



SUBMISSION ON AUCKLAND COUNCIL'S WAITIPU-WAITAKERE QUARRY PARK SERVICE OUTCOMES PLAN

TO: Waitipu Park Service Outcomes Plan
Community Parks Team
Auckland Council
Private Bag 92300, Victoria Street West
Auckland, 1142

Name of submitter: **Aotearoa Climbing Access Trust**

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 This is a submission on Auckland Council's Waitipu-Waitakere Quarry Park Service Outcomes Plan.
- 1.2 Aotearoa Climbing Access Trust ("**ACAT**") is a national organisation formed in 2021 that represents the interests of New Zealand's rock climbing community. Its purpose is to promote public access to rock climbing areas ("**crag**s") in Aotearoa, and to promote conservation and safe and responsible use of the climbing environment.
- 1.3 This submission relates to:
 - (a) ACAT's request for rock climbing to be included as a permitted recreational activity at Waitipu by Auckland Council (the "**Council**"); and
 - (b) the benefits that rock climbing at Waitipu could provide to New Zealand climbers and the local community.

2. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 2.1 ACAT would like rock climbing to be included as a permitted activity in the Waitipu-Waitakere Quarry Park Service Outcomes Plan, and for the site to be developed in such a way that does not hinder safe and accessible climbing.
- 2.2 Rock climbing is a safe and enjoyable sport that is experiencing a rapid growth in popularity, particularly following the sport's addition to the Olympic Games. Providing for climbing at Waitipu will help create a vibrant, diverse Auckland with equitable access to the outdoors, benefitting the community through the health, wellbeing and social interactions that climbing creates.

- 2.3 High quality outdoor climbing locations are hard to find and there are currently only two active climbing areas in the Auckland region, both on Council reserves. ACAT has a good working relationship with the Council regarding climbing at these sites, and volunteers from the climbing community regularly contribute to environmental initiatives in these areas.
- 2.4 The proposed Waitipu Park has excellent rock climbing potential and offers a rare opportunity for a new outdoor climbing facility that will provide active recreation opportunities to the wider Auckland region and the West Auckland community in particular.
- 2.5 Development of the climbing potential at the site can be undertaken by experienced members of the climbing community and would not require any Council funds or operational support.
- 2.6 ACAT can work with the Council to ensure that climbing activities at Waitipu are well managed and do not conflict with other uses of the park, as we do currently in relation to other sites.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 Aotearoa has a proud history of rock and mountain climbing and continues to celebrate the exploits of our most famous climber, Sir Edmund Hillary.
- 3.2 Another famous climber, Sir Graeme Dingle KNZM, MBE, is the official Patron of ACAT. Sir Graeme has dedicated his life to youth development and outdoor pursuits, founding Hillary Outdoors in 1973, which has made a lasting impact on thousands of young people through its philosophy, *"Youth Learning Through Adventure"*.
- 3.3 Sir Graeme and his wife Jo-anne Wilkinson, Lady Dingle, went on to create the Graeme Dingle Foundation, a leading child and youth development charity that empowers thousands of young people every year to succeed and overcome life's obstacles.
- 3.4 These values permeate ACAT today. We are a registered charitable trust that works to create more opportunities for Kiwis to experience the joy and adventure of climbing in Aotearoa's beautiful environment.
- 3.5 Today, the sport of rock climbing is rapidly growing in popularity in New Zealand and internationally and featured prominently in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games. Contrary to common perception, modern climbing is a relatively low-risk sport that is enjoyed by people of all ages and backgrounds. The advent of indoor climbing and improvements in safety have made climbing ever more accessible to a range of age groups and communities.
- 3.6 New Zealand has a thriving recreational climbing community that values getting out into nature and climbing cliffs across the country. Nowadays, most climbers start out in indoor climbing gyms (of which there are several across Auckland), which provide a safe learning environment in which to acquire skills and experience before venturing outdoors.
- 3.7 Despite rock climbing's increasing popularity, high quality outdoor crags are rare in New Zealand so providing for public access to these areas is crucial for the sport's future.

4. CLIMBING IN AUCKLAND

- 4.1 Auckland boasts four major commercial climbing gyms, including two new world-class facilities that have opened within the past three years: Boulder Co. and Northern Rocks. Boulder Co. and another gym, Vertical Adventures, are both based in West Auckland. While the climbers using these facilities are very active and enthusiastic members of the climbing community, unfortunately they have limited options to climb outdoors in the Auckland region and generally have to travel to the Waikato or further afield to find quality crags.
- 4.2 Auckland currently only has two active crags (both of which are on Council reserve land):
- (a) Ti Point (near Leigh); and
 - (b) Stonefields/Maungarei Springs (in Mount Wellington).
- 4.3 This is a very limited number of climbing areas, given the population density of Auckland and the increasing popularity of rock climbing in the region.
- 4.4 The addition of a further crag at Waitipu would ease pressure on the existing crags in the Auckland region and provide a useful geographic spread of climbing options, as there are currently no outdoor crags in West Auckland.

5. POTENTIAL FOR CLIMBING AT WAITIPU

- 5.1 If climbing is confirmed as a permitted activity at Waitipu, we believe that there is the potential for up to 80-100 routes to be developed. This is an incredibly exciting opportunity for the Auckland rock climbing community as it is rare for new crags to be opened.
- 5.2 ACAT has identified the four sites highlighted in the image below as potential areas for rock climbing at Waitipu:



5.3 Further images of the specific sites that have potential to be developed are as follows:

RED WALL





YELLOW WALL



GREEN WALL



BLUE WALL



- 5.4 We believe that Waitipu would prove popular with Auckland climbers and there is already a strong community of West Auckland climbers, as the site is only a 20-minute drive from Vertical Adventures (Glen Eden) and Boulder Co. (Westgate).
- 5.5 ACAT and our partner organisation, the New Zealand Alpine Club (“**NZAC**”), would be able to co-ordinate experienced volunteers from the climbing community to develop climbing areas at Waitipu to make them as safe as possible for members of the climbing community to visit and enjoy.
- 5.6 The experience at Maungarei Springs crag shows that new climbing areas can be developed safely and responsibly by the climbing community. Maungarei Springs is within a recreation

reserve in an old quarry site on the edge of Stonefields, a high-density inner-city suburb. Volunteers have spent thousands of dollars and countless hours working on the cliffs, including strategically placing fixed safety anchors in some locations. These anchors are low profile and are only accessible to climbers and proficient outdoors-people. The same approach could be taken to develop Waitipu as a high quality and safe climbing area.

6. BENEFITS TO AUCKLAND

- 6.1 The opening of an additional crag would provide huge benefits to Auckland-based climbers who, as discussed above, currently have limited options to climb outdoors. A crag at Waitipu would ease pressure on the existing Auckland crags and encourage those who currently climb indoors to venture outside.
- 6.2 The crag would also benefit other groups. For example, many groups use the cliffs and anchors at Maungarei Springs for ropes training, including recreationalists like cavers and canyoneers, and organisations including Fire and Emergency NZ and Land Search and Rescue.
- 6.3 Climbers will often travel in groups to visit crags for a weekend to achieve as much climbing as possible, which would provide a great boost to local accommodation providers, cafes, restaurants and retailers.
- 6.4 ACAT believes that the inclusion of rock climbing would complement the existing outdoor activities that are promoted across the Waitakere region, such as tramping, fishing, mountain biking and surfing, providing more options for active recreation.

7. ADDRESSING CONCERNS

- 7.1 Rock climbing is a safe and inclusive activity enjoyed by many, including young people and families. Modern safety equipment and techniques mean that serious accidents are very rare.
- 7.2 Due to its adventurous nature, climbing can sometimes be perceived as a high-risk activity. However, there is no evidence for this and data from ACC shows that climbing is less dangerous than other popular sports, such as rugby or mountain biking.
- 7.3 ACAT has previously worked through the legal position regarding rock climbing on reserve land with the Council. We have **attached** correspondence from the Council's legal team confirming that, as a landowner providing only recreational access to its reserves, the Council would not have responsibility for the risk associated with any rock climbing activities at Waitipu and that managing these risks would lie with the climbers themselves. This is based on official Guidance by WorkSafe NZ.

8. OUTCOMES SOUGHT

- 8.1 ACAT would like the Council to include rock climbing in the final Waitipu (Waitākere Quarry) Park Service Outcomes Plan and for the site to be developed in such a way that does not hinder safe and accessible climbing (e.g. cliff bases are kept clear of trees, bushes or other obstacles that could hinder the development of climbing routes).

- 8.2 No budget would be required to achieve this, only some communication between the Council and ACAT in regard to the plan for the site.
- 8.3 ACAT submits that these outcomes align with the key service opportunities set out in the Services Outcome Plan, namely:
- (a) improving opportunities within the park for active recreation;
 - (b) providing recreation experiences that complement the wider park network (as discussed in paragraph 6.4 above);
 - (c) improving biodiversity in the park through appropriate and supplementary native planting (the climbing community is able to help with planting and environmental work where necessary);
 - (d) improving the management of invasive weed species and pests in the park (the climbing community is able to help with weeding and clearing where necessary);
 - (e) providing opportunities for people to safely explore and discover the quarry; and
 - (f) avoiding or managing access/circulation route conflicts between active recreation, passive recreation and vehicles (climbing would take place on cliffs that are otherwise unused by the general public).

We look forward to the final Service Outcomes Plan and will happily provide further information or support that the Council may require to enable rock climbing at Waitipu.

Dated at AUCKLAND this 13th day of May 2022

AOTEAROA CLIMBING ACCESS TRUST



Edwin Sheppard
General Manager

Address for service of submitter:

Attn. Edwin Sheppard
6/6 Raycroft St
Waltham
Christchurch

ATTACHMENT

2/17/22, 4:59 PM

Mail - Edwin Sheppard - Outlook

RE: Rock climbing in reserves - request for written confirmation of Council position

Sophie Carruthers <sophie.carruthers@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz>

Wed 2/16/2022 2:25 PM

To: Edwin Sheppard <manager@acat.org.nz>

Cc: Alastair Caldwell

<alastair.caldwell@aucklandcouncil.govt.nz>

 1 attachments (77 KB)

5316WKS-17-Policy-clarification-recreational-access-HSWA.pdf;

Tēnā koe Edwin,

Thank you for your email.

As explained when we spoke last year (5 May 2021), the legal advice I provide to Auckland Council/Community Facilities (**Council**) is privileged and I am unable to share this with you. I can, however, provide you with some published guidance from WorkSafe NZ which you might find helpful (**attached**). If you have any concerns, I recommend you seek your own independent legal advice on these issues.

As the **attached** WorkSafe clarification makes plain, Council, as a landowner providing only recreational access to its reserves, does not have responsibility for the risks associated with the rock climbing activity, the responsibility for managing these risks lies with the activity provider and the rock climbers themselves. This will be different where Council is operating the activity itself or jointly with others. In addition, at times when Council workers or contractors are onsite carrying out work for the Council (for example, pest plant management) Council will owe a duty to ensure, so far as is reasonably practicable, the health and safety of its workers and others (see Section 36 HSWA). At these times, Council will communicate to any recreational climbers when this work will be occurring and alert climbers (and other users of the reserve) to any potential hazards. This will be done through the use of signage and/or verbal and email notification.

Please note that I've copied in Alastair Caldwell who is the new Facilities Manager for Ōrākei.

Ngā mihi | Kind regards

Sophie Carruthers | Senior Solicitor
Litigation & Dispute Resolution | Te tukanga ā-ture me te whakatau tohe
Ngā Ratonga Ture | Legal Services

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