

GIRLS ROCK

*Hitting the wall
during women's night
at Crux Rock
Climbing Gym*

VOLUNTEERS DEE
TVEDT (CLIMBING)
AND KELLEY WILSON
SCALE THE WALLS
DURING WOMEN'S
NIGHT AT CRUX

It's a calm Monday night in Eugene's Whiteaker neighborhood, but Crux Rock Climbing Gym is packed. Or at least it looks packed. For Crux it's actually a slow night, with about 30 or so climbers, ranged between middle-school-aged to late 50s, gripping handholds and falling onto thick blue mats.

Tonight, it looks as though I might be the only newcomer.

Crux features two tall climbing walls ranging from beginner to advanced, and to the left facing the inside of the gym is a cave for "bouldering," or climbing without the use of ropes or a harness. Weightlifting facilities are upstairs for those who want build their strength.

Every Monday night at Crux is women's night, a weekly occurrence for about a decade now. A group of women volunteers assist new female climbers and instruct returning climbers on how to improve their skills. (Men, however, are not excluded from the gym during women's night, which runs 6:30-8:30 pm.)

Debbie Lomax, a Crux co-owner, says women's night was started to create an inviting space for women to workout.

"Walking into a predominantly male workout can be a little intimidating, so we wanted to provide a really open and non-intimidating atmosphere," Lomax explains. "Number one, we really wanted to show women how great women are at climbing."

When new climbers are paired with volunteers, the goal isn't to make it to the top of the wall, Lomax says. "We don't push people to get to the top," she explains. "That's not the goal. It is to climb in their comfort and get a lot of encouragement, and [it] allows them to feel out what works for them."

One of the volunteers, Kelley Wilson, helps newcomers like myself. Wilson has been with Crux as a women's night volunteer for about nine years and started climbing 20 years ago.

After I put on my climbing uniform, Wilson explains the basic terminology for rock climbing: "slack" for when there is tension and a climber wants to take a break; "take" for when a climber wishes to be lowered to the ground; and saying "climb on" to the assistant on the ground, called the belayer, as confirmation that both climber and helper are ready.

When I get back to the ground after completing an intermediate route — which forced me to jump to follow only the pink-labeled footholds — Wilson comments that I seemed to have figured out that climbing is about planning.

For climbers like Ashley Petsch, who recently started climbing again at Crux after a five to six year hiatus, part of the fun of rock climbing is that it takes mental agility to reach the top of a route.

"I think rock climbing is really thoughtful," Petsch says. "You have to look through your route and figure out what you are going to do, and it's not necessarily a sport that relies on who's the biggest or the fastest or the strongest."

Wilson says women's night is empowering, and it proves there is no age limit to fitness. "I think it's good for women to see that in 30 years they'll still be doing something like this," she says.

Tomoko Sekiguchi, 59, has been a member at Crux since last December. "I like coming on women's night because you're so supported with these instructors, and they don't help you with the beginning, but they'll help you with technique later on and you'll progress and just keep going," Sekiguchi explains.

In the end, Sekiguchi says, the benefit of indoor rock climbing is getting a full-body workout, which might leave you a bit sore for a few days, she adds.

Petsch concurs. "You get to use your strengths in different ways," she says. "So I can't do a push up, but you know I can make it up a wall pretty well. And it's a really empowering sport. It really puts you in touch with your body." — *Claire Rischiotto*

Crux Rock Climbing Gym, 401 W. Third Ave., is open noon to 10 pm Monday through Thursday, noon to 9 pm Friday and noon to 6 pm Saturday and Sunday; for more info, visit cruxrock.com or call 484-9535.

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