

Marlow Profile, Route Development Clinic 2021

Background:

During the fall of 2021, over the course of 6 weeks, a route development clinic was held at the Marlow profile. The Marlow Profile is a small outcropping located in the southwestern NH town, Marlow, and the home of 36 established rock climbs. The cliff has been a climbing area since the 1970's, and has been visited by many well respected rock climbing pioneers. The clinic was initially conceptualized by a small group of people who felt marginalized in the climbing community because route development has been done nearly exclusively by right of "colonial" male climbers and they wanted access to route development skills. The prerequisite for participating in the route development clinic was knowledge of the figure 8 knot and ability to top rope climb. The MCA (Monadnock Climbers Association) claimed oversight of the clinic, and provided tools and materials. The clinic was managed by members of the AMC (Appalachian Mountain Club), WMCC (Western Mass Climbers Association) and the MCA.

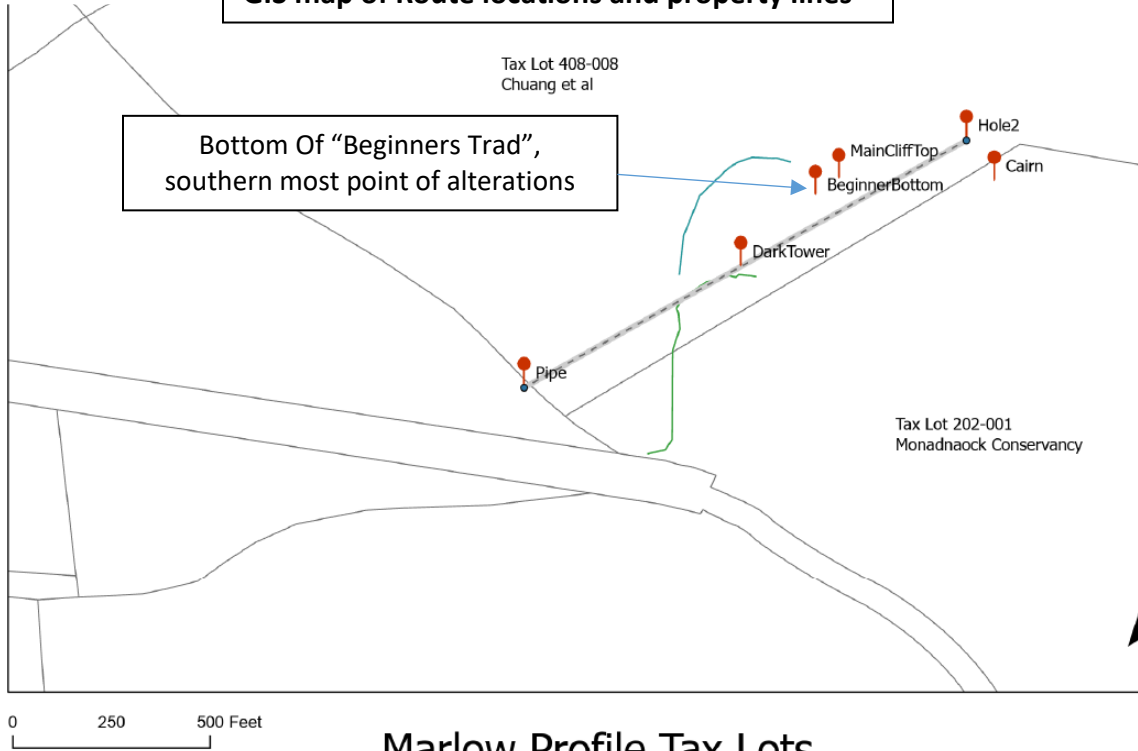
Clinic participants installed 16 new bolts during the clinic. However, as of November of 2018 the total number of bolts on the upper and lower cliffs was 100 and as of November 2021 that number is 138. A total of 26 students graduated from the clinic, although about 50 people were involved as participants, experts, instructors, or co-organizers. The clinic was not advertised to the Monadnock community.

Land Ownership and Permission:

In 2015, 91.5 acres of land leading up to the cliffs was donated to the Monadnock Conservancy by Ben and Judy Sands. At this time, the Conservancy tried to speak with an abutting property owner, the Chuang family from Lexington Massachusetts, to gain the abutting parcel; however, the Chuang's were not interested in conveying their property at the time.

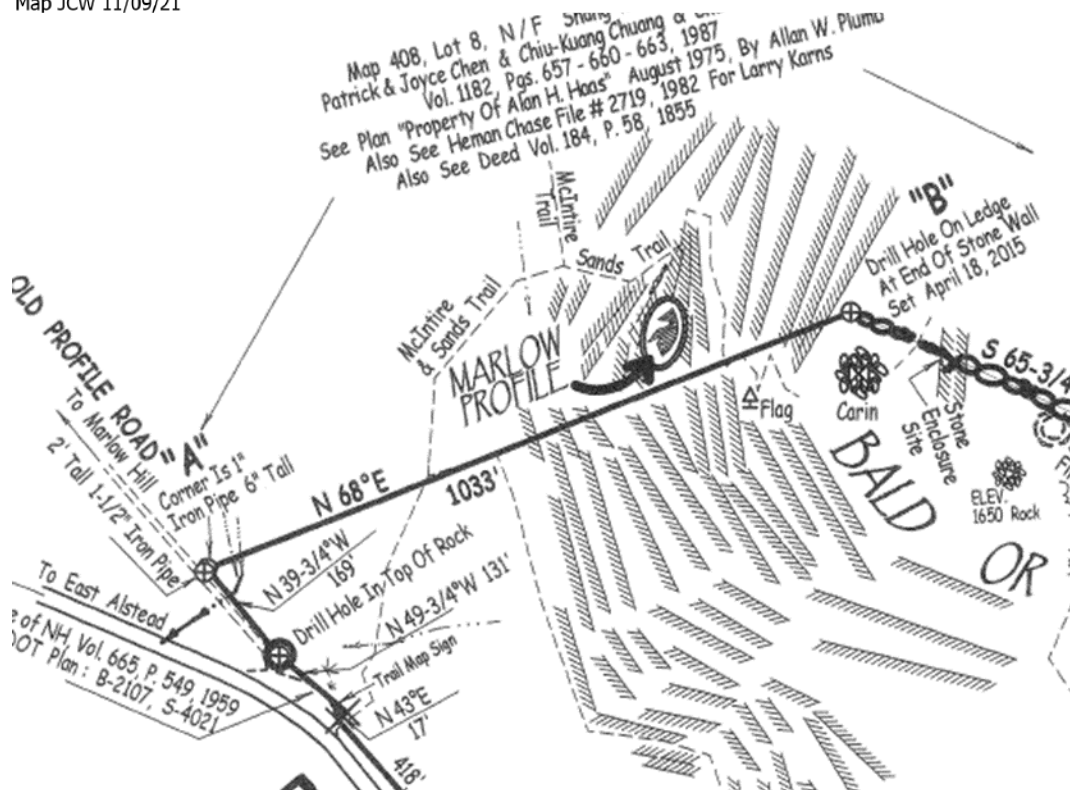
While the clinic managers spoke to representatives of the Monadnock Conservancy, they did not acquire a survey map of the property and determine the location of the boundary between the two properties. The managers of the clinic relied solely on the word of the Monadnock Conservancy for permission to install new bolts at the cliff. A short investigation using a survey map and GPS showed that all of the climbing resources on the upper cliff, and possibly much of the lower cliff, reside exclusively on Chuang property and therefore all of the alterations have been done without owner permission.

GIS map of Route locations and property lines



Marlow Profile Tax Lots

Map JCW 11/09/21



Poor or dangerous practices:

- Using glue with a wedge / sleeve anchor is not recommended.
- From the Bolters Bible, Glue-ins end of chapter 1:

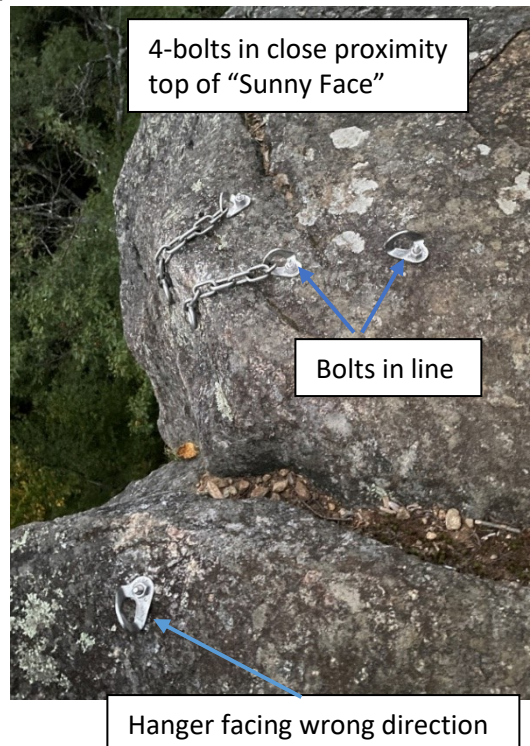
“Do not use glue with mechanical bolts. You don’t get the best of both worlds, you get the worst. The glue will only sit on the outer sleeve and not attach to the actual rod that holds the hanger down. The glue could prevent the anchors from expanding. If the hole is big enough for glue, the wedge won’t wedge. If the hole is the right size for the hanger, there is no room for the glue. The glue can also clog the threads. I’m not saying that a mechanical bolt is going to fall out of the hole easily if you use glue, but that is not how they are designed. Don’t try to get fancy!”

Many bolts were found using this method.



Glued wedge bolt, Base of “Sunny Face”

- What torque value was used when tightening the wedge / sleeve anchors? Who will check the torque values periodically? The torque value of a glued wedge bolt will not be accurate/valid.
- Over bolting existing routes. This does not show a good conservation ethic.
- 4-bolts in close proximity as a top anchor. Current practice would be a 2-bolt anchor.
- Hanger facing the wrong way on top of Sunny Slab
- Bolts added for practice and teaching only, which offer no use for technical climbing (Base of off-width boulder).
- Lack of drop-ins on top anchors. Climbers must untie and thread through the top hangers to lower off or rappel. However, at the top of “Beginners Trad”, only a single ring is provided attached to the bolt. Therefore, the ring does not allow the rope to pass freely through and may cause a twist in a rope as it is pulled or get stuck.
- Bolts added to an existing route where natural protection was possible (Sunny Face Right). This route had never been considered unsafe.
- Bolting established routes without the first ascent party’s consent, poor ethics. (Escape Slab)



4-bolts in close proximity top of “Sunny Face”

Bolts in line

Hanger facing wrong direction

- Bolts added under a small roof (beginning of “Inside Straight”), creates rope abrasion and drag for a climber. Possible rope failure in rare circumstances.



Moral Hazard

- Lack of conservation or restraint was displayed.
- 26 people who may have very little exposure to historical ethics of rock climbing may now feel that installing bolts is the norm.
- No participants were from the Monadnock community.
- Individuals who managed and led the clinic were empowered to continue these practices.

Conclusion:

A clinic that had a large portion of its agenda focused on installing bolts where the participants were not required to have much if any outdoor climbing experience should not have occurred.

The end result of the bolts that were added displays a lack of judgement and adherence to a conservation ethic in teaching this activity.

All improper hardware should be removed and the routes should be repaired in a mutually agreed manor by the local climbing community.

Any clinic that includes the installation of bolts should ensure that a broad spectrum of the local climbing community is aware of and has an opportunity to comment on the proposed clinic.