

*ACCESS POINTS*

Aaron Dye

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APPROVED:

Melinda Levin, Committee Chair

Tania Khalaf, Committee Member

Steven Wolverton, Committee Member

Harry Benshoff, Chair of the Department of  
Media Arts

James Meernik, Interim Dean of the College of  
Liberal Arts and Social Sciences

Victor Prybutok, Dean of the Toulouse Graduate  
School

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*Access Points* explores the different relationships that humans have to land, focusing on the various ways that the area known as the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is used, appreciated, and preserved by disparate groups. The natural beauty of this Wildlife Refuge and its striking appearance amidst encircling plains makes it a popular destination for many groups of people, including the local rock-climbing community and generations of indigenous peoples whose connection with this land is as deep as it is longstanding. While climbing organizations have long had to negotiate access and rules regarding climbing within the park, members of the Kiowa community negotiate a much different relationship to a natural area that is now managed by the United States government. These disparate voices, identities, and ways of thinking about land all impact the modern-day Wildlife Refuge in terms of its appearance, individuals' access to the land, and the conservation efforts happening there.

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Aaron Dye

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## CHAPTER 1

### PROSPECTUS

Title: *Finding Refuge*  
Genre: Climbing/Environmental Conservation  
Mode: Poetic, Observational Documentary  
Length: Approximately 30 minutes  
Medium: 2K Digital Film  
Director: Aaron Dye

#### 1.1 Preproduction Research

##### 1.1.1 Introduction and Description

*Finding Refuge* will explore the different relationships that humans have to land, focusing on the various ways that the area known as the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge is used, appreciated, and preserved by disparate groups. The natural beauty of this Wildlife Refuge and its striking appearance amidst encircling plains makes it a popular destination for many groups of people as well as a scenic location for nature filming. The Refuge was first established in 1901 and is one of the oldest federal wildlife refuges in the country. Located in Southwestern Oklahoma, in Comanche County, the area spans 59,020 acres and is known for its granite rock formations and natural prairies.<sup>1</sup> A variety of groups and peoples have their own personal interests in this land, which may overlap or diverge depending on each group's relationship and history with this place. The US Fish and Wildlife Service manages the park and has successfully reintroduced beautiful fauna to the area, notably river otters, bison, elk, and wild turkeys.<sup>2 3</sup> Rock climbing organizations have long had to negotiate access and rules regarding climbing within the park and climbers use the features of the land to practice their sport. The ancestors of

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<sup>1</sup> About the Refuge.

<sup>2</sup> Lillie-Beth Brinkman.

<sup>3</sup> Harry B. Candell.



Native American peoples Indigenous to this area once lived off this land, but now they negotiate a much different relationship to a natural area which is now managed by the United States government. These disparate voices, identities, and ways of thinking about land all impact the modern-day Wildlife Refuge in terms of its appearance, individuals' access to the land, and the conservation efforts happening there.

Various testimonies commenting on the geologic history of the land, the conservation efforts within the park, the impact of rock climbing on the famous granite rocks, and the complicated issues of land rights facing Native Americans who consider this place sacred, will be structurally framed by reoccurring imagery of rock climbing in the park. Rock climbing will be used as a visual device to communicate individual appreciation for land, nature, and an obligation towards stewardship as it pronounces a tactile, immediate, and reverent relationship to literal objects of land. Relying solely on the versatility of one's own body, a climber must negotiate features of land with the utmost respect so as to avoid serious injury and potentially death. The confluence of fingertips and toes to small nooks in granite rock are the means and medium of this gravity-defying negotiation. The image of the lone climber further pronounces this relationship, as the expanse of rock, shrub, and prairie becomes the extent of his or her world.

Highly composed images highlighting the beauty of Southwestern Oklahoman nature will be accompanied by a deep and diverse sound palette including the whooshing of wind over the prairie, the calls of birds such as mountain plovers, bobwhite quail, and woodpeckers, the bellows of bison, and a score of soft acoustic guitar. The sum of these elements will serve as an attempt to balance, uplift, investigate, and challenge the different relationships to this beautiful

place. Slowness, reflection, empathy, and the communication of a universal dependence on land will be at the center of this film.

Ryan Sheldon is a well-known member of the Wichita Mountains bouldering community and author of the book, *Refuge Bouldering: A Bouldering Guidebook to the Wichita Mountains*. In the film, he climbs a series of striking boulder problems with no ropes and no gear other than his climbing shoes, a chalk bag, and a crash pad. As he performs these ritualistic feats, oral testimonies describing the ecology, geology, and Indigenous relationship to the park are shared with the audience. A local conservationist, geologist, and land rights activist offer their voices, providing natural and historic context to the land at the heart of the film. Each boulder on which Ryan climbs offers opportunities for meditative reflection on human's relationship with the land and our responsibilities to preserve it for generations to come.

#### 1.1.2 Treatment

Ryan precariously hangs on a boulder as he musters up the strength for a heaving, leaping move. The world around him is arid and rocky with a distinct southwestern look. Birds chirp and wind rolls over the earth around him. His muscles tighten and he makes the leaping motion. The screen cuts to black before we know of his success or failure.

TITLE: Finding Refuge

The landscape is enormous. Tall jagged cliffs rise out of the ground like monoliths. We hear Ryan's voice describing his introduction to climbing and his upbringing. He hikes down a trail with a bouldering crash-pad strapped to his back (think portable gym floor). Always via voice-over, we hear him comment on what climbing is like in the park, how the rock here differs from other rock in North America, and why this place is special to him.

Ryan arrives at the M.C. Escher Boulders, a small outcropping of tall boulders on a hill. He sets down his crash-pad and prepares to climb. In a long, unbroken take, he ascends his first boulder. Buffalo roam in the distance. A bird flies across the sky. The voice of Marion Hutchinson breaks onto the soundtrack. As Ryan continues to climb, Marion briefly describes the establishment of the park and its intent to protect wildlife. He describes a catalogue of notable animals that can be found in the park and as he does so, we see buffalo graze, otters poking their heads above a stream, and various birds perch atop thin branches and then flutter away. A group of longhorn gather near a remote stream. As Marion finishes up his account of the park's inhabitants, we see Ryan pull himself up another boulder. No ropes, no harness, just shoes and a crash-pad.

Ryan's hands grip rock in close-up. Shots of especially striking rock formations fill the screen. Molly Turko's voice accompanies the visuals as she describes the volcanic origins of these rocks and the tectonic changes that have shaped them over millennia. She describes the process of erosion and how the constant weathering of the rocks is what has created the boulder problems that so many love to climb today. Ryan continues to climb while Molly comments that granite can be fragile, break and crack easily, and that respect and care are needed to preserve these routes for future climbers.

Ryan takes a break below the "Super Mario" boulder. He eats a partly crushed sandwich and looks up at the particularly high project. The landscape is vast, open, and seemingly untouched. The land could pass for any age. Phil "Joe Fish" Dupoint's voice joins the landscape as he discusses the tribal history of the Kiowa Native Americans and their relationship to the Wichita Mountains. He discusses the centrality of Longhorn Mountain and the rituals that take place on the slopes of this lone mountain. Ownership of the large hill is split between five

different private citizens, one of whom has leased the land to a gravel mining company. Dupoint describes the destruction of the mountain that could take place if the mining company is allowed to mine the western side of the mountain. The conversation continues to include the ways that Kiowa conceptions of land differ and are at odds with contemporary Western ideals of ownership and property rights. The discussion turns towards ways that progress can be made both from a cultural and linguistic perspective (how do we talk about this history and land) and to a practical one as well (what issues currently face Indigenous people today, how is land a part of these issues?).

Ryan is halfway up another boulder. Struggling to make the next move. He appears against the arid, dramatic landscape once again; just him and rock. Via VoiceOver, he reflects more deeply on what the park has meant to him over his ten years climbing these boulders. He reflects on what makes the park special and how important it is to preserve the natural integrity of this space. The film ends on an extreme wide shot, in which Ryan is tiny, seemingly suspended upon the vertical face of a boulder.

### 1.1.3 Subject Matter Research, People, Locations

As one drives north from Wichita Falls, TX, the flat Oklahoman landscape slowly gives way to rolling hills and gigantic granite protrusions that cover the barren area. The Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge encompasses these mountains and operates with the explicit purpose of protecting wildlife native to the area. The Refuge was established as a National Forest in 1901 under the U.S. Forest Service, before being transferred to the purview of the early U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service in 1935.<sup>4</sup> Day hiking is popular here, as well as car camping and nature

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<sup>4</sup> Harry Candell, *A Brief Refuge History*.

watching. Climbing has long drawn people to the park, though permission to climb here has never been assumed. Today, people are allowed to climb in the park only due to years of negotiation and cooperation between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and local climbing organizations.<sup>5</sup>



**Figure 1: The Charon's Garden's area of the Refuge.**

The topics of ecology, geology, and Indigenous relationships to land will be explored in sections throughout the film. The visuals of the film will reflect each subject's topic of discussion as well as chart the progress Ryan makes on various boulder problems within the park. The project herein is to convey meaningful context for park patronage as it relates to the conservational mission of the Refuge and the significant history of this place. The tying together of adventure sports and conservationism is important as the relationship between climbers and Refuge officials has not always been without issues. Through the 1990s and again in 2009, climbers have had to actively negotiate with the Fish & Wildlife Service when the Refuge has periodically instituted new conservation plans. Though each of these negotiating periods successfully maintained the freedom for climbers to climb in the park, it has mainly been

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<sup>5</sup> WMCC, *Main*.

because of the dedicated advocacy of the Access Fund and the Wichita Mountains Climbers Coalition.<sup>6</sup>



**Figure 2: Features in the park can be incredibly striking.**

The cooperation of the nonprofit organization, the Wichita Mountains Climbers Coalition, will be extremely valuable here, as they have for decades worked with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to ensure that climbing in the park is environmentally sustainable.<sup>7</sup> The organization's website specifically lists a series of precautions that climbers should take in order to climb in a way that aligns with conservation goals.<sup>8</sup> Marion Hutchinson is one of the founding members of the organization and a current board member. He can speak at length about the flora and fauna of the park as well as meaningfully comment on the imperative to protect these creatures. He will also discuss the history of the park's formation and the continued efforts to protect wildlife within the park. Gary Lantz's 2013 nature writing memoir, *Morning Comes to Elk Mountain*, provides many of the seasonal reference points for what we can expect to film.

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<sup>6</sup> Access Fund, *Climbing Potentially at Risk*.

<sup>7</sup> WMCC, *Main*.

<sup>8</sup> WMCC, *What You Can Do*.

Buffalo, prairie dogs, elk, Texas brown snakes, cacti, rattlesnakes, baptisia, wild longhorn, switchgrass, standing cypress, black-eyed Susans, leadplants, and bobwhite quail are some of the plants and animals that we can expect to film in June.<sup>9</sup>



**Figure 3: Ryan Sheldon in the Charon's Gardens area of the Refuge.**

As Marion describes these creatures, the audience watches Ryan Sheldon climb a series of boulder problems within the park. Bouldering entails climbing short routes with no ropes or harness, only using climbing shoes and a crash-pad.<sup>10</sup> As these projects are often low to the ground and the falls are therefore less far, boulderers are often encouraged to seek out routes that require gymnastic flexible ability and intense bursts of strength. Ryan has been climbing these routes in the Refuge for over ten years and recently published his book, *Refuge Bouldering: A Bouldering Guidebook to the Wichita Mountains* in 2021 through Sharp End Publishing.<sup>11</sup> He states in the book that he had been planning and devising the book since 2014 and views this as his main contribution to the local climbing community. Ryan is a loan officer during the week and lives in Oklahoma City, about an hour and a half away from the Refuge. His trips to the

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<sup>9</sup> Gary Lantz, *Elk Mountain*, June.

<sup>10</sup> John Sherman, *Better Bouldering*, Chapter 1.

<sup>11</sup> Ryan Sheldon, *Refuge Bouldering*.

Refuge are therefore almost entirely scheduled as weekend trips, usually on Sunday morning. Ryan is soft-spoken and generally quiet. He climbs with a lot of intensity and focus, but often smiles and jokes with friends during these climbing trips.

The next section of the film details the geologic history of the park. The principal rocks found in the park are granite, rhyolite, and gabbro.<sup>12</sup> The low mountain range is the result of tectonic activity in the Pennsylvanian Period (323.2 - 298.9 million years ago) which pushed underground magma up onto the earth's surface where it cooled.<sup>13</sup> Molly Turko's testimony will dive deeper into these processes as the camera's gaze lingers over striking formations of rocks throughout the park. Molly is a professional geologist who is coworkers with Ryan's climbing partner, Mark Hagge. Though her day job deals mainly with the energy sector, she is an expert on the geologic history of the Wichita Mountains. She can describe the age and volcanic origins of the rocks seen in the film, as well as the millennia-long tectonic changes that have shaped the park as we see it today. Molly is also the co-author of the geologic section of Ryan's guidebook to the park.



**Figure 4: An example of a difficult boulder problem. Ryan tests out a “crimp” (a small hand hold which engages the tips of one’s fingers, bent at the knuckle).**

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<sup>12</sup> *Wichita Mountains*, [okhistory.org](http://okhistory.org).

<sup>13</sup> Kenneth Johnson, *Geologic History of Oklahoma*.





**Figure 5: Ryan works on “The Angry Inch” (the name of this route). Routes are often named by the person to first successfully complete them.**

The third section of the film will discuss the local Indigenous community’s relationship to this land. The Kiowa are among several tribes who have called this area home and their modern-day headquarters is located just north of the Refuge. Carnegie County is the contemporary area that overlaps what was once the Kiowa Reservation. Established to house the Kiowa population in 1867, it was dissolved in 1901 to open the land for white settlement.<sup>14</sup> Within this area though, several sacred sites to the Kiowa remain, though now under the control of white landowners. One of the most important sacred sites is Longhorn Mountain, which is used by the tribe to collect sacred cedar and as the location for ritualistic, multi-day fasts. In 2013, the landowners on the western side of the mountain leased their land to a gravel mining company with plans to excavate the western slopes.<sup>15</sup> The work of land activists has kept this destruction from coming to pass as of yet, though the land remains at risk.

To the Kiowa still living in this area today, the preservation of Longhorn Mountain is of extreme importance.<sup>16</sup> There are several tribal elders who have campaigned vigorously to

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<sup>14</sup> Kathy Weiser.

<sup>15</sup> Logan Layden, *Longhorn Mountain*.

<sup>16</sup> Curtis Kline, *Longhorn Mountain*.

prevent the Oklahoma Department of Mining from approving the mining permit.<sup>17</sup> Phil “Joe Fish” Dupoint and Amie Tah-Bone are among several community members deeply involved in the issue and who could both comment on this specific conflict, as well as expound upon land rights issues regarding the Kiowa community in a larger sense. Though the Longhorn Mountain controversy is very grounded and immediate, testimony describing why the mountain is so special to the Kiowa can lead to both discussions on the centrality of land in Kiowa mythology and the unique ways that the tribe views and understands land.

#### 1.1.4 Feasibility

There are several foreseeable difficulties of shooting this film, one of which is the need to coordinate routine transportation of equipment and crew from Denton, TX to the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge (3 hours each direction). Because the shoot requires travel, overnight stays near the Refuge will be coordinated with an AirBnB. All interview sessions will be single-day shoots and therefore do not require overnight stays in the area.

The potential for inclement weather with little cover is also a significant concern. Weather forecasts will have to be closely monitored as any precipitation could damage equipment. As a result of this unpredictability, all shooting will take place on days with clear forecasts and much of the shooting will take place on day hiking trails, rather than in the backwoods areas, so as to be nearer to cover.

There is also the potential for injuries among the subject(s) as rock climbing is an inherently dangerous sport. The imperative to defending this prospectus early, has been to give this production the flexibility required should an injury occur. If Ryan does sustain a long-term,

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<sup>17</sup> Logan Layden.

debilitating injury, a replacement climber will have to be found. I've established a good relationship with Ryan who has already introduced me to several other climbers in the community who may make interesting subjects as well. If he cannot continue to appear in the film, one of the other members of the community could likely step in.

The risk of contact with dangerous animals while filming in the park poses another challenge. Bison, longhorn, and rattlesnakes are the most aggressive and dangerous animals in the park. In order to maintain safety, the production will stay on trail as much as possible. If dangerous animals are met while filming, standard protocols of making lots of noise and giving animals a wide radius will be followed. A first-aid kit will be on hand at all times.

Much of the filming will take place over the Summer of 2021, however, average temperatures in Oklahoma can reach up to 97 degrees Fahrenheit.<sup>18</sup> Therefore, the climbing season generally occurs between October and April of any given year. Filming of nature footage and interviews may still take place during the summer, but footage of climbing must occur when the weather permits. This will largely occur in April 2021, before the weather becomes too hot, and resume in October for several more shooting dates.

Permission from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service to film commercial documentaries is *not* needed to film in the park. The park ranger in charge of commercial operations, Quinton Smith, has however, expressed considerable interest in this project and has offered to consult on the film to ensure that the film's conservation message is aligned with the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service's messaging regarding the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. This should not prove limiting to my film, as I view Quinton as a content expert in this regard, and I am grateful to

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<sup>18</sup> [weather-atlas.com](http://weather-atlas.com)

have his input. He genuinely seems excited about the documentary and his co-sign and input should prove valuable in other ways as well.

In his book, *Directing the Documentary*, Michael Rabiger stresses the importance of location scouting before production in order to troubleshoot problems.<sup>19</sup> Since January 2021, I have gone out to the Refuge with Ryan several times to practice filming him. We have been working on creating a traditional climbing video for him to help promote his new book. As I have gone out to film with him, I have learned that; direct heat and sunlight can make conditions untenable for climbing, temperatures below freezing can make conditions untenable for climbing, many boulder problems are located thirty to forty minutes down-trail from a parking lot which can make carrying equipment difficult, boulders at-or-beyond a climber's ability limit may never be successfully climbed on film or otherwise, and the nearest gas station to some parking lots in the Refuge can be thirty minutes away. These excursions have greatly informed me about filming in this environment and the potential obstacles inherent to filming this subject matter.

## 1.2 Goals of the Production

### 1.2.1 Persuasive and Ethical Aims

As adventure tourism continues to grow in the United States, so too does our impact on fragile preserved and natural spaces. Beyond clearly destructive climate change and industrial development, adventure tourism also poses risks to sacred lands as everyday human impacts, over-population, and irresponsible patrons can easily damage brittle habitats. Littering, building campfires in wilderness areas, creating unofficial shortcuts, improper disposal of human waste,

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<sup>19</sup> Michael Rabiger, *Directing the Documentary*.

chipping/chiseling at rock, fixing anchors, and applying a surplus of chalk to the rocks are all activities that damage this habitat and must be avoided. By educating potential Wildlife Refuge patrons about the specific histories and nature of the Wichita Mountains and clearly linking this information with the practice of rock climbing, this documentary hopes to imbue respect and reverence into viewers who may one day travel to this place and others like it. Films like *Treeline: The Secret Life of Trees* have successfully made this link in the past. Jordan Manley's 2019 film creates a visual dialogue between skiers and environmental scientists who describe the fragility of the forests through which cross-country skiers elegantly navigate on-screen.<sup>20</sup> *Finding Refuge* will similarly emphasize the mutual interest that disparate groups have in protecting the environment.

The documentary will also serve an artistic purpose, one which subverts common tropes of climbing documentaries in order to shift focus away from trial-and-error structures, conquering figures, or subordination of land. Popular climbing documentaries such as *Free Solo* (2018) and *Meru* (2016) often depict white, male protagonists who are framed as unapologetically single-minded risk-takers struggling against the rock in a test of his physical and mental abilities. The structure of these films is often characterized by a series of failed climbing attempts which ultimately lead to a successful domination of the mountain or rock.

*Finding Refuge*, however, will show very little of the trial-and-error component of climbing, and show almost exclusively successful ascents. This design is intended to place the spectator in a contemplative mode in which they do not question whether or not Ryan can conquer the boulder, but rather reflect on what Ryan's relationship to the boulder truly entails.

The suggestion herein, is that the climber's relationship to land is far more spiritual and

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<sup>20</sup> Jordan Manley, *Treeline*.

symbiotic, as opposed to one characterized by a conquering mindset. A conquering of land has historic implications related to the concept of Manifest Destiny, which describes the idea that the United States is ordained by God to rule over the expanse of North America, thereby expanding the domain of capitalism and democracy.<sup>21</sup> John Wilsey recounts that historically, this had been fueled by the white supremacist theory that the dispersion of slaves across the west would ultimately result in the expulsion of all blacks to Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as the idea that “Mexicans lacked the ability to govern California.”<sup>22</sup> The enacting of these racist ideas in the form of westward expansion has had notoriously destructive effects on Native American populations throughout the United States, most infamously exemplified in the forced migration of Cherokees from Georgia to Oklahoma in the late 1830s, now known as the ‘Trail of Tears’.<sup>23</sup> Although no amount of reparations can adequately compensate for the loss of lives and livelihoods experienced by Native Americans across the continent, contemporary practices can be informed by the proper respect, reverence, and empathy for those adversely affected by the United States’ historical obsession with expansion and dominance.

Therefore, a particular focus on contemporary Native American relationships with land will be of central focus to this section of the film. The interview with a local Indigenous land rights activist will seek to answer questions about how land is conceived and used, as well as the ways that local activists have worked and are still working to protect their land. Some history will be discussed in the form of contextual scaffolding, though much of the conversation will attempt to go beyond a linear way of thinking about the land. The angle of this interview is designed to honor the experience of the individual being interviewed without reducing them to

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<sup>21</sup> history.com, *Manifest Destiny*.

<sup>22</sup> John Wilsey, *Manifest Destiny and Christian Nationalism*.

<sup>23</sup> history.com, *The Trail of Tears*.

merely a citable historical resource. This approach is informed by the concept of *moral terrains*, which Steven Wolverton et al. describe as particular places that are socially constructed by disparate groups based on cultural values and heritage.<sup>24</sup> This concept also allows for the possibility that the interviewee's views may diverge from their community's consensus, acknowledging that, "one lives many moral terrains across many spaces, just as one is socially located across many identities."<sup>25</sup>

### 1.2.2 Intended Audience

The intended audience of this film includes individuals between the ages of 20 and 60 with interests in bouldering, rock climbing in general, nature, Oklahoma history, conservation, geology, ecology, and/or Native American history. This film may also appeal to those interested in meditative and experimental film as well as nature videography. The film will convey a distinct Southwestern aesthetic, with flora, fauna, and landscape indicating wildness of place. Those interested in the aesthetics and symbols of the Southwest will also find the film compelling.

### 1.2.3 Possible Distribution Outlets and Promotional Tactics

Local film festivals are of top priority as interest in the Wichitas and Kiowa history may be highest in proximity to the places depicted. Potential local festivals include:

1. Dead Center Film Festival - Oklahoma City, OK
2. Great Plains Film Festival - Lawton, OK
3. Tulsa American Film Festival - Tulsa, OK

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<sup>24</sup> Steven Wolverton, *Archaeology, Heritage, and Moral Terrains*.

<sup>25</sup> Steven Wolverton.

4. Thin Line Film Festival - Denton, TX
5. Texas Independent Film Festival - College Station, TX
6. Dallas DocuFest - Dallas, TX
7. Dallas International Film Festival - Dallas, TX
8. Dallas Independent Film Festival - Dallas, TX

Film festivals which privilege a theme of climbing and adventure sports are also a priority. These festivals include:

1. Gunks Climbing Film Festival - New Paltz, NY
2. Calgary Mountain Film Festival - Calgary, Canada
3. Vertical Life Film Festival - Studio City, CA

Film festivals which are centered around a theme of environmental conservation will also be interested in the goals of this film. These include:

1. Colorado Environmental Film Festival - Golden, CO
2. Eugene Environmental Film Fest - Eugene, OR
3. Boulder Film Festival - Vineyard Haven, MA
4. Big Sky Documentary Film Festival, MT
5. Jackson Hole Wildlife Film Festival, WY

Other international film festivals which may be interested in programming films that exemplify Southwestern United States sceneries and culture include:

1. Seoul Eco Film Festival, South Korea
2. The Sydney Film Festival, Australia
3. Environmental Film Festival, Australia
4. Greenmotions Film Festival, Germany



5. Festival International Nature Namur, Belgium
6. Berlin Indie Film Festival, Germany

### 1.3 Integration of Theory and Production

#### 1.3.1 Observational Mode

Brian Winston describes pre-WWII documentary as being observational, “...even if illustrating personal, poetic, or agitprop agendas... The characters in the film(s) were not to be ‘actors’ adopting other personas but ‘real’ people behaving ‘naturally’...”<sup>26</sup> My film will largely follow this formatting in regards to the construction of a suggested authentic diegesis of what is being shown. Ryan will not acknowledge or directly address the camera. Instead, he will be framed as a lone wanderer within an otherwise people-less landscape, focused solely on the task of climbing boulders. To accompany his actions, extensive nature photography will reflect the content of the speakers’ testimonies which play over the soundtrack. Visually however, the film will endeavor to communicate that Ryan is acting ‘naturally,’ as if the camera were not there.



**Figure 6: A discursive cut in *Stone Spirit* to a cultural artifact found in the vicinity of a climbing site in Switzerland.<sup>27</sup>**

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<sup>26</sup> Brian Winston, *Introduction*.

<sup>27</sup> Cameron Maier, *Stone Spirit*, 2020.

This mode has certainly been explored in climbing films to an extent already, as can be seen in Cameron Maier's climbing film, *Stone Spirit*. Although the climbers react to the camera within this film, environmental footage is pronounced to such an extent that much of the film is observational of the climbers' surroundings. With the use of much discursive editing, Maier repeatedly cuts to environmental shots which privilege the visuals of place and culture as contextual scaffolding for the act of climbing.

This context imbues the act of climbing with meaningful relevance to the experience of travel, the sanctity of place, the role of history, and the confluence of disparate cultures. In *Finding Refuge*, the act of climbing on land which was once the domain of Native American tribes is a problem that must be addressed through reverence for the land and respect for people and culture. An observational focus on land and space is therefore of utmost importance.

### 1.3.2 Poetic Mode

Elena Von Kassel Siambani describes poetic documentary as experimental in themes and style, innovative, and often low budget.<sup>28</sup> This film will be poetic to the extent that it is guided by a meditative flow, subverts common structures of the climbing film genre, and privileges views of the landscape over people. Rather than visually include interviews within the chronology of the film, the voice of each speaker will be omniscient and their faces mainly unseen. The voices will rise gently above the mix of the film, which includes musical score and ambient sounds of nature. The project of disembodied the central voices is to foreground the true subject of the film, which is place itself. Lower thirds will nevertheless identify each speaker and their faces will occasionally be shown in double exposure over the landscapes of which they

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<sup>28</sup> Elena Con Kassel Siambvani, *The Poetic Tradition*.

speak. Examples of this poetic style can be seen in Grant Gee's 2012 documentary, *Patience: After Sebald*, in which he conceals his speakers so as to foreground space and place.



**Figure 7: A lower thirds is used to identify a voice, rather than a face.<sup>29</sup>**



**Figure 8: A double exposure is one of the few methods by which a speaker is visually apparent. She is speaking about the place upon which she is layered.<sup>30</sup>**

## 1.4 Schedule, Shot List, and Equipment

### 1.4.1 Schedule

Some of the following dates are subject to change as I continue to coordinate with interview subjects, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, and with the upcoming weather forecasts over the summer.

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<sup>29</sup> Grant Gee, *Patience*, 2012

<sup>30</sup> Grant Gee.

- October 1, 2020 - April 31, 2021: Pre-Production Research
- April 11, 2021: Filming Ryan complete 4-5 boulder problems in Charon’s Gardens
- *Late April/Early May: Prospectus Defense*
- May 31, 2021 - June 6, 2021: Filming Nature Photography near Mount Scott, Charon’s Gardens, and along Indiahoma Road
- June 26, 2021: Interview with Ryan at his home in Oklahoma City
- Early July 10, 2021: Interview with Marion Hutchinson and Molly Turko at the Refuge Visitor Center
- Late July 2021: Interview with Comanche National Museum in Lawton, OK
- October 10, 2021: Film Ryan complete 4-5 boulder problems along Indiahoma Road
- October 17, 2021: Film Ryan complete 4-5 boulder problems near Medicine Park
- November 1, 2021 - January 31, 2022: Post Production
- March 2022: Thesis Defense

#### 1.4.2 Shot List

Shot	Description	Action	Sound
Scene 1			
1	CU Ryans hand on boulder	Slo Mo	Oklahoma birds, ambient music, ethereal ambience, <i>Heavy breathing</i>
2	CU Ryan’s face, teeth gritted	Slo Mo	Oklahoma birds, ambient music, ethereal ambience, <i>Grunting, heavy breathing</i>
3	WS Nearby rock formation, wild grass, bushes blowing in the wind, blue sky	Slo mo	Oklahoma birds, ambient music, ethereal ambience, <i>Grunting, heavy breathing</i>
4	CU Ryan's arm as he makes the move	Slo Mo	Oklahoma birds, ambient music, ethereal ambience, <i>Grunting, heavy breathing, wincing</i>
Scene 2			
1-6	WS Various shots of landscapes, Charon’s Gardens, Indiahoma Road	Still	Oklahoma birds, insects, wind rusting the grass, <i>Ryan’s Narration Starts</i>
7	EWS Ryan hiking frame left to right	Still	Oklahoma Ambience, soft music, <i>Ryan’s narration</i>

Shot	Description	Action	Sound
8	WS Ryan winds down a narrow path	Panning with Ryan	Oklahoma Ambience, soft music, <i>Ryan's narration</i>
9	WS Ryan arrives at MC Escher Boulders	Still	Oklahoma ambience, <i>music fades away.</i>
10	CU Ryan looks up at the boulder	Soft tilt	Oklahoma Ambience
11	WS Ryan ascends the boulder	Slow tilt up with Ryan	Oklahoma Ambience. <i>Marion Hutchinson's Narration Starts</i>
Scene 3			
1	MS The Refuge sign at entrance	Still	Oklahoma Ambience, soft music, <i>Marion's narration giving basic history of the refuge</i>
4	WS The visitor center	Still	Oklahoma ambience, soft music, <i>Marion's narration</i>
5	WS Roadway dugout, tourists gathering to look at bison	Dolly in to tourist line	Oklahoma ambience, soft music, Marion's narration, <i>tourist murmuringst</i>
6	CU Bison	Pan with Bison	Oklahoma ambience, soft music, Marion's narration - <i>describing the reintroduction of species</i>
7	WS Mother bison with juvenile	Still	Oklahoma ambience, soft music, Marion's narration - <i>describing the reintroduction of species</i>
8	MS Longhorn	Still	Marion describes why reintroduction is key to the Refuge's mission
9	CU River otter	Still	Marion describes why reintroduction is key to the Refuge's mission
10	CU Prairie Dog	Still	Marion describes why reintroduction is key to the Refuge's mission
11	EWS Bison graze in a distant prairie	Still	Marion describes why reintroduction is key to the Refuge's mission
Scene 4			
1	Ryan rests at the base of a rock	Still	<i>Marion describes how the Climbers Coalition has had to negotiate climbing rights</i>
2	Ryan climbs boulder #2	Slow tilt up with Ryan	<i>Marion finishes describing why reintroduction is key to the Refuge's mission - Molly Turko's narration starts</i>
3-6	WS various rock formations	Still	Oklahoma ambience, soft music, <i>Molly's narration describing the tectonic history of this place</i>
7-9	CU granite	Still	Oklahoma ambience, soft music, <i>Molly describes the qualities of granite</i>
10	CU Ryan tests out a crimp, feels the rock	Pan with hand	Oklahoma ambience, soft music, <i>Molly describes how climbing on granite is different than other rocks</i>

Shot	Description	Action	Sound
11	WS Ryan climbs boulder #3	Slow tilt up with Ryan	Molly finishes by discussing the fragility of granite. <i>Joe Fish's narration begins.</i>
Scene 5			
1	EWS Longhorn Mountain.	Still	Urban ambience. Joe discusses the <i>significance of Longhorn Mountain</i>
2	CU Cedar bushes on the Mountain	Still	Natural ambience, soft music, Joe <i>discusses the reasons why Longhorn Mountain is now owned by private owners.</i>
3	WS ranch homes at the foot of the mountain	Still	Natural ambience, soft music, Joe describes how Kiowa members still retain access to the mountain.
4-8	CU various outcropping of rock that are scattered across the mountain.	Still	Natural ambience, soft music, <i>Joe describes the leasing of the west side to a mining company.</i>
9	WS the western slope of the mountain.	Still	Natural ambience, soft music, Joe describes why the mining would be so terrible for the Kiowa.
10-14	Trail head signs, tourists, construction	Still	Natural ambience, soft music, <i>Joe discusses the Kiowa views of nature and ownership</i>
15	CU butterfly alighting on a flower	Still	Natural ambience, soft music, <i>Joe discusses the other issues Kiowa people face today</i>
16	WS striking rock formation. Ryan walks past after the narration has finished	Still	Natural ambience, soft music <i>fades out, Joe discusses why the natural area as a whole is sacred to the Kiowa</i>
Scene 6			
1	MS Ryan eats a sandwich at the base of a huge boulder	Still	Natural ambience, <i>crumpling of plastic, eating</i>
2	CU Ryan applies chalk to hands	Pan with hands	Natural ambience, <i>hands rubbing together</i>
3	CU Ryan looks up at boulder	Slight tilt	Natural ambience
4	CU Ryan climbs boulder number #4	Tilt up with Ryan	Natural ambience
Scene 7			
1	Ryan's interview	Still	Ryan's testimony
2	Marion's interview	Still	Marion's testimony
3	Molly's interview	Still	Molly's testimony
4	Joe's interview	Stil	Joe's testimony

### 1.4.3 Equipment

Because of the remote nature of this shoot and the hiking required to reach bouldering

sites throughout the Refuge, lightweight camera and sound gear will be used in order to ensure mobility and flexibility.

Amount	Equipment
x1	Sony FS5
x4	Sony FS5 Camera Batteries
x1	Sony FS5 Camera Battery Charger
x1	Manfrotto Tripod
x1	H6Zoom Recorder
x1	9ft XLR cable
x1	Sennheiser Shotgun Microphone & Boom
x4	128GB SDXC cards
x4	Solid state hard drives
x1	32GB SD card
x1	Lowell 4 Light Kit
x4	Stingers
x6	Sandbags
x1	Slate

#### 1.4.4 Budget

Description	#	Unit	Rate	Cash	In Kind	Total
Preproduction						
Director Research	4	Month	\$700		\$2800	\$2800
Travel	3	Trips	50	\$150		\$250
<b>SUBTOTAL PREPRODUCTION RESEARCH</b>				<b>\$150</b>	<b>\$2800</b>	<b>\$2950</b>
Production						
Producer/Director	11	Month	\$700		\$7700	\$7700
Cinematographer	10	Day	\$600		\$6000	\$6000
Sound Recordist	10	Day	\$400		\$4500	\$4500
Cam Op	4	Day	\$400		\$1600	\$1600
Hard drives	4		\$110	\$440		\$440
Petty Cash			\$100	\$100		\$100

<b>Description</b>	<b>#</b>	<b>Unit</b>	<b>Rate</b>	<b>Cash</b>	<b>In Kind</b>	<b>Total</b>
Meals (2 Crew x 3 Meals x 9 Days) + (1 Additional Crew x 3 Meals x 4 Days)	66	Meals	\$10	\$660		\$660
Gas	10	Days	\$20	\$200		\$200
Hotel	3	Days	\$136	\$136		\$136
Camera Rental	1	Weekend	\$195	\$195		\$195
Equipment Rental Package (See Equipment List)	10	Days	\$322		\$3200	\$3200
Expendables	1	Flat	\$500	\$500		\$500
<b>SUBTOTAL PRODUCTION</b>				<b>\$2,231</b>	<b>\$23,000</b>	<b>\$25,231</b>
Post-Production						
Editor	10	Week	\$500		\$5000	\$5000
Assistant Editor	2	Week	\$300		\$600	\$600
Color Correction	1	Flat	\$500		\$500	\$500
Original Music Composition & Recording	1	Flat	\$600	\$600		\$600
<b>SUBTOTAL POST PRODUCTION</b>				<b>\$600</b>	<b>\$6100</b>	<b>\$6700</b>
Distribution						
Festival Entry Fees	20	Festivals	\$50	\$1000		\$1000
Publicity Materials	1	Allow	\$200	\$200		\$200
Website	1	Year	\$120	\$120		\$120
Postage & Shipping	1	Allow	\$200	\$200		\$200
<b>SUBTOTAL DISTRIBUTION</b>				<b>\$1520</b>		<b>\$1520</b>
<b>GRAND TOTAL</b>				<b>\$4501</b>	<b>\$31,900</b>	<b>\$36,401</b>



## CHAPTER 2

### RECONCEPTUALIZATION BEFORE PRODUCTION

I first made contact with Ryan Sheldon in November of 2020 when I discovered that he was close to publishing his guidebook. I knew that the landscapes of the Wichita Mountains fascinated me, and as an amateur rock climber, I was interested in using climbing in the Wichitas as a jumping-off point for an investigation into land and people's relationships to nature. I began filming a rock climbing video with Ryan in January 2021, and went out to the Wichitas with Ryan and his climbing partner, Mark Hagge several times over the course of Spring, 2021. This footage was intended to be used in a rock climbing video that Ryan could use to promote his book as well as a way for me to build a working relationship with him for the subsequent filming of the actual thesis film.

I initially viewed the film as an exploration of climbing as a way of communicating with nature, however, I simultaneously wanted to bring in other voices to the film and sought out guidance from Steve Wolverton and Melinda Levin on ways to do this. Throughout the Spring of 2021, the concept of 'moral terrains' became more and more of a structuring force, guiding the film towards de-prioritizing the climbing elements of my idea and instead focusing on the distinct ways that climbers, scientists, and Indigenous peoples respectively view and relate to the Wichita Mountains.

Through the series of trips out to the Wichita Mountains to film Ryan's climbing video, I also got to know his climbing partner, Mark Hagge, and heard of their mutual friend, Molly Turko, both of whom are professional geologists. I initially planned to interview Molly Turko, but after several outings with Mark in the Wichita mountains, felt that he had expressed a great interest in the geology of the park as well as climbing. He enthusiastically agreed to be

interviewed for the film as the geologist spokesperson.

Several years ago, I gained some background knowledge on the Comanche Nation after doing research for Electric City Entertainment on a planned film adaptation of S.C. Gwynne's *Empire of the Summer Moon*, a nonfiction book detailing the life of Comanche chief, Quanah Parker. I initially sought out interviews with board members of the Comanche National Museum and spoke to famed Chickasaw historian, Towana Spivey about doing an interview related to the Comanche's historical relationship with nature and the Wichita Mountains. These conversations occurred in April and May of 2021, but led to nothing concrete as the members of the Comanche Nation I spoke with did not want to get involved, citing the production of a separate, Comanche-made documentary that they did not want to pose any conflict with. Spivey also expressed great reservations about appearing in the film, mainly citing old age, health complications, and the Covid-19 pandemic.

Over the course of Summer 2021, I broadened my outreach to include other Indigenous tribes with a deep history and relationship to the Wichita Mountains. I found that the Kiowa Tribe operated a number of robust programs, including an Environmental Program and the Language and Culture Revitalization Program. I first spoke with Dorle Tartle at the Environmental Program and though this did not lead directly to an interview, she was extremely informative, forthcoming, and enthusiastic about my interest in Kiowa culture and in the subject of the documentary. She did warn me that she felt it would be near impossible to get any member of the Kiowa community to speak openly and on record about environmental issues and access to the park because there is a great fear among the community that publicly expressing any sort of agitation in this regard would result in further restrictions on Indigenous people's access to ritual sites in the mountains. When I later spoke with Kiowa environmental activist, Phil Dupoint, he

confirmed Dorle's prediction to me, as he was bluntly uninterested in speaking with me about any environmental issues. These roadblocks were concerning to me and I began to worry that I would not be able to find someone to be in the film. As a result, I began speaking directly with members of the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization program about Kiowa words for objects in nature.

I first reached out to members of the Language Program in late September 2021 and I was encouraged by elder, Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune, to start attending their weekly language learning sessions on Zoom, in which future Kiowa teachers learn the language from the Kiowa elders who grew up with Kiowa as their mother tongue. Over the course of several weeks of attending, I learned a great deal about the important stories, places, and practices of the Kiowa and much of the language associated with these artifacts. The elders were extremely gracious with me and always answered my questions about the Kiowa words for objects in nature in great detail. Dorothy is considered to be the most knowledgeable of the elder group and is a primary resource in the language learning community as she is one of the last remaining of her generation who grew up speaking only Kiowa and learned English as a teenager. She agreed to interview for my film, but because of her age and the ongoing pandemic, we agreed that it would be a remote interview. Dorothy's daughter, Nennette Delaune agreed to record Dorothy's audio using her phone and send me the file after we had finished.

## CHAPTER 3

### INTEGRATION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

#### 3.1 Land Use and Access

This film balances two primary user groups of the area; rock climbers and members of the local Kiowa community, to investigate asymmetries and similarities in each group's quest for access to features in the park. The concept of 'moral terrains', outlined by Robert Figueroa and Gordon Waitt as "the web of values layered over places through discourses that establish normative practices and belongings," is a theoretical tool for understanding how decisions regarding permissions and accessibility are made, as well as the ways that normative assumptions about minoritized and dominant groups are embodied.<sup>31</sup> The intended goal for considering land use in such a way is to comprehensively address philosophical gaps in understandings that arise from discussing environmental justice as either a distributive justice or a justice of recognition, the synthesis of which Figueroa and Waitt refer to as *bivalent justice*, citing the terminology of Nancy Fraser.<sup>32</sup> For Figueroa and Waitt, *bivalent justice* offers a way to take into account economic barriers to entry that often affect poor communities, as well as postcolonial racism, often habitual in nature, which most negatively affects communities of Indigenous, black, and brown people.

In their paper, *Climb*, Figueroa and Waitt describe the problematic regulations regarding climbing Uluru rock at Uluru-Kata Tjuta National Park in Australia and outline arguments for the climb's closure. Similarly to the Wichita Mountains, Uluru is a popular climbing destination for many Australians, though, in contrast to the situation at the Refuge, the ownership of the

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<sup>31</sup> Robert Figueroa, Gordon Waitt, *Climb: Restorative Justice...* 146.

<sup>32</sup> Robert Figueroa, *Bivalent Environmental Justice and the Culture of Poverty*, 29.

national park in which Uluru can be accessed is “under Indigenous claim” and while climbing is permitted, abundant signage and educational material heavily discourages the practice as disrespectful to the local Anangu people.<sup>33</sup> The paper then takes an ethnographic approach to understanding the reasons why Australians of European descent may disregard these admonishments and climb Uluru anyway, concluding that “the creation of the affective capacities of national pride and spiritual bliss prevented transformation of habitual practices and perceptions associated with the colonial imagery...” but that, “in contrast, when touring practices evoked shame... transformations became apparent in the visitor’s perceptions and practices towards Aboriginal people...”<sup>34</sup> The authors argue that the feeling of shame at having once disregarded Indigenous perspectives on the sacred qualities of land may be an effective way for people to understand that their behaviors, beliefs, and regulations may disproportionately privilege some users and disadvantage others.

There are multiple governmental and Refuge policies that affect access to geographic features both inside and outside of the Refuge’s boundaries to different extents to different user groups. For Indigenous peoples, access to sacred sites outside of the Refuge is primarily limited by private ownership of land. The contemporary non-Indigenous ownership of much of the land in this area is a direct result of a long history in which economic and racial factors pressured and compelled many Kiowa to sell their allotments in the post-reservation era.<sup>35</sup> Under the pretense of a benevolent assimilation program, the Dawes Act of 1887 effectively “(stripped) over 90 million acres of tribal land from Native Americans, then (sold) that land to non-native US

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<sup>33</sup> Figueroa, Waite, 143.

<sup>34</sup> Figueroa, Waite, 161.

<sup>35</sup> Mark H. Palmer, *Sold!* 53.

citizens.”<sup>36</sup> The Kiowa were among the most heavily impacted tribes as the act brought a swift end to the massive Kiowa-Comanche-Apache reservation that had been established twenty years prior.<sup>37</sup> Landmarks such as Rainy Mountain, Saddle Mountain, and Longhorn Mountain are among those affected by private land ownership.

Since its inception as a national forest in 1901, the Refuge has been open to visitors. However, regulations limit the areas that patrons may and may not visit in the park as well as the activities they may enjoy there. The primary mission of the Refuge is to “preserve, protect and maintain the natural habitat and native wildlife while keeping a unique environment for future generations to study and enjoy” and their systems for evaluating land use and access reflect the scope of that mission.<sup>38</sup> As per the National Wildlife System Improvement Act of 1997, all potential uses first deemed appropriate, must then go through a compatibility-determining process. This process includes writing a description of each use, a determination of available resources for the sustainability of that use, and the anticipated short-term, long-term, and cumulative impacts of the use.<sup>39</sup> Rock climbing, for example, is considered a compatible use in the Refuge.

(Climbing) is a legitimate recreational activity that has been historically allowed on the Refuge. It provides a primitive recreational activity in the Charons Garden Wilderness Area consistent with the purpose of the Wilderness Act and subordinate to Refuge purposes. Through the Wichita Mountains Climbers Coalition’s Advisory Bolting Committee and overall efforts to foster a spirit of genuine cooperation with the climbing community and improve environmental ethics of all ‘backcountry’ users, it is generally accepted as reasonable and fair by climbers who will thus tend to monitor their own sport

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<sup>36</sup> The Nation Park Service, *The Dawes Act*, <https://www.nps.gov/articles/000/dawes-act.htm>

<sup>37</sup> Palmer, 38.

<sup>38</sup> Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge, *FAQ*.

<sup>39</sup> US Fish and Wildlife Service, *Wichita Mountains Draft Compatibility Determinations and Environmental Assessment*.

and voluntarily cooperate and comply.<sup>40</sup>

The compatibility determination gives climbers access to all areas of the park that are open for recreation and includes few limiting policies (no climbing at night, groups may not exceed 15 people). Notably, quite a lot of trust is given to the climbing community to self-regulate themselves, a stipulation not seen in many other compatibility determinations. In doing so, this allowance also gives climbers a reasonable peace of mind that their activities in the park are sanctioned and protected by the Fish and Wildlife Service who are also on-call if emergency evacuations need to be staged.

The same cannot be said to the same extent for Kiowa people wishing to perform vision quests at sacred sites within the park. Vision quests are a traditional religious act performed by Kiowa men who would dress in traditional garb and hike up to high elevation points in the Wichita Mountains and fast for up to four days while offering tobacco to the spirits and sleeping on a sacred shield.<sup>41</sup> In my phone calls with members of the Kiowa community, I was told that male members of the community still practice this ritual as a coming-of-age tradition, though must often now do so in secret. The reasons for this can be seen in the Refuge regulations regarding camping within the park which stipulate that “Camping is allowed only at Doris Campground and Fawn Creek Youth Campground within the Public use area and throughout a designated area within the backcountry of the Charons Garden Wilderness area.”<sup>42</sup> This leaves out many of the sites that are actually sacred to the Kiowa people, including Mount Scott and Mount Sheridan. Not only is camping disallowed at Mount Scott, but any activity after sunset is

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<sup>40</sup> US Fish and Wildlife Service, *Wichita Mountains Draft Compatibility Determinations and Environmental Assessment*.

<sup>41</sup> Benjamin Kracht, *Kiowa Religion in Historical Perspective*, Ebook, Part 3.

<sup>42</sup> US Fish and Wildlife Service, *Wichita Mountains Draft Compatibility Determinations and Environmental Assessment*.

prohibited on the mountain, while Mount Sheridan is off-limits to visitors entirely. These regulations effectively bar many of the traditional activities of the Kiowa people within the Refuge and compound the limitations on Kiowa access to land in the surrounding area which are resultant from private land ownership.

### 3.2 Rock Climbing

Rock climbing, specifically bouldering, is central to this film as it is portrayed as a potential lens through which to understand human's relationship to nature. Figueroa and Waitt challenge the very practice of climbing as an expression of a colonial mentality that affectively describes a national pride inextricably tied to a "white-settler mythos".<sup>43</sup> As stated in a previous chapter, the concept of Manifest Destiny in the American context has long been associated with national narratives of westward expansion and contemporary attitudes towards adventurism and the domination over mountains and boulders via the practices of climbing and mountaineering. While acknowledging these very real and problematic aspects of climbing, this film will also seek to legitimate its continued practice in the Wichitas as an act of goodness that does not necessarily contradict Indigenous attitudes towards the land.

This goodness can be identified in the impact that climbing has on those who participate in it which does not necessarily describe an act of domination. In her article, *Rock Climbing: On Humans, Nature, and Other Nonhumans*, Penelope Rossiter contends with two prominent understandings of climbing; one that, "emphasises the possibility of and desire for immersion in nature, of oneness, or merging," and one that, "expresses the old desire for human mastery of nature".<sup>44</sup> She pushes back on both frameworks in favor of applying actor-network theory and

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<sup>43</sup> Figueroa, Waitt, 150.

<sup>44</sup> Penelope Rossiter, *Rock Climbing: On Humans, Nature, and Other Nonhumans*, 293.



an understanding of affordances which allows her to characterize climbing as an act of “animated intercorporeality” which she defines as being “expressed in the meetings and exchange between bodies of rock and flesh and in the imaginative encounters between the bodies of the climbers—past and current, present and absent”.<sup>45</sup> Her discussion continues to reframe the act of “defacing” not simply as a destructive human act upon the sanctity of nature, but as a mutually occurring phenomena that acts both on objects in nature and on the humans themselves.

Through the defacing of the face, the climber is memorialised in the cliff. In the meeting of bodies, the removals, scratchings, rubbings, mutual roughing-up, the climbing body becomes part of the memory of the earth. At the same time, the rock is body-memored too. At a certain, undefinable point, when enough rock has been memoried in the growth of muscles, the reformation of tendons, the transformation of feet, the brain alterations, the sanding back of skin from the fingertips, a climbing body emerges.<sup>46</sup>

In discussing climbing as such, the relationship between humans and nature is reframed not as dichotomous, but as an interrelated series of exchanges and mutual shapings and re-shapings. It need not be a story of domination over nature, or of any potentially misguided attempts to merge with an imagined sanctified space. Instead, climbing can be reframed as a practice of *becoming* for both climbers and the land itself. This idea of *becoming* can also be thought of as the process by which one comes to feel at home in the world, which philosopher Albert Borgmann refers to as the *disclosive* task of geologic study.<sup>47</sup> For Borgmann, explanations of how to become at home in the world are central to the way he advocates for a sense of reverence for the earth, counterbalancing the normative tendency of geologists to concern themselves purely with answering quantitative scientific questions.<sup>48</sup> In terms of

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<sup>45</sup> Rossiter, 298.

<sup>46</sup> Rossiter, 299.

<sup>47</sup> Albert Borgmann, *The Transparency and Contingency of Earth*, 101.

<sup>48</sup> Borgmann, 105.

climbing, one can conceptualize the activity not only as a sport framed by difficulty grades or completion rates, but as a way to communicate with features of the planet so as to learn one's place in it.

This understanding must however be contextualized, narrativized, and presented to members of the public who may otherwise fall into a mindset of domination, spiritual right, or even athletic ranking. As discussed, these tendencies are evidently prevalent given the notoriety of films such as *Free Solo* and *Meru*, although corrective films which offer reverent ways of conceptualizing climbing are equally positioned to take advantage of narrative and aesthetic presentation as argumentative tools.

### 3.3 Kiowa Beliefs and Language

Via a short series of translations, this film engages with Kiowa culture and historical relationships to land. Key natural landmarks in and around the Wichita Mountain range hold cultural significance to the Kiowa people and some continue to be used to this day as ceremonial fasting sites.<sup>49</sup> The Kiowa's connections to many of these places, most notably Rainy Mountain, are described in poetic detail by N. Scott Momaday in his famous book, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. In his book, Momaday describes how the Kiowa people migrated from modern-day Wyoming to the Black Hills in South Dakota, and finally were forced to settle in Oklahoma.<sup>50</sup> The hill itself is positioned in the book as the end to that journey and as a nexus for reflection.

In one sense, then, the way to Rainy Mountain is preeminently the history of an idea, man's idea of himself, and it has old and essential being in language. And the journey is

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<sup>49</sup> Curtis Kline, *Longhorn Mountain*.

<sup>50</sup> N. Scott Momaday, *The Way to Rainy Mountain*, 8.

an evocation of three things in particular: a landscape that is incomparable, a time that is gone forever, and the human spirit, which endures.<sup>51</sup>

The striking landscapes throughout the region, the area's association with a meaningful legacy, and the people who have come to identify with these places are reified in the language used to describe them. Momaday remarks on the importance of the Kiowa language throughout the book and references a key myth that intimately ties the invocation of the Kiowa language to a dialogue with and an understanding of the natural world. He describes the spoken word as having "power in and of itself. It comes from nothing into sound and meaning; it gives origin to all things. By means of words can a man deal with the world on equal terms."<sup>52</sup> Having a strong oral tradition is important not only in its utility as a medium for interpersonal communication, but also in its ability to imbue power upon concepts, places, and upon the wielder of the words themselves.

Within the Kiowa mythology, their language is seen as a special conduit to communicating with the natural world. Momaday recounts the story of a group of Kiowa children building a horse out of clay. The clay horse comes to life and is so wild and unruly that it turns into a tornado. Kiowa at the time, and Kiowa still to this day, pray to the horse-tornadoes, "Saying 'Pass over me.' They are not afraid of (it), for it speaks their language."<sup>53</sup> Here, the medium of the Kiowa language is a unique gift that enables Kiowa people to speak directly to features and events in nature which may be inaccessible given the wrong words. This legend was also recounted to me by members of the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization Program, one of whom told me that she, herself had experienced a tornado that politely moved out of the

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<sup>51</sup> Momaday, 8.

<sup>52</sup> Momaday, 36.

<sup>53</sup> Momaday, 50.

way of her house after she had prayed to it in the Kiowa language.

Kiowa as a written language did not enter significant development until 1918 when John Harrington, a caucasian linguist commissioned by the Smithsonian Institute, began developing his orthography for the language. However, most credit for the current orthography most widely accepted today goes to Parker McKenzie, a Kiowa academic and linguist born in 1897 who began developing his own orthography as a child in grade school.<sup>54</sup> Although several other academics, most of whom were white, were concurrently developing orthographies throughout the 20th century, the McKenzie orthography is widely considered to have “far (surpassed) all other attempts in thoroughness, accuracy, comprehension, and particularly in dealing with the tonal and grammatically complex aspects of the Kiowa language.”<sup>55</sup> This accomplishment by a member of the Kiowa community is largely regarded with pride and reverence by Kiowa speakers and learners today.

### 3.4 Geology

With a focus on land use, and given the dramatic shape of the Wichita Mountains landscape, I found it important to incorporate a discussion of the geologic history of the mountain range into the film. The regulatory policies of the Refuge should be understood and framed as socially constructed guideposts that convey moral value. Discussing the sheer timescale of the creation of these mountains provides an ontological starting point for the future discussion of land access and regulations. Starting from here is important given the limitations of humans’ ability to think in geologic time. Author Steven Earle notes that animals have only been present on land for, “360 million years, or 8% of geologic time” leaving the first 92% of the

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<sup>54</sup> William C. Meadows, *Introduction*, 235.

<sup>55</sup> Meadows, 236.

earth's existence sans terrestrial animal life.<sup>56</sup> Understanding this is not only informative of a reverent feeling towards processes and phenomena that occur on a scale beyond human comprehension, but also vital to understanding human's relationship to our planet and the impacts we have on it.

Earle goes on to discuss how the difficulty of conceiving of geologic time negatively impacts people's perception of climate change, stating "some people, who don't understand geological time, are quick to say that the climate has changed in the past, and that what is happening now is no different" and what they don't understand is that although there have been significant changes in climate throughout the earth's history, the earth is now warming at a rate 45,800 times faster than it did 56 to 33 million years ago.<sup>57</sup> This fallacy can be extended to describe a myriad of impacts that humans have on the planet and informs our understanding of just how quickly industrialization and development (as a result of policy) have changed the face of our planet in just one hundred and fifty years.

### 3.5 Ethics

My approach to working with subjects throughout the production process of *Finding Refuge* has been to try to accurately and openly discuss the core interests at the heart of the film; sustainability, land access, the relationships that people form with nature, and the different perspectives that inform the building of those relationships. In his paper, *The Dance of Documentary Ethics*, Pratap Rughani discusses the uncomfortable balance of performing ethical duties towards the subjects of a documentary with the drive for artistic freedom. He quotes Carolyn Anderson's and Thomas Benson's analysis of Frederick Wiseman, saying, "without

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<sup>56</sup> Steven Earle, *Physical Geology*, 15.

<sup>57</sup> Steven Earle, *Physical Geology*, 233.

informed consent of the subjects the form lacks ethical integrity, without freedom for the film maker, it lacks artistic integrity.”<sup>58</sup> This quote has stuck with me throughout the course of filming with Ryan and recording interviews with Mark, Dorothy, Marion, and Robert as the concept of informed consent has proven to be more complicated than I initially assumed.

As the film has significantly changed since my initial vision for it, I’ve felt a growing feeling of discomfort, given that the film now quite explicitly criticizes rock climbers of European descent. Although my initial intention was to make a film that depicted differing groups’ respective relationships to a shared space, the social and political dynamics of this Refuge as well as the challenging history surrounding the treatment of Indigenous people in this region, have guided the film into a more confrontational territory than what I may have initially pitched to my climbing subject, Ryan. Via the process of attending Kiowa language learning classes, I was exposed to the knowledge that boulders were traditional gravesites for the Kiowa and other nomadic tribes, a fact which, incorporated into the film, reframes the discourse as more complex and potentially misunderstood as zero-sum.

Agnieszka Piotrowska’s writing in *Documentary Film: A Discourse of Desire* deeply explores the reticence of filmmakers to engage their subjects in discourses of truth that are often evolving and which reliably pose unintended consequences. In her discussion, Piotrowska cites the moral dilemma of Polish filmmaker, Krzysztof Kiesłowski, and critically engages with the Slovenian philosopher, Slavoj Zizek’s interpretation of Kiesłowski’s discomfort with the situational ethics of documentary filmmaking. Tellingly, she focuses on a quote of his in which he reflects on his decision to abstain from documentary filmmaking, writing, “You never know how a film is going to turn out. In every film there’s always a very narrow threshold which each

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<sup>58</sup> Pratap Rughani, *The Dance of Documentary Ethics*, 100.

of us can only cross according to our own discretion. At that point I retreat.”<sup>59</sup> Firstly, Piotrowska brings in Zizek’s analysis which posits the feeling of *shame* as the reason why Kieslowski backs away from documentary filmmaking as a practice. However, whereas Zizek sees the documentarian’s shame as resultant from the knowledge that the subject’s intimate transparency is *shameless*, Piotrowska sees *shame* as rooted in the knowledge that one has betrayed the subject by taking advantage of the reciprocal desire for the subject to be embodied in the filmmaker and vice-versa.<sup>60</sup>

In terms of attempting to reconcile my own perceived betrayal of Ryan (and mitigating any perception that the act of climbing is an inherently immoral activity), I had sought out the final interview with Robert Figueroa which I hoped would provide a bridge between the discourses on climbing and on Indigenous issues. Being familiar with his and Gordon Waitt’s paper, *Climb*, I anticipated that he would have the vocabulary and experience necessary to describe climbing as a complicated activity, rather than a simply villainous or morally reprehensible one. By laying out the concept of moral terrains in an eloquent yet straightforward way, Robert’s testimony delicately describes the balanced view with which we can contend with the idea of climbing on sacred land as one which can be reverently performed by informed moral actors. Climbing without such knowledge can be atoned for and the activity need not necessarily cease in order to make the climber appear deferential to a minoritized group.

By bringing a very formative theory into the film in a very explicit way, I worried that audiences would find the film too aesthetically academic. It is true that Robert’s testimony does give the film a more esoteric character, however, the effect of having a figure in the film

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<sup>59</sup> Agnieszka Piotrowska, *Documentary Film: A Discourse of Desire*, 75.

<sup>60</sup> Piotrowska, 76.

straightforwardly engage with the concepts of manifest destiny, whiteness, layered values, and reconciliation has proven very beneficial to creating a complicated film rather than a condemnatory one.



## CHAPTER 4

### PRODUCTION

#### 4.1 Overview

The Production of *Finding Refuge* took place over the course of many months, starting in April 2021 and continuing until January 2022. A significant priority of the shoot was to capture aesthetically beautiful shots of the flora and fauna of the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge as well as a great assortment of shots depicting the varied granite structures throughout the park. Formal interviews were conducted with the five primary subjects of the film; Ryan Sheldon, Mark Hagge, Dorothy Whitehouse Delaune, Marion Hutchinson, and Robert Melchior Figueroa.

#### 4.2 Shooting Schedule

- April 10, 2021- Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, OK

Rocking climbing footage of Ryan climbing a series of boulders near Indianoma Road inside the Refuge. Each boulder is dramatic looking, yet on the physically easier end of the spectrum so as to ensure that successful ascents would be visible in the film.

- June 10-13, 2021- Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, OK

Three days of observational nature cinematography and ambient sound recording. On the first day, we focused on capturing as many animals as possible, while the second and third days were devoted to capturing images of mountains and boulders.

- June 20, 2021- Oklahoma City, OK

Formal interview with Ryan Sheldon at the *Blocworks Rock Climbing Gym* in Oklahoma City.

- June 26, 2021- Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, OK  
 Additional nature cinematography, focusing on images of boulders in the Charon's Gardens wilderness area.
- November 14, 2021- Anadarko, OK  
 Remote phone interview with Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune. Dorothy's daughter Nennette Delaune, recorded sound on her phone so as to send me cleaner audio than if recorded over the phone lines.
- November 21, 2021- Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, OK  
 Observational footage of Ryan climbing in the Charon's Gardens Wilderness area and hiking on a plateau towards the boulder. Formal interviews of Mark Hagge and several additional questions for Ryan as an addendum to his initial interview.
- December 5, 2021- Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, OK  
 Observational footage of significant mountains to the Kiowa people, water, and fences as visual support for Dorothy's interview.
- December 10, 2021- Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, OK  
 Interview with Marion Hutchinson at Mount Scott.
- January 19, 2022- Corvallis, OR  
 Remote interview with Robert Melchior Figueroa, recorded onto his phone and on Zoom.
- January 23, 2022- Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge, OK  
 Observational footage of boulders to be paired with Robert's interview.

## 4.3 Interview Questions

### 4.3.1 Ryan Sheldon Interview, June 20, 2021

1. Can you introduce yourself and talk a bit about how long you've been climbing in the Wichitas?
2. Do you view climbing as therapeutic? What first drove you to try it?
3. What makes climbing in the Wichitas different or unique compared to other places in the United States?
4. Is there anything unique about the rock quality specifically?
5. How have your climbing abilities changed over the years?
6. Why did you choose to focus on bouldering over ropes climbing?
7. What do you enjoy about the process of developing new (boulder) problems?
8. What is the Wichita Mountains climbing community like? Where do you see yourself in it?
9. Is bouldering as a pastime growing and how might it be changing?
10. What is your guidebook and what is its main goal?
11. What do you hope to achieve with the guidebook?
12. What specific advice do you have for new climbers?
13. What can climbers do to maintain the environment of the Refuge?
14. Why is it important to protect and preserve nature in the Wichitas, specifically as a Wildlife Refuge?

### 4.3.2 Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune Interview, November 14, 2021

1. Can you tell me your name and a little about yourself?
2. What is the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization program?
3. What is the Kiowa word for Kiowa?
4. How did the Kiowa come to settle near the Wichita Mountains?
5. What is the Kiowa word for Mountain?

6. Which mountains in the Wichitas have particular significance?
7. What is the word for air?
8. Can you tell the story of the horse turning into the tornado?
9. What is the Kiowa word for fence?
10. What would the Kiowa use to say about fences?
11. What is the Kiowa word for Boulder?
12. What was that story about boulders as gravestones?
13. What words come to mind when you think about the Wichita Mountains?
14. Why do stories of plants and animals and nature continue to be so meaningful to Kiowa people today?
15. Why is it important to teach and preserve the Kiowa Language?
16. What are you most proud of?

#### 4.3.3 Ryan Sheldon Addendum Interview, November 21, 2021

1. What words come to mind when you think of the Wichita Mountains?
2. What and where are the Wichita Mountains?
3. Can you define ‘bouldering’?
4. What does “multiple discovery” mean to you?
5. Lately in the news, there has been some controversy regarding problematic boulder names. Have any boulders/problems in the Wichita’s seen name changes because they were problematic?

#### 4.3.4 Mark Hagge Interview, November 21, 2021

1. Can you tell me your name and a little about yourself?
2. What words come to mind when you think about the Wichita Mountains?
3. What are the primary types of rock you will see in the Wichita Mountains?
4. What geologic periods contained most of the activity necessary to creating these formations?

5. What characterized those periods?
6. What other functions, occurrences, and phenomena occurred to create the landscape we see today?
7. What is happening below the surface of the mountains we see? (Gabbros)
8. What are rhyolites?
9. What is subsidence?
10. What role does erosion play?
11. What role does oxidation play?
12. Are these conditions unique to the Wichita Mountains? How does the geology here differ from the rest of Oklahoma?
13. What are 'red-bed' plains?
14. Besides fun facts related to climbing, what are geologists interested in when it comes to Oklahoma? Why is it important to know these things?

#### 4.3.5 Marion Hutchinson Interview, December 10, 2021

1. Tell me your name and a little about yourself.
2. What is the Wichita Mountains National Wildlife Refuge?
3. What is the Wichita Mountains Climbing Coalition and what is your role in it?
4. What was happening in the 1990s that compelled the Refuge to reach out to you about forming a Coalition?
5. What were the ongoing challenges that led to the 2009 renegotiation?
6. What do you know about the process of compatibility determinations that the Refuge makes?
7. Are there cultural differences between the different types of climbing/climbers that can more positively or negatively affect the environment of the Refuge?
8. What should any climber do in order to maintain their access to the Refuge?
9. What most attracts climbers to this specific place?
10. What has Refuge management been doing recently in order to protect the environment here?

#### 4.3.6 Robert Figueroa Interview, January 19, 2022

1. What is your name and what do you do professionally?
2. Do you have any special areas of interest?
3. What led you down this path?
4. Why is work in Environmental Justice important?
5. How are ecotourist activities like climbing complicated when they are understood to be taking place on Indigenous land?
6. What does it mean for land to be called, “Indigenous land?”
7. What aspects of climbing may impact the land itself?
8. What is the concept of “moral terrains?”
9. How might (the term) apply to a scenario in which a Wildlife Refuge, which is culturally significant to several Indigenous groups, is now a popular climbing destination?
10. What makes “moral terrains” an effective tool for understanding these dynamics?
11. Is there a way to climb reverently? Does knowledge of a place’s history and ties to Indigenous people in any way allow us to more ethically engage with landscapes?

#### 4.4 Crew

##### 4.4.1 Aaron Dye - Director/Producer/Cinematographer/Editor

Aaron Dye is a filmmaker and Teaching Fellow at the University of North Texas. After graduating with his bachelor’s degree in Film Production from Emerson College, he continued to self-produce experimental films and low-budget documentaries as well as pursue a career in film education. Aaron’s films have become increasingly focused on environmental issues regarding sustainability, land use, and culturally informed relationships to the natural world. His experimental documentary *Come as You Are* was screened at the 2020 UFVA Conference. He is currently seeking his MFA in Documentary Production and Studies at the University of North Texas.

#### 4.4.2 Helen Brose - Assistant Director/Assistant Camera/Sound Recordist

Helen Brose is a graduate of the University of North Texas with a bachelor's degree in Media Arts. While a student, she served as the head writer and script supervisor of *The Fairview Chronicles* produced by Datalus Pictures. She is adept at maintaining and assembling lighting, sound, and camera gear from her extensive time working in the University of North Texas media arts equipment room. She has attended filmmaking classes at UCLA and helped produced media content for non-profits in the DFW area.

#### 4.4.3 Christian Taliaferro - Camera Operator

Christian Taliaferro is a graduate of the University of North Texas with a bachelor's degree in Media Arts. As a former student of the director, he assisted with camera operating some of the rock climbing footage, Mark Hagge's interview, as well as Ryan Sheldon's addendum interview.

#### 4.4.4 Jack Springer - Sound Recordist

Jack Springer is an undergraduate student at the University of North Texas. He is pursuing a bachelor's degree in Communications and is also a former student of the director. Jack ran sound on November 11, 2021 during the shooting of the rock climbing footage as well as for Mark Hagge's and Ryan Sheldon's interviews.

#### 4.4.5 Joshua Flores - Camera Operator

Joshua Flores is a graduate of the University of North Texas with a bachelor's degree in Media Arts. He is another former student of the director who operated the camera on June 26 while filming boulders in Charon's Gardens.

#### 4.5 Equipment

The main camera used during production was the Sony FS5. A Blackmagic Pocket Cinema Camera was also used to film some of the rock climbing footage. While working with the Sony FS5, the main lenses used were a Sony 28 - 135mm and a set of Zeiss prime lenses. The FS5 was chosen due to its ergonomic size and weight as well as its efficient battery life, removing the necessity to build out a cumbersome and heavy camera rig for the long hikes into the wilderness areas of the park. Lightweight tripods were also used, namely a Manfrotto 526 Pro Video Head tripod.

Although the video of his interview does not make it into the film, a Lowell lighting kit was used to light an interview with Ryan at Blocworks Climbing Gym in Oklahoma City. An H6 Zoom and Sennheiser boom microphone were used for the majority of ambient sound recording while a pair of Lectrosonic lavelier microphones were used to capture Mark's, Marion's, and Ryan's formal interviews. Due to distance and the ongoing pandemic, Dorothy and Robert's respective interviews were both recorded during phone calls using voice memo apps on the subjects' cell phones.

#### 4.6 Experience

One of the main challenges I experienced during the production of this film was the commuting distance between DFW and the Wichita Mountains. The six-hour round trip was very taxing on me physically and financially, while the gas and food money required to routinely make these trips was coming out of my pocket. In order to arrive at the Refuge early enough in the morning to see a diverse set of wildlife, to avoid the midday heat, and to capture morning light, I had to leave my house at 5 am at the latest which made many of these drives not only uncomfortable but dangerous if I was traveling by myself. I never put myself in the position of



creating a car accident, but in the future, I would like to plan solutions to these logistical hurdles more carefully.

During the November 21st shoot, on which I and a small crew of former students filmed Ryan climbing and Mark's interview, the commuting distance posed particularly difficult logistical headaches. My crew members were unable to leave DFW for the Wichitas before 6 am although Ryan was adamant that he could start climbing no later than 8 am, which would put myself and the crew behind him by one hour. We agreed to meet him at the location of the boulder and film only the end of their climbing session and then stage reenactments of Ryan walking to and arriving at the boulder. The boulder in question, *The Angry Inch*, is a boulder that I had been to several times, though always with Ryan as my guide. This time, however, it was incredibly difficult to find and I got myself and the crew somewhat lost in the Wilderness on the way to the location. We eventually did find Ryan, Mark, and the boulder and were able to attain the necessary shots, however, the difficulties of commuting from DFW to the Wichita Mountains for shooting materialized most negatively on this particular day.

The second main challenge I dealt with during production was finding subjects willing to appear in the film. In late June, I had scheduled to interview Marion Hutchinson, a climber and founding member of the Wichita Mountains Climbing Coalition. Unfortunately, he canceled on me at the last second, and became impossible to get back in touch with. I had enlisted Josh Flores, a former student of mine, to help out with filming the interview, and rather than cancel on him as well, we instead went up to the Charon's Gardens area of the Refuge and filmed landscapes and rock formations together. Although we were still able to make use of the day, all of my attempts to restart contact with Marion were unsuccessful until he called me out of the blue in December 2021. He explained that his work and personal life had gotten quite hectic over

the summer, but that he was still interested in the film. I was able to reintegrate him into the film, but the focus of the story had somewhat shifted away from what his testimony could offer at that point.

Similarly, I greatly struggled to find an informant within the local Indigenous community who was willing to appear in the film. My early talks with members of the Comanche community yielded no interested participants, and later discussions with environmental activists in the Kiowa community also turned out to be dead ends.

In October 2021, I began attending weekly language learning sessions on Zoom with the Kiowa Language and Culture Revitalization Program. I was invited after talking with Dorothy Whitehorse Delaune about the subject of my thesis and about the role of the Kiowa language in describing nature. Each of these classes consists of a group of Kiowa elders who are fluent or semi-fluent in the Kiowa language and a group of Kiowa teachers and community leaders who are learning the language so as to teach it themselves. Every session includes a Q&A period followed by discussions with the elders and listening to historical recordings of Kiowa language monologues and dialogues. I was able to ask several questions every week and discuss the role of language, nature, and culture in the Kiowa community today.

On November 14, I conducted an interview with Dorothy over the phone. Her daughter was present in her home to record Dorothy's answers using her cellphone. Since language is such a major part of Dorothy's life and work, I focused on asking for the translations of Kiowa words for objects such as *mountain*, *fence*, *buffalo*, and *boulder*. After each translation, Dorothy characteristically mused about the significance of each of these words and their referents to the Kiowa community. It was sometimes difficult to keep Dorothy on track, but overall, the

interview was quite successful and Dorothy was very patient with me given the remote nature of the process.

## CHAPTER 5

### POST-PRODUCTION

#### 5.1 Overview

Post-production started gradually in November 2021 as final elements of the connective tissue for the film were being captured. During this time, I was backing up and organizing footage onto several drives and importing footage into Adobe Premiere Pro in order to start organizing my bins within the editing software. Through the first half of December, I worked to create the first rough cut, incorporating the recently acquired footage of sacred mountains to the Kiowa as well as Marion's interview.

#### 5.2 Equipment

This film was edited on Adobe Premiere Pro using the editing suites at the University of North Texas. Premiere was used for the story edit as well as color correction, stabilization, and titling. Adobe Audition was used to remove some of the wind sounds from Marion's interview as well as background noise from Dorothy's interview.

#### 5.3 Editing Schedule

- 12/6/2021 - 12/13/2021 - Initial Editing
- 12/14/2021 - 1st Rough Cut
- 1/18/2022 - 2nd Rough Cut
- 1/20/2022 - Reconceptualizing the film given Robert's testimony
- 1/25/2022 - 3rd Rough Cut
- 2/4/2022 - Developed version of the 3rd Rough Cut sent to musicians for scoring.
- 2/16/2022 - Fine Cut Completed and Color Grading started
- 2/21/2022 - Original scores are integrated into the film

- 2/28/2022 - Sound sweetened and mixed in Adobe Audition
- 3/1/2022 - Final mix of the film, final color grade.
- 3/29 - 4/5 - Reconceptualization to partially accommodate Ryan's concerns

#### 5.4 Original Score

Kaarthik Tharmiya is a graduate of UNT with a degree in Media Arts. He is the principal guitarist for several Denton area rock bands and has experience scoring other student productions. We extensively discussed the creation of a score that would be acoustic guitar-based, blues-inspired and contemplative in tone.

Terry Tsothigh is a Kiowa blues and flute musician whose 2008 album *Goin' for It* is available on streaming services for purchase. He is a 2018 Oklahoma Blues Hall of Fame inductee and has won awards for his flute playing in the native style. He has agreed to record the flute score for the Kiowa sections of the film.

## CHAPTER 6

### RECONCEPTUALIZATION OF THE FILM DURING POST-PRODUCTION

As the film came together in post-production, I quickly became aware that I would have to make significant changes to the flow and narrative progression of the film. The initial vision for the film, to have three distinct sections with respective focuses (ecology, geology, and Native American history,) was tested out in the first cut of the film. This cut was significantly limited in its success as the first section of the film, the ecological mission of the refuge, was sandwiched in with necessary introductions to the location, to the nature of climbing, and to the climber himself. The following sections of the film seemed tangentially related to the material that the beginning of the film set up and not meaningfully tied to the visuals of climbing.

Although I had initially envisioned the film as a structural exercise that would challenge dominant modes of narrative progression, it also became clear that such a compartmentalized approach would run counter to the concept of *moral terrains* at the heart of the film. As moral terrains describes an ever-deepening and interconnected web of meanings imbued upon land, an intertwined approach to storytelling began to seem more appropriate. The second cut of the film is therefore an exercise in taking Ryan's, Mark's, Marion's, and Dorothy's interviews and interweaving them throughout the runtime so as create this sense of a web of values as well as to build a narrative progression that would be more engaging to audience members.

The difficulty which arose from this development, was that the interests of climbers started to appear more directly compared and contrasted to the interests of Kiowa people. As previously stated in this thesis, I initially hoped to create a more humanist portrait of the different ways that diverse people form relationships with nature, although now the film started to heavily implicate climbers as potentially ignorant trespassers on Indigenous land. In addition to this

issue, the film still *felt* unfinished. Despite my best attempts to discuss the limitations to land access experienced by the Kiowa people, it was difficult to find subjects interested or willing to directly speak on this topic. Therefore, the connection between climbing and Indigenous rights still appeared tenuous by the end of the film, which at that moment would be perceived more as the beginning of an as-yet-uncompleted feature, rather than as a completed short film.

In response to this, I conducted the last interview with Robert Melchior Figueroa, one of the writers most associated with the concept of moral terrains. I directly asked him about the meaning of the term and how it would apply to climbers in a Wildlife Refuge context on land which was once the domain of Kiowa, Comanche, and Apache Native Americans. In the third rough cut, Robert's testimony largely creates this bridge that directly puts climbing in discussion with Indigenous rights to land.

Another change made to the film, was the decision to refrain from implementing double-exposures showing the interviewees superimposed upon images of the land, as described in the first chapter. In the early stages of editing, I began to get a feel for the imagery which was often so vibrant yet so barren at the same time that superimpositions quickly struck me as an overly stylized gesture given the restrained nature of all other aspects of the film's construction. Also, because of the COVID-19 pandemic and untenable travel distances, I was unable to obtain video footage for Dorothy's or Robert's interviews, respectively. The result is a more subdued and contemplative film that very clearly focuses on features of landscape, animal life, and the imagery of the lone climber.

## 6.1 Thesis Defense and Further Reconceptualization

During the defense of this thesis on March 24 2022, several issues arose from my committee members, resulting in a conditional pass for the project. These issues largely related

to the framing of Ryan as an unsympathetic character who was made to seem ignorant of Kiowa concerns regarding land in the film. Ryan had recently seen a cut of the film at this point, and echoed these sentiments, saying that he was unhappy with his portrayal in the film and would feel uncomfortable with it being shown in its present form. During the course of the defense hearing, two initially opposing viewpoints slowly shifted towards a consensus; Steven Wolverton, professor of geography and the environment, initially applauded the unforgiving framing of Ryan, while Tania Khalaf, professor of documentary, felt that this harsh framing represented an unfair breach of documentary ethics. Steven's position was admitted by himself to be primarily informed by his work as a geographer whose career is in large part driven by an attention given to Indigenous issues and an interest in projects that seek to rectify post-colonial systems. Whereas Tania noted that the function of putting Ryan effectively "on trial" during the course of the film represented a breaking of Ryan's entrustment to myself with his image and persona. She made the excellent suggestion of putting the landscapes of the film "on trial," rather than Ryan himself. Steven came to agree with her, noting that in terms of crafting a piece of media, he could see how this breach of trust would be a significant issue in need of addressing.

Although I had initially felt that my film was finished at this point, I also came to agree with my committee members. This was in part due to the fact that I had been anxious for weeks about showing Ryan the film. I knew that the film would seem critical of his role as a climber and that the concept of the film had changed quite a lot since I first pitched his involvement in it to him. Once he had expressed that he was overwhelmingly opposed to the direction the film had taken, I felt an immediate sense of loss and devastation as it was never my intention to cast him as the villain of my film, though I could understand why he would interpret the edit in such a way. From an ethical perspective, I felt and still feel uneasy about making a film that demonizes



Ryan, although I do believe that fair and balanced criticism is appropriate.

Because I have no wish to completely betray Ryan's trust, I have put myself in the position of needing to rework the film in such a way that addresses his primary concerns, while still holding true to my vision and to the information I've learned along the way that has changed the film so much since the project started. In a phone call with him on March 27, we lengthily discussed the issues in the film that he feels most cast him in a bad light and in his opinion, threaten the access of climbers to the Wichita Mountains. Referring to specific issues with the film, he listed the structure of the ending which implies that he could be climbing over a Kiowa gravesite, the way that Rob Figueroa's narration plays simultaneously to footage of him preparing for a climb, the specific moment when Rob makes the generalized claim that climbers may not be aware of Indigenous peoples, and the fact that his voice is absent in the second half of the film.

These are all grievances that I can understand and can see how they contribute to a narrative that not only demonizes him personally, but may also abstractly contribute to a sentiment that would endanger people's ability to climb freely within the Refuge. Therefore, in the final edit of the film, I have woven in voice-over narration of Ryan throughout the entire runtime in which he sympathetically discusses the inherent need for climbers to be environmentally conscious while inside the Refuge. This narration also serves to separate Dorothy's statement about gravesites from the imagery of Ryan climbing and interjects more empathetic narration from Ryan himself. I have also shortened the length of Terry Tsotigh's final flute song so that it does not coincide with Ryan climbing.

Understanding that Rob's statement about the ignorance of climbers is perhaps overly generalizing, I have taken this line out of the film and consolidated Rob's narration to occur

mainly over imagery of landscapes and nature, not of close-ups of Ryan. Although this perhaps seems like a subtle change made to the film, this moving around of contentious narration so that it occurs over landscapes rather than Ryan's face, has a significant impact on the way that the audience synthesizes the information presented to them. Rather than having an omniscient voice frame Ryan as a potential trespasser upon lands that which he does not fully understand, moving the delivery of that information to occur over imagery of landscapes shifts that indictment not onto Ryan, but onto the subject-object relationship that the audience themselves are forming as they visually encounter these locations.

An additional subtle change with an equally impactful effect has been to move Ryan's opening narration in which he directly discusses the fragility of climbers' access to the park from the first few seconds of the film, to the very last section of narration heard. The original location of this soundbite framed his ensuing character as being singularly concerned with climbers' access at the potential exclusion of other peoples. In its new location, this piece of testimony now follows Dorothy's revelation that boulders were once the gravesites of Kiowa men and directly leads into additional narration of Ryan reflecting on the need of the climbing community to be respectful towards nature if it wants to continue. There is now a suggested congruence between the two perspectives with respect and reverence for the natural world tying them together.

As I have made changes to the film, I have not been completely amenable to every ask that Ryan has made. Ryan also expressed a desire that Dorothy's interview be consolidated to the first half of the film as a kind of historical framing of the Wichita Mountains. I have refused to do this as I believe that this would dishonestly and detrimentally frame the concerns of Indigenous peoples as being relegated to the past. Ryan and I will continue to have conversations about the role that Dorothy and Rob play in the film, but for me, their perspectives and the

entirety of their discourse as currently laid out in the film have become essential to the story I wish to tell. This compromise is uncomfortable and I wish that Ryan was more open and perhaps more self-reflective so as to also see the interest, beauty, and importance of these voices. Despite this discomfort, I feel that I have offered Ryan a fair compromise, heard out his concerns, and implemented changes where I felt necessary. The rest is the film I wish to make.

## 6.2 Subject-Filmmaker Relationship

This has been an incredible and difficult learning experience for me. I have been forced to self-reflect on the reasons why it was so difficult for me to approach Ryan about the changing direction of the film sooner. Had I discussed the growing importance of *access* as a concept in the film or the ways that the Kiowa relationship with nature was increasingly driving the direction of discourse within the project, maybe Ryan would have either been more comfortable moving forward or I could have given myself the time to recast the film with someone more congruent to the film's new direction. My future as a documentarian, filmmaker, and politically engaged person somewhat depends on the resolution of a lifelong learning experience that seems to have crested with the production of this film.

For reasons perhaps too diaristic to indulge here, I have lived through twenty-seven years of being in a familial position wherein truth is a very flimsy concept and facts can be incredibly dangerous. Since my childhood, information has repeatedly been drawn out of me from correspondent directions and weaponized towards the opposition. Over a long period of time, I have grown to be incredibly cautious about to whom I divulge information, especially if I believe that information could hurt that respective person, other people I am close to, or even myself. As a result, my tendency to prolong inevitable moments of confrontation has repeatedly hampered my ability to navigate those confrontations in a healthy and productive way. Of course, this is an

area of growth that I am working on and I recognize that this attitude not only has negative effects on myself personally, but clearly can apply tension to my professional and artistic career as well.

## CHAPTER 7

### EVALUATION OF THE COMPLETED WORK

#### 7.1 Pre-Production

The genesis of this project was born out of a general disaffection with the environment and aesthetics of the Dallas-Fort Worth metro area. The patchwork of strip malls, highways, and freshly constructed cookie-cutter housing developments left me interested in two things: my own yearning for a return to nature, and the land policies that lead to such development and zoning-related aesthetic failures in the first place. Starting in the Fall of 2020, I began rock climbing at a local gym almost daily as a way of escaping from the urban sprawl of DFW and the stresses of my graduate program. I began to consider the practice of rock climbing as a powerful way of framing a conservationist's appreciation of seemingly untouched natural landscapes and as an avenue for investigating issues of land management and access. The Wichita Mountains seemed a natural site of exploration as they were the closest significant destination for climbing enthusiasts in the Denton area.

Starting from these focal points was incredibly helpful in the process of creating a working relationship with Ryan Sheldon and utilizing his network of climbing friends later in the production process. Throughout pre-production, I had many great opportunities to meet with Ryan, film him climbing, and talk with him about the issues of access facing climbers at the Refuge. I was welcomed by Ryan and his climbing partner, Mark Hagge, to film them anytime I desired and I often took them up on that offer throughout the writing of this document's prospectus. This strong relationship-building work paid off as I was able to get all of the necessary footage of Ryan climbing before the summer season began and rendered climbing in Oklahoma unfeasible. It was also helpful in the creation of a friendly relationship that led to a

great interview response and well-maintained communication between us during the summer months.

Starting from a somewhat nebulous urban anxiety as the driving force behind this film did have a noteworthy downside, however, in that the focus of the film evolved heavily over time. Without a strong conceptual anchor, I felt that the sheer amount of research necessary to compile and synthesize throughout the pre-production process was leading me down multiple rabbit holes of potential angles and areas to focus on. I wanted to incorporate the relationships that ecologists, geologists, and Native American communities formed to these boulders, but soon found that even within the climbing community, different generations and kinds of athletes often have drastically different ideas about climbing and nature. Later, it became quite evident that if I was to seriously engage with the relationships of Kiowa people to these mountains, I would either have to drastically broaden the scope of the film or frame their limited access to the land in contrast to the comparative freedom of the climbers. The change of name from the working title of the film, *Finding Refuge* to the current title, *Access Points*, reflects this overall shift in focus.

Had my pre-production process been more focused from the beginning, I could have possibly avoided the quagmire in which the film now finds itself; climbers and Indigenous people are presented in binary terms. I would have liked to have done more research into the specific issues of land access facing the Kiowa at an earlier point in the process so as to sooner incorporate that knowledge into the construction of the film. Similarly, I would have liked to have had this knowledge anchoring me to that part of the story, so that I could have more adeptly sidestepped intriguing but tangential avenues of narration.

## 7.2 Production

The filmmaking process went mostly smoothly, especially in terms of the quality of

compositions throughout the film. I am very happy with the way the film looks and feels as a result of the static and patient approach to camera work I employed while filming the landscapes of the Wichitas. The wide shots of climbing achieve the durational aesthetic I was hoping for, in that it successfully downplays the dramatic act of conquering so often built into climbing documentaries. Despite this restrained approach, the act of climbing is still quite arresting to look at, as the durational nature of the shots also serves to highlight the inherent risk of the activity.

Filming the animals of the Refuge was quite successful, although I wish that I had made use of an even more telescopic lens than the Sony 28 - 135mm. It was particularly difficult to obtain close-ups of the bison, given that they are dangerous animals and require a significant radius of personal space. There are two shots of elk in the film, one of an elk in the distance behind a herd of bison, and one of a small herd of elk disappearing over the ridge of a mountain. Again, I wish I could have obtained more closeups, but it was particularly fulfilling and exciting to record these images as elk are a shy and less-common creature in the Refuge.

The biggest issues with the production quality of the film are related to the sound recording. I had planned to film Marion's interview over the summer, giving myself plenty of time to schedule the shoot for a non-windy day and reschedule if necessary. Unfortunately, he canceled on me at the last second and I was not able to reestablish contact with him again until mid-December. With limited time left, I was forced to record his interview on the one day in December on which both of us would be available, which so happened to be one of the windiest days in Oklahoma that year. As a result, his interview audio features wind sound that is not up to the standards I try to set for myself.

Additionally, Dorothy's interview is particularly ridden with background sounds which I believe are rustling papers and finger taps against her phone/recording device. The Covid-19

pandemic with notable variants, Delta and Omicron, meant that I was not able to film Dorothy in person due to her old age. Given the way that the audio turned out, I wish I had more carefully given Dorothy instructions on how to handle her phone while talking with me.

### 7.3 Post-Production

My editing process throughout post-production has been more intense and unlike any previous project of mine. Never has a film I've worked on changed so drastically in the editing room and never has the process of editing raised such difficult questions as this film has brought forward. The shift from a vignette-oriented approach that explores different perspectives on nature, to an intertwined approach that ultimately leads the viewer to the knowledge that some boulders may be gravesites of Indigenous peoples, repaints the film as a very different exercise than as it was first envisioned. As previously discussed, I hoped that the incorporation of Robert Figueroa's testimony would help alleviate some of the pressure put on climbers and on Ryan specifically, and in general, reframe this context not as condemnatory, but as complicating. In some ways, this turned out to have the opposite effect, with much of Ryan's discomfort with the film arising from the content and framing of Robert's testimony.

The reconceptualized film is far different than what I had initially conceived over a year ago and the increasingly difficult relationship with Ryan has proven to be an element of documentary filmmaking that I was heretofore unprepared for. Previously in this thesis, I referenced Krzysztof Kieślowski's famed abstention from documentary filmmaking as a result of the difficulty of not knowing how the circulation of his films could potentially negatively impact the lives of his subjects. I have continued to deeply reflect on this story in relation to my experiences with Ryan, with a small part of me wanting to follow in Kieślowski's footsteps. This overall experience has, however, driven me to even more directly want to improve my craft as a



documentarian so as to address the central conflict at the heart of this matter. The craft of documentary, in this case, does not describe prowess in editing or competency with a camera, but rather an ability to connect with subjects on a meaningful level so as to build descriptive, meaningful, and challenging art together. I hope that my future projects may be more solidly built upon a coherence between my vision and that of my subjects and that the process of myself learning from them, and vice-versa, will be a mutually enlightening one.

In all iterations of this film, the final image has been meant to bring the audience away from climbing and instead towards a conception of land as a receptacle of values. I end with a group of mundane rocks poking out of gravel, standing in stark contrast to the dramatic landscapes that make up the majority of the runtime. Although large boulders act as visually unique features of land that draw large groups of patrons to this Refuge every year, the land here is, in a sense, no different than the land beneath the intersection of George W. Bush Turnpike and I35 in Dallas-Fort Worth. All land in North America is Indigenous land and all North American land is now the domain of diverse groups of co-modern peoples who must negotiate with each other to decide what to do with it. By ending on a shot of mundane land that could have been acquired anywhere, I hope to suggest this idea in the film, even if only in a subtle way.

I believe the editing decision to build the film in a narratively progressive way, that leads the audience to an impactful truth, renders the effect of this final image more powerful and resonant than if it had appeared at the end of a film organized by vignettes. Additionally, the reconceptualized foregrounding of Ryan's voice and character, better captures the humanist intent that the film originally had. In an odd, circuitous way, I believe the film ends up saying what I initially intended it to say, although via a set of somewhat different words.

#### 7.4 Success in Integrating Proposed Theories

In terms of employing an observational mode of filmmaking, I believe the film successfully immerses the viewer into the world of the Wichita Mountains. The restrained approach to cinematography, which is often passively observing features of landscape and creatures of nature, helps to put the audience in a contemplative state of mind while also directing attention towards the unique beauty of this particular place. The lack of on-screen interviews keeps the audience in the visual space and world of the Refuge for the duration of the film, maintaining a modal cohesion. And although many of the climbing-related shots in the film are at least partially staged, Ryan's apparent disregard for the camera contributes to the overall observational style.

The most significant hurdle engendered by maintaining an observational approach is the resultant moral uneasiness of a film in which the author's voice is obscured. Because Ryan is the only human seen in the film and because his, Marion's, Mark's, Dorothy's, and Robert's voices are the only testimonials throughout, my authorial presence in the film is made more omniscient and therefore potentially taken for granted. The danger here is in crafting an obviously biased film that pushes audiences to take Indigenous land rights issues more seriously, but which conceals the source of those biases, save for the credits at the beginning and end of the film. My hope is that several of the other formal decisions made in the construction of the film remind the audience that what they are watching is still the construction of a biased, creative actor.

The poetic decision to have all testimony delivered via voice-over, and to maintain Ryan as the only human on screen is one element that I believe keeps the audience in an interrogative space in which they are encouraged to reflect on the authorial intent of the film. As discussed in the prospectus of this document, including the lower-thirds title cards of speakers without

showing their faces, is an intentional decision that runs counter to the normative way of building a testimony-driven film. Although I decided against using any superimpositions of speakers in the film, I believe the poeticism of a lack of sit-down interviews still comes across as a motivated and successful choice.

In conjunction with the use of faceless lower-thirds, I have also used a titling mechanic that writes the Kiowa words that Dorothy translates on screen. These non-diegetic intrusions further draw attention to an authorial, if unseen, presence. The inexplicability of hovering text in a language that most audiences will not recognize or understand is meant to be another poetic choice that differentiates the film from a normative approach to titling. I have intentionally made these instances of text slightly disjunct from the pace of the underlying film, using hard cuts rather than fade-outs, as well as alternating the timing of the titles to sometimes coincide with the spoken iteration, sometimes outlast it, and sometimes entirely precede it. I find this approach to be a visually compelling way of incorporating an Indigenous language that is so inherently tied to a close relationship with nature and so meaningful to its people, both in its oral and written forms.

## 7.5 Conclusion

As this film has developed further and further, I have continued to feel apprehensive about it turning into a partisan project. My goal since the beginning has been to use the act of climbing and the various perspectives on land discussed throughout the film to describe an inner conflict that I feel when personally traversing landscapes that may be understood as one time having been colonized. I understand that the very nature of this film is political and will invite opposing and perhaps strong reactions from audience members about the validity of climbing on sacred lands and about the lack of access experienced by Kiowa peoples near the park. Although

this is by design, I hope that the film not only expresses the conflict within my mind, but also allows audience members the space to come to their own conclusions given the information presented in the film.

One way that I have tried to create this space, has been to ere on the side of subtlety when messages in the film have the potential to be extrapolated towards broader political goals. Generally, the film ends somewhat ambiguously, leaving the audience with the simple and straightforward knowledge of traditional Kiowa burial customs, followed by Ryan's declaration that the growing bouldering community ought to be respectful and responsible while visiting the Refuge. We see Ryan climb one last time, now knowing that the boulder he is perched upon is an object far more complicated than what may have been initially assumed. The suggestion that Ryan could be climbing amongst the gravesites of Indigenous peoples is clearly not the act of subtlety, however. What to do with this information is, on the other hand, greatly left to the audience. The film does not answer the question of, "Should climbers of European descent feel morally justified to climb wherever they please?" Nor does it really answer the question of what to do with recreational public lands. Given that the film is merely twenty-three minutes long, the intention has always been to craft a nuanced text that puts general audiences in a position of posing these questions to themselves.

I hope to include climbers and nature lovers within the general audience I envision for this film. My own experiences with the DFW climbing community, climbing friends, and interactions with the subjects of this documentary have taught me that neither climbers nor general nature lovers operate as homogenous blocks of people. There is a wide diversity of opinions about the status of North American land as Indigenous and whether that categorization entails any moral considerations on the part of patrons. The subtlety I have built into the film is

therefore meant to bring in those in the audience who may be willfully blind or simply uninformed about Indigenous land rights, and offer them the information I have collected that has led me to my position. Finally, this film is meant to grow an awareness of the considerations we can make as an informed public as well as offer a way of conceptualizing land that can be applied by anyone.

APPENDIX  
TRANSCRIPT OF THE FINISHED FILM

Ryan:

The Wichita Mountains are located in Southeast Oklahoma, particularly around the town of Cache. It's a wildlife refuge set aside by the United States government to protect a pretty place with some cool animals and plants in it.

Marion:

Back in the early 1940s, this area was actually designated first- late 30s, early 40s, as the Wichita- It was a forest preserve. And later, through an act of Congress to protect the Texas Longhorns and the bison population, which had dwindled almost to nothing, they moved those here and created the Wichita Mountains Wildlife Refuge. It was the first refuge in the country, I believe. Now it's one of more than 500.

Ryan:

My name is Ryan Sheldon. I've been climbing in the Wichita Mountains for the last ten years or so. Bouldering is the most simplistic type of climbing, usually done for short heights of like zero to 30ft. All you need is some shoes, a crash pad, and a chalk bucket, and a few cool rocks to climb on.

My first trip was in 2012. I had found some information on Mountain Project and had decided to try to go out with my friends. Ended up having a heck of a bad day, but it kind of got me hooked on going back out and trying to find new stuff. I've always liked the kind of excitement of like when you go out camping or hiking or climbing, there's always like a small chance, depending on how careful you are, that you might die. And that's always been kind of a plus for me just a little bit. I'm not an adrenaline junkie. I don't go out to get adrenaline high, but I enjoy the being-in-the-middle-of-nowhere aspect of it.

Marion:

There are four main federal land agencies. Three of those are within the Department of Interior. You've got the National Park Service, the Bureau of Land Management, and the Fish and Wildlife Service. And then the US Forest Service is the fourth, which is under the Department of Agriculture. The other three are typically very oriented toward public use, recreation, and they've always been that way, and national parks are that way. With the Fish and Wildlife Service, that wasn't originally their mission. They're primarily set up for protection of wildlife and habitat. And public use is something that's incidental, over the years, it was encouraged to provide as much recreational use as possible back in the 60s and into the 70s, but more and more, it was kind of determined that often if there's too much or the wrong kind that can impact the purpose of the refuge. And so as we got into the late 80s and early 90s, there was just a lot of assessment and change in the way they wanted to view how refuges were to be managed. Being out here flat in the plains, whether you're in Kansas or Oklahoma or Texas, this is an extremely unique environment having such a granitic mountain range in this area of the country. Besides the quality of the grant, which is kind of a preferred medium for climbing. It's the wilderness experience that this place provides that I think draws people as much as anything.

Dorothy:

Gáuígú: the old word for Kiowa. There was a legend about us coming out of underground, and that means pulling us out from under there. But that comes from our fairy tale, our jokester. His name was Sendé, and some people went by the belief that we came from underground. My great grandfather was the leader of the tribe from 1833 to his death in 1866. And in the books, his name was Dohásän, which means Little Bluff. And then there were sub-



chiefs around, and they seemed to like to be where mountains were. I was able to go on a pilgrimage two times now to where we originated around Wyoming. And when they were driven south, all they had was the mountains around Mountain Scott. And I thought how lonely they must have been, when they'd think of the life we had up there.

Mark:

Specifically with the Wichita Mountains, it all kind of began about like the Cambrian period of 520,000,000 years ago. This area was actually volcanic in origin. So all the rocks you see are volcanic in origin. What was happening is it was rifting. So there was a big tear across North America where essentially the continent was trying to be ripped apart by tectonic forces. It didn't end up happening. We still have North America together, how it is today. But in that process, this area essentially had a bunch of magma coming up from underground. It was volcanoes everywhere. And that's what gives us all these different granites and rhyolites, different igneous rocks here. Fast forward to the Pennsylvanian area. So about 300 million years ago, and then we have some other volcanic activity. Essentially, we have another plate crunching into Oklahoma, into this North American area. And in doing so, we get mountain formation, just like we see all across the world. And then following that tectonic activity, ever since then, we've had more or less just erosion, weather via water, wind, ice has just been working its way and essentially making these mountains smaller and smaller and smaller into what we have today. It's a lot of rounded volcanic rocks.

Dorothy:

Mountain Scott is Kóp Aydl. That means a lot to the Kiowa drive right here. By Lawton,

it's a Wichita mountain range. It means the big mountain. That's all it means, Kóp Aydl. And our story is on that- I always wander off on different stories. That's where our buffalo went when people were killing them too fast. So when they left us, they went into Mountain Scott, never to come back again. They were our food. Kiowas called them all áuñ:gáubíñ, our food.

And there's another one, there's Mount Sheridan. It was named after General Sheridan. And then up west there's Saddle Mountain, which meant a lot to the Kiowas and we called it Saddle Mountain. So we call it tau kóp. And then, of course, rainy mountain. That's sépyàldà.

Robert:

We know that at the level of national parks, it's highly contentious because many parks, especially the big early parks in the history of the United States Park Service was an extraction of Indigenous people from their lands. It may have happened upon making something apart. It may have happened previous by colonial incursion to that area. And then herds passed through the area, various uses, and then it was deemed a National Park. Colonial settlers and the United States taking this sovereignty from Indigenous people. It's iconic in a variety of ways. One is a state sanctioned extraction of Indigenous people. In many ways, it's also neutralized sites within the parks that were meaningful to Indigenous people by virtue of the separation of Church and state. And a sacred place becomes sacred sure to you as an ordinary citizen, but the park is not going to close down for one day because you view this as a sacred site and this is your solstice.

Ryan:

There are a lot of things that we can do to maintain the environments that we climb in. Primary one is going to be mitigation of erosion. So you just being in a place, walking around in

it causes you're killing the grass and everything you're walking on. A big problem with bouldering is the paths. I'm sure most people have noticed if you lay a blanket down your backyard or don't pick it up when you pull it back up a day later, the grass is going to be all dead. It's not best practice to be leaving your pad over grass or over-padding an area. Try not to kill the vegetation. That's going to be a really big one. And then the second biggest one is going to be littering. Just remember that you're not the primary group. They're animals, wildlife, vegetation, all that is more important. Like there's been probably hundreds of boulders that I've been like, man, that would be great. But there's bushes or a tree growing right in front of it, and now we just can't climb it. And that's fine. We'll go find another one.

Robert:

The first part of that moral ecology of moral terrains is that there are layers of meaning on the rock and that already has some complexity because the varying relationships that have layers of meaning may not all be visibly present.

So first question is how do we see the layers? And if we see the rock as only an object, like a climbing wall is perhaps only an object, then we lose the sense of the relationship to the rock. So if we envision an ascent of any kind or just treading over these moral terrains, there's a question of how the multiple layers of meaning play upon us and what new meanings come to us through that embodied experience.

Dorothy:

Haun p'ah. Iron tide. They didn't know what it was because we've never been fenced in, and that's a fairly new word from maybe the late 80s. Those are words we had to invent, our

people. Isn't that funny? But to compare that, but that means we didn't want to be fenced in. That's what happened towards the end when they turned our land into different sections. I can imagine. I live this as I'm talking, when I'm teaching a class or telling someone I live it: the confinement they must have felt.

Robert:

There's different pathways to this moral context. There's the intrusion, there's the invasion. I think that it doesn't have to be the poles of villainy or a pure respect. But these are part of the complex terrains. As to knowing that there's something morally justifiable feeling good about being in a place, feeling like the place isn't rejecting me, the rock isn't rejecting me. So it has to be more of a tuning into the moral agency and the moral layers that are there not asking so much about the agency of the rock in terms of what does the rock want? But really, what does the rock mean?

Dorothy:

Tso bienhedl, bienhedl, tso. Big boulders is how they buried them. And especially the more important you were in the tribe, the more they hid you. So the elements couldn't get to you and other warriors or wild animals. I've got the directions to one of them. That's my great grandfather. But it's up in Cimarron County and it's way up almost into Texas. Stumming bear, all of those guys, they're buried under boulders, different places. They didn't want anyone to get to them because all of their regalia went with them, even their horses.

Ryan:

We are very much on borrowed land, for sure. Climbing access was almost lost in the refuge in the 90s. And anybody that was around that time, that's something they're terrified of still to this day, of that happening again. I think that bouldering is quickly overcoming every other facet of climbing Because it's the most accessible. And when something's more easily accessible, people are more apt to do it. You only need a pair of shoes, a chalk bag and then a pad. And you can find a friend that's been bouldering that already has a pad. Whereas if you're going to rope climb, you need rope, harness, gear. Somebody that already knows how to do it, to show you how to do everything. Tie knots, place gear, all that stuff. And a lot of people- that's too much faff for a lot of people nowadays. They want quick, easy access, to do something fun. With this new growth, especially with it being in the bouldering only, there's a lot of responsibility with that.

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