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CLIMBING FOR CREDIT

Rock climbers of all ages and skill levels have been flocking to Skinner Butte's basalt column climbing wall

By Jillian Daley for the Emerald

Get ready to grip cliff. Spring term, the University is offering a series of climbing classes, including Rock Climbing 101, offered through the Outdoor Program, and Introduction to Lead Climbing, which is offered through Outdoor Pursuits.

The Outdoor Program, which operates out of the Student Recreation Center, is putting together the 101 class, a Saturday clinic that will meet at the basalt columns at Skinner Butte. It costs \$3 for four hours of technique instruction and an additional \$3 for shoes, harnesses and blades, according to Emily Simonis, an exercise and movement science major.

Michael Strong, the coordinator of Outdoor Pursuits (an EMU-based student cooperative), cautioned that Introduction to Lead Climbing, which will also be held at Skinner Butte, "is not a beginning class."

Crag climbing takes place 10 or fewer feet above the ground, and there is no need for ropes. Lead climbing is more advanced. Working in tandem, two climbers make their way up a mountain. The lead climber, as the name suggests, goes first, securing the rope every few feet by attaching it to the cliff face with metal "anchors."

Strong encourages only experienced climbers to register, and to register soon, because there are only a few spots available.

"We limit enrollment," Strong said. "We keep it down because it is a special class with a little more involvement with instructors, so we end up having 10 and no more than 12 students."

It may appear easy to climb the basalt columns at Skinner Butte, but there's a reason why only advanced rock climbers should register for this particular class. Strong explained that the class focuses on lead climbing, which "takes longer and requires practice to develop the skill." This makes it far more difficult than "your basic crag climbing," he said.

The climbing classes may fill up quickly, as Strong said the sport's popularity is growing.

Roger Baily, a local rock climbing expert for Eugene City Parks, said the number of people climbing has increased, especially among youth.

"Young people are getting into climbing at an early age, like eight or nine or 10," he said.

Baily has seen a variety of people using the Skinner Butte columns, especially in the summer.

"One hundred people go through climbing instruction (through the city's programs) through the sum-

mer months," Baily said.

Amateurs, professionals and clubs all visit the columns because of their versatility as both a beginning and an advanced area for those who love to climb, he said.

But Baily said climbers should remember the delicacy of nature when visiting the butte.

"The columns are in a natural state, and rock's natural state is a state of deterioration," he said.

Communication is also an important factor in safe rock climbing, he said. In lead climbing, the two partners have to communicate effectively to carefully direct their ascent.

Baily said the average climber is "someone who sets goals and tries to work toward them and is willing to fail. Sometimes you fall ten times." Climbing also takes someone who is "willing to show some vulnerability in front of (his or her) peers," he said.

Despite a need for compliance with safety protocol and sterling communication skills, climbing's popularity continues to increase, Baily said.

Perry Smith, an employee of The Crux, an indoor rock climbing gym, said rock climbing "is going to become my life. I love doing it."

Jillian Daley is a freelance reporter for the Oregon Daily Emerald.

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