



Libby Peter's Climbing Essentials

No. 2 : Sport Essentials, part 1

The rather uninspired title 'sport climbing' describes rock climbs that have in-situ bolt runners and anchors for protection. The idea is that the uncertainties and difficulties of protecting the route are removed leaving the climber better able to focus on the climbing itself. There's a delightful simplicity to standing below a line of gleaming bolts, racking up a bunch of quickdraws, lacing your boots, tying into the rope and heading off. No concerns about where the route goes, how much gear to take, whether you'll find the belay, what you'll do if it's too hard etc. It just involves climbing ever upward, clipping reassuring bolts as you go. It's this relative simplicity that makes sport climbing a great stepping-stone from the wall to climbing outdoors for the first time.

Of course there are plenty of mistakes you can make and accidents still happen, but there are fewer ways to get into trouble and hopefully we'll cover most of them here.

Belaying skills

If you've been leading routes indoors, the belaying skills you and your partner need should already be tried and tested. Ensure you both know how to pay out slack smoothly, take in quickly and 'take' – i.e. hold your partners weight when they need to rest and lower off safely. You should also both be prepared to hold an unexpected fall, which of course is very hard to practise for until it happens for real. By always watching your partner's

progress and standing in an optimum position (close in to the rock, somewhere flat) you should be able to anticipate any falls and hold them effectively.

At the top

Very occasionally the lower-off will be organised with a chain to a central karabiner to clip straight into, as in the wall, but more likely you'll need to thread the lower-off bolts. In this country the most common type of bolts are glue-in staples. If the staple leaves a small gap the rope can only be threaded through it singly as in our example from a typical Portland lower-off. So the rope must be untied from your harness first (scary!)

Gear list

Harness – the one you use indoors should be fine, as long as it has at least four gear loops and a central belay/abseil loop. Alpine/mountaineering harnesses do the job but are less comfortable when you're dangling and lowering off. If you're looking for one harness for everything, make sure it adjusts small enough for those balmy shorts and bikini days, and large enough for off-season when you need several layers.

Helmet – wear one! There is a misconception that sport climbing venues are free from stonefall. Whilst it's true that because the climbs finish below the top you avoid the worst of the choss, other climbers can still dislodge rocks and drop

gear. More importantly there's always the possibility of hitting your head if you fall badly. An ideal sport helmet is one that is best at withstanding all-round impacts, i.e. during a fall rather than being hit by an object from above. The lightweight, comfortable modern style helmets are therefore perfect (and stylish too).

Rope – choose a single rope for sport climbing, once again, the one you use already indoors is probably fine. If you're shopping for one buy a hardwearing, 60m, non-skinny, single rope of approx 10.5mm. The lightweight, narrow diameter ropes are harder to hold falls with so don't go less than 10mm. Treat yourself to a rope-bag to keep out the grit, dirt and sand and make it easier to bundle it from one route to the next.

Belay device – a non-slick standard belay device is the most versatile. Those models with extra jaws for biting the rope, making holding falls easier, are best but always check its compatibility with the rope diameter you're using. A gri-gri (a self-locking device) is a popular choice but is a specialist piece of gear that requires thorough practise or some instruction, as accidents have happened!!

Quickdraws - if you're buying just for sport climbing choose ones that are short (about 16 cm) and robust rather than super lightweight. A bent gate on the bottom karabiner makes clipping the rope in much easier and if the tape is sewn or held in place by rubber bands it stops the karabiners turning inadvertently. Some climbers carry a longer quickdraw made with screwgates for clipping the lower-off.

Lana Lammiman on **Actually** (F6a), Blackhor Central, Portland.

All photography: Mike Robertson.

Climbing Essentials



a. Arrive at the lower-off and clip the nearest bolt as a runner. You can ask your partner to 'take' now.

b. Clip into the second bolt with a quickdraw direct to the harness central loop (the green one here). Then re-clip the first quickdraw to the harness too.

ASK FOR SLACK BUT DON'T LET YOUR PARTNER TAKE YOU OFF BELAY

c. Pull up an arm's length of slack, tie a figure of 8 knot and clip with a screwgate to harness central loop as a back-up.

d. Unite the rope and thread the bolts.

e. Re-tie into end of rope in the normal way.

f. Remove the back-up knot and ask your belayer to take in tight.

CHECK KNOT

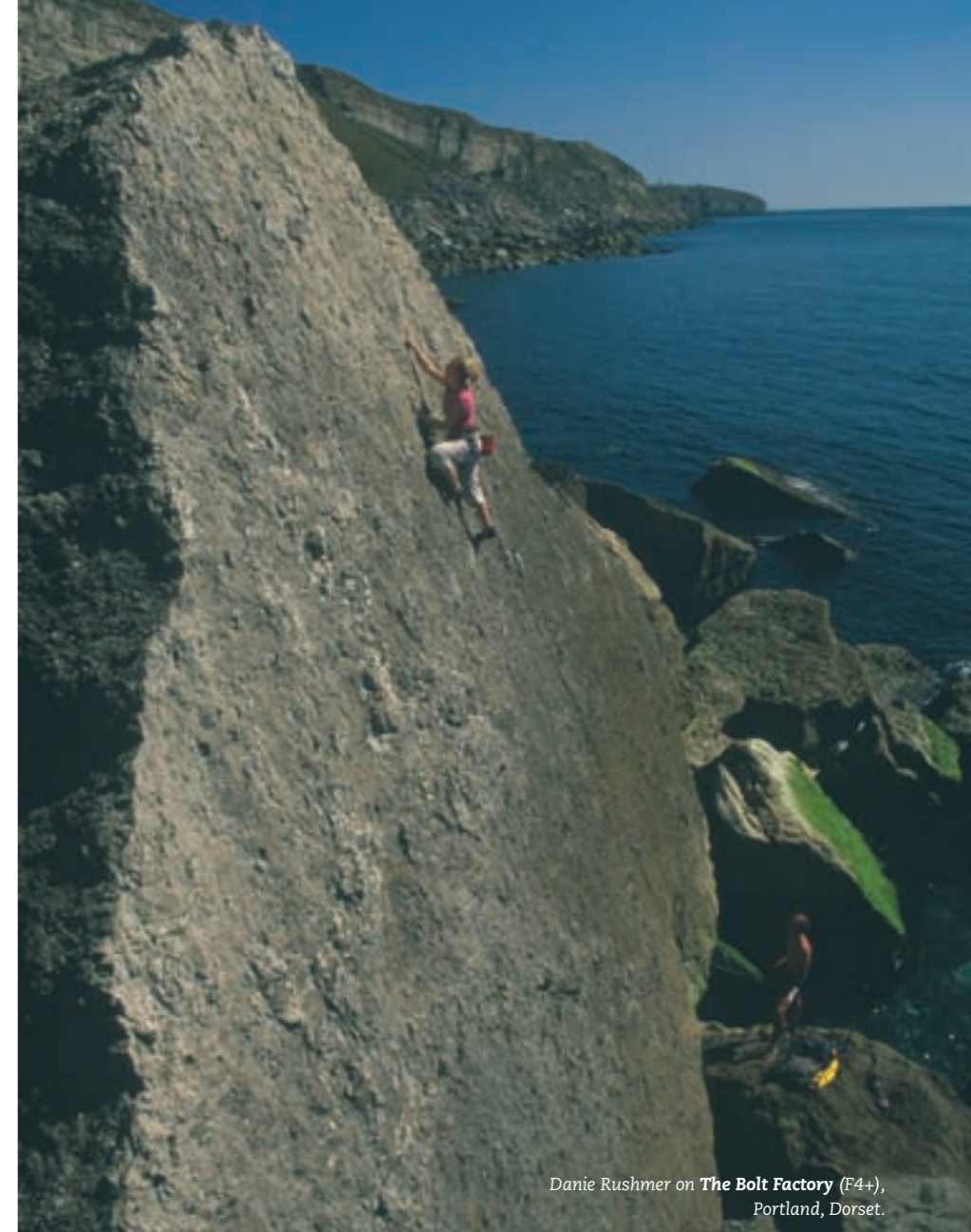
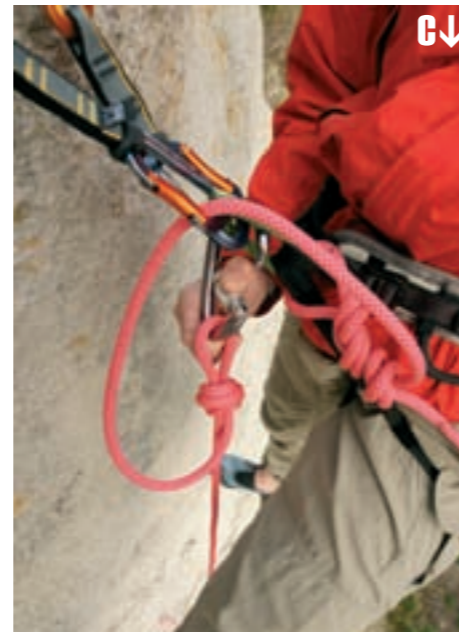
g. Remove quickdraws and lower off. At some venues the staple is large enough to take a bight (fold) of rope so there's no need to untie first. Clip in as above then feed the bight of rope through the bolts, tie a figure of 8 in bight and clip this with a screwgate to your harness central loop. Untie the original knot, remove the quickdraws and lower off.

Clip tips

- Get in a comfortable position before trying to clip. Ideally this will be with the bolt in easy reach rather than at full stretch. Clipping full stretch is tiring, makes it more likely you'll fumble the clip and means you'll fall further if you slip with the slack still in your hand.
- Always clip the bolt with the top (non-bent gate) karabiner of your quickdraw. Always rack up in the same way so you don't end up using this karabiner for the rope as it may get rough burrs from the bolt hanger that could subsequently damage the rope.
- A bent-gate karabiner is designed for the bottom half of the quickdraw and accepts the rope easily.
- Set it up with the gate away from the direction you're climbing.
- Clip the rope so it runs from the rock through the karabiner to you, i.e. from inside to outside.

✗ Clipping - doing it wrong.

✓ Clipping, doing it right.



Danie Rushmer on **The Bolt Factory** (F4+), Portland, Dorset.

Keeping out of trouble

Don't assume that old bolts are still solid, especially near the sea, corrosion may be eating away the metal out of sight and bolts do occasionally fail. Look for signs of rusting on the bolt and rock below. If something arouses your suspicion give the bolt a pull, twist, and turn. If you're still concerned avoid falling on it and back it up if you can. Sport routes are an ideal place not only to start leading but also to try something harder. Next month in *Sport Essentials, part 2* we'll give away some tips for making progress on harder routes, look at falling off and stripping steep or awkward pitches. □

Libby has been climbing for 20 years, she is a qualified Mountaineering Instructor and IFMGA Guide and is the author of *Rock Climbing – Essential Skills and Techniques* published by MLTUK. Her base is North Wales from where she runs the guiding outfit Llanberis Guides (info@llanberisguides.com)

