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Battle For Ten Sleep

How a chipping and route-chopping war put a Wyoming climbing area on the radar of federal land managers, prompting new regulations. A look at how it all went so wrong.

By Ben Ramsey | November 12th, 2019

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BATTLE FOR TEN SLEEP

How a chipping and route-chopping war put a Wyoming climbing area on the radar of federal land managers, prompting new regulations. A look at how it all went so wrong.

BY BEN RAMSEY

A padlocked bolt on a manufactured route at Funky Town. Photo: Ben Rueck.

Ace Ashurst, 25, was raised in Las Vegas but has called Wyoming home for the past 13 years. He works in Casper and frequents Ten Sleep, where his father co-owns a cabin with Alex Green, the president of the Bighorn Climbers' Coalition, which oversees access to climbing in the canyon. The cabin sits just two doors down from a climbing campground called the Ten Sleep Rock Ranch, owned by Louie and Valarie Anderson, and abuts the Andersons' property across Ten Sleep Creek.

In 2018, Ashurst heard about new routes going up at an area formerly known as Afghanistan. He was familiar with the wall, newly bolted by Louie Anderson and dubbed Funky Town. Ashurst and some friends had walked the base a few months before Anderson arrived, looking for potential routes. But the faces they found were sparsely featured. He said most of the first 20 feet of the wall was nothing but half-pad crimps.

What he'd also heard was that his sometime neighbor had installed 20-odd routes in the area, some reliant on suspicious holds.

Ashurst said he took the rumors of manufacturing with a grain of salt, figuring that Anderson, being a Californian, was bound to draw criticism from Wyoming climbers no matter what he did.

That summer he saw the wall.

"As soon as we walked up, there were these super-obvious, monster-deep pockets right off the ground that were never there before," he said.

In his opinion, the thin starts he had seen the previous season would have gone at V8 or V10, but now appeared to be about V1.

Around the same time, J.B. Haab, a Colorado resident who has been climbing in Wyoming's Ten Sleep Canyon since 2001 and developing routes there since 2006, paid his old haunt a visit, only to have a similar experience.

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He had heard from friends about a handful of new routes going up at the Slavery Wall, a popular area in the upper canyon originally developed by Aaron Huey, Mike Snyder and Charlie Kardaleff between 1998 and 2009. (The wall is named after a Huey route, which itself is named after Nine Inch Nails' "Happiness in Slavery.")



Before the chipping and chopping incidents, Ten Sleep was known for its quantity of quality—and all natural—routes on bullet limestone, such as that on *Galactic Emperor* (5.14a) on the Sector d'or et Bleu, as demonstrated by visiting climber Ben Rueck. Photo: Bryan Miller.

It seemed improbable to Haab that there were new moderates going in where dedicated developers had searched before. But there they were: two 5.10c's, a .10d and an .11c, opened the season before by a canyon newcomer, Louie Anderson.

Haab climbed the routes, and said each one had been glazed with Sika, an epoxy sometimes used to reinforce loose holds.

But what he saw was different.

"It wasn't about holding something together," Haab said in an interview this past July. "It was just making the texture of what you were going to climb be Sika. It was really weird."

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While on the wall, he railed about a route down to his partner, feeling bad for being a buzzkill on a day out climbing. But right next to him, other climbers were having a ball on the new routes.

"I sort of got freaked out about the future in that moment right there," he said.

Haab realized most of the climbers in the canyon—more each year flocking from an ever-growing number of gyms nationwide—wouldn't realize the routes they were climbing were not the handiwork of time and the elements, but an artificial process.

This canyon is going to be chiseled into oblivion, he thought, and there will be routes every five feet the entire way.

The Canyon

Ten Sleep, Wyoming, has long been a waypoint. It was once a layover for Native Americans, equidistant from trading centers on the Platte River near Casper and near what is now Yellowstone National Park: 10 sleeps of travel in either direction. Now, it's the main attraction for sport climbers on U.S. Route 16.

Approach from the west, and you cross the parched depression of the Bighorn Basin, and rise with the plains over fields fed by slowly turning irrigators until you reach the town and, seven miles beyond it, the canyon.

From the east you practically fall into it, riding down the Bighorn Mountains on a wave of geologic history—from three-billion-year-old granite gneiss to Mississippian limestone—and emerge alongside cascading rows of blue-gray cliffs honed by runoff when the last ice age loosened its grip some 10,000 years ago.



Jared Leader on *Silly Rabbit* (5.11b) on the Superratic Pillar. Photo: Bryan Miller.

The town, bracketed at its borders by the Ten Sleep Brewing Company to the west and a church to the east, has a main drag about six blocks long—small enough that the local high school competes in six-man football. On any summer day, the equivalent of Ten Sleep's entire population of 260 might be roping up on the canyon walls.

The canyon itself is shaped roughly like a giant torch, with the flame at the northeast side, blazing to the north. The rows of walls allow for climbing along some 12 miles of U.S. Route 16—from the bottom of the torch's handle through where the flames split and fray—and farther if you want to hike.

A small group of climbers started bolting the lower canyon in the late 1980s. Since then, others have added routes steadily, and some estimates put the total number of sport routes in the canyon at 1,300. Ashurst's and Haab's experiences, and others like them, sparked a debate about how some of those routes are created, with Anderson at its center.

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A Good Evening

Louie Anderson grew up climbing in Southern California, first roping up at age 8. He went on to open hundreds of routes around California and internationally (he says he has close to 3,000 FAs, starting in the 1980s) and helped bring the sport indoors by starting his own climbing gym, called Factory Bouldering, in Orange, California. He also consulted on construction for other gyms, and owns Legacy Ascension climbing holds.

By 2016, Anderson, nearing 50 (he is now 52), was ready to label himself semi-retired when he and his wife, Valarie, stopped by Ten Sleep Canyon during a climbing trip. They had visited the area before when it was still a nascent climbing backwater, but it had grown rapidly since then.

The couple was smitten. They decided to sell their house, and, upon further visits to the area that year, found a large tract of creekfront property for sale on an old apple orchard at the base of the canyon.

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They purchased the property that fall, and the next year built the Ten Sleep Rock Ranch.

With low rates for camping spots—\$5 a night—plus water, bathrooms, WiFi, waste disposal and recycling, a communal fridge, and picnic tables, it became a hub for climbers.

Things seemed to be going smoothly for the Andersons. Louie quickly became known in the area as a prolific route developer and a friendly, charismatic ambassador for sport climbing, putting up a scorching average of 50 routes a season.

In September, 2017, Valarie joined the board of the Bighorn Climbers' Coalition and proved to be one of its most industrious members. She was to work extensively to organize the Ten Sleep Climbing Festival, one of the BCC's main fundraisers, held each year in early July. Louie was also busy working on a new guidebook.

But by the next summer, gossip started to circulate that certain routes Louie had established were emerging on empty walls.

A Spectrum

In late June of 2018, a group of Ten Sleep climbers organized by Ashurst met to discuss what was going on. Louie attended, as did other active route developers and Alex Green, president of the BCC, though the coalition was not formally associated with the meeting. Anderson said in an interview with me in July that he copped to the whole thing—admitted to manufacturing and promised to do his subsequent FAs on the straight and narrow. But Ashurst, among others, felt that the local developer Mike Snyder and Louie had in fact promulgated a different view during the meeting, promoting quality of climbing experience over sticking to strictures.

The debate is an old one, and the ethos of route creation runs along a continuum. In the latter 1980s, the early, experimental days of sport climbing, route developers sometimes chipped holds to make a route go, though most climbers never knew of it. At a base level, route development still frequently involves clearing off loose flakes or blocks, often with a hammer or crowbar. Then there's comfortizing—dulling the edges of sharp pockets so they don't cut fingers or cause too much pain. While those practices may be tacitly accepted, especially on limestone or dolomite, deepening a pocket is generally taboo and done in secrecy. Similarly, use of epoxy such as Sika to shore up holds is accepted by many climbers, but its use can turn to abuse; Sika can make holds bigger or smaller, changing a route's difficulty.

Some people posited that Funky Town could have held top-tier climbs. Jody Sanborn, who was BCC president until December 2018, said, "Everyone thought that wall was pristine for 5.15 climbers." The host of manufactured Funky Town routes, she said, potentially eliminated the prospect.

The first meeting ended, as Ashurst recalled, "with Louie and Mike Snyder saying they were going to do whatever they felt was necessary to make a route fun and climbable." Anderson maintains that he was contrite and willing to change, and that his statements were conflated with Snyder's. Ashurst and five other people from the meeting produced minutes that supported Ashurst's impression of Anderson's response: "He believed leaving routes for future generations was 'bullshit,'" read the minutes posted in February to Facebook, and "he believed 'every route should be five stars.'"

Green, the BCC president, saw the meeting differently, and declined to sign the minutes, feeling they were biased and misattributed quotes.

Snyder doesn't dispute what he said that day, but says Ashurst misunderstood his meaning and used his words out of context. He says he was trying to defend Louie, whom he considered a friend and an exceptionally experienced contributor to the sport. He says he also wanted Ashurst to hear his view that the nature of the rock in Ten Sleep often demands some alteration, including occasional chipping, to be feasible and enjoyable.

"The whole reason Ace is even in Ten Sleep is because the quality of the routes is so damn good," Snyder said. "If they weren't ... nobody would be climbing in Ten Sleep. The way we decided to develop that canyon is the reason it has become an international destination."

Snyder agrees that Funky Town crossed the line. "I understood that [Louie] was bending the rules a bit," he said. "But at the same time he was getting such an amazing quality out of what he was putting up."

"In retrospect, I should have approached him and said, 'Hey, look, I like what you're doing but this is going to backfire.' But ... I just sort of accepted it."

As area climbers looked further around the canyon, they found dozens of routes that they thought violated good style. Most were Anderson's, though climbers also scrutinized the work of past developers, and saw what they felt was evidence of prior manufacturing. Eventually, Ashurst estimated

that most of Anderson's 150 routes were heavily manufactured. They were mainly grouped in new crags strung along the old road, which runs under the southern side of the canyon. Some were interspersed among older, established walls.

Climbers in the community started looking into Anderson's online history. He had been called "Gluey Louie" on message boards before he left California, where his heavy-handed development, including gluing and, at least, aggressive comfortization, were noted in places like Frustration Creek and Riverside Quarry.

Riverside Quarry, however, is widely considered an exception to the norms of route development. The formation had already been compromised and fractured through blasting, so there was no natural aesthetic to be lost. It also contained massive amounts of loose and dangerous rock, and took hard labor to clean. Glue is accepted there. Though cobbled together using practices that wouldn't fly at other areas, Riverside Quarry is now a major sport-climbing venue in Southern California.

But Anderson's actions at Frustration Creek drew ire from other climbers. Some called him out for going too far on at least one route, where holds were cut "in a complete transformation of the natural wall," a poster wrote on RockClimbing.com in 2012.

"While I do appreciate all of the work that Louie has done for the climbing community, I think that he has spent too much time at the quarry and really needs to think about what he is doing when he develops other areas," wrote another.

Others defended Anderson, one saying that without him, there would be little established climbing in Southern California (the poster did not mention Joshua Tree or some other outlying areas). "If you don't like the areas they've spent countless hours (and dollars) working to develop, climb somewhere else," the person wrote.

From Anderson's perspective, his acts in both Frustration Creek and Ten Sleep were founded in precedent.

"[Manufacturing] is a long-standing practice in Wyoming," he said in an interview at his house in July. "There's no way I would have done what I did in Ten Sleep without having seen it done previously."

Anderson estimated that he had drilled a new pocket outright fewer than five times in the canyon, though he admitted to expanding small pockets to make them larger (still a considerable trespass in the eyes of many).

He also asserted that around 200 routes put up by others in the canyon have altered holds, but wouldn't name them. "I'm just not interested in throwing anyone else under the bus in all of this," he said.

Alex Green agrees about the history of route manufacturing, though only to a point.

Manufacturing and chipping had taken place over the years, he said, "but a crag like Funky Town is kind of the next step up in the industrialization of a rock-climbing area."

If Funky Town was the next step in Ten Sleep's "industrialization," The Octagon was the first.



From top down: A worked pocket. Enhancements such as this were largely ignored by the Ten Sleep 18, while blatantly manufactured holds, typically created by drilling a pocket where none existed, were filled in, such as you see in the middle photo. The lower photo is of a chopped bolt on one of the manufactured routes. "The chopping and filling in of holds varies in quality," says Ben Rueck, who climbed at Ten Sleep this summer. Photos: Ben Rueck.



Nate Matthews approaching the crux on Atheist Childhood (5.11a), an Aaron Huey route from 2004, at The Ark. Photo: Corey Zukie.

A Cave and a Precedent

The **Octagon** is a semi-secret crag just outside of the canyon. It was bolted mainly by Kevin Wilkinson as a training area for strong climbers and was not intended for general consumption. As such, he approached it with different ethical standards than in Ten Sleep proper, though a handful of his routes in Ten Sleep have since been called into question. For his part, he said that outside of the Octagon, he had dulled a few edges, but nothing out of line with area norms. The Octagon is made of Madison limestone, which is notoriously chossy. To make it climbable required liberal use of epoxy and a lot of cleaning.

"The general sentiment, when you're climbing at the Octagon, is if it doesn't have glue, chalk or shoe rubber on it, don't touch it, because it'll probably fall apart," Green said.

Green estimates there are 50 or 60 routes at the area, ranging from 5.11 to 5.14.

"It's a cool area to climb," he said. "But it puts a weird kind of capstone on this style of development that we ended up seeing migrate into the canyon over the last couple of years."

On August 5, 2018, a few weeks after the first meeting, the BCC released a statement in an effort to preclude any further manufacturing and to state its position that it "strongly opposes the intentional alteration or creation of new holds." It did not demand that Louie remove and restore any of his routes.

Anderson said he thought the matter was settled, "that everything was kind of dealt with and agreed on."

It was not.

Ashurst and others felt that stronger action should have been taken, that the BCC had been soft on the issue, and that Anderson and Snyder had blown off their concerns.

In the following months, Green said, the BCC tried to handle the matter quietly, as is recommended by the Access Fund, in hopes of avoiding attention that could influence land managers to close the canyon to bolting. But some started to lose faith in the organization.

The BCC met at the Rock Ranch a handful of times, including for two official board meetings—"Simply for convenience sake (and because Valarie makes awesome tortilla soup)," Green explained in an email to me. Critics saw the location as a conflict of interest. A rumor also went around suggesting that the BCC had received an anonymous donation of \$22,000 in hardware for rebolting, and some wondered if it was donated by Anderson. Green says the money came from a federal grant to complete a climbing-management plan.

"I don't know anything about any anonymous donations of bolting hardware," he wrote. "I sure wish we had an extra \$20K to throw at rebolting the canyon!"

The Open Letter

In mid-July 2018, Aaron Huey, first ascensionist and the author of nine editions of Ten Sleep Canyon guidebooks, had been contacted by Ashurst, asking if he had heard what was happening in the canyon, while giving no names. A few days later Anderson, too, contacted Huey, asking if he planned to put out another guidebook soon. Huey replied that he would put out another edition in two to five years, and had no authority over who wrote Ten Sleep's guidebooks. Huey, who grew up in Worland, Wyoming, and now lives in Seattle, did have one request of Anderson: If he found whoever was manufacturing in the canyon, he do his best to stop it.

Huey soon learned Anderson was at the center of the issue, and intended to include his routes in his upcoming guide without a disclaimer explaining how they were made. Text from emails provided by Huey shows he then told Anderson he felt forced to produce his own guidebook to inform readers that certain routes were produced through methods the previous developers would not have used, and that he would not let someone like Anderson "be the holder of history" in Ten Sleep. Ashurst, among close to a dozen others, helped Huey research the next book.

In February, 2019, Huey, Kardaleff and Haab co-authored an open letter addressing concerns about manufacturing, passing down unethical standards, and potential overbolting in the canyon, which they posted on a Facebook account called "Ten Sleep Canyon Aerospace Society."

"[O]ur growing community has experienced questionable ethics in the past, and we have all climbed on routes with a bolter's dirty secret of an enhanced hold or two," the letter read. "We decided to write this open letter to make it clear that it is not normal and not accepted and it will not be hidden anymore."

The letter called for manufactured routes to be removed from the canyon and guidebooks to prevent normalization.

Posted on Facebook, the letter received more than 450 signatures, the first 10 of which comprised climbing luminaries including Lynn Hill, Greg Child, Cedar Wright, Michael Kennedy, Mark Synnott, Jonathan Siegrist and Matt Segal. The list was also sprinkled with the names of Wyoming climbers.

The BCC, instead of supporting the call for route removal, continued to maintain that the local community should work toward a good-faith consensus on what should happen to the routes through further meetings. Others argued that the "local community" was too small to make such a decision.

Louie said that, upon the release of the open letter, he received threats for things he had stopped doing months before.

But he did himself no favors when, in spring of 2019, his new guidebook came out with a photo of Funky Town on the cover.

"That was the slap in the face for most people," said Jody Sanborn. "Your words mean nothing if these are your actions."

Huey, Haab and Kardaleff released a second open letter on Ten Sleep Canyon Aerospace Society's Facebook page: "It was not enough to just stop chipping and move on, the damage was too widespread, so we asked that the routes be removed from guidebooks and stripped from the walls to avoid the normalization of bad ethics," the letter read.

A few weeks later, Huey's own guide debuted.

The first three words inside are "History," "Stewardship" and "Ethics," printed in bold black letters.

Huey's guide omits Funky Town from the table of contents entirely. At the section where Funky Town would be is a disclaimer: "Manufactured routes, please avoid this area." The following two pages are a photo of the area overlaid with a red tint. The only text is Mountain Project comments condemning the routes.

"This crag is a travesty and should be erased. Shameful," one reads.

"Heavily manufactured. Didn't pull a single pocket on this wall that wasn't manufactured," says another.

Throughout the book are small chisel and glue emblems next to routes suspected as being manufactured. Fourteen of Louie's routes are marked as such, and most of the 10 that aren't accompanied by a chisel or glue symbol are listed in whole areas designated as possibly manufactured. A few chisels (one or two each) also appear alongside the routes of other developers, including Snyder, Matt Wendling, James Litz and the late Terry Twomey.

Snyder put out a Rakkup guide in 2016, with this proviso written on the site description after a paragraph about the prolific 2017 season: "Ten Sleep has been the site of some egregious route manufacturing recently and sporadically throughout the years. ... Routes developed on Wyoming Big Horn dolomite are expected to be comfortized as has been the practice around the state for decades, however holds may not be created from nothing and the use of Sika (glue) is frowned upon."

First Editions

Huey printed his first Ten Sleep guide in the 1990s: a xeroxed hand-drawn schematic of routes in the Mondo Beyondo. He and other Ten Sleep climbers ran small batches of guides that were heavily influenced by zine culture, but they swelled in pages as the number of routes in the canyon grew.

Other editions followed, and Huey made the 2016 Punk Rock version a fundraising tool for the BCC. Guidebook sales raised around \$18,000 over three years. All proceeds from the new version, called *Swallow the Lightning*, will go to the Access Fund.

For his book, Anderson had spent the past two seasons re-photographing the routes, re-counting the bolt numbers, and commissioning professional photographs of featured routes.

Anderson's guidebook also addresses manufacturing in a section called "Chipping and Gluing": "While both of these practices have been used to establish new routes at some of the areas in this guide, and at other area crags, neither has been accepted universally in Ten Sleep Canyon," it reads.

Both books are available at several stores in downtown Ten Sleep. I asked the woman behind the register at a store that sold both which was more popular. She said the Huey book sold two copies for every one of Anderson's. Huey's is also \$10 cheaper at \$35.

In the wake of social-media posts, including the open letters, the BCC was questioned throughout the winter of 2018 and the spring of 2019 about its handling of the situation.

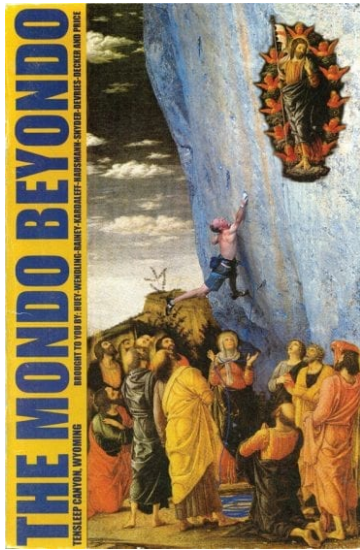
"(Comments) were coming from all over the place," Sanborn said. "You had professional climbers, local climbers, donors. It came from literally all over the world."

Commenters asked what the BCC was doing to prevent more manufacturing, and questioned the appropriateness of Valarie's position on the board.

Although Valarie resigned in April, 2019, under pressure over the situation, two different BCC members would publicly thank her at this year's festival in July for her hard work.

"She did a lot of the legwork early this year to recruit more sponsors than we've ever had before," Green wrote in an email to me.

In June, 2019, the BCC started hosting a series of round tables for developers and other climbers to discuss what was going on.



The Mondo Beyondo, an early Ten Sleep guidebook. The early guides were printed in batches of several hundred and updated frequently as the route counts grew. According to guidebook author Aaron Huey, from 2003 to 2011 there were five different bound guidebooks.

The BCC had already, for two seasons, been working with the Forest Service to create an overall climbing-management plan, which would address, among other things, the local bolting ethic. According to Green, the first of the climbers' round tables was meant to get the parties talking again, and the second was to start hashing out a prevailing code of ethics.

The meetings were contentious, and even the content of the minutes on the proceedings is debated, especially the assertion that the community decided against route removal. One former BCC member said they had been slanted in favor of the coalition. Multiple sources said the second meeting got heated. Green and Anderson say that they saw the meetings as progress, but for some they were not enough.

A Bump in the Night

On the nights of July 1 and 2, a group of 18 climbers from five states donned headlamps at dusk and started climbing the routes in Ten Sleep they believed were manufactured.

According to one of the climbers involved, who said he spoke anonymously because a Forest Service investigation is underway, the climbers were tired of inaction.

The climber, whom I will call Sam, described a meticulous assessment in which groups split up, went to chosen walls, then walked from route to route, climbing each and checking for tool marks and man-made pockets. Where a route could still be finished without a manufactured pocket, they filled the offending hold with a mixture of concrete and dirt or gravel.

When a climb required using multiple manufactured holds, or if one had been significantly downgraded from its potential difficulty through manufacturing, they removed it. After two nights of working from dusk until dawn, the group, which came to be known as the Ten Sleep 18, removed the holds and bolts from about 30 of what they considered to be the most egregious Anderson routes, and put red-painted padlocks on the first bolts of another 30. Anderson believes the total was 70 and only his routes were targeted, while others are unsure of the total count and say that it was not necessarily their intent to single out Anderson. The Ten Sleep 18 did not keep a comprehensive list of affected routes.

All of Funky Town was padlocked. Many of Anderson's routes along Valhalla and the Mondo Beyondo were fully removed. Snyder removed a padlock from one of his routes, a 5.11d from 2017 called *Too Many Holes*. He said he has bolted questionable routes, but *Too Many Holes* was all natural. Huey's book doesn't name it as manufactured, either. Its neighbor, *Prison Sex*, a 5.12d bolted by Wendling in 2000, does receive a chisel symbol in Huey's book but wasn't locked.



Lena Rueck on *Dances With Cows* (5.13a), Grasshopper Wall. The route was bolted by Mike Snyder in 2001 and FAed by Alli Rainey in 2002, and, like the majority of routes at Ten Sleep, is reportedly all natural. Photo: Bryan Miller.

"I think whoever put that lock on there fucked up and put it on the wrong route," said Snyder, who considers the route stripping and locking a transgression.

Sam said he recalled being taken aback by the extent of Anderson's manufacturing. He said that people who thought that the routes should not have been taken down underestimated the extent of the damage, and that the idea that the round tables could address the problem sufficiently was naive.

"This idea that, 'Oh, these conversations are going to fix it' ... doesn't take into consideration that in 30 years those routes are still going to be there but none of us are," he said. "And I don't want the canyon to go down that road where in 25 years the next person comes along and says, 'Look, there's 50 Louie routes that everyone loves climbing. He did it, why can't I do it?'"

I pointed out that the BCC and Forest Service expect to have a climbing management plan in place in two years, which would explicitly prohibit such actions.

Sam said outside regulations wouldn't stop climbers from thinking that manufacturing was an under-the-table standard.

"There's a very clear message now that it's not acceptable in Ten Sleep," Sam said.

He also recognized, as did all of the Ten Sleep 18, that route removal would not be accepted, which was why the group acted at night.

"They knew they were doing something wrong," said Anderson, who knows who some of the 18 are, but won't name them.

"Louie [as a resident] went up in the daytime when no one was around and did them," Sam said. "It sucked that we had to go and hide our faces and names when we feel we are ultimately on the right side of history."

A week later the Access Fund issued a statement condemning the actions of the route strippers and manufacturers, and called for unity for the sake of preserving access in Ten Sleep. The BCC also released a statement, opposing the actions of the route strippers.

Meet the Andersons

When I met the Andersons face to face, they were over the whole episode. Washakie County Sheriff's Office confirmed that Louie reported being shot at while climbing in the Ten Sleep Falls area in June 2018 (though it is unclear, given the timing, if the alleged shooting had anything to do with manufacturing). Since that summer he had been the topic of nearly constant conversation online, and he says every time he is named in media, he receives threats. He was hesitant to talk to me.

After being asked for proof of threats, he reluctantly showed me a text that included the line, "First the routes go, then you go."

He also claims to have been assaulted multiple times.

"One guy said, 'Are you Louie Anderson? Someone should have done this a long time ago,' and just charged me swinging," Louie said, leaning over his kitchen table. "One hit me two or three times in the head. And finally, I just hit him back. Then his buddy came up and starts hitting me across the back with a stick clip."

Valarie said the two do their best to ignore the comments online. For months, she had tried to walk a fine line during BCC proceedings, excusing herself from matters pertaining to her husband. She said it was painful to leave the BCC, since she considered volunteerism part of her identity. She said she and Louie relax by hosting groups of friends.

"That's a lot of how we get through things that people say to us, or post about us," she said. "Or people reach out to us and say, 'How are you guys doing?' because they've read something."

I asked Louie if he would have considered removing his own routes, and he said that he would have considered it before, but not after the Ten Sleep 18 incident.

"There are a couple of routes that were removed that had zero manufacturing, zero enhancements, zero glue, nothing," he said, though Sam disputes this.

Anderson also said the community had made it practically impossible to meet the demands for route removal, since, he said, no one specified which routes should be removed or how many it would take to end the conflict.

Huey did say in an email that he could not support Anderson's guidebook, "Unless you plan on stripping every chiseled route you put up."

The Gavel Comes Down

On July 20, the BCC held another round table, this time at a wooden pavilion at Vista Park in Ten Sleep. Ashurst, his father Joe, a couple of their friends, and the Andersons attended.

Traci Weaver, the district ranger, was also there, with James Pfeifer, the new climbing ranger for the district as of August 5.

Weaver was hired in February 2019. In a July interview, she said the Forest Service had been reluctant to intervene in the issue. According to its code, all bolting could be interpreted as a fineable action, but the local entity hadn't been enforcing it. The FS knew how popular the area was and didn't want to restrict climbing needlessly. They had a good relationship with the climbing community.

But she started receiving emails about the canyon and heard that her superiors in D.C. had received complaints about route manufacturing. As soon as the district was given more money, this past March, Weaver hired Pfeifer. She hopes to bring on an additional ranger for the summer of 2020.

At the meeting, Weaver passed out a statement from the Forest Service saying, effective immediately, it would enforce codes on alteration of the natural landscape. New routing could resume after the relevant parties produced a set of ethical guidelines or the Forest Service undertook a permitting program. (A day later the Forest Service confirmed that an ongoing anchor replacement initiative by the BCC could continue.) Weaver communicated that the Ten Sleep 18's actions had not helped the climbing community in the eyes of the Forest Service, and had delayed the management plan. The Forest Service is currently investigating route manufacturing and removal, and property damage. Weaver was unsure what the penalties would be, and said they would depend on how the violations were prosecuted.



New regulations posted throughout Ten Sleep prohibit bolting at Ten Sleep. Photo: Ben Rueck.

To her surprise, the groups in the pavilion reacted to the Forest Service's action with relief and, to a varying degree, support.

"Let's take advantage of this," Ashurst said of the mandate. "This is a good opportunity to catch up on bolt replacement."

"Sam," too, later said he was happy with the outcome, though he still believes the Ten Sleep 18 were justified.

"We had a chance to set an example [on] manufacturing and its place in sport climbing," he said. "This was bigger than just Ten Sleep."

He was referring to other areas that were dealing with influxes of climbers, many from recent gym backgrounds. The 2019 State of Climbing report stated that around 14 million Americans climbed in a gym in 2018—nearly double the number from 2014. Numbers vary, but about half are believed also to climb outside, where new climbers might have little sense of history and could perpetuate poor ethics.

Weeks later, the Access Fund would put out a statement recapping the events in Ten Sleep: "This incident reflected poorly on our community as a whole, and land managers around the country are taking notice."

Armando Menocal, founder of the Access Fund, which in the late 1990s helped successfully fight a Forest Service ban on bolts, believes it is "stupid" to risk climbing's relatively unregulated status by chipping holds or chopping routes. "These myopic hammer-wielding factions," he says, "have no idea how close we've come over the last three decades to a ban and removal of bolts and imposition of a regulated sport."

Menocal also believes that if climbing is regulated it could happen behind closed doors with no input from climbers. "Regulations will probably be an overreaction to a squabble fought out by arrogant factions," he says, "each laying claim to ownership of the rock. Both sides at Ten Sleep have issued a free pass to those who want to rein in and govern climbing."

A Last Chance

Behind the pavilion in Vista Park, the sun sank lower, turning the bluffs a deeper shade of red, as the Forest Service, the BCC, the Andersons and Ashurst started digging into what the canyon's code of ethics would look like.

It was their chance at regaining what they had lost, and they understood that their decisions would likely influence other management areas and other generations of climbers. They scrolled through the document in the dark pavilion, their faces illuminated as they gazed into the projector screen, choosing their words carefully.

Ben Ramsey is a writer and editor who has worked for The Park Record, Park City, Utah, and the Buffalo Bulletin, Pinedale Roundup and Sublette Examiner in Wyoming.

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