

## Why Fixed Anchors Are Needed

Recreational rock climbing, ranging from traditional mountaineering to sport climbing, is increasing on national forests. Recreational rock climbing has occurred on national forests for many years, inside and outside of designated wilderness. Rock climbers routinely use fixed anchors to assist them in their climb and to help them navigate dangerous terrain safely. The safest, most common reliable fixed anchor is an expansion bolt, a small steel bolt placed in a hole that has been drilled into the rock (figure 1). Frequently, a “hanger” is attached to an expansion bolt to accommodate a carabiner or sling (figure 2).

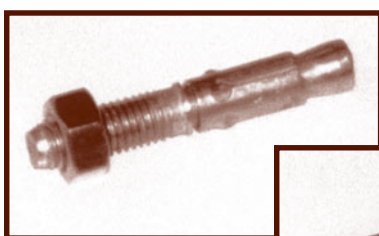


Figure 1—An expansion bolt is placed in a drilled hole into the rock.



Figure 2—An expansion bolt is used with a nut to attach a hanger.

Sport climbing evolved through technological advances in climbing equipment. This type of climbing is usually done on a single pitch, or face, and often relies on bolts. Sport climbing differs from traditional rock climbing where more strategic, and sometimes horizontal, movement is favored over a quick vertical climb and descent. Bolted routes increase the margin of safety for climbers.

Traditional rock climbing uses removable protection such as nuts, stoppers, or cam devices, placed into a crack of the rock formation (figure 3). Traditional rock-climbing protection devices require sound judgment for placements. These protection devices are rated for strength in pounds or metric units of force called kilonewtons. A kilonewton rating measures the amount of force that would break a piece of equipment during a fall. Even traditional climbing requires bolts to be placed at the top of a vertical crag for rappelling if there is no other way of descending.

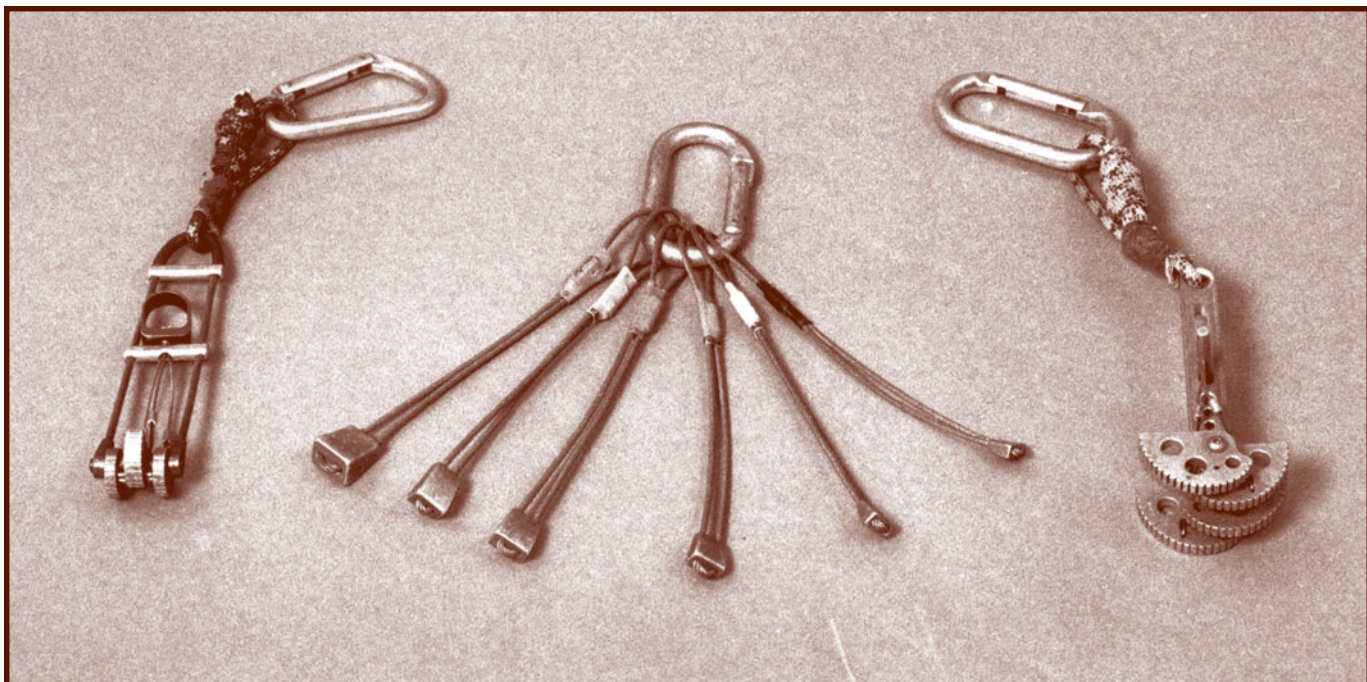


Figure 3—Removable protection includes cam devices and nuts.

## Events Leading Up to the Negotiated Rulemaking Process

Forest Service wilderness managers have questioned the use of fixed anchors in wilderness for over a decade.

In September 1996, the Sawtooth National Forest supervisor reviewed Sawtooth policy on the use of bolts and decided no additional fixed anchors would be permitted in the Sawtooth Wilderness. Existing anchors would be maintained and replaced as needed.

The Forest Service was the first land-management agency to prohibit the use of bolts as fixed anchors. The agency estimates about 40 of its wilderness areas (10 percent nationally) offer rock climbing.

Under the Wilderness Act of 1964, installations for other than administrative purposes are prohibited in designated wilderness areas (Public Law 88-577, Sec. 4 (c)). The controversy centers on whether bolts are installations or whether they are necessary safety precautions.

This 1996 decision was appealed by the Access Fund, a climbing advocacy group, and Wilderness Watch, a conservation group that focuses on the management of existing wilderness areas. The Access Fund felt the decision was too restrictive, while Wilderness Watch felt that the existing use of anchors should be discontinued based on the language of the Wilderness Act.

In 1998, Jim Lyons, Forest Service under secretary for national resources and environment, announced that the Forest Service would initiate negotiated rulemaking to clarify national policy about permanent fixed anchors for rock climbing in wilderness areas. Lyons' decision meant that metal bolts (whether camouflaged or not) would remain legal in national forest wilderness areas (except in the Sawtooth Wilderness) for up to 1 year pending a final policy.

Key issues to be considered for negotiation as set forth in the Federal Register, Oct. 29, 1999 (DOCID:fr29oc99-24), included:

- ➔ What type of rock climbing-related equipment should be allowed in wilderness areas and under what circumstances should certain types of equipment be allowed.

- ➔ What process should be used to decide whether the insertion or removal of a fixed anchor should take place and who should be party to the decision.

- ➔ Who should be responsible for the insertion and removal of fixed anchors.

- ➔ What is the impact on the Forest Service and the climbing industry if the agency assumes an active role in regulating use, insertion, and removal of fixed anchors.

In 2000, the Secretary of Agriculture established a negotiated rulemaking committee to develop recommendations for a proposed rule regarding the use, insertion, and removal of fixed anchors placed by recreational rock climbers in congressionally designated wilderness areas administered by the Forest Service. This committee, called the *Fixed Anchors in Wilderness Negotiated Rulemaking Advisory Committee*, includes 23 people representing a cross section of interests with a definable stake in the outcome of the proposed rule (Federal Register, Vol. 65, No. 111, June 8, 2000).

Four meetings were held in Denver, CO: June 27 to 28, July 19 to 20, August 30 to 31, and September 19 to 20, 2000.

A draft working proposal may take 12 months to complete.

Reports and ideas from the committee that could be introduced into the draft working proposal are:

- ➔ Bolt-intensive climbing is incompatible with wilderness.
- ➔ Leave-no-trace or clean-climbing ethics should be integrated into a rule.
- ➔ After a climbing management plan is in place, the placement of a small number of bolts will be allowed to connect terrain.
- ➔ A rule can be written with two different interpretations of the Wilderness Act. Fixed anchors could be considered installations, but still be allowed in the wilderness.

At this time (March 2001), the negotiated rulemaking process has not been completed.