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# **Biking, Climbing and More: The Thrill of eXtreme Sports**

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Getting Down and Dirty with Dirt Biking

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# **Biking, Climbing and More: The Thrill of eXtreme Sports**

## **Beginning Basics to BMX**

BMX is an exciting and adventurous sport, but if you have never done it before, it can be a little intimidating. Keep in mind, though, that everyone has a first time and that you can start in the sport whenever you like. Here are a few basics you need to learn so that you can get started in the fast and exciting sport of BMX racing.

First and foremost, you need a bike that is BMX track ready. That means you first need to get a bike with wheels no larger than 20 inches. Second, it must have the fenders, reflectors, chain guard, and kickstand removed for the safety of you and the other racers. It must have pads on the gooseneck, the handle cross bar, and top tube.

Your frame will need to be in good shape and have absolutely no cracks in it. Finally, your brakes need to be in top condition. BMX can be dangerous, so make sure you have the right bike and if you have any questions consult an expert in your local BMX shop.

Next you need to consider your clothing when it comes to BMX beginnings. You must have long pants. Racing pants work best and offer the best protection, but in the beginning you need only to make sure that you have long pants. Second, you need a long sleeved shirt or jacket. Again, racing shirts and jackets are best, but just make sure you cover your arms to protect against severe scrapes and cuts. Lastly, you will absolutely need a full-face helmet with chinstrap. A regular bicycle helmet is not acceptable and will get you kicked off of most tracks. You need to protect your face in the case of a crash.

Next, take some time to watch people that know what they are doing. There is more to the sport than just pedaling fast, though that does help. Watch closely how they move their bodies as they go over jumps. You will see them using their arms and legs as shocks. Also, watch where on the track they pedal and where they coast to get an idea of the best strategies. Then, the first time you get out there, take your time. You are not going to win your first race, and it is best to get a feel for how a race shapes up. As a beginner, smooth and clean is better than fast in most cases.

Next you will need to address your abilities at the starting gate. When you first start, you will likely approach the gate and use a one-footed start. This is where you have one foot on your pedal and the other down as a kickstand. As you gain experience you will see that most riders use a two-footed start where both feet are on the ground. Practice this takeoff and you should be able to get it down in the first day if you work at it. If not, some take as long as a week, but once you learn it you will see an immediate difference in your times and results.

Make sure you practice and do so often. The best way to improve is to get out there and learn the strategies, see what other riders do, and learn what works for you. You will see that you get better as you compete against those better than you. Pay attention to technique and

polishing your own races. The fewer errors in each race the more you can worry about speeding up your times.

Lastly, keep an eye out for clinics. Many tracks and local BMX organizations will offer clinics throughout the year. These are a great way to improve your jumps, your starts, or even your passes. Either professionals or very high-level amateurs will be able to teach you a great deal about your new sport.

BMX racing is fun and exciting for people of all ages. If you are interested in getting started in this sport, just take some time and know what you are getting into. Make sure you have the right bike, the right clothing, and the right knowledge to race. Then it is just all about practicing and gaining experience. Before you know it, you will be a top notch BMX bike racer.

## **FAQ's of BMX Bike Racing**

When it comes to the sport of BMX Bike Racing, like with any sport, there are a number of questions that come up consistently. Knowing the answers to such questions can help you make that jump from novice to semi-pro, or from professional to the top. Here are a few of the questions that show up often and the answers that will help you get past them.

### **What can be done about a clicking or skipping crank on my BMX bike?**

One thing to do is take the actual cranks apart, clean out all of the old grease inside, re apply lubricant on it and put the whole thing back together again. If, after the process, you are still getting a clicking noise, your cranks may be worn down or actually broken. The skipping is its own problem, and should be addressed immediately since a skipping crank can cause quite a spill. Check to see that your chain is in good shape or you may have to just replace cranks and chain to prevent future skipping.

### **I just got a new BMX bike frame, and in the technical information I keep seeing the abbreviation, B.B. What does that stand for?**

B.B. is short for Bottom Bracket. That is the portion of the bike frame where the cranks go in. There are four different types of bottom bracket, and each is a different size. These can range from Euro-style, Spanish-style, Mid-style, and American style BB's available.

### **Does the position of your handlebars affect bunny hops and other tricks?**

The simple answer is yes, but not in a good or bad way. Whether your handlebars are forward or back will just change the technique you use in performing your tricks and the way they feel to you. The position of your handlebars should be whichever one feels best to you. Find a comfortable setting and stick with it so that you will get a feel for how each of your tricks is best executed.

### **Are three-piece cranks better than one piece cranks?**

As a general rule, in BMX biking, three-piece cranks are going to be better. They are stronger to put up with the heavy abuse that BMX racing and freestyle environment. In addition, they are easier to install and work with. The three-piece cranks are going to cost you more money, but if you are serious about BMX biking it is certainly more than worth the investment. With a one-piece crank you may find yourself replacing it with alarming regularity.

**My child wants to get into BMX racing, how do I know which bike to get him? Is there some sort of guideline to look at for help?**

There actually is. Make sure you do all the necessary research before you buy a bike so that you get the right one. Remember that a BMX bike is not like a pair of shoes. You do not want your child to try growing into the bike. If it does not fit your child, it can actually hurt him. Ask at a BMX shop or at a local track to get guidelines that will help you select the right bike for your child.

**I am just starting in BMX bike racing, what type of clothing do I need to have?**

You will need long pants for sure. Racing pants will be better and protect you more, but at the very least most tracks will require that you wear some sort of long pants. For the same reasons you will also need a long sleeve shirt. Many injuries that happen in BMX racing are related to scrapes. So, long sleeves and pants are part of the protection. In addition, you will need a full-face helmet with a chin strap on it. The head always needs to be protected, and a traditional bike helmet does not work for BMX. You need a face cover and the special design of that a true BMX helmet provides.

**What are some of the customization required for a bike to be track ready at most BMX facilities?**

Most will require that you remove fenders, reflectors, chain guards, and kickstands from your bike. For safety, you will also likely need to have pads on the goose neck and handle bar cross in case you are thrown forward. Handlebars must have grips that cover the meal on the end and your frame should be crack and damage free. Make sure that your brakes are in good condition as well.

**Getting Down and Dirty with Dirt Biking**

A couple of things come to mind when you think of dirt biking; either a group of people gathered in the desert riding an assortment of bikes over various trails and courses on a hot summer day. Another type of dirt racing that may come to mind is the kind you see on the sports channels as you are surfing through the television trying to find something to watch.

There are the X-games, which are very popular and include not only dirt bike (motor cross) racing but also skateboarding, and trick bikes as well. They have several different types of races for those who love to participate in dirt bike racing also known as off road racing of course watching the fantastic speeds and jumps that these athletes perform are amazing for the spectators.

After World War II, dirt bike racing was performed primarily on a "flat track," which is how racing was done prior to the war. If they could not find dirt, ovals were made on a horse track. Europe during this time began holding motor cross racing, but it had not yet reached a widespread audience in the United States.

The first racing bikes were quite primitive especially by today's standards. They were not lightweight, but quite heavy and did not have much power. Their suspension systems left the rider wondering whether they had suspension at all as they traversed the rough terrain. Nevertheless, dirt bike racing offered two elements that would increase its success in the future of the sport: it was affordable and extremely challenging, and it provided up close and personal action for the spectators.

By the late 1960s, dirt bike racing had taken a hold of America. During this time, the American Motocross Association (AMA) began holding a variety of amateur and Pro-am races. By 1972, there was no holding back of the Americans and their love of the sport this same year the National Championship Motocross Series began. During the races, the Americans were primarily trying to beat their European rivals, but they did not have to wait long. By the 1980s, the Americans learned the sport very well and began to dominate dirt bike racing.

In 1971, the American Motocross Association (AMA) did something that would change the way the public would view the sport forever – they built a temporary track at Daytona International Speedway. This brought the sport to the spectators and the world of dirt bike racing would never be seen as something done out in the rural countryside again.

Now, if this was not big enough, they went further by transforming sports stadiums and the first place they did this was with the Los Angeles Coliseum. A new name was formed for dirt bike racing competitors and fans – "Supercross" was born. This term is from a combination of the words Super Bowl and Motocross.

Race weekends would never be the same once this transformation took place. Race weekends turned into well-executed weekend festivals that would draw spectators by the thousands. These races began drawing the best of the best competitors to the sport. During the 1980s and 1990s the racing teams, sponsors, and manufacturers pulled together to bring the sport to a wider audience and before long the top names in motocross became household names and before they knew everyone around the country wanted to own their own dirt bike and sales began sky-rocketing.

Today, the American Motocross Association (AMA) races, which includes, the Motocross and Supercross Championships are the best-attended motorsport that takes place in dirt, in the nation. Their races are watched worldwide via cable, Internet broadcasts, and satellite. You can see children as young as two and three years of age riding miniature dirt bikes complete with the racing outfit and helmet.

If you have never been to one of these productions, you are missing a superior sport in action. The heights the professionals pull off jumps, the turns, and of course the inevitable crashes that take place are breathtaking and the adrenaline rush you will be from simply being a spectator is amazing.

Keep an eye out when the next Motocross or Supercross race is coming to your city and be sure to be there to experience the rush that can only come from a sport that soars over and through the dirt.

## **How BMX Bikes Are Different from Other Bikes**

Perhaps one of the fastest growing types of bike on the market, the BMX bike is a mystery to many. You have probably heard of BMX bikes, and even have some idea of what they are used for. You probably don't know, though, what specifically makes a BMX bike what it is. Obviously bicycles vary, but that is it that makes a BMX bike? There are certainly ways of knowing.

Original BMX bikes came well after the invention of the bicycle. In the late 1960's they were made to as knockoffs of motor cross motorcycles. They were made for jumping and racing in dirt. Eventually they began to gain popularity with all kids, even those who were not into racing. Now, you will see that many kids use BMX style bikes to ride to school, play in the neighborhood, and as a way to visit friends in addition to racing and doing tricks.

A true BMX bike can be identified by a number of factors. While a regular bike may vary in wheel size, almost all BMX bikes will have 20-inch wheels. The tires will be very knobby to help with traction in loose dirt, as opposed to other bikes, which may have smooth or slightly treaded tires. Frames on the BMX bikes are very light and very sturdy to endure a lot of shock. The lightweight sets them apart in many instances since recreational bikes are often heavier.

The lightweight of a BMX bike is important because of the racing and jumping aspects of the sport. To keep them light, a BMX frame will generally be made of either aluminum or chrome steel. A regular bike that you might buy for casual rides in the park might be made of aluminum, stainless steel, or some other inexpensive composite. Aluminum is very popular with the BMX bikes because it will not rust and is the lightest weight material they have available.

Like other bikes, BMX bikes actually do come in a number of sizes for different size people. BMX is a sport that can often start with very young children that are even below school age, and they can continue to pursue the sport right through their adulthood.

There are essentially four sizes of BMX bike. You can find mini which is for children up to age 6, a junior will get them through age 9 as a general rule, expert size is for through the age of 13, and then a pro size is for getting through adulthood. Obviously, the size of the kid matters in this, but overall the sizes are a guide through age.

As opposed to many other types of bicycle, a BMX bike will use only one gear. Because of that, they are equipped with just the one chain wheel and have no gear shift on them. That is because they may be used for tricks as well and so many are equipped to pedal both backward and forward. This allows for racing up and down hills and jumping ramps with ease.

Another difference is that they often lack a front brake because there is no real use for one. They may also have padding in up to three locations: on the handlebar crossbar, the gooseneck, and on the straddle bar in front of the seat. All of these features are there for the

protection of the rider during BMX racing competitions and jumps. The same goes for the stem that is secured with four large bolts to help hold the frame together during a landing when all of the rider's weight may come down on the handlebars.

BMX bikes are big business. Between actual racers and the kids who just enjoy the look and feel of them, they sell at an amazing rate. You may also see a number of adults who ride them to do freestyle tricks or to ride in competitions. Thought you may think of BMX bikes in terms of kids, a large part of the upper end market is for adult riders and professionals.

There are, obviously a number of types of BMX bikes to accommodate all types of riders and all ages. The best bet, if you are thinking of buying a bike for yourself or someone else, is to ask an expert at a shop. Make sure you know what the bike will be used for and how much money you are looking to spend. Once you know those things, and once you understand the fundamental differences between bikes, you will be able to get the right BMX or other type of bike for you or someone close to you.

### **Pedal Pushers: The Extremes on Mountain Biking**

You have enjoyed riding your bicycle as a child, and didn't mind riding in the dirt, even though it took forever to get the chain cleaned up afterwards. Well, by now you have probably grown up and you still wonder what it would be like to ride your bike in the dirt instead of the sidewalk. Well, there is a sport for you and it is called mountain biking. In its purest form, mountain biking simply refers to riding your bicycle on any surface instead of paved roads. Thus it is not uncommon to see mountain bikers on beaches, mountain trails, and any other bit of dirt road that may be in your neighborhood.

While most mountain bikes have similar features, such as the thick, wide tires and a suspension that will absorb the worst of shocks from rocks and uneven ground, there are also as many bells and whistles as you care to spend money on. Just like a car, a mountain bike may come as a base model or fully loaded, which also includes a rather loaded price tag.

**There are a few safety precautions you will need to take in order to have an enjoyable ride:**

Know how to fix your bike. While you do not need to know how to take it apart and put it back together blindfolded, it is advisable for you to know how to fix any broken parts and especially a flat tire. Since mountain biking will quite often takes you miles from streets and therefore from help, it is imperative that you can get your bike up and running yourself, unless you are prepared to carry it for a very long hike.

If you plan a long distance outing, consider joining up with a local club or a group of mountain biking enthusiasts. This way you will have others around you who can help you, even if you are a couple of days away from the nearest road or convenience store.

Always, always, always wear a helmet! It is so easy to fall off a bike on a paved road, but the risk is much higher when traversing uneven dirt roads and paths.

As with any sport, there are a number of competitions and races that avid mountain bikers love to compete in. Depending on your level of enthusiasm and skill, you may wish to consider participating. Since there are different types of competitions, everyone from the endurance freak to the speed demon will find a niche that will satisfy her or his urge to show off what she or he is made of.

For the survivalist there are cross-country races that may be as long 15 miles. While the start line will see a huge group of riders, very soon the selection process will begin when bikes begin to break down and rider may or may not be able to fix the bike quickly. In a true cross country race, outside assistance with respect to mechanical issues is not permitted. Thus you will be wise to come prepared with tools and whatever other parts you believe you will need to fix your bike once or twice along the way.

If you are a speed demon, you may enjoy the downhill races. While the path is short, the speeds that can be reached are incredible and proper handling as well as an ability to read the terrain quickly and accurately is required. Because of the high speeds that you will reach, it is easy to get injured and you will be wise to follow all the safety precautions required by the event promoter.

Of course, for those who do not really care too much for break neck speed or being left in the dirt, literally, when the rest of the pack moves past you, there is the endurance race. Promoters have recognized the popularity of car endurance races and applied these concepts to the mountain biking world. Teams of varying makeup will compete in time trials of either twelve or twenty-four hour duration. It does not matter who goes through the finish line first at the end of the race, but which team was able to do the most laps.

### **Ain't No Mountain High Enough That Can't Be Climbed**

Mountain climbing, or mountaineering, is one of the oldest sports in the world. It is the timeless sport of scaling high slopes on a mountain with the goal of reaching the top, or summit, in mind. Mountaineering is actually a combination of many other sports, like snow, ice, and rock climbing as well as hiking and often camping.

Much of the introductory mountain climbing done by beginners is little more than hiking up hill. Because there is such a range of difficulty levels and it is easy to start, mountain climbing is very popular. The basic climbs also seem much less intimidating than if people had to start off scaling a straight up rock wall.

The other exciting part is that there is such variety in the sport even at its most basic levels. In fact, one day of mountain climbing can get you everything from freezing temperatures to unbearable heat due to changes in altitude, weather, and basic sub angles. This variety offers you the opportunity to use skills like problems solving, climbing skills, and overall physical conditioning.

When beginning mountaineering as a sport, there is a lot to consider in terms of training and equipment. In the beginning, supplies that are necessary really only include those similar to hiking: tents, sleeping bags, and rations are obviously a must, but little else. However, as the difficulty level increases and the slope becomes tougher, climbers will need ropes and other actual climbing equipment to ensure safety. In extreme climbing situations, rock and ice climbing gear is needed beyond the ropes and hiking equipment.

So with all of this in mind, how do you get started if you think mountaineering might be for you? The first thing you must do is figure out which type of mountain climbing would be best for you. Each type of mountain climbing, no matter what level, does require a certain amount of personal fitness as well as an investment of time and money.

Choose the one that sounds the most like something you would enjoy, rather than just looking for the one most commonly associated with more clout. Decide whether you like hiking more than climbing, what kind of weather you prefer to be active in, and how much cardiovascular effort you are willing to put into the sport. Once you have answered many of those questions, you will have an easier time deciding which type of climbing will work best for you.

In addition, as a beginner, it may be a good idea to consider hiring a mountain guide. Mountain guides are professionals who are adept climbers and skiers who can help lead you up a mountain safely. They know the terrain and can help you with what you need to know and what you need to do in order to get to the summit safely in some of your early climbs. As a beginner, spending time with a mountain guide is a great way to learn the basics of mountaineering before you try doing it on your own on a mountain you don't really know.

As a general rule with most anything, learning with a professional is the best and safest way to get your start. If your guide is certified, it means that he or she has done a number of trainings and has literally thousands of hours worth of personal experience climbing. Even if you are not a beginner, but you wish to advance a mountain that is beyond your skill set, a guide will be able to assist you with that climb.

For many a person globally, mountain climbing has become a complete lifestyle. For some, it becomes almost a complete obsession. However, for many, mountaineering makes a wonderful little distraction from the mundane nine to five living and routine family life. It fills the same gap that golf might for many others.

In addition, pursuing mastery of various aspects of climbing is a challenge that can last you the rest of your life and keep you in good physical condition. Many find that as they master one aspect of climbing, they immediately find themselves obsessed with the next phase. You just may find that one day you are that obsessed mastering climber, but the only way to find out is to get out there and get started right away.

## **Boulder Climbing: The Extreme for Climbers**

Boulder climbing, most commonly referred to as bouldering, is an extreme sport that has been around for a long time. Very often thought of as mountain climbing without the mountain and ropes, bouldering aficionados in Great Britain pioneered this sport some time in the late 1880s. In those days, the climbing of a boulder was considered a warm up and training activity for the more ambitious mountain climbs that the participants would engage in later on.

Self proclaimed American boulder climber pioneer John Gill has made many advances in this sport that have allowed it to enter the mainstream. As opposed to traditional rock climbing, the focus in boulder climbing is on the performance of the athlete on the rock they are climbing instead of on the headway they can make on any given mountain hike, the type of equipment they may have that ensures success of some mountain climbing expeditions and failure of others, or the personal safety gear they possess.

Safety is nonetheless of great importance to any boulder climber. After all, even though she or he will only be about six feet off the ground, a fall from this height will hurt and might result in severe injuries if safety precautions are not taken. Chalk is often used to allow climbers to get a good grip on the boulder they are climbing and to prevent them from slipping. Drying the hands and reducing slippage due to sweating hands, a chalk pouch is indispensable in this activity.

Another important item that should be a part of your climbing gear is the choice of shoe. While particular climbing shoes are not required and may even be looked down upon by the purists on the fringe of the sport, many climbers prefer to wear specialized climbing shoes that not only protect their feet from rock cuts, splinters, and painful twists, but also help them in securing a safe footing during their climbing experience.

In competitions, crash pads will break the fall of a climber and allow for a safer landing. Fortunately, boulder climbers no longer wait until the competitions come around to use a mat to break a fall, but many climbers now carry their own collapsible mats that they use when bouldering recreationally.

Many times an individual who is designated as a spotter will seek to direct the climber away from danger, or in case of a fall, will render first aid. A few boulder climbers will use top ropes to traverse a boulder, but the majority of the sports aficionados look on this safety precaution with disdain, as it distorts the actual beauty and goal of the activity itself.

Since bouldering has become a highly competitive game, judging methods have evolved over the years. At first the "B" system invented by John Gill was used. Terming boulders as problems that need to be solved, difficulty levels were assigned to different boulders. Thus, a B1 problem boulder would not be considered easy yet does not fall into the hard category either. A B2 problem boulder simply designates a boulder that is harder to traverse and master than a B1 rock.

The B3 boulder climb, on the other hand, designates boulders that have been so hard to climb that they have only been successfully mastered once. As is apparent to boulder climbing enthusiasts, the "B" system only worked for a short period of time until more participants in the sports brought more differentiated skill levels to the climbs. Soon the "B" scale was replaced by

the "V" grade system invented by John Sherman, another great of the sport. This scale is open ended, but at this point only designations from V0 to V16 are used.

Some refer to a VB rating, which simply means "V-basic" if a boulder does not even meet a V0 designation. Sometimes a plus or minus sign is added to the V designations to even further pare down the difficulty level of a rock. The "V" scale and the "B" system are comparable at times; for example, a "B1" problem as defined by John Gill is similar to a "V5+" problem designation using the John Sherman scale.

In Europe, the cradle of this sport, an entirely different grading system is used: the Fontainebleau grading. This system uses the numbers 1 through 8 and the letter designations of a through c. An "8c" rating would be similar to Sherman's "V15" rating.

## **Rocky Starts: Defining the Rock Climbing Craze**

Rock climbing has become a nation and even worldwide craze. People are coming to the sport in droves because it offers exercise and excitement at the same time. Do you see the appeal? If not, perhaps you should take a look at exactly rock climbing actually involves. You never know, you may be lining up to be a part of the crowd in no time flat.

Those who have attempted rock climbing before will tell you that it is many things, but easy is not one of those things. Most people, on their first attempt, come away feeling defeated by the sport. What beginners soon realize, whether they try indoor climbing or outdoor climbing, is that this sport requires an incredible amount of physical and mental energy. It is perhaps the most completely demanding sport around.

There are three basic types of rock climbing you can try. The first is called top roping and is perhaps the most common. In top roping you climb with a partner. From the ground, the partner has a rope from his harness up to the top of the rock and then back down to you as you climb. The second type of rock climbing is called lead climbing. In lead climbing you are still with another person and there are still ropes and pulleys. The difference is that the rope is not at the top of the wall, but it is instead hooked into clasps.

The third type of rock climbing is completely different. It is called bouldering, and there are no ropes or harnesses. As a climber, you will likely stay closer to the ground as you climb around and across the rock more than up the rock. There will generally be a route of some sort that you can complete without much resting. In some cases, you will be required to do what rock climbers call a dyno. In a dyno, you leap off the wall and grab onto a hold that is beyond your reach. This is why many will say that bouldering is the most mentally demanding of all the types of rock climbing.

Interestingly, experienced rock climbers will tell you that it is predominantly a leg activity. About three fourths of your work should be done by your legs, and then one fourth by your arms. The key to climbing well is to have solid technique. One major technique rule that you will learn early on is to at all times have three points (each hand and each foot is a point) touching the

wall. There is an enormous difference between having your weight on three points as opposed to two.

A second rule of technique is to always climb with your feet. Your hands will hold you to the wall, but should never be doing the pulling, and since your legs are stronger, it is a more efficient way to climb anyway. Thirdly, it is important to remember that the closer your body is to the wall the easier it will be for you to climb. With lots of practice, you will see that it is all this thinking and strategy that has helped make rock climbing one of the fastest growing sports in the world.

When you first begin climbing, no matter how well you have been taught technique, it is a good idea to start with one of the first two types. They are easier and by forcing you to have a buddy with you are safer as well. As you develop technique and strength you will find that you can then more easily move into bouldering if that is something you desire to try.

You may feel like rock climbing seems awfully extreme for a regular Joe like you, but it is quite the workout. As you get further into the sport, learn technique, body positions, and even how to shift your weight, you will see that your mental sharpness will improve as well. If you like to get out and work, but also enjoy chess or other strategy games, you will find that rock climbing is right up your alley. It is not enough to be strong or in shape, and it is not enough to be smart, you have to be strong and sharp.

### **Sports Climbing: Why It's Different from Other Extreme Climbing**

Sports climbing and other extreme climbing types are totally different sports. Despite the fact that both entail climbing up large structures, the differences make it so that the two cannot easily be confused. Consider each type and you will see that there is a definite difference between sports climbing and other extreme climbing.

Sports climbing is actually fairly recent in terms of popularity. Much of the sports climbing craze started during the 1980's. Since it does place an emphasis on strength and stamina, it actually helped the top climbers of the traditional sense improve. They found that the increase in strength and skill they go from the sport could be applied to traditional climbing. That then set the stage for an increase in climbing grades.

In addition, the sport of sports climbing is actually a unique form of rock climbing. It is heavily reliant on permanently affixed anchors into the rock. Usually these are bolts. This particular form of climbing puts a heavy emphasis on the physical side of the sport. When a route has already been set with bolts, a sports climb can be taken on with very little equipment. For sports climbing you will usually need a rope, quick draws, dynema and locking carabiners.

There are many areas, especially in parts of England, where sports climbing is not looked upon very well at all. Many of the rock climbers think that putting bolts in a mountain permanently takes away from the outdoor feel of the climbing experience. They also feel like the bolts damage the rock and in some ways may devalue the climb made by the first one up the

mountain who probably put the bolts in for his or her own protection as the climb progressed. In countries like that, almost all sports climbing is done indoors on climbing walls.

On the other hand, in some countries like Spain, sports climbing has become incredibly popular. There, you will find a number of different places that have many sports climbs available. Seemingly in Spain, it is actually the preferred type of climb, and thus you can expect to find access to tons of sports climb routes wherever you go.

On the other hand, other extreme types of climbing, also known as traditional climbing, is completely different. Traditional rock climbing is climbing where the routes are climbed starting from the bottom of the mountain and working up without the use of any artificial holds or bolts to make their way up. The lead climber temporarily provides protection as they make their way up. Traditional rock climbing is a form of free climbing.

Depending on the country you are in, the definition of traditional climbing may vary slightly. However, in North America, it may still be called traditional climbing even if there are bolts on the route. Someone on the lead, not the rappel, must place the bolts in this type of climbing. They also may only be where completely and totally necessary for safety.

Overall, the extreme or traditional climbing may be said to emphasize danger and adventure in climbing. By forcing participants to place their own bolts and collect them along the way, traditional climbing is often preferred by the climbing purists. However, it is up to you the one would be best suited to your wishes.

The main differences, then, in the two types of climbing are where the emphasis is. While sports climbing emphasizes the strength and stamina aspects of climbing, traditional climbing places a premium on adventure and exhilaration. Though both types incorporate both aspects, their emphasis in each definitely varies. Overall, sports climbing may not be as well respected in some places in the world, but it is often seen as the safest type of climbing and thus great for beginners to learn the sport,

Sports climbing, no matter what others may think of it, is a growing sport that shows no signs of slowing down. Much of the craze that is sports climbing is due in no small part to the growing number of indoor climbing walls in sporting goods stores, gyms, and now even some spas. Indoor climbing is a form of sports climbing and is a fantastic way to learn the sport before you hit a real live rock. Even outdoor sports climbing is a leap from the indoors since weather conditions can really play a big part in your climb, the grip you can get, and your overall sense of wellness as you climb.

### **The Cool Appeal of Ice Climbing**

As far as the physical challenge, the focus, and determination and, of course, the goal of ascending a nearly vertical surface, ice climbing has certain similarities to rock climbing. A major difference is that rock climbers have many natural hand-holds to use while climbing, while ice climbers make their own holds with ice axes (one in each hand) and spikes (called "crampons") on the toes of their climbing boots.

That, however, is just the beginning of the gear required for ice climbers. There is the normal climbing (climbing safely that is) gear such as harnesses, ropes and miscellaneous things with cryptic names such as: "quick draws," "shock absorbing runners", "biners", "leashes", and "locking biners". In addition, there are specialized ice climbing gear such as "ice screws", "ice pitons", and "ice screw clippers".

The obvious extra requirement for ice climbing is the clothing -- remember, you're climbing on the ice and the weather must, by necessity, be cold enough to keep it ice. Included in that clothing, something rock climbers don't necessarily wear, is a helmet. Ice climbers need to worry about falling chunks of ice more frequently than rock climbers worry about falling rocks.

If you are climbing for the first time, it is highly advisable to be with either a professional guide or an experienced friend who knows that you are an amateur. Climbing with an equally inexperienced drinking buddy will almost certainly lead to disastrous consequences. Ice climbing has a complete set of potential hazards that an experienced hand can help you avoid. Never, under any circumstances (or 'under any influence') climb alone -- there are some sports that can be more enjoyable when experienced alone with your thoughts, but climbing is not one of them.

Another option (actually the best option) for the first-time climber is joining mountaineering or climbing club. These clubs always have professional instructors and, best of all they might have access to an indoor climbing gym. Depending on where you live, you might be able to find a climbing gym near by. Unless you live in an area where there is a big interest in ice climbing (due to a nearby mountain), you may have to travel a bit to find an indoor ice challenge.

Most climbing gyms have special memberships for beginners. They realize that most people like to try something out before making a major investment in equipment. An introductory package at one of these climbing gyms may cost between \$50.00 and \$75.00 but it may also include equipment rental, an instructor's time and time to practice. Not a bad deal, even if you have to travel a couple hundred miles to get to it.

You can make it into a weekend adventure that is as much fun and as challenging as a trip to an ice-clad mountain, while being a lot safer. The climbing gym gives you a safe, controlled, convenient way to not only learn what you will face in the "real world" -- on the face of a mountain, but how to face it. Also, you will learn what techniques work for what situations and also give you a chance to make sure your body is up to the challenge. Climbing is fun, no doubt about that, but it is a physical challenge that is as rigorous as that of the cross-country runner or the channel swimmer.

After completing one of these introductory climbing courses at an indoor gym, you might consider taking some advanced courses before tackling a mountain. Many climbing gyms offer classes that will make you into a safer climber under almost any real-world weather condition and classes that teach you to safely lead groups up the mountain.

You'll find that your fellow ice-climbers have a strange sense of humor and love to crack jokes about falling off the mountain, but don't confuse that with a cavalier attitude or over confidence. Their humor is usually just a cover-up for their healthy fear and respect for the

dangers of the sport. The 'secret' to being safe in the sport of ice climbing is no more secret than it is for any other sport: find a competent teacher, take what he or she says very seriously, practice and focus on what you are doing.

You will be climbing in some of the most breathtakingly beautiful environments you'll ever see. You may be able, occasionally, to stop and drink in the beauty but when your are climbing, when its you against the mountain, it is only a fierce determination to make it to the top and an extreme focus on every movement that advances you another foot, that will keep you safe.

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