

Rock climber says there's mo

by Rhonda Watters

Focus Editor

"If you blow it in tennis, you lose the match. If you blow it in climbing, you lose your life. It is, in fact, the most dangerous game."

— Kevin Donald

It seems that only a fool would play a game where he could lose his life.

But in a game as dangerous as rock climbing, there is no room for fools, because fools don't survive.

Kevin Donald is no fool.

Donald, 32, has been climbing since he was 16 years old, and is rated among the world's best climbers. He is the director of the International Alpine School, a climbing school in Eldorado Springs, Colo., and came to Texas A&M University last weekend to give a rock-climbing seminar for the MSC Outdoor Recreation Committee.

In rock climbing, the difficulty of a climb is rated on a decimal scale beginning with a 5. A 5.1 or 5.2 climb is relatively easy; a 5.5 is more difficult.

Originally, the ultimate was a 5.9, but because climbers have surpassed earlier limits, the scale now goes up to 5.12.

On the scale, Donald is rated a consistent 5.11 climber. In other words, he can climb just about anything.

The big question is "Why does he want to climb anything at all?"

For Donald, the reason to scale a steep rock goes far beyond the classic excuse "because it's there." To him, there is more to rock climbing than making it to the top.

"It doesn't have to be looked at as a thrill-seeking death wish and machismo-type thing," he said. Donald said it can involve personal growth for the climber.

Donald said climbing can help a person learn more about his mental and physical capabilities. Because of the dangers involved and the challenges they present, climbing can give a person a new perspective on what he can and can't do.

"Most people have a strong sense of self-preservation. You're not only teaching them the mechanics of climbing; you try to teach them to judge their abilities and the resources in themselves."

Donald said climbing can also help a person learn to control his emotions. And in something as dangerous as rock climbing, one

emotion, fear, can be a difficult one to control.

He said fear of the unknown, fear of failing and the fear of actually acknowledging one's fears are all difficult to overcome.

"From a purely physiological standpoint, fear can either make you or break you.

"Fear can both destroy you or provide the adrenalin flow to climb slightly above your previous limit.

"You have to take that strength and let it trickle. You have to learn how to control it.

"In a really good climber, fear will be there all the time."

Donald said climbing can also give a person a different perspective toward reality, because the climber is in an "up and down" world that is different than the horizontal mode of everyday life.

"Climbing is a trip into the realm of the vertical. It shows you how relative reality can be. You just have a different perspective."

At Donald's International Alpine School, for \$400-\$500 a person can spend a week learning to climb.

"It's an intense five days," Donald said. "I'm not a patient man. Nor am I a particularly polite person in these situations. I yell and scream a lot at people."

Donald said that in the five days a person can learn enough about climbing to go out on a trip, and even has an opportunity to lead the group if he chooses.

As dangerous as rock climbing is, Donald said there are certain safety precautions a climber can take.

Although the natural dangers in rock climbing, such as rock slides, can be fatal, Donald said a climber can minimize them by learning more about nature.

"Predictable patterns appear out of the chaos of nature," he said.

"God didn't just throw the dice."

He said by recognizing potentially dangerous situations, climbers can eliminate much of the danger.

Donald said most climbing accidents are caused by human error. He said knowledge of what one is doing and the exercising of good judgment are important factors in being safe.

However, he said using good judgment is not always an easy thing to do, because "good judgment is the result of experience, but experience is often the result of bad judgment."

Donald said he looks at teaching at the school as a "short-term career," and climbing as a "life-long recreation."

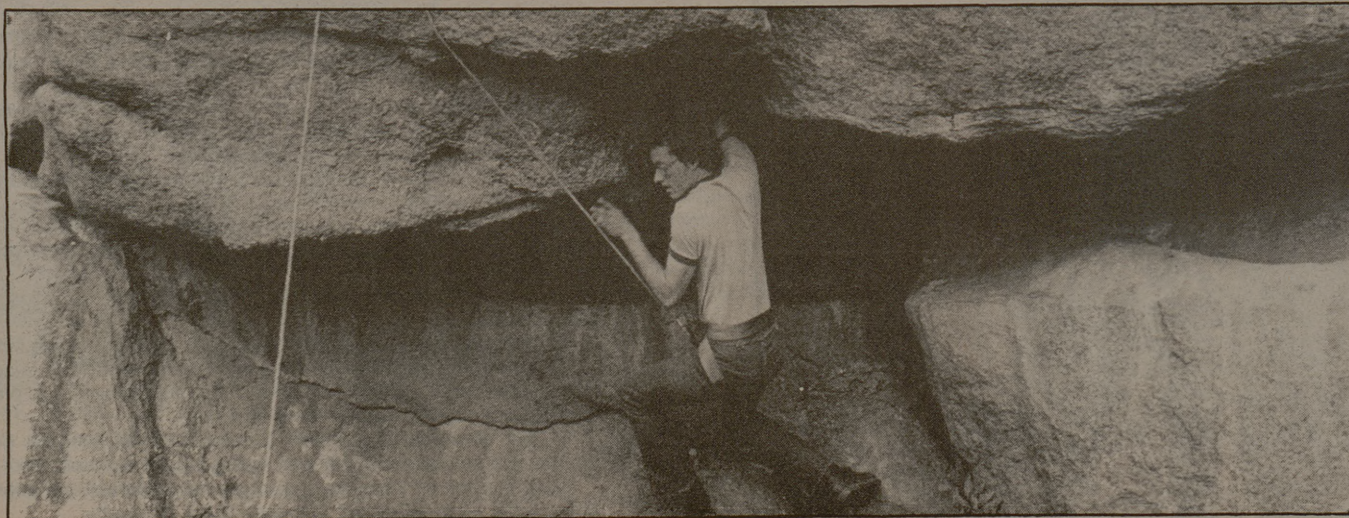
"I will continue to guide at a professional level the rest of my life.

"It's kind of like the joke: 'Have you been climbing all your life? Not yet...'"



Kevin Donald, a professional rock climber and director of the International Alpine School, demonstrates climbing techniques and explains how to use the equipment on a trip to Enchanted Rock by Fredricksburg. Donald came

to Texas A&M University last weekend to teach a rock-climbing seminar sponsored by the MSC Outdoor Recreation Committee.



John Mackey tries to scale one of the crags at Enchanted Rock, located near Fredricksburg. The climbing trip sponsored by the MSC Outdoor Recreation Committee.

Photos by Del Ho