

Environment

Tired of the treadmill? Try rock climbing

by Lauren Bala

For local residents who crave an intellectually stimulating outdoor activity and a tight-knit community, rock climbing and bouldering provide an exhilarating alternative to the usual autumn weekend fare in Centre County.

YMCA climbing instructor Scott Margaree introduces new climbers to the sport on the YMCA's indoor rock wall.

"Climbing is really all about balance," he said. "A lot of people enjoy figuring out how to use their body to achieve it."

Balance is a good skill to hone on the indoor wall before heading to real rock faces to do traditional climbing, which involves working one's way up the face using small tools wedged into the rock, or top-rope climbing, in which the climber is anchored to a tree or rock at the top of the face.

While central Pennsylvania may lack large rock faces, the region does offer good bouldering, a form of climbing that doesn't involve ropes or tools but does require pads that climbers place at the bottom in case

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they fall. The rocks are generally lower to the ground, though not necessarily less difficult to climb.

It appears that mastering the smaller rocks can prove to be surprisingly arduous, even to experienced boulderer Zach Irwin, who recently attempted several climbs at Hunter's Rock, a local bouldering hot spot.

"I've climbed this rock successfully a lot of times, in a lot of different ways," Irwin said after falling about 10 feet off a rock numerous times. "Success really depends on what strategy you use to climb it. Some work and some don't, which is an example of why bouldering is a challenging activity physically and mentally."

Hunter's Rock features several large, oddly shaped rocks of varying degrees of difficulty. With names like "monkey boy" and the too-vulgar-to-anything-but-abbreviate "MDSF," the climbs require agility,

upper-body strength and problem-solving ability.

According to Margaree, the sport is especially attractive to people involved in engineering, followed by those in geology and kinesiology.

"Most climbers aren't team players," he said. "We don't get a whole lot of soccer players—mostly kayakers, hikers and tennis players."

Most rock climbers and boulderers learn about places to climb and how to climb them through word of mouth. Irwin said he was introduced to bouldering by a few friends who happen to be engineers.

Margaree said the community is small enough that everyone ends up climbing at the same places, and people get to know each other. The YMCA and the Penn State Outing Club also bring climbers together.

Thomas Mrotek is a climber and adminis-

trator of the Climbing Conservancy of Central Pennsylvania, a local nonprofit organization dedicated to maintaining a good relationship between climbers and land owners. He said conservancy members have noticed an issue with keeping climbing areas public. Some of the best climbing areas are on private property whose owners are worried about liability.

According to Mrotek, the group improves access to public climbing areas to minimize traffic on private property. The conservancy made a new path to Hunter's Rock and is working with the Standing Stone Association to communicate to the Pennsylvania Department of Conservation and Natural Resources the value of climbing-area accessibility.

The conservancy also periodically contacts land owners to learn about any problems they may be having with the climbing community in the hopes of resolving the problems to the benefit of both groups.

"Climbers definitely have to be respectful of land owners and other user groups, like hunters, hikers and mountain bikers," Mrotek said.

Sufficiency, not efficiency, leads to sustainability

by Andy Lau

When I ask engineering students what is the purpose of engineering, one of their answers is invariably efficiency.

In common engineering use, efficiency is the ratio of the useful energy output of a device—heat or light, for example—divided by the energy input, such as fuel or electricity. If the units are the same, the ratio is always less than 1. In other words, we lose some of the input energy along the way.

Because higher efficiency implies that we are getting more of what we want for less, we aspire to be more efficient.

This modern understanding of efficiency, only a few hundred years old, emerged from engineering and the analysis of engines. All other things being equal, there is merit to striving for higher efficiency, because it equates to less waste and less resource use.

In reality, though, most of the time, all other things are not equal. Take cars for example. As measured by miles per gallon (a more modern use of the term efficiency and clearly not the same units), today's cars



are more efficient than ever.

Yet we also use more gasoline than ever. Because of more people and more cars and more driving, the higher efficiency is overwhelmed by the many more total miles driven. Ironically, having a more efficient car may lead one to drive it more.

We are deluded in thinking we are making overall progress because of the higher efficiency. In reality, we are consuming resources at ever-increasing rates. The limits of efficiency can be seen in other realms

too.

Labor productivity, measured by the amount of "goods" produced per worker, is often touted as a good thing to strive for. Here again we run into the reality of all things not being equal. If workers produce more, then one possible outcome is to work less to achieve the same output. Is that what happened?

In fact, we work more hours per person now than we ever have. And instead of reducing the work week and keeping productive workers employed, increased productivity leads to a decrease in the number of workers.

In his 2005 book, *The Logic of Sufficiency*, Thomas Princen shines light on the shortcomings of efficiency, particularly in our age of rapid global development and growth.

In contrast to efficiency, Princen posits sufficiency as a new principle and ethic that can help guide us toward sustainability. By sufficiency, Princen means a sense of "enoughness" and "too muchness."

Countering the economic norm of

growth, sufficiency is based on the realization that in a finite world, there are limits to production and resource consumption. Economies cannot continue to grow indefinitely, and at some point, we need to recognize when we have enough. Furthermore, sufficiency recognizes that beyond a certain level of income, having more does not lead to more happiness.

Princen is not looking to do away with efficiency; rather, he prefers "to see the theme as subordinating efficiency to sufficiency and other ecologically informed principles."

Princen also warns that sufficiency is only one of many principles that can guide us to sustainability: "Even if sufficiency makes perfectly good sense, even if it is logical, economically, socially, and ecologically logical, it is only one social organizing principle of sustainability, indeed one candidate for a principle of sustainability."

Sufficiency may be only one of many principles of sustainability, but to me it is foundational.

May your life be sufficient.

Memories of summer bird songs bring warmth to winter

by Alice Fuller

On a steamy afternoon, when the slightest exertion causes perspiration to pour from the skin until one feels completely waterlogged, it is almost impossible to remember how, just a few short months ago, the yard was covered with snow.

The trees were barren of leaves, and birds hugged the tree trunks with feathers fluffed into round balls for protection against chilly blasts.

This winter, it will be equally difficult to recall just how hot and uncomfortable I was in August, when my glasses would slide down a slippery nose as I tried to write. Yet occasionally, some sight, scent or sound can transfer us from one season to another.

Even more than the other incessant singers I've written about this summer—the red-eyed vireo, the scarlet tanager and the

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indigo bunting—I associate the song of the field sparrow with long, lazy summer days.

On a raw, chill-in-the-bones day in late March or early April, the sweet trilling of a field sparrow can almost trick the mind into smelling a meadow of newly mown hay or into visualizing several long-stemmed daisies gently nodding in the breeze along some dusty roadside.

The field sparrow does not have the fullness or brilliance of song of other family members such as the cardinal, purple finch or rose-breasted grosbeak, nor can its tones compete with the haunting melodies of the hermit thrush or veery. However, few other bird songs fit the warm-weather mood quite

so well as the simple, harmonious air of the field sparrow.

I may tune out the monotonous phrases of the red-eye or pay attention to the songs of the bunting and tanager merely to guide my eye to the beauty of the performer. Still, I always stop to relax and listen to the pleasing, dreamy song of the field sparrow.

In *The Habitat Guide to Birding*, Thomas P. McElroy describes this sparrow's song as a plaintive trill that starts with three or four long whistled notes, increases in tempo as it ascends or descends the scale and then fades away.

The field sparrow probably goes unnoticed by all but those acquainted with its song, for it is a quiet, modest little bird. If one takes the time to search them out, both the chipping sparrow and the field sparrow have brownish backs and immaculate white breasts.

The field sparrow lacks the black and white eye lines of the chippy, while its pink bill is the field mark that distinguishes it from others of its kind. Dorothy Bordner's drawing depicts the modest plumage of the

field sparrow.

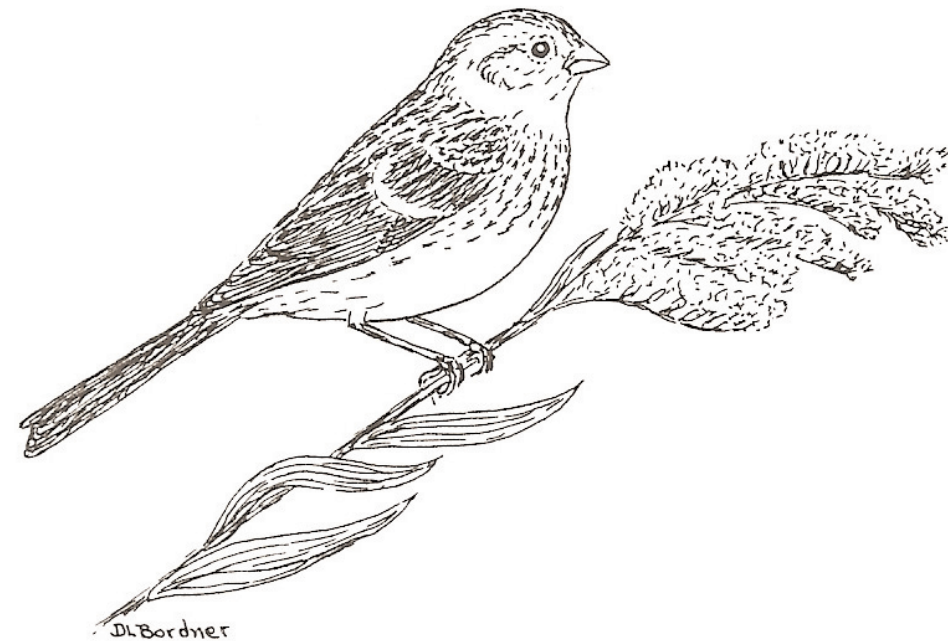
Field sparrows are common birds of weedy fields, brushy borders and old pastures. Like the indigo bunting, it is abundant along power lines, where it can find nesting security in the blackberry, dewberry and raspberry brambles or the tangles of wild grapevines.

When the heat is not too oppressive, I try to take a few minutes to wander along an old woodland road on the mountainside.

A few weeks ago, mountain laurel blossoms and lady slippers beautified the path; now mosses carpet the ground, and brightly colored fungi add touches of color along the way.

Inevitably, as I walk along, I hear a scarlet tanager and a red-eyed vireo singing in the leafy canopy overhead. The songs of the indigo bunting and field sparrow float to my ears from the power line that runs parallel to my road a few yards below me.

Then I smile to myself and decide, indeed, I have chosen four worthy candidates as representatives of the warmest, drowsiest days of summertime.



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