

flexibility. Sport climbers, traditional climbers, and mountaineers often perform their sports 50 meters or more off the ground, making safety equipment essential. Boulders do not need this same type of equipment for protection and very rarely do boulderers sustain severe injuries as a result of participating in the sport. While bouldering differs from other forms of climbing in the ways already described, many consider bouldering a distilled form of rock climbing because many of the hardest physical aspects of the sport (e.g., muscular strength and power, balance, and flexibility) are involved in problems.

### The Future of Bouldering

In recent years bouldering areas have been developed in almost every state in the United States. The United States, of course, is not the only place where bouldering is popular. New and challenging boulder problems are being established all over the world. Many of the hardest boulder problems have been established in countries such as France, Spain, England, and the Czech Republic. Boulderers such as Frederick Nicole (France) and Bernd Zangerl (Austria) are legendary in the sport for establishing some of the most difficult boulder problems. In the United States young boulderers/rock climbers such as Chris Sharma and David Graham have pushed the envelope in this sport and established and repeated some of the most challenging contemporary boulder problems. This form of rock climbing that was once used as a training regimen is now one of the most popular forms of rock climbing.

Bouldering as a competitive pursuit is also becoming more and more popular. In recent years the United States has experienced an upsurge in bouldering competitions. In North America organizations such as the American Bouldering Series (ABS) and the Junior Competition Climbing Association (JCCA) provide competitive bouldering and climbing contests. Nevertheless, bouldering is still a sport that can be experienced in the lap of nature and as a non-competitive, individual pursuit.

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See also Bouldering

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## Buildering

**B**uildering, also known as “urban climbing,” is the activity of climbing human-made structures designed for purposes other than climbing. For some people buildering means nothing more than bouldering on buildings. However, climbing on buildings is usually illegal (trespassing). Nonetheless, much that can be said about bouldering also can be said about buildering. Builderers and boulderers use similar equipment (climbing shoes, chalk, crash pads), and buildering can be executed either with safety or with high risk. Both activities involve climbing with technical expertise, mastering the environment, having outstanding body strength and body control, and playing with gravity or, in some cases, playing with life and death. Reaching a top (of either a skyscraper or a mountain) can be (but is not necessarily) of importance for builderers and boulderers.

Builderers and boulderers have similar philosophies with respect to freedom, individuality, and nonconformism. The “family resemblances” of both activities are also evident in their ethics. In his book on bouldering and buildering, Jensen (1984) includes a section on ethics in which he urges participants to take responsibility for their actions. He also warns against the use of chalk and the destruction of property, which might throw a negative light on the climbing community. Changing the rock or the building is discouraged because of the damage it causes and because it is contrary to the ethics of climbing.

Buildering concentrates on making playful and athletic use of the environment, not changing the environment for athletic, competitive, or other purposes. Builderers embrace the city as a “natural environment.” Climbing on human-made structures involves reconceptualizing the urban environment as a sporting space. The city becomes a playground, a gymnastic arena in which the architecture does not speak

in aesthetic or functional terms but rather in terms of climbing *affordances*. The climber reads the incongruities of the building in terms of climbability, opportunities, and techniques. The building "tells" the climber where and how to climb. Dedicated builderers talk about the city as an "urban jungle."

However, important differences between bouldering and buildering exist. Buildering is not just an illegal variant of bouldering. Buildering has its own history and stories of outstanding performances. In terms of media attention and achievements, buildering can easily compete with all other ways of climbing.

## History of Roof Climbing

A person whose pastime is climbing the outside of buildings is also called a "stegophilist." Translated from Greek, this term literally means someone who is infatuated with roofs. In fact, the early pioneers of buildering called themselves "roof climbers." Although there are obvious similarities with climbers of rock, climbers of buildings are often more affiliated with other adventurous activities in cities such as urban exploration and *parkour* (a discipline in which participants attempt to pass obstacles using skills such as jumping and climbing). These modern activities toy with the borders between extreme sports and crime, between traditional gymnastics and fearless risk, between rebellion and extreme self-control.

A strong link exists between the origin of buildering and the city of Cambridge, England. In 1899 Geoffrey Winthrop Young (1876–1958), an English writer and mountain-

eer, published *The Roof Climber's Guide to Trinity*, in which he described all the possible climbing routes on the roofs of Cambridge. He also wrote *Wall and Roof Climbing* (1905), which included an appendix on haystack climbing.

Under the pseudonym "Whipplesnaith," Howard Noel Symington and others wrote *The Night Climbers of Cambridge*, which was first published in 1937 (and reprinted in 1952 and 1953). This book has become a collector's item, not in the least because it serves as a great guidebook to the ancient buildings in Cambridge. It contains some photographs of nocturnal climbing as well as diagrams; one, for example, explains an escape from the roof of the department store Marks & Spencer.

The following passage explains both the attraction of buildering and the reason for the relative absence (at that time) of literature on the subject.

It may lop off many a would-be climber who cannot risk being sent down, and keep many an adventurous spirit from the roof-tops, drain-pipes and chimneys, but this official disapproval is the sap which gives roof-climbing its sweetness. Without it, it would tend to deteriorate into a set of gymnastic exercises. Modesty drives the roof climber to operate by night; the proctorial frown makes him an outlaw. And outlaws keep no histories. (Whipplesnaith 1937)

The book stresses important differences between roof climbing and mountaineering. Most of the roof climbers did not belong to a mountaineering club, and most of the regular mountaineers were not roof climbers, facts which the authors commented upon:

### "Underground" Buildering

The sport of buildering—climbing of man-made structures—often takes place under the radar, with underground buildering groups keeping track of the best times and places to climb. With the proliferation of the Internet, these tips circulate faster, and easier, but not without increasing the risk of exposure. It is illegal to climb most private and public structures, so buildering tends to take place under the cover of darkness. Here is how one website—[www.urbanclimbing.dk](http://www.urbanclimbing.dk)—describes climbing a building in the Danish city of Aarhus: "The

financial centre is an excellent urban spot, with good possibilities for long traverse routes. The sizes of the holds vary between small and medium, which makes climbing relatively difficult and challenging. The best time to climb is after closing time and in weekends—then the suits will have left the building."

Source: Where to climb. Retrieved February 5, 2007, from <http://www.urbanclimbing.dk/main.html>



A man practicing climbing  
on a rock-wall building.  
Source: istock.

Until they have tried themselves on buildings, they assume roof-climbing to be as straightforward as a rope in a gymnasium, a travesty in all ways of the true sport. On the other hand, the greatest roof-climber we know has never climbed a mountain. The two sports are quite distinct, appealing to the same instincts without helping or interfering with each other. (Whipplesnaith 1937)

It is interesting, notwithstanding the differences between mountaineering ("the true sport") and buildering ("a travesty"), that the ethos of both ways of climbing is similar and as old as the game itself. *The Night Climbers of Cambridge* warned against leaving boot scratches and damaging stonework, "which is not consistent with the night climber's ideal of leaving no trace where he has been. The use of the rope in climbing is a controversial matter. A rope is not necessary, but is an asset. It should be regarded as an additional safeguard" (Whipplesnaith 1937).

The community of modern builderers recognizes its predecessors of urban climbing. On the other hand, much has changed since roof climbing of the early twentieth century. Some of the important changes involve the international organization of the climbing community (mainly via the Internet) and the increase of competitiveness and the athleticism and abilities of elite builderers.

## Extreme Performances

The early roof climbers did not consider their night climbing activities a competitive sport. The following quote suggests that the pioneer builderers had quite moderate ambitions.

Mountaineers have always some bigger mountain they hope to climb, some steeper rock face they hope to assault. However, in Cambridge, with the exception of several dangerous or difficult buildings that few climbers attempt, there is no graded list of climbs, no classification of climbs according to their degree of severity... A moderate degree of fitness is advisable. A man who can pull on a horizontal bar until his chin is level with his hands should be able to manage the severest climbs (Whipplesnaith 1937).

Today builderers no longer perform in small groups or in anonymity. The Internet enables builderers to communicate with each other and exchange accomplishments, pictures, movies, and stories. Meanwhile, buildering also

has classifications and competitions. Buildering nowadays involves the climbing of extremely high, difficult, and dangerous buildings for which a moderate degree of fitness does not suffice anymore.

On January 2006 a group of climbers from Germany, Turkey, and the Netherlands met for the first world buildering championships in Cologne, Germany. However, Luk described the "informal atmosphere" as "charming" and devoid of professionalism. This characterization suggests that buildering remains a subcultural activity. Indeed, buildering is one of the few "sports" in which a world championship is not required to determine who is the best athlete.

The French urban climber Alain Robert (b. 1962) more or less sets the standards for elite performance and defines the upper limits of buildering. Without using ropes or other safety devices, Robert has climbed more than seventy skyscrapers and monuments all over the world. The documentary *Alain Robert Is Spiderman* has appeared at many festivals around the world. Robert writes on his website, "Spiderman is my nickname, but I have no supernatural powers. When I climb skyscrapers, there's no special effect. No safety net!" ([www.alainrobert.com](http://www.alainrobert.com)).

Robert has had two severe accidents. He was in a coma for five days after a fall of 15 meters. After this fall doctors considered him 60 percent disabled. Asked what motivates his climbing, Robert said, "Calculated risk. Mastering my fear" ([www.alainrobert.com](http://www.alainrobert.com)). As the night climbers of Cambridge already knew: "The fear of heights is the easiest of all fears to cure, though one of the most troublesome while it exists" (Whipplesnaith 1937).

No doubt climbers such as Robert have outstanding capabilities, but should he be considered an athlete like others? Is buildering a "true sport" or a "travesty"? After Robert has climbed a skyscraper, there is usually no prize, no ceremony. Some elite climbers do have sponsors and get paid for their climbing, but often they are arrested for trespass.

Whether builderers are adrenaline addicts, gathering in an illegal underground scene, or whether their climbing should indeed be considered sport is open to debate. However, one thing is certain: Urban authorities will continue to frown on the activity. However, for many urban climbers official disapproval is merely the bonus that separates buildering from other climbing activities. This means that buildering will probably remain an underground activity instead of a sport.

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See also Bouldering; Climbing; Meaning of Extreme, The

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## Bungee Jumping

People have always exhibited an interest in aerial activity and the engagement of the body with gravity. People have engaged in high diving, parachuting, trapeze artistry, ballooning, mountaineering, and high-wire walking. Bungee jumping builds on this legacy. Bungee jumping is leaping from a high point with an elastic cord fastened to one's body or a body harness, the cord stretching and contracting with the jumper's weight, eventually ceasing to stretch and contract to allow the jumper to be freed from the cord. The jumper may be freed after reaching the lowest extremity of the cord (e.g., just above water) or after being raised to the launching point at the conclusion of the jump (e.g., from a building or canyon rim).

The sport's name is linked to the word *bungee*, which is an elasticized cord used especially as a fastening or shock-absorbing device.

Bungee jumping has its roots in vine jumping of the Pacific Ocean. Pentecost (Pentecôte) Island, named by the French explorer de Bougainville on the day of the Pentecost in 1768, is one of eighty-three islands of Vanuatu. The Pentecost Island village of Bunlap has a legacy of local myth and rites of courage. A local legend tells of a woman who dived from a banyan tree, with concealed vines tied to her legs, to escape unwelcome attentions of her pursuing husband, who leaped after her with no such restraining vines. Her escape and his death are commemorated annually, with men jumping from 30-meter-high towers. The jumps are associated with male puberty and are believed by the villagers to

enhance the fertility of yam planting through a jumper's hands or hair touching the ground at the base of his leap. Such vine jumping, known as the "N'gol," "Nagol," or "Gkol" land-diving ritual, possibly dates from the 1500s and takes place from April to May.

The Pentecost Island rites were brought to the notice of European audiences through the photography of Charles Lagus, who visited Bunlap with the naturalist David Attenborough in the late 1950s. The Attenborough production was seen by members of the Oxford-based Dangerous Sports Club (DSC), a group of thrill-seeking amateurs led by David Kirke, who sought new and unconventional physical challenges.

On 1 April 1977, the DSC imitated the Pentecost vine divers by leaping from the 73-meter-high Clifton Suspension Bridge in Bristol, England. Employing nylon-braided, rubber shock cords, they leaped simultaneously, resplendent in formal dress. The club has undertaken eighty projects in forty countries with varying levels of compliance with local laws.

In the tradition of Sir Edmund Hillary, conqueror of Mount Everest in 1953, and Sandy Barwick, the first woman to complete a thousand-mile run in 1988, the development of bungee jumping is associated with another New Zealander, A. J. Hackett. Hackett, independent of the Dangerous Sports Club, had developed an interest in bungee jumping. His single-minded pursuit of this led to a range of commercial ventures.

### Nowhere to Go but Down

Hackett and Henry Van Asch, a fellow New Zealand speed skier, had met at Wanaka in southern New Zealand. They were taken by the adrenaline charge of bungee jumping. They jumped 91 meters at Tignes, France, from a ski gondola. Hackett followed that jump with his epic leap from the Eiffel Tower in 1987. This jump drew global attention to the sport.

After a bungee-jumping experiment at Ohakune, North Island, New Zealand, in early 1988 by Hackett and Chris Allum of New Zealand, the former's interest was stimulated by the thrills and entrepreneurial possibilities of commercial bungee jumping. Hackett became a force in the spread of bungee jumping in New Zealand and beyond.

Acceptance of the sport was facilitated by recognition of bodies setting commercial and sport safety standards. In New Zealand the Bungee Code of Practice was published in