

A SUBMISSION RELATING TO  
THE DRAFT PLAN OF MANAGEMENT  
dated September 2006

# Evans Crown Nature Reserve

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*Prepared by Sydney Rockclimbing Club Inc*  
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## **Introduction:**

This submission deals with recreational rockclimbing in the context of Evans Crown Nature Reserve. That it concentrates largely on this single activity is due to the fact that the Club's main purpose and expertise reside in this field. However rockclimbers may also enjoy some of the other recreational activities available within the unique setting that the Reserve provides.

Sydney Rockclimbing Club (SRC) has been in existence for 55 years. In that time there has been considerable growth in the numbers attracted to the sport. In recent years, aware of the increasing impacts, we have worked with land managers, and climber-initiated groups such as Blue Mountains Cliffcare, to address problems resulting from our activity and to educate climbers in best practice procedures.

Rockclimbing is a legitimate recreational activity and is undertaken in many countries around the world. Consequently there is a considerable body of knowledge dealing with the management of rockclimbing in protected areas.

By consulting and working with bodies such as NPWS we believe climbers can develop opportunities to engage in our recreation in a way that does not compromise the natural and cultural values of Evans Crown Nature Reserve nor impinge on other users.

## Comments:

In its earliest pages the Draft Plan of Management (DPoM) states “*Nature reserves are reserved under the NPW Act to protect and conserve areas containing outstanding, unique or representative ecosystems, species, communities or natural phenomena*” and “*Management of nature reserves aims to minimize disturbance to natural and cultural heritage*”. (page 2)

And here too we are reminded that nature reserves “*differ from national parks in that the purpose for reserving lands as nature reserves does not include the provision of opportunities for sustainable visitor use and enjoyment*”.

But then confusingly, under the heading “Management Objectives” the very last objective listed is: “*Resolution of conflicts between recreational use, and the broader purpose of and management principles for, nature reserve management*”. (page 3) Does this mean selected ‘conflicts’ will be resolved simply by totally closing the area to a particular recreational use or does it hint at some form of compromise? We note for instance that it is proposed to “*Permit recreational bushwalking in the reserve*” and “*Extend the track so that it ends at a lookout point*”. (page 17) Such thinking unfortunately perpetuates the myth that walkers have no impact on the environment and by extension portrays climbers as demons who destroy the natural world. Neither of these simplistic assessments is valid!

The Plan notes that the Reserve “*protects an island of remnant vegetation as well as spectacular granite tor formations*” (page 5) and later adds “*There is strong evidence to suggest that Evans Crown was an important place for the Wiradjuri people as well as the neighbouring Gundungurra and Darug people*”. Climbers agree the granite formations are spectacular, and for them represent a valuable recreational resource, but accept there is a need to preserve the unique natural environment and the area’s cultural heritage.

The granite outcrops of Evans Crown have long attracted the attention of climbers, dating back to before the area became a nature reserve, and they have continued to receive climbing visitation right up to the present time. “*The scarcity of alternative granite sites close to Sydney*” (page 9) accounts for this popularity.

So for the climbing community here is the dilemma: This popular climbing destination now lies within a nature reserve and has a special significance to the traditional owners and other indigenous people with a connection to the area. Although the native plants and animals listed for this area are unlikely to be disturbed by climbers any more than they could be by other users - with the possible exception of nesting raptors that may from time to time use the area – it has been suggested that climbing activity on the Crown offends the Wiradjuri people and so this becomes a concern for the climbing community.

Clearly there is a great need for a better understanding of the Aboriginal connection with the Evans Crown area and the Plan proposes a high priority be given to preparation and implementation of a Cultural Heritage Management Plan. Climbers endorse this proposal and agree it is an important step in assessing the cultural significance of the reserve.

As part of the CHMP process, or in parallel with it, the climbing community would welcome the opportunity to converse with the Wiradjuri people and with NPWS to determine how our seemingly divergent interests might co-exist.

### Issues:

1. *Is it or isn't it?* There needs to be a clear resolution of the question as to whether the Reserve is a) a purely nature conservation area or b) an area of significant Aboriginal cultural heritage deserving of preservation in its own right or c) a combination of these two. Or could it perhaps be a hybrid form encompassing conservation of natural and cultural values while still allowing some level of recreational use?

The approach adopted by the Service to date has muddied the waters to some extent, with recreational activities passively accepted and allowed to continue despite the notion that “*Management of nature reserves aims to minimize disturbance to natural and cultural heritage*” (page 2) There was even the requirement at one time that climbers obtain a permit from the local area office (then Bathurst) but this did not seem to be enforced and in fact climbers found, when seeking such a permit, no system was in place to issue one.

Whilst it may be true that such ‘anomalies’ are a result of a lack of resources available to the Service it does not engender a satisfactory level of compliance – in fact the opposite!

2. *Climbers and bolts.* It needs to be understood that climbers place and use bolts in different ways. Single placements at intervals up the climb provide intermediate protection points to hopefully prevent the lead climber being injured in the event of a fall.

At the top of the climb a double placement may be used as a ‘belay’ or anchor point to secure the lead climber who then manages the intake of rope to protect the next climber as they in turn ascend. In some situations this anchor point may consist of two or more bolts equipped with rings or short lengths of chain to facilitate a roped descent (abseil) directly back to the base of the climb. Apart from any convenience this may deliver it also reduces or eliminates wear and tear on the vegetation and soil of what would otherwise be the descent route.

On longer climbs an intermediate belay/anchor point may be installed and this might utilise two or more bolts if no natural anchors exist such as cracks for placement of removable protection, or solid trees that can be used for the purpose.

The Plan proposes the removal of “*rock fixtures from areas where they are identified as directly impacting on Aboriginal sites*”. (page 18) All reasonable climbers will understand the philosophical reasons underlying this action but we strongly recommend consultation with the climbing community on this issue **prior** to any removals occurring so that the key desired outcome will be understood and identified by all concerned.

**In conclusion:**

- The environmental impacts of climbing within Evans Crown Nature Reserve need to be managed to permit sustainable use.
- Reasonable climbers are prepared to accept sensible restrictions on their activities where it can be appropriately demonstrated that such controls are necessary or desirable.
- Climbers are aware of, understand, and accept, the inherent dangers of the activity, including those associated with the use of fixed protection. Climbers are best qualified to install, maintain and remove such fixed protection.
- “By using the authority of the resource, rather than difficult-to-enforce restrictions, land-management agencies may see increased compliance by concerned recreationists.”<sup>1</sup>
- Sydney Rockclimbing Club Inc is always willing to engage in dialog with land managers and other stakeholders to discuss identified problems, and can also act as a conduit to convey information to the wider climbing community.

We thank the National Parks and Wildlife Service for providing us with the opportunity to comment on the Evans Crown Nature Reserve Draft Plan of Management and hope that this submission can constitute a worthwhile contribution to the planning process.

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<sup>1</sup> Camp, R. J. and Knight, R. L. (1998) **Effects of Rock Climbing on Cliff Plant Communities at Joshua Tree National Park, California.** Conservation Biology, Volume 12 Number 6.