



# { HANGING ON

OVER-ALL BODY FITNESS IN ONE CLIMB...

**R**emember the monkey bars on the elementary playground? Whether it's the image of a dome-shaped steel cage, or a memory of the horizontal ladder suspended just beyond the toe tips, it's easy to recall that feeling of empowerment when finally reaching the top.

In those days, tree houses were sacred; getting the top bunk was considered a privilege; and hanging at the peak of the Ferris wheel was a once-in-a-lifetime thrill. From those heights we gained new perspectives. As adults, feelings like these are hard to come by. Between balancing the checkbook, going to work and picking the kids up from practice, there is little time to contemplate — or to revive that deeply embedded sense of child-like wonderment and adventure.

Thankfully, even as adults, there is a way to unleash that spirit, and it includes the thrill of climbing.

Rock climbing is one of the fastest growing outdoor sports in the United States. It may seem a little more daunting than a jungle gym, but with the proper equipment, training and attitude, everyone can experience its benefits — and maybe reclaim a bit of the playground thrills.

In “How to Rock Climb,” author John Long (an experienced free climber) explains that man has always been a climber. Before the introduction of supermarkets and zoos, climbing was necessary to escape predators and to scavenge for food. But as time progressed, the necessity to climb evolved into the desire to climb.

You don't have to be extremely athletic or even good at keeping your balance to make a go at rock climbing. Getting started may seem unrealistic, so start by buying the essential equipment. That includes suitable clothing, chalk and chalk bag, a harness, rubber-soled climbing shoes, a rope, carabiners and a helmet.

Marianne Parker, a native of Camdenton, MO, got her start climbing on a 35-foot rock wall at a summer camp in Naples, ME.

“When I applied for the counselor job, the ropes course sounded the most appealing,” she said. “I had liked the idea of rock climbing before that, but didn't really expect that I would learn to enjoy it so much. I think the situation I was in, which consisted of a pretty large number of first-time climbers coupled with extremely knowledgeable and vivacious instructors, really started me off with a positive attitude toward climbing.”

Missouri's topography of brittle limestone cliffs makes top-rope climbing the most popular, easiest and safest form of climbing. Unlike





free climbing or mountaineering, climbers walk or drive to the pinnacle of the summit and anchor the equipment first.

Wikipedia's definition is helpful when trying to understand the concept:

Top-rope climbing (or top-roping) uses a rope for the climber's safety. It runs from a belayer at the foot of a route through one or more carabiners connected to an anchor system at the top of the route, then back down to the climber, usually attaching to the climber by means of a harness.

Locations along the Osage River and other Missouri water systems offer a beautiful array of water-carved overhangs and rock formations for this form of climbing. Within two hours, one can find himself in Capen Park or Rock Bridge State Park in Columbia, MO; the Hermann Bluffs along the Katy Trail near Hermann, MO; The Forgotten Wall in Henley, MO; Painted Rock Conservation Area near Westphalia, MO; or the cliffs that nestle against the Niangua River waterways in central Missouri. But if the fear of being above the rock is too great, there are also indoor gyms designed to teach newbies how to climb before they journey outdoors.

When it comes to indoor gyms, Jim Jackson, Jr., engineer and graduate of the University of Missouri-Columbia, highly recommends the

climbing wall at Upper Limits in St. Louis. With the passage of the Amusement Ride Safety Act in 1997, which requires all amusement rides to be inspected annually, Jackson has had the opportunity to ensure the safety of the Upper Limits' ropes, carabiners, harnesses, belay devices, and structural condition of the wall.

"I like living on the edge," he said. "It takes great mental and physical strength to climb." Parker, 25, now living in Tennessee, took up climbing four years ago. She says the benefits of rock climbing are endless.

"In the best moment, it makes me feel fearless, coordinated, exhilarated, exhausted," she said. "In the worst moment, it just makes me feel exhausted and frustrated. I know to take a rest and eat some raisins then come back and make the move. I can count the times that has happened to me on one hand. Climbing is hard!" The professionals at Upper Limits say that rock climbing is an incredible way to strengthen the core and increase stamina. Although it will benefit an individual who is in shape already, one does not have to be so because rock climbing is a complete body workout. According to Parker, climbing "is always a good combination of cardio/strength-training workout. If done regularly, virtually every muscle from shoulder to finger tip is developed, as well as glutes, quads and calves. My abs have even been sore after I have climbed. Some drawbacks of climbing,

only intermittently, are an almost assured total-body soreness the day after, and raw fingertips."

In the mid-1700s, the sport of climbing emerged in the European Alps where village dwellers sought to conquer the nearby summits as the ultimate goal. Lower cliffs and crags were used to develop the craft in a safer environment, and this is where ropes and rudimentary belaying techniques were introduced.

The sport advanced throughout Europe and finally reached the United States in the 1920s in the Rocky Mountains. Because fundamental tools of the sport — like pitons and carabiners — were expensive and rare, few people climbed in America. Technical developments introduced during WWII made nylon ropes, carabiners and pitons easier to buy, and interest in the U.S. gradually progressed to rival that of Europe. Mountaineering turned into sport climbing, which eventually evolved into free climbing and the development of many other forms such as bouldering, top-rope climbing and scrambling.

Rock climbing offers more than dirt under the fingernails. The sport not only benefits a person physically, but it also offers adventure, mental challenges and invites the soul to step outside itself to view the world from new heights. ●

# {9 ITEMS YOU NEED

Websites can be amazing tools to learn more about rock climbing. ABCofRockClimbing.com lends this advice:

- 1. Climbing is not about making a fashion statement.** Many climbers wear T-shirts and Lyrca pants or shorts. It does not matter what kind or length of pants as long as the clothing allows the legs to spread wide enough to reach different footholds.
- 2. The harness provides a comfortable means of attaching the body to the rope.** Also, in the event of a fall, it helps the climber remain in an upright position. These cost from \$40 - \$50.
- 3. Wear rubber-soled climbing shoes.** The rubber of these shoes molds to the surface of the rock. In situations where footholds are hard to come by, you may need to "smear" the shoe against the rock to gain a hold. You can probably get by without special shoes. Shoes usually cost \$100 - \$150.
- 4. You'll need a chalk and chalk bag.** Only you know how much you sweat, but when under strain your palms can get uncomfortably damp. The chalk takes care of this potentially slippery situation. A bag (with chalk) will cost around \$10.
- 5. No matter what kind of climbing you do, you will need special rock climbing rope.** Here's what to look for: strength, elasticity, flexibility, impact load, thickness and the number of falls (by you) it can withstand before becoming unusable. Your rope is your best friend on the rock, so don't take any chances. The most common rope is called a "kernmantel."
- 6. Carabiners (care-a-bean-ers) are metal links used to hold the rope in place quickly and securely.** The standard snapping variety is the lightest, and climbers may carry 30 or more. A carabiner (or "beaner") will cost about \$10.
- 7. Have a good supply of nuts and "protection" or "pro" because they protect the climber from a possible fall.** Nuts are inserted into cracks in the rock in order to help hold the rope in place. Coming in a variety of shapes and sizes, they are linked to the rope with a carabiner.
- 8. Tape slings.** These strong strips of nylon can run anywhere from a couple of inches to four feet long, and are useful for wrapping around trees and other objects. Short ones with a carabiner on each end are used to connect nuts to the rope.
- 9. Helmets protect against loose, falling rocks, and also come in handy if you're the one doing the falling.** Because helmets don't fit the popular "tough guy" mountaineer image, many climbers don't wear them. Safety or fashion — you be the judge.

