

## Frequently Asked Questions About the Via Ferrata at Sinks Canyon SP

- What is a via ferrata? Are there examples and visuals that you can show?
  - It is an assisted climbing route using cables and rungs that allows novices to scale the face of a cliff. The climbers are attached at three points with a body harness. A photo of the proposed route for the Sinks Via Ferrata is below, but the exact location and route are subject to change based on climbing and resource considerations.
  - **Please note that the thickness of the lines in the photo are not to scale.** The cables on the route itself will be largely invisible to the naked eye from the highway, since they are less than an inch thick and will match the rock color.



- Why is this project being prioritized amongst others in the Sinks Canyon Master Plan?
  - This project will have the highest return on investment in terms of economic development and will have less of an impact on aesthetics and wildlife than other projects proposed in the Master Plan. Very little additional infrastructure will be required for the via ferrata.
  - There is also a strong commitment from volunteers and community supporters to raise money for the project and contribute in-kind labor and expertise.
  - Via ferratas are increasingly popular across the country. As these are proposed in Wyoming, it makes the most sense to develop a route where climbing and

recreation are already concentrated rather than establishing a route in a place that will require significant infrastructure improvements.

- Where did this idea come from? Whose idea was it?
  - The Via Ferrata concept was first raised during the Sinks Canyon Master Plan process in 2019. Several local climbers and business owners pitched the idea, which proved popular among the planning group and in public comments from the local community.
  - Once the Master Plan was finalized and approved, the Wind River Outdoor Recreation Collaborative, a group of local recreation stakeholders, land managers, and elected officials, adopted it as a project and established a subcommittee to develop a proposal for State Parks and Wyoming Game and Fish to consider.
  - Once the Via Ferrata was approved by both agencies, the WRORC subcommittee worked with State Parks staff to develop a more specific plan for its development.
  
- Have there been and will there be future opportunities for public input?
  - There were three opportunities for public input during the master planning process; two were in person prior to COVID-19 and one was on a video call in the summer of 2020. Additionally, an online portal for comments was available throughout most of the planning process. These opportunities were publicized through print media, radio, social media, and online notices.
  - We received 23 written comments directly concerning the via ferrata, 22 of which were strongly in favor of the via ferrata and one was asking for more information. These were not simply yes or no responses, but were sentences and paragraphs.
  - There will be a public open-house meeting in August 2021 regarding the Sinks Canyon Master Plan process, which included the via ferrata proposal.
  
- What is the timeline on the development of the project?
  - Final clearances will likely be in place by late summer 2021. Installation may commence shortly thereafter, or more likely in the spring of 2022.
  
- Where (specifically) will the proposed route be located in the canyon?
  - Please see the photo referenced above for more detail. The proposed location is south of the Rise on the north facing slope. The local BLM recreation manager requested that no part of the route include lands managed by that agency; the proposed route is entirely located within the state park.
  - This area was selected by local climbers due to its shady nature in the summer and the cliff features that are best suited for a via ferrata, including regular linear ledges. It is the only place on the south side of the canyon suitable for climbing that is located entirely within the boundaries of the park.

- Have other locations been evaluated, particularly on the sunny side of the canyon that would alleviate wildlife concerns or extend the route's operability into the shoulder seasons?
  - The rock outcroppings on the sunny side of the canyon are much hotter in summer months than the cliffs on the shady side, which makes for very uncomfortable (and potentially unsafe) climbing conditions in the summer when most visitors who are likely to use the via ferrata will be in Lander.
  - We rejected suggestions for climbing near the Rise, as that area already sees substantial use.
  - The Sawmill area of the park is the most suitable due to its limited weather exposure, favorable climbing conditions, and lack of significant impact to the resource.
  - The sunny side of the Sawmill area does have a southwest facing buttress with a lot of uneven rock that would be hot during the day in the summer. This could be a location for a second via ferrata, if winter and shoulder season travel will be able to support it.
  - People will be unlikely to travel in the winter a long distance for the sole purpose of climbing the via ferrata at Sinks since it will be a relatively short climb compared to other via ferratas. For this reason, it makes the most sense to target visitors who will already be in Lander and use the Via Ferrata as an experience that will encourage them to stay another day, promoting economic development.
  
- Will the project route be visible from the road and other scenic locations in the canyon?
  - The climbing route will either be barely visible to the naked eye or completely invisible from the road. The cables and rungs will be less than one inch thick and will be painted to match the color of the cliff. If one walks closer to the cliff, the route will be more visible, of course. A before/after concept drawing is being developed which will demonstrate the minimal visual impact of the project.
  
- What times of the year do you expect the route to be open?
  - The route would be open from May through October, barring any temporary closures for raptors or other wildlife concerns as mandated by Wyoming Game and Fish.
  
- What additional infrastructure could be needed to support this project such as trails, parking, bridges, and bathrooms?
  - A single track trail (footpath only, not bikes) would be needed. There are already informal trails in the area but a designated path would need to be established.
  - A simple cable crossing over the Popo Agie may be installed as well. This crossing would not be anything imposing like the existing bridge at the campground, but would instead be more like a low-impact "Tyrolean" traverse.

- What are some things that the State Parks will do to protect natural and cultural resources in the vicinity of the Via Ferrata?
  - A foot scraper can be employed at the entrance to help combat seed spreading from invasive plants.
  - Trails will be built sustainably with best practices to minimize erosion and keep maintenance costs down.
  - We will work with Wyoming Game and Fish to monitor, address, and adaptively manage any emerging wildlife concerns.
  
- How many people does state parks estimate this project would attract daily/annually?
  - It is difficult to predict how many would participate. The limits of the canyon in terms of parking and number of people who could climb the route at once would ultimately determine the capacity. If an average of 25 people a day used it over the summer season, then the seasonal number could be as many as a few thousand.
  - Parking will be limited to a few spaces. Any RFP or contract for operations would have a stipulation about parking limits. Climbers may need to be transported to the park by a shuttle or van.
  
- Who is the target demographic that this project is trying to bring to Sinks Canyon?
  - Anyone who is interested in climbing, but never had the chance to do so. Families with children would be able to use the route, as well as school groups above a certain age, probably fourth grade and up.
  - A minimal level of physical fitness would be required, but the proposed via ferrata would have shorter/lower and longer/higher loops depending on interest and ability.
  - As mentioned above, any via ferrata experience in Sinks Canyon is not likely to attract many users in the winter or shoulder seasons. Visitors who are already planning to come to Lander, or to pass nearby, will be the most likely users. The experience will probably take three hours from start to finish, which is long enough to encourage existing visitors to stay the night in Lander, contributing to the economic development of the community.
  
- What would be the estimated economic impact to the Lander Community?
  - The estimated impact would conservatively be between \$250,000 and \$500,000 annually in direct spending based on estimated revenue at the concession, as well as estimated dollars spent on lodging, food, fuel, and incidentals in and around the Lander community. Overnight out-of-state visitors typically spend more than \$100 a day per person.
  
- How will this project be made safe from non-guided use and regular park users?
  - Signs will be posted with the hours of operation and warnings about trespassing or unauthorized use. The river crossing would also be locked. The beginning of

the climbing route would have a ladder that could be covered and secured or removed when not in use.

- A state parks law enforcement ranger lives on site and the via ferrata is visible from the front of his residence with binoculars.
  
- How might the presence of peregrine falcons impact the viability of the project in the future?
  - Temporary mandatory closures would be instituted should nesting raptors be observed in the area, per best practices as interpreted by WyomingGame and Fish.
  - As far as we know, there has never been a mandatory climbing closure in the state park, but there will be for the Via Ferrata if needed.
  - Wyoming Game and Fish have stated that this project will impose no significant impact on wildlife, including peregrine falcons.
  
- What is the long-term vision for this project and are other routes being suggested for future development?
  - A second route could be possible where suggested on the sunny side of the Sawmill area should the need or interest arise for winter shoulder season use, but no other via ferratas are under consideration.
  - A future parking area and additional restroom has been considered as well, should the need arise, and would be developed in previously disturbed areas to the extent possible.

The Sinks Canyon State Park Master Plan (2020) is available on the Wyoming State Parks, Historic Sites, and Trails [website](#).