

The Campbell Tract Leaf



Trailhead thefts a continuing problem

A visitor safety message from BLM Law Enforcement Ranger Jeff Duhrsen

In the Fall 2005 issue of The Campbell Tract Leaf was a headline: “Smash and grabs here to stay.” Unfortunately, that prognostication has proven true, despite the recent installation of surveillance cameras at both the Campbell Airstrip and Smokejumper trailheads.

Recreational users of Campbell Tract trails suffered twelve vehicle break-ins in 2008 and three break-ins in the first two months of 2009, losing several thousand dollars in personal items and numerous hours of lost time to repair broken vehicle windows. Even worse, several victims had personal identification, checks, and credit cards stolen, resulting in fraudulent purchases at area merchants while the victims were still out recreating on the trails. And even though victims of credit card fraud are not personally liable for the charges, the specter of identity theft looms even after the cards are canceled.

Given the contracting economy and the ever-present scourge of methamphetamine and heroin addiction, the problem is likely to continue. An estimated 85% of all property crime is attributed to drug use. Not surprisingly, thieves exhibit some of the highest rates of recidivism of any class of criminal. Even when successfully prosecuted, they often return to illegal activities as soon as they are released from jail. This revolving door is simply the reality with which we are faced.

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What they’re after

A common thread runs through virtually every break-in—visible items inside the vehicle. Thieves key in on bags and jackets, knowing they often contain wallets, purses, iPods, GPS navigators, and other valuable items.

These thieves are often in the parking lot when the victims arrive and, in many cases, have broken in within minutes of the victims leaving the trailhead. Our cameras have recorded thieves bypassing other cars already parked to target the most recently arrived vehicle, thus giving them the most time to purchase items on stolen credit cards before the victim has a chance to cancel the card. Thieves may follow the victim down the trail a certain

Surveillance cameras on Campbell Tract record trailhead activity 24/7.

distance to ensure they won’t return too soon. They may target women, particularly those who appear to be exercising, assuming that purses were left behind in the vehicle.

Finally, thefts occur year-round and throughout the day. Theft has occurred as early as 10 a.m. and as late as 8:30 p.m. They occur when the parking lot is full and when



it’s empty, when passing traffic is heavy and when it’s light. They are as likely to occur on a weekday as a weekend. They happen as much or more in winter than in summer. In short, neither rain, nor sleet, nor cold, nor snow will keep these thieves from their appointed rounds.

What we’re doing

There is good news, however. The theft unit at the Anchorage Police Department has done an excellent job of following up on leads generated by the cameras. Of the twelve break-ins in 2008, there were eight indictments and suspects are under investigation in two others.

In virtually every case, the thieves had committed other crimes around the city and the investigation of the Campbell Tract thefts helped solve other crimes and expose the network of criminals involved. For example, two thefts from the summer of 2008 resulted in 24 felony indictments against each of four suspects.

What you can do

However, the BLM and Anchorage Police Department can only do so much. The Anchorage Field Office manages 19 million acres with a single law enforcement ranger to patrol those lands. The Anchorage Police Department receives dozens of theft reports each week. The recreating public can—and must—undertake certain precautions to protect themselves.

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• Never, never, never leave your wallet or other valuables in your car, even if they are hidden from view. Thieves know about consoles, floor mats, and other hidden places; they can search them in a matter of moments.

• You may know the bag you leave behind has nothing valuable in it, but the thief doesn't know that. If you must leave a bag behind, empty its contents out in plain view so that the thief can see what's available, then turn the bag inside out. Thieves aren't as likely to break in if the pickings are slim.

• Consider leaving your car unlocked. While no one wants to have their items stolen, it might be better to have something of nominal value easily taken than suffer a broken window.

• Be observant of others in the parking lot, particularly those who appear to be loitering for no apparent reason. Simply knowing you have taken note of their description and vehicle may deter thieves. Never approach a suspicious individual; if they are addicts, they are likely to be paranoid, on edge, and potentially armed.

• Re-calibrate what seems suspicious to you. Surprisingly, it's not typically "kids" who are doing this; rather, most perpetrators are between their mid 20s and early 40s, old enough to have an established drug habit and to pass stolen credit cards credibly. One thief even had his little black dog with him during two separate incidents, apparently trying to fit in with the trailhead crowd.

• Do your stretching a little ways down the trail, quietly observing any suspicious activity at the trailhead. Consider returning to the trailhead within a few minutes, just to check. If your instinct tells you something is amiss, it probably is. If you don't feel comfortable, get back in your car and leave the area.

• Carry your cell phone and report suspicious activity to me (267-1436 office, 240-5224 cell) and the Anchorage Police Department (786-8900). The information you provide might be the missing link that helps identify a suspect from an earlier crime and prevents future crimes. As ever, for crimes in progress, call 911.

Looking forward

The BLM remains committed to making Campbell Tract the safest place in Anchorage to run, ski, bike, hike, or walk your leashed dog. But we need your help. By remaining vigilant and immediately reporting suspicious activity, you can help us accomplish that mission.



Meet Ben Schiedel

If you enjoy Campbell Tract trails, you may have met Ben already. He's a BLM volunteer from Meridian, Mississippi, who came to Alaska last fall under the Mennonite Service Adventure Program. He's helping the BLM with trail maintenance at Campbell Tract through July of this year.

Ben said he chose Alaska for his service project because he was ready for a cooler climate and loves the outdoors. Off duty, he enjoys skiing and hiking, which makes Campbell Tract a great place for Ben.

If you see this dedicated volunteer out on the trails, give him a big thank-you for his efforts!

Winter Trails Day

On Feb. 14, more than 1,300 outdoor enthusiasts of all ages came out for Winter Trails Day at the Campbell Tract. This annual event introduces visitors to skiing, snowshoeing, winter biking, running and camping, geocaching, dog mushing, and more. All equipment was loaned free of charge, courtesy of **Anchorage REI**, the BLM's Winter Trails Day partner.



The Campbell Tract Leaf provides news about the 730-acre BLM Campbell Tract, located adjacent to Far North Bicentennial Park in Anchorage, Alaska. If you'd like to be added to the mail list (or removed), phone 267-1420 or drop a note to tmcpfers@blm.gov.



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