



## A quarterly publication of the Gunks Climbers' Coalition

Welcome to the Spring 2004 issue of *Talus*, the newsletter of the **Gunks Climbers' Coalition**. Published quarterly, *Talus* is available to those who support the **GCC**.

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Editors: Dell Bleekman, Christopher Spatz

Contributing Writers: Dell Bleekman, Rob Mecus, France Menk, Jannette Wing Pazer, Christopher Spatz

Art Direction: France Menk

Web Newsletter Development: Jannette Wing Pazer

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## A Springtime Welcome



Gertrude's Nose

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It was just a few short weeks ago that the sun finally eased its way over the valley, casting strong rays of light toward the cliff. You could sense the transformation — spring had arrived. And, as if you needed further proof, just check out the West Trapps parking lot at 9am on a Saturday.

After a punishing winter, springtime is here, and the GCC couldn't be happier. We've

got a full plate for the climbing season, and we're not talking about steering committeemembers' climbing tick lists. Rather, this is the time to ramp up our activities — from clean-ups and slide shows to increased communication with the land managers — the GCC is ready to roll. Right now you can read about what's going on at Peter's Kill, find out who cleaned up the multi-use campground, about campfires and climbing with kids.

**So dust off that trad rack and feel the warmth. It's time to climb!**

## Recent GCC Activity

Over the winter, the GCC Steering Committee has been busy setting goals and planning events for 2004. We became an official affiliate of the Access Fund and did an inventory of our climbing resources to document the crags and areas our organization serves. The GCC is now incorporated in New York State as a not-for-profit and we are in the process of getting federal 501(c)(3) status. We've recruited new volunteers to help with access, education, and membership and we have a CPA helping us with tax laws and bookkeeping. We've updated our membership form to include additional opportunities for volunteers, and will soon have online membership subscriptions and renewals with credit cards. And finally, look out for our website redesign.



The GCC is actively discussing access issues with local climbing areas, and the relationship with our main climbing area landowners, the Mohonk Preserve and Minnewaska State Preserve, grows stronger each year.

Upcoming slide shows with well-known climbing celebrities will entertain the Gunks community and will help spread the word regarding the GCC. And a skink crawled onto our GCC logo! There's still much to be done and we need your help — join us and volunteer!

## Closures (and Openings) at Peter's Kill and the Mac Wall



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Climbers at Peter's Kill were greeted to the opening of the climbing season April 1 with an "ecological restriction" on the central part of the crag: about 20 climbs were closed to accommodate nesting ravens in the Scrotum Pole area. Wondering how long the area would remain closed, and seeking reasons for the restriction of a non-threatened species, the GCC spoke with Minnewaska's naturalist, Hatti Langsford, and met with their head climbing ranger, Jorge Gomes, who provided a copy of Minnewaska's Draft Management Plan for Peter's Kill to the GCC.

During the assessment phase preparing Peter's Kill to accommodate climbing, an environmental impact study was done to inventory the presence of bird, mammal, and species of vegetation which might be affected by climbers. While no ravens were found on the proposed climbing crags at the time, they were sighted within the study area, and guidelines were established to protect nesting ravens (DEC Special Concern status) in the future.

The Master Plan reads: "Common ravens in particular may be impacted by technical rock climbers as they nest directly on the cliffs. No ravens have been found in the area proposed for technical rock climbing. However, ravens have been found on cliffs outside the area proposed for technical rock climbing and close to areas which have desirable climbing routes. Ravens begin setting up their nests in February and March, so mitigation action should be taken if raven nests are found within the climbing area before climbing season begins. The agencies will monitor the climbing area during February and March. If a nest is discovered, the nesting area will be closed to climbers until fledglings have left the nest." The plan even provides for the elimination of rock climbing "when the most protective measures are found to be unsuccessful."

**Common ravens in particular may be impacted by technical rock climbers as they nest directly on the cliffs.**

Bird biologists from the Mohonk Preserve and Albany were brought in to determine the ravens' comfort zone, and a 75-foot easement on either side of the nest was established on the crag from top to bottom. The site would have remained restricted until the chicks fledged — typically 5-6 weeks after hatching — sometime from mid to late June. But the nest was found to be inactive or abandoned in late April, Peter's Kill rangers monitored the nest for another week, and the restriction was lifted on May 4. Keeping in mind that climbers were consulted during the planning phase of Peter's Kill's original opening, and having seen that specific protocols regarding the raven closure were being followed, the GCC had advised that climbers respect the restrictions until they were lifted.



**Black Vulture on "Three Pines" © 2004 Bob Elsinger**

The GCC was also informed by the Mohonk Preserve of a nest monitoring situation at the Mac Wall, prior to a closure of Three Pines and Something Interesting in the third week of April to accommodate nesting Black Vultures — a species considered threatened in New York state — which will likely last about 120 days. Adult vultures were aggressively defending the nest from climbers prior to the closure, and Mohonk Preserve officials moved to establish a buffer. Protection status aside, these closures illustrate how Preserve and Minnewaska officials must deal with the reality of nests in heavily climbed areas to protect both the nests and climbers.

At Preserve head ranger Hank Alicandri's suggestion, a working group is being formed from the GCC, Mohonk Preserve, PIPC/Minnewaska, and possibly other ridge land managers to establish a more uniform response to nesting closures in accordance with Shawangunk Biodiversity Partnership guidelines. This will allow climbers to provide input and review nesting closures before they occur.

**The GCC is working with land managers to establish a more uniform response to nesting closures.**

## **GCC Spruces Up Multi-Use Camping Area**



**W**ith climbing commands echoing down from the Trapps, eleven GCC members and volunteers sacrificed half a perfect climbing day on Saturday, April 17, to assist DEC ranger Rob Mecus with a clean-up of the Shawangunk Multiple Use campground on Rt. 299 in Gardiner. The crew scoured the grounds for glass and garbage, shoveled out knee-deep ash from fire rings, and rebuilt campfire pits on the 58-acre site. With

the cleaning and digging dispatched in a jaunty four hours, Rob decided to reschedule some necessary trail-work for another day.

Long tabbed with the nickname "Multiple Abuse" for its reputation of overuse and late night parties, the only public campground serving the Northern Shawangunks has recently seen a reduction of eight sites, with further restrictions and a complete closure threatened by next year — largely due to the complaints of one neighbor. With camping already at a premium in the Gunks, keeping the campground open permanently is a major objective for the GCC.

Our ongoing efforts at the site include regular clean-ups, education to reduce noise, garbage, and parking complaints, and a letter writing campaign to Governor Pataki, Ulster County Assemblyman Kevin Cahill, and the DEC Region 3 Director Marc Moran, who has approved the restrictions and will be deciding the fate of the campground. The GCC is also looking into sponsoring a porta-toilet at the site and constructing an education kiosk that has been offered generously by an anonymous GCC member.

**...the only public campground serving the Northern Shawangunks has recently seen a reduction of eight sites...**

We believe approval for further site reductions and the decision whether to close the campground will occur some time in May. It is crucial for your letters to be written now. Assemblyman Cahill has been alerted to the situation by the GCC and says he will do everything he can to keep the campground open — but emphasized he needs letters (hard-copy, not emails) to assist with his argument. You may download the letter from the GCC web site at [www.gunksclimbers.org](http://www.gunksclimbers.org) or use its outline for writing your own.

## Building A Smarter Campfire



**W**ho doesn't like a nice warm campfire when they spend some time camping? They are warm, inviting, aromatic, and they are centers of evening socialization. Unfortunately, campfires are one of the single most destructive forces affecting our public lands. The obvious threat is a campfire that gets out of control and starts a forest fire. While this is true, it is not necessarily the biggest reason why they are destructive.

Campfires tend to leave long-lasting scars. A campfire built in the wrong area, such as underneath a rock overhang or on rocks, can leave a scar that will last years. These scars, accumulated in a heavy use area, leave the woods looking overused and dirty. If campfire rings are not regularly cleaned out, the ash and debris build-up creates large, unsightly mounds that attract garbage.

A large concentration of campfires in a small area will quickly strip the forest floor surrounding the campsites of natural debris. This debris is necessary for a healthy forest ecosystem. Furthermore, campers are often tempted to break low hanging branches off of trees and peel bark for kindling. Some people go so far as to cut down trees for firewood. This is probably the single biggest reason that campfires have been prohibited in the Eastern High Peaks area of the Adirondacks.

With all this in mind, there are a few things you can do the next time you take a weekend climbing trip and decide to rough it. The first thing is not to build a campfire at all. Such fires are remnants of a past age when people needed them for cooking and warmth. You should already have the clothes to keep you warm, and most climbers and campers have discovered the wonders of backpacking stoves. So do you really need a fire after all? The simple act of not building that fire could be the best thing you do to minimize your impact on the land.

If you decide that you really want to have a fire, then take some steps to avoid leaving your mark. Most climbers visiting crag areas are car camping and not carrying their camping supplies far from the car. Try building a pan fire. Recycle the bottom half of a cheap charcoal grill or hibachi and build your fire in that. You will not create a burn scar on the ground and it is easy to extinguish and scatter your ashes. You could also try building a mound fire. If you have a nearby source of sand or mineral soil, you can pile this up in a 6-inch thick mound and build your fire on that. Again, this leaves very little impact on the ground and makes it easy to extinguish and scatter ashes. A typical source for the mineral soil is underneath a recently uprooted tree. Be sure not to disturb any living plants and then replace the soil when done.

So, you've decided to build a mound or pan fire. Where do you get your wood? If you are trying to reduce your impact on the land, you will bring the wood with you from home or buy it in a local store. Kindling wood should be gathered from a wide area to avoid stripping the immediate area around the campsite. If you spend the whole day climbing, you can probably walk an extra 200 feet or so for your firewood. Do not break branches off of standing trees; use only wood that is dead and on the ground. The practice of peeling bark off of trees to start your fire is extremely damaging.

**A large concentration of campfires in a small area will quickly strip the forest floor surrounding the campsites of natural debris.**

Before you leave you should take a few minutes to clean up your fire. Make sure your fire is cold. Remove your ashes from the fire ring and scatter them in a wide area in the woods. Try to consume all the wood in your fire. Half charred logs take a long time to break down. If you camp in an area not frequently used, break down your fire ring before leaving. Better yet, don't build one at all.

A little forethought and effort will go a long way in reducing impact on the land. It's time we realize that everything we do has an impact, so take responsibility, and act wisely.

## Climbing With Kids

**J**ust because you're a parent doesn't mean you can't still get out and climb! It just might take a bit more planning. For more info, read on.

Often parents with very young children cannot climb and give their kids the attention they need while one is climbing and one is belaying. Perhaps parents with adolescents want to get them started in climbing, but the kids are still of an age that requires constant attention. Or a non-climbing parent married to a climber doesn't want to have the kids constantly dumped on them when the spouse goes climbing.

### Here are some ideas:

- Climb with another family or kid-friendly climbers to help increase the adult-to-children ratio.
- Set up top ropes or lead one-pitch climbs with one adult climbing, one adult belaying and at least one adult to keep an eye on the kids. Also, you can set up an easy top rope for the kids to do if there are two additional adults — one to belay kids and another to watch the kids who aren't climbing. Sometimes it even takes two adults to help a child on a climb — one to belay and one to help encourage, and another to place small feet on



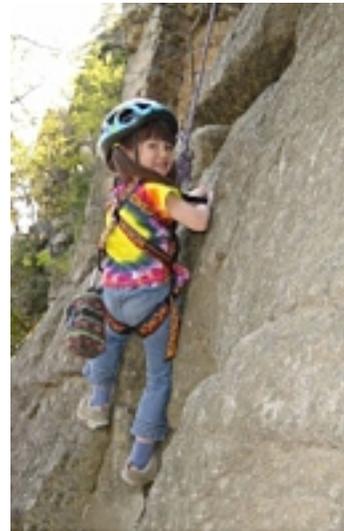
Top Roping: Uberfall Descent  
© 2004 Jannette Pazer

footholds or provide the all-important "tushie-push."

- Consider swapping turns while doing longer routes: one parent from each couple does a climb, the others watch the kids, then they switch.
- Find another couple with a non-climbing parent. The non-climbers can attend to the kids and go on field trips to local events or hikes, so the non-climbing parents get to socialize and as soon as the climbing day is over, the climbing spouse is right there to take over kid duties. Perhaps the non-climbing parents can get the night off to play and the climbing parents put the kids to bed.
- Find other families who live near popular climbing areas and take turns hosting each other.

### And keep in mind:

- Watch out for steep drop-offs, slippery leaves and eroded trails.
- Pay particular attention to babies and toddlers while close to the base of the cliff because of falling debris.
- Children at the cliff should wear helmets. For adults, we can weigh the risks, but children do not necessarily comprehend the danger.
- Remember that not everyone wants to see children at the cliffs. Please monitor the children's behavior, noise level, and courtesy.
- Do not leave a child alone at the base of a climb when you don't want to top-rope.
- Give the children a safety reminder talk every time you take them climbing.
- Instill an understanding of climbing safety, etiquette and ethics from the start so they can grow up to be responsible climbers.
- Teach them to look after their buddies, and remind them of the safety rules, and to get an adult if a dangerous situation arises.
- Teach them NOT to throw rocks down when there could be people below that they can't see.
- Warn them that not all dogs are friendly. Check first before you let them approach strange dogs.
- Teach them how to care for their environment. No littering — or give them a bag to help clean up litter that they see. Don't spread their toys and gear all over the place so people have to trample off-trail to get around the group. Discourage damage to plants and trees, or little "landscaping" projects that encourage erosion.
- Take them to the potty and don't leave toilet paper litter. If you're going somewhere without facilities, bring Ziploc bags to put dirty toilet paper in.
- Make sure the other adults agree with your comfort level of safety with your children. If you're up a climb and the adult watching your kid is letting them boulder 20 feet up without a spotter, you may not be too happy.



Kids like chalk bags too!  
© 2004 Jannette Pazer

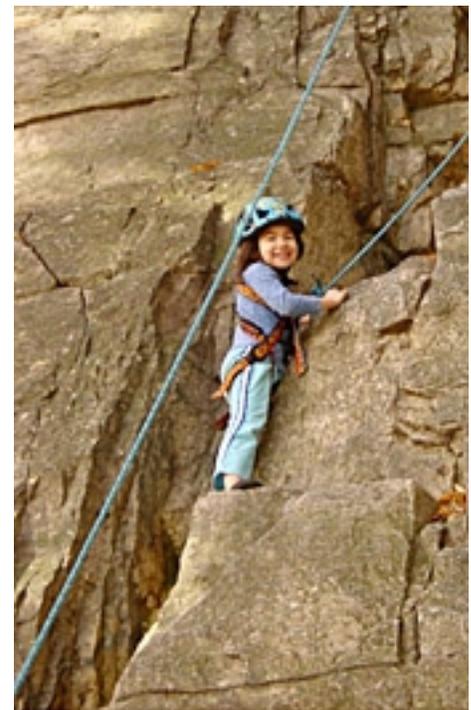
- It helps if the children are close enough in age to enjoy each other's company. Sometimes they have so much fun they don't want to bother climbing at all. Rocks, sticks, acorns, a puddle, and leftover Ziploc bags can provide hours of amusement.
- A deck of cards or Uno is great for older kids who like games. Make sure to bring toys that can get dirty. And bring something for them to sit on (tarp or rope bag), and use a tarp for shade if it's really hot and sunny.
- Don't forget snacks and something to drink.

### When on the rock:

- Young children definitely need a full body harness so they don't tip upside down.
- The biggest problem with any young child is how to lower them. Many are too intimidated to let go of the rock, especially if they're on a comfortable ledge — they don't want to back off. It helps to have a second adult to assist in lowering, preferably at the top with the child.
- Children being lowered must be taught to keep their hands and feet in front of them to prevent them from spinning sideways and hitting the wall. They instinctively clutch the rope instead.
- Children bouldering around should be spotted; downclimbing is not usually intuitive to them and they may not be able to judge the distance from which they can safely jump.

### Where to climb with kids at the Gunks?

- For very young climbers, look just a couple of feet to the left of the Uberfall descent route. There is a small tree just to the left of the usual route which is big enough to support a young child. Set up a top rope anchor there, and the climbing is easy enough that there's a good chance a little one will make it to the top. Of course, always give climbers the right of way and keep the rope out of the way of the main route.
- On the top of the cliff, not far from the Uberfall descent, is a small cliff called the Practice Face. There are no documented routes on it, but it's all pretty easy and you can set up top ropes on it. The only problem is getting everyone up there and back. There's a rough trail from the carriage road before the first climb, but it's steep and difficult for little children.



"Dirty Chimney"  
© 2004 Jannette Pazer

### Multi-pitch hints:

- The leader uses double ropes and clips into pieces as normal. When at the belay station, leader sets up an anchor so that she can see the climbers if possible.
- Back on the ground, the child goes on one rope, and an adult ties into the other — so he can help the child if necessary. Leader can use a reverso in its auto locking mode to belay both.
- Have the child climb first about 10 feet ahead of the other climber so if there is any

problem getting gear out the other climber can climb up and help.

- Try to have two clip in points ready at the belay station so there is not too much shifting when it's time to start leading again.
- Make sure the climb is something the young climber can manage!

*This information is excerpted from Jannette Pazer's Web site Cliffmama.com. Jannette has been climbing at the Gunks since she was a teenager and has 2 daughters, ages 7 and 9. This information is suggestion and not gospel — please use common sense when you climb with your kids.*

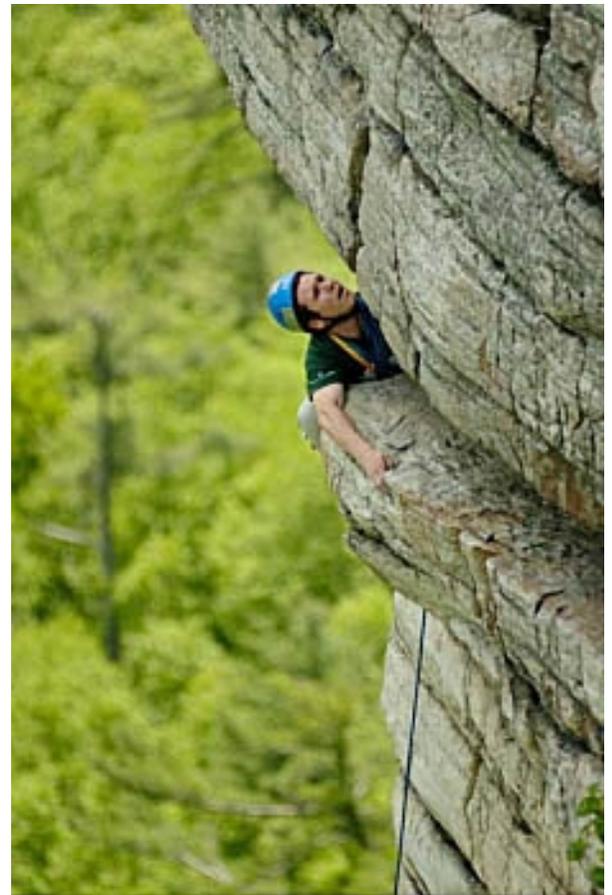
## Members' Corner

### Photos by Mike Stanislaw



Sky Top from the Trapps

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Graham Seaton on "High Exposure"

© 2004 Mike Stanislaw



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## The poem I wrote to win a rope.

**M**y rope hung down within my palm  
and rested lightly on the rock.  
My rope curled down around that rock.  
My hands caressed its silken strand,  
my heartbeat slowed to its languid form  
upon that rock we lay upon.

My aged rope, had helped me dare  
to go ahead, to further find  
that place, that spot, that hold,  
that kind of face this rock  
would give to our embrace.

Now my rope has reached its end  
of traveling with my dreams.  
Its aged face cannot proceed with  
grace in sure mobility.  
I cannot ask it to hold tight.  
I cannot trust its efforts now.  
Its memory has worn it thin.  
It gnaws at my heart's door.  
I write this poem to ask for more  
than my old rope can bring.

Lines to climb above the circling hawks  
now lie in wait  
while birds sing and I move, untethered,  
in my dreams.  
This state of loss, this time too late  
for my old rope to share,  
drives me to write to you.  
Your prize is my license to fly again;  
to secure my path to the clouds.

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## Upcoming Events

**A**l Demaria, an early member of the famous Vulgarians, will be doing a slide show for the GCC on May 29th at the Mohonk Preserve Visitor's Center. Al has climbed all over the world. He will present slides and stories of his exciting climbing adventures from the familiar cliffs of the Gunks to the remote ranges of Alaska and the people he's climbed with along the way. Come see Al's slide show and learn what the GCC is doing and how you can help.

For more details on Al's slide show and other GCC Events, please see our website at:

[www.gunksclimbers.org](http://www.gunksclimbers.org)

## Rope Up! Tie In!

**T**he GCC began in 2002 with the goal of maintaining and expanding climbing opportunities along the Shawangunk Ridge. We as climbers must realize that, although diversified in climbing styles and overall recreational interests, we enjoy a common goal of maintaining the pristine nature of our climbing area. Climbers are some of the most environmentally aware “guests” using the Preserve. Help us keep it that way. Become part of the solution. Make a difference. **Join the Gunks Climbers' Coalition** today!

## Send It!

**T**ell us what's going on in your world of climbing. Any upcoming slide shows, lectures, book signings, or fundraising events? We'd like to hear about them. Or, do you have anything to share with the GCC community? Our goal with the newsletter is to keep expanding the offerings to include poetry, short stories, trip reports; anything innovative and compelling will be considered.

**Pop off an email to us at [newsletter@gunksclimbers.org](mailto:newsletter@gunksclimbers.org).** We welcome your comments, whether on our newsletter, the direction of our organization, or the future of climbing.

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## Mission Statement

The **Gunks Climbers' Coalition**, established in the fall of 2002, is an advocacy group dedicated to creating and maintaining sustainable opportunities for responsible climbing along the Shawangunk Ridge and surrounding areas.