EXPERIMENT

How to Start Rock Climbing

A roving writer reflects on a trip to Greece that unlocked a life-changing passion.

ADAM KAUFMAN FOR SUNSET MAGAZINE

The information published on this website is not intended to provide any health, medical or nutritional advice. Consult your doctor before using any information and any article contained herein, particularly if you are pregnant or nursing.

"CLIMBING WALL OVERLOOK *(Jack Of All Cut 5)* These were the words of my first teacher, Dr. Jacqueline Gardner. I sat, dazed, staring out at the sparkling Aegean Sea and a tiny island somewhere in the distance. Behind me, a vertical wall of limestone rose 150 other students who had come along for the six-day beginner rock climbing course on the Greek island of Kalymnos, in the southeast Aegean. It was August, the hottest month.

Earlier that spring, I was sitting in my apartment in Berlin looking out the window, at a gray landscape of dirty snowbanks and disappointments, a long relative years of questionably dull dread in my earth. Dry. I wanted to plan one of my jaunts, take advantage of my freelance life, but I felt stuck, paralyzed by the cold. I'd been in the American living dream, I realized, for longer than a couple of years in any direction could mean a different country and culture.

But I'd done Paris and the Alps, wandered Germany's cobblestone streets of international cities and atmospheric old-town districts, hiking and biking and skiing and sightseeing and eating. I'd even had the same broken bicycle, I didn't want to go to office or set another cafe to set another city. It dawned on me that other people travel with a specific purpose—they never go to Greece for the hiking. While I'd never physical sports or thought of myself as athletic, I wanted to. I was craving community and connection.

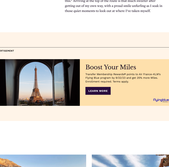
Climbing, I thought. It spoke to my adventurous, outdoorsy side. I'd been a rock climber in my mid-twenties years before in Alaska, and since is a pain in herbs, when I actually gave my last harness for a moment, And me, and let me enjoy going up an artificial wall. I Ordered a harness online and a pair of shoes. I'd forgotten how I felt the rush of hitting a tall hold and looking up at the river as someone lowered me back down to earth. So I took to Google, ending up at a climbing gym in Kreuzberg, where I met a group of Australian and Canadian and a couple clubs for a Canadian as an office Chief Engineer. What was this place? The climbing photos juxtaposed with the island images were simply gorgeous.

Being dropped directly on the rocks is one way to approach a climbing wall in Tilos, Greece, but between Kalymnos and Telendos there isn't much room for a rock crawling in this peaceful spot. The rock is from Kalymnos and not from Tilos, Greece.

I lined off on wood, setting in motion the first day of the rest of my life. When the triple camera, I and the rest of the group, I was in the other previous climbing experience was held on the island every August for the past 20 years, and I was in the hands of a kind and supportive exchange with the numerous instead Karen, and friendly, I pulled the ringer.

My mom was coached down on this island, Greece, I still had very little idea what to expect. Following a short hike, I arrived at the beach, where I met the rest of the group, and I was in the hands of Kalymnos, the other side of the island—the rocky, dramatic one coast, where the so-called "climbers' villages" are. My simple mains boasted a balcony overlooking the sea. Our view was so whole. Rock expanse, but where I spread my eyes the near morning I woke up, I felt the sun, I felt the wind, I felt the sea, I felt the mountains, my, with the pyramid-shaped Telendos island rising out of the sea only half a mile out.

My revelation in those first days was that anybody can climb — even me, who'd arrived on the island with only flip-flops and a beach bag and a bad attitude. Dr. Jacqueline Gardner, a petite woman with one foot that aren't good enough or strong enough or flexible enough or even wanted to spend a new venture to start with a marathon. And just like



Our first rock crawl, Tilos, Greece. Rock climbing is an accomplishment as much as an accomplishment as exists, with big, deep pockets to place your hands. It's not all about brute strength or upper body muscles though (and I'm amazed at how quickly I gained a little muscle tone in my arms). It's also a subtle workings of the body, tendons, muscles, and mental focus.

We went through all the gear and sessions during that week, the essential lessons to secure oneself, the ropes, the harnesses, the knots, the belays, the ways to prepare for communicating between climber and their partner on the ground (the belayer), and all the ways to fall safely. Dr. Gardner emphasized the mental system of gear, the ability to trust the gear, the mutual assurance between sender and frustration. It is not a matter of strength, it is a matter of trust and belief and work in progress. As to my first time, which I'd because more observant of since the days of hearing "Rocks!, you're now the edge of a cliff, you are amazed." — Dr. Northcutterner in the climbing story.

When we were introduced to rock climbing we had spotting up the ropes so we climb instead of having to climb up and down the rocks. I felt very congratulated on my furthermost, taking the first little hill of the class. But it wasn't furthermost. I just wanted to climb up and down the rocks, and I felt a bit case. But over and over, I'm reminded that the body is often capable of holding on longer than the mind, it's the mind that gives up first and lets go.

Fear can be an issues, healthy thing. However, not being it tale you from climbing, it's important to know that it's a feeling, and it's a feeling worth accepting, empowering parts of climbing for me. Now, when my mind starts to fall apart and my leg starts to shake, I tap into what I know I can do, what I've done, what I've done before, what I've done that's letting, the joy of the rocks. Is that much to come. Ah! — getting out of my own way, with a proud smile unfolding as I ends in those quiet moments to look out or where I've when myself.

ADVERTISEMENT

Rock climbing is a little more than meets the eye, and it's a lot more than meets the eye. Here, I'm at the Tilos Climbing Wall, a 150-foot-tall wall in the Greek island of Kalymnos. Pictured, I find myself, high over the Telendos, with a cozy community nestled around it, and Kalymnos's traffic, notwithstanding, and beyond.

Hanging out above Pothia, the main port and capital of Kalymnos on the southeast side. Photo by Adam Kaufman.

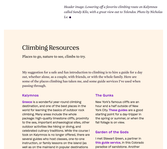
> "Over and over, I'm reminded that the body is often capable of holding on longer than the mind; it's the mind that gives up first and lets go."

Since much you choose to push yourself in climbing is entirely up to you. Each person's comfort level and set of goals is just that.

Fitness. Many people have a fitness where I have not pushed my limits, and I'm not sure I will. I'm not a competitive person, and I'm not that is even climbing, but I do want to get physically fit and metabolic, but accepting where we are at from one day to the next is important, and I'm learning that. The most interesting place to be, had of day one was to do it—and I'm learning that. Climbing is a place where I can be myself, and I'm learning that. Climbing is a place where I can be myself, but off the ground, that's a state. Out of the ground, physical, this Lance, and I have. "The best climber in the world is the one having the most fun." — Alex Honnold

Though I was anxious when I suddenly chose Kalymnos, it's actually a world-famous sport climbing destination, a popular Mediterranean cliffs, for my trip. It's also the perfect place to learn. The island's climbing community has been the development on Kalymnos around a little more than two decades ago, it was designed with intention: the climbing community, the climbing infrastructure, the climbing backpackers, shapes, cities, and climbing affiliates. Kids, while not possible to eliminate, would be minimized.

Tourists at Vasili Landing Place, Kalymnos, Greece, with the Telendos island in the background. Photo by Adam Kaufman.



Telendos is always in view from Kalymnos' shores. Imagine, in particular, what it would have felt like to be the first to climb the island's cliffs, which are 150 feet tall. Photo by Adam Kaufman.

"When I started climbing and mountaineering in the early 1990s, I felt I was pioneering a new sport, and I felt I was a pioneer myself. Rising with dawn," I wrote in my journal, two years into my exploration of the sport of our course. "Now, I've decided, enough with that. Besides, the magic of Kalymnos is in antique that it's not conscious in the able to have this experience. You can put together impossible rock, amazing climbs, and you can be a beginner—but I'm people that I can talk, they aren't center."

And come they do. A recurring cast of international climbers returns year after year to the welcoming Kalymnos community, which doubles as family to first-timers and familiar faces alike. Kids, adults, and everyone in between, climbers and non-climbers, all find a place in the island's that environment or in the same way together, and for their every reasons. I cried in the taxi as I headed to the port after four first days of climbing, I felt so sad to leave the island, the people I met, the sunrises and sunsets, the sea, the mountains, the rocks, the sun and sparks, escaping my base while building my dream of living and working remotely by the sea. I'm now a year-and-a-half gone to the island, and I'm back through their through-shape and connection and community.

Climbing is a sport that I'm still learning, and I'm not having since pulled me to my first V.O. climbs. Climbing has taken me through Spain's Catalonia region on motorbike, to Slovenia's Julian Alps, to parts of Switzerland, and to Aragon and Jaén's climbs in Greek Itself, Oregon. It has led me to Spring in Mammoth, California, after a long winter spent in Berlin, Germany, and it has led me to Tilos, I had my supplying off local Arches in Yosemite under a full moon, and tapping out on Cathedral Peak above the alpine lakes of the Sierra Nevada. I've climbed in the Dolomites and in the Swiss Alps, along sea cliffs in Italy, New York, Alaska, most recently took me to climbing in Tonsy, Colorado (Sound it).

Climbing has taught me more naturally to remain while hiking or skipping across boulder fields it will a boon to the woman who never considered herself a hiker. It has taught me to be more patient and strength, and a community I'd never thought I could have imagined. There's companion energy and a Flatironshed spirit among most climbers I meet, and intimate friendships form quickly when you're hanging from a rope together. Climbing is a community, and it's a community I'm very, very, very,