



New Rock Climbers

YOUR FIRST STEPS TO CLIMBING OUTSIDE

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The British Mountaineering Council is the public voice for climbers and mountaineers in England and Wales » we secure access to crags and mountains » we deliver discounted courses and lectures » we arrange member discounts at over 700 retailers nationwide » we provide specialist insurance cover » we supply Summit magazine every quarter » we have over 75,000 members, and the numbers are rising...

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Naomi Buys on *Goose in Lucy* (6c), Foxhole Cove, Gower Peninsula. Photo Mike Hutton



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www.sportengland.org

BMC Participation Statement

The BMC recognises that climbing, hill walking and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement.



This book contains a number of illustrations provided by Mountain Training, taken from their book *Rock Climbing* by Libby Peter. Buy online from the BMC shop

www.bmcshop.co.uk



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1. The Great Outdoors

If you enjoy climbing indoors, good news – you'll probably love climbing on real rock.

Great days can be had climbing outside, visiting beautiful places, being with your friends and having a good old-fashioned adventure. Three major styles of climbing are outlined in this booklet: bouldering, sport climbing and traditional climbing. Some styles are best suited to particular seasons and most climbers do a bit of everything throughout the year.

Britain is often referred to as the home of adventure climbing, famous for the incredible variety of rock types on offer. Our cliffs may not be the tallest, but they present many new challenges not experienced indoors. Slabs call for a balanced approach, cracks demand jamming with fingers, hands and fists whilst overhangs require good footwork and inventive body positions.

You can spend a day bouldering, get away from it all on a high mountain crag or enjoy the sea breeze climbing on one of our world-renowned sea cliffs. Movement on real rock can feel different to indoor climbing. With no coloured holds to follow, the choice on offer can be overwhelming. Footholds will seem smaller but there are more of them. It takes time to learn what holds you can trust, but soon your footwork and technique will improve. Adding variety to your climbing is a great way to develop your skills.

Climbing outside takes you to special places with unique flora and fauna which climbers have a responsibility to leave as they find. It is not unheard of to see seals or pods of dolphins when sea cliff climbing or peregrines, buzzards and golden eagles in the mountains. Rare plants also find refuge on our cliffs.

Climbing can take you to incredible places all over the world. If that sounds like your thing then read on.



WATCH: Our short film about climbing outdoors

www.thebmc.co.uk/firststeps



2. | How to try climbing outside

Can anyone climb? Yes!

People of all ages, genders, backgrounds and abilities enjoy climbing. Climbing routes and boulder problems are graded by difficulty so it's possible to find something to suit all abilities. The variety on offer results in climbing being a life-long pursuit for many people, with climbers visiting crags well into their 70s and 80s. Many people with physical, learning and sensory disabilities climb too. Read our *Climbing For All* booklet to discover more about how people with disabilities can enjoy climbing.

www.thebmc.co.uk/climbing-for-all



It's never too young to start



Join a club, find a friend, do a course

Join a club

Clubs provide a great opportunity to meet like-minded people to climb with. There are over 300 BMC climbing, hill walking and mountaineering clubs in England and Wales. These vary from small and local to large national clubs, with some clubs owning huts in prime locations near crags. Many climbers are members of one or more club for decades, building life-long friendships. Find a club near you on our website.

www.thebmc.co.uk/find-a-club

Other resources

BMC TV's Skills channel is full of short films covering the fundamentals for climbing outside. New films are added regularly and chances are that you'll find one to hone your skills. For a comprehensive video resource you can purchase the BMC's Rock Climbing Essentials DVD online from the BMC shop.

www.bmcshop.co.uk

<http://tv.thebmc.co.uk/channel/skills>



Ask a friend

Many climbers take their first steps outside with an experienced friend or family member. This can be a fun option. Do you know anyone who climbs outside to show you the ropes?

Get active outdoors

The BMC subsidises rock climbing courses at Plas y Brenin, the National Mountain Sports Centre in Snowdonia. Ideal for indoor climbers wanting to take their first steps outside.

www.thebmc.co.uk/activeoutdoors

Go on a course at an outdoor centre

As well as Plas y Brenin other outdoor centres and climbing walls across the country deliver tailor-made courses for beginners. Delivered by qualified instructors, you will be equipped with the fundamental skills for climbing outside.

Hire an instructor, coach, or mountain guide

To receive instruction tailored to your individual needs, consider employing a professional. This will enhance your long term development by helping you to identify your strengths and develop your weaknesses. Progress your skills, allowing you to enjoy future adventures with only your own wits to guide you. Find an outdoor professional on Mountain Training's website.

www.mountain-training.org/find

No amount of reading or training can make climbing completely safe, but if you adopt a progressive approach, developing your skills incrementally and building upon past experience, you can minimise the risks and maximise your enjoyment.

Climb within your ability

Risk

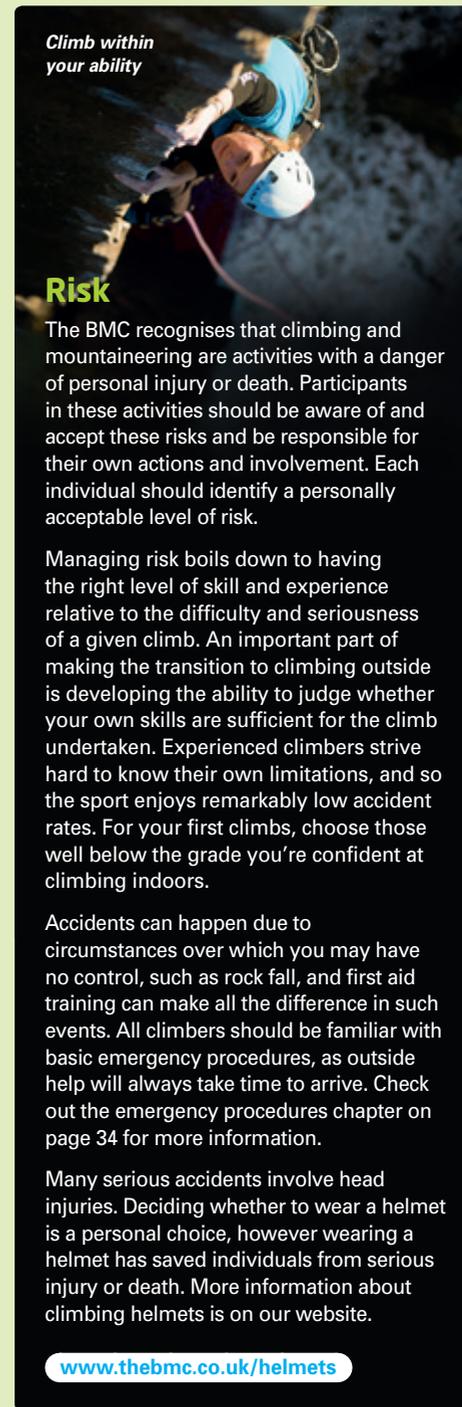
The BMC recognises that climbing and mountaineering are activities with a danger of personal injury or death. Participants in these activities should be aware of and accept these risks and be responsible for their own actions and involvement. Each individual should identify a personally acceptable level of risk.

Managing risk boils down to having the right level of skill and experience relative to the difficulty and seriousness of a given climb. An important part of making the transition to climbing outside is developing the ability to judge whether your own skills are sufficient for the climb undertaken. Experienced climbers strive hard to know their own limitations, and so the sport enjoys remarkably low accident rates. For your first climbs, choose those well below the grade you're confident at climbing indoors.

Accidents can happen due to circumstances over which you may have no control, such as rock fall, and first aid training can make all the difference in such events. All climbers should be familiar with basic emergency procedures, as outside help will always take time to arrive. Check out the emergency procedures chapter on page 34 for more information.

Many serious accidents involve head injuries. Deciding whether to wear a helmet is a personal choice, however wearing a helmet has saved individuals from serious injury or death. More information about climbing helmets is on our website.

www.thebmc.co.uk/helmets



3. | Join the club

Joining a club is a great way to try climbing outside.

Why join a club?

You can learn to climb, progress your skills and make new friends with like-minded climbers. Many clubs have pooled equipment for members to use, very handy when you're starting out. You'll discover new places to climb and receive advice from experienced climbers. There'll be opportunities to meet up at local crags and fun trips further afield.



Get clubbing and make new friends

How do i find a club?

Search for a club near you on the BMC website or enquire at your local climbing wall. Over 300 climbing, hill walking and mountaineering clubs are affiliated to the BMC. Some clubs are open to all, while others are open to those with a certain level of experience. There are women's clubs, university clubs, and more besides. There's bound to be a club to suit you.

www.thebmc.co.uk/find-a-club

What are the benefits of joining a bmc affiliated club?

BMC affiliated clubs can apply for training and equipment grants. Members of BMC affiliated clubs have access to third party liability insurance, subsidised training courses, support from BMC staff and volunteers, BMC travel and activity insurance, a free copy of BMC Summit magazine, mountain huts and discounts at over 700 outdoor shops.

www.thebmc.co.uk/why-join-a-club

What do i need to join?

Many clubs cater for beginners, but some have guidelines on what is required to join, so check their websites or send an email. You may need to be a competent indoor climber for example.

Can i try before i join?

Most clubs allow prospective members to come and try out the club by attending a social event, climbing session or dedicated new members' meet. Remember that all climbers were beginners or new members once.

How to choose a club

Check out club events calendars on their websites to see what they do. Ask questions like what their age range is, where they go climbing, how regularly they meet and what training opportunities there are.



WATCH: Our club film on BMC TV to see what fun you can have

www.thebmc.co.uk/clubfilm

4. | Young climbers

Children are natural climbers. Scaling trees, clambering over walls and exploring rock pools are all common childhood activities.

Visiting a local indoor wall is a natural first step for children wanting to climb, with the skills and techniques learnt there transferable to climbing outside. Many indoor walls run children's clubs and indoor-to-outdoor courses, some working in partnership with the BMC.

www.thebmc.co.uk/rockout

The 'How to try climbing outside' section on page 4 of this booklet lists many ways to get into rock climbing, including the BMC's Active Outdoors courses, some of which are specifically for young people. Additional rock climbing opportunities for young people are provided by local youth services and organisations such as the Scouts, Girlguiding and the Duke of Edinburgh's Award.

www.thebmc.co.uk/activeoutdoors

Clubs

Clubs provide a great opportunity to meet other climbers. Many BMC clubs welcome children when accompanied by a parent or an adult acting in loco parentis. As a general rule, clubs do not provide formal instruction but opportunities for novices to learn from those more experienced.

www.thebmc.co.uk/find-a-club



Competitions

Delivered at indoor walls and open to children aged 7 to 17, the regional BMC Youth Climbing Series provides opportunities for young climbers and their parents to meet others to climb with. Talented children are identified from the Youth Climbing Series and invited to attend the BMC Regional and National Academies.

www.thebmc.co.uk/youth

www.thebmc.co.uk/regionalacademies

Safeguarding young people

The BMC's Child Safeguarding Policy and Guidelines are designed to protect young people and vulnerable adults, and support those who look after them. The policy outlines the BMC's roles and responsibilities and those of BMC employees and volunteers. The guidelines include good practice advice for adults working with young climbers.

www.thebmc.co.uk/safeguarding



Parents may not be climbers themselves but can download *Young People*, a parent's guide to climbing, hill walking and mountaineering from our website. The various activities are explained and the meaning of commonly used climbing terms provided. Children and their parents also need to understand the risks associated with climbing, which the guide helps to address. The majority of today's best climbers began climbing when children, developing climbing skills and risk awareness in tandem.

www.thebmc.co.uk/youngpeople

5. | Being a climber

Joining the outdoor climbing community comes with responsibilities. Always be mindful of these three things.

- Your right to climb at a crag or on a climb
- Your impact on the rock and surrounding environment
- Your behaviour and its impact on others, including the landowner

www.thebmc.co.uk/greenguide

Chipping

NEVER, EVER chip the rock. Chipping is the ultimate selfish act, lowering a move to the chipper's level and denying another climber ascent by fair means. Chipping will make you very, very unpopular.

Brushing and chalk use

It is common to brush excess chalk from holds, but only ever use a soft nylon or horse hair brush. Some rock has a hard exterior layer, which once removed, accelerates the erosion of softer rock underneath. A wire brush should never be used.



WATCH: Caring for rock and using chalk

www.thebmc.co.uk/chalk

Dogs

Much wildlife would not see man's best friend in a positive light, so keep your dog under control at all times. During the nesting season dogs off the leash can snaffle up chicks, usually without the owner even noticing.



WATCH: One dog and his man

www.thebmc.co.uk/dogs



WATCH: Don't ruffle feathers by ignoring access restrictions

www.thebmc.co.uk/birdsfilm

Never ignore climbing restrictions – your actions could lose access for everyone.

Sanitation

If you need to go, bury your waste about 15cm deep to increase rates of decomposition. Carry a ziplock bag to pack out your toilet paper. Burning paper on hot dry days can cause a fire.

Clean your boots

As climbing legend Johnny Dawes once said, 'If somebody cleans their boots well, you can tell that they care about the rock and about themselves. If you stand on a hold and your foot's clean, it's good for the rock and good for you.' Nuff said.

Gardening

Keep cleaning to a minimum, ensuring you don't remove any rare species. If in doubt, remove nothing.



WATCH: Be nice to nature

www.thebmc.co.uk/cleaning

Parking

Be considerate and don't block gates or entrances - a major cause of access issues. Parking a little further away than you may wish often eliminates conflict with local residents and farmers.

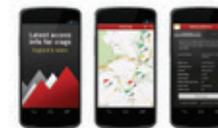
Silent Running, Range West, Pembroke. An easy climb on a non-tidal sea cliff, but with multiple seasonal access restrictions due to nesting birds and MOD live firing.

Access to climb

The majority of popular climbing cliffs have no access restrictions. However, to balance the needs of outdoor recreation and conservation, seasonal restrictions are placed upon some cliffs, a period of time when climbing is not permitted. Many restrictions are there to protect nesting birds from being disturbed.

The BMC is the expert body on climbing and conservation, negotiating for any restrictions to be reasonable, whilst recognising conservation needs and other interests. The BMC manages the Regional Access Database (RAD), listing cliffs in England and Wales with access restrictions. Available as a free iPhone and Android app or searchable online, it's easy to check access restrictions before heading out. Guidebooks also detail access restrictions, but these can quickly date.

www.thebmc.co.uk/rad



Download on the
App Store

GET IT ON
Google play

6. | Bouldering

Bouldering is justifiably popular, and for many, is the essence of climbing. With no ropes, harnesses or hardware involved, bouldering is an easy first step to take when climbing outside for the first time. There are new risks to manage not encountered indoors, and strategies for dealing with some of them are outlined here.



What equipment to take

Climbing shoes used indoors will work fine outside. As boulder problems are short, and it is not uncommon to land on your back - and on your mat! - chalk bags are often not worn. Instead a larger chalk 'bucket' is taken. Bouldering mats absorb the impact of a fall, but are not a failsafe against injury, especially if you miss them. Bouldering in groups with many mats allows for more of the ground to be covered. As problems are tried repeatedly, the rock can wear quickly. A rag to clean your boots before climbing protects the rock and improves your chance of success. Chalk can build up on holds, and a soft brush for bouldering will clean holds and protect the rock. Hard brushes can damage rock.



WATCH: Bouldering kit

www.thebmc.co.uk/boulderingkit

What is bouldering?

Bouldering is climbing 'problems' - like very short routes - of five to ten moves not far above the ground without ropes. Whilst indoor bouldering walls have extensive matting throughout, when outside you're not so lucky! Instead, bouldering mats are taken to absorb the impact of a fall.

Where to boulder

There are many bouldering venues across the country with their problems described in guidebooks. The BMC publishes guidebooks for the Peak District, a world class bouldering destination. Another guidebook, *Boulder Britain*, showcases venues throughout the country. You may also find an artificial boulder in your local park, perfect for that outdoor climbing fix! Check out our list of beginner venues.

www.thebmc.co.uk/boulderingvenues

www.thebmc.co.uk/guidebooks



Check before you go

Some cliffs have seasonal restrictions placed upon them, often to protect nesting birds from disturbance. Always check your desired crag for restrictions using the online BMC Regional Access Database (RAD). Ignoring restrictions jeopardises future climbing access. Android and iOS RAD apps are available for free.

www.thebmc.co.uk/rad

Where to start

The techniques you gain indoors will soon translate to real rock so just get stuck in. Start with easy problems and work your way up. Don't think too much about grades, but appreciate that you are learning a whole new set of skills. Bouldering is the perfect group activity, with everyone working together to unlock a tricky problem.

Outdoor problems are - literally - set in stone. You can't and most definitely should not change anything about them. Problems are often named by the person who first climbed them, often with evocative names.



WATCH: How to boulder responsibly

www.thebmc.co.uk/boulderingssense

Holds

If you've only climbed indoors then widen your horizons - there's a lot more choice on rock. For a start, the way ahead is not clearly marked. Holds won't be as obvious and footholds often less positive. You'll have to look and think harder. Different rock types will provide very different experiences, one of the many beauties of climbing.

Grades

The same system is used indoors and outdoors, V grades (V0, V1, V2...) and Font grades (Font 4, 5, 5+, 6A...). However, as real rock is so different to indoors, this is where the comparison ends. Start with grades way below what you've climbed indoors. As you gain experience, you'll improve. Climbers with good technique often find they climb harder on real rock.

Family fun

Age is no barrier to bouldering. What could be better than a family picnic and some bouldering on a sunny day? Bouldering can be a great way to introduce children to climbing. Think of the boulders as a giant adventure playground.



WATCH: Descending off a boulder problem

www.thebmc.co.uk/descent



BOULDERING SKILL:

Spotting and mat arrangement

Bouldering mats (also known as bouldering pads) can reduce the risk of injury when landing and a good spotter makes them even more effective.



WATCH: Happy landings when you fall!

www.thebmc.co.uk/landing

What is spotting?

Spotting is a technique for reducing the risk of injury when a boulderer falls off, guiding them to land upright on the mat, and taking care to protect their head and back.

How to spot

Hold your arms outstretched and slightly bent like shock absorbers. You're not aiming to catch the climber, but direct them to the mats and ensure they don't topple over or roll off when they land. How you make contact with the climber depends on the nature of the boulder problem and the body position of the climber when they fall. Spotting places you in a position of responsibility and possible harm. Assess the risks and check you're happy before agreeing to take on the job. You don't want to get squashed by your mate, or get knocked over if they fall. Bouldering in groups means more mats, more spotters and greater safety.



WATCH: How to spot a boulderer

www.thebmc.co.uk/spotting



Placing the mats

Place mats the right way up with the hard foam on top, creating a level surface. Don't just pile them on top of each other. Try to cover as large an area as your mats allow, whilst minimising any gaps in between. Consider filling gaps with a rucksack, ropes, clothing or small mat doubled up. Check carrying straps are out of the way. It would be daft to execute the perfect landing only then to trip over a strap and hurt yourself! Always think where the fall zone is, as mats are only useful if landed on. Not every problem goes straight up, and climbers can fall in the most surprising directions. The spotter may need to move a mat during a climb.

www.thebmc.co.uk/placingmats

What's underneath a problem?

Are there small or large rocks?
Does the ground slope away?
A small doubled-up mat could be wedged under a larger mat to make a flatter surface. A spotter can stand up against this arrangement to prevent it from sliding down a slope.

7. Sport climbing

Experienced indoor climbers will be familiar with many sport climbing skills. The same grading system is used and the routes are equipped with bolts. But there are new risks to manage not encountered when climbing indoors. Strategies for dealing with some of them are outlined here.

Where to climb

There are many sport climbing crags across the country with their routes described in guidebooks. The BMC publishes guidebooks for the sport climbing crags in the Peak District for example. Some cliffs have seasonal restrictions placed upon them, often to protect nesting birds from disturbance. Always check your desired crag for restrictions using the online BMC Regional Access Database (RAD). Ignoring restrictions jeopardises future climbing access. Android and iOS RAD apps are available for free.

www.thebmc.co.uk/rad

www.thebmc.co.uk/guidebooks



What equipment to take

Whilst ropes may be in place for top roping at climbing walls, this is not the case outside. At least one climber needs to lead, carrying their own quickdraws to clip to the bolts and their rope. Make sure you carry enough quickdraws for your route, with a couple extra just in case.

www.thebmc.co.uk/quickdraw

The same harness, rope and belay device can be used outside as indoors. As outdoor routes are generally longer, ensure the rope is at least twice the length of the climb to allow for lowering off from the top. Serious accidents have occurred when the rope has been too short, and a wise precaution is to tie a knot in the spare end of the rope before climbing. Helmets are commonly used outside, providing protection in case of a fall or something falling from above. Watch our film and download our helmet guide to find out more.

www.thebmc.co.uk/helmets

With no matting outside, the lead climber can be very exposed before clipping the first or even second bolt. Specialist clipsticks allow bolts to be clipped from the ground, reducing the risk of a ground fall when leading. Watch our film to see how these work.



WATCH: How to use a clipstick

www.thebmc.co.uk/clipstick

What to do at the top of a climb?

When leading indoors there are karabiners at the top to clip into. This is generally not the case outside, and the most important sport climbing skill to master is threading a lower-off at the top of a route. There will commonly be closed metal rings to thread the rope through, requiring the climber to untie their knot, thread the lower-off and tie back in. Doing this incorrectly can be fatal. Our step-by-step guide on page 15 outlines the process, and you can watch our film too. Practice at ground level first before doing it for real, maybe at one of the lower-off practice stations the BMC has installed at walls.

www.thebmc.co.uk/loweroff

Top roping routes

Top roping sport routes is very popular, but as with all climbing it's important not to monopolise a route for extended periods. A consideration unique to sport climbing is to always thread the rope through your own karabiners clipped into the lower-off. Top roping directly through the lower-off results in it being worn out very quickly.

Who places and monitors bolts?

Bolts are generally placed, monitored and replaced by local climbers, but no-one is ultimately responsible for maintaining them. Therefore, climbers need to assess the bolts they use. If ever unsure of a bolt's worthiness, then retreat from your route, maybe leaving some gear behind as you do. This is much better than risking serious injury should a bolt fail. It is however important to stress that bolt failure is extremely rare. Bolts are usually placed by climbers who then climb the route, with a vested interest in ensuring they are safe. Find out more about how to sport climb safely and how to look after lower-offs with our guide and BMC TV films.

www.thebmc.co.uk/safer-sport-climbing

Grading system

The same grading system is used at indoor walls and sport climbing crags. A direct comparison cannot of course be made between rock and an artificial surface, so drop your grade on those first climbs as you get used to the rock. When climbing outside, it is common to find routes on varied terrain, with easier climbing interspersed with short harder sections.

Josie Ball on The Railway Children (6a), Dinorwig Slate Quarry, shortly after making the route's first ascent aged ten

HOW TO:

Thread a lower-off at the top of a sport climb

Threading a lower-off involves untying and retying your knot at the top of a climb. If done incorrectly, the outcome can be fatal. Both belayer and climber must concentrate and communicate and there should be no reason for the belayer to take the climber off belay.

Ensure you master this essential skill at ground level before being faced with it far above the ground. Many walls have practice stations, some of which were installed by the BMC.

www.thebmc.co.uk/simulators



1



2



3



4

1. Clip into the lower-off with quickdraws or slings attached to your central loop. Clip into both anchors or the central ring joining them.
2. Thread a loop of rope through the lower-off and tie a figure of eight in it.
3. Attach this to the central loop of your harness with a screwgate karabiner.
4. Untie the original tie-in knot.
5. Check that the rope passes from your belayer, through the lower-off, to the knot clipped into your harness.
6. Call to your belayer to 'take in' and check that you are tight on the rope. Once happy you are securely attached, unclip the slings or quickdraws attaching you to the anchor.
7. Call to your belayer to lower you to the ground.

If a loop of rope cannot be threaded through the anchor, follow this procedure after stage 1:

- 2a. Pull up a metre of rope, tie a figure of eight knot in it and attach it to the central loop of your harness with a screwgate karabiner. This will ensure you are belayed at all times and prevent the disaster of dropping your rope!
- 3a. Untie from the rope, pass it through the lower-off and tie back in to your harness.
- 4a. Untie the figure of eight knot attached at stage 2a.

Rejoin the steps to the left at stage 5.



WATCH: How to thread a lower-off

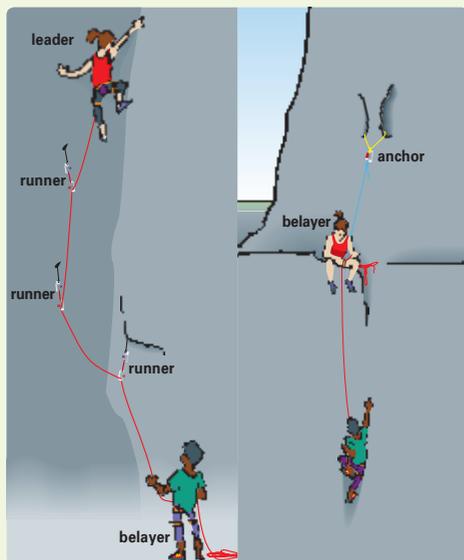
www.thebmc.co.uk/loweroff

8. Traditional climbing

Traditional climbing, or trad climbing, offers an unparalleled sense of freedom. Mastering the skills opens the door to climbing adventures around the world.



Stanage, a great beginner's crag with lots of short single pitch climbs



What is trad climbing?

Trad climbing is roped climbing, where instead of clipping bolts, the lead climber places metal protection, known as runners, in cracks as they climb.

The leader clips their rope to each runner with a quickdraw, and on completing the route, makes themselves secure at the top. They then belay the second climber who retrieves the runners.



WATCH: How to lead a trad climb

www.thebmc.co.uk/leadtradclimb

Your first trad climbing venue

There's great trad climbing to be had throughout Britain. Popular novice venues include Dartmoor, Swanage, north and south Wales, the Peak District, Yorkshire, the Lake District and Northumberland. Scotland offers immense variety throughout. Read on for advice on identifying suitable beginner venues.

SEE: Top 10 British trad crags for beginners

www.thebmc.co.uk/tradvenues

Read a guidebook



Definitive and selected guidebooks are available for all major climbing areas. Many will identify beginner routes, such as the BMC's guide for The Roaches in Staffordshire.

The route description will provide some idea of what's in store. Phrases such as 'a bold slab' imply limited protection. Conversely, 'a well-protected climb' would be more suited for the beginner.

DOWNLOAD: FREE Roaches guidebook chapter

www.thebmc.co.uk/roaches

SEE: FREE online Stanage guidebook

www.thebmc.co.uk/zoomtopo

Go small

The granite tors of Dartmoor, the gritstone cliffs of the Peak District and Yorkshire and the sandstone edges of Northumberland are just some cliffs offering short single pitch climbs. Most mountain crags and sea cliffs offer climbs completed in stages, known as multi-pitch climbs. These are more committing and not best suited for novices. Great benefits of single pitch climbs include ease of communication between climbers, the ability to lower to the ground if necessary, and ease of descent once the climb is completed.



Check before you go

Some cliffs have seasonal restrictions placed upon them, often to protect nesting birds from disturbance. Always check your desired crag for restrictions using the online BMC Regional Access Database (RAD). Ignoring restrictions jeopardises future climbing access. Android and iOS RAD apps are available for free.

www.thebmc.co.uk/rad

Your first trad climb

Start easy

Whatever grade you climb elsewhere, choose the easiest climbs available for your first outdoor trad routes.

Just as a child won't learn to ride a bike on a busy road, you want to master trad climbing in as unchallenging an environment as possible. Once fluent, you can push yourself a little more.



Consider top roping

Before leading your first route, top rope it first. That way you can spy out cracks for protection and will feel more confident when leading it. Do not top rope a climb for extended periods, be considerate of others wishing to climb it.



Practise at ground level

There will be plenty of cracks at ground level to practise using your climbing equipment. Familiarise yourself with your equipment before climbing.



WATCH: How to use common climbing protection: nuts, hexes and cams.

www.thebmc.co.uk/nut

www.thebmc.co.uk/hex

www.thebmc.co.uk/cam



Use your eyes!

Before setting off take a good look at your climb. Note cracks where you can place protection, and reassure yourself that your chosen climb is well within your abilities. Plan for success!

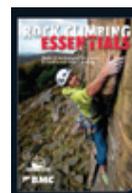
Choose a good belayer

Easily overlooked, your belayer literally has your life in their hands. Choose someone competent and attentive.



WATCH: How to belay a leader on a trad climb

www.thebmc.co.uk/belayleader



Get inspired

From small crags to mountain climbs and towering sea cliffs, the BMC's Rock Climbing Essentials DVD shows you the very best of British trad climbing. A range of technical chapters will help supercharge your skills.



WATCH: Rock Climbing Essentials trailer

www.thebmc.co.uk/rockessentials

Equipment

Before doing your first trad climbs you will need to get kitted out correctly. Choosing the right equipment will help you enjoy your climbs.

Slings

Two or three 120cm slings will complement any first rack. They can be worn around the body with the two ends connected by a krab. Slings can either be placed over spikes as a form of protection or used to equalise a belay.



Belay device

A belay device allows you to control the rope without the full weight of the climber going through your hands. Read our free leaflet for comprehensive advice on choosing a belay device.

www.thebmc.co.uk/belay



Quickdraws

Quickdraws connect the gear you have placed in the rock (e.g. nuts and camming devices) to the rope, therefore reducing the distance you would drop were a fall to be taken. For a first rack 12 quickdraws is a good amount. Aim for a mixture of short, medium and long lengths.

Camming devices on krabs

Camming devices are designed to fit parallel sided cracks and often fit in spaces where larger wires do not. Three of varying sizes is good to start off with: one small, one medium and one large.



Single rope 50 or 60m, 10mm

You will need a rope for your first single pitch trad climbing adventures. A 10mm single rope is a good all-rounder, providing a good balance between weight and durability.



Equipment



Screwgates

Screwgates allow for additional safety. Ensuring that they are done up will prevent accidental opening and the karabiner being loaded 'gate open'. Get yourself two medium size and one big.

Nut key

An essential piece of kit. Occasionally wires can get stuck in cracks if they have been placed too firmly. In this scenario a nut key is used to help remove them.



Nuts size 1-10 on a krab

Wires come in a range of sizes to match the sizes of cracks you might expect to find on a traditional rock climb.



Hexes on krabs

The largest form of protection carried, due to their strong and robust nature they are popular as part of a solid belay. Three will be sufficient (one small, one medium and one large).



Organising equipment

Develop a system for racking equipment on your harness that works for you, and keep to it. This will allow you to locate equipment quickly when climbing. Gear such as nuts and quickdraws should be placed close to hand, with larger and less used items placed further back.



WATCH: How to rack up for a trad climb

www.thebmc.co.uk/rack

Using equipment



Good nut placement in narrowing crack



Well-placed hex



Poorly placed over cammed



Well-placed: evenly cammed

It takes time to learn what piece of protection will best fit a crack, which is why experimenting at ground level is such a good idea.

Nuts should be seated in a crack with a firm tug in the direction the force would be applied should the climber fall off. Hexes work well in larger cracks, their offset sling making them cam in a crack as force is applied. Mechanical camming devices can be used in parallel-sided cracks. Unlike nuts and hexes, which are tugged to seat them, camming devices are assessed more visually. All protection can be pulled out of position as the rope runs through it, if too short a quickdraw is used.

It is easy to place equipment so badly that no security is offered, but when placed well, real protection is provided.



Sling threaded around block

Slings used on natural rock features such as threads and spikes can also provide protection. When using spikes slide the sling backwards and forwards in the direction that the force will be applied, and check the sling does not ride up and slide off.



Mental approach

Do not rush into leading trad climbs before you fully understand and accept the risks. Hanging on long enough to place protection takes much more effort than clipping a bolt. A positive frame of mind is essential for leading climbs, so regular practice is key, particularly if you want to progress to harder routes.

Desire is vital for leading climbs. Only try a climb if you really want to get up it, but don't get despondent if you fail, it happens to everyone. Failure can help to identify weaknesses to address.



WATCH: How to place climbing protection effectively.

www.thebmc.co.uk/nut

www.thebmc.co.uk/hex

www.thebmc.co.uk/cam

Building belays



At the top of your climb you need to build a belay and secure yourself to it. Once safely attached, you can belay your second. There are two simple yet vital principles to follow when building a belay, namely that all the individual pieces of equipment, or anchors, are **independent** of each other when linked together, and the ropes or slings joining them are **equalised**.



Anchors are independent of each other if, should any one piece fail, the remaining anchors are not shock loaded. Anchors are equalised if pulled with an equal force once connected together.

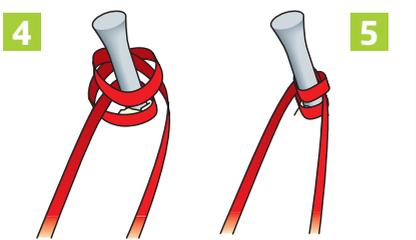
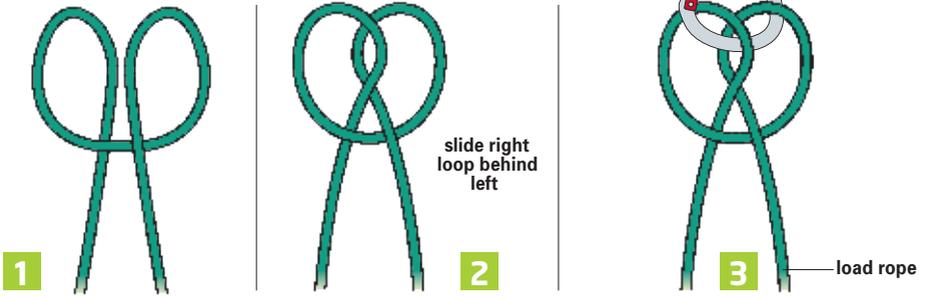
Both requirements can be fulfilled using slings and ropes tied with clove hitches and overhand knots.

If using nuts, hexes or camming devices a minimum of two must be used to build your belay. A sturdy tree or large boulder can suffice as a single anchor.

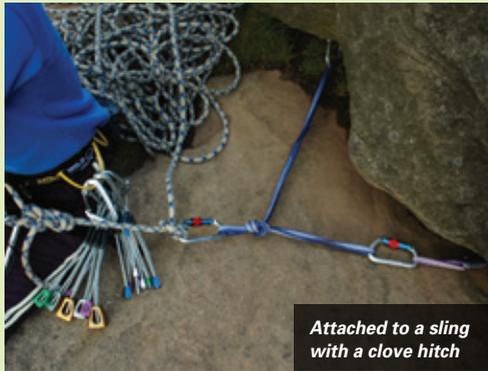


Clove Hitch

Useful for tying on to anchors due to its simplicity and adjustability (1, 2 & 3).



When tying a clove hitch on a stake, the cross should be at the back of the stake, allowing it to tighten when loaded (4 & 5).



Attaching to anchors



Single anchor within reach

Tie a clove hitch to a screwgate karabiner at the anchor.



WATCH: How to attach to a single anchor within reach at the top of a climb

www.thebmc.co.uk/oneanchor



Single anchor out of reach

Clip the rope through a screwgate karabiner at the anchor.
Tie a clove hitch to a screwgate karabiner attached to the rope loop on the harness.



WATCH: How to attach to a single anchor out of reach at the top of a climb

www.thebmc.co.uk/oneanchor



Two anchors within reach

Tie a clove hitch to a screwgate karabiner at the furthest anchor.
With some slack in between, tie a clove hitch to a screwgate karabiner at the nearest anchor.
Finally, tie a clove hitch to a screwgate karabiner attached to the rope loop on the harness.



WATCH: How to attach to two anchors within reach at the top of a climb

www.thebmc.co.uk/twoanchors

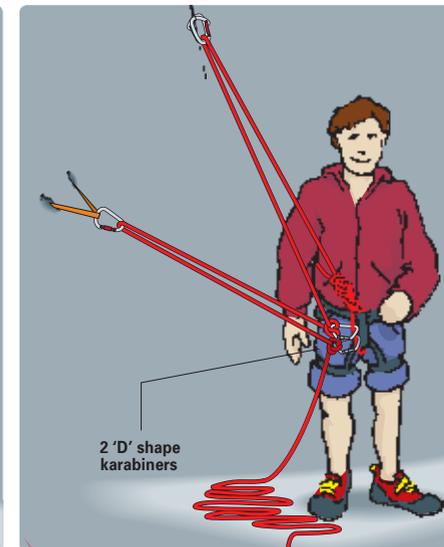
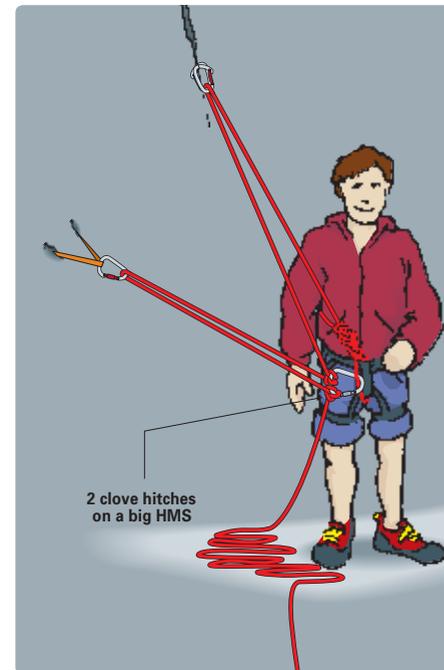
Two anchors out of reach

Clip the rope through a screwgate karabiner at the furthest anchor.

Tie a clove hitch to a large HMS screwgate karabiner attached to the rope loop on the harness. Ensure the rope is tight on the anchor.
Clip the rope through a screwgate karabiner at the nearest anchor.

Tie a second clove hitch to the same HMS screwgate karabiner attached to the rope loop on the harness. Ensure the rope is tight on the anchor.

If you do not have a large HMS karabiner, then use two separate screwgate karabiners instead.



WATCH: How to attach to two anchors out of reach at the top of a climb

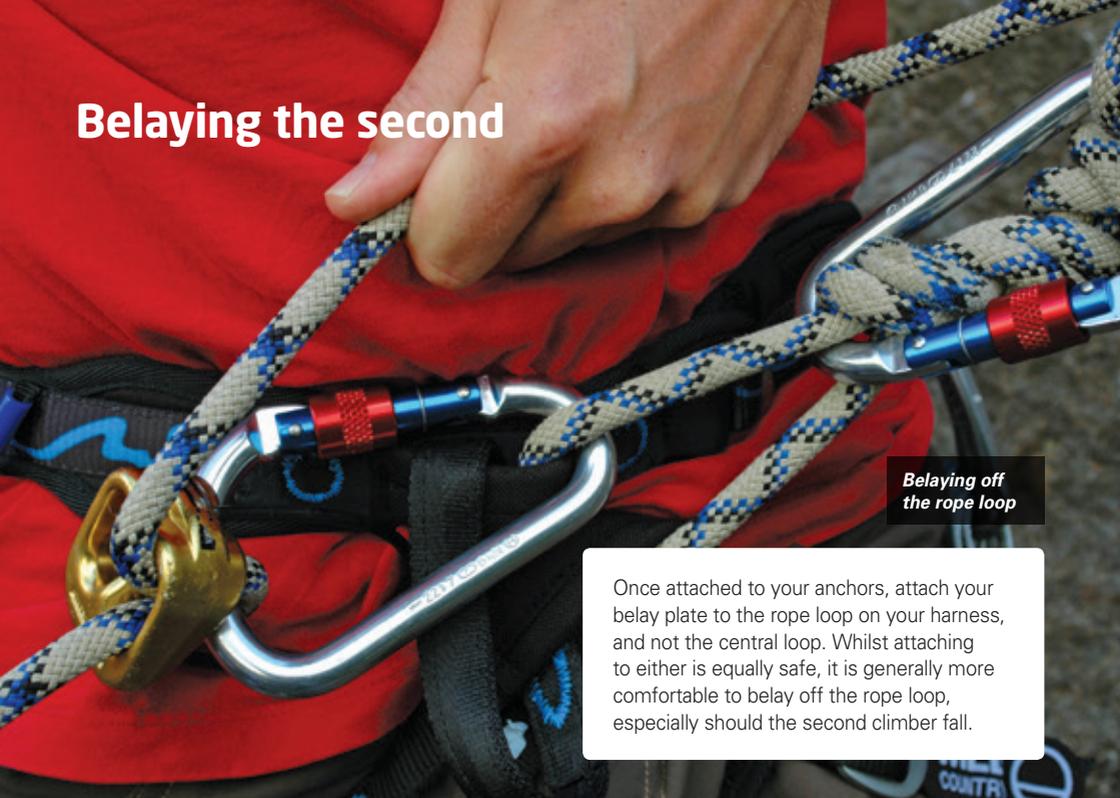
www.thebmc.co.uk/twoanchors



3 Anchor essentials!

- 1 Anchors equally loaded
- 2 Anchors independently tied off
- 3 Angles between anchors 60° or less

Belaying the second



Belaying off the rope loop

Once attached to your anchors, attach your belay plate to the rope loop on your harness, and not the central loop. Whilst attaching to either is equally safe, it is generally more comfortable to belay off the rope loop, especially should the second climber fall.



Belaying off the central loop

Whenever belaying at the top of a climb it is essential to consider what will happen should the second fall. Ensure you are tight on your anchors, and if at all possible, positioned where you can see your partner climbing. Climbers fall without warning, so be fully confident of your ability to belay effectively.

 **WATCH:** How to belay at the top of a climb
www.thebmc.co.uk/belaysecond

Climbing grades

Climbing grades

While indoor and sport climbs use the French grading system, trad climbs use the British grading system. Though the two look similar, both using figures such as 6a, 6b, 6c, they are not equivalent, a regular point of confusion.

Trad climbs have an adjectival grade and a technical grade. The adjectival grade starts at Moderate (M), and then progresses to Difficult (D), Very Difficult (VD), Severe (S), Hard Severe (HS), Very Severe (VS), Hard Very Severe (HVS) and Extremely Severe. This last grade is abbreviated and open ended – E1, E2, E3..... The technical grade indicates the climber's hardest move, progressing 4a, 4b, 4c, 5a, 5b, 5c, 6a, 6b, 6c, 7a, 7b.

Together with a route description, the two grades provide a rich picture of what to expect. A grade such as Very Severe can range between VS 4a to VS 5a, with VS 4c being the benchmark grade. VS 4a will ordinarily have quite easy moves, but less protection that one would associate with 4a climbing, therefore meriting the VS adjectival grade. Conversely, VS 5a would suggest a climb with one very well-protected 5a move.

Most grades have an average where the climbs strike a good balance between the difficulty of the moves and the quality of the protection. These are roughly: S 4a, HS 4b, VS 4c, HVS 5a, E1 5b, E2, 5c. Climbs rated Difficult and Very Difficult rarely have technical grades.

Climbers often describe themselves using adjectival grades, such as, 'I'm a VS leader', meaning they're happy leading pretty much any VS graded climb.

www.thebmc.co.uk/grades

UK adj.	UK tech	French sport
M		
D		F1
VD		F2
S	4a	F3
HS	4b	F4
VS	4c	F4+
		F5
HVS	5a	F5+
		F6a
E1	5b	F6a+
		F6b
E2	5c	F6b+
		F6c
E3		F6c+
		F6a
E4	6a	F7a
		F7a+
E5	6b	F7b
		F7b+
E6		F7c
		F7c+
E7	6c	F8a
		F8a+
E8	7a	F8b
		F8b+
E9		F8b+
		F8c
E10	7b	F8c
		F8c+
E11		F9a

Falling off

The ultimate goal of a successful lead climb is to reach the top without falling off. If you do slip unexpectedly do not attempt to grab any protection. You could badly hurt your hand or worse. You could even pull the piece of protection out, and so fall further.



Multi-pitch trad climbing

Multi-pitch trad is more of a challenge both physically and logistically than single pitch climbing. You have to climb pitch after pitch and be slick with your rope work. Persevere and it will grant you access to some of the most amazing climbing on offer – long routes in mountains and adventures on sea cliffs.

Before embarking on the route consider how you will get off. It's a good idea to carry some spare cord and a karabiner that you are willing to abandon on an abseil retreat if necessary.

Treat multi-pitch climbs like an expedition. Aim to be independent in the event of incidents or unexpected changes in the weather. For your first multi-pitch climbs choose easy routes of two pitches.



WATCH: Leading a multi-pitch climb

www.thebmc.co.uk/multipitch

If unable to complete a move, reverse back to a resting spot. If this happens on your first leads then you have likely chosen something too hard, and it would be advisable to retreat to the ground. The safest way to escape is to down climb to below a couple pieces of good protection. Then continue down climbing or lower to the ground, whilst ensuring you have sufficient rope!

Stripping gear as you down climb is a good way to get injured, as many climbers can testify. Equipment is replaceable, but your health isn't. It may be your first lead outdoors with brand new equipment, but losing a few wires and quickdraws costing £50 is infinitely preferable to broken bones. You should also be able to retrieve any equipment by abseil.



Practice at ground level

9. | Abseiling

Abseiling is used to gain access to a climb, commonly on sea cliffs, to retrieve equipment left behind on a route or as a means of emergency descent, such as due to bad weather. Abseiling is more hazardous than rock climbing and you should take your safety very seriously at all times.



WATCH: How to abseil

www.thebmc.co.uk/abseil

There are a number of films on BMC TV that look at abseiling of single and multi-pitch climbs. Before you abseil for real, do a dry run at ground level, or down a grassy slope.

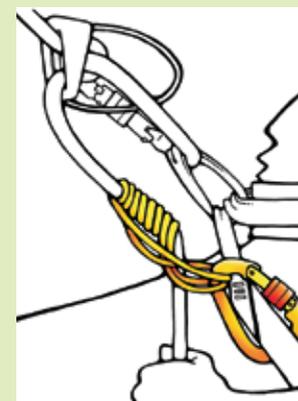
Abseiling » get it right!



1

Check the Anchors

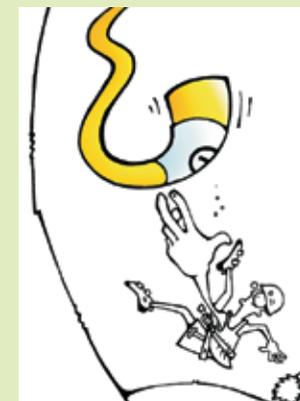
Anchor failure is not an option – if in any doubt always leave extra gear behind. Check the rope is properly threaded through the anchor. Check the abseil device is correctly attached to both you and the rope.



2

Use a Prusik

A French Prusik can be used as a backup when abseiling. The prusik should grab the rope if control is lost, but this is not foolproof. The prusik can be used in a variety of ways, and when abseiling on two ropes it must be wrapped around both. When used correctly, the prusik should not become trapped in the belay device.



3

Knot the Rope

The consequences of abseiling off the end of a rope are usually fatal. Tying a big enough knot in the ends of all ropes should prevent this from happening.

How to tie a French Prusik

www.thebmc.co.uk/abseiling



10. | Emergency procedures

Climbing incidents range from inconvenient to life threatening. There is no golden rule on what to do but there are some well-established principles.

Make a plan

Stay calm and assess the situation. Consider what should be done immediately to safeguard everyone. Try to determine your position and consider the options for walking down, sending for help, or finding shelter.

Only minor injuries should come within the scope of treatment and self-evacuation. For all other cases make the casualty safe, start first aid, and send for Mountain Rescue.

Sending for help

Dial **999** and ask for:
POLICE and then **MOUNTAIN RESCUE**.

When connected, provide:

- 1 Location of the incident
- 2 Number and names of people in the party and their condition
- 3 Any injuries and names of casualties

Be ready to provide the following additional information:

- Number of the phone you are using and any other phones in the group
- The nature of the incident – what happened?
- Time of the incident
- Any distinguishing feature at the accident site

If there is no coverage at your location consider walking to find a better signal. If no signal can be obtained, one of more people with full information about the accident should find the nearest telephone or mobile signal. At least one person should stay with the casualty.

Emergency text service

The emergencySMS service allows you to send texts to call for help in areas with low signal – a potentially lifesaving tool. You must register before using the service.

www.emergencysms.org.uk

Alone with a casualty

If alone with no phone signal and with no reply on shouting for help, assess the relative dangers of leaving the casualty against failing to get help. Act decisively in the interest of the casualty whilst not endangering yourself.

First Aid

Many climbers do not consider the importance of first aid training until standing next to an injured partner. First aid courses tailored for climbers and hill walkers are available. Book yourself on one!

Support Mountain Rescue

Mountain Rescue Teams are run by volunteers, relying on donations to operate. Your support goes a long way to ensure the service continues. Collection boxes are located in pubs and outdoor shops in most upland areas. Alternatively, donate online at

www.mountain.rescue.org.uk

www.mountainrescuescotland.org



Some rescues require helicopter evacuation.



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