

# Relayer

**Your Friends Of Pinnacles Newsletter**

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### • FOP Editorial • Climbers That Care

After clipping into a relatively harmless looking bolt, I look up to scope out the next section of climbing. Not too bad at first glance—I see 25 feet of 5.6 Pinnacles rock that, after careful climbing, will bring me to the next clip. However, when I arrive at the next bolt, I reassess my position. It soon becomes apparent that some nerve-calming medicine is in order; the so-called bolt is a Star nail-drive whose nail I wiggle out with my fingers...

Has this ever happened to you? If you've climbed some of the older routes at Pinnacles, chances are that you have some similar stories to tell around a six-pack of beer. As well, if you've climbed enough of these hair-raisers, you might find yourself wanting to do something about the unnecessary runouts you encounter.

But, you may ask, what's the story on fixing bolts on existing routes? What kind of gear do you need and what are the issues that you should be aware of? To start, if you plan to "fix" an existing route, you'd better be sure you know what you're doing. There's a lot of us climbers out there, and if you botch it up, you may need something a bit stronger than nerve-calming medicine to fix your woes. The climbing community doesn't take the rebolting issue lightly. And, if you've been following the latest developments, you'll notice that the climbing community has recently gained some important new members. Most notably, I want to point out many park officials and land managers have now joined the ranks of the climbing community. So aside from pleasing yourself by fixing an old route, you must also make sure to please the others in our extended family: fellow climbers, park officials, and land managers alike.

This article is not meant to scare off would-be Good Sams from fixing a death route here or there. In fact, this article is to encourage this community service. However, to make sure your efforts are viewed as service, be sure you know your stuff before you go out and bolt your way into an ethical debate.

To begin, you must understand the difference between rebolting and retro-bolting. While these two actions may seem to be closely connected, their underlying makeup are worlds apart. "Rebolting" is the act of replacing old bolts on existing climbs. New protection points are not added nor are they moved. New bolt technology has greatly improved the trustworthiness of bolts. Because of this, rebolting is generally considered an accepted practice by the climbing community.

### • FOP Update • What Is The Park Service Proposing?

#### What Came Of The Meetings?

• Brooks White

The Park Service, led by Chief Ranger Bill Lester, is in the process of developing a Wilderness/Climbing plan for Pinnacles National Monument. This plan, based on the "Limits of Acceptable Change" criteria put together by the National Forest Service, will be the definitive guideline for climbing, and other activities, in the Park for years to come. Their goal is to have the plan in place by the end of June.

So, what does that mean to us, the climbing community? Just EVERYTHING! This plan will, most likely, include recommendations concerning everything from trash handling to bolting regulations, safety concerns to route maintenance. This is the biggie. If we don't seize this opportunity to help shape the Wilderness/Climbing plan, it will be a long time before we get another chance.

The great news is that Bill Lester and the Park Service know and respect the climbing community. Many of the rangers are climbers themselves and Pinnacles National Monument is one of a handful of Parks that actually have a full-time climbing ranger. We (the climbing community) have a perfect forum in which to be heard. We can lend our assistance to the development process and shape the future of climbing for the Monument.

**The more you know, the better.** For more details about the Wilderness/Climbing plan, see the "Gory Details" article in this newsletter. You can also contact the Park Service or Friends of Pinnacles for more information. Write, call or FAX.

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## **Bolting, Rebolting and Retro-bolting (cont.)**

“Retro-bolting,” on the other hand, makes a greater impact on a climb because it entails adding bolt-protection points to an existing climb. Additionally, moving the placement of bolts is classified as retro-bolting. Think carefully before you retro-bolt because you’re treading on thin ice as soon as you begin to change the makeup of an existing climb. The climbing community does not generally approve of this tactic.

In the scenario beginning this article, there’s no doubt that the Star nail-drive bolt needs to be replaced. With the proper tools, one could remove the old bolt and put a new one in its place. Such a service is viewed as a plus by the entire climbing community; the first ascent party is not likely to complain about the bolt replacement, and the park rangers and land managers alike are happy to see an existing route made safer.

However, if someone didn’t take the time to remove the old bolt and just pounded a new bolt in right next to the old one, they’ve effectively desecrated on the route and significantly impacted the rock unnecessarily. When replacing old bolts, every effort must be made to keep the aesthetics of the route intact. And this means keeping the number of bolts on the route consistent with the number placed by the first ascent team.

Returning to our Pinnacles adventure, suppose my friend hates runouts and insists on protecting the 25' runout with a bolt every six feet. Don’t laugh yet, as I’ve seen some routes that have had this very thing happen to them. In recent years, retro-bolting has taken on new dimensions. I’ve even heard one person claim it will be the next big issue to face the climbing community.

Retro-bolting raises some tough issues. Many new members of the climbing community believe that climbing should be a risk-free sport. Their train of thought may go something like this: “Why should I risk life or limb when the technology exists to make this death route safe?” The argument continues as some people feel that everyone should have equal access to all routes: “Why should I put myself at risk just because ten years ago, some hot-shot climber built runouts into this great line?” Yet another popular track concerning retro-bolting goes something like this: “Why should climbers have to think about what they need to take on a climb? I’ve got a rack of 25 quick-draws—why should I need to buy crack pro too?” With this thought, they break out the electric drill and proceed to place a bolt ladder next to an A1 crack.

For sure, all these arguments for retro-bolting have counter-arguments. And although I don’t want address all the concerns here, I do want to say that climbing is a dangerous sport. If you can’t stand the heat, get out of the kitchen and let someone else do the cooking. But more important than my opinions about bolting and retro-bolting are the concerns of the park rangers and the land managers. Anger them, and you might not even need your bolting gear anymore. In fact, you might not even need your rope or quick draws, because they have the ability to decide that bolts are not an acceptable use of the wilderness (this has happened before). In fact, this is how Friends of Pinnacles got its start. Climbing at the Pinnacles was being threatened by an individual who took it upon himself to change the generally accepted approach to climbing at the Pinnacles (no pun intended). His actions alone endangered our ability to climb at the Pinnacles.

So, when you break out your bolt kit, keep these ideas in mind. Before bolting, ensure that the time you spend upgrading a route is actually seen as a positive gesture by the others who are impacted by your actions. Lastly, I urge you to be informed about the mechanics involved with rebolting routes. Read Todd Vogel’s article on rebolting: “BOLTS: bomber or time bombs” (Rock & Ice #62, July/August 1994). This excellent article explains the gear you’ll need to replace bolts and the problems you’re likely to encounter when you undertake the roll of a Climbing Good Sam.

• Kelly Rich

## **• Telegram for Mongo •**

• Brucestopher

### **Letters to Relayer**

Friends Of Pinnacles - Letters  
208 Woods Street  
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Dear FOP,

There seem to be several new closures at the park. Is this part of the Wilderness Plan? Should we be worried? Do these closures REALLY help the erosion?

*Just Wanna Climb*

## **• What's New(s) •**

### **Access - Climbing Guidebook**

New guidebook is out

## **• Upcoming Events •**

Party?

## **• FOP Update •**

### **The Pinnacles Wilderness Plan**

Whatever

## **• Final Notes •**

Changes in personnel? Andy and Wendy gone.

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