

Outdoors



Climbing Over Obstacles

Central Oregon's World Class Rocks Offer Exciting Challenges

By Taylor Thompson

photo by Chockstone Climbing

There comes a time in every parent's life when that ever-mysterious cookie jar loses all of its—well, mystery...and distance from grabbing hands.

The back corner of your kitchen counter? Too easy to climb onto.

The highest shelf in your pantry? Amateur stuff.

The top of your refrigerator? Conquered!

So with such a natural tendency for kids to ascend, perhaps that curiosity and climbing energy could be, well, harnessed by harnessing up for some actual sport climbing. And unless you've been living under it for the last three decades, Smith Rock just happens to be one of the world's most famous sites for this particular activity.

"There's no place quite like it," says Bend dad Steve Hanes, who has made the 30-minute drive to Terrebonne dozens of times this past year with his son Matthew. "Climbing has been an incredibly beneficial experience for our family, and it all started at Smith Rock."

It's a special place, Hanes notes, because it's where he first saw signs of improvement in Matthew's behavior.

"He has struggled with emotional and behavioral disorders since he was four," Hanes says of his now 12-year-old son. "But since he started climbing, I've seen both his mental and physical skills improve tremendously, and we've grown closer as a family because of it."

And Matthew agrees.

"[Climbing] has made a huge difference," he says. "Being out on the rocks makes me feel so much calmer and happier, and there's nothing like the feeling of sending a new route."

According to Hanes, Matthew showed an immediate change in mannerism after his very first climb.

"He was focused and aware, as if his mind and body had suddenly connected for the first time. And then he was hooked."

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No surprise there, according to psychologist and climbing instructor Adrian Hurst. "In climbing, we learn how to apply our bodies to gain height up a section of rock," Hurst says, "and we discover that applying good technique leads to improved outcomes."

These outcomes can include increased self-awareness, better coordination and improved discipline, not to mention stronger muscles and enhanced flexibility.

"We've seen such an overall balance in Matthew since he started climbing," Hanes explains. "It's proved to not only help him overcome his anxiety and behavior issues, but it has set the stage for all sorts of valuable life skills."

Brenna Thomas, a resident of Redmond, has also seen the positive effects of rock climbing for kiddos. Her son Aiden, who scurried up his first route at age seven, continues to beam about "going higher and higher" each climb.

"[Aiden's] confidence has grown so much since he first started climbing," Thomas states. "Just overcoming that initial fear of heights really proved to be a turning point for him. Now he's actually excited about setting goals for himself and tackling challenges."

Aiden, who recently celebrated his ninth birthday at Bend Rock Gym, says his favorite part about climbing is, of course, reaching the summit.

"I like to stop for a couple minutes when I get to the top," he says. "It's really cool to look down and around and think to myself, 'I just did that!'"

A proud mama (and a climber herself), Thomas says she loves engaging with her son in such an exciting activity.

"Watching him grow as a climber has been magical for me," she says. "And it's not a bad way for him to burn off all that excess energy, either!"

As for parental advice, both Hanes and Thomas encourage moms and dads to simply let their kids climb.

"If you provide them with the proper gear and safety training," Hanes says, "the rest is really up to them. Reaching higher just comes natural."