Rock Mastery Method

Rock Courses - Level I
Intro To The Vertical World
A Week On The Rock I

Rock Courses - Level II
Gaining Altitude
More Altitude
A Week On The Rock II
Efficient Rope Handling

Rock Courses - Level III
Anchoring Methods
A Week On The Rock III
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Hard Rock
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Advanced Leader's Week
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Essentials Of Self-Rescue
Advanced Self-Rescue
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Top Rope Instructor Training
Guiding Skills

Rock Guiding

Rock Equipment

Rock Climbing Equipment

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We provide all technical gear such as climbing ropes, harnesses and helmets. We can also provide klettersacks (packs for climbing), fanny packs, and rock shoes for your use during our day-long programs. You are always welcome to use your own gear, as long as it is suitable and in good condition.

For our overnight trips, we provide all group gear such as tents, stoves, cook sets and emergency equipment; you will need to provide your own sleeping bag, pad and pack.

Participants must provide appropriate clothing. In some mountain environments, clothing can be as important to your comfort and safety as a rope. Please pay careful attention to our suggestions.

Please visit our Equipment page for an in-depth discussion of technical clothing. Included are topics on: heat and moisture management, outdoor fabrics, fit considerations for clothing and footwear, purchasing suggestions, and much more. If you are not very familiar with specialized outdoor clothing we suggest you carefully review this page.

Sorting gear after a climb

In the list below, we have tried to give you a range of choices to help guide you in the acquisition of equipment. There is no one "best way" to outfit yourself and cost certainly should enter into your purchase decisions. Our opinions regarding the best equipment for any given purpose are based upon our experience using the equipment extensively in the Adirondacks. When we travel away from this area the equipment we take is sometimes different. If you have any questions please don't hesitate to contact us.

What To Wear

Tops

Cotton t-shirts are great when it's hot; a synthetic "wicking" zip-turtleneck will work well when it's cold or damp (could be anytime). An extra long sleeve shirt can be handy to ward off bugs, the sun, or a chill. Bright colors make the best photographs.

Pants

When it's cool and dry, or buggy, you can choose cotton sweat pants for their flexibility and low price, or there are several types of pants designed especially for rock climbing. Our favorites are the 4-way stretch-knit pants, which allow excellent freedom of movement and are very comfortable. They will also protect your legs from scrapes while you develop good technique. Pants made from fleece are great early or late in the season when it could be cold. When it's really hot, there's nothing like a pair of baggy shorts. Stay away from any tight-fitting or constricting pants such as blue jeans.

Insulating Layer

When climbing early or late in the season this layer is essential. During the summer months cool days are not uncommon, and a warm pullover can make climbing much more comfortable. We prefer pullovers over full-zip jackets and we have found synthetic polyester fleece material to be much better than wool, although wool is an adequate substitute if you don't mind smelling like a wet sheep when it rains. Several brands of fleece are available and they all work well. Heavy-weight fabrics tend to be too hot and bulky for anything except winter use. Lightweight synthetic long-johns are great when it's chilly, as are a lightweight hat and fingerless gloves. Extra insulating layers are a good idea; they can always be left behind if they are not needed.

Rain Gear

In warm weather, we suggest light-weight nylon jackets and pants. These garments are sufficient for most summer showers. In cooler weather we like lightweight Waterproof/breathable rain suits. Plastic rain jackets are adequate for summer use but they are very short-lived.

Personal Accessories
This category tends to get out of control but there are some important items to remember; here are a few:
•Sunglasses and Retaining Strap – a good hard case is a smart investment.
•Camera – if you have one of the smaller point and shoot cameras get a rugged padded case that will slide onto a belt so the camera will be ready almost any time while you are climbing. Small digital cameras fit almost anywhere and we usually have one when we climb. We suggest an "elephant's trunk" type case for larger cameras. We will be happy to take pictures, using your camera, of you climbing. We can also provide duplicates of photos we take of you.
•Bug Repellent – we prefer the natural repellents such as "Green Ban". 100% DEET will not only dissolve plastics; it is toxic enough that it can no longer be sold in New York!
•Swim Suit – if you are planning on mid-summer climbing, a cool dip in a mountain pond can be delightful.
•Climbing Equipment – if you have your own equipment you are welcome to use it as long as it meets with our approval.

Footwear

Please wear sneakers, running shoes, or approach shoes to access the climbing sites. We have climbing shoes for your use on the rock if you do not own a pair.

The information below may help you understand the many footwear options available for climbers. Please feel free to contact us if you need help with footwear – everyone's needs are a bit different.

Approach shoe selection

The photo above illustrates some of R.L.'s approach shoes. Most of these models are no longer available and your foot might not fit them anyway – so think of each as representing a category of shoe, rather then a specific model. Shoes are selected according to the approach situation expected and, in some cases, they can be used for the climb too. By the way, there are far more shoes shown here than most people need!

Far Left – La Sportiva Trango Light
Lightweight boots are nice on wet days, or for long rough approaches, but they are cumbersome to carry on a climb. Sometimes they can be worn instead of rock shoes on easier alpine rock climbs.

2nd From Left – La Sportiva El Cap
These rugged approach shoes offer good support and durability but not much sensitivity. The rubber is not very sticky, but they have great arch support, making them ideal for standing in etriers on long aid climbs.

3rd From Left – Kayland Vertigo
Similar to El Cap but different fit and stickier rubber. We wear these shoes often while guiding on easier climbs. Their balance between fit and comfort makes them very versatile.

3rd From Right – La Sportiva Superfly
Extremely light weight with sticky rubber. These shoes are great for short, steep, scrambling approaches but support for walking is non-existent so they never get too far from the car.

2nd From Right – Boreal Flyer
This was the first really good approach shoe. In the late 1980's, when Boreal discontinued it, we stocked up on this model and it is still a great choice for easy to moderate slab climbs. The lack of any tread on the sole makes walking on wet trails a real adventure.

Far Right – Flip-flops
Not the best choice for most approaches if you are fond of your toes.

Not Illustrated – Sneakers (running shoes, tennis shoes, etc.)
Their light weight, small size, and the fact that most folks already own a pair, make this type of shoe very popular for approaches. They lack the cachet of an approach shoe but your feet probably won't care.

This photo illustrates some of R.L.'s active rock climbing footwear. You will notice many of his shoes are made by La Sportiva. That is because they fit his feet very well. Although La Sportiva makes a wide selection of superb shoes, their shape will not fit all feet. Your feet should determine the brand of shoes you buy – don't be influenced by what other people wear!

Rock climbing shoe selection

All of the shoes illustrated and described are suitable for long, traditional rock climbs. Today, most rock shoes are designed for short outdoor climbs and indoor climbing. Climbers can remove shoes frequently in these environments so this type of shoe may sacrifice comfort in the interest of performance. Remove your shoes often on a big climb and you'll slow down so much you may end up removing them for the night – while you bivouac!

Far Left – La Sportiva Rock Jock
A triumph in modern shoe design. These shoes do almost everything well.

2nd From Left – La Sportiva Enduro
After changing the rubber and the mid-sole, this became a nice shoe for longer friction routes.

3rd From Left – La Sportiva Kaukulator
Very supportive and quite similar to the Mega.

Middle – La Sportiva Mariacher (sold by Merrell)
Another favorite from many years back. Very comfortable and supportive; great on long routes.

3rd From Right – La Sportiva Mega
Shaped differently from the Mariacher but also comfortable. Great support for long routes.

2nd From Right – Boreal Big Wall
A very specialized shoe designed mostly for standing in étriers on big walls. They do that well, but that's all.

Far Right – Boreal Firé
The shoe that started the sticky rubber revolution in the early 1980's. These old friends have stretched over the years and now work best in cold weather with thick socks.

Rock Climbing Shoes: Selecting, Fitting & Resoling

Rock shoes are the single most useful piece of equipment a climber can own. As such, they are the first, and most important, equipment purchase a climber should make. We have prepared this information because far too many climbers coming to us with new rock shoes have shoes that are ill-fitted, or inappropriate, for their needs. We always feel awkward telling people that the only solution to their shoe dilemma is another (expensive!) pair of shoes; so read carefully. We suggest you take this information with you and show it to the salesperson. A seemingly-endless stream of poor advice has been published in the rock climbing magazines and, if the sales staff where you shop is using this inappropriate advice to aid in the fitting process, you'll be very unhappy with your shoes; we guarantee it. The advice below is based upon fitting hundreds of pairs of rock shoes and (most importantly) climbing extensively with the owners immediately afterward. Very few sales people have this kind of experience.

Before you even go anywhere near a pair of rock shoes you should realize that the fit of a climbing shoe far outweighs its other attributes such as design, weight, rubber, and even price. Forget the reviews in the magazines; let your feet tell you what to buy! You should also realize that most serious climbers eventually end up owning at least two pairs (usually more) of shoes – each for a particular purpose. For now, the only shoes to consider are the "general purpose" models. Contrary to advice you may receive, your first pair should be relatively comfortable (not bedroom slippers, but definitely painless). Also, there are many good deals to be had by mail-ordering climbing equipment, but shoes are not one of them. The best you'll ever get is shoes that seem to fit because sending them back is more of a bother than accepting them as they are. Even if you've tried on many shoes in a shop, and think you know your exact size, rock shoes are notoriously inconsistent and you may find your size in the shop is not your size elsewhere.

We've divided the fit of a climbing shoe into three categories. Most serious climbers own a pair of shoes from

each category, sometimes several pairs. In general, a tighter fit gives better the performance and less comfort. It is important to remember that a shoe that fits the shape of your foot well can out-perform a tighter one that is shaped poorly for your foot.

COMFORTABLE: The tips of your toes barely touch the front of the shoe and, although you wouldn't wear the shoes for dancing, you could wear them all day long and even while walking down a descent trail (with some discomfort) at the end of the day. Fit and comfort are definitely improved by socks. A good choice for most long climbs up to about 5.8 difficulty (harder if your techniques is good). We wear this type of shoe whenever we think we can get away with it, which is most of the time.

SNUG: The tips of your toes definitely touch the end of the shoe but they are not bent. Your foot feels almost like someone wrapped it with an elastic bandage; tight everywhere but without any painful pressure points. You may want to take your shoes off at the top of a long climb, but only after several hours of climbing. Walking down from a climb in these shoes would be quite uncomfortable, but not impossible. Socks will sometimes improve fit and comfort of shoes in this category. Ideal for most routes from 5.7 through 5.10

UNCOMFORTABLY TIGHT: You simply couldn't get your foot into anything much smaller. Walking is decidedly uncomfortable and your feet feel like the circulation is being cut off. If there are significant pressure points in a shoe this tight you won't be able to wear it at all. You'll definitely want to take your shoes off at belay ledges and the thought of walking down from a climb in them is nightmare material. Socks will get in the way of a good fit here. For difficult (5.11 and above) climbs, the added control of shoes this tight can make a difference, but for easier climbs the discomfort is simply not worth the negligible increase in performance.

Fitting Your First Pair Of Rock Shoes

1) You are looking for a comfortable to snug fit in a shoe that is shaped appropriately for your foot. Don't be swayed by people who tell you shoes have to be super-tight to be useful. This is simply not true until you are an expert (and then it is only true on certain types of climbs) and you'll wear out several pairs of shoes before you can really appreciate the difference a tight shoe makes. Why be unnecessarily uncomfortable during the process? Also, keep in mind that stretch in modern rock shoes is minimal. They don't break-in so plan on the shoes changing very little over time. DON'T BUY YOUR SHOES TOO SMALL!

2) Find a shop with a stock of at least two different models of "general purpose" shoes in your size range. Shoes in this category will offer good support (for a rock shoe) and a design that leans more toward comfort than performance.

3) Before fitting your shoes, trim your toe nails short and get a pair of lightweight socks, preferably cotton. We like the specialized rock climbing socks with no seam over the toes to cause discomfort.

4) Without lacing the shoes, stand in several different-size pairs of each model until you find the size where your all of your toes are touching the front of the shoe, but they are not bent. This approach will allow you to determine the correct length for each model. Don't pay any attention whatsoever to the sizes marked on the boxes other than to find relative size differences. It is not uncommon to have a perfect fit in each of two shoes that are marked several sizes apart. This process will leave you with one "best" fit for each model or a total of two "finalists". We also suggest you avoid looking at the price at this point.

5) This is where you determine the width (or more precisely the shape) of the shoe. Lace up one pair of the shoes and wander around the store for five minutes. The laces should be near the middle of their range; if there is little room to tighten them the shoe is too wide and if your foot causes them to open widely over the tongue area the shoe is too narrow. The shoes should be tight, but not unbearable. Pay attention to pressure points, especially over the toes; they usually won't go away. Find an edge to stand on and, with weight on it, manipulate your foot into as many positions as you can. You're not trying on street shoes so don't expect that kind of comfort, but remember you will need to wear the shoes for several hours at a time so pay particular attention to positions that are uncomfortable.

6) Now repeat the process with the other "finalist" shoes. You are looking for the shoe that gives you the best balance between snugness and comfort. If there is a clear winner that is the shoe to buy. If not, try to narrow the selection down by putting a different model on each foot at the same time. This side-by-side comparison often ends the confusion.

7) If there are no major fit differences between models you'll probably want to take into consideration such factors as price, color, and other minor differences. Usually fit will clearly be the deciding factor.

Resoling & Repairing Rock Shoes (and other climbing footwear)
Most rock shoes, and some approach shoes, can be resoled. Resoling can rejuvenate a favorite pair of rock shoes and many shoes perform better after resoling. This option is considerably less expensive than purchasing a

new pair of shoes, but make sure you resole before the sole is completely worn away. We suggest you have your shoes resoled only by a cobbler who has the equipment and skill required to do the job properly. Mark Meschinelli is a climber, and a talented second-generation cobbler, who can handle just about any type of footwear repair or modification. He has kept our shoes and boots healthy, and worked a few miracles on them, since 1985. The quality of Mark's work is superb. Contact Mark at:
Plattsburgh Shoe Hospital
9 City Hall Place
Plattsburgh, NY 12901
(518) 561-2580

Equipment For Following

Although we would be happy to lend you any equipment you need for our programs, most climbers want to get at least some of their own equipment. The list below is provided to help you make good buying decisions and it is arranged in order of importance. We are familiar with just about every climbing product on the market and we'll be happy to help you select other items if you need them. All safety equipment you use should be designed and intended specifically for climbing.

Climbing Harness

The most important consideration here is comfort, and everyone's body is different, so don't buy any harness unless you can hang in it to try it out. That eliminates mail-ordering a harness from the start. Although we don't have a favorite brand, we do suggest you buy a 'waist-belt and leg-loops' style of harness. There are some other harness styles on the market but they rarely fit as well, especially when you are hanging. A few gear loops on the waist-belt are handy, but don't assume lots of padding will make the waist-belt more comfortable; some climbers prefer waist-belts with no padding at all. Choosing a harness is simple; try on several brands/models and see which feels the best while hanging from a rope. Pay particular attention to positions that cause discomfort. Adjustable leg loops are a good option if you plan to climb throughout the year. If you buy a harness without adjustable leg loops, make sure BOTH the waist-belt AND the leg loops fit. You can only choose the type that feels the best if you are hanging. Limit your harness selection to models that are designed so that the climbing rope passes under the crotch strap of the leg loops and through a closed loop in the waist belt to form your tie-in knot. With this type of harness, the loop of your tie-in knot will be oriented in the vertical plane (the majority of harnesses do this). Other designs are confusing and offer no useful advantages. Chest harnesses are rarely used in the United States. By the way, if your harness fits well for rock climbing, it probably will be too small for ice climbing. If you want a harness that will fit well for rock and ice climbing your only option is to buy an adjustable leg loop model with extra length in the waist-belt.

Belay Device

We prefer simple dual-slot devices based upon the original plate designs. The Black Diamond ATC and numerous similar designs are versatile and adequate for nearly any climbing situation. Avoid the Grigri, multiple friction designs, and other complex or specialized devices.

Locking Carabiners (2)

Any of the major brands are fine and all designs work fairly well. We tend to prefer smaller carabiners because they don't get in the way as much as larger ones. We generally prefer screwgate locks, but other locking systems are OK too.

Nut Tool

Get a small one with a narrow profile and a special hole for removing stuck camming devices.

Non-Locking Carabiners (2)

Any of the major brands and shapes work well for general use. We prefer solid gates over wire gates for ergonomic reasons, but either will get the job done and wire gates are lighter.

Long & Short Prusik Loops

5mm Perlon works better than 6mm (Spectra cord should not be used). The short one requires 6 feet and the long one requires 10 feet. Use a triple fisherman's knot to secure the loops and try to get a different color for each loop.

Cleaning Sling

Mostly for convenience, a 24" sewn runner is handy when you can't get at the gear loops on your harness because they are covered by a jacket.

Chalk Bag

On more difficult climbs chalk can be quite helpful. Get a bag that will stay open and wear it on a separate belt rather than attaching it to your climbing harness. This arrangement will allow you to slide the bag around your body to keep it out of the way.

Helmet

We suggest you buy one of the lightweight UIAA approved models that adjusts to fit your head comfortably. Make sure you can use the helmet over a lightweight hat as well. The headband should provide a solid, secure fit; the chin-strap is mostly a backup. Stay away from the heavy models; they are just too uncomfortable for most people and it won't do you any good unless it's on your head. Helmets do help prevent head injuries so seriously consider buying and using one regularly.

Klettersack

This is just a fancy name for a pack for carry climbing gear. Any day pack will do, but there are many models available that provide some very nice features. 2,000-2,500 cubic inches is good size and the pack should be rugged. Ballistics or cordura nylon are good choices because these fabrics wear well. Various attachment systems for racking gear and carrying ropes may be useful but we find attachments often get in the way or snag if you wear the pack while you climb. You might also want to get a small fanny pack to carry just the essentials on a short climb.

Lightweight Wind/Rain Pullover

A very useful piece of clothing for summer climbing! A simple, non-coated nylon pullover will keep you warm when the wind comes up or an afternoon shower hits unexpectedly. These versatile garments stuff to grapefruit or smaller size and are great addition to any climber's wardrobe.

Suggested Reading

There are no required texts for any of our courses but "Mountaineering: The Freedom Of The Hills", published by The Mountaineers is as close to an alpinist's bible as it gets and anyone with mountain aspirations of any type should read this book! This comprehensive mountaineering text covers rock, ice and snow climbing along with glacier travel, navigation, basic first-aid and many other topics.

We maintain a small selection of books available for sale, including this one.

~ Mountain Adventures In the Adirondacks Since 1985 ~

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