

ACCESS, ETHICS, AND THE CLIMBING WORLD

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INTRODUCTION

Climbing, like any other outdoor sport, depends on the use of public and private resources, especially land. Mountain bikers, hang gliders, equestrians, hikers and river rafters, as well as climbers, face the challenge of having a place to practice their chosen activity and having limits placed on their actions. The AMC addresses these concerns in several ways: through conservation efforts, community service efforts, access efforts, and education about the outdoor world. In this chapter, we will discuss:

ACCESS

Access is one of the most difficult problems facing climbers today. Access refers to the ability to get to climbing areas. Urban development, widespread fear of litigation, and environmental impacts have caused temporary or permanent closures of traditional climbing areas around the country. The AMC has an Access Committee that works to maintain access to these climbing areas. The following is the mission statement of the AMC Access Committee.

AMC Access Committee Mission Statement

The primary purpose of the Arizona Mountaineering Club Access Committee is to work on maintaining access to climbing areas. The committee will also keep the climbing community informed on access issues and work with local and national access organizations.

The following are guidelines the Access Committee has adopted to use when dealing with access issues:

Fixed Protection and Anchors

Use of fixed protection should be kept to a minimum.
 Paint bolts and hangers to match the rock before placement/use.
 Top roping should be considered as an alternative to short, bolted routes.
 When slings must be left, use colors that match the rock to minimize visual pollution.
 Install chains at rappel stations instead of slings. They are safer, last longer and are less visually obtrusive.

Public Lands

Work with government agencies responsible for recreational uses on public land.
 Promote public interest on Public Land issues.
 Show an interest (either for or against) in government policies concerning the use of public lands.

Private Lands

Encourage private land owners to donate land for public use.
 Work with land trusts and local, state, and federal governments to purchase/preserve private lands for public use.

Legislation

Support legislation and other regulations concerning recreational uses of public and private lands.
 Have legislation that lists recreational activities include climbing.

Conservation/Wilderness Ethics

Encourage the climbing community to be concerned with the environment and the way climbers affect it.
Encourage low impact land uses and behaviors.
Stay on existing trails during approaches.
Keep secondary impacts on the land down to a minimum.

50 Simple Things You Can Do To Preserve Access To Climbing Areas

In addition, the Access Committee has developed a list entitled “Fifty Simple Things You Can Do to Preserve Access to Climbing Areas.” These are things to remember when you are out climbing. You should recognize that they fall mostly under the category of “Respect the land and its owners.” As in most other activities, it takes the thoughtless actions of “the few” to ruin a good time for “the many.”

IN WILDERNESS AREAS

1. Respect the “no-trace” ethic in wilderness areas.
2. Reduce the visual impact of your climbing practices—bolts, chalk, slings, etc.
3. Respect other wilderness users.
4. Climb in small groups.
5. Avoid climbing near heavily used trails.
6. Leave your dog at home—pets are not allowed in the wilderness.
7. Minimize the use of bolts as much as possible. Bolts are an imprint of man and should be a measure of last resort.
8. Consider top-roping as an alternative.
9. Hold yourself to a higher standard in wilderness areas than on other public lands.
10. Cooperate with land managers. Respect their feelings and their mission.
11. Step lightly in the wilderness. Avoid trail proliferation.

ON THE WAY IN

12. Car pool to climbing areas.
13. Park your vehicle in specified parking areas only and never park on any vegetation.
14. Ask permission when climbing on private property.
15. Be friendly to climbing area visitors or hikers. Show courtesy and concern for their safety.
16. Use existing trails as much as possible and never cut switchbacks.
17. When hiking off-trail try to stay on rocky terrain and avoid damaging vegetation.
18. Step upslope and off the trail when meeting equestrians.
19. Be firm but polite with desert abusers.

ON THE ROCK

20. Minimize chalk use as much as possible and clean off heavily chalked holds.
21. Control rockfall while you climb. Many people regard this as damaging the rock and don’t understand the concept of “cleaning” a route.
22. Use established descent anchors or walk down routes.
23. Leave only earth-tone colored webbing.
24. Use earth-tone or camouflaged bolts.
25. Don’t crowd other routes when putting up bolted routes.
26. Instead of placing bolts on short routes, use a top-rope. Your machismo is not at stake—access to the rock is.
27. On a first ascent, minimize bolt placements low to the ground that are easily seen by non-climbers.
28. Don’t chop holds in the rock (build a climbing wall if you want artificial climbing).
29. Climb safely and avoid the need for rescues.

AROUND THE AREA

30. Leave the climbing area cleaner than you found it.
31. Take it easy on plant life—especially the very fragile desert plants.
32. Pick up trash when you arrive so others don’t assume you are the culprit.
33. “Field strip” cigarettes when you are finished smoking and then carry out the butt. (Better yet, QUIT smoking).
34. Obey any fire restrictions. Never build fires with native plants. Use a stove or bring your own wood.
35. Move well away from the climbing area when relieving yourself.
36. Bury your poop under a rock and away from water sources.

37. Put your climbing tape, cans and wrappers away in your bag, so that they don't "run away" to become litter.
38. Teach you children to be responsible users.
39. Leave the "boom box" at home or wear a Walkman. Most people go climbing and hiking to get away from the noise of the city.

WHEN YOU LEAVE

40. Respect all nearby land owners' privacy and property. Don't shortcut across someone's land without their approval.
41. Fantasize all you want, but NEVER vandalize signs, buildings or other private property.
42. Report desert abusers (vandals, cactus thieves, arsons, etc.) to the local authorities (show land owners that YOU care about their land).
43. Avoid confrontations with authorities or land owners. Never argue—report the situation to the local access folks.
44. Stay on established or "most used" trails.
45. Do a little trail maintenance each time you go out (on the trails YOU use).

ONGOING EFFORTS

46. Give a damn. If you don't fight to keep climbing areas open, then WHO WILL?
47. Don't stand still for other climbers making YOU look bad (react as a peaceful group against offenders).
48. Keep up with current events regarding access (read climbing magazines that cover these issues).
49. Attend public meetings and speak up for YOUR sport of climbing (show your desire to cooperate with land-owners and officials).
50. Write letters to your local public officials about key issues (37 cents just might buy you a climbing area).
51. Never assume "No news is good news." Help out YOUR Access Committee.
52. Talk about the access dilemma with other climbers you meet (open their eyes to these practices).
53. Show local authorities that you care about the area.
54. Talk casually with public officials about climbing and our access plight (the more they know, the better).
55. Volunteer for "high visibility" local events like trash pickups or trail maintenance.
56. Encourage climbing stores to sell more earth-tone equipment.
57. Talk to members of other user groups and keep them up to date on access problems. We need all the support we can get.
58. Donate \$15 or more to the Access Fund.
59. Go climbing.

ETHICS

Climbing is both an individual sport and an outdoor activity, among many other such sports. General "rules" of conduct have developed over the years as to how climbers and outdoor people should conduct themselves. Climbing ethics are usually established by local groups at crags all over the country, while minimum impact guidelines and back-country ethics have been established by government agencies, environmental groups and participants.

Climbing ethics have been debated endlessly over campfires and grain beverages and in print, and are often the subject of conflict in various climbing areas. The AMC does not espouse a particular philosophy; members should choose their own beliefs. The intent of this section is only to inform you that different views exist and to briefly describe them.

In today's climbing world, you may hear about traditional ("trad") ethics vs. radical ("rad") ethics. You will hear a lot about the arguments between the two camps, but it will be up to you to decide what is right for you. Traditional ethics generally dictate that climbs are "put up," or established, from the ground up, and that no bolts should be added or subtracted without the consent of the first ascentist. Rad ethics may hold that almost anything goes in putting up climbs: bolting on rappel, siege tactics, routes spaced closely together, chipping holds in the rock, gluing holds on the rock, etc. Also, guidelines may exist about what kinds of anchors are safe, whether or not a particular area has been designated as "no-bolts," and how to identify a current project by the gear left on the rock. Ask locals about the presiding ethic when you visit distant climbing areas.

All climbers should recognize that we live in a world of shrinking resources. Left unchecked, the growing population will love the outdoors to death. Outdoor and wilderness sports such as climbing, skiing, mountain biking, river rafting and hiking all have to deal with their participants' impact. The outdoor users' ethics should reflect good stewardship of our natural resources, show a healthy respect for the environment and other users. This class does not address directly the education needed to minimize our impact, but there are several good books on the subject at local stores. Be sure you understand how to take care of the land when you use it.

RATINGS

The Yosemite Decimal System (YDS) is the commonly accepted method for rating the technical difficulty of climbs. It originated in California at the Tahquitz-Suicide climbing area near Palm Springs in the 1950s and was applied extensively to Tahquitz, Yosemite and Joshua Tree. It is a subjective rating that has not been consistently applied throughout the rest of the climbing world.

1st-class—hiking on trails and easy off-trail terrain, no hands or gear needed

2nd-class—scrambling on easy terrain off-trail, possibly needing hands but no gear

3rd-class—steeper terrain with moderate exposure, often needing hands to keep balance

4th-class—intermediate climbing terrain with potentially injurious or lethal exposure, requiring gear for most people

5th-class—technical climbing, requiring gear to protect against injury or death

6th-class—using gear to ascend; known as “aid-climbing”

The 5th-class section is sub-divided into the decimal rankings 5.0-5.14, with ratings 5.10–5.14 further subdivided into 5.10a, b, c, d, 5.11a, b, c, d, etc. The original system rated climbs from 5.0 to 5.9, with 5.9 being the hardest known climbs. As equipment and ability have improved, harder ratings have evolved. Climbers are now pushing the 5.15 threshold.

The 6th-class section is also further sub-divided into A0–A5, with increasingly harder or more dangerous conditions.

In addition, many 5th-class climbs in the back country are classified using the National Climbing Classification System (NCCS), indicating the overall difficulty of the climb in terms of length and difficulty. In most guidebooks, the approach effort is not included in the “Grade” classification.

Grade I: climb requires a few hours, any difficulty

Grade II: climb requires half a day, any difficulty

Grade III: climb requires a full day, any difficulty

Grade IV: climb requires a full day, hard technical climbing, crux 5.7 or above

Grade V: climb requires one and a half day, hard technical climbing and crux 5.8 or above

Grade VI: climb requires 2 or more days

Ratings in Arizona are generally conceded to be a grade harder than in California; e.g., a 5.7 Arizona climb is considered a 5.8 in Yosemite. The system starts to catch up to itself in the 5.10 range, where there is more uniformity among areas. Ratings elsewhere in the country vary as well. Even within areas, there may be considerable difference in similarly-rated climbs. Also, 5.10 face climbs are not the same as 5.10 crack climbs. A climber proficient at hard faces may not be able to climb at the same level on a crack.

As a new climber, you should not get hung up on ratings. Do not consider yourself a “5.something” climber because you have completed a 5.something climb. Do not limit yourself to climbs above a certain level because you cannot be bothered with easy climbs; there are many beautiful and rewarding climbs at all levels. Do not get discouraged if you feel you should be able to climb at a certain “5.something” level, or if others are climbing at that level. Climb what you can and what you enjoy—ratings should be secondary to the climbing experience.