William Wallace Bass arrived at Grand Canyon’s South Rim in 1885, and quickly went to work improving inner–canyon wildlife paths, prehistoric routes, and at least one earlier prospector trail to prospect, ship copper and asbestos ore, and guide tourists from rim-to-rim. He completed what we call today the South Bass Trail in the mid-1890s, the North Bass Trail by 1901, and a cable car across the river in 1906, thereby creating the first transcanyon corridor. Although these trails were never heavily used or maintained to high standards, they did remain in use through the 1920s, after which they were abandoned but for the occasional explorer and NPS ranger until backpacking appeared in the popular culture in the 1960s. During 40 years of rare usage, portions of the original trails disappeared from landslides, slope erosion, and especially vegetation overgrowth, while two generations of backpackers short cutted original alignments and wore others based on the reduced needs of pedestrians versus stock animals.
Rehabilitating the South Bass Trail

The Ace crew took on the South Bass Trail first, from autumn 2004 through spring 2005.
Salute Bass Trail
TM 12 S 376 197 4005225
Facing north, ACE crew spike camp at South Bass trailhead, contracted to repair trail in autumn 2004 / Winter 2005
NPS Sign at Bass Camp Spike Camp
ACE crew leader Gavin Rose and his international volunteers clearing slides, brushing, and raking down the Supai within Bass Canyon
Much of the work would entail benching and widening the trail
Brushing through the Redwall Break before (left) and after
Brushing through the Redwall break to a width of 10-15'
Original Bass switchback is buried in oak (left) then resurrected (right)
Besides a lot of brushing, raking, and slide clearing, ACE built a considerable number of walls and steps from the Toroweap down to the top of the Redwall.
Work across the Esplanade consisted mostly of brushing, raking, and cairn placement, but here, in a boggy area where hikers fanned out to avoid the muck, Ace built a causeway...
ACE worked from the Bass Camp spike camp down to the Esplanade then setup a second spike camp on the Esplanade to work down to the Bright Angel Shale.
Rediscovering & rehabilitating the drop from the Esplanade comprised the longest realignment on the South Bass. USGS benchmarks, artifacts, old trail, blast fractures, and a few old walls pointed the way.
According to the Secretary of the Interior’s Standards for Historic rehabilitation, new structures must appear different but be consistent with the historic style and fabric. Here is an ACE dry-laid wall, replacing a Bass rubble wall.
Rehabilitating the North Bass Trail

The winter and spring of 2005 proved extraordinarily WET!

Although we were able to reconnoiter the North Bass on the February 2005 trails river trip as far as the Redwall, attempts in May to conduct a cultural survey from the river failed because Shinumo Creek was in flood. As it turned out, we surveyed just a couple days ahead of the ACE crew beginning their work in mid-June, when the road to Swamp Point was finally cleared of snow. ACE kept one or two crews in the field almost continuously through the end of October 2005, when the entire project was nearly completed (the Redwall still needs work) but time and money ran out.
NPS Seasonal Archeologists who surveyed the North Bass (right)

Gavin Rose and Chris Baker from ACE (left)
Even more than on the South Bass, we used historic indicators like USGS Benchmarks, blast fractures in rock, historic artifacts (horseshoes, cans...), old trail, Bass walls, inscriptions, and old cairns to help rediscover and rehabilitate about 5 miles of the historic North Bass Trail.
Three spike camps were established along the North Bass to facilitate work in this remote corner of the canyon. One on the rim 0.3 miles back from Swamp Point, one at the top of the Redwall, and the original camp at Shinumo Creek, 3 miles up from the river. Crews were supplied by truck, raft, and helicopter.
A Quick Tour up the Rediscovered and Rehabilitated North Bass Trail

From Shinumo Creek up to Muav Saddle
From Shinumo Creek up the Supergroup slopes and cliffs
Across the Hakatai Shale – This portion of trail was completely gone, but old cairns marked the way.
Across the Shinumo Quartzite and Tonto levels
The trail in this long traverse was almost entirely obscured by brush, but again, old cairns marked the alignment. ACE brushed and benched following the cairns, connecting the “dots” of extant trail and artifacts.
Across the quartzite and Tonto level
Dropping into White Creek
Switchbacks down to White Creek

Steps across White Creek
Bass’s original trail passed Benchmark 16 3486’ then down to the bedrock bed of White Creek (right) where there are pools. This is as far as ACE worked from the Shinumo Creek spike camp. Bass used periodic benches as he made his way up to White Creek’s falls in the Muav, but we did not try to rehabilitate the bench segments.
Crews brushed the upper half of the Redwall ascent, but ran out of time before they could do any work on the tread or brush the lower half.
Old Bass tail liner (left) points the way. Beyond this, near the top of the Redwall, ACE worked on the trail tread itself all the way up to Swamp Point.
ACE had to rehabilitate nearly the entire distance from the top of the Redwall back to White Creek, a distance of about two miles. There were few old cairns in this segment, but beginning and end were marked by USGS benchmarks, and a few artifacts helped guide the way. Prior to this work, nearly the entire segment was overgrown with brush, particularly manzanita...
We rehabilitated one creek bed bypass around a dry fall up White Creek in the Supai, then left the creek for the last time at Benchmark 21 5697’. ACE built these steps out of the creek to mark the new (old) alignment, which now climbs the east slope in switchbacks through the upper Supai and Hermit Shale.
The upper Supai and Hermit Shale. The rehabilitated trail runs up the slope, along a ridge line, crosses the Queen Anne Spring drainage, and up another slope to the spring itself. We followed a few old cairns, small sections of extant old trail, a few artifacts, and a benchmark that had been lost for half a century
Approaching Queen Anne Spring at the base of the Coconino

North Bass Trail
Documentation of ACE work
UTM 12 S 378726 4021404 +33'
Facing 320 degrees. Tangent 21 from White Creek in Hermit Shale
The last leg up to Queen Anne Spring (left), and a Bass stone bench beside the spring, uncovered while excavating the old trail.
Looking back at the rehabilitated trail along the slope east of Queen Anne Spring