

# Rock Creek Outfitters, Chaco Help Save Atlanta Bouldering Site

Throughout the Chattanooga area, special-interest sports groups are quietly combating the big yellow taxis and preserving land destined for development. One well-celebrated event was the recent mortgage payoff for a site in Metro Atlanta, called Boat Rock. This area in south Fulton County was assuredly slated for development as any 7.8-acre tract in the Atlanta metro area would be nowadays.

In 2001, the Southeastern Climbers Coalition rang the bell for all local climbers to purchase Boat Rock for the non-negotiable price of \$100,000. A national climbers organization, the Access Fund, provided a large grant to get things going, but it was local efforts that helped close out the mortgage at the end of 2006. **Dawson Wheeler**, president of Rock Creek Outfitters, teamed up with the regional Chaco (the well-known footwear company) representative and North Chattanooga **Chad Wykle** to raise funds by making a special-edition Chaco sandal. "We just saw it as a gold nugget for climbing inside of Atlanta and wanted to be a part of its preservation" says Dawson. With each pair sold through Rock Creek's Web site, a \$20

donation went into a Boat Rock Fund. The program netted an \$8,000 donation to the cause.

In addition, Chad headed up a climbing competition, known as the Triple Crown, a Southeastern bouldering competition that takes place in successive stages through the Southeast. Its final stage takes place in Chattanooga, with the competition held at Little Rock City, and a public demonstration closes out the event at the Chattanooga Market in the late fall each year. Little Rock City is a bouldering area near the Montlake Golf Club. The Southeastern Climbers Coalition has special access to the private property via a downloaded waiver that is signed and delivered to the club's pro shop. Special parking spots are reserved for climbers, along with some reciprocal responsibilities by climbers not to litter, wear shirts at all times outside the wooded area, to carpool, and to use a parking pass. In both cases, grass-roots efforts and responsible negotiations have allowed these areas to remain open to climbers. The Boat Rock site in Atlanta is now a public park for climbing and hiking. The SECC also has made the site available for school groups to study the local flora and

fauna—items now scarce amongst the urban sprawl affecting Atlanta.

Indeed, climbers and boulderers have the spotlight for the moment, but a careful inspection of other area sports interest groups will reveal a common thread—its not just about play anymore. Chattanooga SORBA (Southern Off-Road Bicycle Association) has numerous local projects, including building a 13-plus-mile loop around the TVA Raccoon Mountain Pumped Storage Facility, a six-mile loop at Chester Frost State Park, quarterly work on the Lula Lake Land Trust Cloudland Connector Trail, and a nod to develop mountain-biking trails at the Chattanooga VAAT recreation site. The Chattanooga Hiking Club has played an instrumental role in the extension of the Cumberland Trail system through the Signal Mountain and nearby Cumberland Plateau sections. The Southeastern Cave Conservancy teams up annually with local cave grottos or clubs to clean up and map numerous local caves. You may never know it, because, well—you get the point. The Chattanooga Bike Club has undertaken Suck Creek Mountain Road in the adopt-a-highway program. Scheduled clean-up

days will take place throughout the year. And, back to the climbers—numerous workdays are scheduled each year in our own back yards, with clean-ups, and trail construction performed at Sunset Park, Signal Point, and an area called Leda on Mobry Mountain, and at many other sites.

Volunteerism at the grass-roots level also is being formalized via **Sarah Quattrochi**, who has been hired as volunteer coordinator for Lookout Mountain Land Trust, Reflection Riding Arboretum & Botanical Garden and Tennessee River Gorge Trust in a joint venture that is being administered by the Center for Nonprofits. The Benwood, Maclellan, Tucker and Community Foundations have designated \$125,000 over the course of three years to the program. Scheduled workdays at various locations allow volunteers to be a shared and valued resource.

Passion for the environment and recreation that take place in wild places is what makes the Chattanooga area the special home for so many of us. A special thanks goes out to every organization and business that contributes to the outdoors, the environment and a healthier Chattanooga.

*by Mike Pollock*