

Catskill Park Advisory Committee

Meeting Notes

January 28, 2022 at 10:00am

Meeting held via Zoom

Jeff Senterman welcomed all present and thanked everyone for taking part virtually. He went over a few housekeeping and technical details for the zoom meeting and urged everyone to introduce themselves through the chat function.

Jeff thanked stakeholders who submitted their reports ahead of time and noted that it allows for everyone to get the information beforehand and that any reports received will be included with the meeting notes when they are distributed.

FPAC Update

Peter Frank (DEC) provided a short update on efforts to reform the FPAC (Forest Preserve Advisory Committee) in order to make it function more effectively as an advisory body to DEC instead of just a passive information delivery system. Peter noted that there's a subcommittee of FPAC members working to make some recommendations to the full FPAC.

Catskill Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG)

Peter Frank provided an update on the CAG process. The CAG was established by the DEC, by request of the Governor and is charged with making recommendations to the Commissioner of DEC to address impacts to the Catskill Park from high use. He noted that the [CAG's Interim Report is now available](#) for review and that DEC is asking for public comment on the report. Comments on the report to CatskillPark@dec.ny.gov by Feb. 3, 2022.

Peter invited members of the CAG who are also on the CPAC to say a few words about the report. The CAG members highlighted some individual items in the report and urged everyone to read the report and make a comment on the report.

Presentation - Catskill Trailless Peaks Addendum

Pine Roehrs, an Environmental Program Specialist with the NYSDEC presented the results of updated research on impacts to the trailless peaks of the Catskills. The presentation is attached to these notes, along with the Addendum Report. The overall results of the study indicate that the DEC should manage the increasing impacts to the trailless peaks in accordance with the Catskill State Land Master Plan.

NYS Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) Updates

Catskill Park Coordinator:

Peter Frank introduced McCrea Burnham, the recently appointed Catskill Park Coordinator at DEC. McCrea introduced himself and provided an overview of his experience in the Catskills, and the work that he expected to be doing moving forward at the Catskill Park Coordinator. McCrea said he looks forward to working with everyone in the Catskills. His email is McCrea.Burnham@dec.ny.gov and his phone is 518-408-9518.

Central Office:

Peter Frank noted that the Department is working with a FPAC subcommittee to help the DEC establish draft guidelines for trail construction and maintenance in light of the recent court decision.

Peter noted that the DEC expects the professional trail crew to be able to work for 14 weeks in the Catskill Park, which is an increase from last year.

McCrea Burnham noted that the DEC's [Trail Supporter Patch](#) is now available for purchase. Proceeds from the sale of the patches goes into a non-motorized trail fund that supports trail projects on DEC lands. In the past the fund has helped support projects in the Catskills.

Peter said that the Governor's proposed budget includes a large funding increase for state land stewardship activities, including significant new support for the Forest Preserve.

Region 3:

Bill Rudge announced that he would be retiring from the DEC on February 28. He noted that it has been a real pleasure to work in the Catskills for so long and to work with so many others who are dedicated to the region.

Michael Callan noted that a new Forester had been hired for Region 3, which would help distribute the workload. The new Forester will be focusing on private land issues.

Ian Dunn noted that 2 new lean-tos were flown into the Forest Preserve in November to replace older lean-tos that could not be repaired - Terrace Mountain and Table Mountain lean-tos. He thanked the Catskill 3500 Club for its donations, and the Bruderhof for fabricating and pre-building the lean-tos. He said that the lean-tos had

been constructed, then disassembled for storage at the Catskills Visitor Center, before being flown to their permanent locations, and then being reassembled by the DEC operations crew.

Ian noted that the DEC is in the process of hiring its backcountry stewards. The stewards will be working across the Catskill Park on a number of different projects.

Ian reported that the [Catskill Fire Tower Challenge](#) has begun for 2022 and now includes a sixth tower - the Upper Esopus Fire Tower at the Catskills Visitor Center. Those who hike to all six will get a certificate and a patch from the DEC and be entered into drawings for other prizes.

Region 4:

Alicia Sullivan reported that Jeff Rider has been promoted to the position of Assistant Director, Division of Lands and Forests.

Alicia noted that the Trail Crew had completed several projects across Region 4 last year, including the Kaaterskill Falls Trail and the replacement of the steps on the Devil's Path in the Devil's Tombstone Campground and Day Use Area.

Alicia reported on the washout of the Escarpment Trail bridge this past fall near the Route 23 Parking Area. The DEC operations team replaced the bridge and repaired damage at the parking lot, all caused by flooding. In addition more boardwalk was installed on the Escarpment Trail in the same area to remove the trail from muddy areas.

Alicia noted that the DEC is currently searching for an intern from SUNY ESF to work in the Stamford Regional Office. She asked if anyone knew of anyone interested, to have the student look at the ESF intern system for the opportunity.

Trail and vehicle counters installed in the Kaaterskill Falls area had the following numbers for 2021:

- Kaaterskill Clove Middle Pool - 131,000 visitors
- Kaaterskill Clove Viewing Platform - 88,000 visitors
- Laurel House Parking Area - 87,000 vehicles
- Schutt Road Parking Area - 12,000 vehicles

New York State Department of Transportation (NYSDOT) Updates

Peter Dunleavy noted that NYSDOT had submitted a report, which will be included in the meeting notes.

Peter reported that Ed Frantz, the NYSDOT Forest Preserve Coordinator has retired. The position is expected to be refilled, but until recently NYSDOT wasn't refilling positions and this position has not yet been approved to be refilled.

Peter noted that the effort to update Catskill Park gateway signage has been paused until the Forest Preserve Coordinator role is filled.

Peter said that recently the NYSDOT has been working on efforts to improve wildlife passage across and under roadways.

The Catskill Park Transportation Working Group (TWG) has not met since Ed Frantz retired. Jeff Senterman suggested that he and Peter work on calling a meeting of the TWG, which is a subcommittee of the CPAC.

New York City Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) Updates

Tom Davidock noted that the DEP is facing challenges from staff turnover. He said that during this transition period, requests may take more time to process, but attention is still being given to everything. He noted that Paul Lenz has retired and that Adam Bosch has left the DEP for a new job opportunity.

Tom said that the 2021 Boating Season on the Reservoirs was the best year so far with a total of 1826 boats registered to be on the Reservoirs. He said that he's working with stakeholders to review the 2021 season and make plans for the 2022 season.

Tom noted that land acquisition activities at DEP are beginning again after pauses during COVID. He said that there are currently 144,000 acres of DEP owned accessible land across the Catskills.

Tom said that in 2021 the Ashokan Rail Trail saw 165,000 visitors and that the numbers for deer management permits they partner with DEC on were on par with previous years.

Member Updates and Items

A number of reports were submitted by stakeholders prior to the meeting and are included with these meeting notes for reference.

Members were given the opportunity to provide additional updates during the meeting.

Jeff Senterman noted that the Catskill Center was hiring for a number of new positions including a full-time Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator, a full-time Aquatic Invasive Species Manager, and seasonal Catskill Steward positions. All open positions are [posted on the Catskill Center's career page](#).

Cathy Pedler from ADK noted that a [Forest Preserve Education Webinar](#) will be held with legislators on February 10th. She noted that this is an effort to continue to bring up Forest Preserve issues to legislators during the budget season. A newly created coalition of groups, representing both Forest Preserves, has been working to advocate for Forest Preserve resources in this year's budget process.

John Thompson from the Catskill Center's CRISP program noted that the Spotted Lantern Fly has been detected in the CRISP region.

Wendell George from the Catskill Mountain Club noted that the Catskills Lark in the Park was successful this past October and in person events were held. He looks forward to the 2022 Lark in the Park.

Wendell also noted that the Views from the Watershed program has evolved from a bus tour to a self guided podcast tour of the NYC watershed. The podcast features interviews with a number of guests who talk about the history of the watershed, about its management and about how it has impacted Catskills communities and can be found at <https://www.walkingthewatershed.com/podcasttour/index.html>.

Melissa Cascini from the NYNJTC reported that volunteer crews for trails and lean-tos in the Catskills are gearing up for the season.

Amanda LaValle from Ulster County Planning noted that they are looking for funding to implement Phase 1 of improvements to the U&D Corridor at the western end of the County.



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Addendum to 2019 Visitor Use Study of the Trail-less Peaks Over 3,500' in the Catskills

Pine Roehrs, EPS, NR 1
Region 3, NYSDEC

January 2022

Summary of Developments Since 2019

- In the Spring of 2020, Covid-19 emerged, and a global pandemic ensued. Public lands experienced unprecedented levels of visitation while people took to the outdoors in record numbers.
- In January of 2021, Graham and Doubletop were permanently closed to public use. The NYSDEC and Catskill 3,500' Club reached a decision to temporarily designate South Doubletop and Millbrook Ridge as alternative peaks for aspiring 3,500 club members. These peaks were removed from the list of required hikes on March 31, 2021, however, sustained visitation to SD since then has resulted in the rapid proliferation of new Informal Trails (IT's) to that summit.
- Significant improvements to STRAVA mapping and route recording features are now available and these improvements will dramatically improve the accuracy of future data collection efforts on the IT networks.



2008 CPSLMP Management Guidance Related to Trail-less Peaks

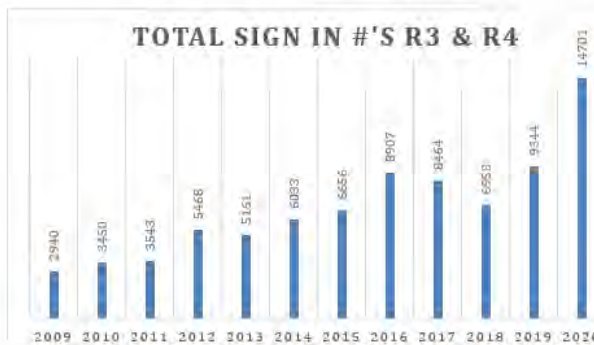
- The Biodiversity Act of 1993 mandates that DEC identify, manage and conserve plants, animals and ecological communities that are rare in New York State, and that are located on State-owned lands. Pg. 13
- Where public use of existing trails or facilities endangers rare plants, animals or communities, these trails or facilities will be modified, relocated or closed. Pg. 24
- Requires that new trails on trailless peaks can only be proposed if there is serious environmental degradation, i.e., multiple herd paths. Pg. 103



Trends in Visitation to the Trail-less Peaks

Percentage Increase in Sign in Numbers by Peak from 2009-2020

Peak	2009	2020	% Increase
SW Hunter	301	1565	690%
Vly	228	1417	687%
Rusk	197	1199	635%
Balsam Cap	221	1249	578%
Friday	244	1202	571%
Halcott	201	1159	562%
Fir	226	1069	559%
North Dome	155	1009	542%
Rocky	214	1013	475%
Lone	248	1017	432%
Big Indian	334	1240	414%
Sherrill	181	957	411%

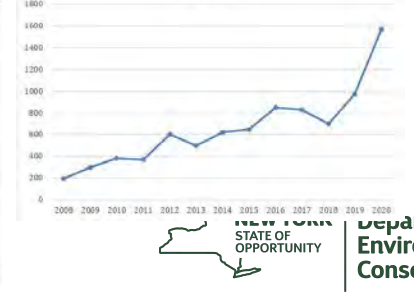
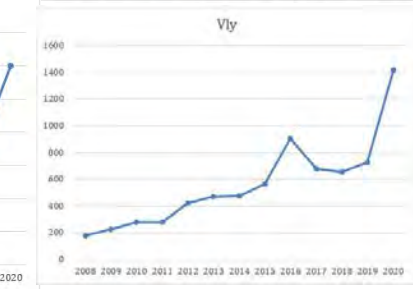
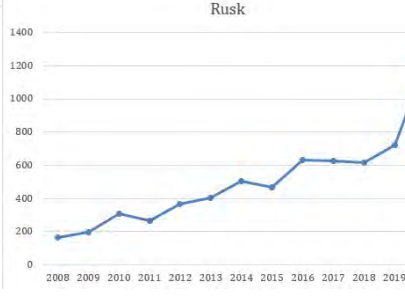
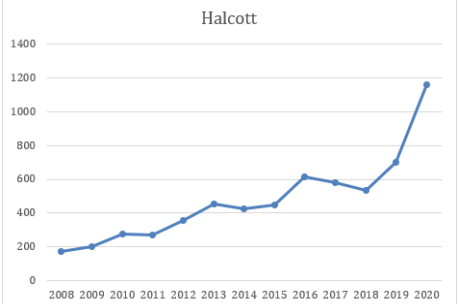
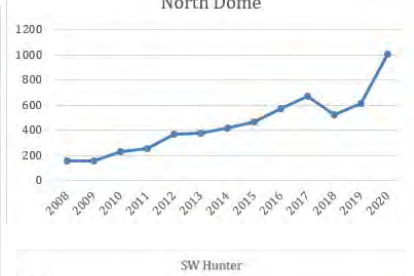
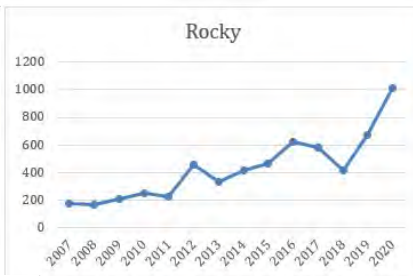
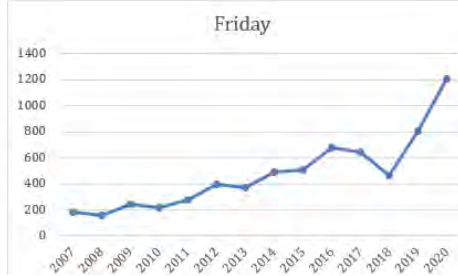
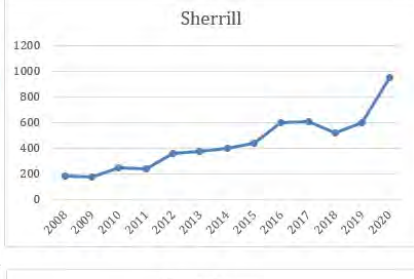
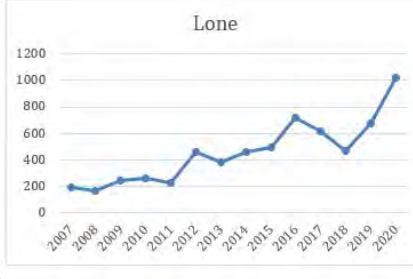
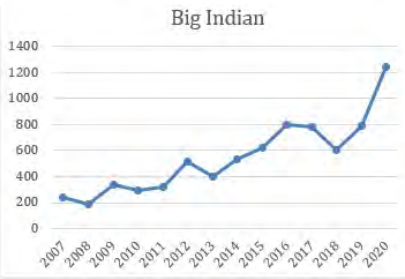


This graph does not include KHP numbers or Eagle numbers for 2019, 2020. Including these figures would skew the data that we have for 13 peaks from 2009-2020.

Preliminary 2021 Canister Sign In Results

	2020	2021	Percentage +/-
N Dome	1009	1065	5.50% ↑
Sherrill	957	1110	15.98% ↑
Vly	1417	1402	1.05% ↓
Rusk	1199	1045	12.80% ↓

Trail-less Peak Canister Sign In Rates





IT leading to KHP Photo courtesy of J. Bouton 11.21

11/10/2021

IT's typically have steep grades, fall line alignments and can deteriorate rapidly under heavy traffic. Impacts can include:

- Soil compaction and Erosion
- Altered Hydrology
- Habitat Fragmentation
- Reduction in canopy cover and tree density
- Increased opportunities for invasive species introduction into interior habitats.

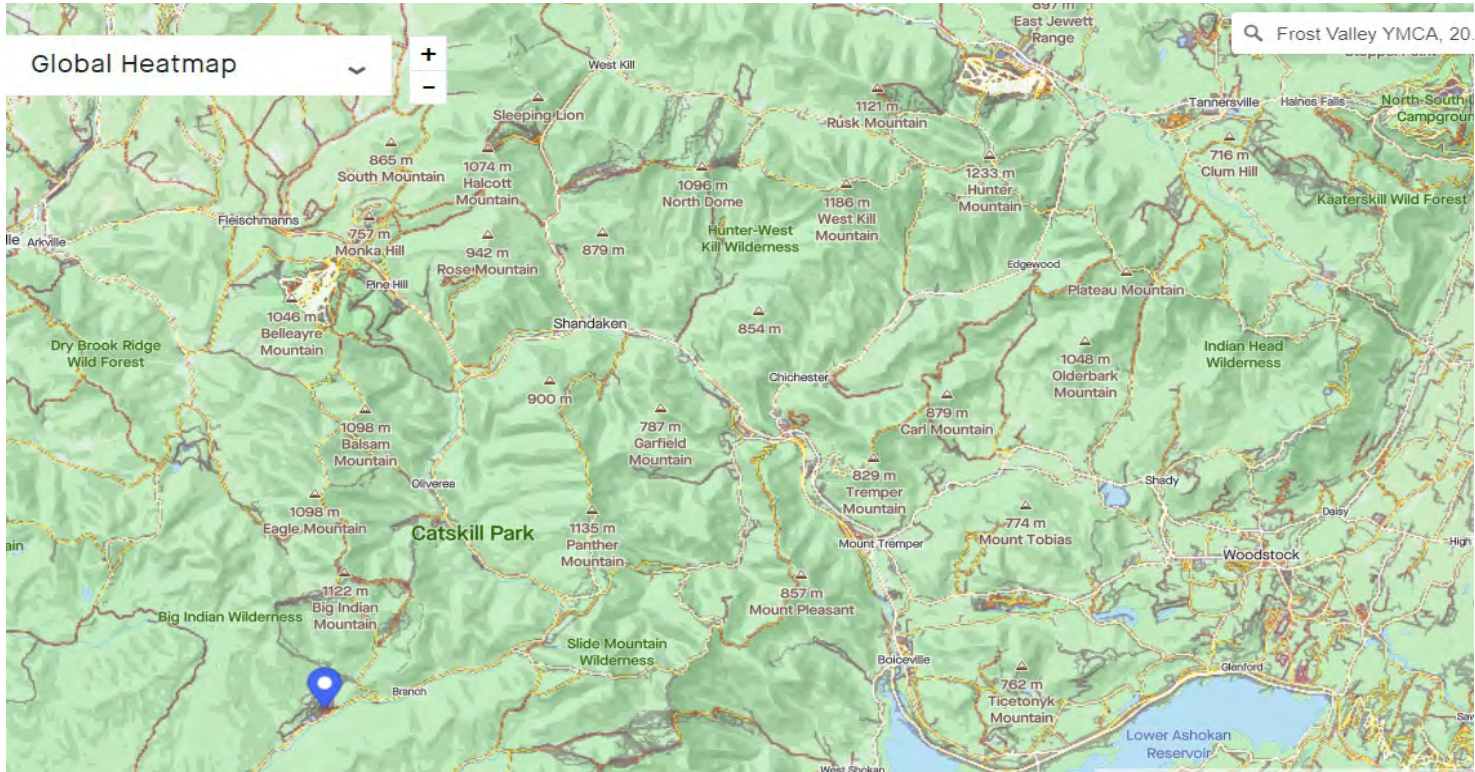


Summit of S. Doubletop Photo Courtesy of J. Bouton. 11/21

11/03/2021



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2022 Monitoring Priorities

Highest Priority Peaks

- South Doubletop
- Fir
- Big Indian
- Balsam Cap
- Friday
- Lone
- Rocky
- Kaaterskill High Peak
- Sherrill
- North Dome

Exhibited concerning visitor use patterns with duplicative summit approaches and new, extensively braided and redundant IT's.

Medium Priority Peaks

- Rusk
- Halcott

Visitor use patterns indicate duplicative summit approaches but extent of the dispersal of use on the summit approaches is not as extreme as the high priority peaks.

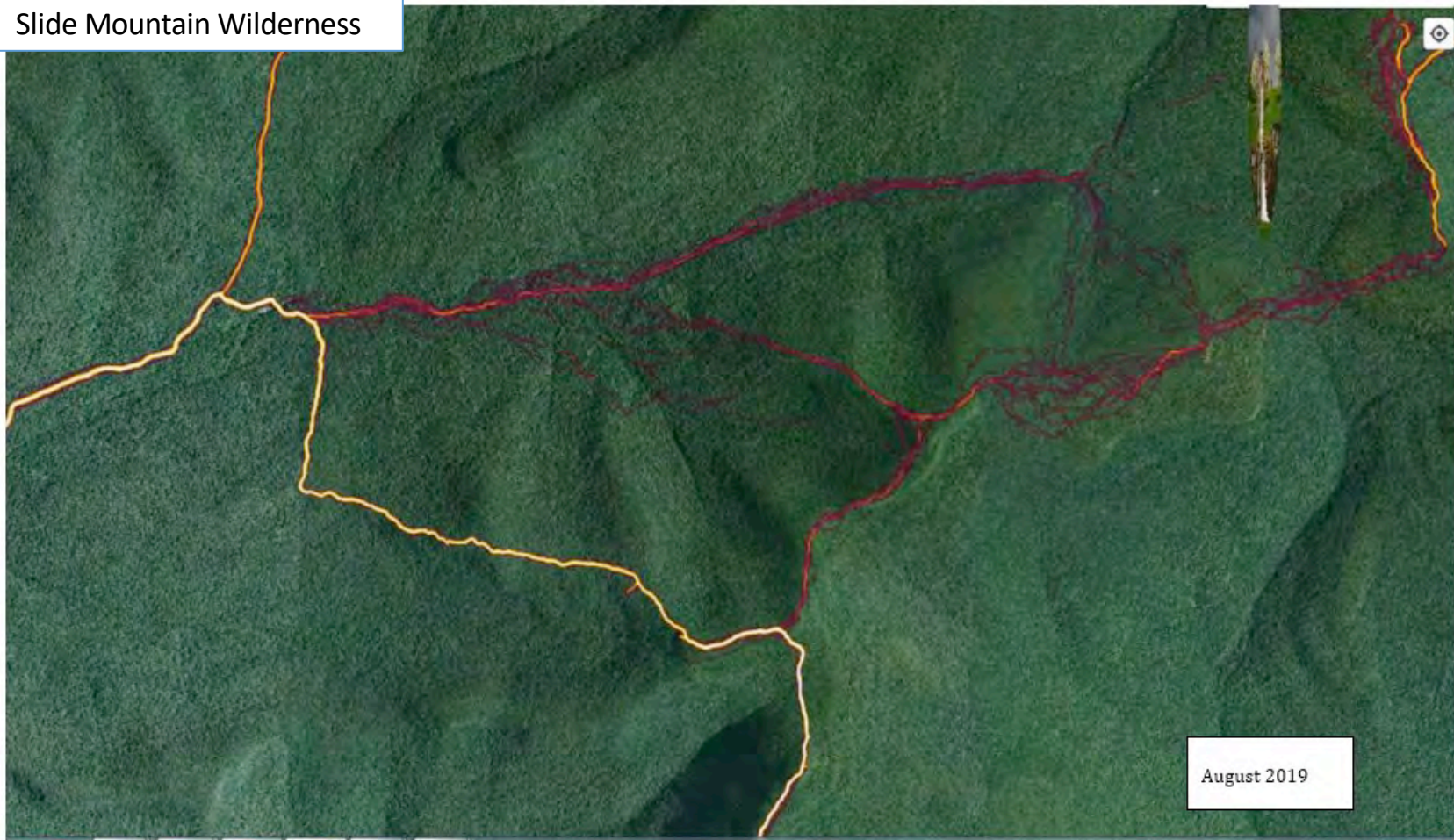
Lowest Priority Peaks

- Vly
- Bearpen
- South-West Hunter
- Eagle

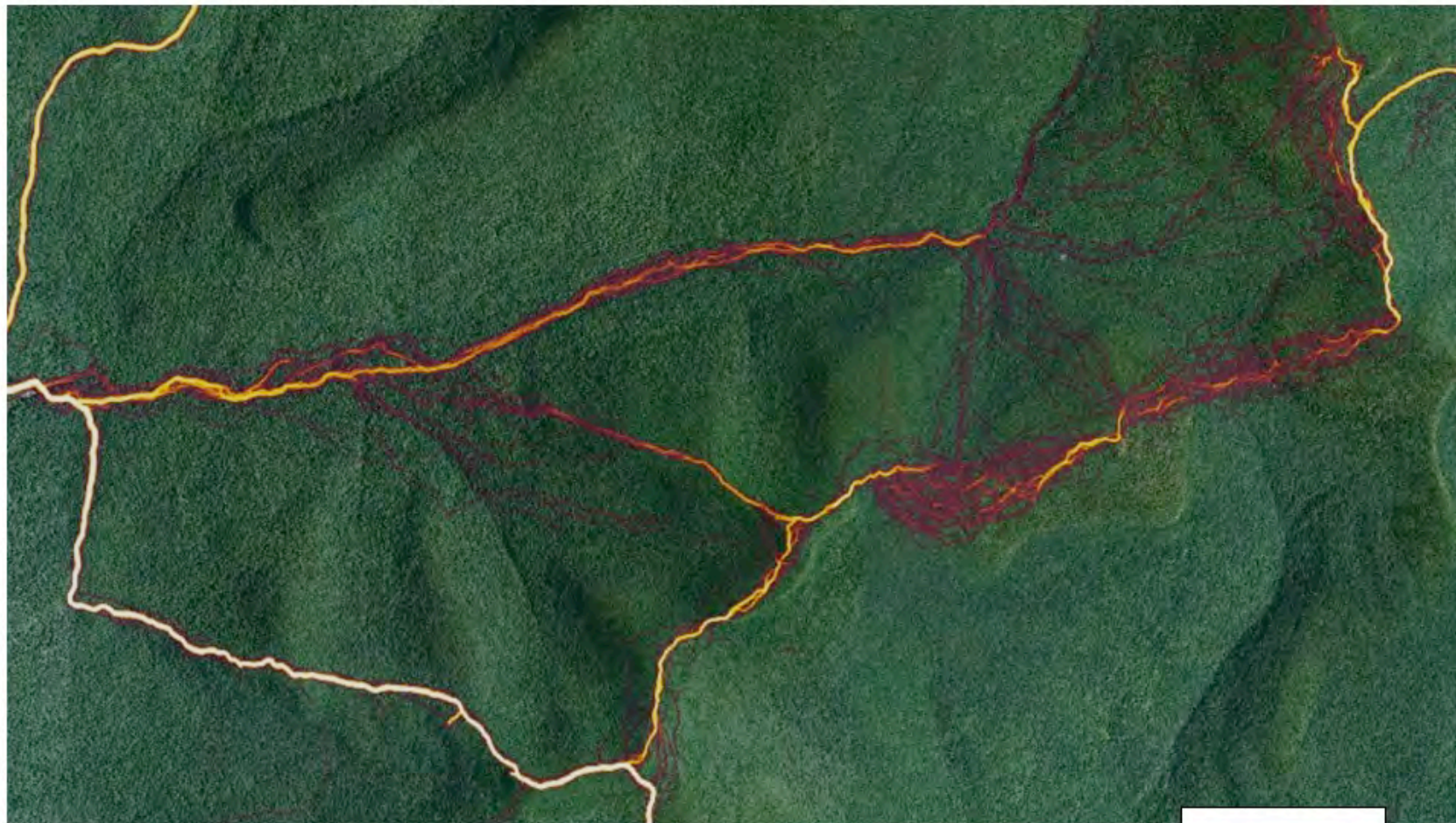
Visitor use pattern is generally acceptable; use is concentrated to a single IT corridor which is short in distance.



Slide Mountain Wilderness

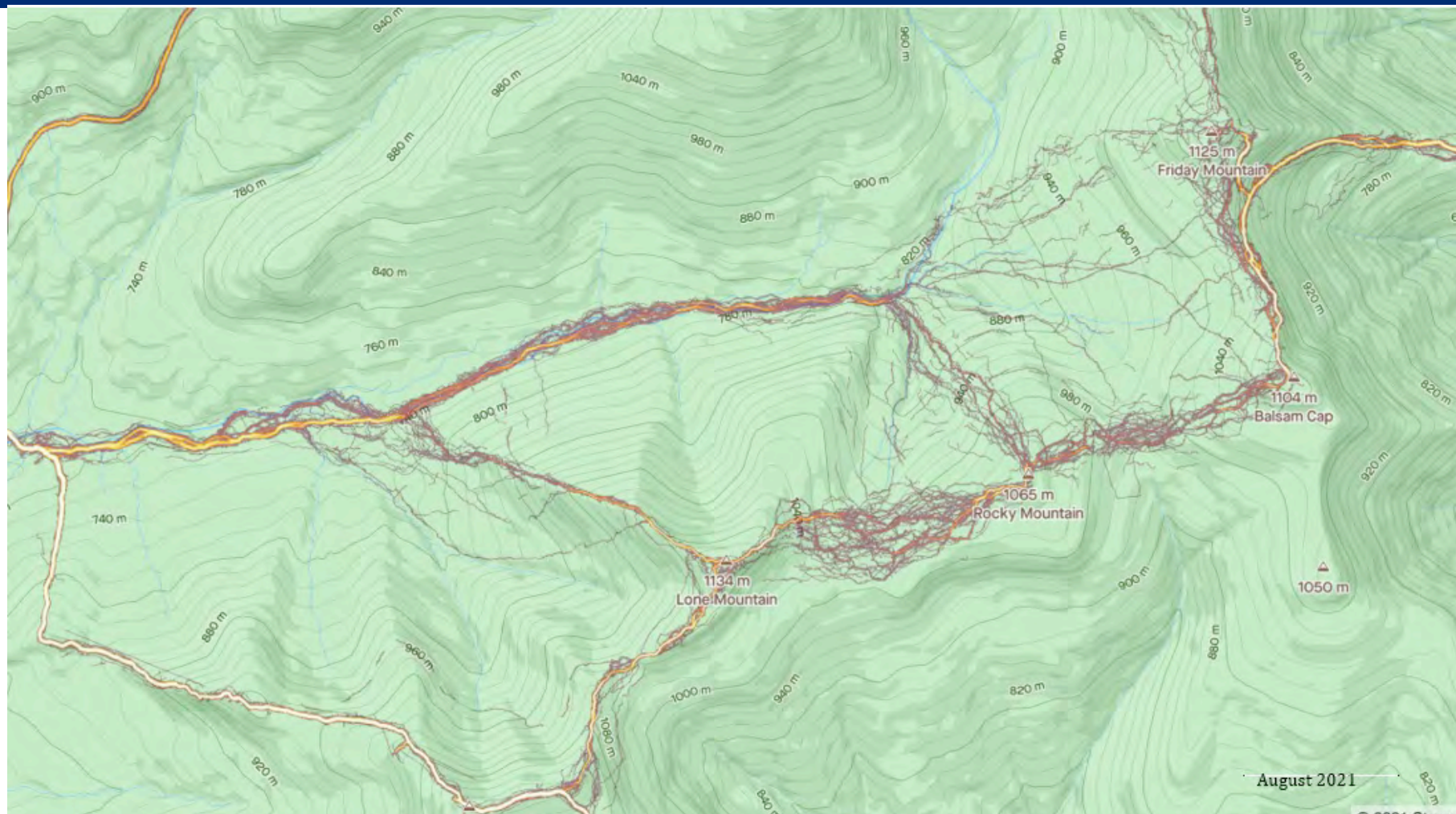


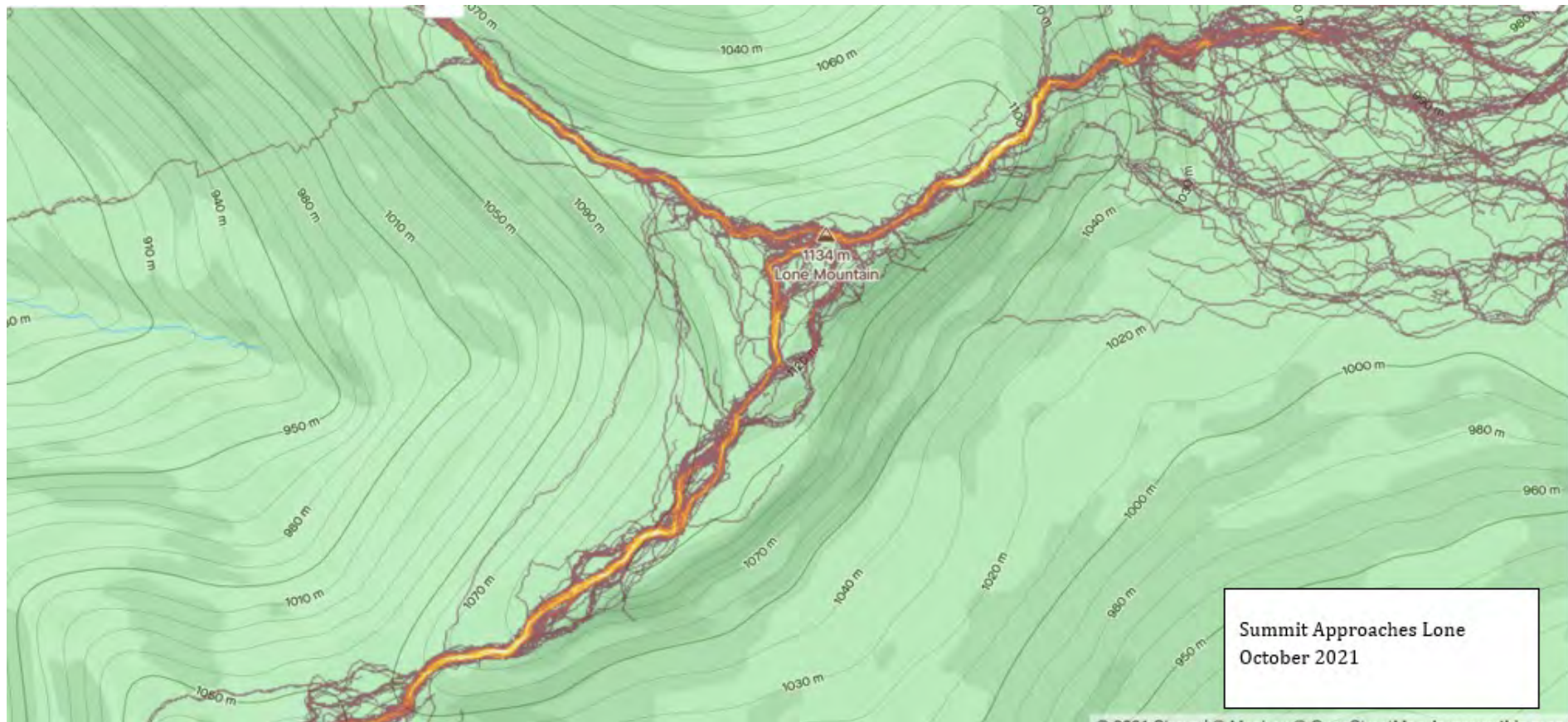
August 2019

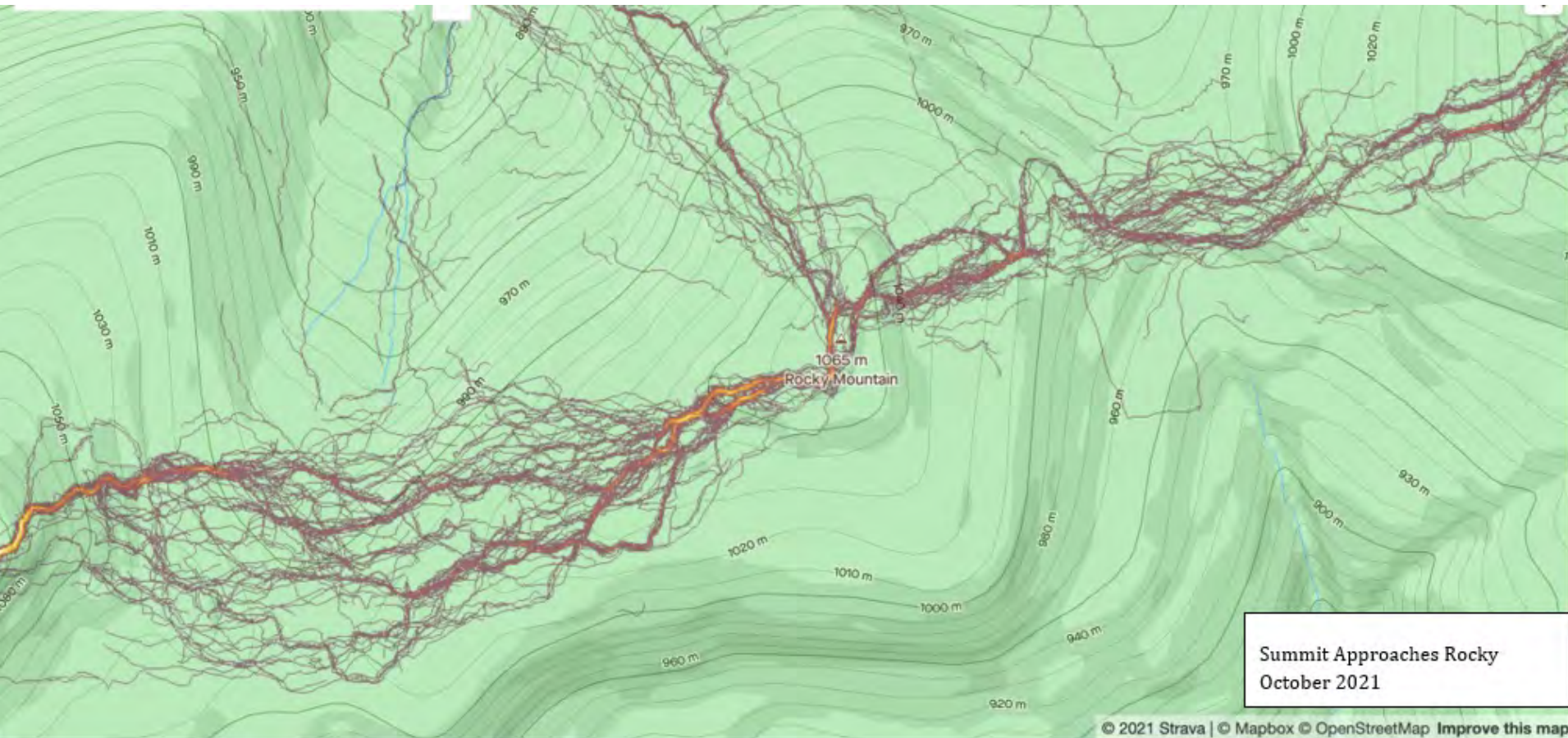


August 2020



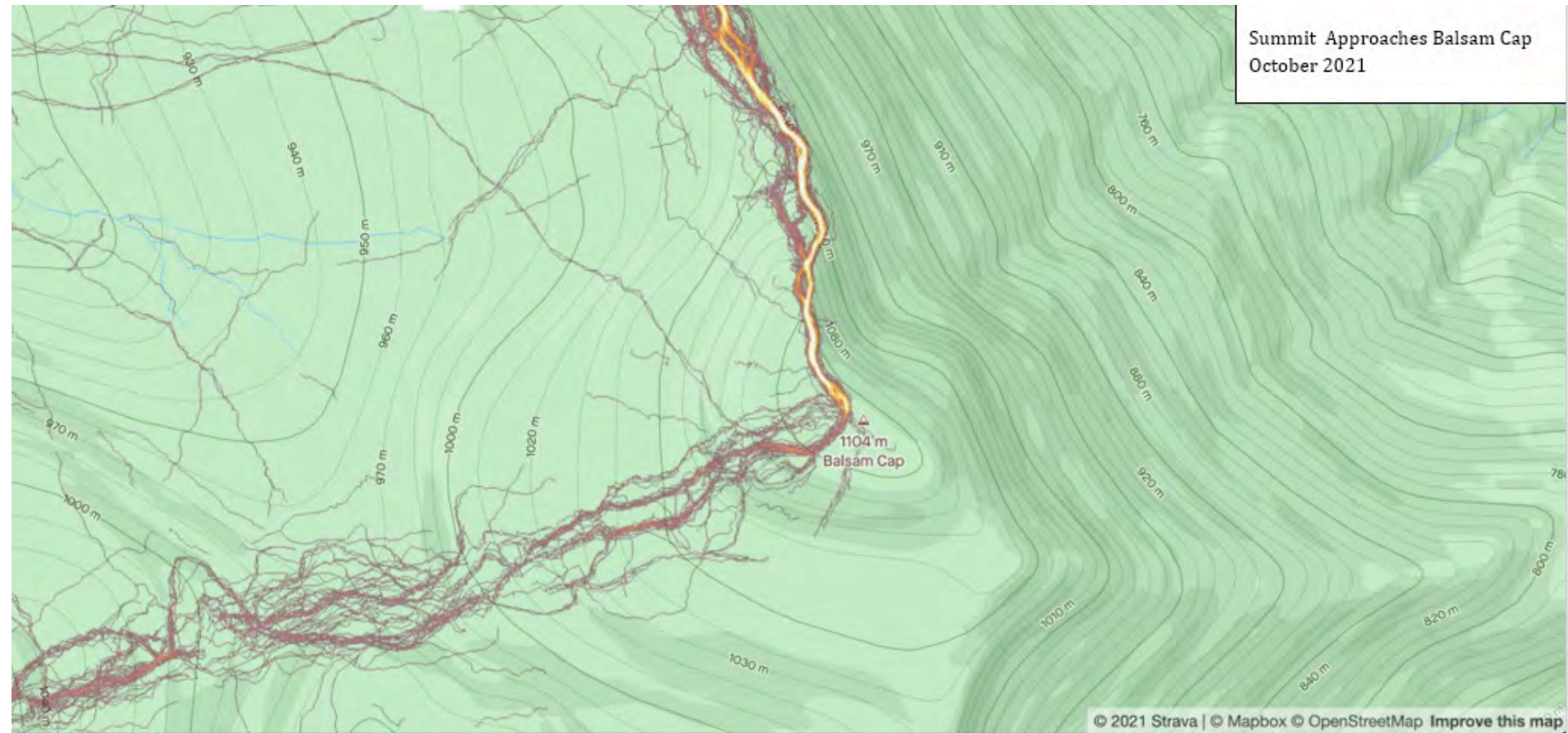




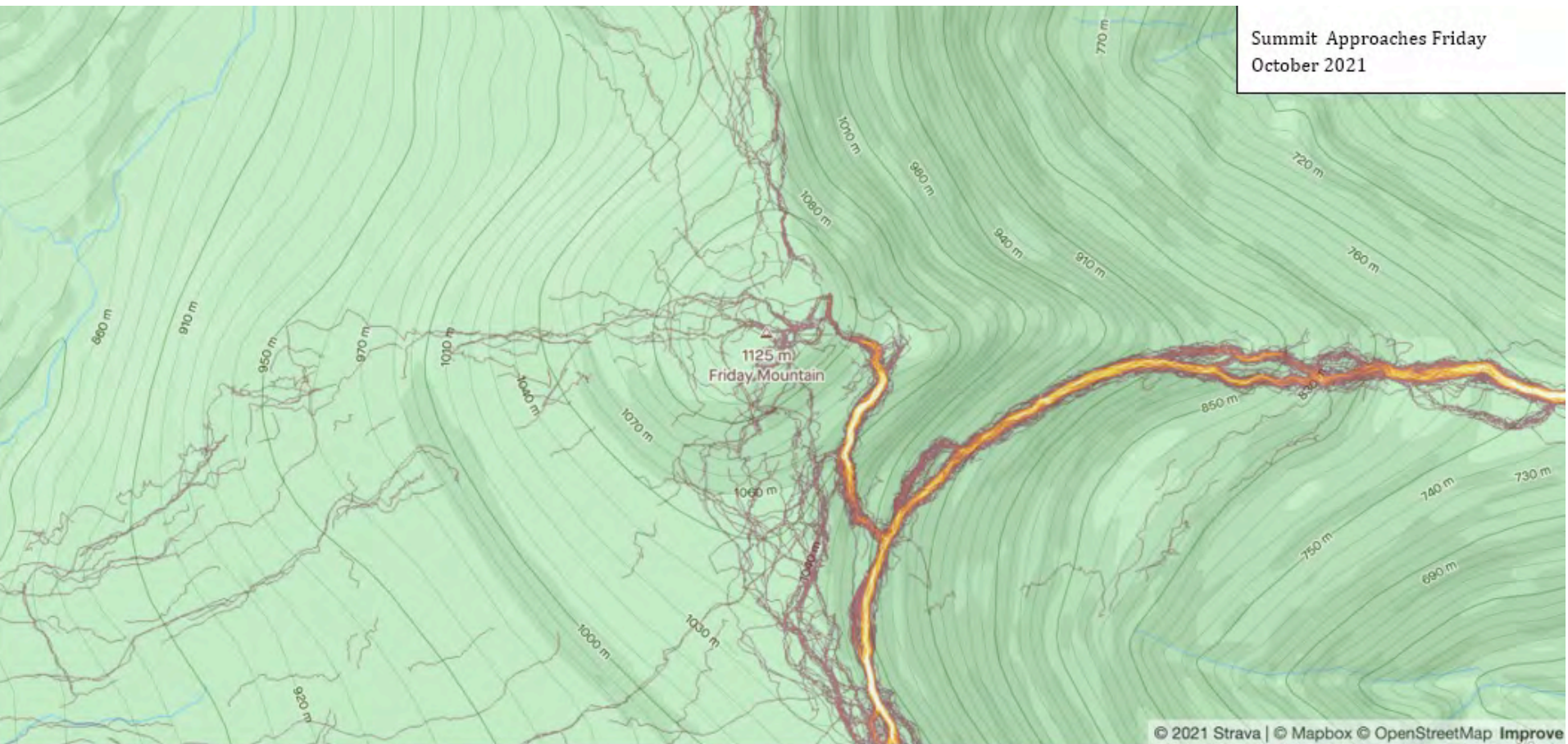


Summit Approaches Rocky
October 2021

Summit Approaches Balsam Cap
October 2021

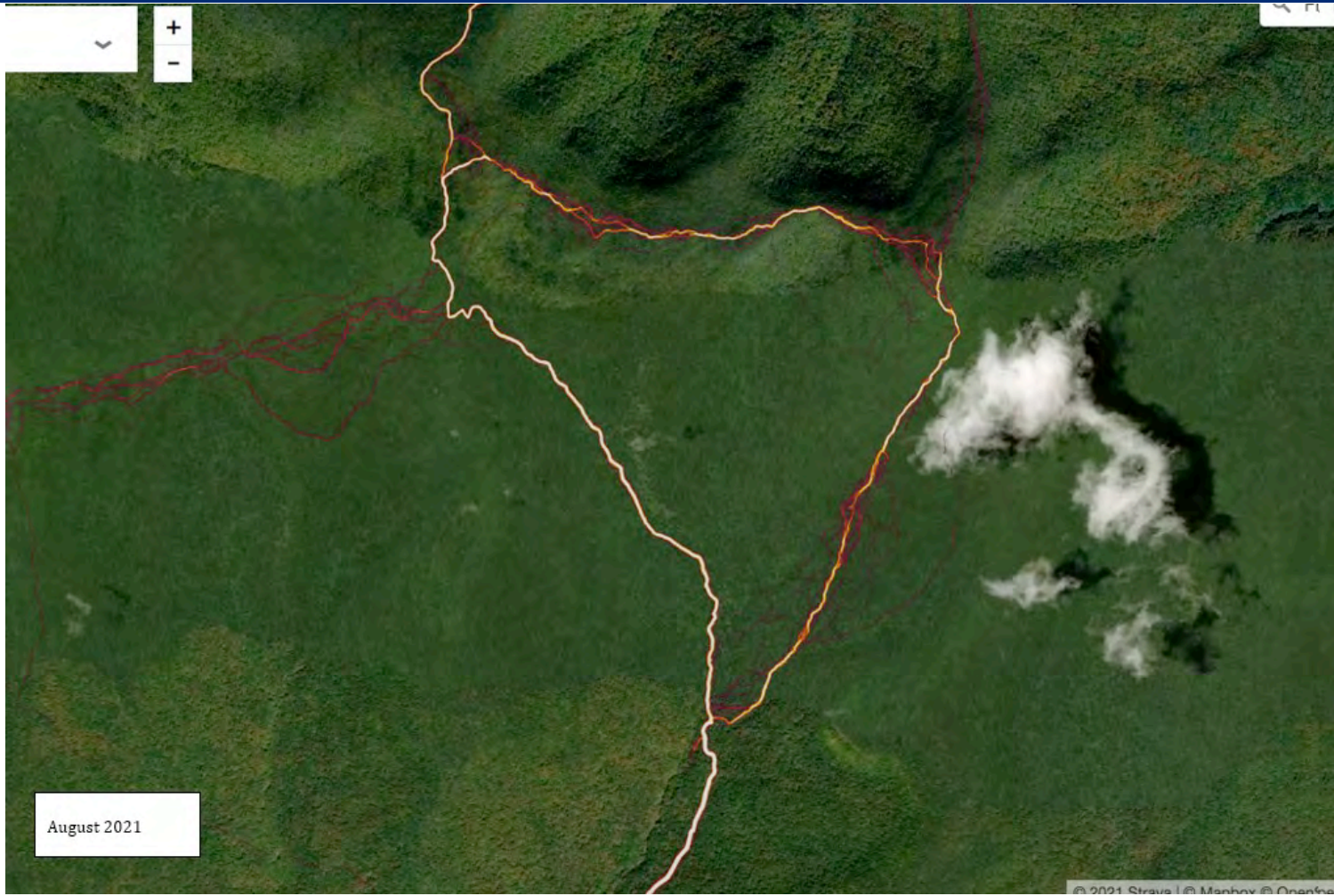


Summit Approaches Friday
October 2021

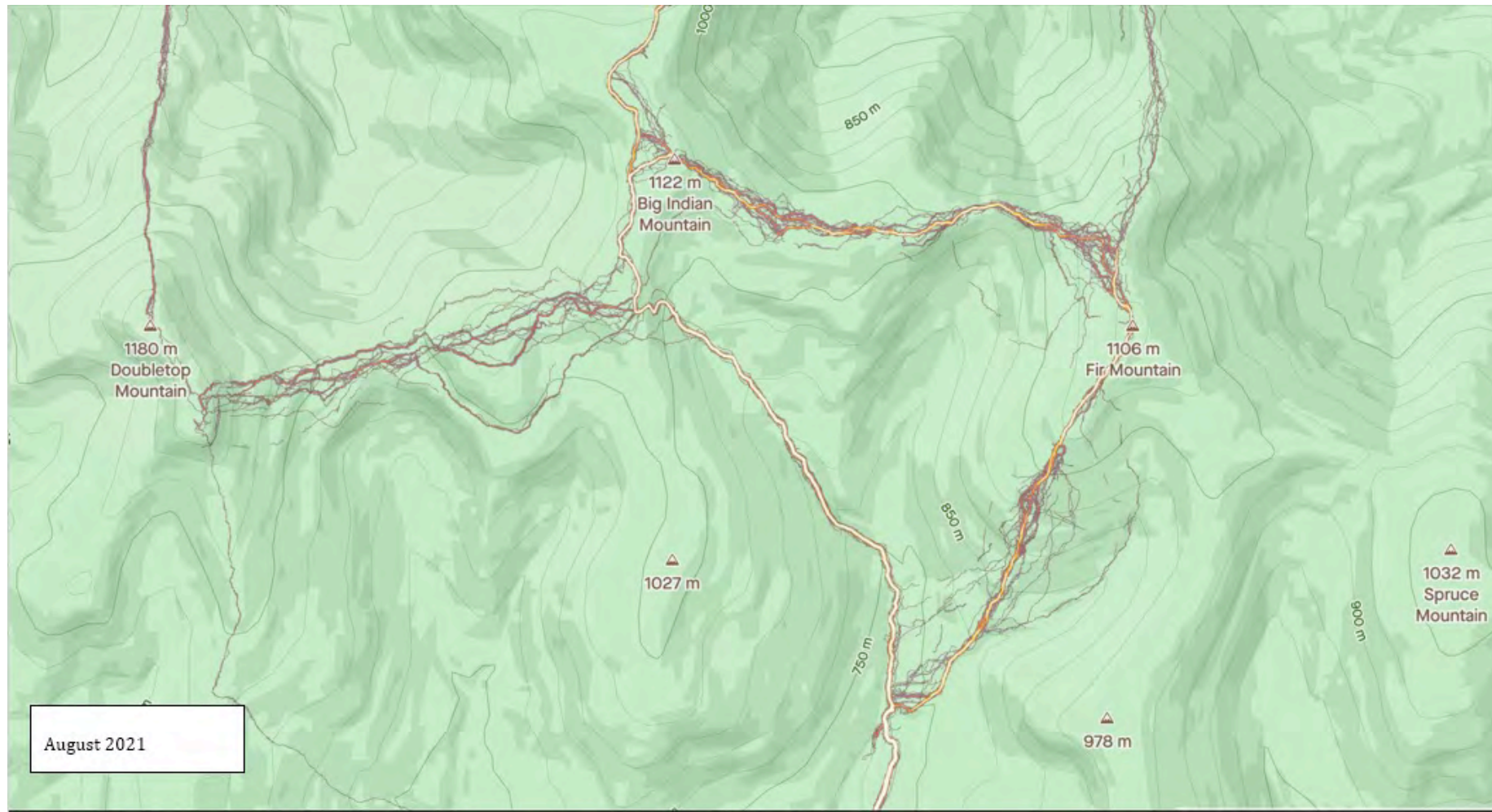




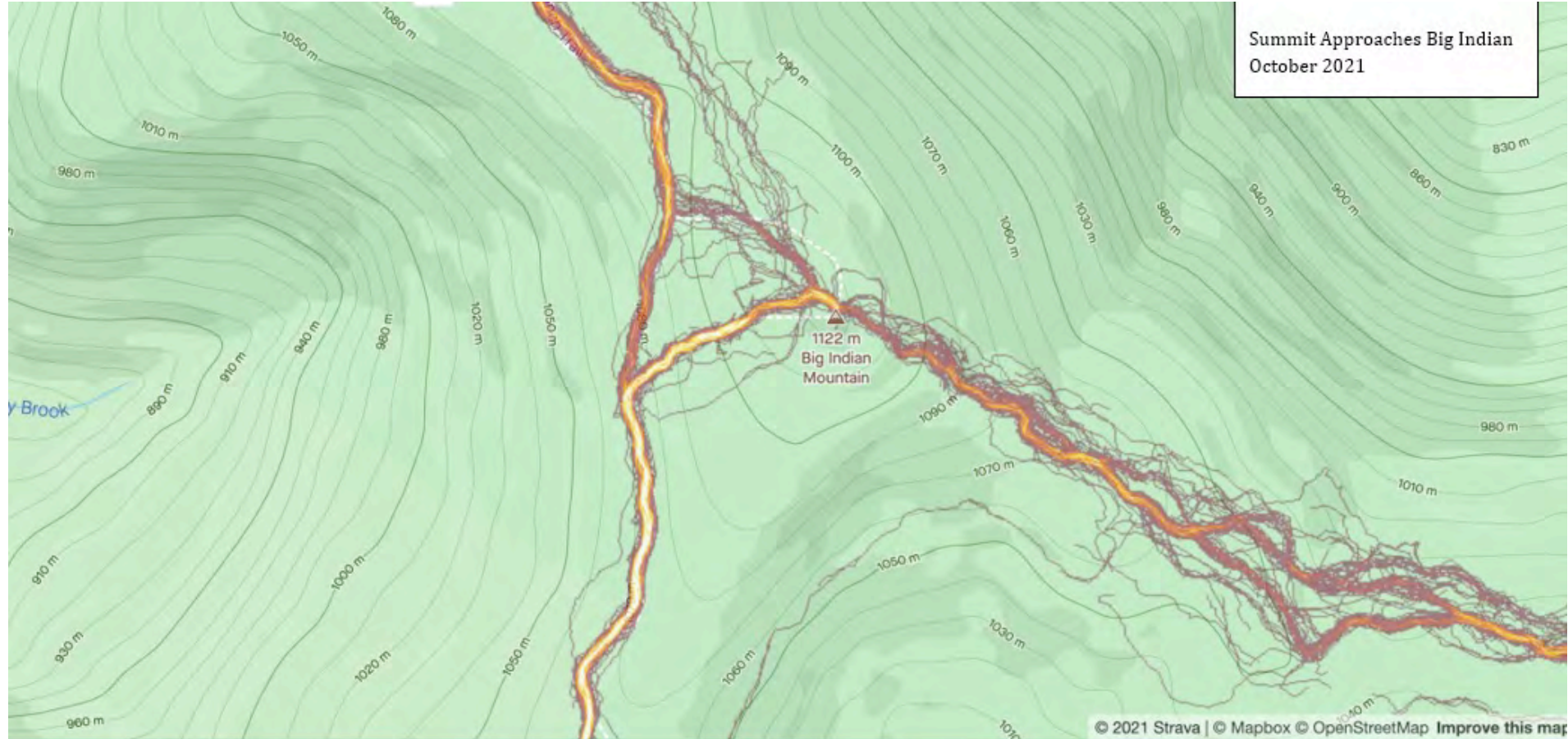




August 2021



Summit Approaches Big Indian
October 2021

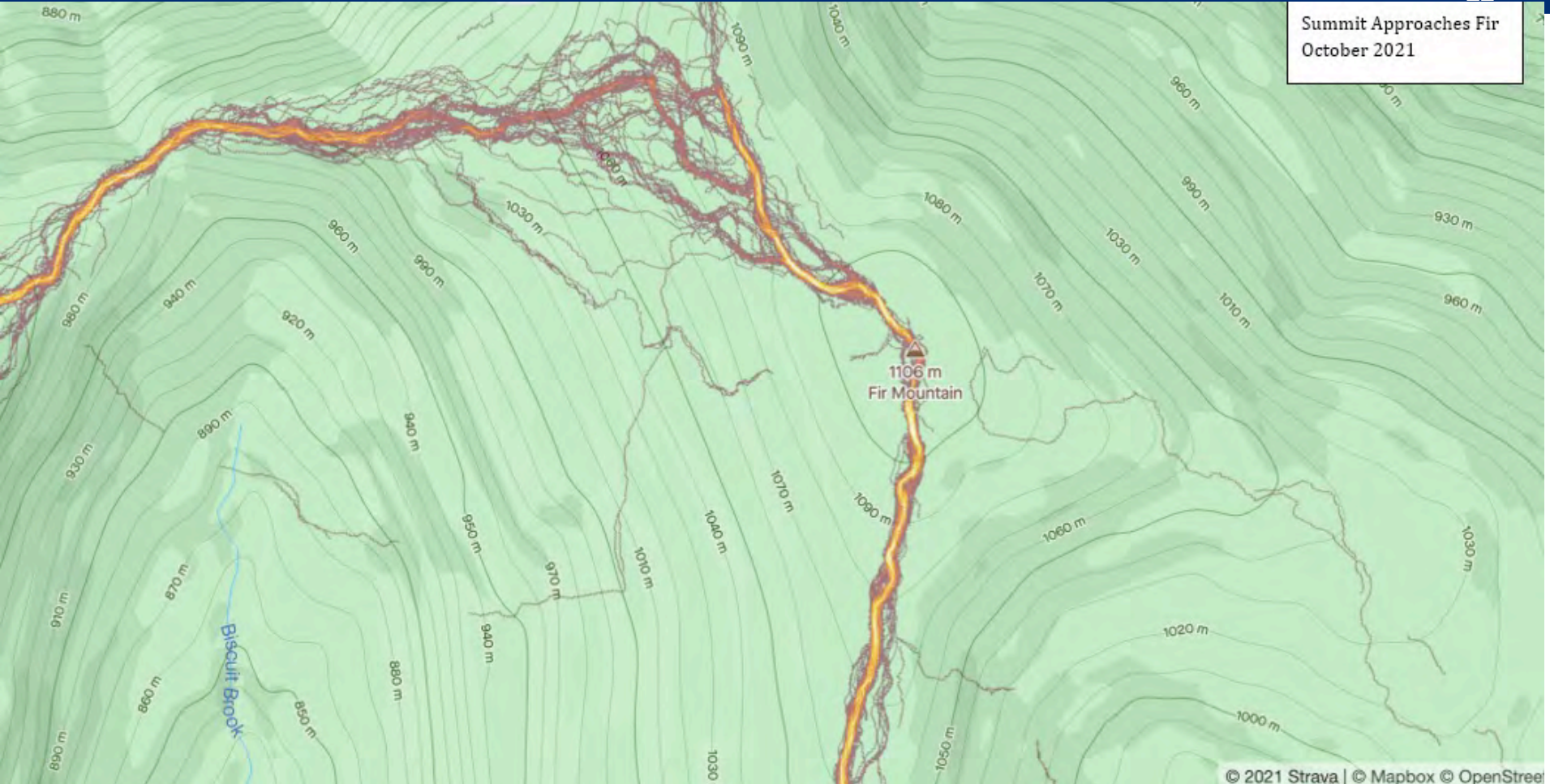


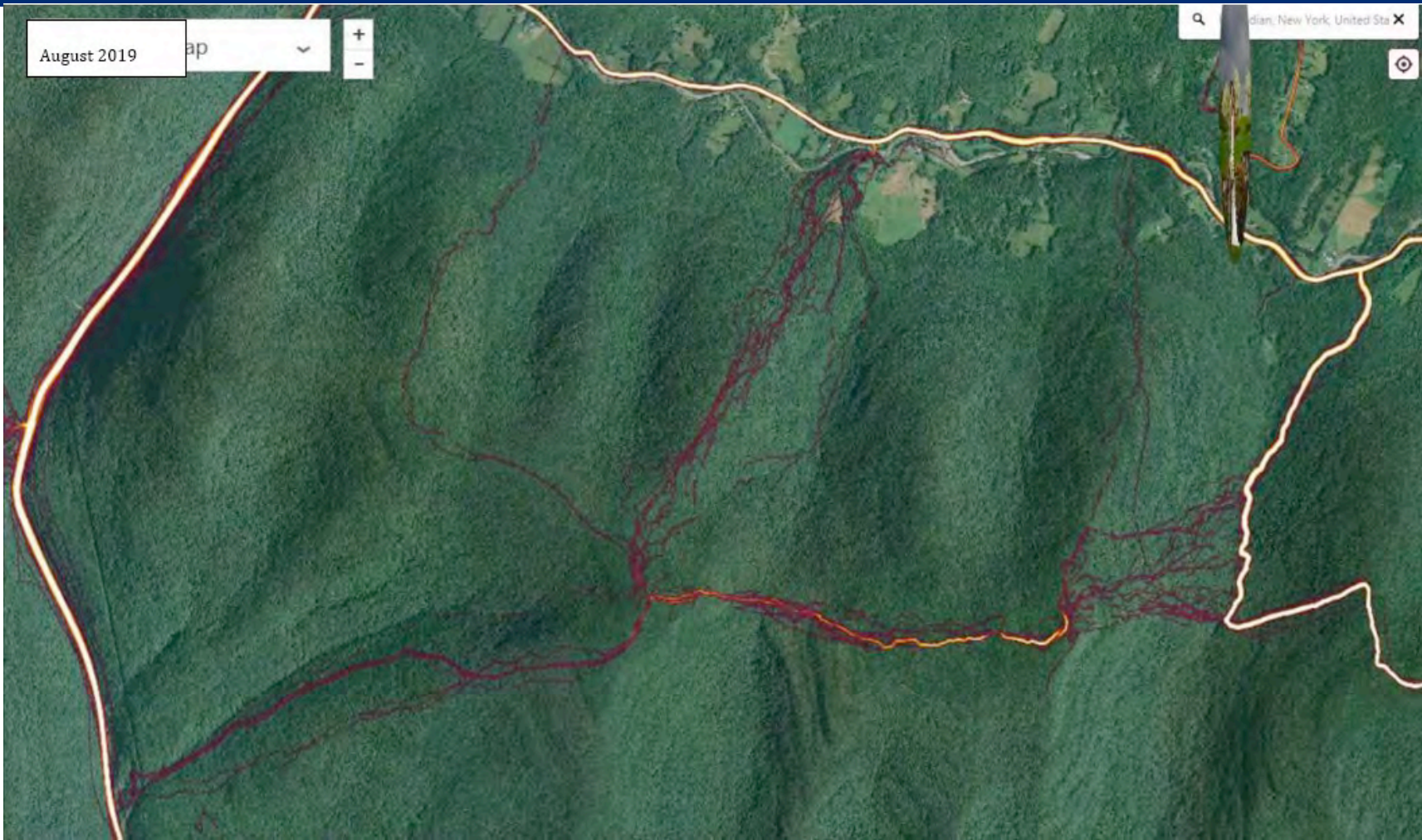
© 2021 Strava | © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap Improve this map



Environmental Conservation

Summit Approaches Fir
October 2021





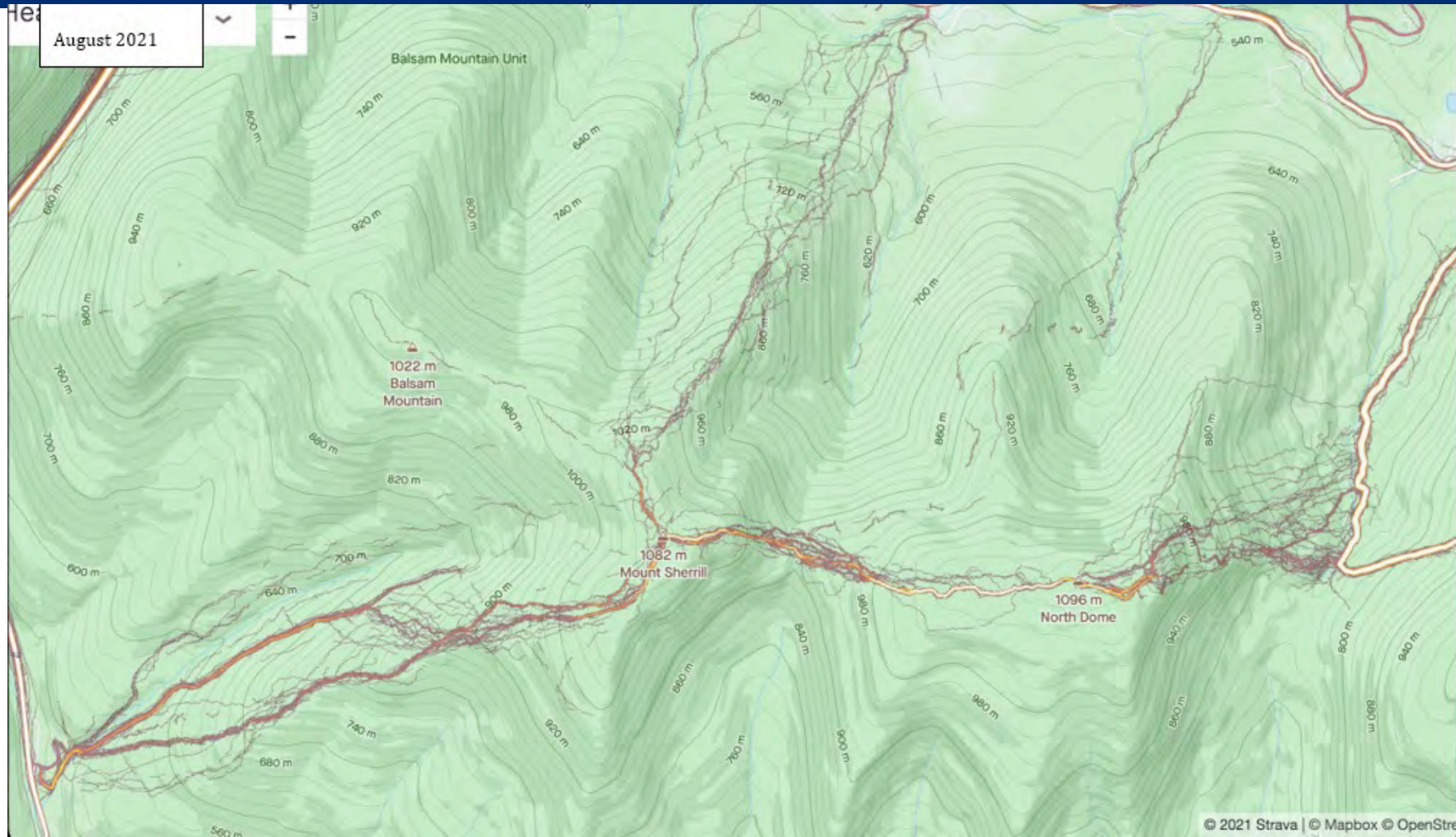
August 2020



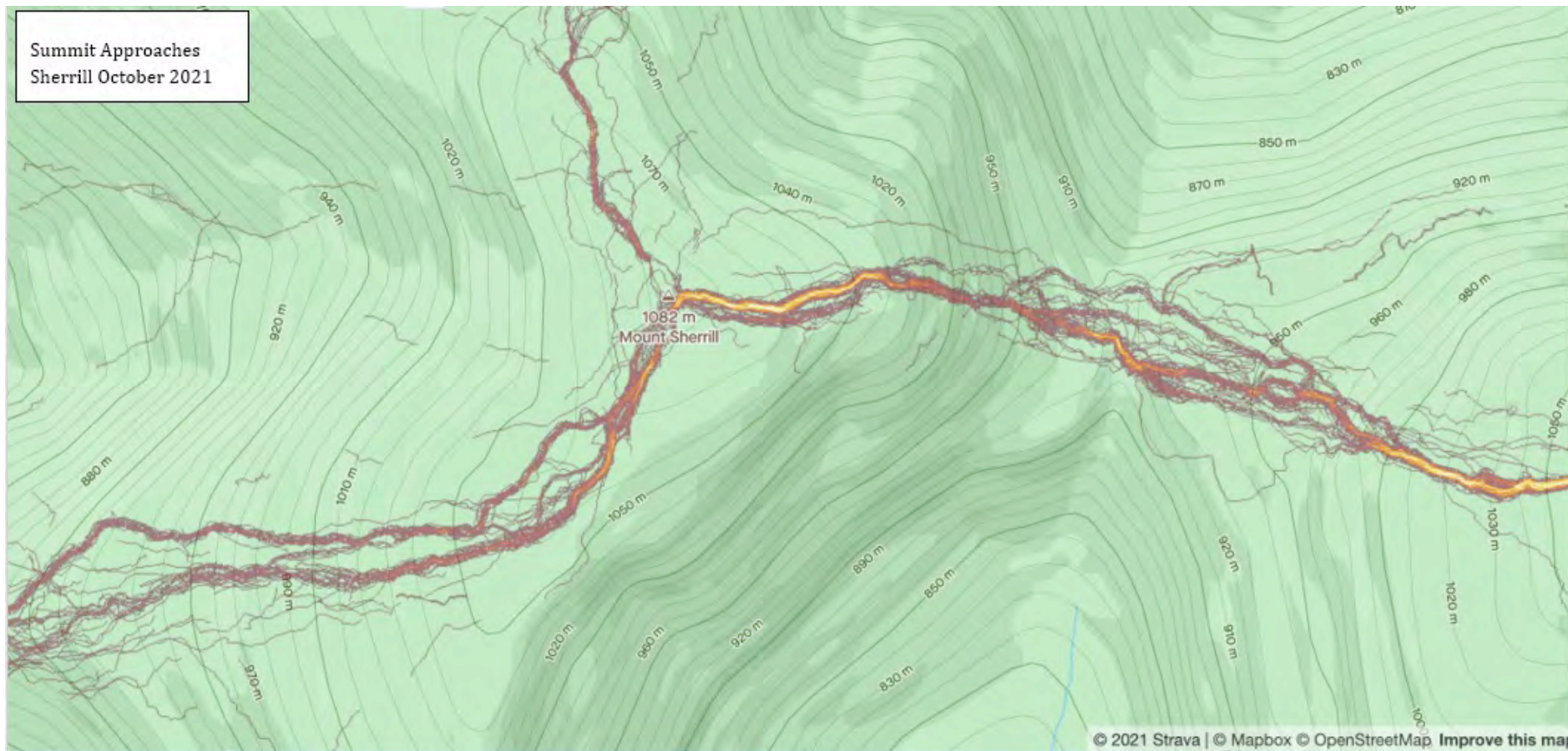
August 2021



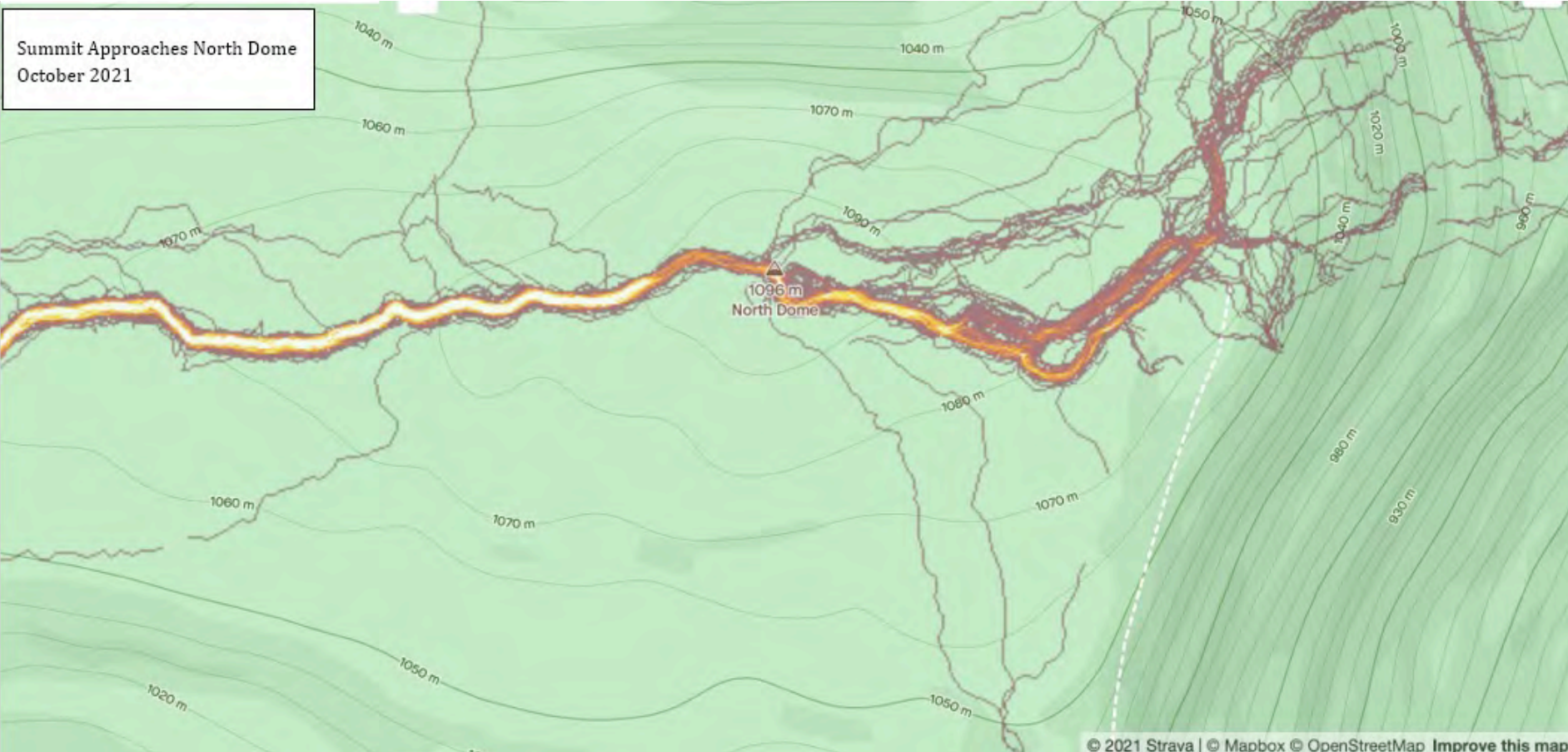
August 2021



Summit Approaches
Sherrill October 2021



Summit Approaches North Dome
October 2021



Environmental
Conservation

Routing preferences

- Walk
- Water-road barrier
- Any elevation
- Any surface type
- Use manual mode

Map preferences

- Personal heatmap
- Global heatmap
- Show segments
- Show distance markers
- Miles
- Water
- Show 3D Terrain

Search: Frost Valley YMCA, 2000 Frost Valley Rd, Claryville, New York 12725, United States

Summary:

Mode	Distance	Elevation Gain	Elevation Loss	Est. Moving Time	Surface Type
Walk	1.57 mi	725 ft	343 ft	30:24	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Pavement <input type="checkbox"/> Gravel <input type="checkbox"/> Dirt/Grass <input type="checkbox"/> Snow/Ice/Unpaved

Segment Explorer

STRAVA Dashboard Training Explore Challenges

My Routes

Create New Route

Learn more about sharing & exporting routes to a variety of devices.

Cycling Running **Walking**

S. Doubletop Rt C

1.85mi 766ft

S. Doubletop Rt B

1.56mi 733ft

S. Doubletop Rt A

1.52mi 779ft

Additional Data Collection/ Research for 2022

- Continue to evaluate the impact acceptability of the IT networks on the “trail-less” peaks to prevent unacceptable and avoidable impacts to natural resources from occurring or continuing to occur.
- Maintain and annually collect STRAVA Heat Map information for peaks between 3,000 and 3,500’ to monitor visitation and patterns of use of those areas. 3,000’ + peaks to watch closely: Sleeping Lion, Van Wyck, Roundtop.
- Engage and consult experts on Bicknell Thrush to distill which BMP’s can be implemented to support species vitality and abundance on and around the “trail-less” peak summits. Work with NYSDEC Wildlife staff to determine present day species distribution and potential impacts of ITs on Bicknell Thrush nest predation.
- Identify educational messaging that has been used successfully in other parks to communicate why users should discontinue use of IT’s.



Future Planning Recommendations & Considerations

- Considering the advantages and disadvantages of a stand-alone guidance document for Trail-less Peak Management in the Forest Preserve.
- Preserve wilderness & wild forest character while minimizing impacts: consider and explore a variety of alternatives to the traditional marked trail model.
- Coordinate with NY Natural Heritage staff and support the effort to update existing or complete new biological inventories on Forest Preserve lands.
- Trail-less peaks management challenges presents opportunities to develop strategic, coordinated and calibrated approaches to management and stewardship of these recreationally important and ecologically significant areas.



Questions?

Pine Roehrs

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845-256-3075

Region 3 NYSDEC

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New Paltz, NY12561

Addendum to the 2019 Visitor Use Study of the Catskill Trail-less Peaks Over 3,500'

STRAVA HEAT MAPS AND ANALYSIS OF VISITATION FOR 2019,
2020 & 2021

NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
PINE ROEHRS, ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM SPECIALIST, NR1



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NEW YORK STATE DEPARTMENT OF ENVIRONMENTAL CONSERVATION
PINE ROEHRS, ENVIRONMENTAL PROGRAM SPECIALIST, NR1



Summary of Developments Since 2019

In 2019, the first baseline data collection effort was undertaken on the informal trail (IT) networks on 17 trail-less peaks over 3,500' in the Catskill Mountains. The objective of this effort was to document the lineal extent and spatial distribution of the IT networks on Forest Preserve peaks that historically were managed as trail-less areas. To begin to understand more about these IT networks, STRAVA heat map data was collected to determine which IT routes people were using and where to focus the monitoring efforts. During 12 weeks in the summer of 2019, over 39 miles of IT's were assessed using an IT monitoring protocol that was developed by the National Park Service. Over the course of the past two years, several major developments occurred that have impacted the levels of visitation and the visitor use patterns that were documented in the original study area.

- In the Spring of 2020, Covid-19 emerged and a global pandemic ensued. Public lands experienced unprecedented levels of visitation while people took to the outdoors in record numbers.
- Over the course of the past 3 years, hundreds of new IT corridors have become established. 2020, 2021 and 2022 STRAVA heat map information indicates that the majority of ITs that were included in the monitoring effort in 2019 are rapidly transitioning into more entrenched and incised IT's as a result of the significant increase of visitation to the trail-less peaks.
- In January of 2021, the private landowner of Graham and Doubletop made the decision to close those mountains to public use. In an effort to provide alternative hiking destinations for aspiring 3,500' club members, an agreement was reached between the Catskill 3,500 Club and the NYSDEC to temporarily designate South Doubletop and Millbrook Ridge to replace Graham and Doubletop. Ultimately, these peaks were removed as required peaks for aspiring 3,500' hikers after March 21st, 2021. Sustained visitation to SD summit continues through today and has resulted in rapid proliferation of new ITs to that summit.
- Significant improvements to STRAVA mapping and route recording features are now available. These improvements will dramatically improve the accuracy of future data collection efforts on the IT networks. The new "Standard" map feature offers improved contour, hill shade and label information that makes it easier to see the exact location of the IT networks in comparison with the "Satellite" map feature that was used in the 2019 report. STRAVA now offers the ability to create custom GPS Routes from IT heatmap information. This feature will eliminate the need to geo-reference IT's and will increase the efficiency of future assessments. (See Appendix for examples of new features).

2022 Research Priorities

The primary research priority for the 2022 field season is to continue the monitoring effort to evaluate the patterns of use that occurred during the pandemic while assessing the acceptability or unacceptability of the associated impacts to natural resources. Field work will involve evaluation of the largest and most established IT'S. New IT networks that developed over the course of the past two years will also be assessed and their condition classes recorded. Sections of IT will be categorized as sustainable or unsustainable based on observed grades, alignments, and drainage characteristics. An assessment of the preferred IT approach to the individual summits will be undertaken to identify a sustainable route in areas with very braided IT networks. This information will inform where field work should occur should the decision to establish formal trails in adversely impacted areas is made.

Ultimately, the data collected will be used to determine if a management interventions such as formal trail establishment will be required to prevent future adverse impacts to natural resources from occurring.

Catskill Park State Land Master Plan (CPSLMP) and Trail-less Peaks Management

Environmental Conservation Law, Articles 3-0301 (1) (d) and 9-0105 place the responsibility for the care, custody and control of the forest preserve in the NYSDEC. DEC adopted a Catskill Park State Land Master Plan to protect natural resources and manage public use of forest preserve lands, including the trailless peaks.

According to the Catskill Park State Land Master Plan:

- The Biodiversity Act of 1993 mandates that DEC identify, manage, and conserve plants, animals and ecological communities that are rare in New York State, and that are located on State-owned lands. Pg. 13
- Where public use of existing trails or facilities endangers rare plants, animals or communities, these trails or facilities will be modified, relocated, or closed. Pg. 24
- Allows for the continued use of canisters on trailless peaks but has the provision that their continued use will be evaluated on an individual basis through the UMP process. Pg. 103
- Requires that new trails on trailless peaks can only be proposed if there is serious environmental degradation, i.e., multiple herd paths. Pg. 10

Observations Since 2019 Based on STRAVA Heat Map Information

Lowest Priority Areas

Four peaks are displaying visitor use patterns that appear to be currently acceptable meaning that visitor use is mainly concentrated to a single IT corridor leading to the

summit and that IT corridor is relatively short in distance. The lowest monitoring priority peaks for the 2022 field season are Vly, Bearpen, SW Hunter, and Eagle.

Medium Priority Areas

Rusk and Halcott both have summits that have several ITs approaches and while concerning, it appears that hikers are staying within a loosely defined main IT corridor on the approach and descent on both of these mountains. These mountains are lower monitoring priorities for 2022 because the extent of dispersal of use on these peaks is not as extreme as several of the peaks listed below. IT herd path evaluation on these peaks should be a priority for the 2023 field season.

Highest Priority Areas

STRAVA heat map information from 2020 and 2021 indicates that nine peaks are showing significant increases in the number new and duplicative ITs. Visitor use in these areas has resulted in duplicative summit approaches and extensively braided and redundant IT networks. The peaks contained in the list below have a combination of concerning new visitor use patterns and known element occurrences for rare, endangered and threatened species. Consequently, these peaks have been classified as the highest monitoring priorities for 2022.

Region 3

Big Indian Wilderness (1993, currently being updated)

- South Doubletop
- Fir
- Big Indian

Slide Mountain Wilderness (1998)

- Rocky
- Lone
- Balsam Cap
- Friday

Region 4

Hunter Mountain Wild Forest (1995) does not include Sherrill and North Dome.

Hunter-Westkill Wilderness UMP has not been completed

- Sherrill
- North Dome

Kaaterskill Wild Forest (1987)

- Kaaterskill High Peak

Peak Specific Monitoring Goals for the Highest Priority Peaks

Big Indian Wilderness

1993 Big Indian Wilderness UMP: Guidance for Trail-less Peaks

No known reference or management proposals for the trail-less peaks in the 1993 UMP. An update to this plan is underway and specific management recommendations will be included in the draft plan for the 3 trail-less peaks in this unit.

Big Indian/ Fir/ South Doubletop

Natural Heritage surveyed the summit of Big Indian and Fir in October of 2021 and will revisit the area prior to 5/30/22 to build on the initial biological survey work. Preliminary field work suggests that the forest below the highest elevation areas are an extensive Element Occurrence quality beech maple mesic forest. At the initial site visit, Natural Heritage was quick to conclude that the summits have been significantly impacted by trampling and that high visitation levels are degrading the wilderness condition of the summits. Initial observations strongly suggest that the upper elevation forests deserve enhanced protection from the onslaught of visitation.

Heat map data shows that the IT network on BI and Fir is beginning to consolidate into large sections of class 3 IT's. At this time, there is ample evidence of multiple class 2 and class 3 IT summit approaches on all three "trail-less" peaks within the unit. Heat map data shows that there is a preferred or more heavily used IT that leads to each summit and impact acceptability assessments will be conducted on the preferred IT approaches to each peak. The Big Indian Wilderness area is a likely candidate for formal trail proposals if the 2022 impact acceptability assessments determine that there are unacceptable and adverse impacts occurring.

If management interventions are deemed necessary, any formal trail network would be designed to reduce dispersed use and concentrate users to sections of the existing IT corridors that have more sustainable, and acceptable alignments and that also avoid locations of known occurrences of rare, threatened and endangered species.

Areas of Interest for 2022 Monitoring

- The IT network from Burnham Hollow to the summit of Fir will be evaluated. Data in this area was not collected during the 2019 study and over the course of the past 2 years a IT has developed leading to Fir.
- Heat map data has indicated that a new IT is likely emerging on the southern slopes of South Doubletop over Pigeon brook. This IT has not been evaluated and baseline data will be collected in this area over the course of the 2022 field season.

- An IT network has rapidly become established on the slopes leading to the summit of South Doubletop. According to heat map records, this area saw almost no visitation up until 2020 when it was listed as a replacement peak for Doubletop. Doubletop had one of the highest occurrences of rare, threatened, and endangered species of all of the peaks surveyed in 2019. Because of its proximity to Doubletop, South Doubletop will be incorporated in the 2022 biological inventories of the area to determine if species of conservation significance are being impacted by IT proliferation in that area.
- Summit approach IT's on both Big Indian and Fir need to be assessed and sustainable and unsustainable sections of IT's will be evaluated and documented.
- Sustainable sections of the preferred route IT from Fir to Pine Hill West Branch Trail will be evaluated and documented.



Slide Mountain Wilderness

Lone, Rocky, Balsam Cap and Friday

1998 Slide Mountain Wilderness UMP: Guidance for Trail-less Peaks

d. Public Use Management Objectives (5) Page 34

“Ensure that the trail-less areas, especially summits above 3500’ feet in elevation remain trail-less.”

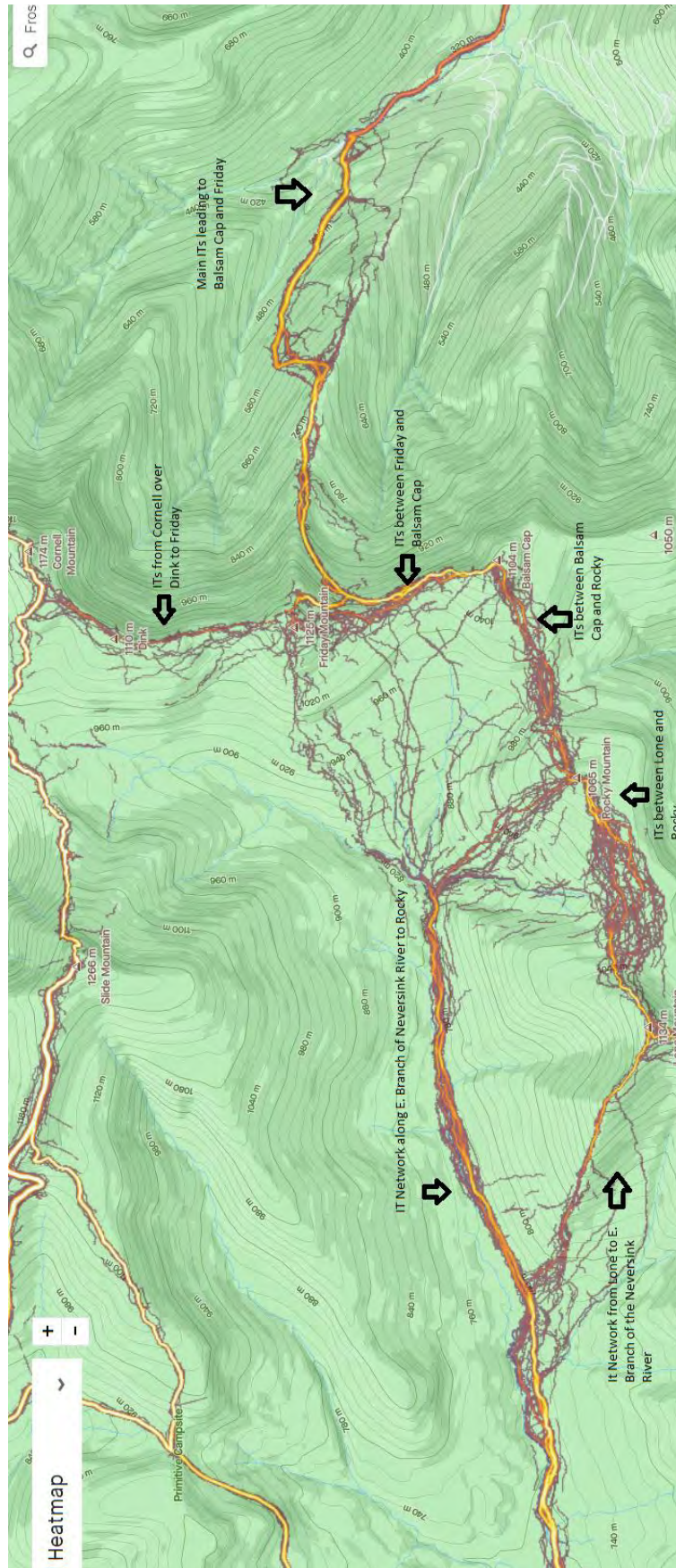
Areas of Interest for 2022 Monitoring

2020 and 2021 heat map information for the Slide Mountain Wilderness indicates that the area is experiencing rapid proliferation of an extensive and very dispersed IT network. In comparison to the other “trail-less” areas, heat maps are showing concerning patterns of IT expansion and establishment on an around all 4 summits. It is also clear from heat map information that extensive lengths of IT have transitioned to class 3 ITs since this area was last monitored in 2019. The cumulative or aggregated impacts to natural resources including the anticipated total area of trampling disturbance is highly likely to require a management intervention to prevent adverse impacts to natural resources.

Slide Mountain Wilderness provides critical nesting habitat for the Bicknell Thrush. While little research has been done on the species tolerance of habitat disturbance resulting from IT network development, it is anticipated that hiker use concentrated into a single corridor is likely much less disruptive to their nesting and mating behavior and can also benefit the species by reducing opportunities for nest predation.

Portions of the IT network with impact susceptible alignments and features will be documented during the 2022 field work. Highest priority areas for NH monitoring and impact acceptability assessments will occur on IT networks on and near the summit areas:

- Between Balsam Cap and Friday
- Between Balsam Cap and Rocky
- Between Rocky and Lone
- Sustainable and unsustainable sections along the main IT leading to Balsam Cap and Friday need to be evaluated and documented.
- Sustainable and unsustainable sections of the IT networks along East Branch of the Neversink River to Lone and Rocky will be evaluated and documented
- New IT’s from Cornell over Dink and to Rocky will be evaluated and documented.
- The preferred summit approach IT’s on all peaks needs to be evaluated and sustainable and unsustainable sections of IT need to be evaluated and documented.



Hunter West-Kill Wilderness

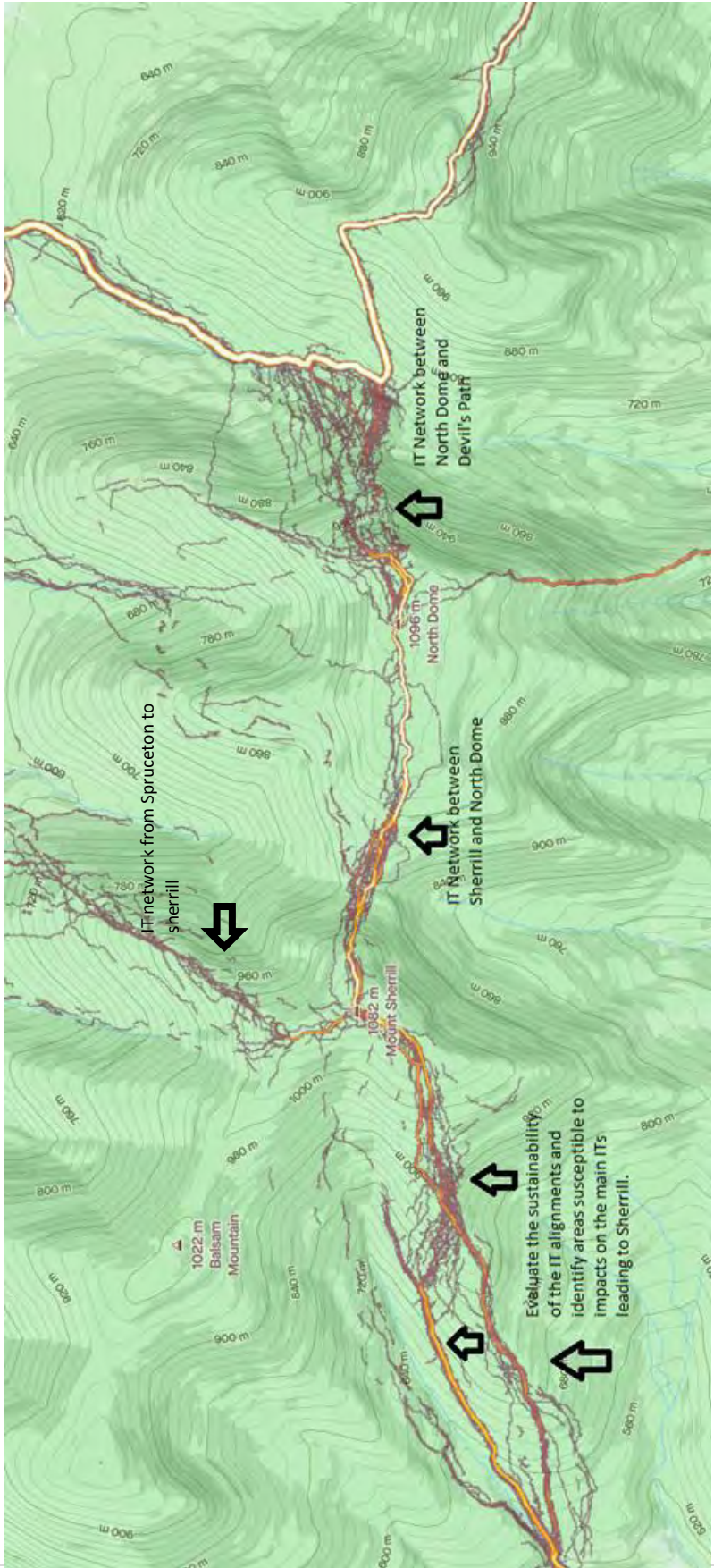
1995 Hunter Mountain Wild Forest UMP

North Dome and Sherrill did not fall within the geographic scope of the 1995 UMP. The Hunter-Westkill Wilderness UMP has not been completed at this time.

Areas of interest for 2022 monitoring

Highest priority areas for NH monitoring and impact acceptability assessments will occur on IT networks in the following areas:

- Between North Dome and Sherrill
- Between North Dome and Devils Path
- Between Spruceton Rd. and Sherrill
- From Shaft Rd To Sherrill
- A preferred approach to both summits will be identified and sustainable and unsustainable sections of the preferred IT need to be documented.



Kaaterskill Wild Forest

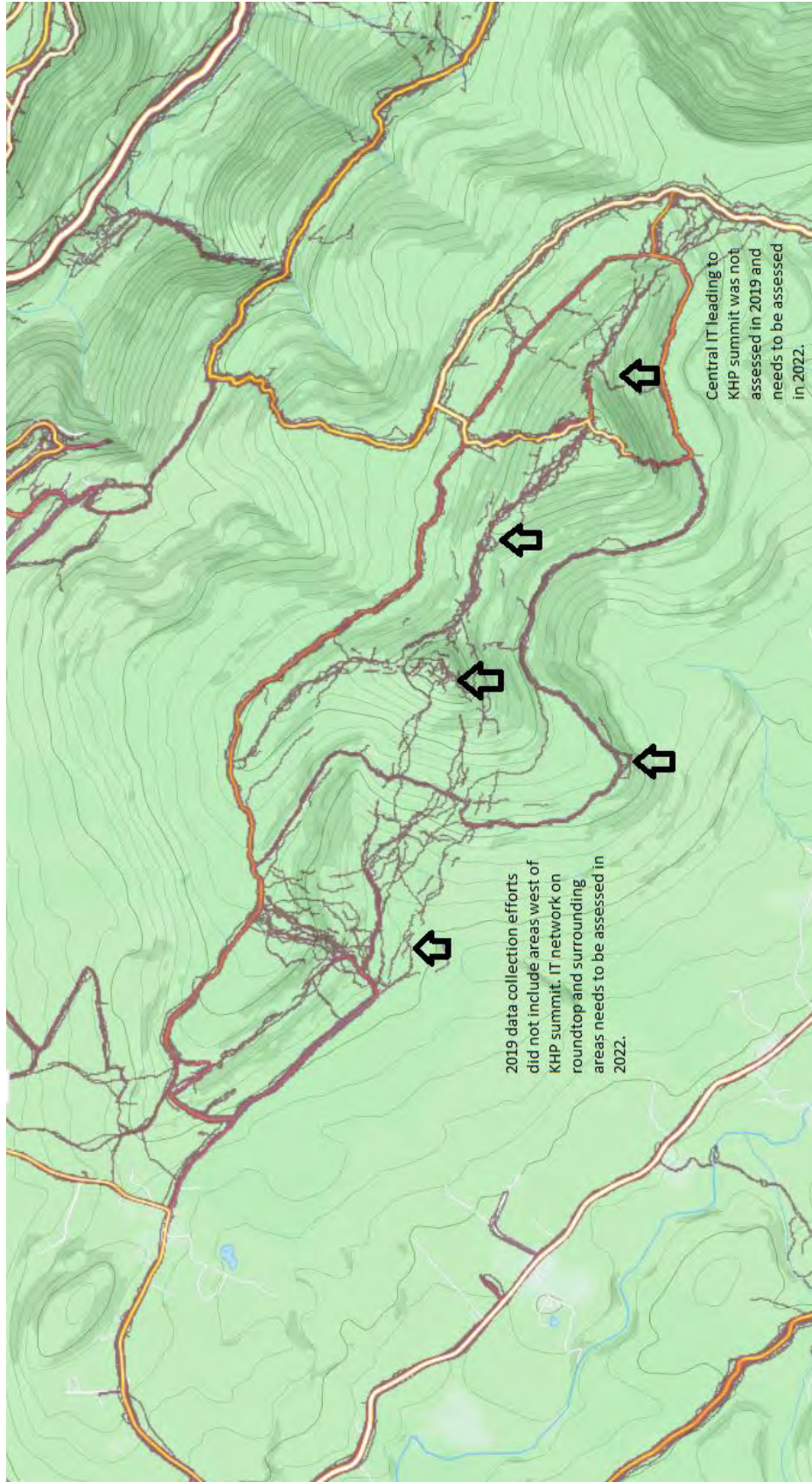
1987 Kaaterskill Mountain Wild Forest UMP Guidance for Trail-less Peaks

No known reference or management proposals for the trail-less area on Kaaterskill High Peak (KHP) in the 1987 UMP.

Areas of Interest for 2022 Monitoring

Highest priority areas for NH monitoring and impact acceptability assessments will occur on IT networks in the following areas:

- IT network west of KHP in the Roundtop area needs to be evaluated as it was not part of the monitoring effort in 2019. Heat map collection for the Roundtop area began in 2022 and should be collected on an annual basis moving forward to monitor new and shifting patterns of visitation.
- KHP heat map data indicates that on the eastern side of the summit, the use is concentrated to two well established ITs. Sections of sustainable and unsustainable IT on the northernmost, and southernmost ITs leading to KHP summit need to be documented and identified.
- Central IT on eastern side of KHP summit will be investigated as it was not part of the data collection effort in 2019.
- Sustainable and unsustainable sections of the preferred IT approaching and on the KHP summit will be identified and documented.



2019 data collection efforts did not include areas west of KHP summit. IT network on roundtop and surrounding areas needs to be assessed in 2022.

Central IT leading to KHP summit was not assessed in 2019 and needs to be assessed in 2022.

Additional Data Collection/ Research Objectives for 2022

- Evaluate the impact acceptability of the IT networks on the “trail-less” peaks to comply with the management directive set forth in the CPSLMP and to prevent unacceptable and avoidable impacts to natural resources from occurring or continuing to occur. Formalized, sustainably designed trails will need to replace unsustainable and redundant herd path networks if impacts to natural resources are found to be unacceptable.
- Continue to collect STRAVA Heat Map information of trail-less peaks on an annual basis. Heat map data should be collected in August for consistency purposes as variation in heat map activity does occur over the course of seasons in a given year.
- Monitor activity on the trail-less peaks on NYSDEC owned lands under 3500’ and over 3,000’. Currently, the peaks that fall within this category are displaying light to no activity on heat maps with the exception of Roundtop, Sleeping Lion and Van Wyck. In anticipation of potential changes in visitation, heat map data for all peaks over 3,000 on public land have been collected and archived for future comparison.
- Consult experts on the Bicknell Thrush to develop Best Management Practice (BMPs) that can be implemented to support species vitality and abundance on and around the “trail-less” peak summits. Work with NYSDEC Wildlife staff to determine present day species distribution and potential impacts of IT’s on nest predation.

Future Planning Considerations

- The predictive power of crowd sourced data generated from recreation-based apps such as STRAVA remains untapped by land management agencies such as NYSDEC. Further investigate how data from various apps can be harnessed to strategically enhance monitoring and management efforts on all DEC managed lands.
- Consider a variety of alternatives to the traditional marked trail model that would be consistent with the management zone objectives for wilderness and wild forest areas.
- Coordinate with NY Natural Heritage staff to conduct and complete biological inventories on trail-less peaks to identify the locations of Rare, Threatened and Endangered species that may be impacted by IT’s.

- Identify messaging that has been successfully used in other Parks to communicate how ITs can adversely impact the environment and why they should be allowed to atrophy and re-vegetate in certain situations.

Key Takeaways

- The trail-less peak monitoring and data collection effort presents a significant opportunity to engage in a Visitor Use Management project in the Catskills. Existing visitation data can be used to inform management decisions and build stakeholder consensus in support of management proposals that are designed to enhance recreational experiences and protect the environment.
- The rapid rate of change that has been observed and documented on the trail-less peaks requires a time sensitive response outside of the conventional and lengthy UMP planning process. The development of a stand-alone guidance document for Trail-less Peaks Management in the Forest Preserve could be a potential tool that could be used to address the progression of natural resource degradation in a timely manner. The feasibility of such a document should be investigated further.
- Management interventions on some, or all trail-less peaks are highly likely given the results from monitoring efforts conducted by DEC staff, the results from the STRAVA heat map analysis, the preliminary biological monitoring observations from NY Natural Heritage and the CPSLMP directives for trail-less peak management.

APPENDIX

Ex of new features in STRAVA include custom GPS track creation based on heat map data. First image is an active route creation project. Second image displays the individual GPS tracks to South Doubletop based off of the heat map information



My Routes

Learn more about [sharing & exporting routes](#) to a variety of devices.

Create New Route

Cycling Running **Walking**

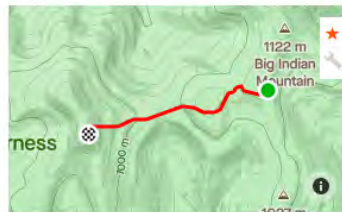


S. Doubletop Rt C

1.85mi 766ft
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 35:48

Created on October 19, 2021

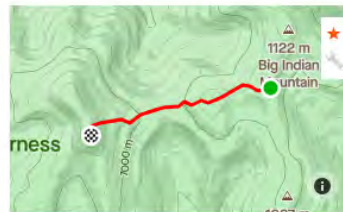


S. Doubletop Rt B

1.56mi 733ft
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 30:11

Created on October 19, 2021



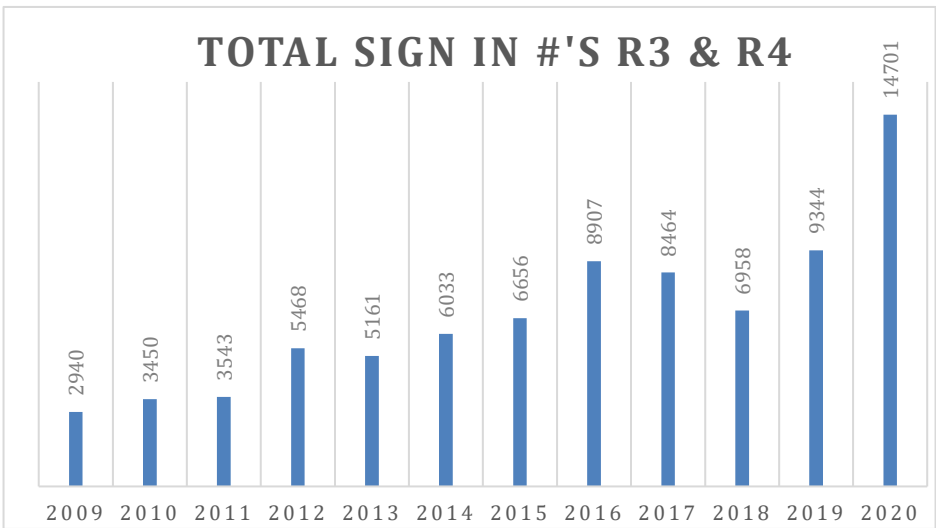
S. Doubletop Rt A

1.52mi 779ft
Distance Elevation Gain

Est. Moving Time 29:22

Created on October 19, 2021

Percentage Increase in Sign in Numbers by Peak from 2009-2020			
Peak	2009	2020	% Increase
SW Hunter	301	1565	690%
Vly	228	1417	687%
Rusk	197	1199	635%
Balsam Cap	221	1249	578%
Friday	244	1202	571%
Halcott	201	1159	562%
Fir	226	1069	559%
North Dome	155	1009	542%
Rocky	214	1013	475%
Lone	248	1017	432%
Big Indian	334	1240	414%
Sherrill	181	957	411%

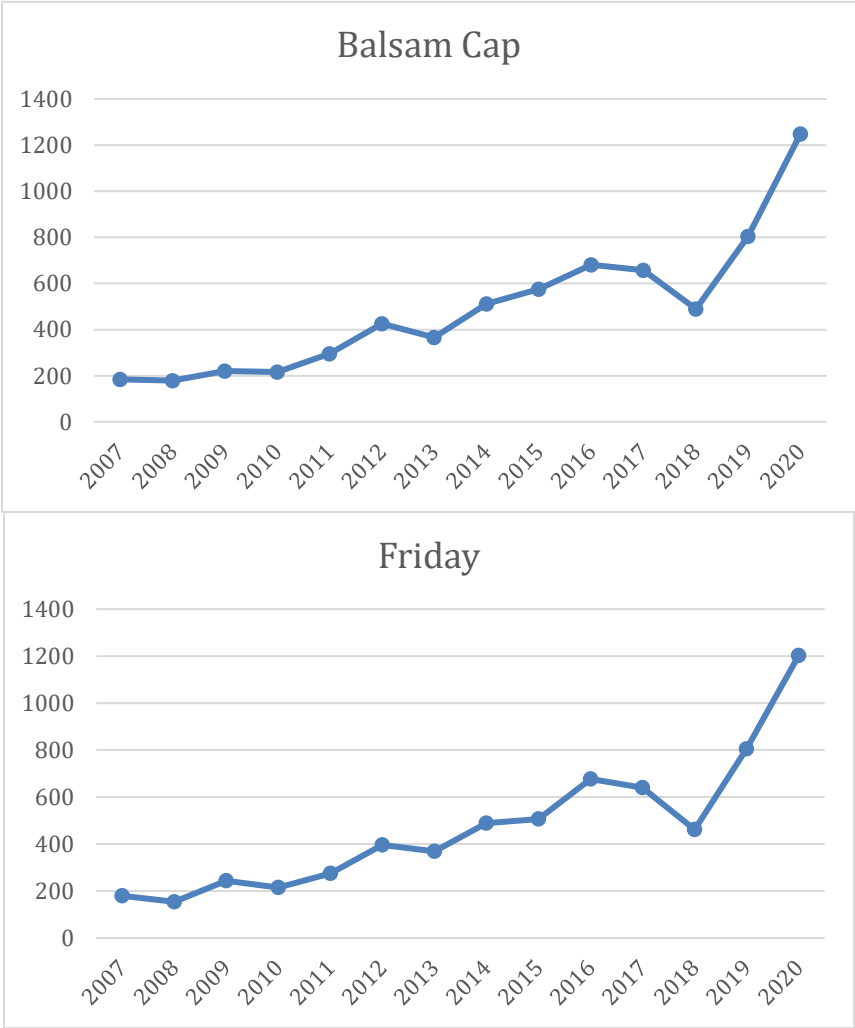


This graph does not include KHP numbers or Eagle numbers for 2019, 2020. Including these figures would skew the data that we have for 13 peaks from 2009- 2020.

Overview of Trail-less Peak Activity
October 2021



Balsam Cap and Friday





August 2019



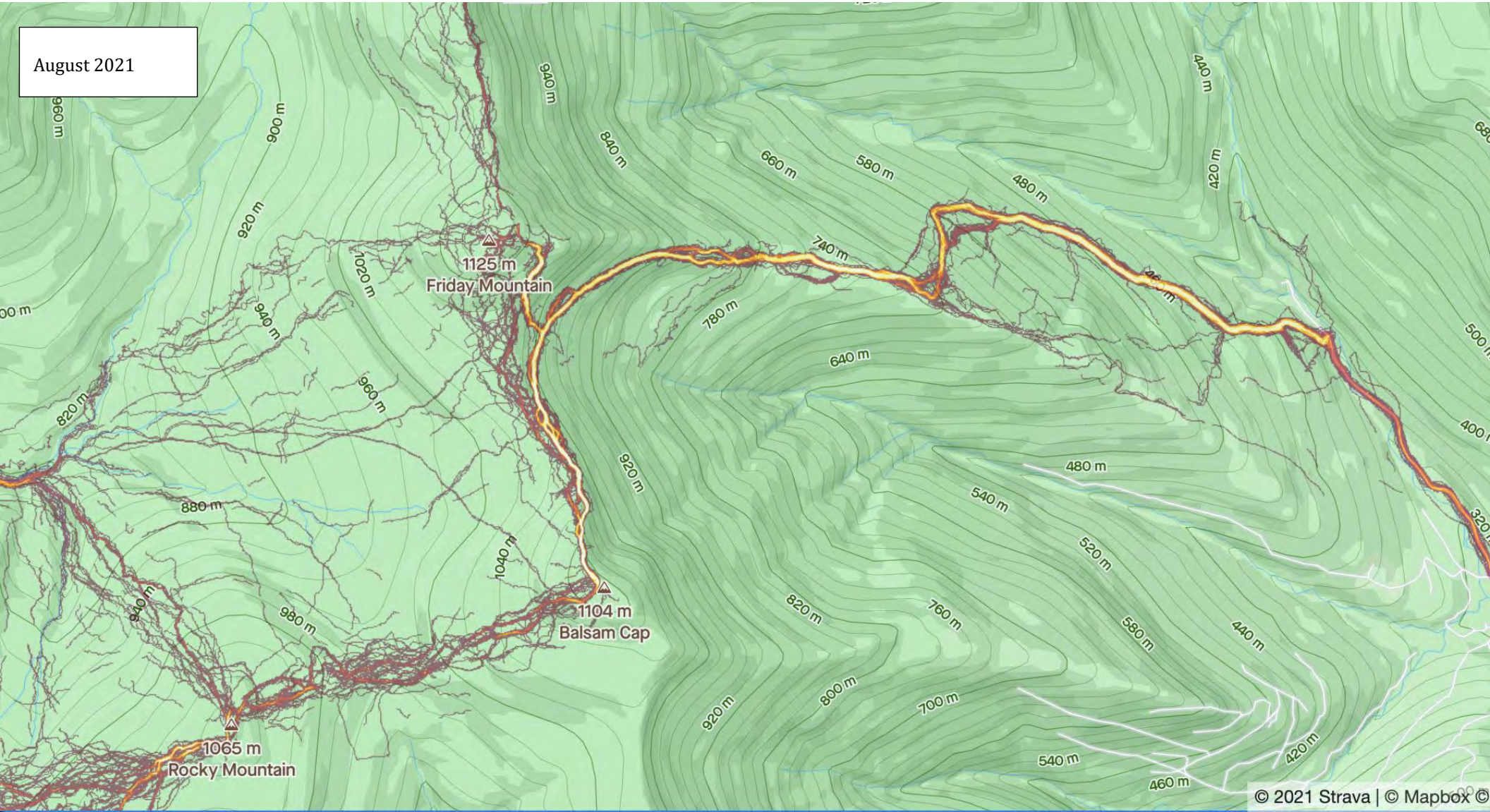
August 2020

August 2021



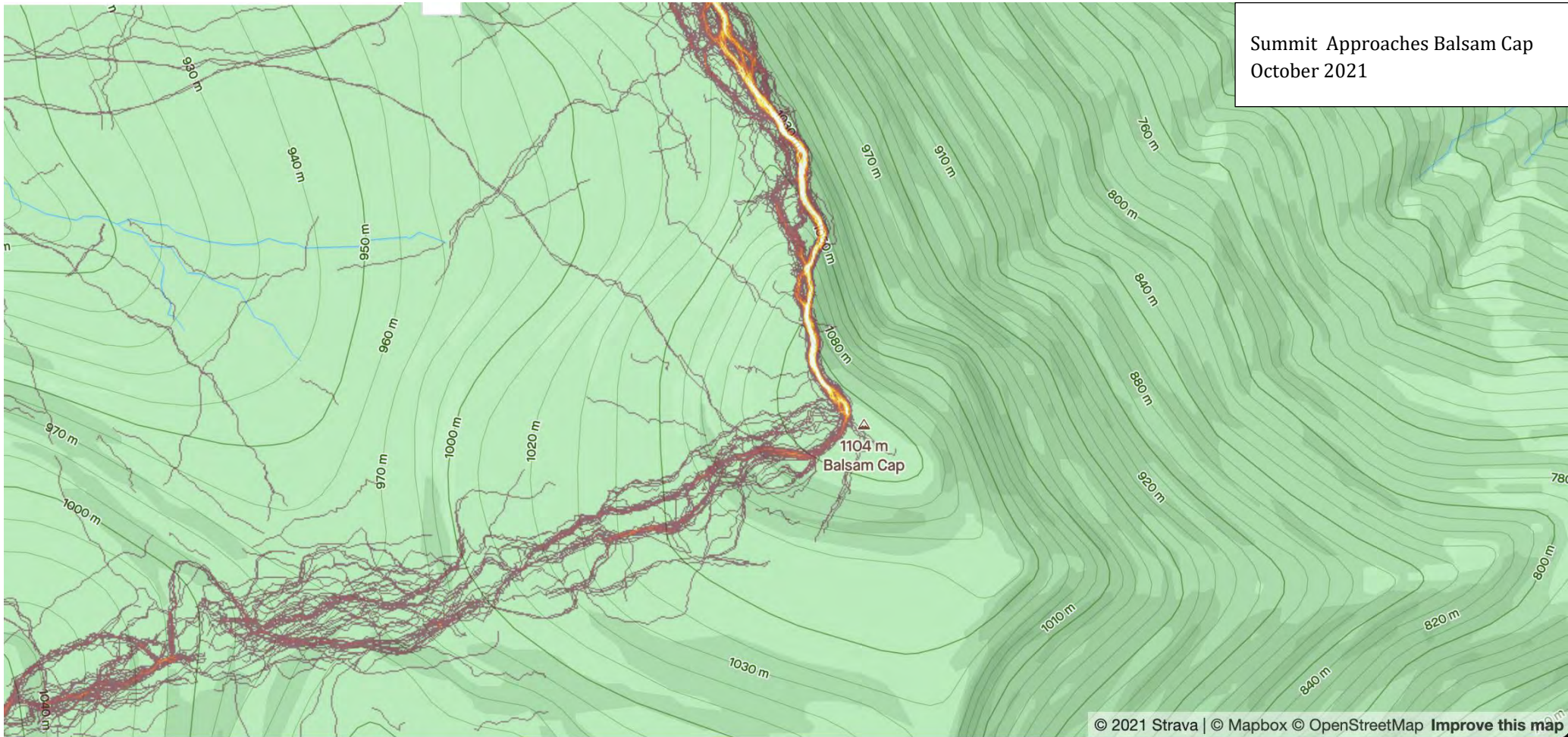
© 2021 Strava | © Mapbox © Op

August 2021

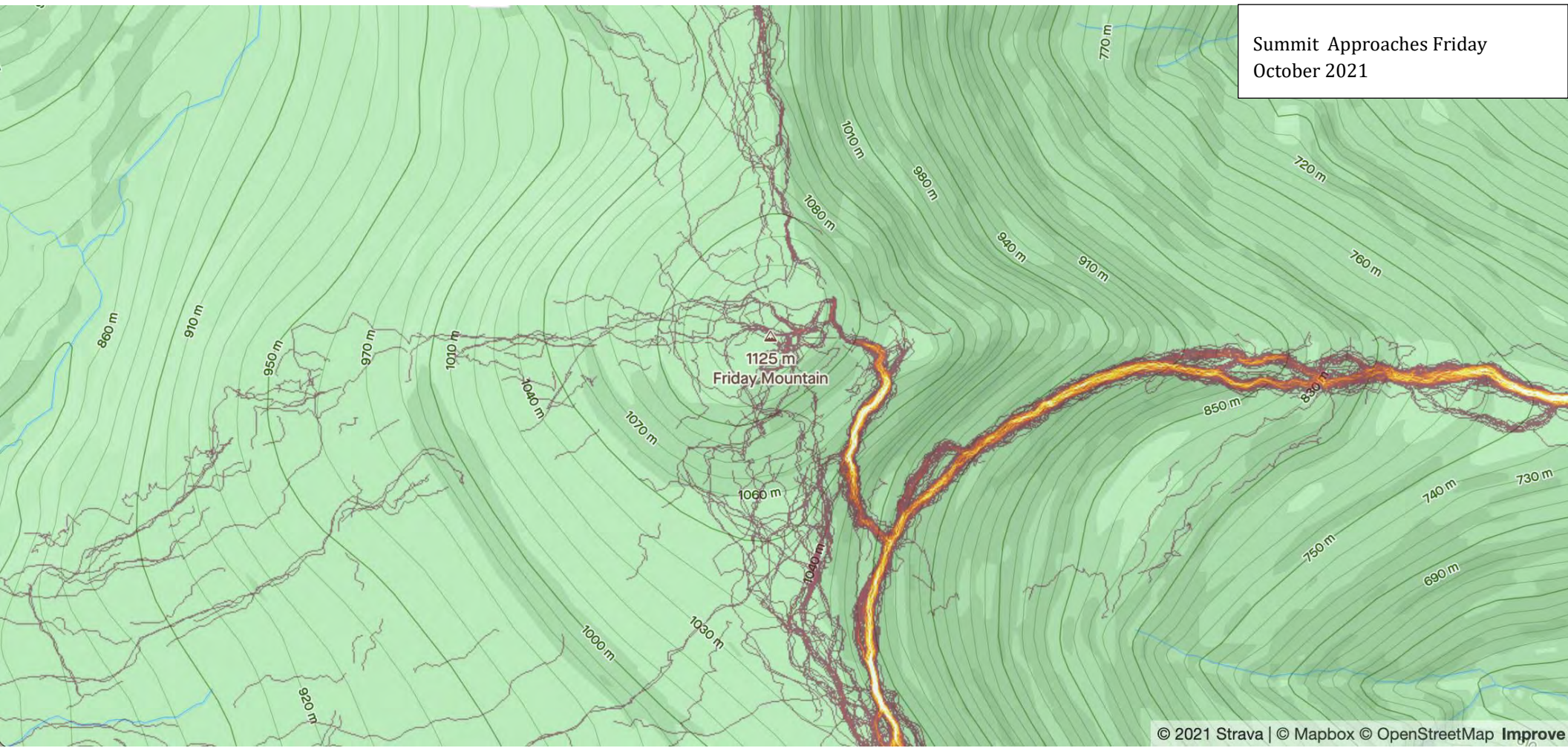


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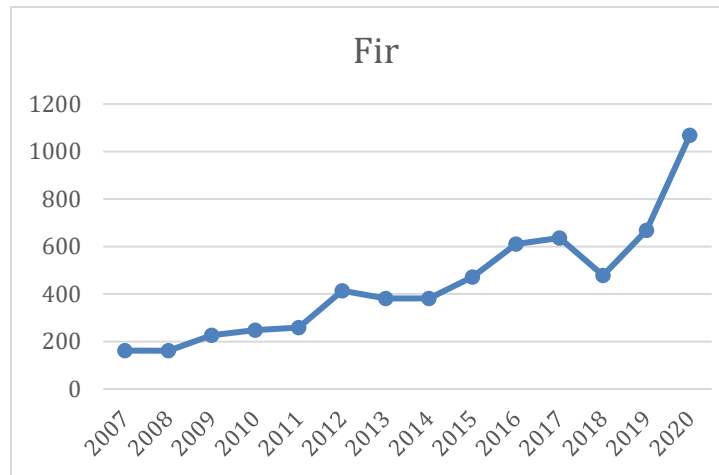
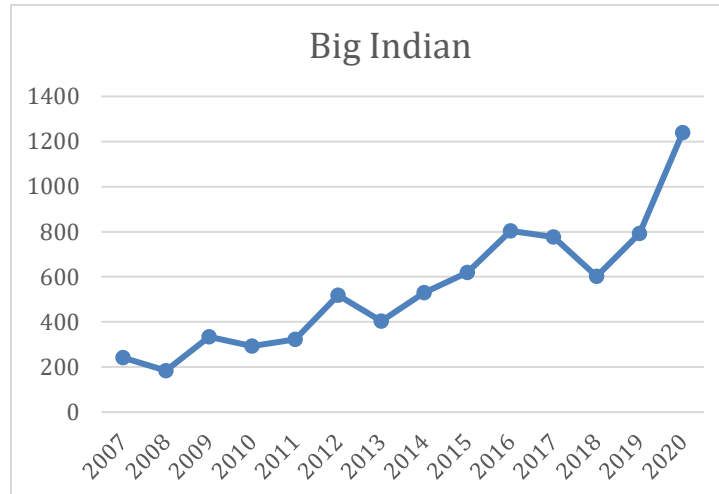
Summit Approaches Balsam Cap
October 2021



Summit Approaches Friday
October 2021



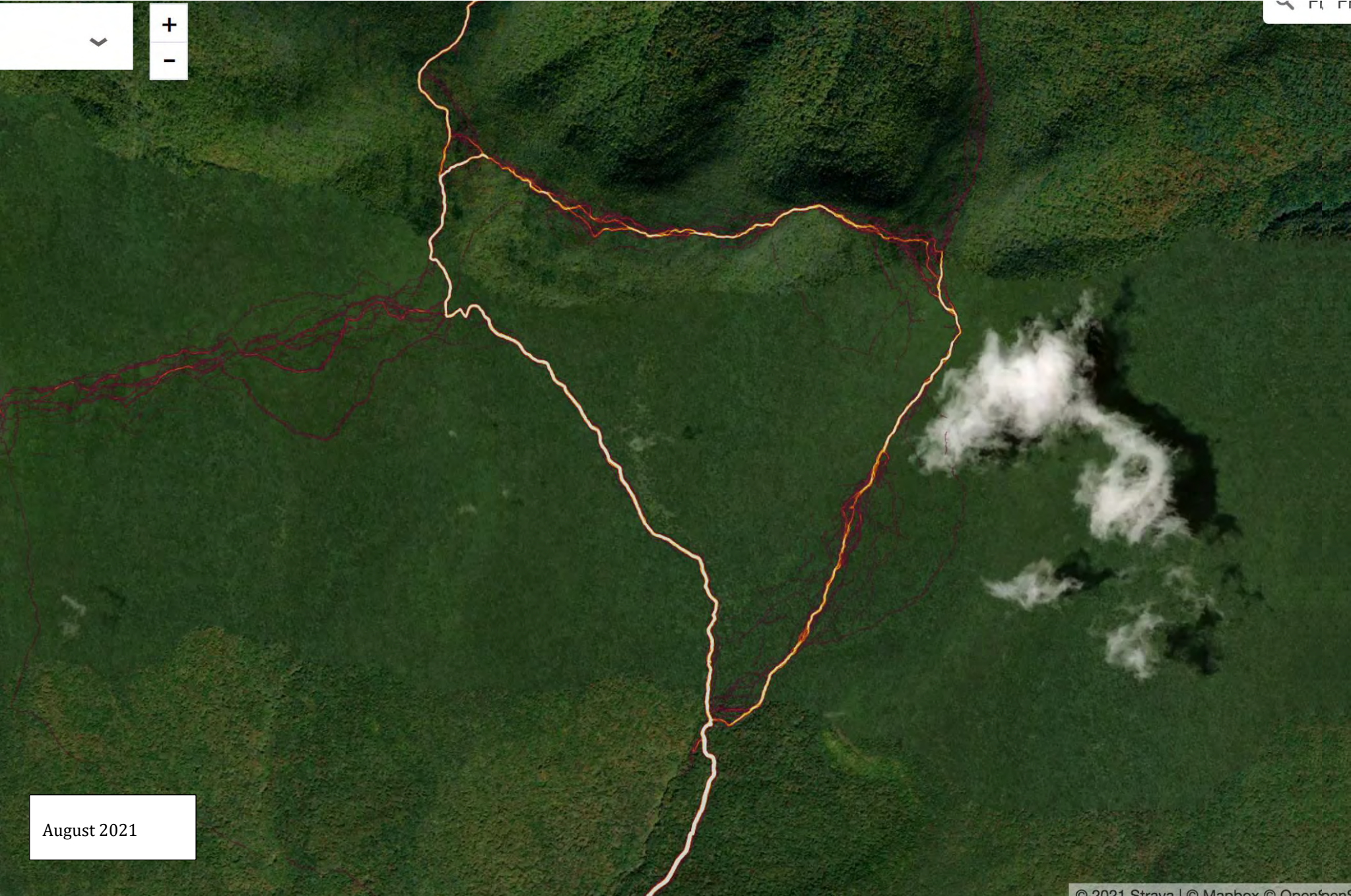
Big Indian & Fir







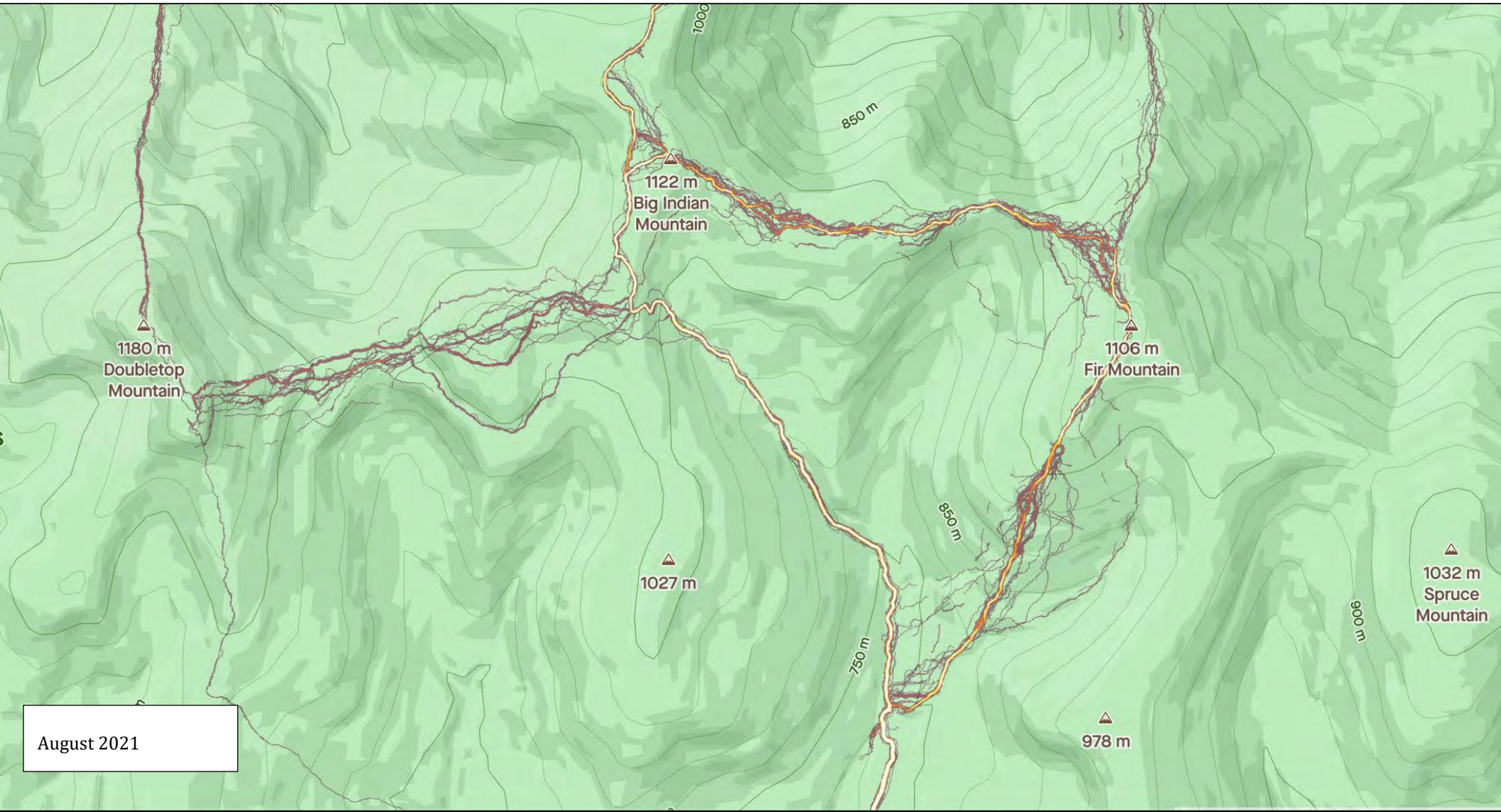
August 2020



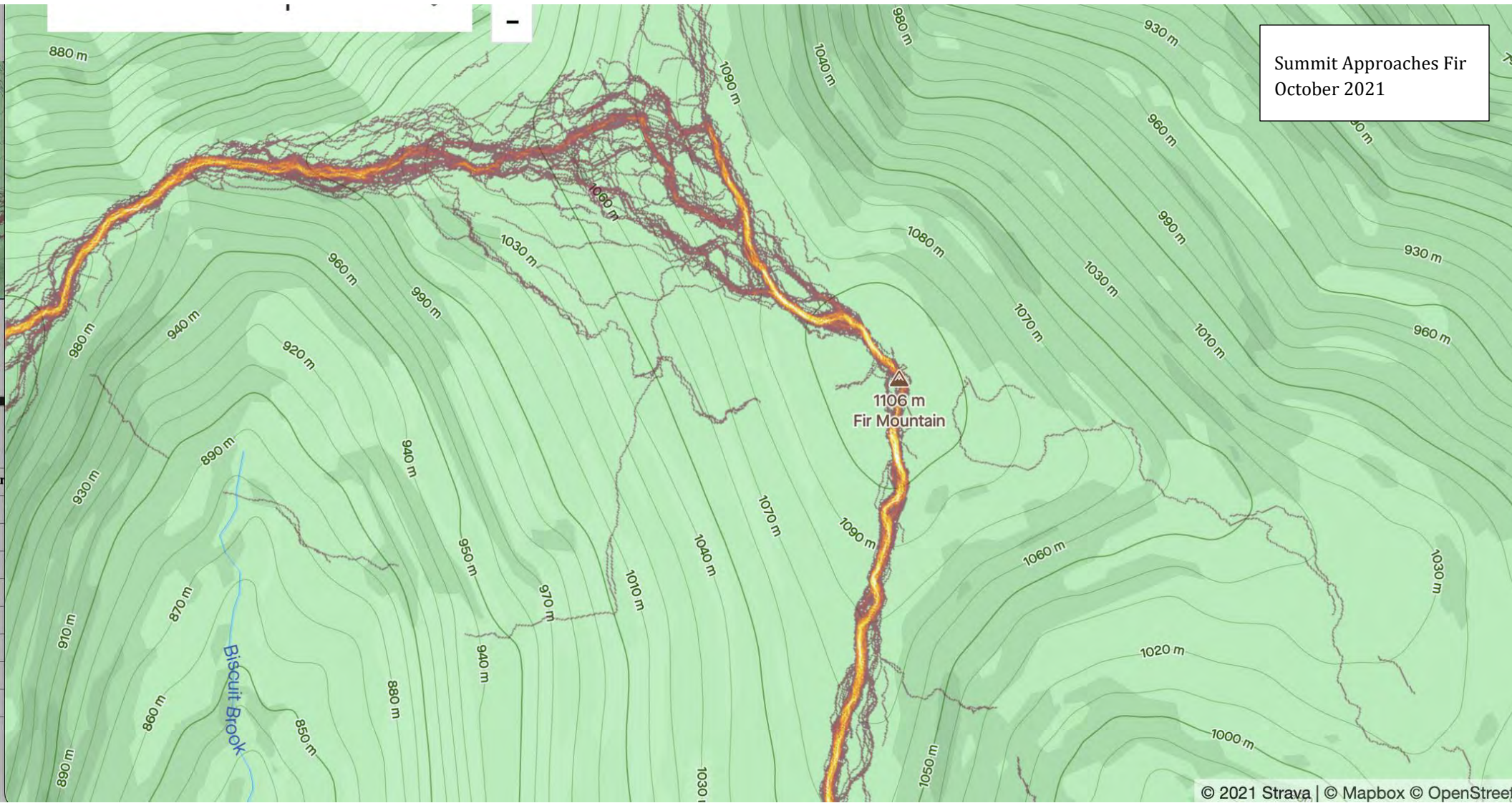
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August 2021



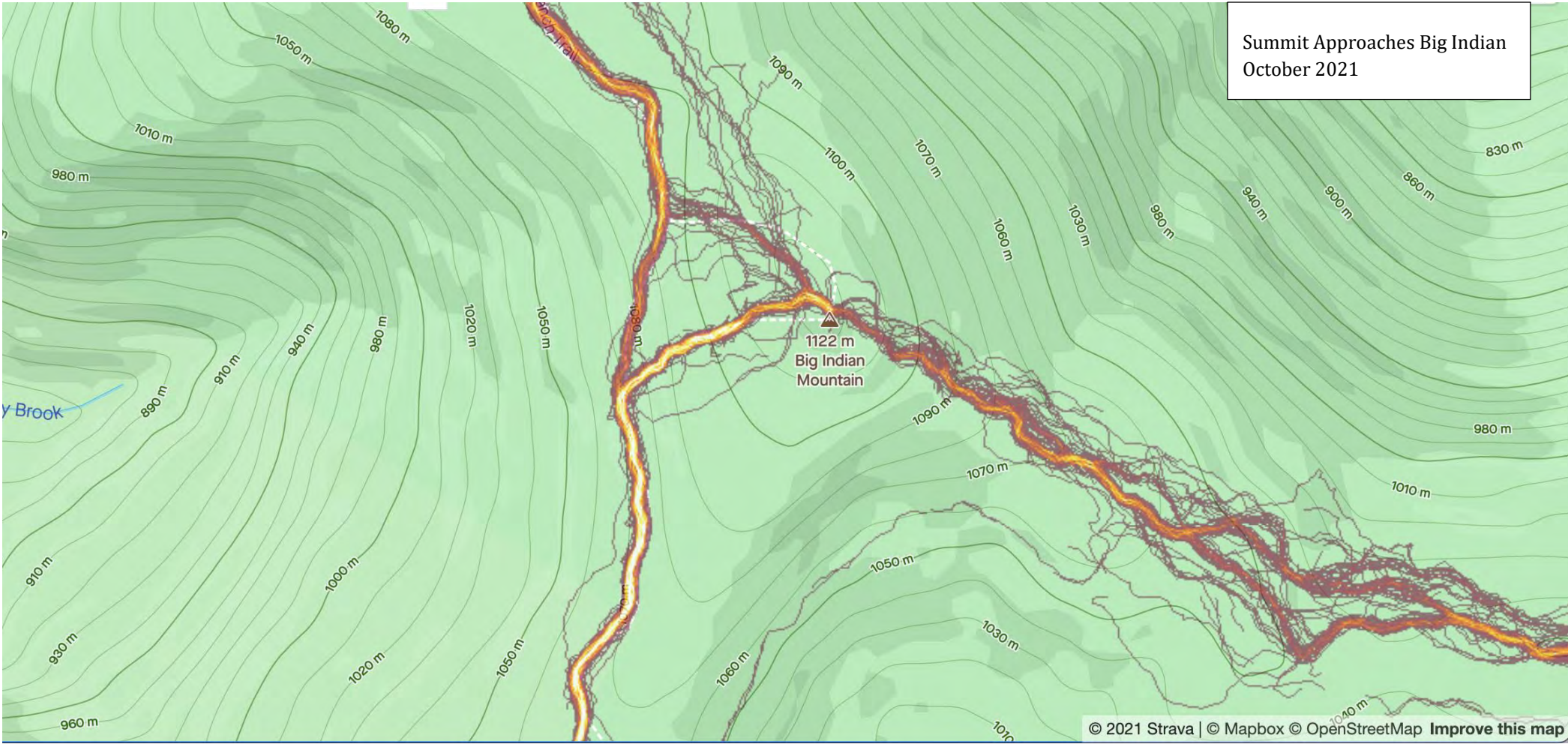
August 2021



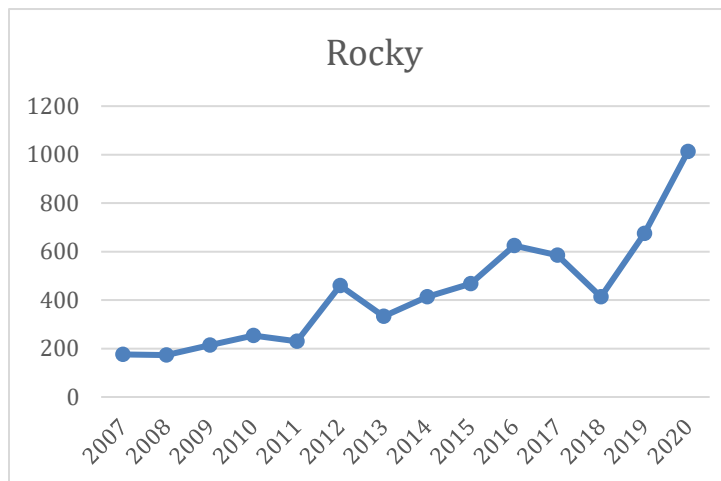
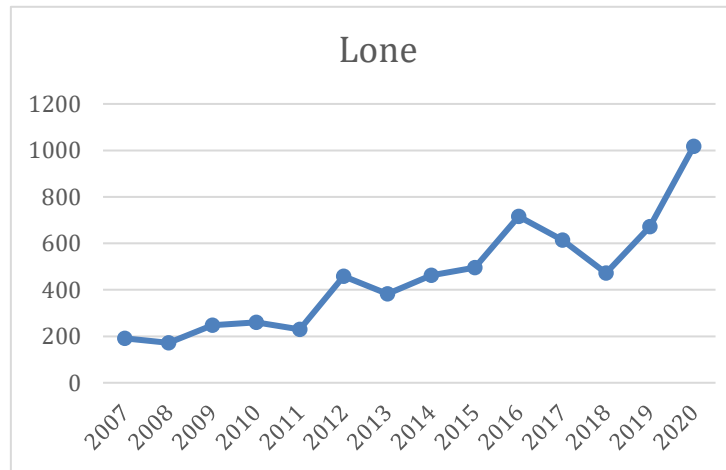
Summit Approaches Fir
October 2021

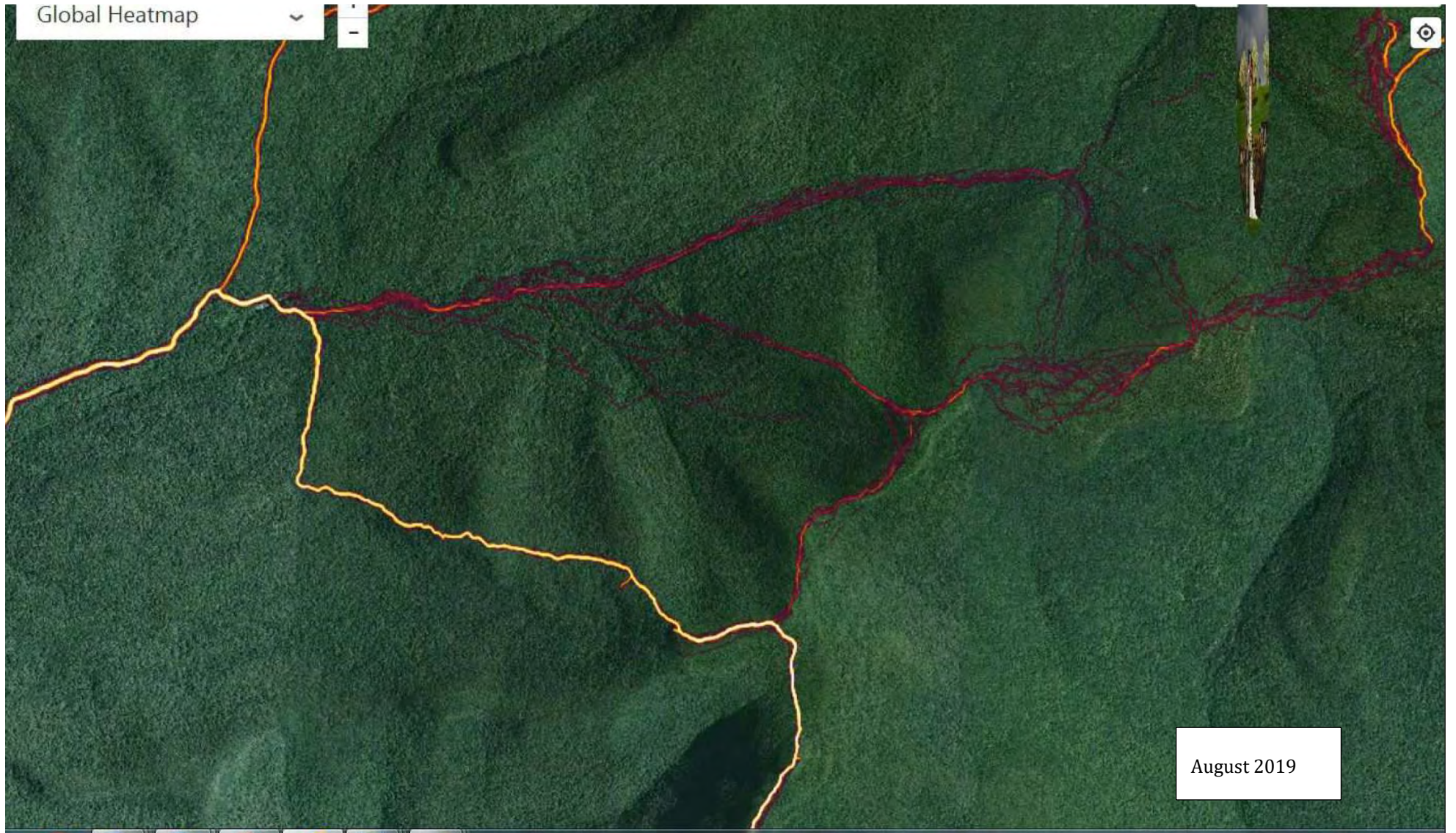
© 2021 Strava | © Mapbox © OpenStreetMap

Summit Approaches Big Indian
October 2021



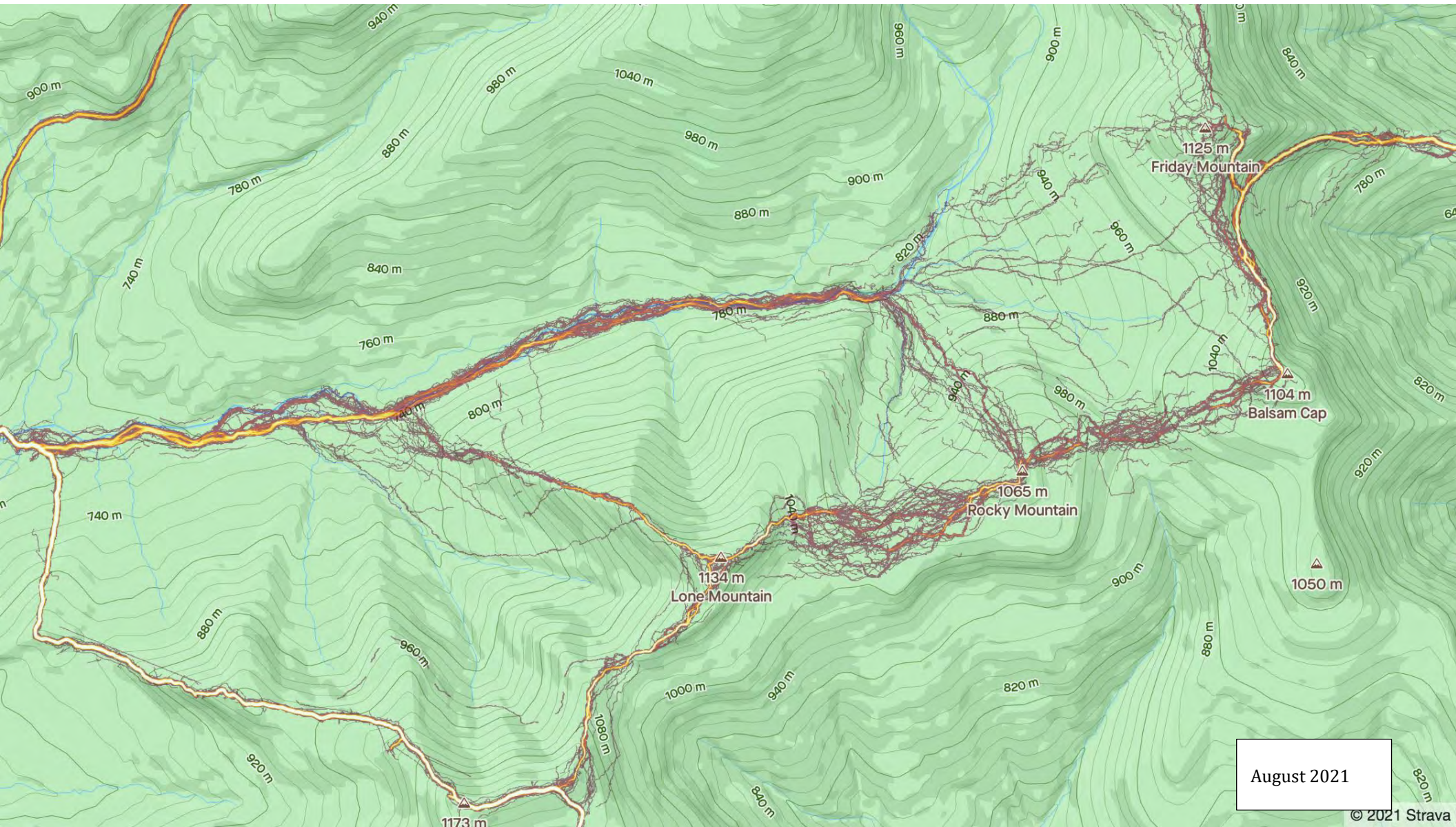
Lone and Rocky



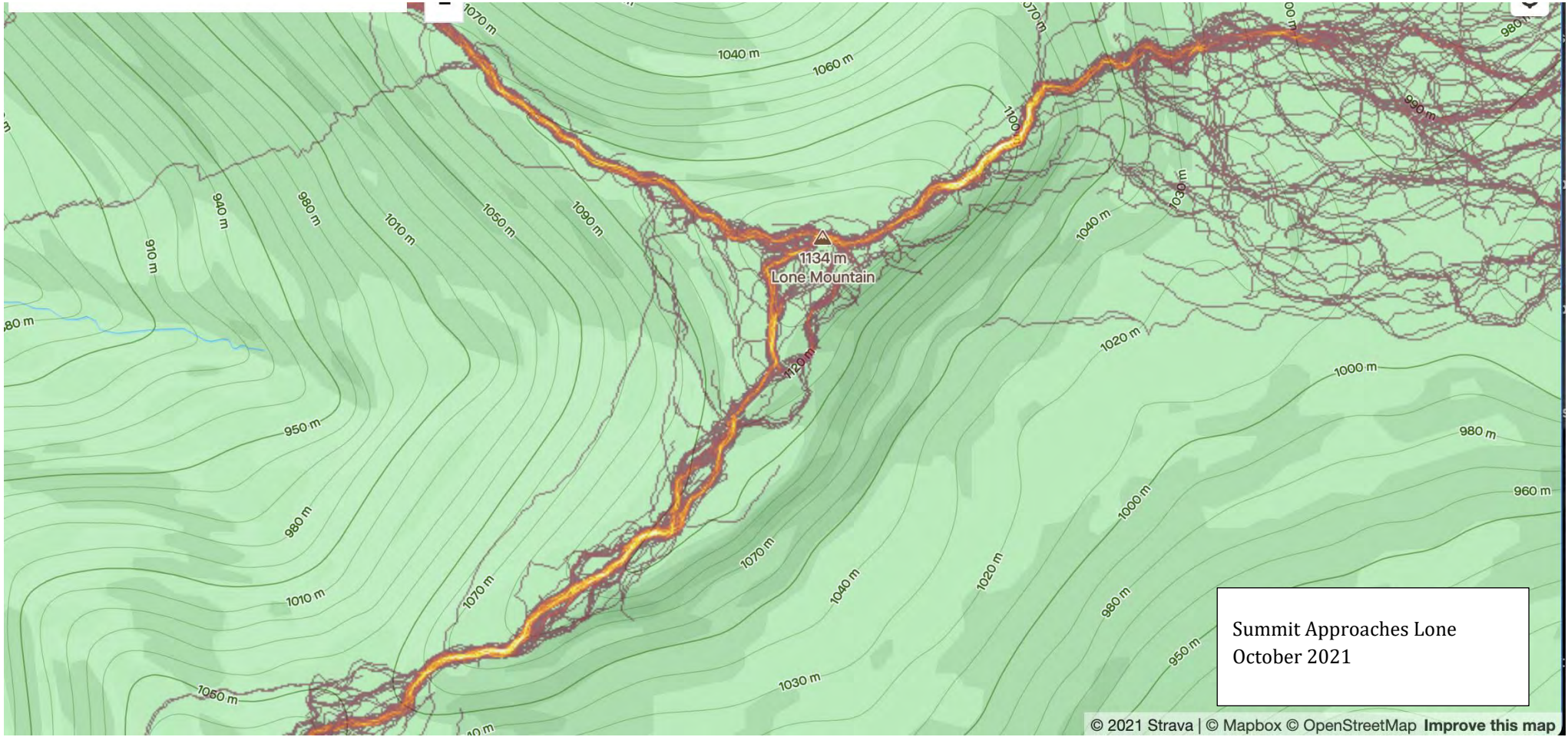


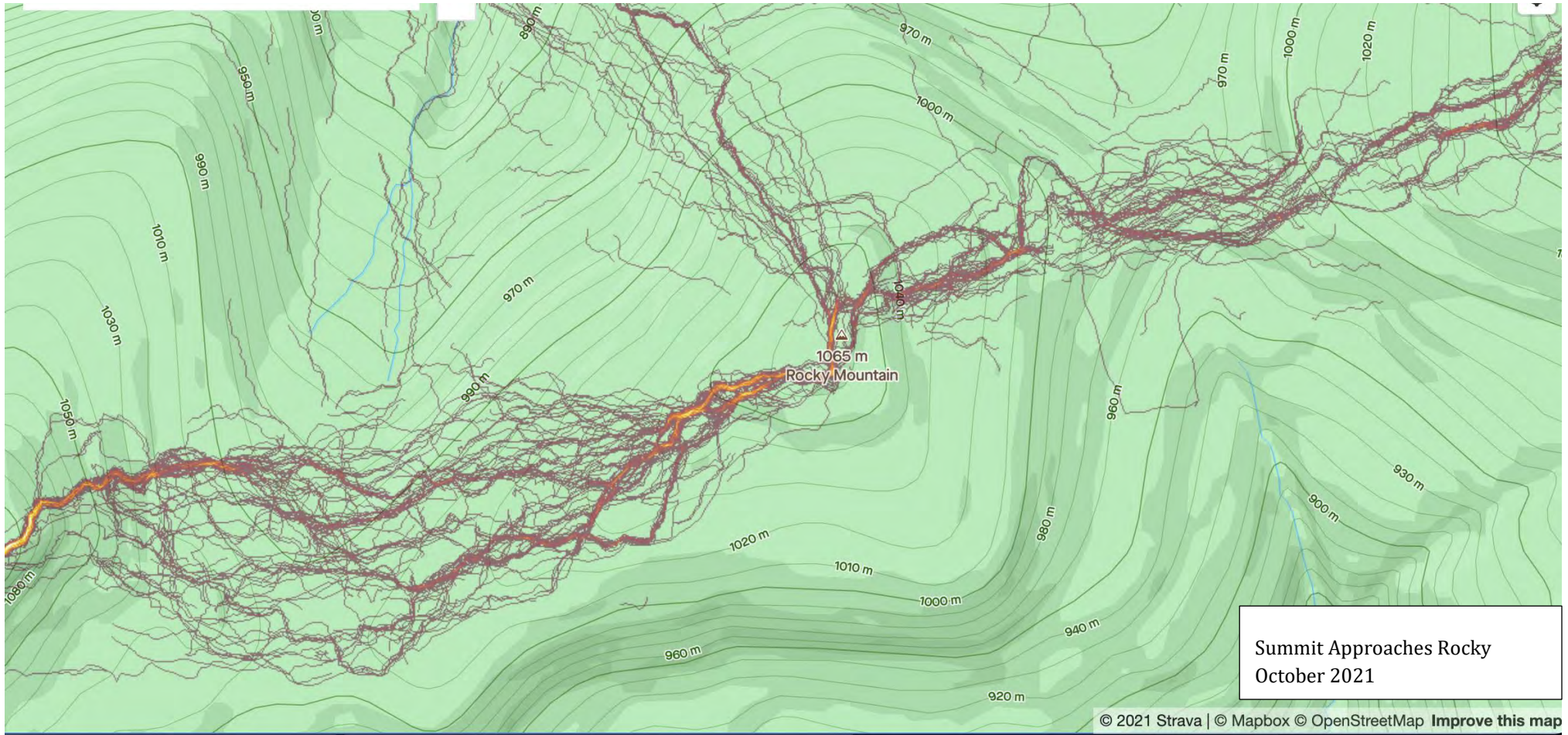




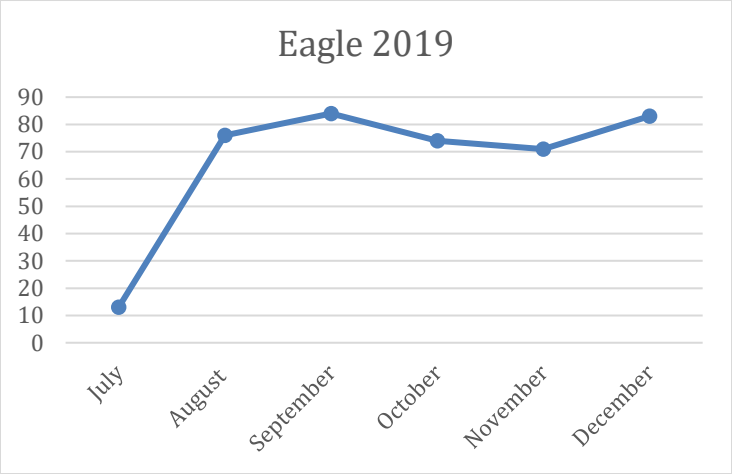


August 2021



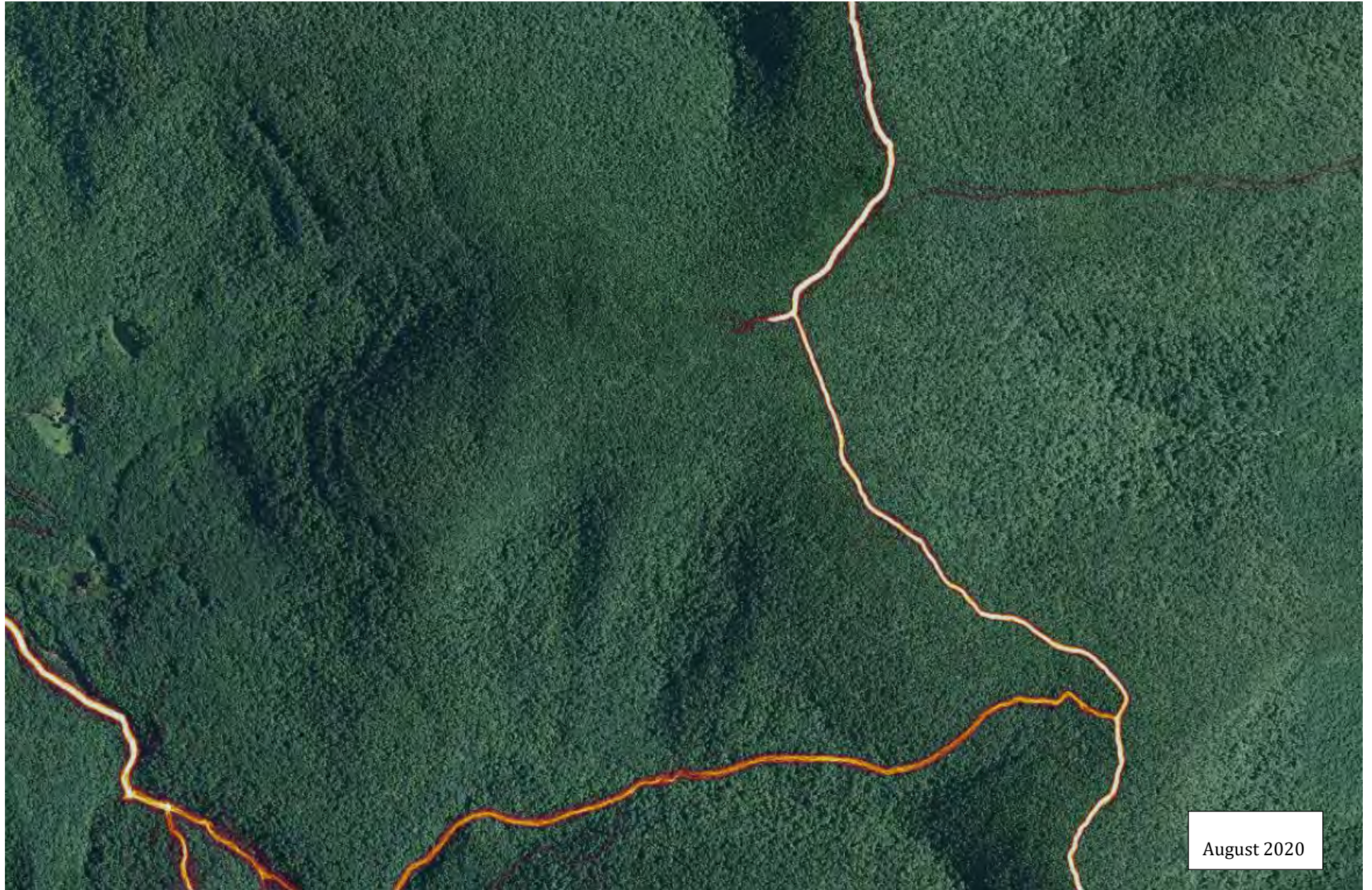


Eagle





August 2019



August 2020



August 2021

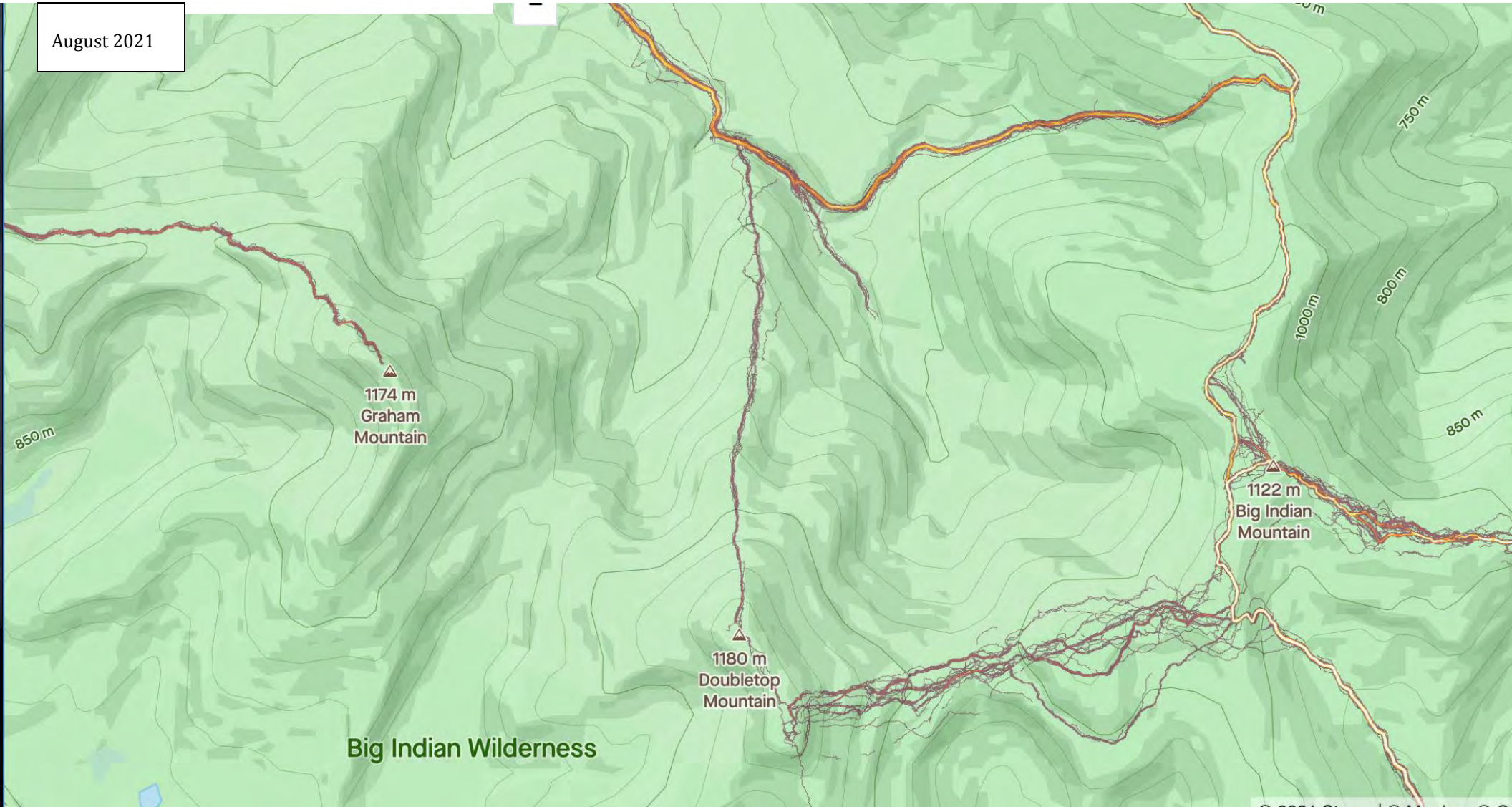
South Doubletop



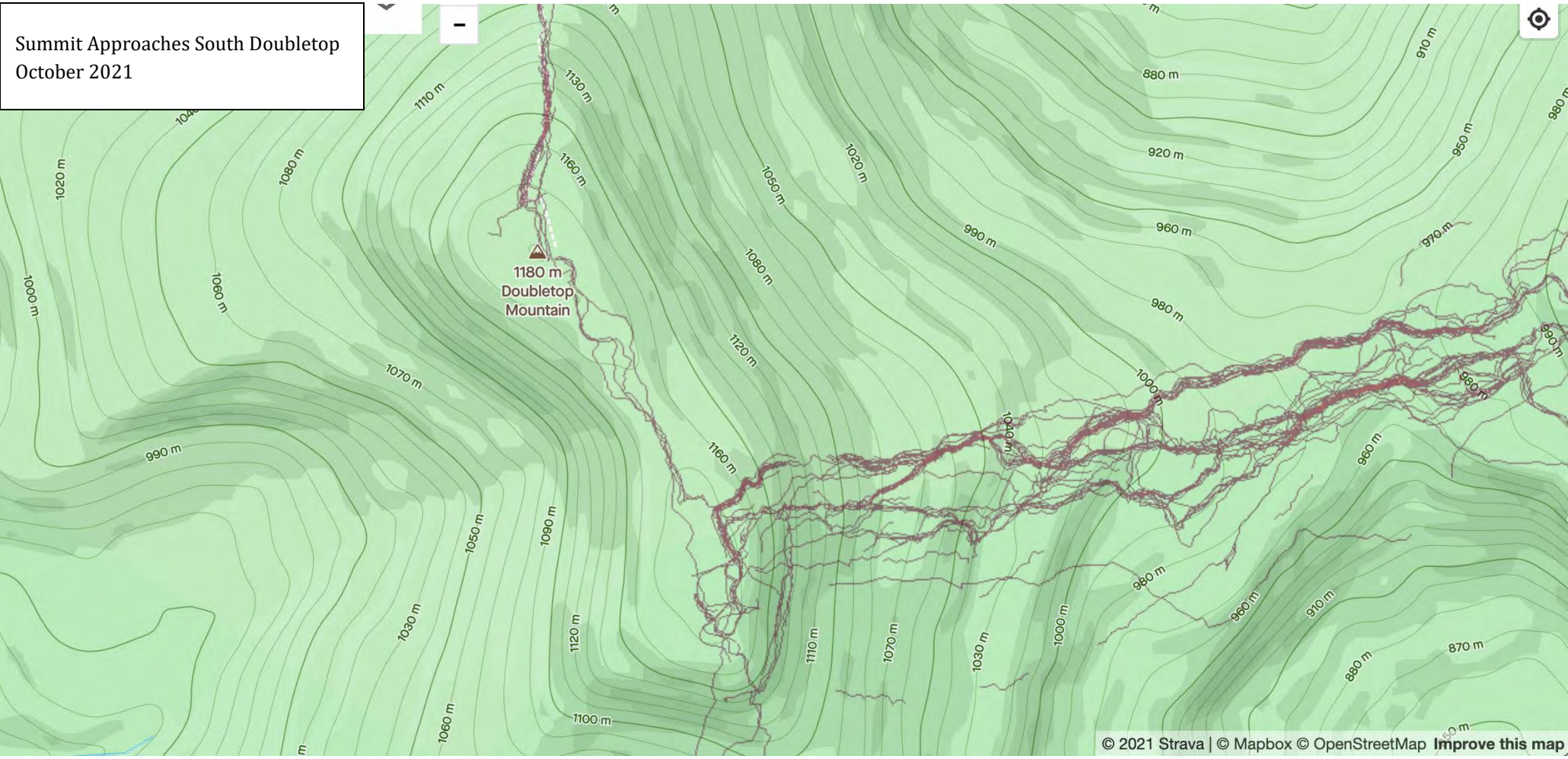
August 2021



August 2021

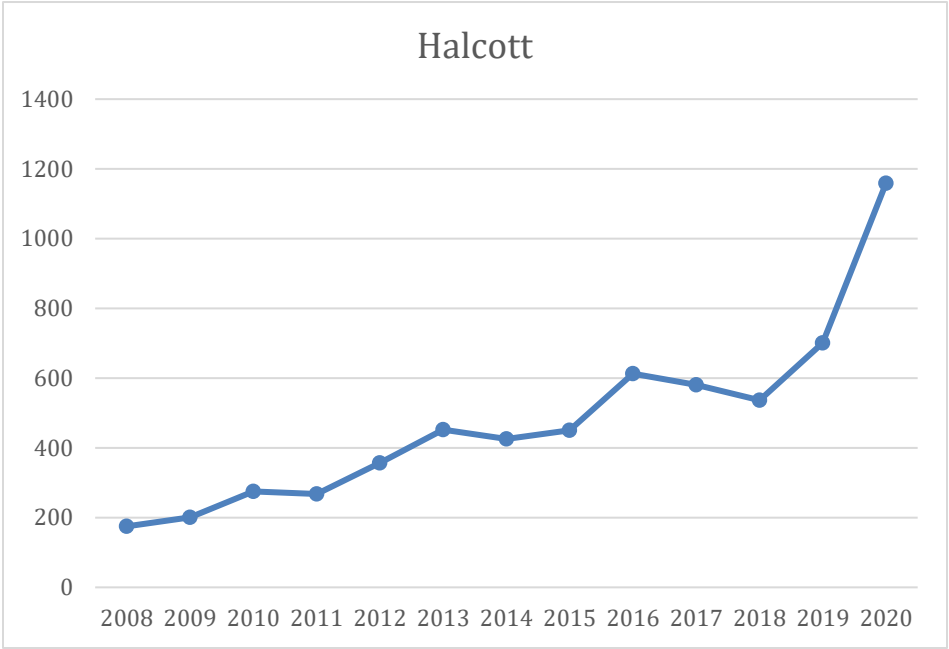


Summit Approaches South Doubletop
October 2021



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Halcott





August 2019

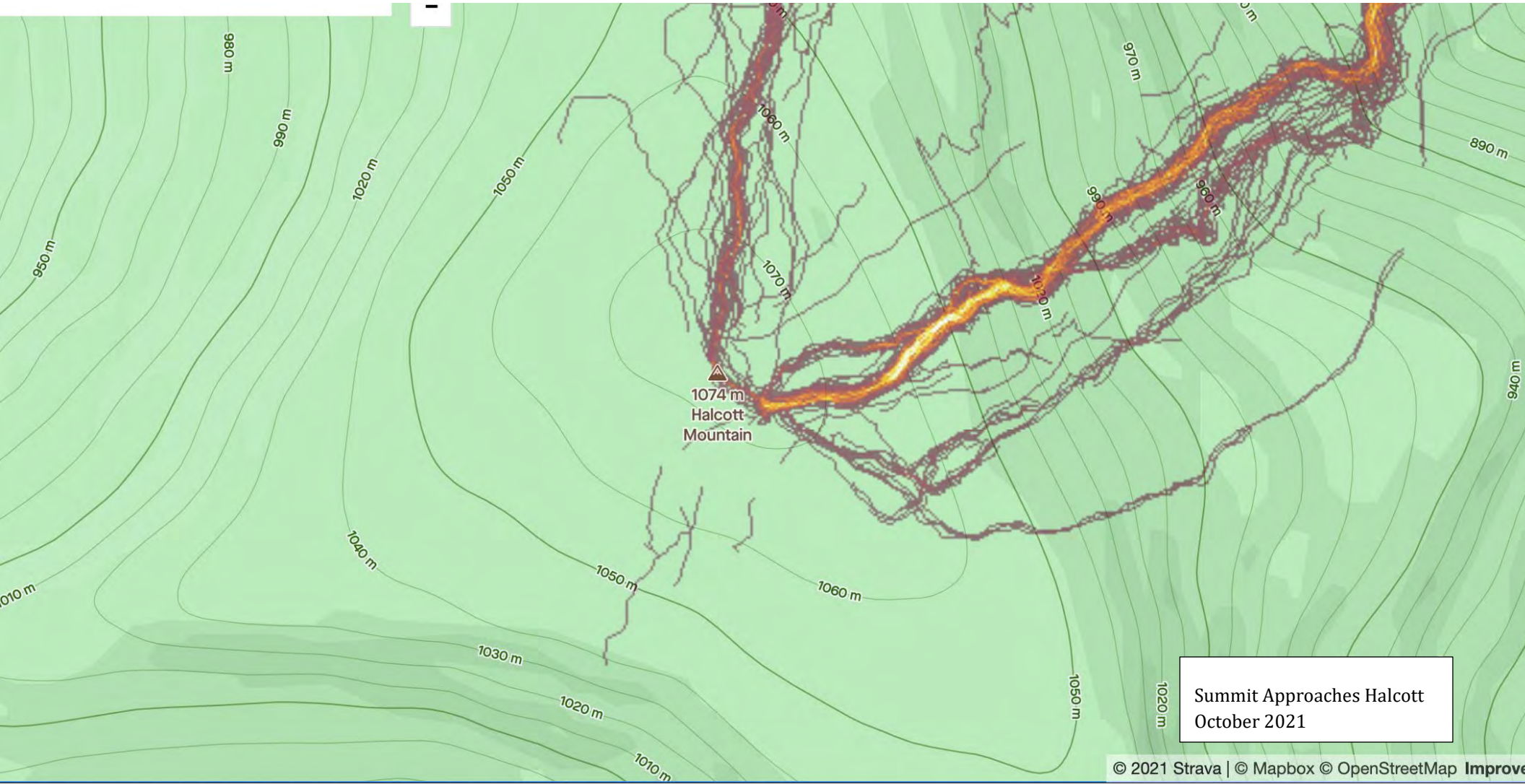


August 2020



August 2021

© 2021 Stra

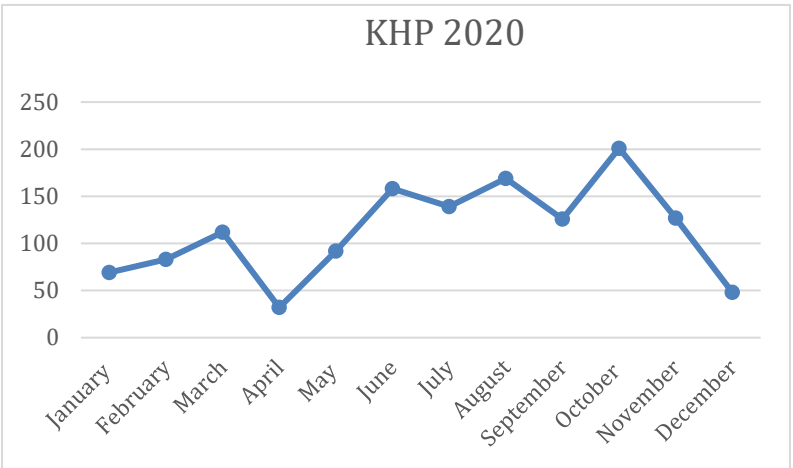
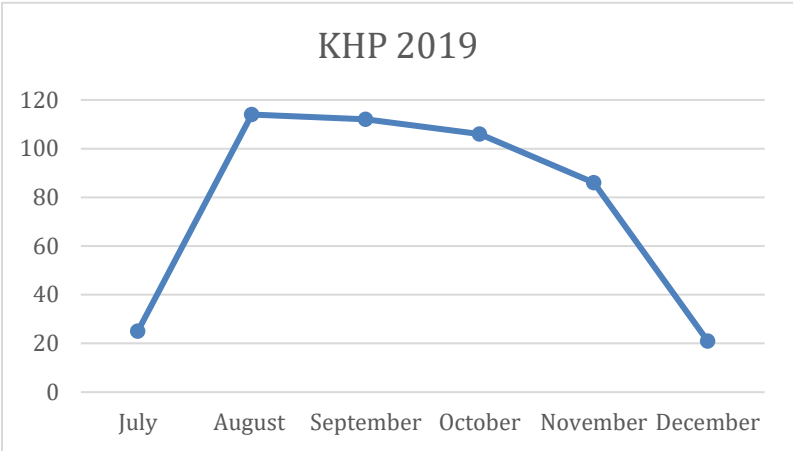


Summit Approaches Halcott
October 2021

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Kaaterskill High Peak

A canister was installed on the KHP summit in July of 2019 so there is no sign in data for the months prior to that.





August 2019



August 2020

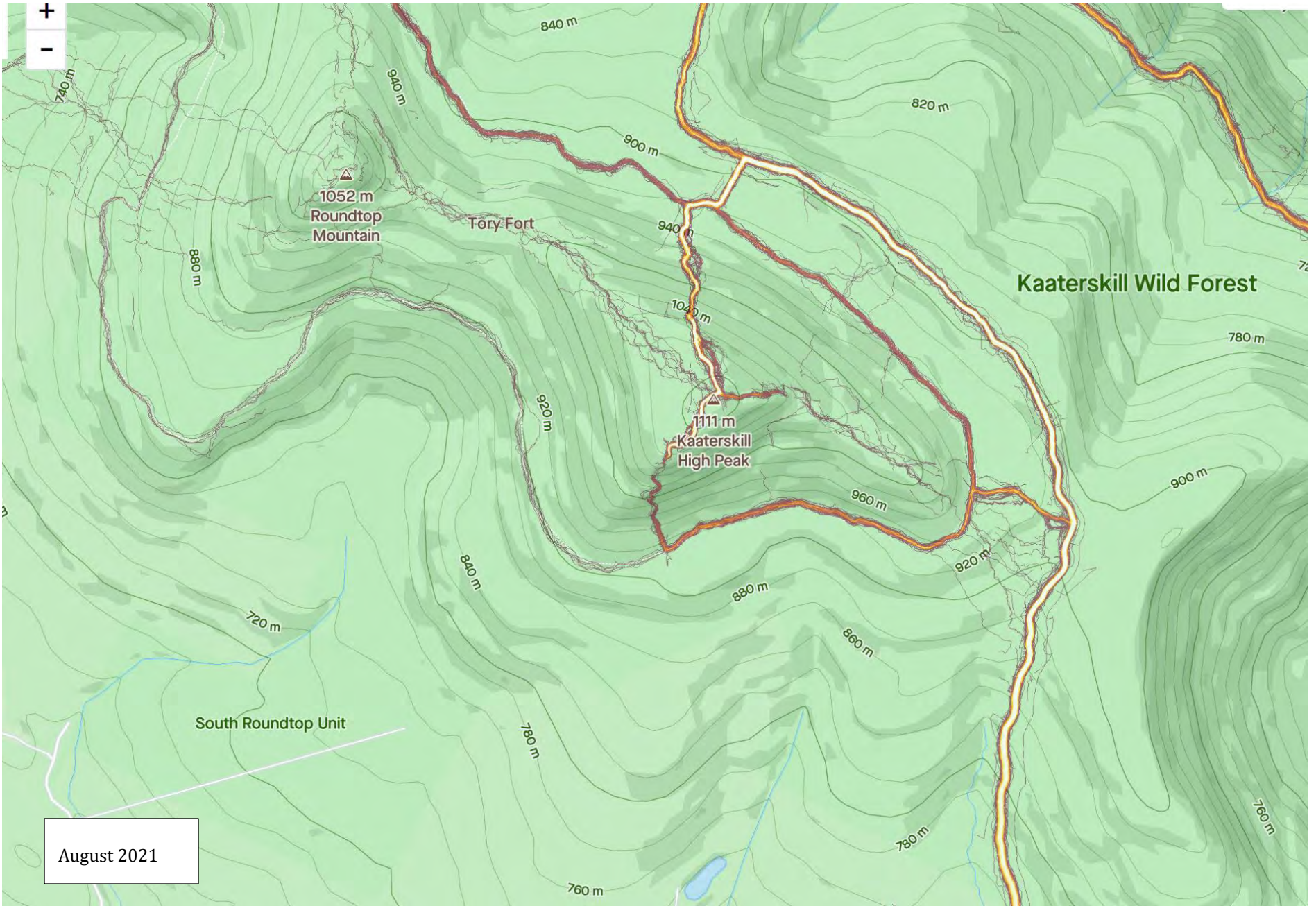


map

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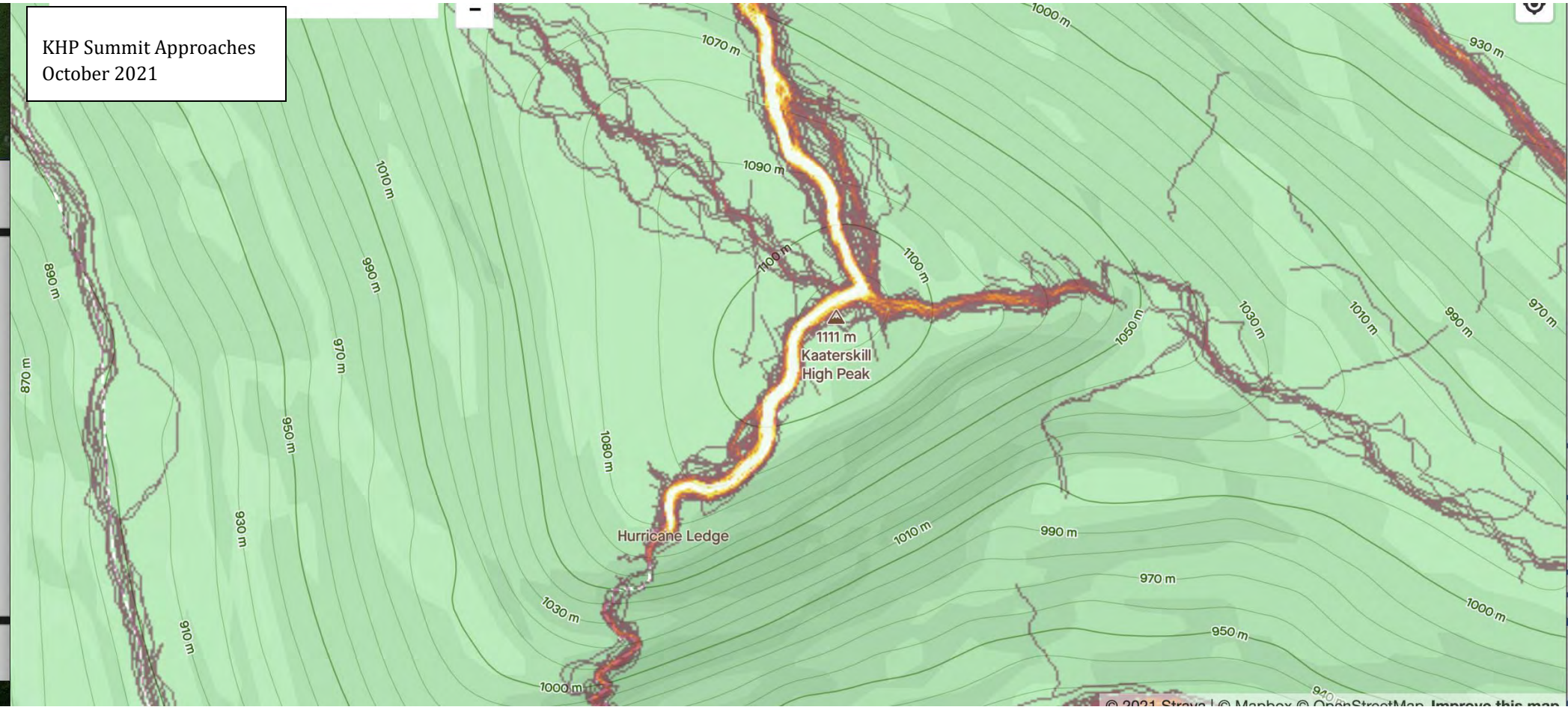
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August 2021

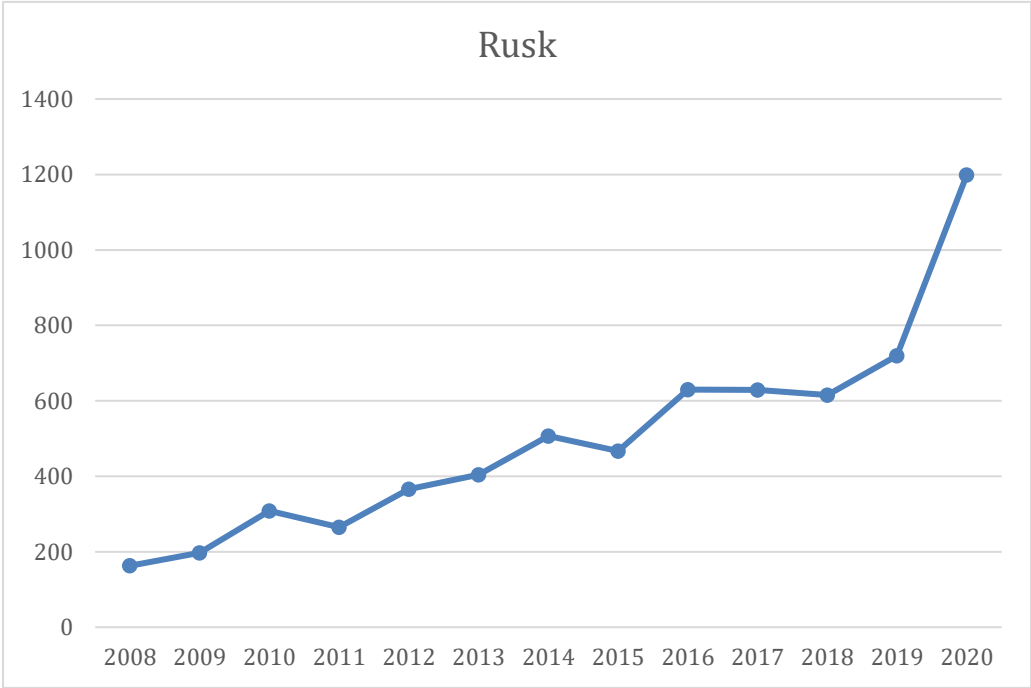


August 2021

KHP Summit Approaches
October 2021

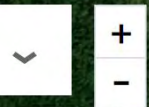


Rusk

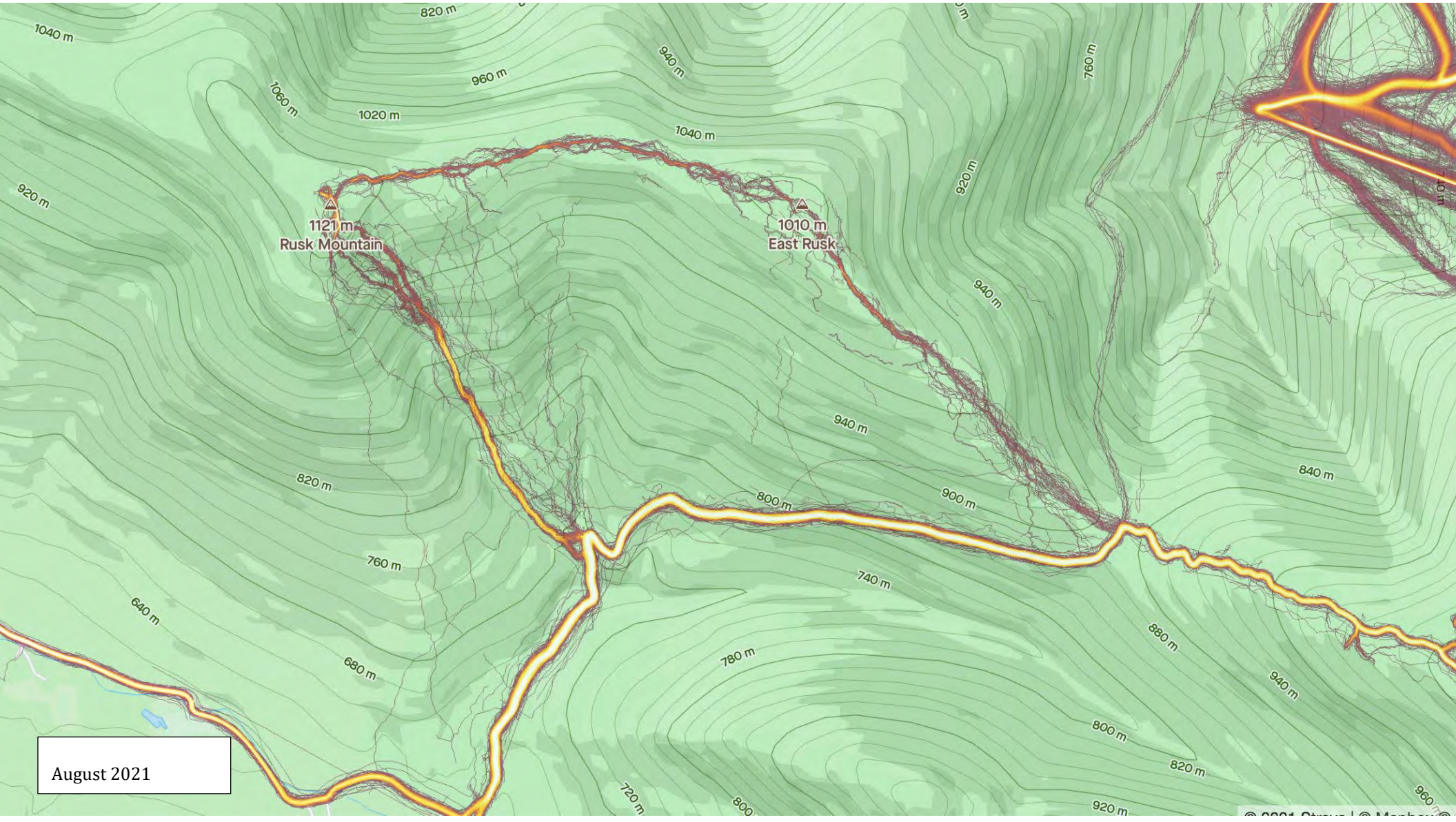




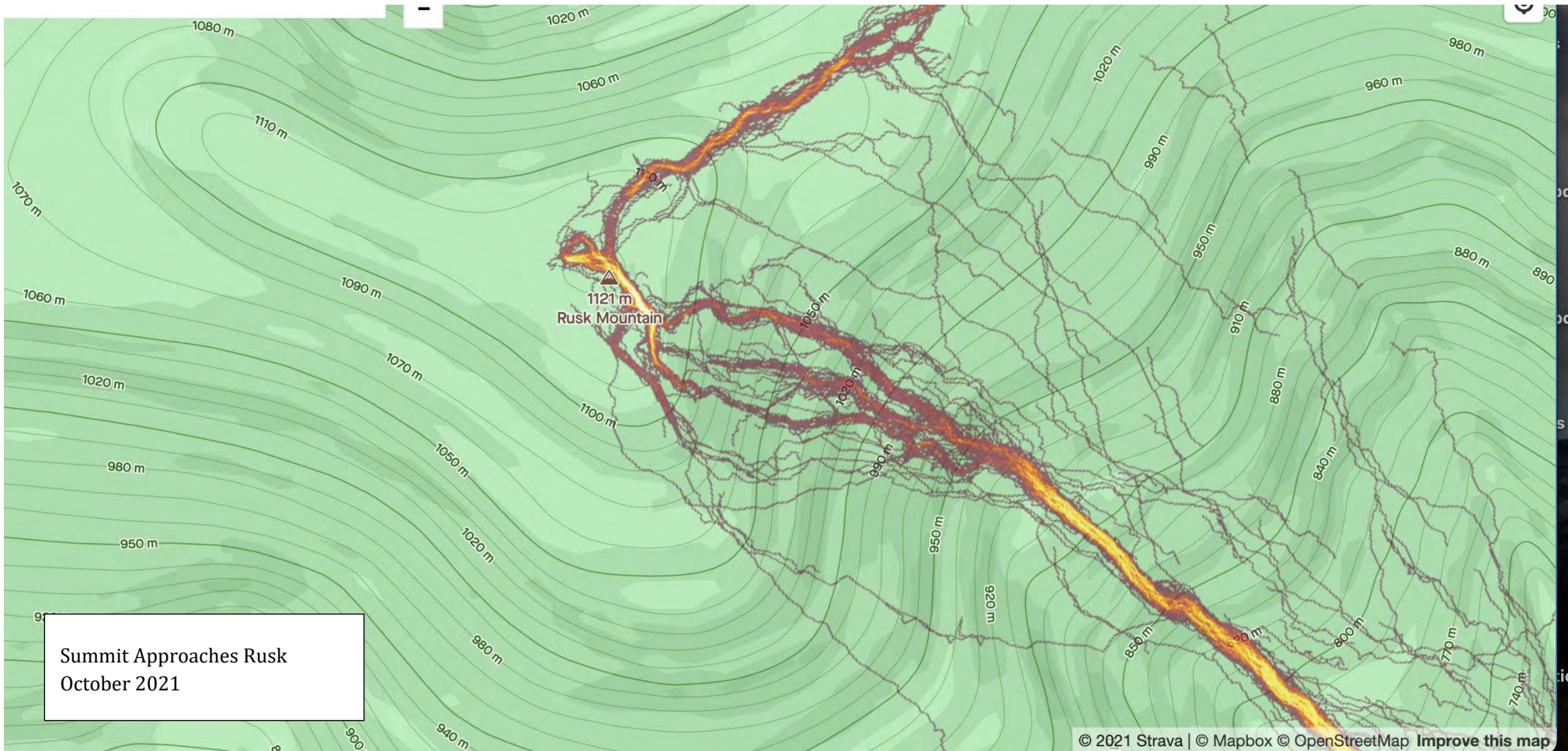
August 2019



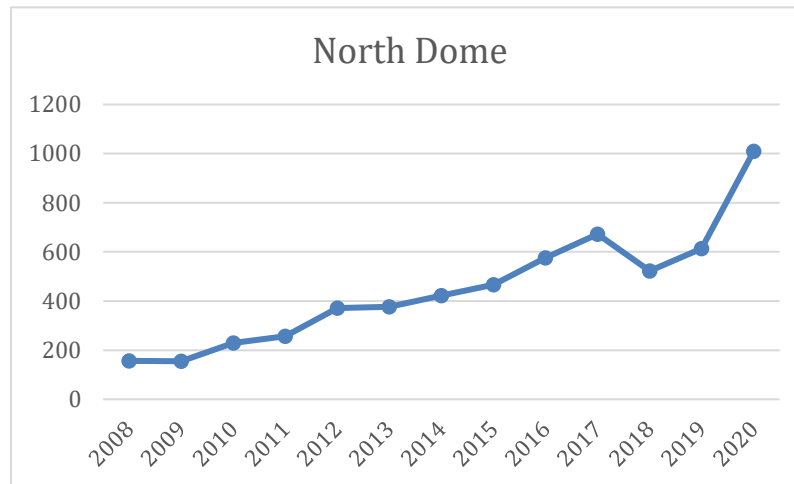
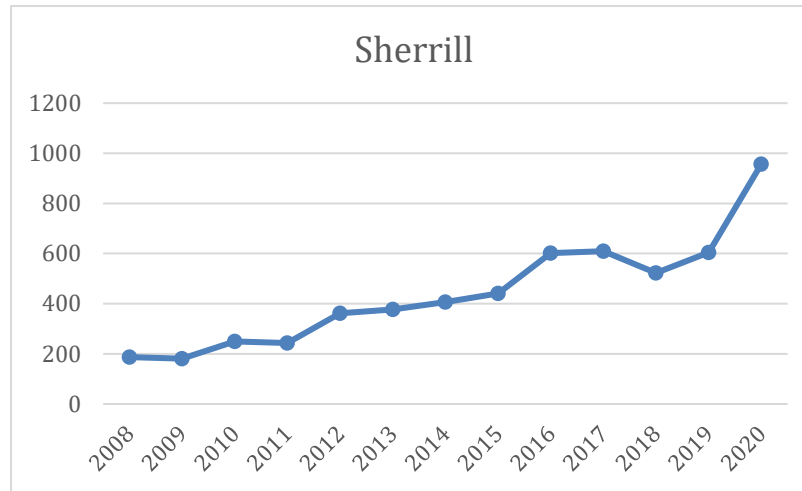
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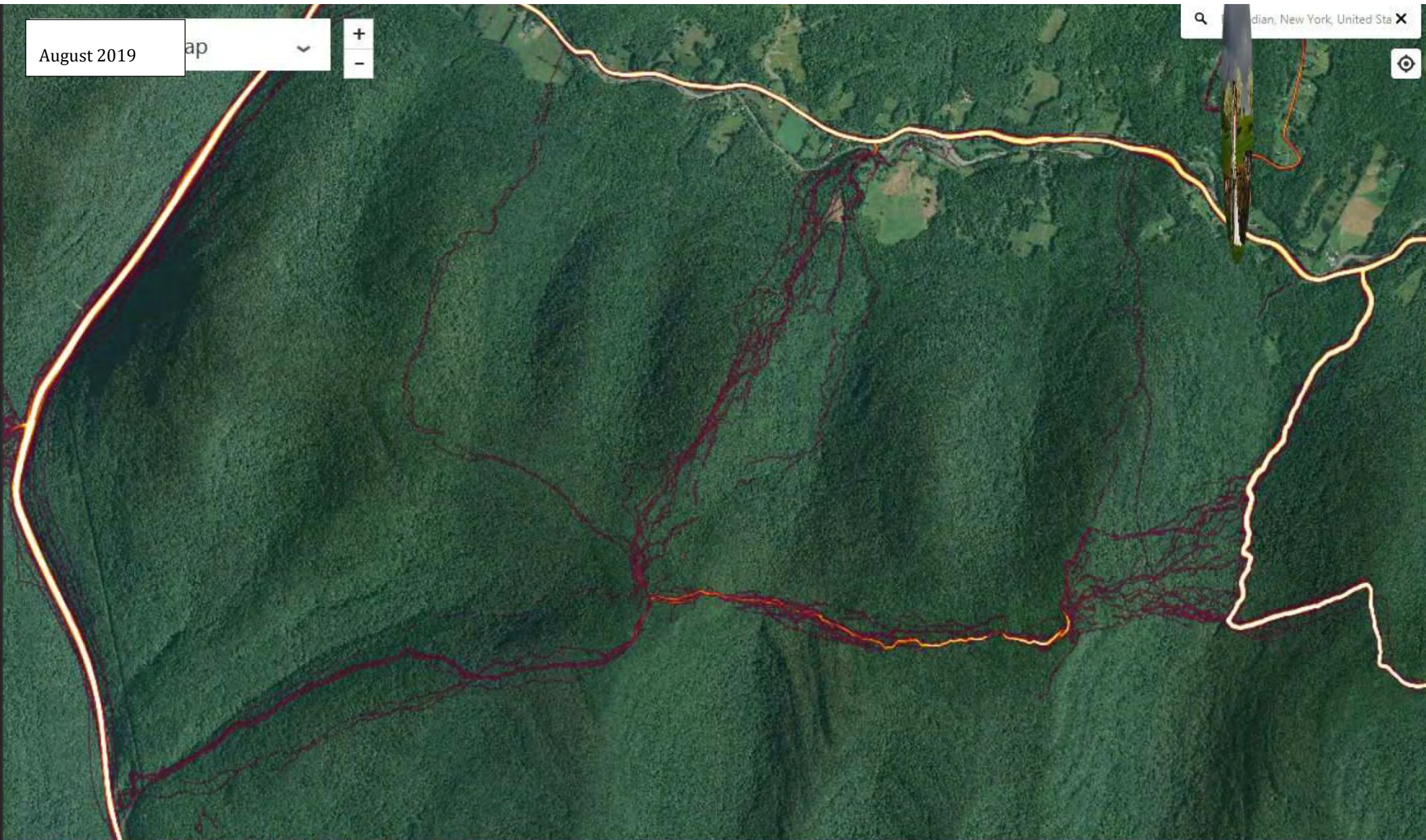


August 2021



Sherrill and North Dome



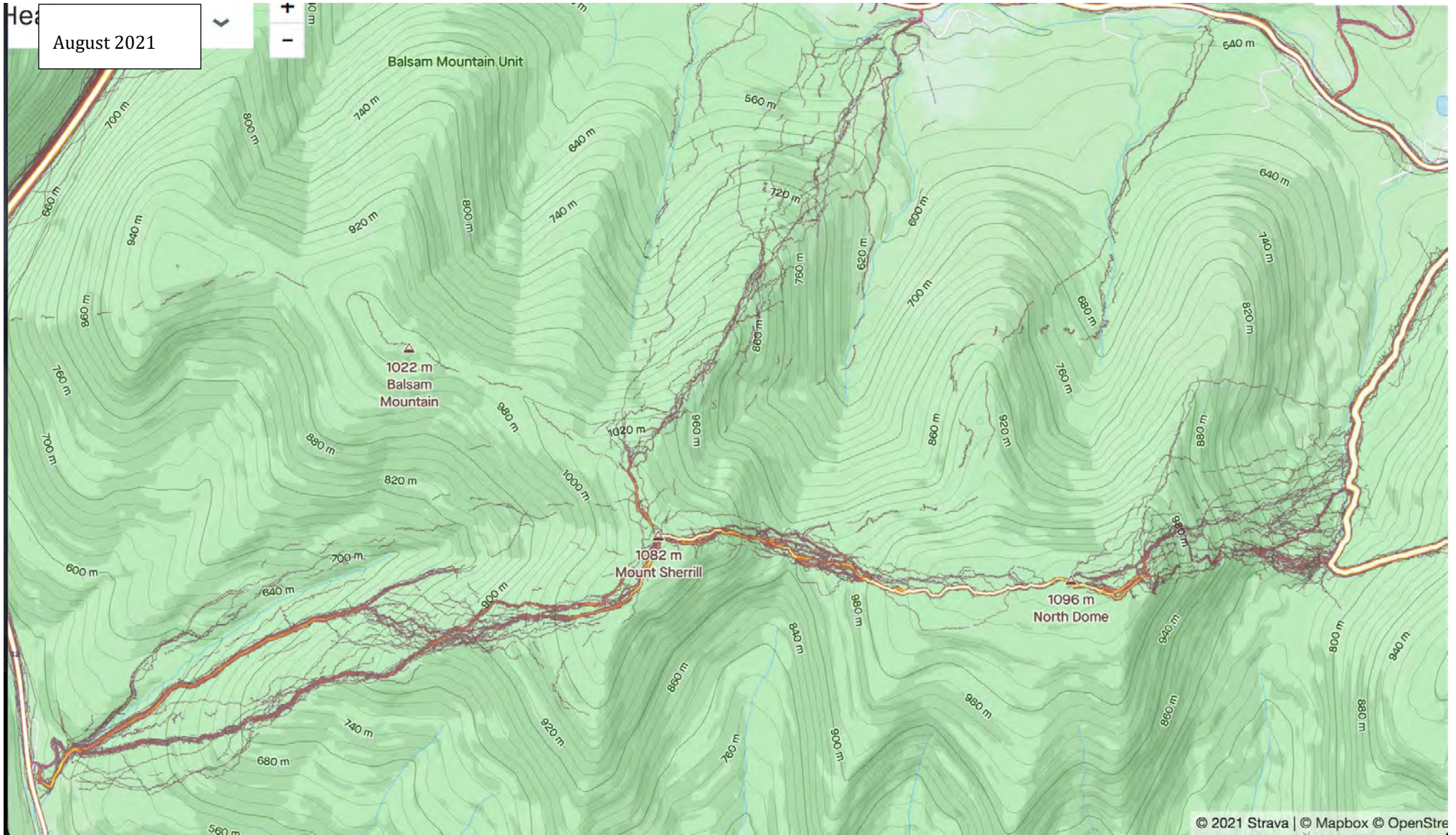


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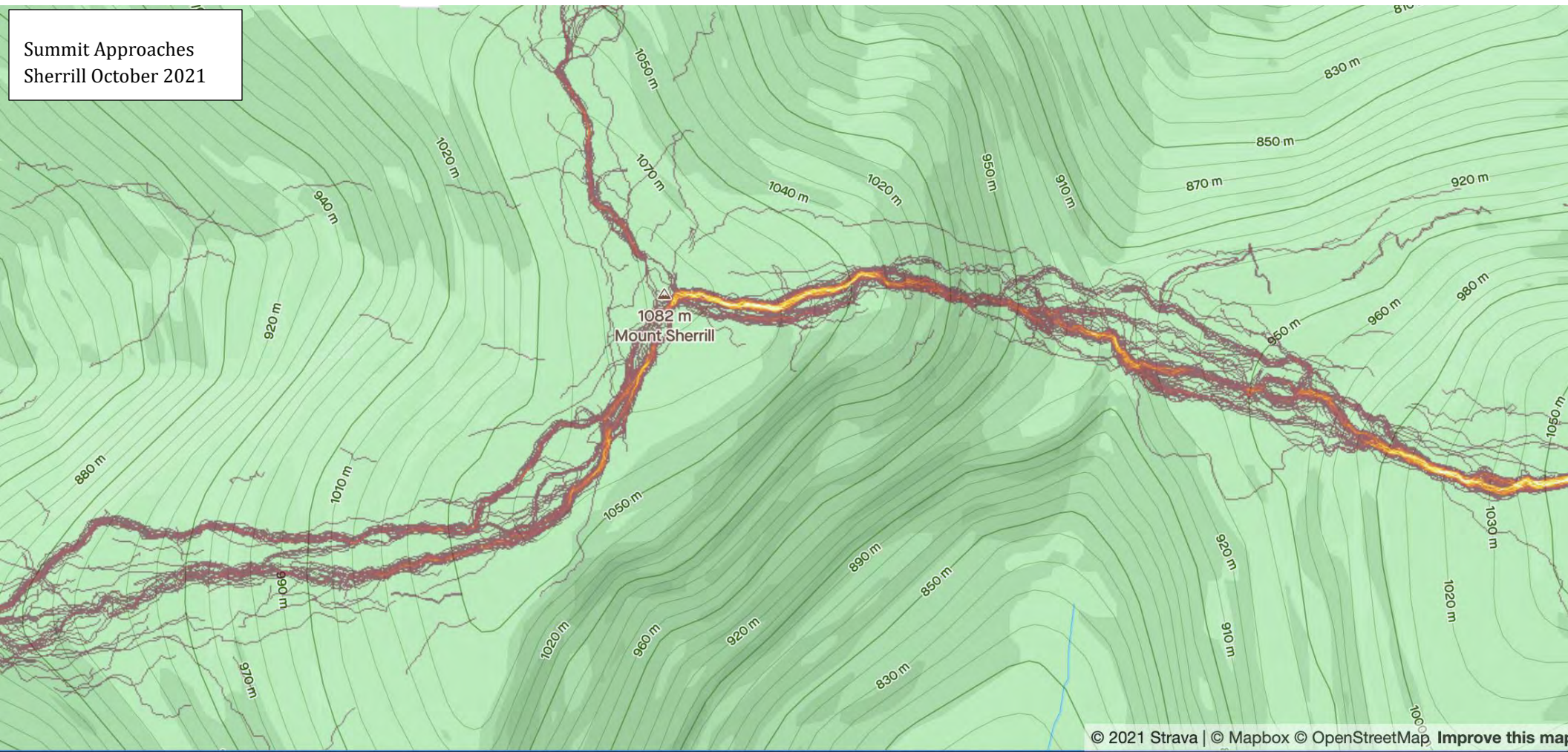


August 2021

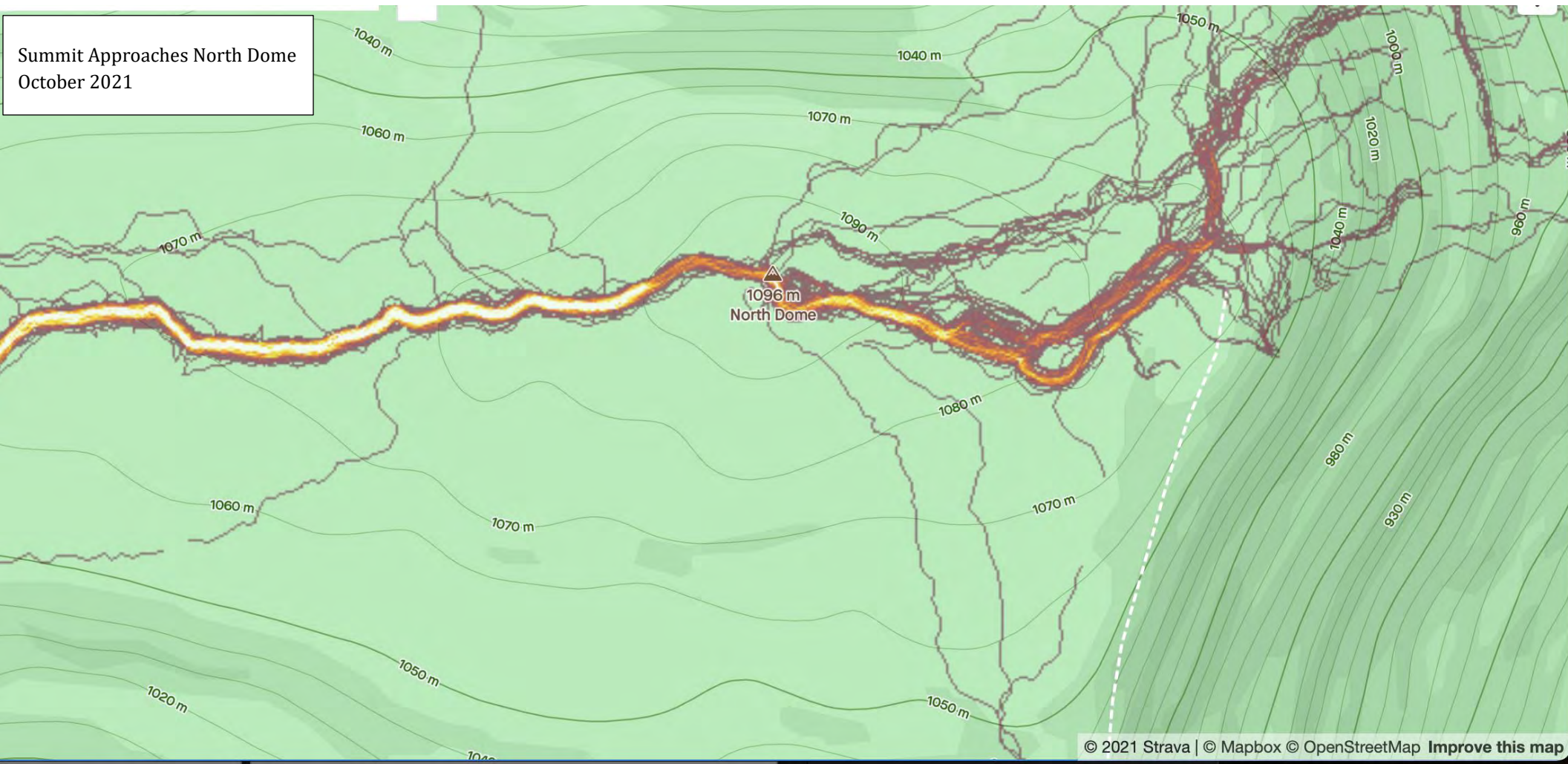




Summit Approaches
Sherrill October 2021

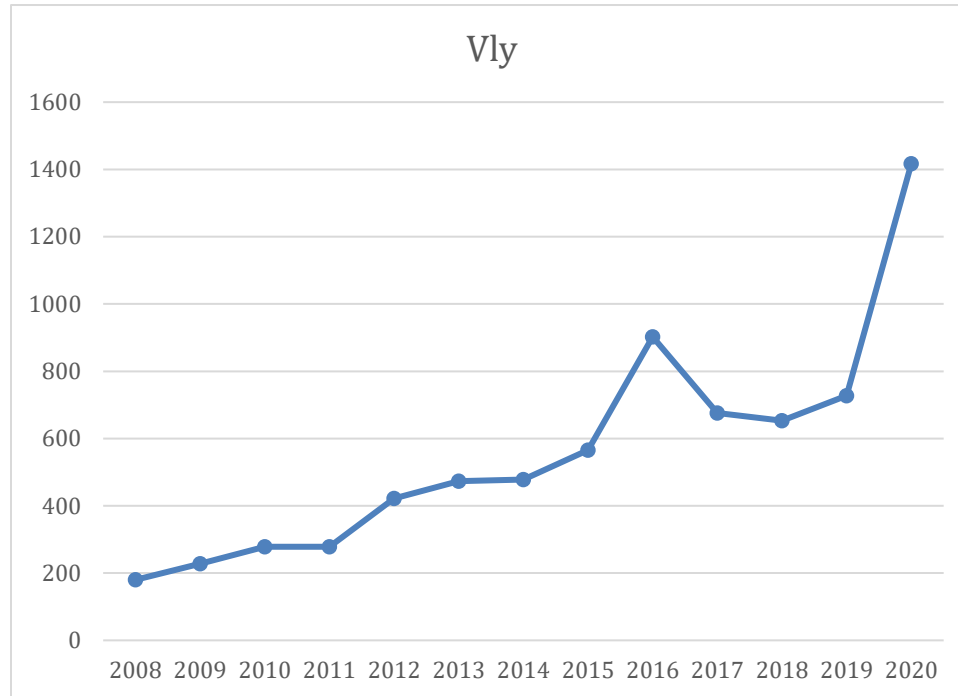


Summit Approaches North Dome
October 2021



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Vly (& Bearpen)

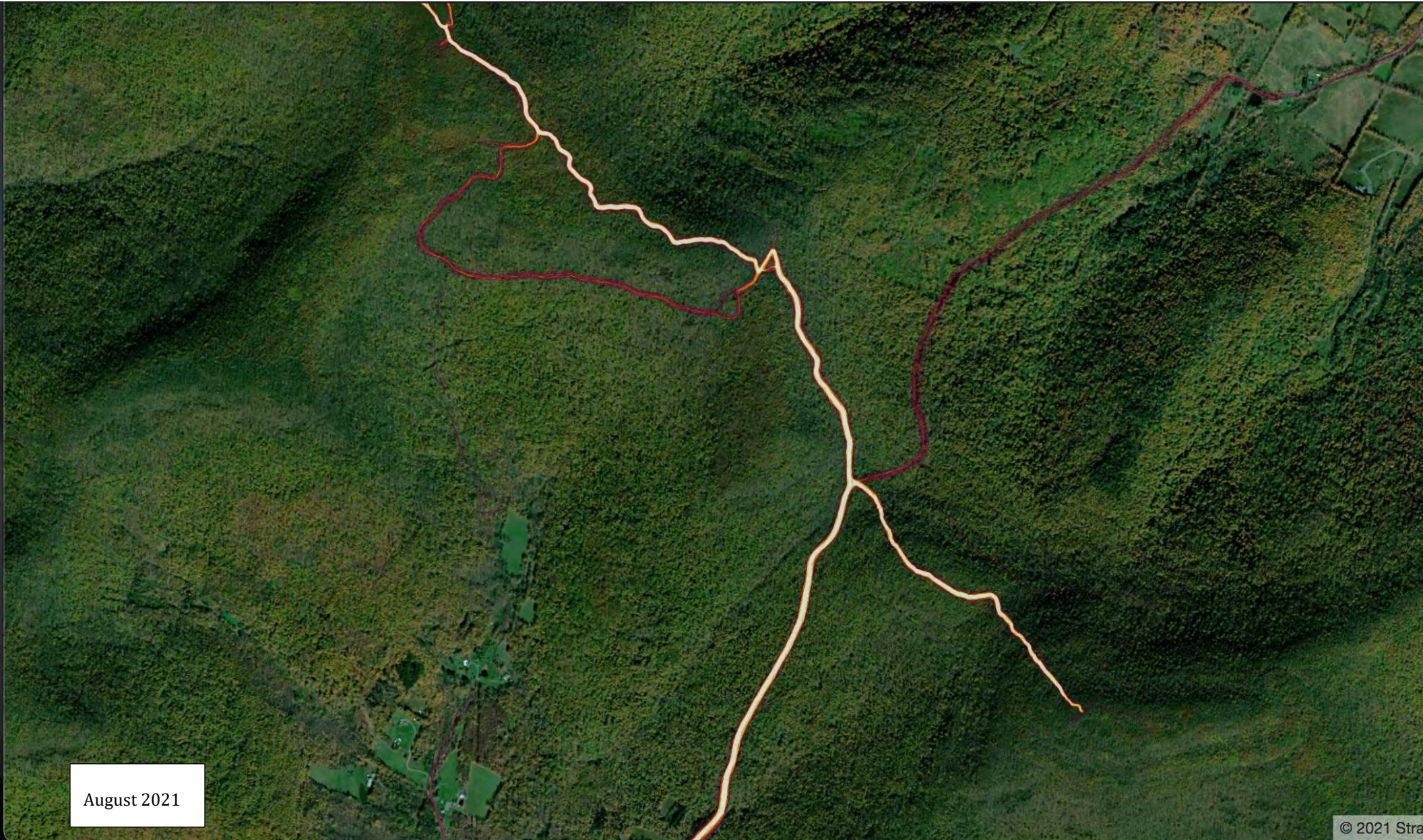




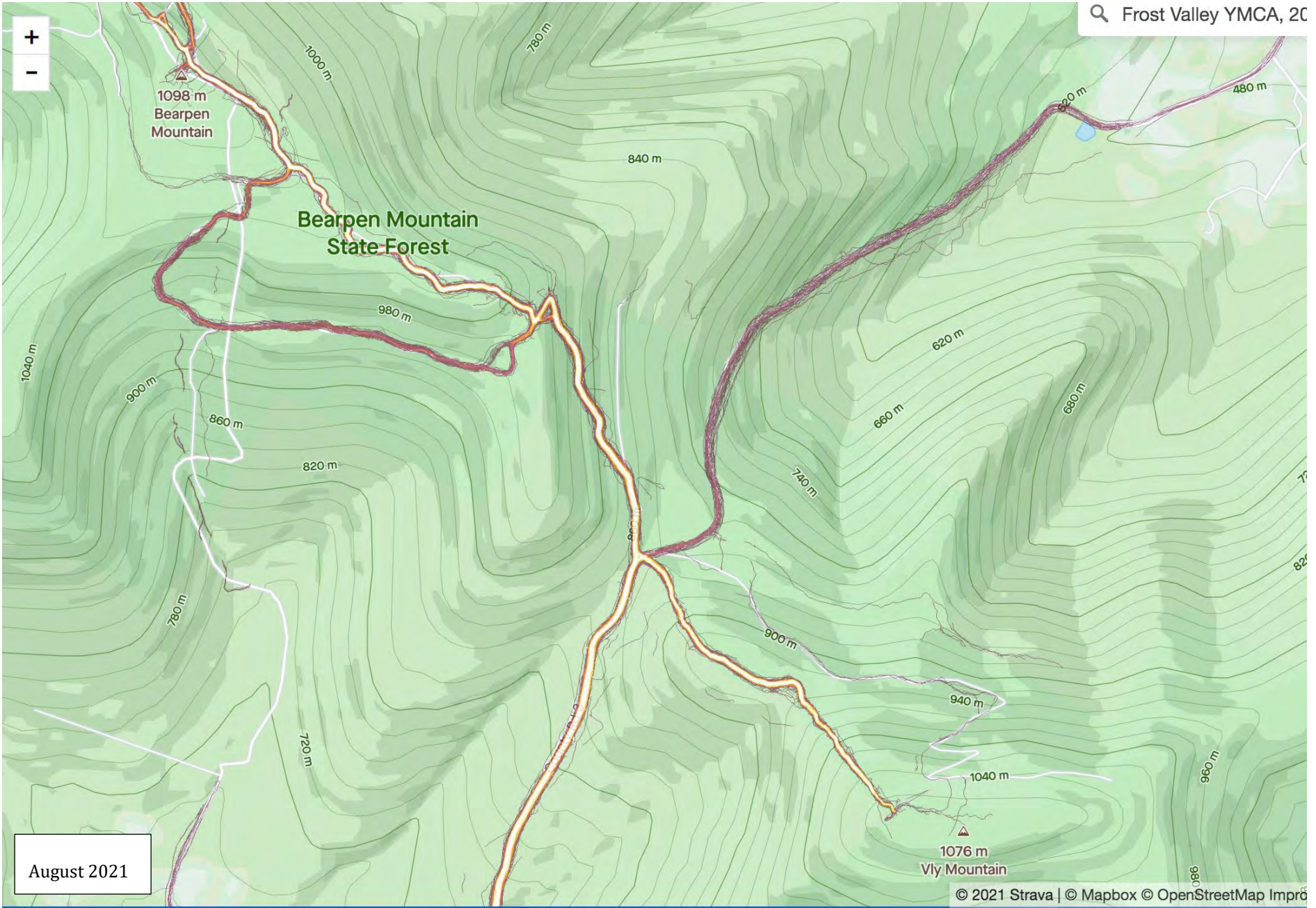
August 2019



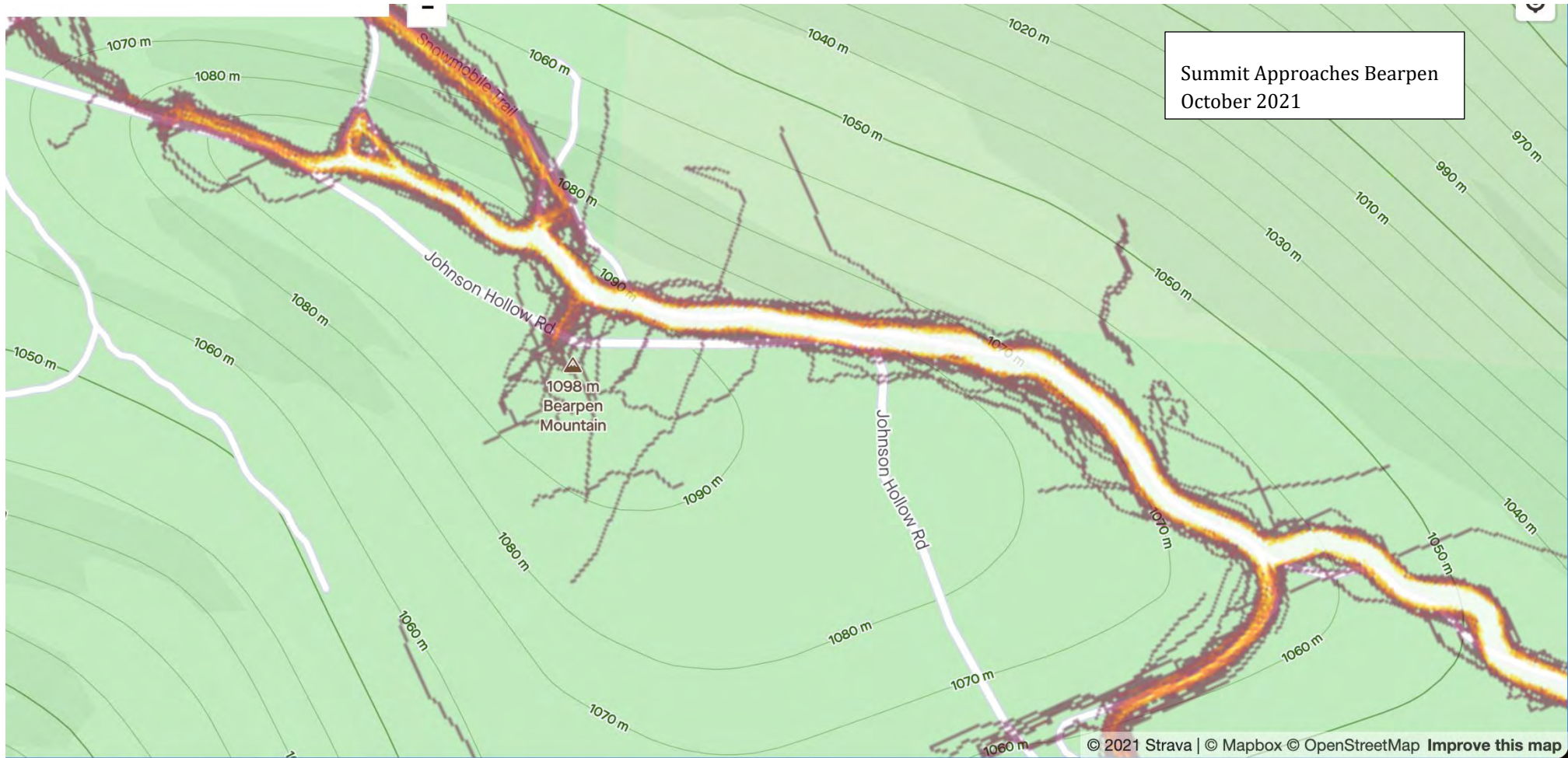
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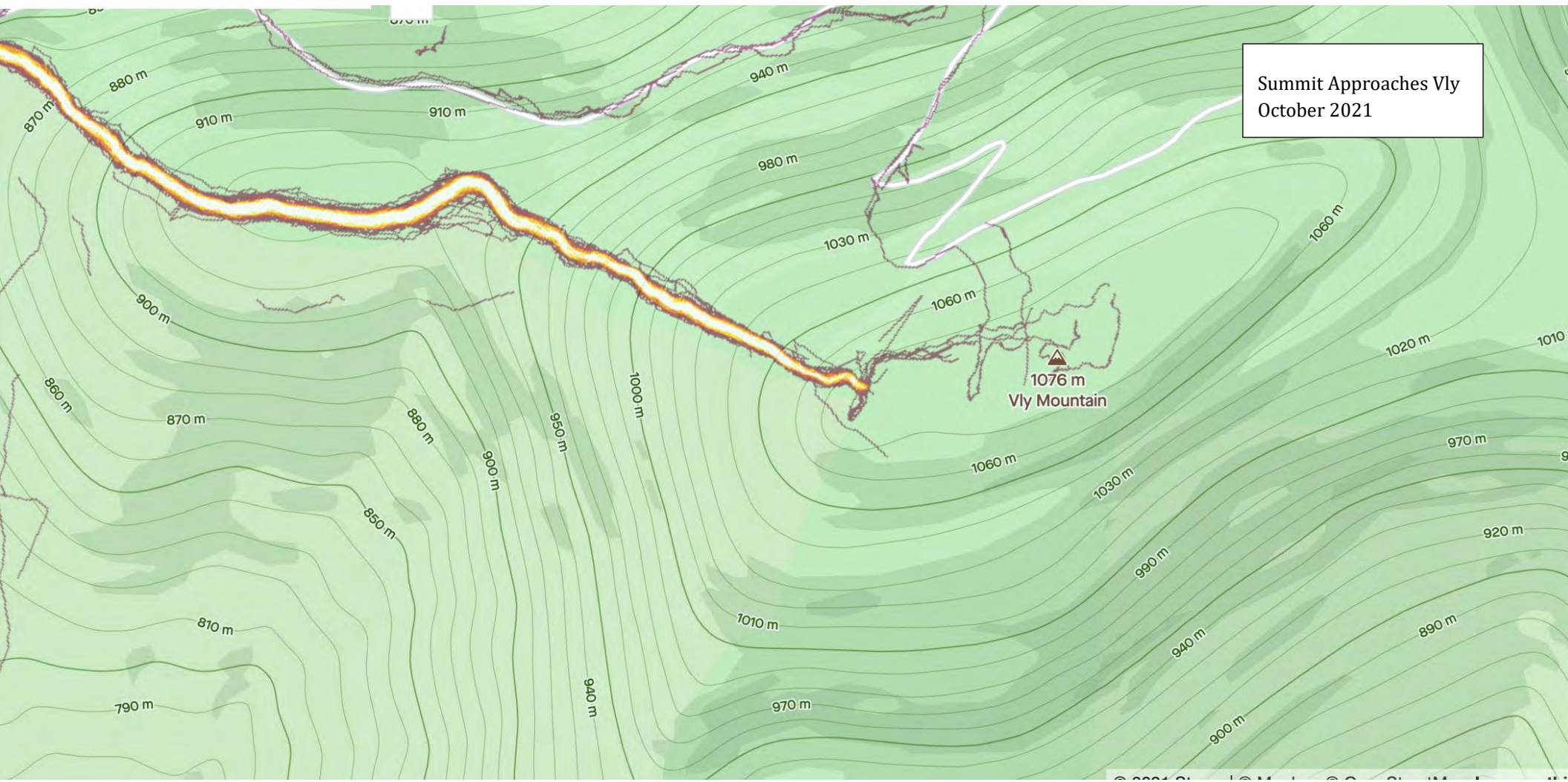


August 2021



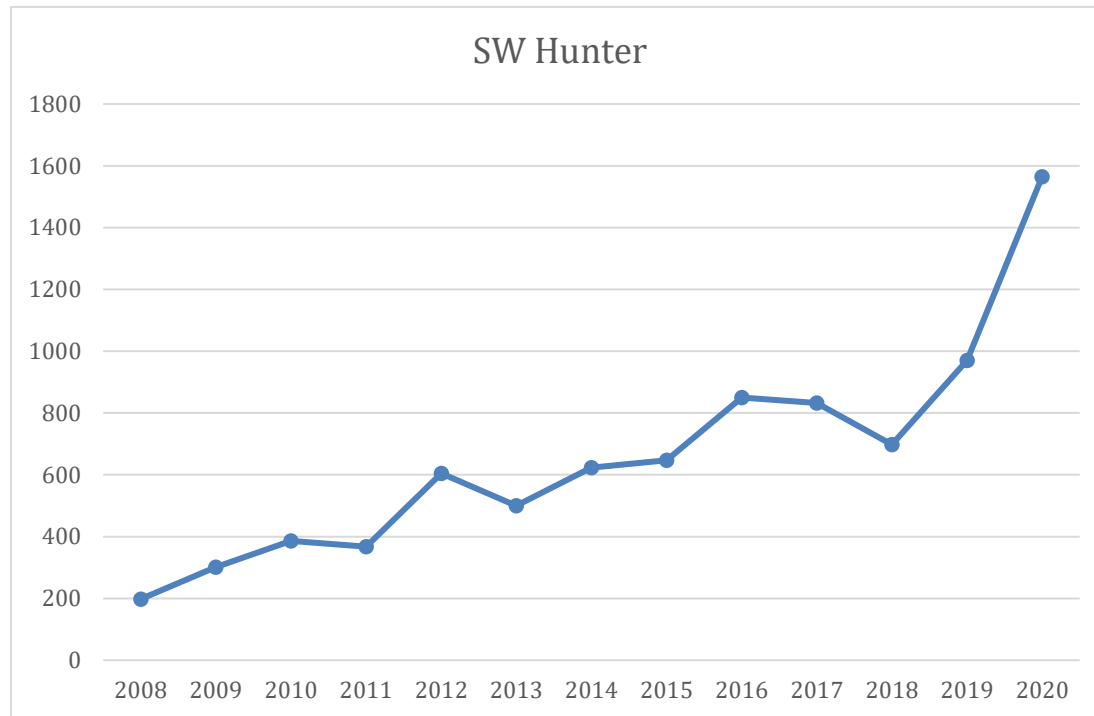
August 2021





Summit Approaches Vly
October 2021

Southwest Hunter



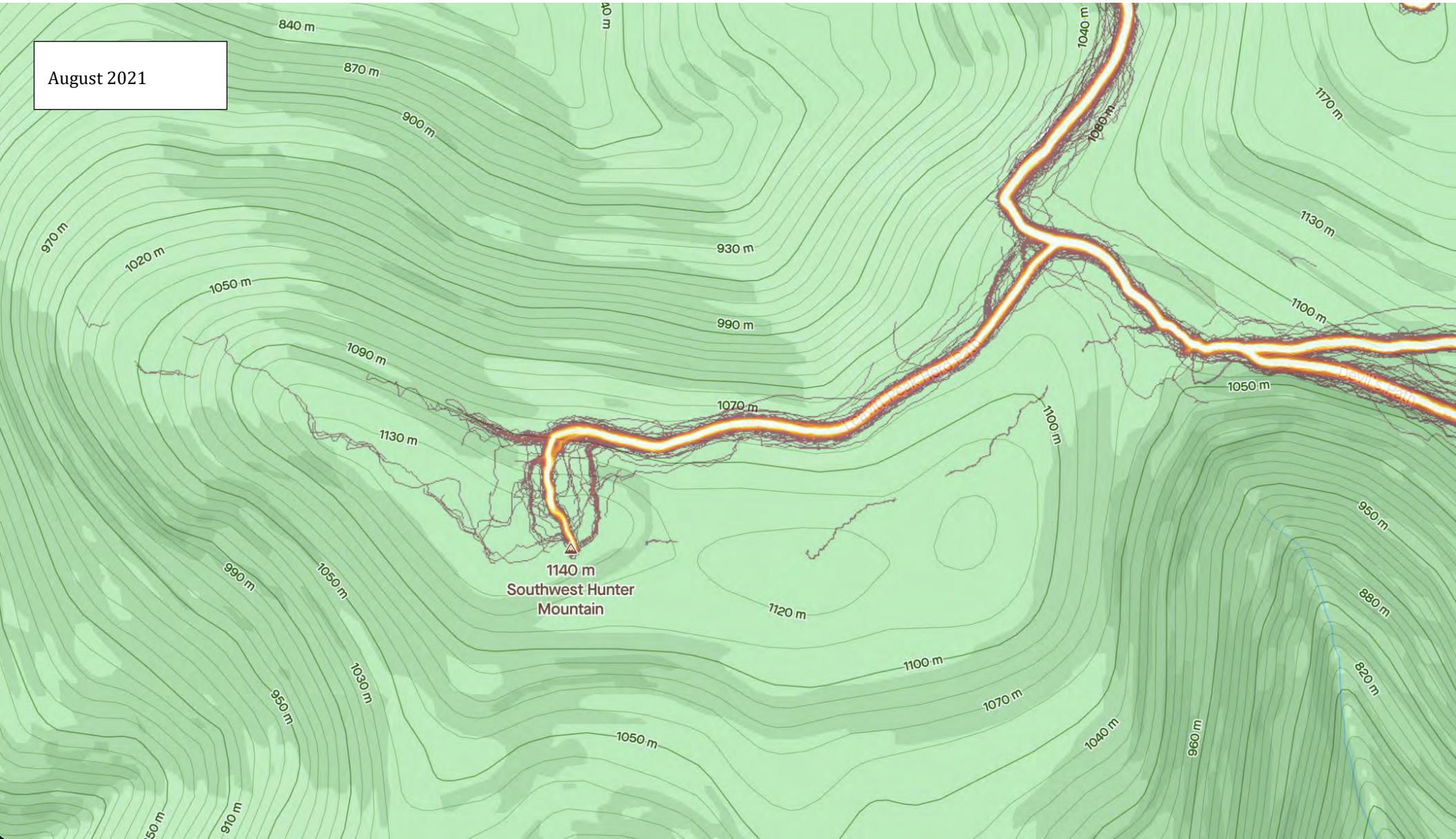
August 2020



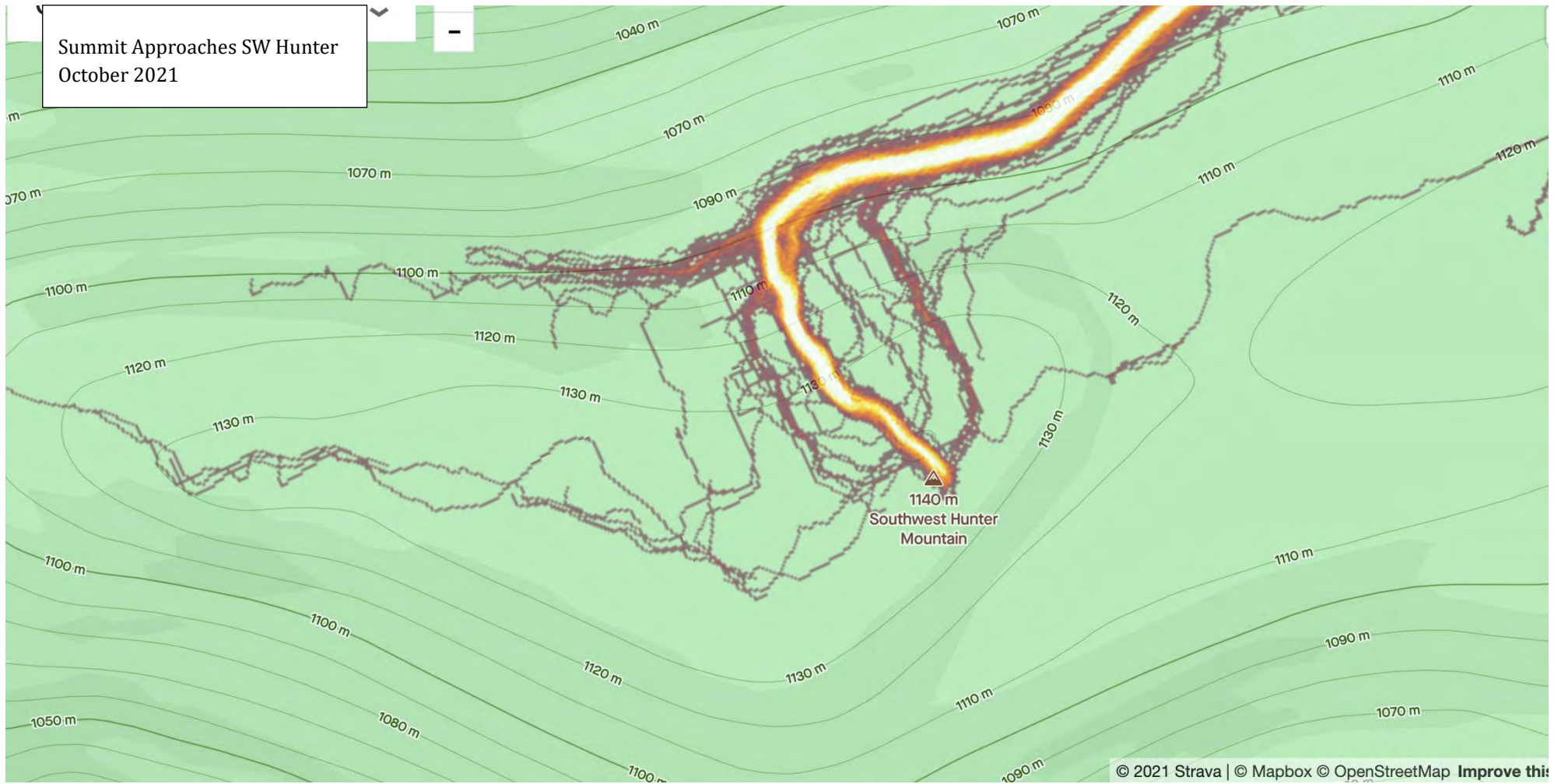
August 2021



August 2021



Summit Approaches SW Hunter
October 2021

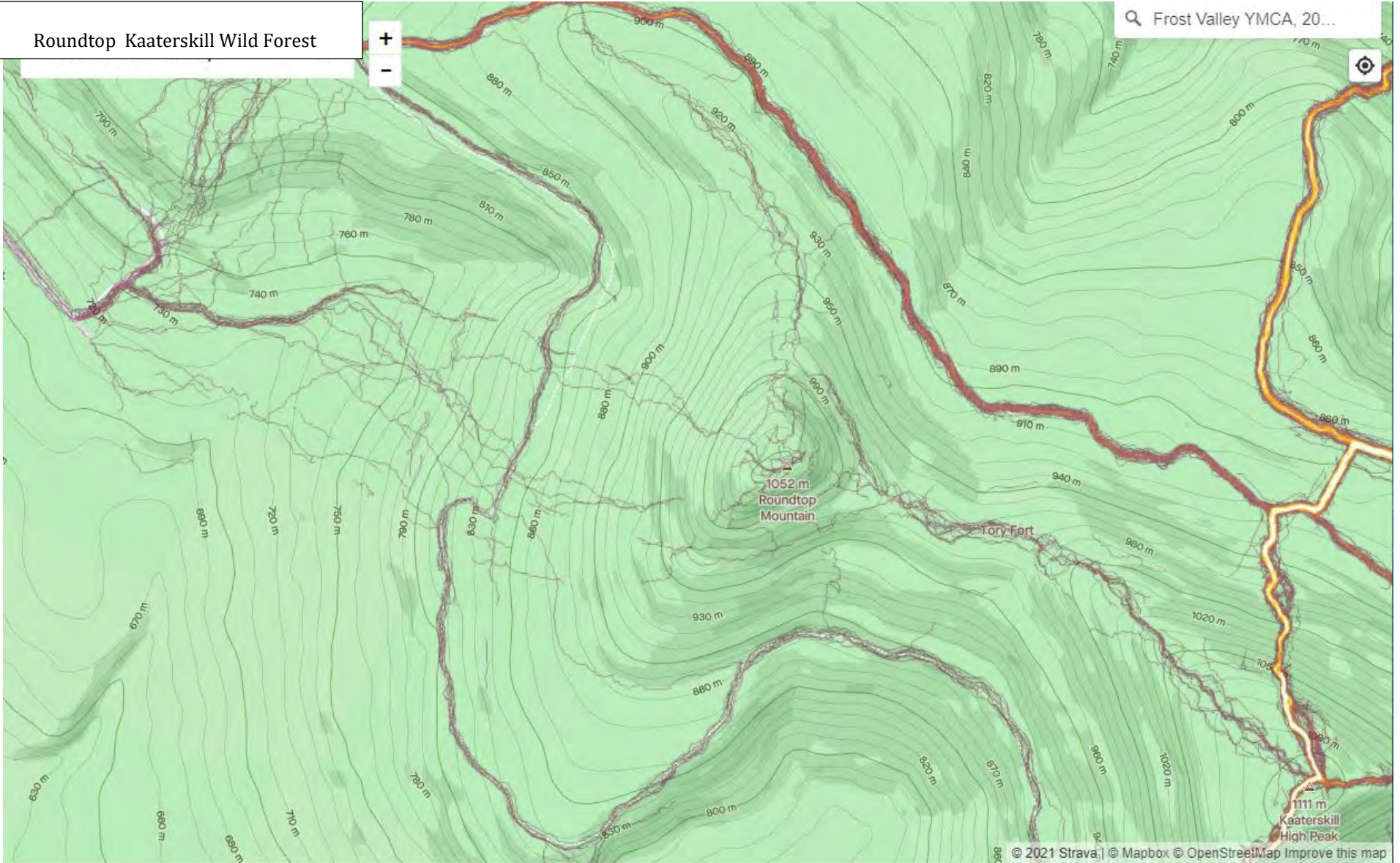


Additional Peaks over 3,000' to Include
in the Monitoring Effort Beginning in
2021

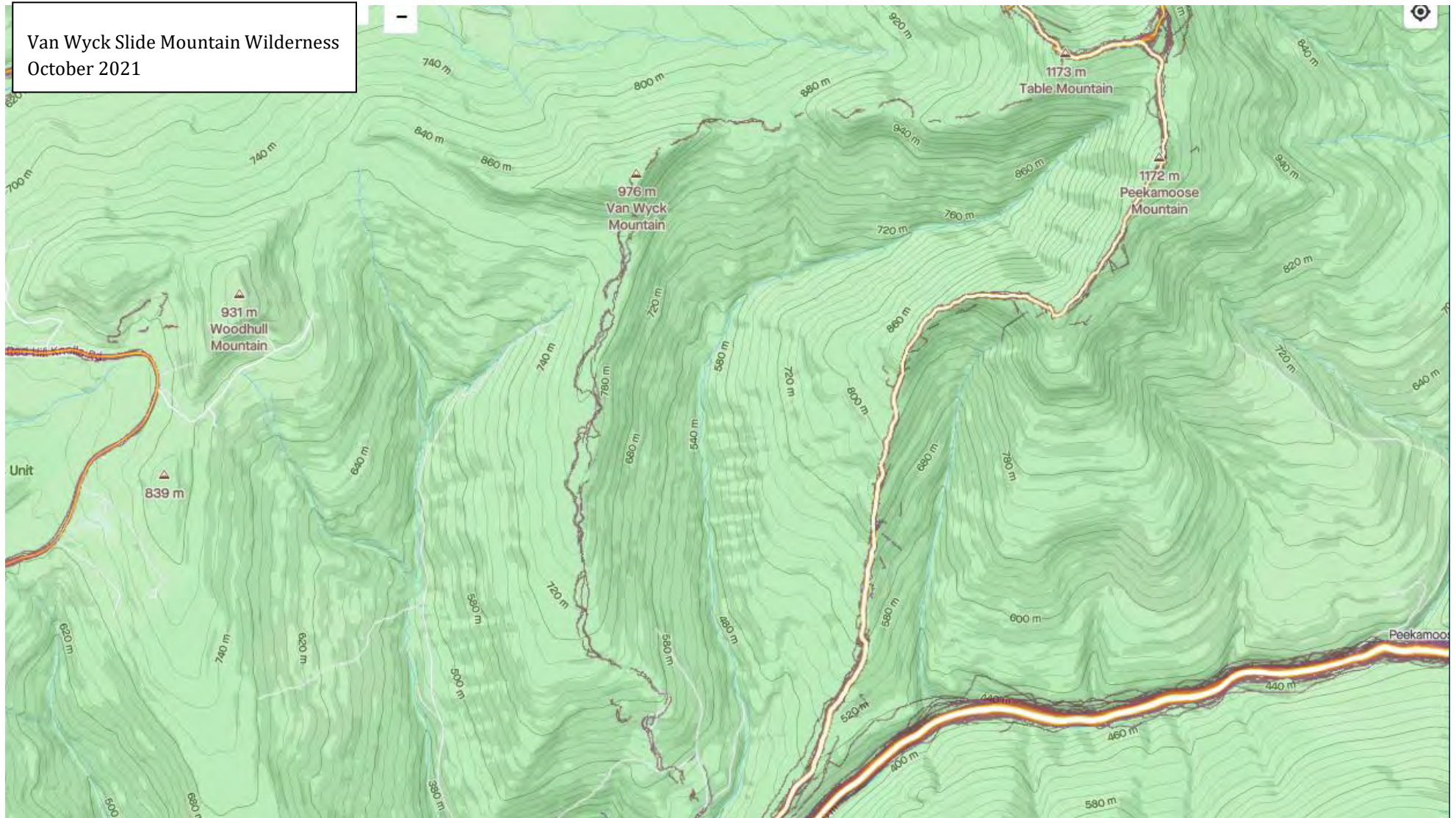
Roundtop Kaaterskill Wild Forest



Frost Valley YMCA, 20...



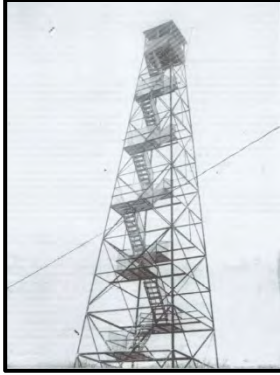
Van Wyck Slide Mountain Wilderness
October 2021



Sleeping Lion Halcott Wild Forest
October 2021

Global Heatmap





**Friends of
Bramley Mountain
Fire Tower, Inc.**
PO Box 63
Delhi, NY 13753



January 24, 2022

Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower Report

We were not successful with our application for a New York State Parks, Preservation and Heritage grant. To date, we have raised more than \$60,000 of the estimated \$215,000 cost to return the tower and are ramping up our efforts to fundraise for the project. We are continuing to look for grants from private and public sources and are reaching out to local businesses and philanthropists

Recognition of the significant historic, economic and health impacts of the project on local and regional Catskills communities is growing. The excitement generated by the Catskills fire towers is evidence of what the restored fire tower will bring to the region – we look forward to being part of the Catskill Fire Tower Challenge in the future.



Catskill Watershed Corporation
669 County Hwy 38 Suite 1 Arkville, NY 12406

Tel: (845) 586 -1400
Fax: (845) 586
-1401
Website:
www.cwconline.org

CPAC Meeting January 28, 2022

On October 5, 2021 the CWC Board of Directors passed a resolution to replace the signs along the NYC reservoirs to commemorate the Towns that were lost to the New York City Water System. This is the second time they have be replaced by CWC. CWC originally erected brown and yellow signs in 2003, and replaced them with brown and white signs in 2013. 45 signs have been order for 25 locations. CWC is requesting assistance from the NYS DOT and NYC DEP to erect the signs once they are delivered.

The list of signs is as follows:

Ashokan Reservoir:

- Boiceville
- Olive City- Olivebridge
- West Shokan
- Brodhead Bridge
- Brown's Station
- West Hurley
- Olive
- Ashton-Olive Branch
- Shokan
- Glenford

Cannonsville Reservoir:

- Cannonsville
- Rock Royal
- Granton
- Rock Rift
- Beerston

Neversink Reservoir:

- Neversink
- Bittersweet

Pepacton Reservoir:

- Arena
- Pepacton
- Shavertown
- Union Grove

Rondout Reservoir:

- Eureka
- Montela
- Lackawack

Schoharie Reservoir:

- Gilboa



Catskills Visitor Center Catskill Park Advisory Committee Report

The Catskills Visitor Center building fully reopened to the public on September 3. The new indoor interpretive exhibits have been well received. The Catskill Center and our contractor, Partners & Partners, are completing final installations and fine tuning. The building is open every day 9:30-4pm, except for Tuesdays when the building is closed. All visitors are required to wear masks in the building, regardless of vaccination status.

Visitation has been steady and fall/early winter numbers have been equal to pre-COVID numbers.

In June, the CVC will be hosting a combined Outdoors Day/Catskills Great Outdoor Expo on June 11th in an outdoor setting. Invitations to vendors will be forthcoming soon.

Catskill Park Trail Information and Conditions are posted weekly at:
<https://catskillsvisitorcenter.org/hiking-and-camping/trail-conditions/>



Updates 1/28/2022

The Catskill Center has been awarded a 5 year contract to continue the Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership (CRISP) through 2026. The Catskill Center is hiring two positions to support invasives work in the Catskills, an Aquatic Invasive Species Manager and a Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator. The AIS Manager will lead AIS prevention and management efforts with partners, volunteers and subcontractors. The Volunteer and Outreach Coordinator will recruit, train, and retain volunteers to support the Catskill Center's mission through CRISP, the Catskill Visitors Center, the Catskill Fire Tower Project, the Catskill Center's land trust program and other initiatives. This spring, the Catskill Center will be working on leading volunteers on the Ashokan Rail Trail to remove invasive species such as tree-of-heaven and oriental bittersweet from vistas. Details for applying are available here: <https://catskillcenter.org/opportunities> The Catskill Center will also be hiring an aquatic and a terrestrial strike team, to perform early detection and rapid response in the CRISP region.

CRISP, jointly with NYC DEP, is soliciting input from stakeholders on invasive species management goals for the Catskills through a Group Concept Mapping process. A total of 160 statements were collected through brainstorming from 85 individual contributions. The 160 statements were synthesized down to 88 statements and these statements have been rated for importance by 41 participants. Currently stakeholders are rating the feasibility of the original input statements. Input will be analyzed by Cornell University and the results of the surveys will guide CRISP and NYC DEP invasive species management for the next 5 years.

CRISP has hired Trampoline Advertising and Design Company, of Glens Falls, to design a new logo for CRISP that is consistent with the branding of the other Partnership for Regional Invasive Species Management logos.

CRISP is continuing to raise awareness about the threat of invasive species and providing trainings on how to identify and report invasives. During 2021, CRISP led 21 programs for 987 people. This included six trainings for 103 participants. Staff and volunteers contributed 723 invasive species records to NY iMapInvasives during 2021. Our next upcoming program will be 2/15 at 12 Noon, "Wild Wonders: Celebrating the Native Plants of the Catskills."

NYSDOT Report out for CPAC meeting on January 28, 2022

- **Staffing & NYSDOT Contacts**

- **Please continue to direct all emails and other correspondence that would traditionally go to Ed Frantz to Peter Dunleavy with a CC to Alexandra von Bieberstein.** Chris Colley remains the contact for the Scenic Byways Program and related issues and should be copied on anything entailing Byways.

- **Contact info:**

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- Andrea Becker- appointed new Maintenance Environmental Coordinator (MEC) for DOT's R1, replacing Scott Kappeller who is now with NYS Thruway. *Both ADK and Catskills – Essex, Warren, Washington, Saratoga, Schenectady, Albany, Rensselaer, and Greene Counties.*
- The NYSDOT Park Manager Position will remain in the OOE Landscape Architecture Bureau. We are waiting on permission to fill the position.

Program Updates

- Adirondack & Catskill Park Travel Corridor (2020-21) Annual Report
 - Have been collecting info from Regions and MO staff
 - Required by Master TCUMP (for Adirondacks), but including accomplishments/ work in Catskills
 - Not a formal issuance but a working living document
 - Format will be a comprehensive spreadsheet used for tracking and planning accompanied by portfolio pages highlighting specific projects and activities.
- Gateways & Branding
 - Catskill Gateways
 - Still planning – R8 installation, MO design
- Wildlife Passage/ Landscape Permeability
 - Statewide effort building on TCUMP working group
 - Products in progress: TEM Section, Bridge Details and Guidance, BMPs and Specifications, Review of other State's details
 - Coordinating with other states and the Nature Conservancy Stay Connected Initiative (SCI)
- Invasive Species- Spotted Lanternfly
 - Multi-Agency Coordination (MAC) working group: awareness training (Construction, Design, Operations, Bridge inspections, Association of General Contractors)
 - 2021 - Traps & monitoring – focus on R9, R8
 - 2022 – Strategizing with MAC partners on trapping locations, and control BMPs
- NYS Scenic Byways Program
 - Reviewing Revised Mountain Cloves Scenic Byway Corridor Management Plan – anticipate providing comments by the end of next month.
- NYSDOT Pollinator Initiative
 - Revised Vegetation Management Guidelines including pollinator BMPs
 - Working with Regions to identify and map existing and potential pollinator habitat

Regional Reports – Specific project details will be shared by our contacts from R1, 8 and 9 at the next CPAC Transportation Committee meeting.

The **Catskills Lark in the Park** for 2021 was held from October 2 – 11. We were able to resume in-person guided events after having none in 2020 due to the covid pandemic. We successfully limited the number of participants and enforced a number of safety protocols. We also limited the number of in-person events we offered to about a dozen. We also offered a number of self-guided tours, including the new podcast version of Views from the Watershed, and featured the new exhibits at the Catskill Visitors Center. We hope to return to a full schedule next year. The Lark in the Park is organized by a partnership including the Catskill Center, the NY/NJ Trail Conference and the NYSDEC. The CMC coordinates the effort.

The CMC has resumed offering in-person guided outdoor recreation events to the public, including hiking and paddling events.

The **Views from the Watershed** program, which is designed and led by CMC board member Lize Mogel, has evolved from a bus tour to a self guided podcast tour of the NYC watershed. Bus tours may resume next year, if possible. The podcast features interviews with a number of guests who talk about the history of the watershed, about its management and about how it has impacted Catskills communities. The 15 segments are associated with sites of interest in the Catskills and can be streamed or downloaded (which is recommended if taking the driving tour). Streaming is available on Apple, Spotify and other platforms. VftW can be found at <https://www.walkingthewatershed.com/podcasttour/index.html>.

The CMC sponsored a new program in 2021 in partnership with several other area organizations. Designed and led by CMC board member Michael Drillinger, **Speak to the Earth** is a series of hikes near urban areas designed to introduce people to the wonders and benefits of hiking. While the program specifically reaches out to members of communities of color, anyone is welcome to participate. This year the program was focused on the Kingston area and hikes were held on nearby rail trails and front country trails. Free transportation was provided by the City of Kingston.

We continue to work on trail design for the **Morris Hill Trail** and hope to finish the job in 2022. It will be built on the DEP parcel in Arkville. We have obtained grants to help pay for some infrastructure.

We received grants from two sources to pay for new trail infrastructure, including registration boxes, kiosks and improved signage.

Use of the trails built by the CMC rose tremendously in 2020, up about 47% overall, not including the addition of the Ashokan Quarry Trail which draws significantly more visitors than any other trail. Usage in 2021, while still much higher than in pre-covid years, has dropped off from 2020. About 18000 hikers used the trails in 2021.

Wendell has retired from the position of executive director. He continues to serve on the Boards of Directors of the CMC and the Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower. The board is exploring ways to fund the hiring of a new ED.



**Catskill Fire Tower Project
Catskill Advisory Committee Meeting (CPAC), January 28th 2022**

The Catskill Fire Tower Project and its team of volunteers is looking forward to the renewed [Catskill Fire Tower Challenge](#) for 2022 and to helping however we can. An increase in visitor numbers on the fire towers and the trails that lead to them is anticipated, and the Catskills Visitor Center is excited to have its tower included in the Challenge this year as well, the Upper Esopus.

The Catskill Center is preparing to apply for funding for two seasonal fire tower stewards and is working together with the DEC and with fire tower volunteers to identify other funding needs for 2022. The Catskill Center and the DEC worked together to close the top cab of Mount Tremper Fire Tower for the winter. New custom windows were made for Mount Tremper Fire Tower, Balsam Lake Mountain Fire Tower, and Red Hill Fire Tower.

The tower top cabs were opened on weekends in 2021 from May through October. Overlook and Hunter Fire Tower top cabs were also opened this year on weekdays most Tuesdays-Fridays from June to October by a seasonal paid Fire Tower Steward who spoke with 2,644 visitors on Hunter and Overlook fire towers, and spent 45 days on the trails, picking up trash each day that he was hiking and reporting maintenance issues. The Upper Esopus Fire Tower at the Visitor Center was also opened by a paid Fire Tower Steward from May to October; he spent 78 days on the grounds of the CVC opening the tower and interacted with 915 visitors.



Catskill Center for Conservation and Development

Catskill Park Advisory Committee Update For January 28, 2022 Meeting

Catskill Stewards Program: The Catskill Stewards Program has concluded a busy 2021 season ([season report available for download](#)). Eight full time stewards, one full time Ridgerunner, and one part time steward worked diligently to ensure the continued protection of the Peekamoose Blue Hole, Kaaterskill Falls, Platte Clove Preserve, and the Devil's Path. The stewards greeted each visitor, rid these areas of litter, rehabilitated illegal campsites, protected stream quality, and educated visitors to encourage self-reliance and minimum impact recreation.

The 2021 Catskill Stewards Program in numbers

Total Visitors: 84,847

Total Bags of Litter Removed: 225

Total Campfires Rehabilitated: 94

Rock stacks removed: 305

Total days on site: 201

Dogs greeted: 3,045

Visitor parking citations avoided: 147 (minimum)

The Catskill Center has [produced a video highlighting the work of the Catskill Stewards](#).

2022 Catskill Stewards Program: The Catskill Center will place full time Stewards at the Peekamoose Blue Hole and Kaaterskill Falls with 7-day a week coverage. A part-time Steward will be placed at Platte Clove. A full time Ridgerunner will be hired to be on the trails and interact with visitors. The Stewards will coordinate with the necessary DEC staff. Look for job postings by mid-February. We are also looking to bolster and expand the Steward program with the addition of volunteer Stewards to support the paid staff at busy locations and expand to other locations as DEC requests.

Catskill Park Coalition: The Catskill Center and Catskill Mountainkeeper is calling together the members of the Catskill Park Coalition to advocate for the following priorities:

Public Safety and Catskill Park Management -- Given the exponential growth of visitors and the subsequently increasing pressure on the Catskill Park's infrastructure, natural resources, and management, the Catskill Park Coalition calls for:

- Increased staffing at the NYSDEC's Division of Lands and Forests in Region 3 and 4 to better manage the Catskill Park and its more than 1.7 million annual visitors;
- Continued annual Forest Ranger Academies to maintain and increase Ranger staff to provide a safe experience for all who visit the Catskill Park; and
- Proper support of the newly created Catskill Park Coordinator position within the NYSDEC with adequate resources.

Environmental Protection Fund Priorities to Enhance and Protect the Catskills -- The Environmental Protection Fund should be funded at \$500 million to adequately protect New York's Environment and specifically for the responsible protection and management of natural and recreational resources in the Catskill Park. Within the EPF, the the Catskill Park Coalition calls for the following funding:

- Continued inclusion of the \$150,000 line, directed to the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development for the Maurice D. Hinchey Catskill Visitor Center's management, operations and facilities maintenance to support a world-class experience for visitors;
- Continued inclusion of the \$150,000 line, directed to the Cary Institute for Ecosystem Studies to support the Catskill Science Collaborative's research on topics of importance in the Catskills;
- Continued inclusion of the \$750,000 line directed to Cornell University for the "Save the Hemlocks" initiative to fight the invasive Hemlock Woolly Adelgid;
- Continued inclusion of funding of at least \$300,000 for Smart Growth Grants dedicated annually to help Catskill communities and nonprofits sustainably improve the Park;
- Continued inclusion of funding for continued upgrades and improvements to the state-owned Belleayre Ski Center;
- A new line containing at least \$200,000 for Catskill Stewards, directed to the Catskill Center for Conservation and Development and Catskill Mountainkeeper, to support the existing education and stewardship program to address increasing numbers of visitors across the Park; and
- At least \$10 million in stewardship funding to support Catskill Park education efforts, improvements and infrastructure maintenance in light of continued exponential visitor growth.

The Catskill Park Coalition supports the \$4 billion environmental bond act. This funding would provide additional resources to construct new and maintain existing Park infrastructure.

Supporting Local Economies -- *Supporting Catskills Communities by investing in projects with direct community benefits, while at the same time addressing increasing visitor pressures is key to supporting local economies and protecting natural resources, therefore the Catskill Park Coalition calls for:*

- \$500,000 to develop a swimming area at the Kenneth Wilson State Campground;
- \$250,000 to implement and construct previously approved mountain biking trail system for the Shandaken Wild Forest; and
- Implementing the recommendations of the Governor's New York Upstate Cellular Coverage Task Force to expand cellular service across the Catskill Park.
- Support construction of Phase 1 of the U&D rail trail in a corridor that runs adjacent to New York State Forest Preserve Lands in the Town of Shandaken. Funding for Phase 1 will cover the conversion of a 2.5 mile stretch of the abandoned Ulster & Delaware Railroad Corridor into a public recreational trail from the Belleayre Beach Day Use Area west to Highmount and the Belleayre Ski Center, including the rehabilitation and repurposing of 2 historic railroad bridges.

Catskill Park Day on February 15, 2021 will be a virtual call to action day and a webinar will be held with legislators to speak about the importance of Catskill Park Advocacy.

Forest Preserve Coalition (see attached letter): The Catskill Center, ADK, and a number of other groups have come together to advocate for the NYS Forest Preserve. We were pleased to see the Governor include the Forest Preserve in her State of the State Address, and also include additional funding for the Forest Preserve in her budget.

Catskill Fire Tower Project: See attached report.

Catskills Visitor Center: See attached report.

Catskill Regional Invasive Species Partnership: See attached report.



10 December 2021

Governor Kathy Hochul
 Executive Chamber
 Capitol Building
 Albany, N.Y. 12224

Dear Governor Hochul,

The undersigned groups would like to bring to your attention the **incredible resource of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks** that serve all the citizens of New York State by protecting public wildlands and providing recreational access for health and well-being, supporting local and state tourism and economies, and preserving intact mature forests and habitat.

The Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks collectively **represent over 6.5 million acres of land** or nearly a quarter of New York State. The Adirondack and Catskill regions serve as home and recreation lands to **over a million residents** in Forest Preserve counties (including nearly 200,000 who live within park boundaries), and **over 25 million visitors annually**. In our current climate crisis, the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks serve as **the lungs of NY**, a great force to combat climate change as its forests provide oxygen and **sequester carbon**. They protect critical habitat, and provide fresh **drinking water to millions including the residents of New York City**.

We also would bring to your attention the **insufficient support for the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks** in the New York State Budget. **We recommend the following:** add \$10 million to the budget to address backlogged projects and increased use (including trail crews and recommendations made by the Adirondack High Peaks and Catskill

Strategic Planning Advisory Groups); increase DEC Lands and Forests staff; increase staff at the Adirondack Park Agency; support Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice (DEIJ) initiatives; properly budget the Forest Ranger division to reflect the recent increase in recruits; increase NY Works funding for DEC; increase funding for the important work of the EPF; and support Park Towns and Villages following Common Ground Alliance and Catskill Park Coalition recommendations.

Ten Million Dollars to Address High Use

The popularity of New York's open space, parks, and wildlands has increased significantly over the past few years creating issues and opportunities for both the recreationists and the places they visit. The Forest Preserve Parks of the Adirondacks and Catskills are managed as wild forest lands and are more susceptible to impacts from increased use than are New York's other State Parks which are developed as built environments for the recreating public. In response to the high use of the Forest Preserve, the Governor appointed two advisory groups: the High Peaks Strategic Planning Advisory Group (HPAG) and the Catskill Park Strategic Planning Advisory Group (CAG). The HPAG has developed a report and recommendations and the CAG, which is still meeting, is in the process of doing the same. We respectfully request that **\$10 million dollars be provided in the SFY 22-23 budget for projects, including those identified in the HPAG and CAG, to support the increased use of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks** (see funding outline end of letter). The \$10 million should be used to fund trail maintenance and building work as well as to expand educational outreach on preparedness, safety, Leave No Trace education, inclusivity at frontcountry campgrounds and backcountry summits, and recreation infrastructure in Park Towns and Villages. This funding would also ensure that there are adequate temporary public bathroom facilities at trailheads and parking areas.

Increase Staff at the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC)

In order to continue to maintain the critical resources of the Forest Preserve Parks it is an absolute **necessity to increase staffing levels at DEC** which is currently operating at 1980 levels and is 250 positions below the staff cap imposed by the former administration. We are especially concerned about insufficient staffing levels in the Division of Lands and Forests. This division of DEC provides planners, foresters, and scientists to ensure that public land units containing thousands of miles of recreational trails, parking lots, campgrounds, picnic areas, boat launches, and protected forests and habitat are accessible and safe. The Division of Lands and Forests also provides supervision and coordination of the many Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) funded projects, as well as volunteer projects, for essential stewardship work such as maintaining trails, keeping infrastructure like lean-tos and fire towers in good operation, and educational outreach that protects delicate alpine summits, pristine aquatic habitat, and diverse visitor experiences. **We respectfully urge that staffing at the Department of Environmental Conservation be increased to 3,300 FTEs.**

DEC staff is needed to ensure open space is protected

The lack of sufficient DEC staff has also contributed to an **eight-year backlog in acquisition projects** across the state. At a time when the future of the planet depends on protecting open space, this should be one of our highest priorities. Forest and wildland habitat mitigate the impact of climate change. Forest Preserve land provides this global benefit and preserves open space. As the experience of the COVID-19 pandemic revealed, residents across the state value their wildlands for healthful recreation, and they flocked to our parks and preserved wilderness areas in record numbers. This

demonstrates **strong public support -- and a strong public need -- for the expansion of our open spaces through land acquisition.** Certainly, such priorities extend beyond the funding requirements for any single year, but the need for wilderness preservation should always be a part of long-range planning.

DEC staff is needed to address the high use of recreational areas on wildlands

Increasing DEC staff by adding **positions to help implement projects and programs related to increased use** on the Forest Preserve is a recommendation supported by HPAG. Additionally, last year the Senate passed legislation to create a **Forest Preserve Coordinator position** for the Catskill Park to help address high use.

DEC staff is needed to build and maintain trails, coordinate contracts and volunteers

With the rapid increase in use of New York's public recreational facilities, often by new recreators discovering the health benefits of New York's open spaces and wildlands for the first time, the **need for high-quality, sustainable trails** that preserve access, safety, and a quality visitor experience for multiple generations is becoming clear. Most trails in the Adirondacks and Catskills were created 100 years ago, before modern trail layout and construction concepts were in place. Many of these trails need to be completely overhauled to improve public safety and protect the natural resource of the Forest Preserve. Today by employing sustainable trail design, DEC can create trails that protect the natural resource and withstand today's heavier use while providing a more enjoyable experience for hikers. Adding DEC staff would **enable the agency to create in-house trail crews** that would increase the efficiency of building and maintaining multi-generational trails and grow the recreational capacity of our public lands. **Additional funding for contracted professional crews should also be increased** to tackle the backlog of trail maintenance, building, and recreation infrastructure needs.

DEC staff is needed to run state campgrounds on wildlands

Another crucial area within DEC that must be supported to address high use on state wildlands are the **55 state public campgrounds in the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve.** The Division of Operations operates DEC campgrounds and also maintains trailhead and day-use parking areas, signage and informational kiosks, restrooms, and other recreational facilities. Campgrounds and day-use areas serve as staging areas for visitors for their frontcountry and backcountry experiences where important educational outreach can occur. Campgrounds and day-use areas also provide recreational infrastructure with parking and bathrooms and should be supported and incorporated into planning to address the growing numbers of public land visitors.

Support is needed for DEC Forest Rangers

We would like to **thank you for hearing the call to support the New York State Forest Ranger force** with their own Ranger Academy and 40 slots for new recruits in 2022. The Forest Ranger force is a critical piece of Forest Preserve recreation infrastructure and ensures that visitors have safe experiences that also protect the natural habitats they explore. When people get lost or injured on the Forest Preserve, the Forest Rangers are there to get them safely back home. In the year ahead, it is **absolutely necessary that the current investment in 40 new Forest Ranger recruits is supported by the necessary equipment, vehicles, and the appropriate funding increases needed to support the 40 new positions.**

DEC staff and program support is needed for DEIJ initiatives

Also essential is support for programs, opportunities, and recommendations that will build capacity in Diversity, Equity, Inclusivity, and Justice (DEIJ) on our New York State public lands. Expanding DEC's successful **First-time Camper program** for group camping would provide a safer and more enjoyable experience for participants. Including other outdoor activities in this program such as bird-watching, fishing, or paddling would extend the experience and build more interest. We also **support the recommendations of the Open Spaces for All report** led by the Open Space Institute (OSI), and the work of the Adirondack Diversity Initiative (ADI). **DEIJ should be incorporated into all educational efforts and operational frameworks within agencies** operating in the Forest Preserve, and should be encouraged and supported **in non-profit and local governments** with whom the State of New York partners. Other programs that should be supported and expanded include the **Nature Bus and non-reimbursement grants to schools and nonprofits for transportation** to open space and public lands.

DEC staff and funding is needed to combat invasive species

DEC must have sufficient resources to address invasive species, including staff for the Bureau of Invasive Species and Ecosystem Health to coordinate contracted projects, facilitate the eight statewide Partnerships for Regional Invasive Species Management (PRISMs), coordinate EPF funded projects, and conduct necessary field studies and analysis. Invasive species are a leading threat to biodiversity worldwide. The Adirondacks and Catskills are particularly susceptible to invasive species which infest aquatic and forest habitats, such as Zebra Mussels and Hemlock Woolly Adelgid.

Increase staff at the Adirondack Park Agency (APA)

The APA also must be supported by **backfilling staff positions that have been vacated through retirement, and by increasing staff appropriately** so that the APA can fulfill its mission. The APA protects the resources of the Forest Preserve by ensuring that management plans comply with the Adirondack State Land Master Plan, and overseeing development proposals of the privately owned lands through the Adirondack Park Agency Act, the Freshwater Wetlands Act and the Wild Scenic and Recreational Rivers Act. **Thank you for the appointments made in 2020 to the APA board of directors.** However, there are currently board members serving with expired terms. **There should be an 11-member board serving in unexpired terms.** The board make-up should also reflect professional diversity including environmental attorneys, scientists, and people with regional planning experience.

Increase NY Works Funding for DEC

NY Works capital project funding also plays a significant role in the work DEC can do in maintaining and enhancing the accessibility of the Forest Preserve of the Catskill and Adirondack Parks. DEC manages 5 million acres state-wide (including more than 900,000 acres of conservation easement lands) and over 2,300 miles of trails, 3,000 lakes and ponds, and 30,000 miles of rivers and streams in the Adirondacks alone. **NY Works funding for DEC capital projects must be increased** to match the responsibility that DEC has for the protection and maintenance of state lands and recreation infrastructure across New York. We respectfully urge you to invest **at least \$100 million in capital funds for DEC in the next budget proposal.**

Support Catskill Park Coalition and the Common Ground Alliance Priorities

Another unique feature that distinguishes the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks from other state parks is that the Forest Preserve Parks have within their boundaries communities where people live, work, and raise their families. These communities and their businesses are part of the fabric of the Parks and they provide lodging, food, entertainment, and emergency services to park visitors. The **Park Towns and Villages**, as integral parts of the Adirondack and Catskill Forest Preserve Parks, **need infrastructure support for quality of residential life and for safe and enjoyable visitor experiences that help support regional economies.** In the Adirondacks, the Common Ground Alliance (CGA), and in the Catskills the Catskill Park Coalition (CPC) regularly meet to collaborate on whole park issues that include the needs of communities within the park as well as recreation and ecological concerns. Each year the CGA and CPC set priority agendas for the year ahead.

Catskill Park Coalition (CPC)

The CPC, which represents organizations, chambers of commerce, and local and county agencies in the Catskills, has identified **three main areas of priority** for investment in the Catskill Park. Public safety and resources to manage the Catskill Park are critical, with investments needed to **1) increase the number of Forest Ranger staff patrolling the Park; 2) increase staffing levels within the NYSDEC's Division of Lands and Forests in Region 3 and 4; and 3) Grow and maintain Environmental Protection Fund (EPF) investments in the Catskill Park.** This includes funding for the Catskills Visitor Center, the Catskill Science Collaborative, Cornell University's "Save the Hemlocks" Initiative, community Smart Growth Grants, upgrades and improvements to the state-owned Belleayre Ski Center, funding to support Park education efforts, and infrastructure improvements and maintenance. Investing in local Catskill economies is critical to community sustainability and includes projects with direct community benefits that address increasing visitor pressures like **developing a swimming area at the Kenneth Wilson State Campground**, and implementing and constructing the previously approved **mountain biking trail system in the Shandaken Wild Forest.**

Common Ground Alliance (CGA)

The CGA recently developed their priorities which include the creation of welcoming communities through housing diversity (i.e., quality housing for all income levels), the ability to attract and retain entrepreneurs (i.e., through training, mentoring, and incentives), and through support of DEIJ initiatives. Another CGA priority is Local Climate Change Adaptation which recognizes the need for funding for flood risk reduction, open space, water quality improvement, land use planning, disaster prevention planning, and self-sustaining stream restoration. Support for communities could be provided by state agency circuit riders. The CGA also identified the need to grow community-based recreation. In this, communities would identify needed recreation infrastructure and standardize education and information, organize events, and create innovative ways for communities to support recreation (e.g., gear "libraries" for lending equipment). The **Blueprint for the Blue Line** is the legislative agenda compiled to support CGA priorities.

Clean Water Infrastructure

Infrastructure funding for **water quality improvement to address combined sewer overflows and wastewater treatment is a critical priority** for Adirondack municipalities. **Thank you** for your understanding of this and your commitment to \$600 million in grants for the

Water Infrastructure Improvement Act (WIIA) and the Water Quality Improvement Program (WQIP) that will go out to communities across the state for water infrastructure improvements. **Thank you** also for \$10 million in grants for asset management at water facilities, and \$20 million for the Green Infrastructure Grants Program. We respectfully urge you to provide at least **\$1 billion in new appropriations for the Clean Water Infrastructure Act (CWIA).**

Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act

Thank you for your insight and leadership in expanding the proposed environmental bond act as the new \$4 billion Clean Water, Clean Air, Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act. We are hopeful that additional funding in the bond act will be available for the Forest Preserve Parks for clean water infrastructure, open space, and recreation infrastructure.

Increase the Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

The EPF has been holding steady at \$300 million for over 5 years. This year there must be a renewed plan to **increase the critical funding of the EPF to \$500 million.** Especially important is the funding for **state land acquisition, combating invasive species, water quality improvement, state land stewardship, and support for visitor centers** in the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks. Under Climate Change Mitigation and Adaptation in the EPF, **an increase in Smart Growth Grant funding could support municipalities** in creating facilities that would enhance municipalities **as Park Town Recreation Hubs** by providing parking, bathrooms, visitor information, trail access, and access to food and lodging.

We greatly appreciate your attention to these important requests and thank you for your work and leadership in caring for the great State of New York and the Catskill and Adirondack Forest Preserve Parks.

Sincerely,

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Ten Million for High Recreational Use on the Forest Preserve

- **\$4 million for trail crews**
 - \$2 million for Contracted Professional Crews (in addition to \$2 million currently in the EPF)
 - \$2 million for DEC Trail Crews
- **\$2.5 million for trail safety and climate resiliency projects** (e.g., bridges over flashy streams, rerouting trails off of roads, etc)
- **\$500,000 (2 FTE) for coordinator and support positions in Catskills and Adirondacks** to implement recommendations from the HPAG, CAG, and Leave No Trace Assessment Reports and to coordinate social media working groups, stewardship committees, comprehensive planning, stewardship and educational programs, etc.
- **\$500,000 for more educational stewards in high-use areas of the Adirondacks and Catskills**
 - \$150,000 for educational outreach by Adirondack Mountain Club at the High Peaks Information Center Trailhead and Trails, and on Route 73 for the Adirondack High Peaks.
 - \$50,000 for educational outreach on Route 73 Corridor for east of Mt Van Hoevenberg Recreation Area
 - \$100,000 for educational outreach by Catskills Visitor Center/Catskill Center's Catskill Stewards at increased use locations in central, northern and eastern Catskills (Colgate, Kaaterskill, Blue Hole)
 - \$100,000 for education outreach by Catskill Mountainkeeper's Catskill Stewards at increased use locations in western and southwestern Catskills
 - \$100,000 NY-NJ Trail Conference Trail Steward Program, currently stationed on the Burrough's Loop Range, Blackhead Range, North Point, and Giant Ledge (Ulster and Greene Counties, N.Y.)
- **\$550,000 Support for Comprehensive Planning**, including visitor use management planning, traffic studies, etc.
- **\$600,000 DEIJ Programs Including**
 - Including projects such as the following,
 - Expand 1st time Camper Program to other activities such as paddling, birdwatching, winter recreation
 - Training for operations staff at campgrounds
 - Support recommendations from the Open Spaces for All report
 - Establish a DEIJ working group for the Catskill Park
 - DEIJ Facilitators attending all major Forest Preserve meetings (FPAC, CPAC, CAG, etc)
- **\$1 million Funding to support Adirondack and Catskill Park Towns and Villages for recreational infrastructure, including public bathrooms, public parking, information, and education.** Funding could also provide Catskill communities with Catskills Visitor Center kiosks, and the establishment of Trail Towns as described in Catskill Region Comprehensive Recreation Plan.
- **\$350,000 Trailhead Support** such as portable toilets, funding to update and refresh Catskill Park recreational wayfinding signage (currently no one is supporting/funding the ongoing maintenance of this), real-time data collection support such as trail and parking lot counters, and a pilot program to run fiber to a trailhead and provide real time data collection (along with potentially other public services).



**Forest Fire Lookout Association
New York State Chapter
CPAC Report January 28, 2022 10am to 12noon**

Following a very busy and successful 2021 work season, the State Chapter has now moved into planning for 2022.

The Town of Tompkins continues to develop their work plan and address access concerns for the Rock Rift Fire Tower. The State Chapter is supporting this work. The Town is also working with the local BOCES to develop a logo and climbing card.

The Friends of Bramley Mountain Fire Tower are actively continuing their fund raising efforts and have surpassed the \$50,000 mark!

The VSA Application for restoration work at the Leonard Hill Fire Tower continues to await DEC approval. Apparently the engineering report that was requested in September of 2018 has not yet been completed and we await that for development of the work plan and the VSA approval. This tower and area would be accessible, a usage that Schoharie County desperately needs with only one other accessible location in the entire county (Looking Glass Pond in Burnt Rossman Hills State Forest).

The release of the Catskill Advisory Group (CAG) report comes on the heels of the newly announced Catskill Fire Tower Challenge and involves several inconsistencies. The FFLA looks forward to the opportunity to publicly comment on the recommendations of the CAG. Because the CAG is on the agenda for this meeting, some comments are contained in this report.

The first three paragraphs of the CAG report note the increase in users and the impact this increase has had on our natural resources and recreational facilities. The development of the CAG to manage this increase seems inconsistent with the development of a new hiking challenge that will potentially increase the users to the area. Additionally, the lack of well maintained infrastructure in the Park such as trailhead parking, bathroom facilities, maintenance of existing facilities and trails will be significantly impacted by this new hiking challenge with no plan to address the impact.

Education: *“Promote fire towers as alternative destinations that provide recreational and educational opportunities.”* The recommendation by the CAG to educate all users of the Catskill Park has been addressed for more than 20 years by the current Catskill Fire Tower Project (CFTP) Volunteer Stewards. Hundreds of Volunteer Stewards have interacted with hundreds of thousands of visitors since the inception of the program in the late 1990's. This is probably the most successful and longest running volunteer program in the Catskills in terms of visitor interaction. The continuation of this program appears to be in keeping with the CAG recommendations.

No maintenance for already existing structures: The recommendation by the CAG to *“Promote fire towers as alternative destinations that provide recreational and educational opportunities. The trails leading to the fire towers are often old roads that are already hardened, so impacts to surrounding natural resource are limited, there are staff and/or volunteers to greet the public at fire towers, and the structures are already on the mountain tops.”* is not consistent with current visitor impacts. While it is

true that the structures are already on the mountains, there are no maintenance plan for these historic structures. Some were restored in the late 1990's at the inception of the CFTP program and have had little or no maintenance since that time. They are deteriorating and are likely to become safety hazards without ongoing maintenance. There is no mention of the need for maintenance in the CAG report and no funding for same. The Fire Tower Challenge is a year round challenge, encouraging more winter hikers. The impact of modern traction devices such as microspikes and crampons will likely have a significant impact on the fire tower landings and stairs causing further deterioration of the facility.

Natural Resource Impact: The statement *“The trails leading to the fire towers are often old roads that are already hardened, so impacts to surrounding natural resource are limited.”* is incorrect. There are numerous foot trails leading to the fire towers in addition to the old Observer's roads. Like the tower structures themselves, many of the old Observer's roads have not seen any maintenance since the towers were decommissioned in the 1970's and are very eroded and have numerous problems with drainage that are impacting the surrounding natural resources significantly. A list of trails and roads to specific towers are listed below.

Associated Recreational Facilities: Bathroom facilities do exist at the summits of fire tower mountains, but few are present near the parking areas. This has had a significant impact on the surrounding environment, some of which are state lands but some are private or NYCDEP lands. The facilities that do exist are noted in the specific tower list below. There is no place in the CAG that addresses this issue for the new Fire Tower Challenge. Bathroom facilities may be thunder boxes, pit privies, or port a johns. All must have a maintenance plan or they quickly become unusable.

Trailhead Parking: The existing fire tower parking areas already overflow onto road sides creating real safety hazards for our neighbors as emergency vehicles cannot pass through secondary roadways due to overflow parking. This has also caused great expense to our neighbors as small municipalities have had to put up numerous no parking signs to try to remedy these problems.* No new parking strategies were put in place prior to the announcement of the Catskill Fire Tower challenge. Yet parking is addressed in the CAG report as a need to - *“Use tools to encourage use of a broader diversity of trails, reducing pressure on these hotspots.”* Again, the Catskill Fire Tower challenge is encouraging more people to go to already identified hot spots (fire towers) with no management plans or investment for the parking areas. It *will* not reduce the pressure on these parking areas, but will increase it. Winter road closures occur which push all of the fire tower visitors to fewer parking areas, again increasing impact, particularly with the new Fire Tower Challenge. *An example of this would be the Spruceton Valley where other recreational users share the trailheads with fire tower visitors. Numerous problems occurred and created a hot spot where trail users, fire tower visitors, and waterfall visitors exceeded the parking lots and were blocking the roadway for emergency vehicles. In winter, the lack of snowplowing at the trailheads was causing users to park on the side of the road and block snowplows from getting through.

Red Hill: Two trails go to the summit, neither is the Observer's road. One parking area is on a seasonal limited use road that is closed in winter. At one time during the last Challenge there was a port a john placed at the limited use trailhead, but it was not serviced and maintained and filled quickly.

Mt Tremper: Two trails, one of which is closed in the winter and the other has a very small parking area that overflows onto the county road frequently. This lot fills quickly in winter as there is little space to push snow. One trail uses the old Observer's trail for part of its length, but not all of it. No bathroom facilities exist at either parking area.

Overlook: Several different approaches exist, all do eventually make their way to the old Observer's road which is quite hardened. Port a johns are located at 2 of the 3 parking areas but these cannot be maintained in winter weather. The new spur trail is extremely wet and hiker traffic is widening the trail significantly in an effort to get around the wet areas.

Hunter: Several different approaches exist, one on the old Observer's road and one which connects into the old Observer's road. Two others do not. The old Observer's road did see a significant investment following hurricane Irene. The tower, Observer's cabin, and privy do receive on going maintenance. The Becker Hollow trail is deeply eroded, particularly in the upper reaches of the trail as are the Devils Path routes. No bathroom facilities exist on the Spruceton Road or Devil's Path trailheads. This is a high elevation area where hiker impacts take a long time to heal.

Balsam Lake: Three approaches are available, One on the old Observer's road which is deeply eroded and very wet in places. One trailhead is on a seasonal limited use road and that parking area is closed in winter. One is a lengthy 6 plus mile walk and not heavily used until a recent hiking challenge added nearby Millbrook Ridge summit to its list. This route now gets a great deal more traffic, much of which is now causing hikers to go over and back from Millbrook Road, doubling the usage on that trail. No bathroom facilities exist except from Alder Lake which has a seasonal port a john, not always maintained. This is a high elevation area where hiker impacts take a long time to heal.

The fire towers are not new destinations and have seen dramatic increases in usage along with the rest of the park. The increase in use that already exists has caused natural resource deterioration and continues to cause impact on the recreational facilities themselves (see photos). Without plans for monetary investment in the fire towers and other related structures, parking areas, and trails the addition of the Catskill Fire Tower Challenge is certain to increase impacts rather than help manage them in any way.

Respectfully submitted,

Laurie Rankin, Director, New York State Chapter
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