

Sports

Working out 30 feet in the air

BY JANET FRENCH

The idea of "getting a workout" often brings to mind images of people running aimlessly like gerbils on a treadmill. However, adventure seekers need look no further than to indoor rock climbing for both physical and mental challenges.

Climbing is not only a test of one's strength and agility, but also a challenge to overcome mental obstacles and practice problem solving skills.

This past summer, I spent a month driving across the continent with two avid climbers. After listening to endless hours of their gushing, spoken in a barely comprehensible language of climbers' lingo, I decided to see for myself what all the hype was about.

Records of the beginning of today's rock climbing techniques date back to the 1800s, or possibly even earlier. However, rock climbing did not gain much popularity until the 1960s, when significant technological advances in equipment began.

In the past ten years, many indoor rock climbing gyms have opened their doors, which accounts for a recent explosion of interest in the sport. Ara Finlayson, co-owner of Ground Zero Climbing Gym, believes that the creation of indoor gyms not only makes the sport more accessible, but reduces the intimidation factor.

"Indoor rock climbing is an excellent way of exposing people to [the sport], but without the risks," said Finlayson. She emphasizes that although the indoor training prepares climbers for the physical challenges, outdoor climbing is a completely different experience. Outdoor climbs present the participant with loose gravel, bugs, the possibility of avalanches and many other mental and physical impediments.

Possibly the biggest appeal of indoor climbing is the small amount of experience or ability necessary to get started. Indoor climbing equipment can be cheaply rented, or bought for around \$200 (that'll include everything you need). After a quick introductory session about belaying, the technique used to hold the climber in the air by means of a rope, you and your partner are ready to roam the walls.

Or, if the idea of being suspended at large heights intimidates you, you can start off by bouldering. Bouldering involves climbing at lower heights without a harness, and is useful for practicing a variety of techniques. Ground Zero has simulated caves perfect for practicing bouldering.

Best of all, regardless of where you start, you don't need to be a body builder or a gymnast to scale these walls — just a little bit confident.

Naturally, a great advantage of climbing is the physical workout achieved as you propel yourself up

the wall. Climbing is an excellent anaerobic workout that targets some obvious regions like the back, chest, abdomen, arms and glutes (that's



Photo by Lee Pitts

your ass, for those lay people reading today) However, it also strengthens some areas that are harder to isolate in other activities, such as the forearms, hands, fingers, shins and neck.

However, most of the climbers at the gym said that the mental challenge of the sport was what kept them hooked. Climbing is not merely a quest of conquering physical obstacles, for it is also highly dependant on skills of logic, spatial awareness, problem solving skills, ingenuity and im-

agination.

Safety is an issue that is stressed highly to beginning climbers. Proper use of equipment is fundamental for good climbing, and should you be so confused as to think that these techniques are an overprotective measure, Ground Zero has some national fatal accident reports lying around to emphasize their adamance.

"They're very useful to read," another climber explained, "so that you can learn from their mistakes."

When asked if she had any comments to add, Finlayson explained that the main objective of climbing was naturally to enjoy oneself. She also adds that the sport of climbing could use more women, as it is generally a male-dominated interest. One web page dedicated to indoor climbing explains that there is an equal ability to climb amongst the sexes, because it requires both upper and lower body strength, agility and balance.

My first experience climbing was an absolute blast. Regardless of how terrifying the first climb was, the adrenalin rush when I reached the top was fully rewarding. It was amazing to find something that was such good exercise and much more fun than just "working out" at a gym. I will definitely go back for more.

Ground Zero Climbing Gym is located at 105 Akerley Blvd, Unit J, Dartmouth, NS. They can be reached at 468-8788. Each equipment rental and climb is \$15.

Reach For the Sky

The mental side of rock climbing

BY ERIN CORDEIRO

Looking for thrills, excitement and exhilaration, along with lots of fun? Then I have the sport for you. I started rock climbing only a few months ago, and it was love at first sight.

You'll always remember your first climb, and your first fall. When you finally reach the top you feel like you could conquer the world — you feel exhilarated yet humbled at the sheer power of the rock. Or, more correctly, the plywood.

Don't be misled though, the indoor climbing gyms provide just as much of a challenge as the real thing. And they're ideal for beginners. Here, anyone can find a challenge and feel gratified by reaching the top.

But why move from your

Stairclimber or Nordictack, you ask? "A sense of uncertainty that is potentially fatal is what makes climbing an adventure," said climber Jim Birdwell. "Anything less is just working out."

And why just work out when you can scale a 30 foot wall of rock?

I view climbing as an escape, but also as a good metaphor on life. As Birdwell writes: "Doubt is the enemy of success. It is a phantom that slips in under the layers of the conscious mind. Riding on bubbles of past failures, it comes to the surface to break down focus and disrupt concentration."

The goal in life is to overcome doubt, and when you're standing at the top looking down, all your doubts and worries seem as small as the people below.



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