

Comments on the Canberra Nature Park draft reserve management plan 2019

Rock Climbing :

The restriction on climbing and abseiling outlined in the draft appears to be a continuation of the policy implemented in the 1999 plan, which was added following a 1994 investigation into Mt Ainslie quarry which found that excessive use by large commercial and recreational abseiling groups was causing extensive soil erosion. These areas have been closed since 1994.

The restriction of climbing in CNP reserves has little effect at the current point in time, as there are no established climbing routes or areas in the reserves managed under CNP. However, under this draft if land was to come under CNP control, which, as noted in section 1.2 is likely, the default status of these areas would become "no climbing". This is obviously of great concern to the climbing community, as we are limited by geography, unlike many other user groups.

Any areas of concern, such as Ainslie Quarry can be adequately managed by individual closures, which tend to be accepted far more readily. As the current default climbing ban has no tangible benefit, I believe that it should be removed to preserve good will going forward.

Bouldering:

The addition of bouldering as an accepted activity is welcomed, however in the draft it is only permitted in zone 2 areas, and "Should be avoided" in zone 1 areas. Aside from the ambiguity of this statement, there are a few small areas that are currently in use that would be impacted by this policy.

There are very few areas where climbing is possible that are close to town and hence suitable for a climb after work on summer afternoons. The visitation at these areas is minimal (estimated at less than 100 visits per year at each site).

Typically boulderers will 'work' on climbs until they succeed, climbing them successfully only once before moving on to another line. The very limited number of climbs in these areas, and the fact that most of them are relatively easy climbs means that there is minimal repeat traffic. Most groups will be small groups of beginners getting an introduction to climbing outside, or people that live in the immediate vicinity.

With the addition of more indoor climbing to Canberra, the traffic to these areas is unlikely to increase dramatically, as the gyms serve as better training facilities, and there are better climbing areas within an hours drive from Canberra for longer outings.

Table 1: Established bouldering areas in Canberra Nature Park Reserves		
Area	Designation in the draft plan	
Coolleman Ridge	Zone 2	Coolleman ridge is the primary local bouldering area, with 140 routes spread across the 2.5km of ridgeline at a variety of difficulties, this diversity and the views across Weston Creek and the city make it a good place for an afternoon session when time is limited. There is firetrail and walking track access to within twenty meters of most boulders.
Black mountain	Zone 1	There are about 10 different boulders, with about 4 routes on each, overlapping and starting at different points, they have rock and leaf litter landings, which are not damaged by climbers, even if they increased in number. Black mountain currently gets about one third of the traffic that Coolleman gets, despite being closer to the city.
Tuggeranong Hill:	Zone 1	There are about 10 boulders, with 4 routes on each nearby to a constructed lookout and path. These have rocky landings that could take a large increase in traffic above current levels, without causing damage. This currently gets about 5% of the traffic that Coolleman receives.
Mt Taylor:	Zone 1	Has only 10 routes, which are all very easy. On top of this, there is extensive earthworks in the area, a large water tank in the vicinity, and it appears it has been classified as a rural block in the past. Mt Taylor gets almost no traffic.

The closure or restriction of the zone 1 sites would increase demand on Coolleman Ridge, and reduce the opportunity for local outdoor bouldering for residents of the Inner North, Tuggeranong and Woden.

Allowing their ongoing use is unlikely to see traffic levels increase much over the next 10 years, and will reduce traffic on Coolleman, provide outdoor recreation for local residents and provide more opportunities for beginners to outdoor climbing.

Climbers have historically responded well to bans at individual areas, so if there are environmental or cultural reasons for bans at specific areas these can be closed independently. Local examples include the seasonal closures of Red Rocks Gorge, and the permanent closures of Mt Ainslie Quarry and Ginninderra Gorge.

Recommendations

These recommendations adhere to the management approach outlined in the draft, ensuring that recreation and an active healthy lifestyle is promoted where this is compatible with protecting reserve values.

Table 2: Recommended policies for climbing in defined management zones	
Zone 1	1) Bouldering and climbing are permitted, except in Mt Ainslie Quarry etc.
	2) Or, Bouldering and climbing are permitted, but the development of new routes is prohibited.
Zone 2	Bouldering and Climbing are permitted.

Climbers should be treated in a similar way to the other user groups in the plan, expanding section 7.4.9 with a best practices list, and should be included in the recreation section of the reserve profiles for Black mountain, Cooleman Ridge, Tuggeranong Hill, Mt Taylor in Part 2.

Table 3: Section 7.4.9 - Abseiling, rock climbing and bouldering	
2019 Draft Plan	Recommendation
<p><i>7.4.9 Abseiling, rock climbing and bouldering</i></p> <p>In Canberra Nature Park reserves where cliffs exist, abseiling and rock climbing will not be permitted.</p> <p>Bouldering is permitted but should be avoided in Zone 1 areas.</p>	<p><i>7.4.9 - Abseiling, rock climbing and bouldering</i></p> <p>In Canberra Nature Park reserves where cliffs exist, abseiling, rock climbing and bouldering will be permitted except where other restrictions exist - (Mt Ainslie Quarry)</p> <p>And add a best practices box like other user groups:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stay on walking, multi-use or management tracks. • Do not take short cuts or create new tracks. • Do not shift rocks or fallen branches • Do not disturb plants and animals. • Keep group sizes small • Be considerate of other users • Take care of vegetation when placing mats for protection • Brush any chalk off the rock with a soft bristled brush when you are finished • Carry out all rubbish • Respect regulations and closures
	<p>Climbers and boulderers should be listed as a user group in the Nature reserves descriptions in Part 2 for the areas outlined above, in particular for Cooleman Ridge.</p>