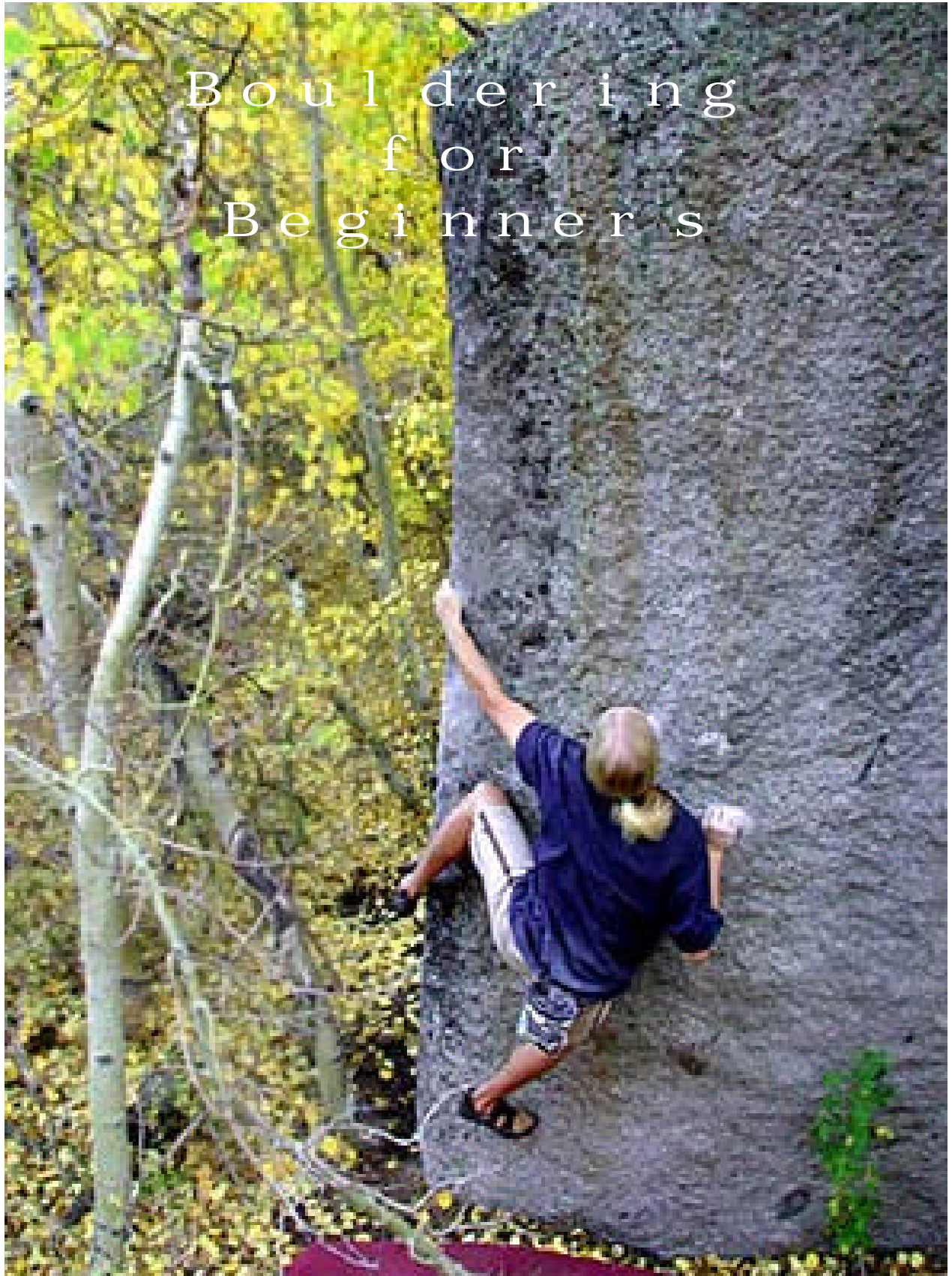


Bouldering
for
Beginners



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Bouldering for Beginners

Introduction

Bouldering is an exciting and enjoyable sport that also keeps you in shape. This manual provides all the information that a beginning boulderer needs to know, such as equipment you need, places to climb, preparation before climbing, and ten beginner tips. After reading this manual, you will be ready to have fun with your climbing experience.

What is Bouldering?

Bouldering is low level rock climbing.

Bouldering

vs.

Rock Climbing

- Climbing from 5-30 feet
- Group oriented
- High group enthusiasm
- Short term, powerful moves
- Difficulty is rated on a v-scale

- Climbing to your limit (height)
- Single person or small group oriented
- Self-motivation
- Long term, high endurance moves
- Difficulty is rated on a 5.0 scale

Bouldering



This boulderer is at a height of about three feet. Although it is short, the moves are harder than rock climbing because they do not have to save their strength.

Rock Climbing



This rock climber is at a few hundred feet up. Rock climbing is high so the climber needs to save his or her strength to get to the top.

Step 1: Get Proper Equipment

A) Find a sports store near you that carries climbing equipment. Depending on your area, the store may or may not have climbing equipment. It's always good to call first. If you are unable to find a store near you that carries climbing equipment, you can order online at one of the following web sites:

www.mgear.com
www.travelcountry.com
www.climbaxe.com

B) Buy rock climbing shoes. Since you are a beginner, you may want to buy relatively inexpensive shoes. La Sportiva, 5.10, Scarpa, and Madrocks are some rock climbing shoe brands. Snug fitting shoes are ideal. If your shoes are too loose, your feet will move in them while you climb, and you will have less control. Closures on the shoes may be velcro, laces, zipper, or slipper. It is your choice. Shoes will range from \$70-\$150.



Brand: 5.10, velcro closure.



Brand: La Sportiva, slipper closure.

C) Buy a crashpad. Crashpads come in a variety of sizes. Select a size that you feel comfortable with. Price range is approximately \$100- \$350.



Cordless® crashpad.

D) Buy chalk and chalk bag. Chalk is necessary to prevent your hands from slipping while you climb. It does so by absorbing the sweat on your hands that can cause slipping. There is a range in size for chalk bags and chalk. Price ranges from \$2-\$7.



Mountain Gear® chalk bag.

Metolius® chalk



Step 2: Pick a Place and Time

A) Decide if you prefer to climb indoor or outdoor. Deciding on indoor or outdoor climbing is dependent on two main factors, the weather and range of difficulty. Weather is not an issue for indoor climbing, whereas outdoor climbing has very unpredictable weather patterns. Also, in outdoor climbing, you are limited to the level of difficulty you can attempt. In indoor climbing, many problems can be mimicked to portray the outdoor climbing experience. For example, some outdoor climbing places only have a certain range of difficulties, while indoor climbing has a multitude of possibilities. On the other hand, indoor climbing has limited space, whereas outdoor climbing is a vast open space.

B) Pick a place to climb. For places to climb indoors, visit:

www.climbing.com/Pages/rockgyms00.html

For places to climb outdoors, visit:

www.drtopo.com

1. Click on “click here to enter the new website”
2. Click on “Topos”
3. Pick a state by clicking on the map.
4. Pick a climbing area by clicking on its name.
5. Click on “Download Guide.”

NOTE: When climbing indoors there will be a charge to climb, and for outdoors there may or may not be a charge to climb.

C) Pick a time to climb. For indoor climbing the only thing you need to look out for is the operating hours for the climbing gym.



A woman climbing in an indoor climbing gym.



A nice sunny day to go climbing outside.

For outdoor climbing the main thing to look out for is the weather. You do not want rain or snow while you climb (it makes the rock slippery). You want a nice sunny day.

STEP 3: PICK AN EASY PROBLEM

Being that you are a beginner, you do not want to climb a hard problem (route) that could be complex, dangerous, or strenuous. A problem is the intended path of travel, which could be vertical, from the ground to the top of the rock, or lateral, from one side of the rock to another side.

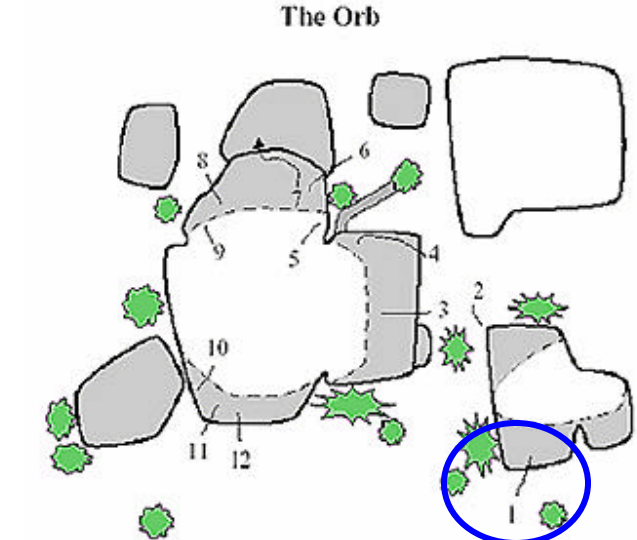
Problems are given a grade to let the climber know the difficulty. In bouldering, a v-scale is used to determine the grade. The v-scale is a simple grading system from V0 to V15, where each grade can have a minus, normal, or plus level of difficulty. For example, V0- is the easiest and V15+ is the hardest, as shown below.

| | | | | | | | | | | | | | | | |
|-----------------|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|-----|----------------|------|------|------|------|------|
| V0± | V1± | V2± | V3± | V4± | V5± | V6± | V7± | V8± | V9± | V10± | V11± | V12± | V13± | V14± | V15± |
| Least Difficult | | | | | | | | | | Most Difficult | | | | | |

An Example

As an example, I will show you an easy outdoor problem through DrTopo. Go to www.drtopo.com in your web browser, click on “Click here to enter new website”, and click on “Topos” with the picture of the U.S. behind it. Since Florida is flat and has no boulder parks, click on the state of Georgia, and then click on “Rocktown” located in the northern part of the state, and finally, click on “Download Guide”.

This will show you all of Rocktown’s climbing problems and their respective v-scale grades. Below is a picture of “The Orb” located on page 4 of the guide. Don’t get confused since the pages are not in order; the page number is at the bottom corner of the page. Page 5 lists all the v-scale grades given to the numbered problems on page 4. Some are unnamed and un-graded and are labeled “Unknown”. So for The Orb, a beginner should try problem number “1” first, since it has a V0 rating.



The Orb

- 1: V0
- 2: V1
- 3: V3
- 4: V4
- 5: Unknown
- 6: Unknown
- 7: V7
- 8: V5
- 9: V4
- 10: V1
- 11: V1
- 12: V1

“The Orb”: This is a climbing area of Rocktown, a boulder park located in northern Georgia. Labeled are problems for these specific boulders, and on the right are the respective v-scale difficulty grades. Circled in blue is problem number “1” which is a good place for beginners to start.

STEP 4: Prepare to climb

In order to have the most fun climbing, you should warm-up and learn proper spotting technique, so you and your friends can climb again without waiting for an injury to heal.

Warm-up

- A) Raise your heart rate.** When performing any physical activity, it is rudimentary knowledge to raise your heart rate by doing any type of cardio exercise for about 10 minutes. This could be jogging, fast-walking, jumping rope, or anything that will get your blood pumping. You want to let your body know that you are about to climb.
- B) Stretch.** This is a very important (and often neglected) warm-up that athletes regret ignoring after they get injured. You are now a climbing athlete and it is recommended that you stretch muscles that are important to climbing. Here are some examples of stretches:

Fingers: Bend your fingers back for 5 seconds and forward for 5 seconds, up to 3 times each.

Shoulder: Hold one arm in front of you, and pull it across your body with your free arm. Hold it there for 8-12 seconds and repeat up to 3 times for each arm.

Back: Put both hands in front of you, with one hand grasping the other, and curl your arms and shoulders forward. Hold for 8-12 seconds and repeat 3 times.

Spotting

Spotting is a very important practice that is used to safeguard the climber from landing in an awkward position. In the event of a fall, the spotter should guide the climber to the crashpad to avoid a hard impact. Instead of landing on your head or neck, the spotter will redirect you to land on your bottom, or even better, your feet.

When you are spotting, there are some general rules to follow:

- **Pay attention at all times.** Be ready to catch the climber at all times.
- The greatest importance is to protect the climber's head, neck, and spine.
- Watch the climber's back as a good indication of when the climber might fall. Do not watch his feet or hands exclusively.
- Visualize the fall trajectory of the climber and position yourself accordingly.
- Communicate with your partner(s).
- Always hold hands up and thumbs tucked in to prevent injury to yourself.

Also, there are different ways to spot a climber, depending on what problem he or she is climbing, a wall or an angled overhang.

STEP 4: Prepare to climb - (cont)

Walls

When spotting a climber on a wall (vertical or small angle), you must help prevent unsafe sliding falls. Sliding falls are falls that occur close to the rock, increasing the chances of hitting a protruding object. Also be aware of barndooring. Barndooring is when the climber releases one side of the body from the rock and swings it like an opening door, but then falls at the end of the swing.

In these situations, direct the climber away from ledges and other dangers that might interfere with a safe landing. The best way to do this is to catch the climber at the waist or a little above the waist, and to ensure that the climber lands upright, legs first. Avoid catching the climber too low and pushing the climber into the rock.



Spotting climber at the waist on a vertical wall.

Angled Overhang

For angled overhangs, the climber is naturally positioned to fall on the back or (depending on height and angle) on the head. Spotting in this situation is most effective by catching the climber under the arms and steering them to land feet first. On greater angles, the spotter should stand away from the rock, directly below with the climber's shoulders, as opposed to directly beneath the climber like you would on a vertical wall.



Spotting climber under the arms on an angled overhang.

Team Spotting

You might need more than one spotter if you are climbing at high elevations, climbing near hazardous objects, or climbing with a novice spotter. When team spotting, you should deem one spotter the primary spotter, who will make first contact with the climber. This way there is no confusion between spotters about who should catch the climber. The rest of the spotters are deemed secondary, which safeguards the primary spotter or provides backup support to the climber. Just as with any spotting, all spotters must be fully aware and fully ready.

W A R N I N G S

ROCK CLIMBING IS, BY ITS VERY NATURE, A POTENTIALLY HAZARDOUS ACTIVITY. THE CORE OF THE CLIMBING EXPERIENCE IS EXPRESSED IN DECISION MAKING; THE HOLDS TO USE, THE ROUTES YOU ARE CAPABLE OF CLIMBING, AND THE INFORMATION YOU CAN TRUST. THIS COMPILATION OF CLIMBING MATERIAL IS NOT INTENDED TO BE THE ONLY SOURCE OF INFORMATION FOR THOSE WISHING TO PURSUE THE SPORT OF ROCK CLIMBING. PRIOR AND COMPETENT KNOWLEDGE IN THE USE OF VARIOUS ROCK CLIMBING SAFETY DEVICES IS ASSUMED. WHILE EVERY ATTEMPT IS MADE TO INSURE THAT THE INFORMATION PROVIDED HERE IS CORRECT AND SAFE, IT IS NEVER A SUBSTITUTE FOR YOUR BETTER JUDGEMENT. ALWAYS CHECK INFORMATION WITH OTHER SOURCES AND YOUR OWN COMMON SENSE BEFORE TRUSTING YOUR LIFE TO IT! BY USE OF THE PROVIDED INFORMATION, THE READER HEREBY RELEASES THE AUTHORS AND PROVIDERS OF SAID INFORMATION FROM LIABILITY FOR ANY INJURY, INCLUDING DEATH. **REMEMBER SAFTEY IS YOUR RESPONSIBILITY**

STEP 5: Climb! 10 Beginner Tips

You bought your equipment, picked a boulder and a problem to overcome, you have your spotter and now, you are ready to climb. If you aren't quite ready to begin your problem and need a little more information about climbing, we've included some helpful points below.

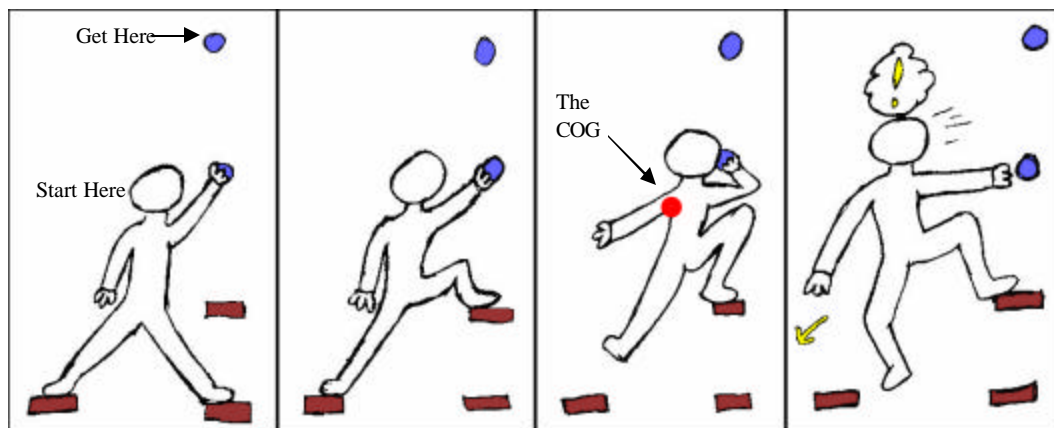
Ten tips for becoming a better boulderer:

Arms can tire quickly. Instead of pulling yourself up with your arms, rely on your legs to lift your bodyweight whenever possible. Your legs are stronger and will not fatigue as quickly as your arms. Remember: stand up rather than pull up.

Be aware of your center of gravity (COG). Your COG is basically the middle point of your body, but if you hold your right leg and arm out to the side, your COG shifts to the right. When climbing, you can position an unused arm or leg so it helps you balance.

For instance, say you want to get to the top handhold labeled "Get Here" on the picture below. To do this you have three strong footholds (brown squares) and two slippery handholds (blue circles). First let's see the wrong way to get to the top.

Your first step will be to move your right foot to the upper foothold. Then you will try to pull yourself up with your right leg and hand, but in this case, you overlook the position of your left leg and hand, which are off to the side (third slide). This will cause your COG (the red dot) to move to the left, which puts added strain on your right hand, and since it is a slippery hold, you will most likely lose your grip and fall.

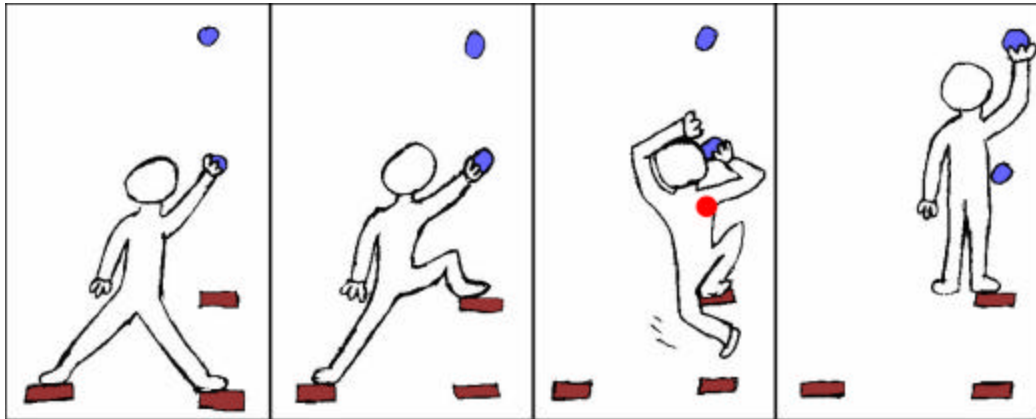


If you wanted to reach the top blue circle, this is how you would fail. In the third slide, the climber overlooks the position of his left hand and leg, which are off to the side. This causes the center of gravity (COG) to shift to the left and adds extra strain on the right hand. The handhold is too slippery and the climber falls.

STEP 5: Climb! - (Continued)

Now let's go through the right way to get to the top.

The first step will be the same as the last method, step onto the higher foothold. In the next step, however, you must flag: swing your left leg under you, moving your center of gravity to your right (above your planted right foot) and providing greater balance. You can also move your hand towards the right to help a little more. Now since all the weight is on your right foot, do a one-legged stand and you're finished.



If you wanted to reach the top blue circle, this is how you would succeed. In the third slide, the climber “flags” his left leg under him, which shifts his center of gravity (the red dot) to the right and gives him greater balance. From there, the climber just uses his right leg to stand.

Crashpads are useless unless you place them properly. People usually fall away from the wall, so if you place your crashpad right against the wall, you are increasing the chance of injury. This is common on overhangs. Before you begin your climb, predict the trajectory of your fall, and place the crashpad where you think is best.

Do not get your thumbs caught on a falling climber when you are spotting. It is common for spotters to be injured when they hold their thumbs out to catch their climber. Instead of having to sit on the sideline due to injury, spotters should keep their thumbs in, close to the index finger.

Ever get frustrated with a problem? Just ask someone for some pointers, or even better, someone who has done the problem. This is one of the best ways to learn and excel mentally in climbing.

Falling from high places can hurt greatly, so try to stay away from highballing. Highballing is a term used to describe a higher, more risky, climbing problem. As a beginner you will want to stay away from higher problems, even if you have a crashpad and a good spot.

STEP 5: Climb! - (Continued)

Greasy holds can be dusted with chalk to make for a better grip. It is most effective to use a brush (non-wire, i.e. a toothbrush) to scrub the hold with chalk. This will work well with sloped holds also.

Hands and feet should be in position for your next move. Climbing is like a game of chess where you plan multiple moves ahead of time, so make sure your feet and hands are positioned to make the easiest transition into your next move. You run a greater risk of falling if you have to reposition after each move.

Instead of using your toe, use the inside of your foot on the foothold when moving up on a problem. This allows your center of gravity to be closer to the rock, making your muscles work less on holding your body close to the rock. If your center of gravity is away from the rock, you have to lift yourself up and pull yourself in to the rock. On the other hand, if your center of gravity is close to the rock, you are mainly just lifting yourself up.

And lastly, but most importantly:

Just have fun!

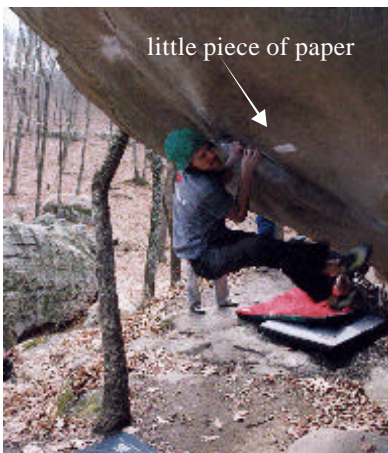
Competitions and pros

Many climbing gyms and outdoor bouldering parks have competitions in which climbers test their abilities against one another. The competitions are usually divided into different categories and depending on the venue the categories may vary. Examples of some categories are Men's Advanced, Women's Advanced, Men's Intermediate, Women's Intermediate, Men's Recreational, Women's Recreational, 40+, and Open. Routes for competition are created and rated by the people organizing the competition.

This is an indoor bouldering competition in which the problems are made by screwing holds on where they are wanted. You may also notice that there are other climbers around encouraging the climber on.



Bouldering competitions take place in two forms. The first type of competition consists of timed climbing tournaments. In these competitions, every climber ascends the same route and whichever climber reaches the top of the route in the fastest time wins the tournament. The second type of competition is called bouldering for distance. Climbers in this type of contest climb the same route but instead of trying for the fastest time climbers vie to see who can reach the farthest point up the route.



In this outdoor bouldering competition: you can see that it is impossible for them to change the problems around due to the fact that the holds are naturally occurring formations in the boulder. You may also notice that there is a little piece of paper next to the climber that lets him know how many points the problem is worth.

The winners are found either by who gets the farthest up the hardest route for that category, the climber who gets to the top in the fastest time, or the problems are given points and the person who gets the most points wins. Usually the competitions are fun and climbers help out other climbers and push them to their limits so that they get better. Just like other sports there are professional boulderers. Some of the well-known professional boulderers are Chris Sharma, Vadim Vinokur, and Lisa Rands.

G l o s s a r y o f B o u l d e r i n g T e r m s

5.0 scale: A grading scale used in rock climbing that denotes a number that represents the difficulty of the climb. 5.0, 5.1, 5.2, ...5.10abcd, ...5.15abcd

Barndooring: When the climber releases one side of the body from the rock and swings it like an opening door, but then falls at the end of the swing.

Crashpad: This is a absorbent pad that will usually break a climbers impact on the ground in the event of a fall.

Flag: To dangle a leg in a way that improves balance.

Flash: This is the term used to say that you got up a problem on your first try ever.

Highballing: A term used to describe a boulder problem that is high enough to inflict injury upon you should you happen to fall.

Hold: Parts of the boulder that can be held or stepped on to advance the climber. There are basically three different types of holds. First the jug, these are big holds that you can grasp with your whole hand. The second is the sloper, this is a hold that slopes or is round. The third is the crimper; usually a climber can only get their fingertips on it and sometimes only one fingertip.

Problem: The intended path of travel. The problem may be vertical, from the ground to the top of the rock, or lateral, from one side of the rock to another side

Sliding falls: Falls that occur close to the rock, increasing the chances of hitting a protruding object.

Spotting: The use of a person who is not climbing at the moment to safeguard the climber from landing in an awkward position that may cause injury, to guide the climber to the crashpad, and to absorb the impact of the falling climber.

V-scale: The code given to a problem that represents its difficulty.