
- 3. The bouldering community should continue to enact self regulation based on minimum impact practices.**
- 4. Efforts should continue to be made by the Ontario Access Coalition and the Niagara Parks Commission to communicate expectations to all stakeholders at the Glen.**

# The Collaborative Discourse Continues!

- 2008 - NPC open house brought different stakeholders together to discuss Glen sustainability.
- 2010 - 'Friends of the Glen' and Boulderer Wildflower Inventory – a huge collaborative success story
- 2011 - Bouldering guidelines are in the final stages of review to make bouldering a sanctioned activity at the Niagara Glen.
- New nature education centre at the top of the Glen – opens on June 4, 2011!

# OAC Initiatives Elsewhere

- Halfway Log Dump – Bruce Peninsula National Park
  - Bouldering camp host program
  - “You are giving us the tools to do our job”
  - National Park Manager support
- Halton Conservation and the OAC recently joined forces for a 5+ year partnership for an annual invasive species removal program at Rattlesnake Point.
- These types of initiatives will also work at the Glen.

# Acknowledgements

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[www.ontarioaccesscoalition.com](http://www.ontarioaccesscoalition.com)

**Thank You!**

**Questions?**



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