

AggieLife

Keep it rockin'

Student rock climbers take adventure to new heights

By Mike Whitlow
THE BATTALION

David Conlon, a senior environmental design major, almost gave up rock climbing after his friend nearly fell thousands of feet off a cliff.

"The scariest thing that ever happened to me was in Mexico," Conlon said. "It was my first time ever climbing outside, and my best friend and I were on the cliffs thousands of feet up. We were rappelling down on the same rope, with about 300 feet left to go. We miscommunicated about who was hooked in where, and he almost fell all the way down. After that, I took a year off from climbing."

Conlon has returned to climbing and said he will not stop any time soon.

An entire subculture has grown around the Rec Center, but rock climbers' interest does not stop there. Many take their favorite activity outside to very interesting places.

Jason Kurten, TAMU TAMU outdoors coordinator and Class of 1998, said many students begin with a rock climbing course at the Rec Center.

"Indoor climbing is how most people get introduced," Kurten said. "They'll get oriented and climb the wall out of curiosity and then fall in love with it. I learned to climb

about six years ago taking a class here at the Rec Center. Then I went on an outdoor trip with TAMU Outdoors, and I was hooked."

Kurten has since participated in or led TAMU outdoor trips to Enchanted Rock State Park and Monterey, Mexico, where the cliffs reach up to 200 feet. He has also ice climbed in Colorado. Harry Miller, a senior recreation, parks and tourism science major, began rock climbing as a result of a crush.

"I had a crush on a girl who worked at the Rec Center," Miller said. "So I dragged some friends up here to take the class with me. That was over a year ago and now all I do is climb.

Most of the time I do bouldering. It focuses more on moves that are more powerful and a lot harder. Climbing is about endurance, but bouldering is more strength."

Kurten said bouldering is climbing without a rope to distances no greater than 30 feet. For protection, climbers place a row of crash pads at the base and have spotters who try to direct their fall onto the crash pads. However, accidents still happen.

"There was one guy we were spotting, and he was up about 15 feet and slipped and fell," Miller said. "We weren't paying attention when he fell, and we missed catching him. He went right through all our arms and then happened to fall between a space between two of the crash pads. He landed flat on his back. He was all right, but there was this big dent in the ground."

Despite accidents, climbers frequently return to climbing and the thrills it offers.

"I've had a lot of good times (including) trouble

with cops, climbing the outside of buildings on campus or leaving artifacts on roofs. I'll keep (rockclimbing) as long as my body lets me. That's my mantra."

"My girlfriend now is into it as well," Conlon said. "She had always been interested. Her dad used to climb, and when she found out I was into it she gave it a shot. When I'm older I'm sure climbing will also be a family activity."

The Rec Center will host an international competition April 13 and weeknight classes are offered for beginners.

"I'll keep (rockclimbing) as long as my body lets me. That's my mantra."

— David Conlon
senior environmental design major



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