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Glossary

membership, day use, rental equipment & more

MORE INFO

Baffled by all the lingo that gets bantered around back and forth in the gym or at your local climbing destination of choice? Well, here's a guide to all that mumbo-jumbo, so that even if you can't climb your way out of bed without [aiders](#), you'll at least sound really cool while you lie there.

The standard disclaimers about how dangerous climbing is and how unreliable anything you read anywhere apply here as well. This index is far from definitive (and probably far from accurate). It is here for your enjoyment and to possibly shed some light, though we don't mind a little obfuscation now and again either. Various parts have been adapted and pilfered from sources found hither and yon, though we have tried to make all entries at least partially original. So please dive on in and explore, but remember that responsibility for safe climbing is your own.

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Aid Climbing

Ascending the rock by using fixed or placed [protection](#) as a means of progressing up the rock face, as opposed to [free climbing](#). Referred to as sixth class climbing in the [Yosemite/Tahquitz rating system](#).

Aider

A ladder made of [webbing](#) and attached to [ascenders](#), used in [aid climbing](#). You should avoid using the original French word, *étrier*, unless your accent is impeccable. The French will scoff at you, and everyone else will think you're a pretentious [poser](#).

Anchor

A means or point where the rope is attached to the rock. Anchors can be natural -- such as trees or [chockstones](#) -- or artificial, such as [bolts](#), [camming devices](#), [nuts](#), etc.

Ascenders

Devices (such as Jumars, etc.) used in [aid climbing](#) that are designed to grip the rope so that one may ascend directly up a fixed rope.

ATC

Air Traffic Controller, a [belaying](#) device made by Black Diamond. The type of belay device Touchstone recommends for use in our gyms.

Barn Door

Occurs when a climber does not have an adequate grip with one side of the body and gravity forces a shift in balance that causes that part of the climber's body to swing away from the rock. The side of the body that does have a firm grasp acts like a hinge, and the climber swings out from the rock like a barn door opening. Good for a few chuckles for everyone except the aforementioned climber.

Belay

A means of securing a climber by use of a rope, and usually a belay device, in order to prevent or minimize a fall. A **belayer** is the person on the ground or at the belay station who secures the [lead](#) or [top-ropeing](#) climber.

Belay Slave

Someone who will sit around belaying you for hours on end while you climb laps on

any route you choose. This person is often either (a) a friend that owes you a very big favor; (b) an injured partner who is jonesing so bad to get back out on the rock that s/he will belay you all day without complaining (extensively); (c) someone who has such a big crush on you that they are willing to risk getting a kink in their neck watching you [hangdog](#) the [crux](#) all afternoon.

Beta

Any type of advice, often well-meaning but more often totally unhelpful, from climbers who have already attempted a specific route. This advice could range from moves or sequences of moves on the climb to info about required gear or a quick approach route or the best [bivy](#) ledges on a [big wall](#) climb.

Big Wall

A route so long and sustained that a normal ascent usually requires several days -- unless, of course, you're climbing with Hans, in which case he'll drag you up it in about 4 minutes and 17 seconds (give or take...).

Biner

An abbreviation of [carabiner](#).

Bivy

An abbreviation of **bivouac**, which means to sleep outside without a tent. On [big walls](#), climbers often bivy on small ledges or portaledges (the poor man's penthouse) hundreds or thousands of feet off the ground.

Bolt

Fixed [protection](#) that has been hammered into a hole drilled in the rock or artificial climbing surface. Not uncontroversial among some [traditional climbers](#) and environmentalists.

Bomber, Bombproof

Extremely solid or secure, usually refers to an [anchor](#) or hold.

Boulder

To climb close to ground level without the protection of a rope and [belayer](#), but usually with a spotter. An excellent way to focus on technique and power by working the same sequence repeatedly.

Bucket

A large and secure hold, often also called a [jug](#).

Buildering

To climb on buildings - usually illegal.

Camming Devices

Adjustable and non-adjustable pieces of removable [protection](#) that can be fitted into cracks and crevices to create anchors or help protect a lead climber in the event of a fall. Common brand names for adjustable cams include Friends, Camalots, and TCUs.

Carabiner

An aluminum alloy link with a gate that one opens to insert the rope or a sling. There are many different designs, each with their own uses: a variety of different shapes with straight or bent gates, including some with locking capabilities.

Chalk

A white, powdery substance that climbers plunge their hands into when they're getting really nervous about their next move. Said to help dry sweaty hands, chalking up seems to serve more as a psychological pacifier than a boost to physical proficiency.

Chickenheads

Large, protruding rock formations that provide excellent hand and footholds.

Chimney

A wide crack or a narrow chute with parallel walls into which a climber can fit most or all of his or her body.

Chipping

To manufacture a hold on natural rock by using a chisel and hammer to break off pieces of the rock. A taboo and unforgivable offense perpetrated by short-sighted climbers who are incapable of ascending the route without destroying it. Many routes chipped in previous years because they were deemed "impossible" without manufacturing holds, would have been within the climbing range of those currently pushing the limits of technical expertise had the routes been left as they were.

Chockstone

A rock or stone that is wedged into a crack, either by natural erosion processes or by a desperate [lead climber](#) who has run out of protection.

Chop

To deliberately cut off the head and hanger of a [bolt](#), making the [bolt](#) unusable as [protection](#). Usually done by some cranky [trad](#) -- sometimes deservedly so.

Clean

To remove pieces of [protection](#), such as [cams](#), [nuts](#), [quickdraws](#), etc., from a route after it has been led.

Copperhead

A very small piece of [protection](#) with a small malleable head made of copper or aluminum that is used in [aid climbing](#). The climber pounds the head into slight cracks in the wall and prays it will hold his body weight until he can get his next piece in.

Crater

To imitate a meteorite by falling a great distance and hitting the ground. Usually one hits hard enough to excavate a significant hole in the earth and throw enough dust into the atmosphere to blot out the sun, and perhaps cause a mass extinction. Not recommended.

Crimper

A small, sometimes painful hold, that one can only grasp with the tips of one's fingers. Extended crimping is good way to strain your tendons.

Crux

The most difficult section of a climb. The crux could be a single move, a sequence of moves, or an entire [pitch](#) on a multi-pitch climb. A route is rated by the difficulty of its crux.

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Daisy Chain

A [sling](#) sewn or tied with numerous loops, thereby providing an adjustable length [sling](#).

Dead Cat Bounce

Unlike live cats, dead cats do not always land on their feet. Usually if a climber has enough velocity to bounce once he or she hits, it doesn't matter too terribly much which part of their body makes contact first. Try to maintain good form on the way down, however, as style points are awarded.

Dihedral

An inside corner where two planes of rock come together at about a ninety degree angle. Also called an **open book**.

Downclimbing

To climb down a route, rather than up it, often when backing off a route that looks too difficult. It's also good practice, mainly because it's quite a bit tougher than climbing up.

Draw

Abbreviation of [quickdraw](#).

Dyno

A dynamic climbing movement, as opposed to a static one, usually involving a jump or lunge and a desperate grasp for a distant hold. A staple of boulderers, it's often a last-ditch effort for roped climbers, and is a great way to dislocate your shoulder.

Edging

Using the inside edge of the climbing shoe to stand on tiny ledges of rock. Trust your feet! For contrast, see [smearing](#).

Elvis Syndrome

The phenomenon of seemingly impersonating the King doing his best blue suede shoes routine without all the hip gyration and none of the screaming co-eds. Often a direct result of too much [exposure](#) and too little strength. Same as [sewing machine leg](#).

Exposure

Lots of distance between little ol' you and the ground or whatever it is that you would hit first if you were to [fall](#). Multiple [pitch](#) climbs up steep routes provide climbers with lots of exposure and the adrenaline rush that comes with it.

Fall

To borrow a phrase from Carl Ockier, "a dynamic retreat from a climb."

Falling!

A warning yelled by a climber to his or her belay partner to alert them to the fact that they should stop flirting with the cute climbers at the base of the route and be sure to arrest the leader's imminent descent.

Flagging

Extending one's foot or entire leg out into space to provide a counter-balance that enables a climber to reach for a hold in the opposite direction.

Figure Eight

An aluminum [rappelling](#) and [belaying](#) device that is shaped like an 8.

Figure Eight Knot

An excellent knot used for tying-in to the end of the rope.

Finger Lock

A means of wedging one's finger in a small crack by jamming and twisting it so that it locks in place in the crack. Good luck extricating yourself!

Flash

To lead a climb, placing one's own [protection](#), without falling on one's first attempt on the route. [Beta](#) okay. As distinguished from [redpoint](#) and [on-sight](#).

Following

Also known as **seconding**. To follow the path of the [lead climber](#) up a route, usually [cleaning](#) protection as you go.

Free Climbing

Ascending a route using only the holds provided by the natural formations of the rock itself, as distinguished from [aid climbing](#). The ropes, [anchors](#), and [protection](#) are used only for security, and not as a means of ascent.

Free Solo

Free climbing without the protection of a rope. A single mistake could easily be fatal, as there is no back-up to secure a climber who slips (see [Dead Cat Bounce](#)). It is an extremely dangerous manner of climbing and while many consider free soloist a bit looney tunes, a number of others consider free soloing the purest and most exhilarating expression of the sport. There are good arguments on either side. Of course, here at Touchstone, it is expressly forbidden to free solo, because we care dearly about your safety and well-being.

Gri-Gri

An auto-locking belay device made by Petzl that is often used in sport climbing and is gaining more popularity on longer climbs, as well. Touchstone encourages beginning climbers to first learn to use belay devices such as the [ATC](#) so that they will have a solid understanding of the basic principles involved.

Gripped

To be overcome with fear to the point of paralysis. To feel as if some icy, white claw has emerged from the Great Beyond to ruthlessly clasp your throat and freeze you in your tracks. It happens sometimes....particularly if you're not a big fan of [exposure](#).

Gym Rat

Formerly a derisive term applied to those that climb predominantly indoors and train intensively. Now the term has mellowed, and is even embraced by many self-effacing indoor climbers, especially since (a) training has made them better climbers and (b) running routes inside on a rainy afternoon beats waiting out a cold [bivy](#) in the sleet any day.

Hand Jam

A technique where a climber tightly wedges a hand in a crack or fissure in an effort to lock it in place in the hope that she or he can use it as a hold (and not induce an undue amount of pain).

Hangdog

Also known as a **dog**. Either a person who - or the act of - hanging on the rope practicing a move or sequence of moves until one has it [wired](#).

Harness

The assortment of webbing, straps, and (usually) a buckle that come together in a dazzling configuration so as to provide a secure article of clothing that fits around the waist and legs, and can be secured to [anchors](#) or the rope so as to protect the climber. These usually consist of a swami (waist band) and leg loops. Many also have gear loops for attaching all modes of jangling, expensive gear. If you are climbing [big walls](#), then you may want to add an additional chest harness, as well -- both for security in case you do an inverted back dive (remember -- the judges are watching) and the fact that you can carry even more jangling, expensive gear.

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Jug

(a) A very large and secure hold also known as a [bucket](#). (b) The act of using [ascenders](#), such as Jumars, to climb a fixed rope.

Lieback, Layback

Though the terms are interchangeable, your freshman English teacher will wince everytime you say layback (s/he might argue that people *lie* down while they *lay* down an object - who cares, we were snoozing in freshman English, too). A climbing technique, usually used in a crack with offset edges, where the feet push against one surface while the hands and arms pull in the opposite direction against another surface.

Lead Climbing

To climb a route from the bottom up, placing [protection](#) as one ascends. As

opposed to [following](#) or **seconding** a climb.

Manky

Often used to describe old fixed protection, such as a loose or rusted [bolt](#) or weathered webbing, whose reliability is suspect. Best not to rely on these items or, at the very least, back them up securely.

Nuts

Removable metal pieces of [protection](#) that one wedges in cracks or crevices. They get their name from the fact that the original nuts (which also describes the pioneering climbers that used them) were large machine nuts with [webbing](#) tied through the center hole. Also known as **chocks**.

Nut Tool

A device that one uses to help remove lodged [nuts](#).

Offwidth

A crack climb that is too wide for good hand and foot jams, yet too narrow to fit a climber's whole body. Uniformly cursed and avoided by the vast majority of the climbing public, offwidths hold a certain appeal for a select group of masochists (who may or may not be a sandwich or two shy of a picnic).

On-sight

To [lead](#) a climb without falling or hanging on the rope on one's first attempt without any prior information about the route. The French term for this is a *vue*, but you should avoid using it lest you humiliate yourself publicly. (For clarification, read entry for [aiders](#).)

Overhang

Extremely steep rock that is beyond vertical.

Pendulum

To swing or fall sideways on a rope. [Big wall](#) climbers sometimes use pendulums intentionally to reach either distant [anchors](#) or a different crack system (e.g. The Big Swing on The Nose, El Capitan). More often, however, a pendulum results from a fall on a [traverse](#) where there is inadequate [protection](#) in place.

Pink Point

An archaic term, now obsolete, that formerly differentiated a [redpoint](#) climb from one where the [protection](#) (usually [quickdraws](#)) was pre-placed. Now, on the most difficult routes, the [quickdraws](#) are always pre-placed and folks still call it a [redpoint](#).

Pitch

A section of a climb between two belay stations, with a maximum distance of a single length of rope (usually 50 meters, but be sure to double check your [topo](#) because there are folks putting routes up out there who are using 60 meter ropes).

Piton

A metal spike that is hammered into a crack for use as [protection](#) or an [anchor](#). A staple of early climbers, they are not widely used anymore. Also known as **pins**.

Piton Scars

Damage to the rock from repeated hammering and removing of pitons. The one chink in the armor of the holier-than-thou [traditionalists](#) (though scars can provide some pretty nice jams).

Poser

Someone who can talk the talk, but can't walk the walk. Usually seen milling around the base of many climbs (but rarely on any routes) wearing wrap-around shades and embarrassingly tight neon lycra that must have a radioactive component.

Pro

Abbreviation of protection. [Anchors](#) placed by a [lead climber](#) to secure a climb and lessen the severity of a [fall](#).

Pumped

The feeling of fatigue, usually in your forearms, that prevents you from even being able to untie from the rope, let alone pull another move. Usually your forearms blow up like over-inflated innertubes, and you take on an uncanny resemblance to Popeye.

Quickdraw

A short [sling](#) with a [carabiner](#) attached to both ends. Also, the whole kit-n-kaboodle: a sling with two attached biners. To be extra hip, just call it a **draw**.

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Rack

The vast assortment of [camming devices](#), [nuts](#), [quickdraws](#), and other assorted hardware that is carried and utilized in an ascent. (A [poser's](#) only use for his rack is to try to impress tourists in the parking lot.)

Rads

An abbreviation of radicals, it was once a pejorative used by [traditional climbers](#) ("trads") to show disdain for their brash - and often obnoxious - [sport climbing](#) brethren. But now these upstarts have embraced the term and it is only considered derogatory by die-hard [trads](#). The rivalry still remains, and occasionally gets heated, with both sides making legitimate arguments. Unfortunately, the noise to signal ratio is often higher than one might hope. It's kind of like the Hatfields vs. the McCoys.

Rappel

To intentionally descend a rope by sliding down an [anchored](#) line. Often just called **rapping** by many or **abseiling** by the British.

Redpoint

To lead climb a familiar route from top to bottom without falling or hanging on the rope.

Rock!

An exclamation to let climbers and other folks below you know that an object is hurtling through space in their general direction. Though it most often is, this object need not necessarily be a rock - it could be a dropped piece of [protection](#), a loose water bottle, your mother-in-law, etc. - the point being to alert those below to imminent danger.

Roof

A section of a climb that is so [overhung](#) that it forms a (more or less) horizontal plane. A good place to hang out underneath when stuck on a climb in a rainstorm. (If there's lightning, try to anchor most of that jangly, metal gear a fair distance away.)

Rope!

An exclamation yelled when a rope is being thrown toward the base of a climb or being pulled from below through [anchors](#) at the top of a climb.

Runner

A short length of rope or [webbing](#) sewn or tied into a loop. Also known as a [sling](#).

Runout

The distance between two pieces of [protection](#) on a route. Also, when this distance becomes uncomfortably long, a climb is said to be runout. Many of the [slabby](#) face climbs in Yosemite only have one or two bolts per pitch, making them extremely

runout (and daunting).

Sandbag

To underrate the difficulty of a climb in an effort to either appear cool and confident or to gull others into attempting the route.

Screamer

A fall long enough to give the terrified leader plenty of time to let out an blood-curdling, ear-piercing howl that reminds you to always securely [sew up](#) every climb that you ever attempt ever again.

Scree

A sloping mass of smallish rock fragments that have detached from the cliff you are about to climb and now lay strewn around the base. Don't think too long or too hard about this. Smaller than [talus](#), it somewhat complicates your approach to the route.

Sewing-machine Leg

When your leg starts oscillating at such a rapid pace that you're certain it will detach at the hip. This usually occurs at a very appropriate time, like when you're twenty feet above your last piece of [pro](#), and even that placement wasn't [bombproof](#). Also called **stitching** or, for those more musically inclined, [Elvis syndrome](#).

Sew Up

To place a whole arsenal of protection every few feet while on lead in an effort to minimize the length of a [fall](#).

Sharp End

The end of the rope to which the [leader](#) is attached. Though the rope is not literally sharp, one's mind needs to be focused when heading out on lead.

Slab

Smooth, low-angle rock that is usually climbed by use of friction, such as [smearing](#), or [crimping](#) and [edging](#) on small holds.

Slack!

A command yelled by a climber who needs more rope, usually to clip into [protection](#) or [anchors](#).

Sling

A short length of rope or [webbing](#) sewn or tied into a loop. Also known as a [runner](#).

Sloper

An extremely aggravating hold that slopes downward and can be very difficult to grasp, particularly when you [dyno](#) toward it thinking that it will be a huge [bucket](#).

Smearing

Gaining a grip on the rock using the surface area of the soft rubber soles of the climbing shoe to create enough friction to step upward, as distinguished from [edging](#).

Soloing

To climb alone, using a rope and gear for [protection](#). See also [free soloing](#).

Sport Climbing

Climbing routes that often require significant gymnastic and athletic ability, but that do not require extensive training in the placement of [protection](#). Sport routes usually have closely spaced [bolts](#) that a leader may clip so that she can concentrate on completing the difficult moves rather than securing herself against a potential fall. Anathema to [trads](#), sport climbing is the domain of the [rads](#).

Stack

To place the rope in an orderly pile such that the end tied to the leader is on top. This helps to keep the rope free of knots and kinks so that it will feed smoothly.

Stem

A position on the rock where both legs are spread wide apart between two holds.

Summit

The top of a mountain peak or rock formation. A great place to hang out and check out the view, unless of course, you're afraid of heights or something.

Take!

A command used to instruct the belayer to take in all the slack so as to create tension in the rope. **Tension** is also used, and **up-rope** can be used when [top-roping](#) or [following](#) a climb.

Talus

A sloping mass of large rock fragments and boulders that have detached from the cliff you are about to climb and now lay strewn around the base. Think even less about this than you did about its smaller cousin, [scree](#).

Topo

Abbreviation for topography/topographical map. This is a drawing or photo usually accompanied by a description of the route. It depicts the line the climb takes, bolts (if there are any), belay stations (if it's multiple pitches) and some prominent features, such as shrubs or flakes.

Top-rope

A type of climbing and [belaying](#) where the [anchors](#) have already been fixed at the top of the route and the rope extends from the climber up through these anchors and then down to the belayer. Most of the routes at Touchstone Climbing Centers, including many of those that are available for [lead climbing](#), can be top-roped.

Traditional Climbing

Evolving as an extension of mountaineering, and close kin to alpine climbing in perspective and motivation, traditional rock climbing involves placing removable [protection](#) in cracks and pockets or around natural features (such as trees or [chickenheads](#)) to secure the climber in the event of a [fall](#). Strict traditionalists, or trads as they are called, eschew the use of bolts or other items that may permanently mar the rock (though [pitons](#), which saw heavy trad use in the past, have done their part to assist Mother Nature's erosion efforts).

Traverse

To climb laterally along a rock face or crack rather than vertically.

Undercling

A type of hold that only offers a positive grip when pulled upward on from above. Large underclings can be very helpful when ascending [roofs](#) as they allow a climber to lean out and over the [roof](#), while using the feet to apply opposing pressure, in order to reach holds above the [overhang](#).

Webbing

A flat strip of very strong nylon that comes in various widths, that is tied in loops to create [slings/runners](#).

Whipper

A long and disquieting [fall](#), comparable to a [screamer](#), that unpleasantly snaps a climber back into reality.

Wired

Completely figured out. To have a route wired is to have each move so ingrained in your sub-conscious that you could do it in your sleep.

Yosemite/Tahquitz Decimal System

The system, developed in Tahquitz in the 1950's, used in North America for rating the difficulty of routes. It defined the range of climbing now known as class 5. In this system, the numeral after the decimal point attempts to differentiate difficulty between various 5th class climbs; this system used to be consistent with base-10 mathematics until the advent of sticky rubber, better [protection](#), and concerted training allowed folks to move beyond 5.9. Climbs rated 5.10 and above often also have a letter (a, b, c, or d) tacked on to further delineate differences in difficulty.

Zipper

To sequentially rip out, usually during a lead [fall](#), a whole series of placements. Not a good omen, as the odds are high that the end result will be at least a [whipper](#) and possibly a [crater](#).

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