

The background image shows a dramatic scene of a climber rappelling down a dark, textured rock face. In the upper right, several large, silhouetted palm trees stand against a bright, cloudy sky. The overall composition is vertical and dynamic.

State of Climbing

Report, 2019

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Introduction

Pg. 02 Climbing has grown significantly in the last few decades. Once a niche activity, it's now hugely popular across the country. This report's goal is to aggregate and analyze data that reflects the state of climbing in 2019.

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Demographics

Pg. 04 We break down the data we gathered in the 2018 American Alpine Club member survey, as well as stats from the AMGA, Climbing Wall Association, and Outdoor Industry Association. Introduction by James Edward Mills, author of *The Adventure Gap*.

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Policy/Advocacy

Pg. 18 Climbers have a long history of advocating for the wild spaces they care about. As climbing grows, so too does the need to influence recreation and public-land oriented public policy. Here's what that looks like in practice.

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Conservation/Stewardship

Pg. 26 The climbing community is taking on stewardship projects, cleaning up crags, implementing traveling trail crews, and using scientific research to better understand human impacts on our mountain and climbing environments.

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Competition

Pg. 08 Formal competitions and the organizations that govern them are a major factor in climbing's increased visibility. In this chapter, we break down the numbers and take a close look at the primary players and recent developments.

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Economic Report

Pg. 12 Climbers are contributing billions of dollars to the economy each year. Access Fund, Eastern Kentucky University, the Outdoor Alliance, and others have provided key economic data that speaks to climbers' impact on the economy.

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Accidents/Rescue

Pg. 32 Is climbing safer now than it was in the early days? Dougald MacDonald, longtime Executive Editor of *Accidents in North American Climbing*, poses this question. We attempt to answer it with data from ANAC, the Climbing Wall Association, and Joe Forrester.

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Appendix

Pg. 38 Specific sourcing, links, and additional information.

 [Cover] Calling it a day never looked so good. Joshua Tree National Park. AAC member Ken Etzel @ken_etzel

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Introduction

One cannot improve what one does not measure.

Climbing in the United States is no longer the niche activity that found me in Tulsa's Chandler Park. It has grown and changed. It is an economic and cultural force. Climbing continues to encourage healthy lifestyles and to improve lives in the ways it always has. It certainly did that for me, for my peers, and the next generation of my family.

We set out to create a report on climbing so that we could share what it is and what it is becoming—and then try to follow it into the future in an attempt to help us all be the best we can be. We quickly realized that this task is bigger and more important than one point of view. The American Alpine Club is not alone in this effort. There is an ecosystem of national climbing organizations that work in every aspect of the sport. You'll see the voices of the Access Fund, the Climbing Wall Association, the American Mountain Guides Association, USA Climbing, and others in the following pages.

This inaugural State of Climbing report aggregates and analyzes data that reflects American climbing in and leading up to 2019. The report reveals baselines that we've always wondered about but never

quantified: Where are we thriving? What influences and trends are we seeing today, and what can we expect tomorrow? Most importantly, I hope this report helps us understand where we need to improve: how can we do a better job welcoming people to the vertical world?

We believe that collecting and distributing this information can lead to inspired action among industry leaders and beyond. If our strengths are exhibited, we can leverage them. If weaknesses are revealed, let's address them.

I think we all see how influential climbing is today—not just how it positively affects our individual lives but also the ways it can better our world. With this document, we'd like to further that conversation.

Respectfully,

Phil Powers
American Alpine Club CEO



Report Objectives

The State of Climbing report is designed to be a valuable resource to anyone who is interested in the future of climbing. This report aims to have rich data and analysis that is valuable for:



Climbing and outdoor industry leaders who need information to make good decisions



Decision makers who need information to establish good policy



Everyday climbers who are curious about our findings



Media who are interested in new ways of looking at the climbing industry

out

Demographics



"No one should be surprised to hear that climbing is dominated by white men. But rather than getting defensive over a statistical fact we should concern ourselves with how to go about fixing it.

Even though most of the legal obstacles of the past that had prohibited people of color and women from fully participating have been removed, it's important to discover ways to make climbing more accessible, culturally relevant, and welcoming to a broader cross-section of the American public.

After more than 30 years in the outdoor industry, I've noticed that rock climbing, both indoors and outdoors, has failed to keep pace with emerging rates of participation among historically underrepresented segments of population. In a recent survey of climbers by the American

Alpine Club, fewer than 20 percent of respondents were non-white. As people of color gradually become a majority of United States citizens, it stands to reason that, if climbing is expected to grow, its ranks of participants must reflect the diversity of the American people. That offers the sport an unprecedented opportunity to expand by simply creating programming and outreach initiatives that appeal to women and communities of color that had been previously neglected."

—James Edward Mills, Author of *The Adventure Gap*



Quick Summary

- ✚ According to Outdoor Industry Association (OIA), in 2014, there were **approximately 7.7 million participants in climbing** in the U.S., up from 7.26 million the previous year.¹
- ✚ OIA's demographic data suggests that if you head to the nearest gym or crag, and you'll see a lot of Millennials: **65% of climbers are between the ages of 18 and 35.**²
- ✚ Among indoor climbers, OIA's data suggests a relatively even gender split: 58% are men; 42% are women. But among climbers who head outside, we're seeing far more men (67%) than women (33%). Median age, percentage of folks who are married and have kids—they're pretty much the same.³
- ✚ According to the American Alpine Club's 2018 survey, the AAC membership is overwhelmingly white (85%) and male (72%); non-members who took the survey are also mostly white (82%) and male (57%).⁴
- ✚ In the gym: climbing is growing. **According to the Climbing Wall Association, in 2017, on average, facilities have 100 new members/month.**⁵
- ✚ According to OIA, 4.4% of all Americans now climb indoors; a decade ago, they weren't even tracking this statistic.⁶

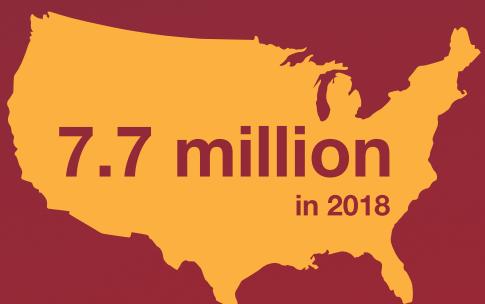
The Guiding Community

The **American Mountain Guides Association** (AMGA) is the United States' international representative to the guiding world with 4,200 professional members—the ranks of which continues to steadily grow.

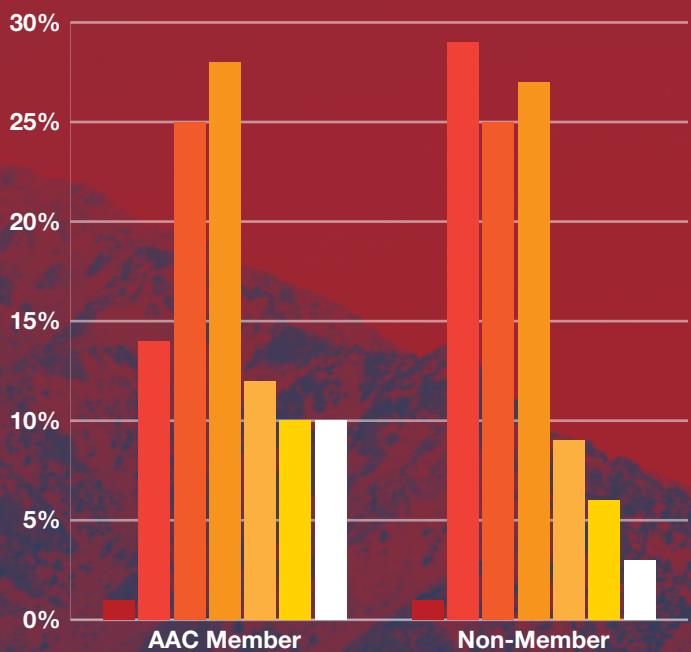
While the main focus of the organization is on training and certification, other priorities of the association are expanding access to guiding and instruction for the public and diversifying the ranks of American guides and instructors.⁷

Currently there are 136 fully certified American Mountain Guides/IFMGA Guides, 303 Rock Guides, 188 Ski Guides, and 185 Alpine Guides. In addition to its guide programs, AMGA certifies instructors. There are currently 1304 Single-Pitch Instructors, 685 Climbing Wall Instructors, and 131 Rock Instructors.

Climbing Participants



Climber Age



Climber Ethnicity

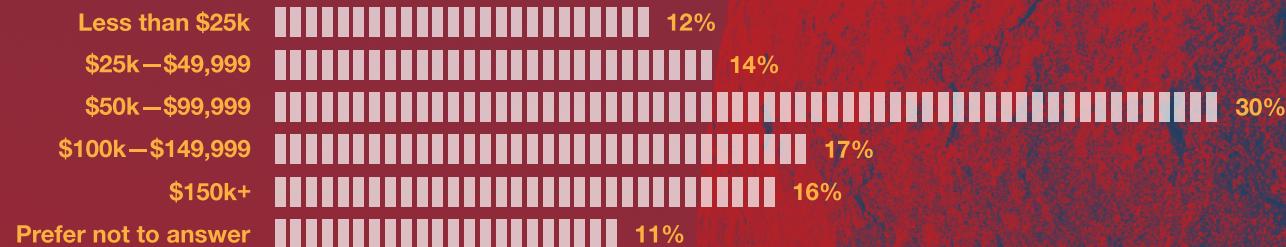


Climber Gender

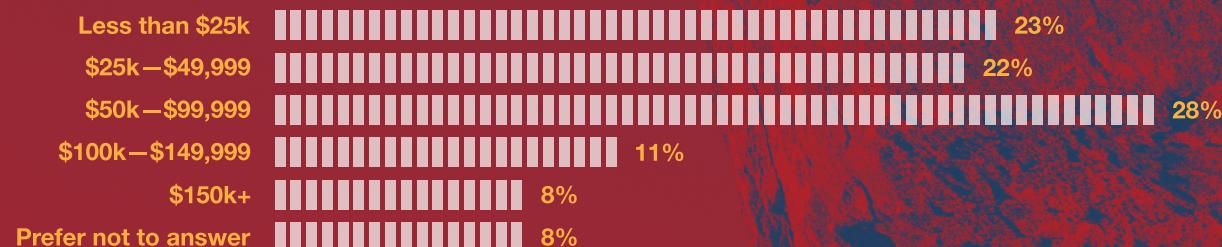


Climber Income

AAC Member



Non-Member



Diversity, Equity, Inclusion Orgs.

The following affinity groups and community partners are just a small subset of the many resources helping to make climbing more welcoming and equitable:

- Brown Girls Climb
- Brothers of Climbing
- Flash Foxy
- Paradox Sports
- ROMP
- Natives Outdoors
- TranSending 7
- Sending in Color
- Latinos Outdoors
- OUT There Adventures
- Catalyst sports
- Queer Climbing Collective
- Adaptive Climbing Group
- Climbers of Color

In 2018, Brown Girls Climb and Brothers of Climbing hosted Color the Crag—240 people of all ages from 21 different states participated in the festival.

In 2016, Flash Foxy held the inaugural Women's Climbing Festival in Bishop, CA for 200 women. After the huge success of the Women's Climbing Festival, they expanded to an additional festival in Chattanooga, TN in 2017. In 2019, expanding

event offerings with Flash Foxy Summerfest (open to all) and W.T.F. Climbing gym events (4 total).

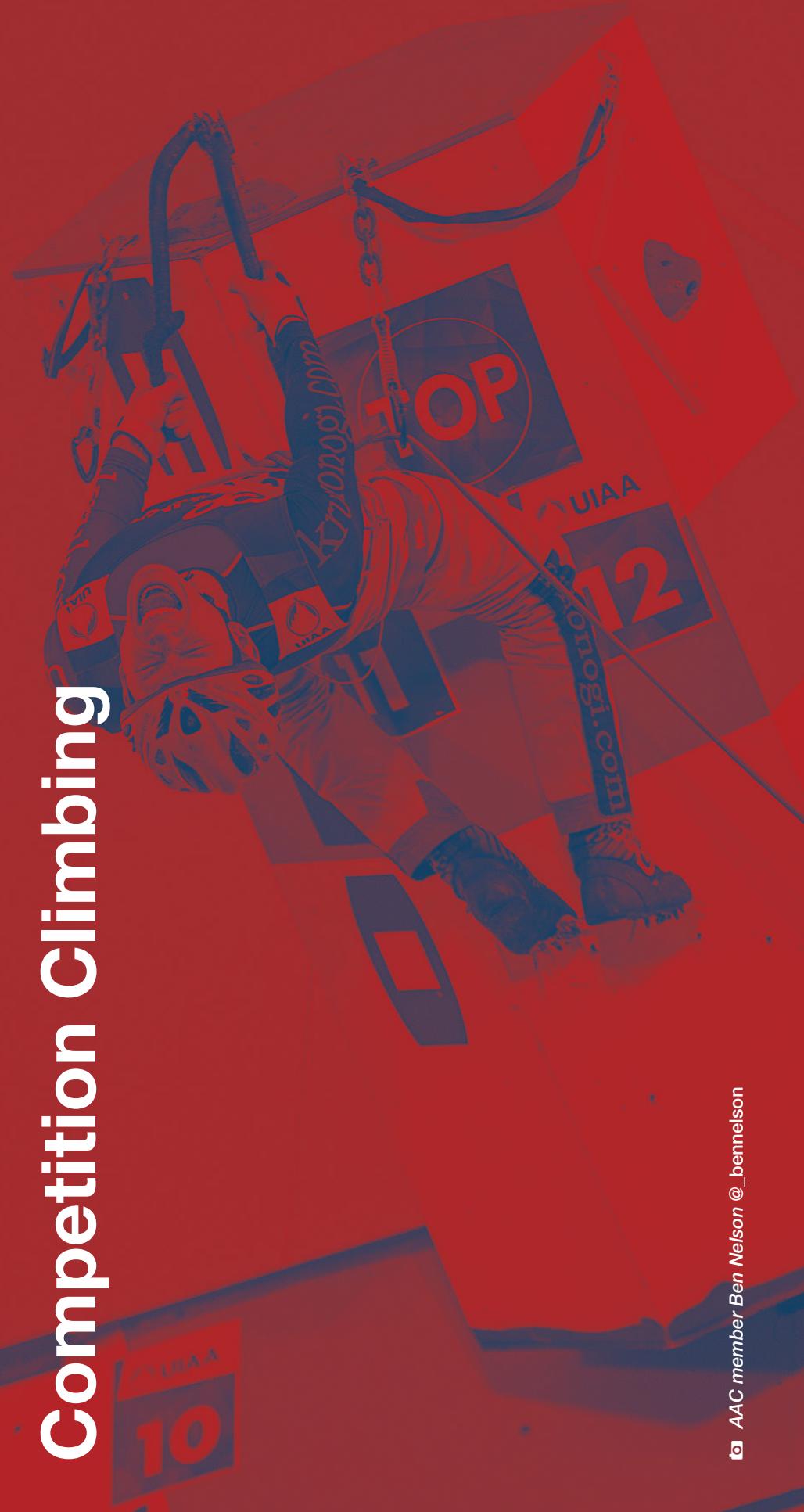
Paradox Sports has been instrumental in empowering climbers with (dis)abilities since 2015, the year they literally wrote the book on adaptive climbing. In 2017, the Adaptive Climbing Initiative (ACI), intended to train organizations in adaptive climbing best practices, was launched in

partnership with the North Face. Since 2015, Paradox Sports has run 45+ ACI courses across 23 states and reached over 4,300 climbers.

For additional resources visit diversifyoutdoors.com or americanalpineclub.org/deiresources.

02

Competition Climbing



“A recent World Cup in Denver blew all expectations and leads the way toward the 2026 Winter Games.” —Outside Magazine¹

Long gone are the days when climbing was a relatively obscure sport. For decades, climbers developed routes without the benefits of cutting-edge gear or bolted climbs. There was little in the way of beta; there were no guidebooks or online forums, and there was certainly no such thing as a climbing gym where folks could train year-round, regardless of the weather.

As the sport grows in popularity, climbing's visibility has increased. It's the subject of Oscar-winning documentaries and, in 2020, it will be an Olympic sport. Climbing competitions are a major component of that visibility. Here's what that looks like.



Major players in U.S. Competition Climbing

USA Climbing

USA Climbing is the national governing body for competition climbing in the US. It promotes three disciplines: bouldering, sport, and speed. The organization, sanctioned and recognized by the International Federation of Sport Climbing, boasts approximately 13,000 members, including competitors, coaches, and route setters.

USSMA

The U.S. Ski Mountaineering Association acts as the official governing body of the sport of ski mountaineering in the United States. The number of races, participants, and members has grown steadily over the years, which coincides with popularity of uphill access at ski resorts around the country and the expansion of the retail market for ski mountaineering equipment. The organization estimates that over 3,000 people have participated in ski mountaineering races over the last year.

USA Ice Climbing

USA Ice Climbing is the national support organization for competitive ice climbing, mixed climbing, and drytooling. Their mission is to support U.S. competitive ice climbing, mixed climbing, and drytooling events and athletes. Additionally, USA Ice Climbing hosts the North American Ice Climbing Championships biennially. They hope to see increased participation in competitive ice climbing, mixed climbing and drytooling and ultimately would like to see ice climbing included in the Olympic Games.

The American Alpine Club is the U.S. member of the UIAA, which is the international governing body of ice climbing championships and world cups. The AAC hosted the 2019 World Cup Ice Climbing finals in Denver in February.

Why Skimo?

The USSMA estimates that upwards of 3,000 people participated in skimo races across the American West and Northeast over the last year.

In other words, **the subset of climbers who race on skis is a big one**; as skimo racing gains popularity, overlap between climbers and ski mountaineers increases. Awareness of ski mountaineering racing continues to grow as more people learn about uphill skiing, more resorts provide uphill access to skinning, and the retail market for new and cheaper gear expands. International competitive ski mountaineering also continues to grow, and there's a push for ski mountaineering to be included in the 2026 Winter Olympic Games.

Participants

100

nationally ranked USA Ice Climbing athletes, 2018

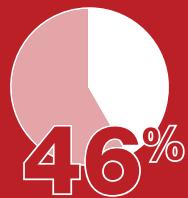
2,500

licensed USA Climbing athletes, 2018

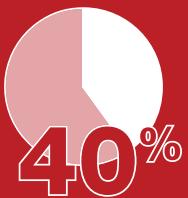
3,000

estimated USSMA athletes, 2018-19

Demographics



USA Ice Climbing female athletes



USA Climbing female athletes



50%

USSMA athletes between the ages of 15-20

Data provided by: USSMA, USA Ice Climbing, USA Climbing



Recent Developments & Events

USA Climbing

- +** In early 2019, USA Climbing announced a multi-year partnership with ESPN to televise three adult national championship competitions.
- +** In spring 2019, *GYM CLIMBER* magazine became the official publication of USA Climbing, exposing many more of the U.S.' five-million-plus gym climbers to competition climbing.

Events:

In the 2018–19 season, USA Climbing sanctioned over 300 local, regional, and divisional events all across the country and organized and hosted five national championship events across the country.

- Combined Invitational
- Bouldering Open National Championship
- Bouldering Youth National Championship
- Sport & Speed Open National Championships
- Adaptive National Championships
- Collegiate National Championships
- Sport & Speed Youth National Championships

USA Ice Climbing

- +** 25,000 fans attended the two-day downtown Denver Ice Climbing World Cup, representing not only the largest ice climbing World Cup audience in history, but also making it one of the most well-spectated climbing events of all time! Hundreds of thousands also followed the livestream of the competition, the sixth and final World Cup of the 2019 season. Furthermore, the UIAA website recorded record visitor figures during the weekend. 64 athletes from 19 countries participated in this event.
- +** In 2017, USA Ice Climbing wrote a set of indoor drytooling guidelines for climbing gyms and started a national ranking system.
- +** The U.S. World Cup Youth and Adult teams have significantly grown from 13 members in 2018 to 30 members in 2019.
- +** The U.S. Youth Team took second overall at the Youth World Champions in 2019.

Events:

In the 2018-19 season, USA Ice Climbing hosted numerous events across the country, including:

- 2018 North American Championships
- 3 Beginner, Indoor Drytooling Events
- 12 events included in the National Rankings with over 100 individual athletes

USSMA

- +** The sport of ski mountaineering will be included in the 2020 Winter Youth Olympic Games, and the USSMA has earned the max quota of four spots (two women and two men).
- +** The USSMA National Team took 7th place overall at the 2019 World Championships. The team consists of 41 athletes, half are youth (15-20 years old).
- +** The International Ski Mountaineering Federation continues its efforts to push for inclusion in the 2026 Winter Olympic Games, which will be held in either Sweden or Italy.

Events:

The USSMA sanctioned 100 races in 10 states in the 2018-19 season. Additionally, USSMA hosts:

- Annual National Championships
- Annual National Cup Series
- Annual National Rankings
- Annual Youth Development Clinics
- 2019 ISMF North American Cup Race

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Economic Impact



“Climbing as a whole contributed \$12,450,000,000 to the economy in 2017,

with more than 87% (10.8B) coming from trips and travel. While you need some gear to take part in the sport, it's clear that providing climbers with a place to play has a much larger ROI. You don't have to be Yosemite; towns such as Castle Dale Utah (Joe's Valley), Lander Wyoming and Sandrock Alabama are all benefiting from the growth of climbing. Let's not forget indoor climbers, who based on the 2018 Participation report now account for 52% of the climbing population.”

—Outdoor Industry Association¹



Quick Summary

- + In total, climbers spent \$168,989,622 on gear in 2018, up 14.4% over the 36-month study period.
- + However, while spending is on the rise, further analysis reveals that it is unit price increases which are driving sales increases. During the same 36-month period, the average change in prices for all categories of climbing gear rose 23.3%; in contrast, the total change in units sold dropped 7.2%.
- + With prices rising, it was the nebulous category of “Climbing Accessories,” which saw the greatest increase in prices at 36%. Climbing ropes, on the other hand, have dropped in price by almost 30% over the last three years.
- + 25% of all climbing gear sales are in the “Climbing Shoe” category, which sold 396,552 units in 2018.
- + In contrast, the smallest sales category was “Ice Climbing Accessories,” which sold 23,166 units valued at \$672,182.
- + The majority of climbers choose to buy their gear at brick-and-mortar stores rather than online commerce. Additionally, more than half of climbers, both indoor and outdoor, want their retailers to inspire them to get outside.

Climbing Gyms

According to the Climbing Wall Association (CWA), it is estimated that the indoor climbing gym industry will be worth **\$1 billion** by 2021—in 2017 the estimated industry revenue was over \$618 million.² Additionally:

- In 2017, there were 43.4 million check-ins at indoor climbing facilities, or about 81,693 check-ins per facility. The average visit duration is 2.3 hours with over 100 million facility visitor hours logged annually.
- With the average gross income per check-in yielding \$20.13, we can estimate that the gross income for check-ins at U.S. climbing gyms equates to \$873,642,000.
- Climbing gym facilities yield an average of 102.3 new members per month.
- According to the CWA, there are 573 commercial climbing gyms operating in the U.S. (478) and Canada (95).³

Climbers & climbing gear: A love story

Climbing is expensive. On average, climbers spend more than \$1,200 more than the average outdoor consumer on gear and apparel—and outdoor climbers spend even more than indoor-only climbers. If climbers know exactly what gear they need, are offered discounts, or have access to rentals and demo gear, would more people be able to afford to get into climbing?

So how much do climbers spend on gear per year? In 2018, the gear bill tallied a whopping \$168,989,622.⁴ But is spending on the rise? Yes and no.

Here's how the current bill breaks down:

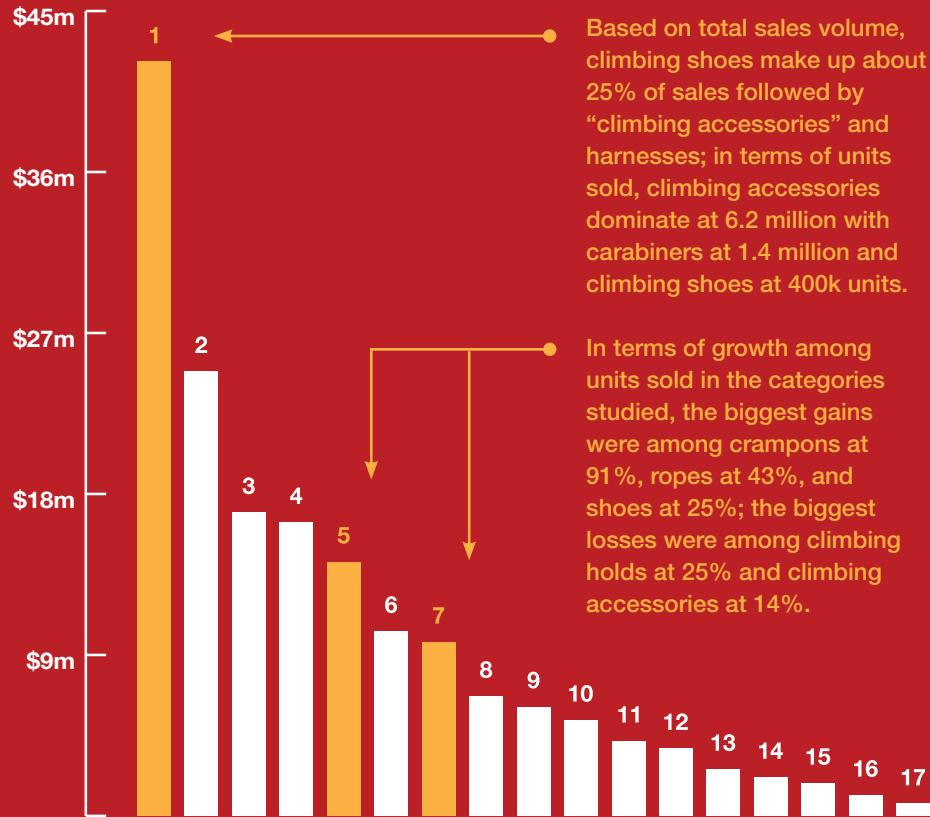


84%

of climbers prefer to purchase at brick-and-mortar stores rather than shopping at online retailers, according to OIA data. The NPD data also supports that e-commerce made up less than half of all climbing gear sales.⁵

Sales volume in dollars, 2018:

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| 1. Climbing Shoes..... | \$42,159,525 |
| 2. Climbing Accessories | \$24,846,041 |
| 3. Climbing Harnesses | \$16,947,468 |
| 4. Climbing Carabiners | \$16,409,365 |
| 5. Climbing Ropes | \$14,181,529 |
| 6. Climbing Protection | \$10,299,934 |
| 7. Ice Climbing Crampons | \$9,721,423 |
| 8. Climbing Belay Devices | \$6,671,929 |
| 9. Climbing Quickdraws..... | \$6,082,541 |
| 10. Climbing Helmets | \$5,338,525 |
| 11. Climbing Crash Pads | \$4,188,146 |
| 12. Ice Climbing Axes..... | \$3,772,260 |
| 13. Other Hardware | \$2,587,730 |
| 14. Climbing Ascenders | \$2,157,645 |
| 15. Climbing Holds | \$1,812,764 |
| 16. Ice Climbing Hardware | \$1,140,615 |
| 17. Ice Climbing Accessories ... | \$672,182 |



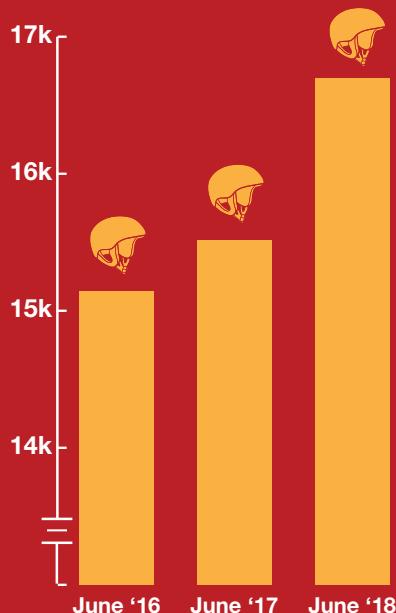
It should be noted in the graph above that item number 4, "Climbing Carabiners," includes both locking and non-locking varieties. Additionally, item number 6, "Climbing Protection," includes cam units as well as hexes, stoppers, and nuts. Item number 13, "Other Hardware," specifically refers to climbing-related hardware—ice climbing has its own "other" category in item number 16.



Noted

Based on total sales volume, climbing shoes make up about 25% of sales followed by "climbing accessories" and harnesses; in terms of units sold, climbing accessories dominate at 6.2 million with carabiners at 1.4 million and climbing shoes at 400k units.

In terms of growth among units sold in the categories studied, the biggest gains were among crampons at 91%, ropes at 43%, and shoes at 25%; the biggest losses were among climbing holds at 25% and climbing accessories at 14%.

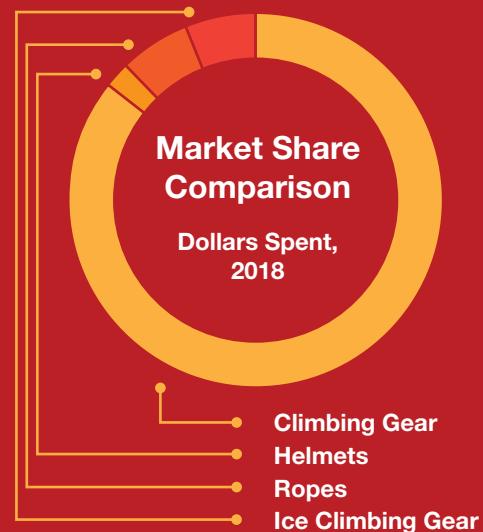


Dome Protection



Noted

Helmet sales are on the rise. During the 36-month study period conducted by the NPD Group, helmet sales increased by 10%.



More than half of climbers, both indoor and outdoor, want retailers to inspire them to get outside.⁷

Is spending actually on the rise?

With the explosion in popularity of rock climbing, one would expect a drastic increase in spending on climbing gear. And, true enough—according to the NPD Group—sales data collected shows that the total amount spent increased from \$148 million to \$169 million in the twelve months ending in June 2018—indicating a 14.4% rise.⁶

However, further analysis reveals that it is increases unit prices that are driving sales increases. During the same 36-month period, the average change in prices for all categories of climbing gear rose 23.3%; in contrast, the total change in units sold dropped 7.2% (10.3 million units down to 9.6 million units).



Noted

Among the categories studied, the largest price increases were among climbing accessories at 36%, belay devices at 19%, and quickdraws at 16%; the largest price decreases were among climbing ropes, which are almost 30% cheaper than three years ago and crampons which are 24% cheaper.⁸







Climbers' economic impacts on local communities

The U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis (BEA) has been tracking the outdoor recreation economy since the passage of the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act of 2016.

BEA estimates that the outdoor recreation economy accounted for 2.2% of current-dollar GDP in 2016 or \$412 billion.⁹ BEA also estimates that the outdoor recreation economy is growing faster than the overall U.S. economy. The BEA estimates are part of a growing body of evidence documenting

the significant economic impact of outdoor recreation in the United States.

Access Fund, Eastern Kentucky University and Outdoor Alliance have been leading efforts to research the economic impact of climbing in rural communities, and the results show that climbers are a growing economic force for good.

These recent studies provide policy makers with concrete information on the economic benefits of rock climbing and the importance

of increasing access to climbing and other recreational resources. They also help to frame climbing and outdoor recreation more broadly as a renewable economic resource that can support sustainable economic development in rural communities. Finally, these studies have helped to establish a methodology for analyzing the economic impacts of rock climbing and other outdoor recreational activities on local rural communities and can therefore serve as a model for future research.



In 2017, Access Fund, Eastern Kentucky University, Outdoor Alliance, and others reported on the Economic Impact of Rock Climbing on the Nantahala and Pisgah National Forests in western North Carolina. The Access Fund study concluded that rock climbers spent an estimated \$13.9 million per year in and around the national forests. Those expenditures supported an estimated 170 full-time jobs and \$4 million in wages.¹⁰



In 2019, an Access Fund study concluded that Non-local climbers visiting the New River Gorge region to rock climb spent an estimated \$12.1 million in a three-county region in 2018 in rural West Virginia. Those expenditures supported an estimated 168 jobs and \$6.3 million in wages.¹¹



In 2019, an Access Fund study concluded that rock climber visitors to the Grand Mesa, Uncompahgre and Gunnison (GMUG) spent an estimated \$6.2 million annually within the GMUG, supporting an estimated 61 jobs and \$1.8 million in job income annually.¹²



In 2016, an Access Fund study concluded that climbers at the Red River Gorge in Kentucky spent an estimated \$3.6 million in the local economy. Climbers support an estimated 39 jobs in the region and generate \$2.7 million in total revenue for local businesses each year.¹³

04

Policy & Advocacy

For more than a century, climbers have been a force in safeguarding wild landscapes and advocating for recreational access to public lands.

As the sport of climbing has grown, so has the power of the climbing community to shape public policy on outdoor recreation and management of our public lands.

While grassroots organizations accomplish incredible work on the local level, this chapter focuses primarily on the national organizations pursuing climbing policy issues on the federal level.

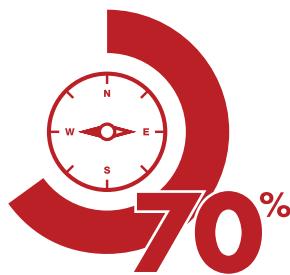
These are not partisan issues, and a large majority of the American public shares these deeply held values. By flexing our political muscle, we can leave a lasting legacy for future generations of climbers and the broader American public.



Noted



Percent of climbing areas located on federally managed public lands¹

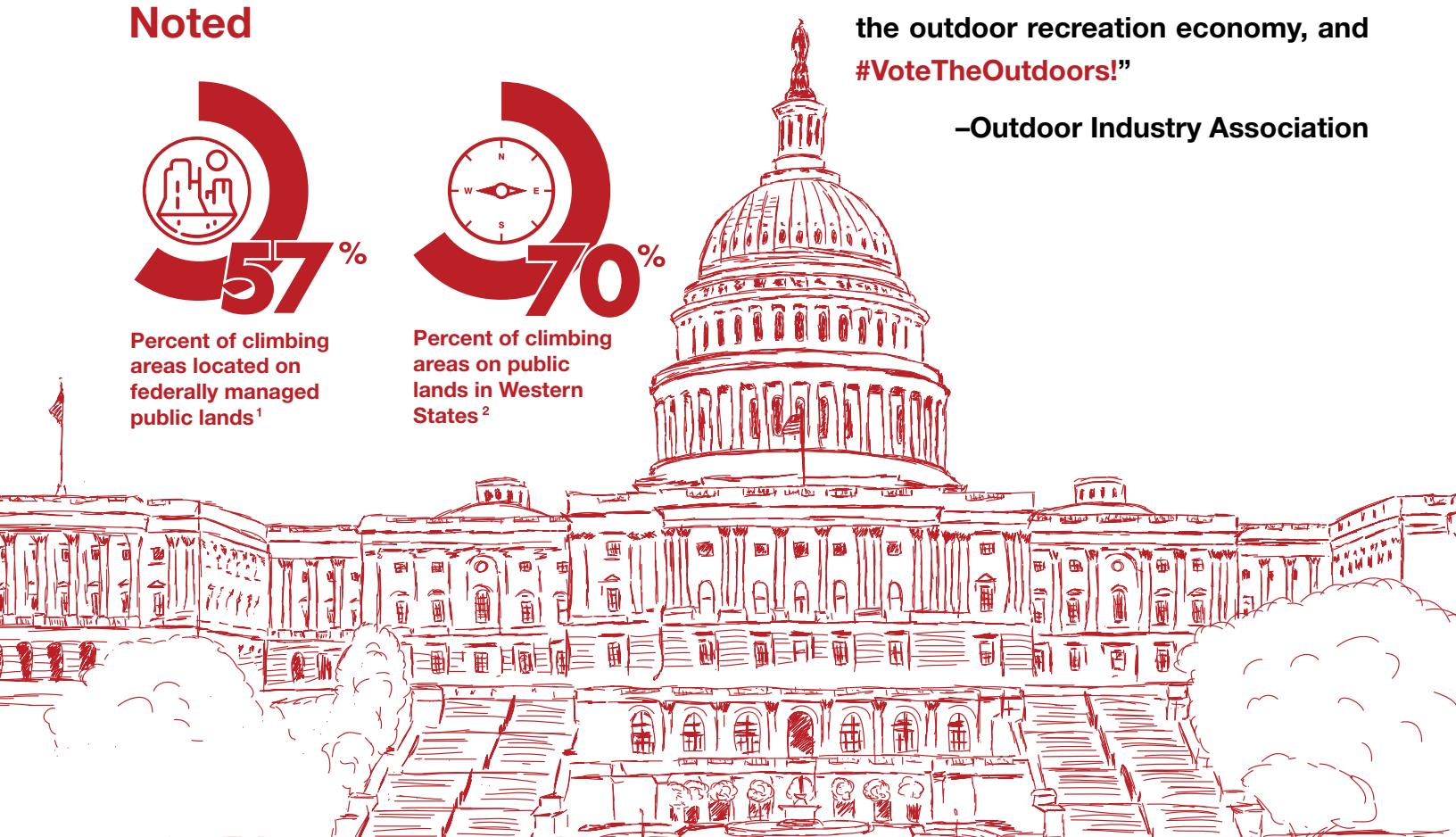


Percent of climbing areas on public lands in Western States²



Getting outside to climb, hike, bike, or otherwise recreate outside unites us as Americans, improves our health, and strengthens our communities and economies. Last November, millions of Americans elected candidates who support the outdoor recreation economy and will protect our public land and water. Now it is time for our leaders in Washington, D.C. and statehouses across the country to support the outdoor industry, invest in the outdoor recreation economy, and #VoteTheOutdoors!"

—Outdoor Industry Association





Protect America's Climbing

For nearly 30 years, Access Fund has represented climbers (and all forms of climbing), working to defend access to and protect our public lands around the country.

One of the most important ways to give climbers a voice in policy issues is to earn a seat at the table by maintaining a sustained, strategic presence in Washington, DC. Access Fund works with legislators, members of the Administration, officials from the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, Bureau of Land Management, Bureau of Reclamation, and Army Corps of Engineers, as well as tribal governments and state officials, to represent the interests of climbers.



Since its founding in 1902, the American Alpine Club has been protecting our country's vertical landscapes and natural treasures. Working alongside our members and partners, we focus on critical issues facing climbers and outdoor recreation nationally.

The AAC relies on its community of members and volunteers to protect public lands, increase access and address the impacts of a changing climate on our mountains and crags. Together, we advance the interests of climbers on the local and national levels.



The American Mountain Guides Association trains and certifies climbing and skiing guides and instructors to international standards; it is the only U.S. member of the International Federation of Mountain Guides Associations (IFMGA).

In 2018, the American Mountain Guides Association (AMGA) relaunched its advocacy and policy program, which aims to increase opportunities for Americans to enjoy public lands with a guide or instructor.

Advocacy Community

Much of the strength of the climbing industry comes from the national and regional climbing organizations that advocate for climbers and monitor and engage in important policy issues. The primary national climbing advocacy organizations are:

National Climbing Organizations

- Access Fund
- American Alpine Club
- American Mountain Guides Association
- Climbing Wall Association
- Outdoor Industry Association*
- Outdoor Alliance

* Organizations do not exclusively advocate for climbing. However, climbing advocacy is an important part of their mission.

National Climbing Governance Organizations

- A number of climbing organizations that focus on sports governance play a critical role in promoting and growing climbing competition and ski mountaineering racing in the United States. These organizations include:
- USA Climbing
 - United States Ski Mountaineering Association
 - USA Ice Climbing

Regional Organizations

Regional climbing clubs are among our nation's most historic climbing organizations. They are key players in connecting people with their local landscapes and in serving as advocates for wild places and are, in many ways, the hearts and souls of the climbing community. There are more than 250 regional climbing clubs in the U.S. These are the four largest regional climbing organizations with advocacy staff:

- Appalachian Mountain Club
Created in 1876, the Appalachian Mountain Club is the oldest outdoor group in the United States. It was originally established to explore and preserve the White Mountains in New Hampshire, but it has expanded throughout the northeastern U.S., with 12 chapters stretching from Maine to Washington, D.C.
- Colorado Mountain Club
The CMC gathers and disseminates information regarding Colorado's mountains in the areas of art, science, literature and recreation and was instrumental in the creation of Rocky Mountain National Park.
- Mazamas
Located in Portland, Oregon, the Mazamas promote climbing, responsible recreation, and conservation values through outdoor education, advocacy, and outreach.
- The Mountaineers
An alpine club serving the state of Washington, the Mountaineers host a wide range of outdoor activities, primarily alpine mountain climbing and hikes. The club also hosts classes, training courses, and social events.

OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

The Outdoor Alliance (OA) is a coalition of human-powered outdoor recreation groups working together to increase our influence in Washington, DC while promoting the ethic of sustainable recreation on our public lands. OA now includes groups representing climbers, skiers, hikers, bikers, paddlers and surfers. Numerous climbing-related groups are members of OA, including Access Fund (a founding member), the American Alpine Club, the Colorado Mountain Club, the Mountaineers, and Mazamas.

Policy & advocacy agenda

From Yosemite's sterling granite walls to the ocean cliffs of Acadia, public lands are among our greatest treasures and are the backbone of the outdoor recreation economy. Fifty-seven percent of American climbing areas are located on federally managed public land. (In the American West, it's almost seventy percent.) Despite the substantial recreational and economic benefits associated with conservation and recreation, we continue to experience unprecedented threats to public lands. Among the most serious threats are recent actions by both federal and state officials and lawmakers to:

- 1. Prioritize a mandate of energy dominance in management of our public lands;**
- 2. Issue directives or introduce legislation that would transfer ownership—or allow for the sale or lease—of millions of acres of public land;**
- 3. Weaken conservation designations, regulations and standards;**
- 4. Underfund public land management agencies, thereby reducing their ability to effectively manage public lands; and**
- 5. Reduce public involvement in agency decisions and government transparency.**

Most, if not all, of these actions would allow for more development and limit public use, threatening climbing access and the fundamental American notion that public lands belong to everyone. Climbing organizations like the AAC and Access Fund and its partners at American Mountain Guiding Association (AMGA), USA Climbing, the Climbing Wall Association (CWA) and Outdoor Industry Association (OIA) work hard to advance a number of priorities, including:

Promoting stewardship of climbing areas to ensure long-term sustainability;

Improving land agency regulations and policies related to fixed climbing anchors in designated Wilderness;

Supporting the American mountain guiding community and inspiring and working to improve opportunities for the public to access lands with a guide;

Offering climbers trips, skills and leadership training, social events and opportunities to volunteer;

Replacing aging bolts;

Promoting the growth and success of competition climbing;

Protecting, connecting, and educating the indoor climbing industry;

Vote the Outdoors Campaign;

Create new state offices of outdoor recreation; and

Support state and local policy and funding measures to enhance access to, stewardship of, and increased protections for outdoor recreation.

Upcoming federal policy issues

The climbing and outdoor recreation policy landscape is constantly changing and climbers will remain active in working with the Administration and Congress to resolve policy issues, and to promote human-powered outdoor recreation on public lands.

We anticipate engaging on the following bills in 2019:

- Antiquities Act authorities (restoration of Bears Ears and Grand Staircase Escalante National Monuments to original designation);
- Advancing the Simplifying Outdoor Access for Recreation Act (SOAR Act) to improve the outfitter and guide permitting systems of the federal land agencies;
- Recreation Not Red-Tape Act (RNR);
- Boost funding for National Parks and address maintenance backlogs (Our Parks and Public Lands Act);
- Department of Interior, Public Land Leasing Regulatory Reform.

In addition, the climbing community will be focused on the protection of existing and potential climbing areas through administrative land planning processes (e.g. Forest Planning, BLM Resource Management Planning, etc.)

Recent climbing policy accomplishments

The outdoor recreation community is a growing force whose political influence is strengthening. Climbers in particular are politically diverse, intimately familiar with public lands, and are building strong connections with lawmakers and their staff. These efforts, in close collaboration with outdoor industry partners, have produced important gains for climbers and outdoor recreation enthusiasts alike. These battles have been hard won and help to define both the history of climbing in the United States and the current state of the sport.

Protecting Wilderness Climbing

In 2019, the climbing community played a crucial role in supporting the passage of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act, which resulted in the protection of 1.3 million acres of public lands as Wilderness across the American west. These Wilderness areas will include the San Rafael Swell in Emery County, Utah, which has hundreds of routes in a wild, backcountry setting. Access Fund also secured a provision in this law that protects wilderness climbing activities.

Learn more at accessfund.org/news-and-events/news/access-fund-gets-wilderness-climbing-protection-written-into-law

Defending the Antiquities Act and Bears Ears National Monument

The Antiquities Act of 1906 gives the President the authority to protect significant natural, cultural, or scientific features on public lands. In 2016, President Obama designated Bears Ears National Monument in southeast Utah to protect Native American cultural resources and the region's fragile desert and canyon ecosystems. The designated 1.3 million acre National Monument encompasses more than 100,000 Native American cultural sites and incredible rock climbing-- Indian Creek, Lockhart Basin, Arch Canyon, Comb Ridge, and Valley of the Gods, for example .

In December 2017, President Trump issued a proclamation to reduce the size of Bears Ears by about 85%. This reduction excludes nearly 40% of the climbing areas within the original boundaries of the monument. Many stakeholders, including Access Fund, are pursuing legal action to restore the Monument to its original size.

Learn more at accessfund.org/news-and-events/news/update-on-legal-fight-to-protect-bears-ears

Other Recent Gains

- Reauthorization of the Land and Water Conservation Fund in the 2019 Dingell Act;
- The Dingell Act declaring that wilderness climbing is consistent with wilderness protections;
- Bears Ears proclamation including “rock climbing” as one of the designated uses of the National Monument;
- Department of Interior Secretarial Order 3366 expanding and enhancing recreational opportunities and creating a Recreation Advisor position;
- USFS Chief’s Guidance, “Modernization of Special Uses to Enhance Visitor and Community Benefits,” which seeks to modernize the recreation special uses program;
- DOI Secretarial Order 3339 (2016), “Increasing Access to Extended Outdoor Experiences for Under-Resourced Youth” or the “Walker Order”;
- Fire Suppression Funding Fix in Omnibus Spending Bill (2018);
- Passage of the Outdoor Recreation Jobs and Economic Impact Act of 2016;
- Passage of the National Park Service Centennial Act of 2016;
- Policy changes on the Shoshone National Forest that expand the availability of special use permits for educational classes, institutional groups, and guides;
- New recreational lease at the Gate Buttress, UT that opens 600 routes and 150 boulder problems for recreational climbing and guided groups;
- Educating voters about public land management and outdoor recreation.
- These gains reflect strong collaboration within the climbing industry, the human-powered recreation community, conservation organizations, and the outdoor industry.

Advocacy in action

The climbing community has a long history of advocating for the protection of our special places and access to public lands and other recreational resources. A network of approximately 130 Local Climbing Organizations (LCOs) in the United States is central to the future of climbing advocacy. LCOs play a critical role in protecting America's climbing and often serve as the first line of defense for local access issues. They lead stewardship projects, build relationships with land managers, advocate for climbing policy, and replace and maintain fixed anchors. They are essential in the broader work to protect America's climbing.

Access Fund provides a full suite of services and support to these affiliate organizations including: advice on starting and running non-profit organizations focused on climbing conservation and advocacy and organizing national and regional conferences gathering climbing advocates together from across the country.

State Offices

State Offices of Outdoor Recreation

The growth of the outdoor industry has garnered the attention of state governments across the country. Offices of outdoor recreation have various charges but most are geared toward elements of the following: accelerating the growth of the industry, advancing education and workforce training, promoting and advocating for active and healthy lifestyles through outdoor recreation and ensuring that the state's natural resources continue to thrive and provide opportunity for current and future generations.

12

number of outdoor recreation offices, to date, with more on the horizon

National Advocacy Programs

Climb the Hill

Co-created by the American Alpine Club and Access Fund, Climb the Hill brings climbing advocates together on Capitol Hill to educate Congressional representatives, policymakers, and top land management administrators on the importance of public lands, outdoor recreation, and improved climbing management. Climb the Hill includes staff and directors from the AAC and Access Fund, influential climbers, local climbing advocates, and outdoor industry partners. Learn more at climbthehill.org

60

individuals participated in the 2018 Climb the Hill event in Washington D.C.

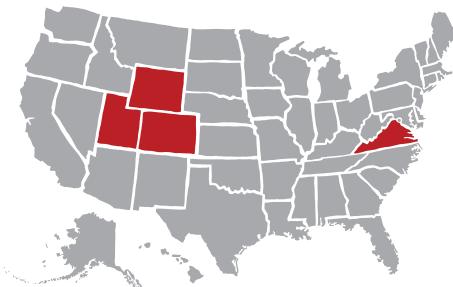
62

meetings were held with congressional policy makers and land management agencies

This event was supported by more than a dozen non-profit partners, as well as by Patagonia, Adidas Terrex, REI Co-op, Clif, The North Face & Brooklyn Boulders.

Hill to Crag

The American Alpine Club's latest outreach program, the "Hill to Crag" initiative, offers lawmakers and their staff a chance to experience public lands and climbing landscapes across the nation. These crag days provide national, state and local elected officials with a day in a harness, and a better understanding of the importance of public lands, outdoor recreation and sound climbing policy.



2018 Hill to Crag event locations: Joe's Valley, UT; Golden, CO; Vedauwoo, WY; Chimney Rock, NC

The impact of these events was amplified by the participation of Black Diamond, Petzl, local climbing organizations, state offices of outdoor recreation, Outdoor Industry Association, land managers and other partners.

“

Partnerships with outdoor recreation industry offices are critically important to the climbing community because they serve as liaisons to state governments, echoing the important message that our wild places are our legacy and birthright and are the foundation for a vibrant outdoor recreation economy.”

—Luis Benitez, Former Director of the Colorado Outdoor Recreation Industry Office

Advocacy Summits

Climbing Advocacy Summit

On September 22, 2018, Access Fund hosted its annual Climbing Advocacy Summit in New York City, which was attended by more than 120 climbing advocates from across the country.³

Other 2018 national advocacy events included:

- AAC Volunteer Summit
June 1-3, 2018
- AMGA Annual Meeting
October 24-28, 2018
- CWA Summit
May 16-18, 2018
- Women’s Climbing Festival
October 12-18, 2018
- Color the Crag
October 18-21, 2018

Local Climbing Organizations across the country hosted a number of impactful advocacy events in 2018. We look forward to incorporating them in the next State of Climbing report.

Advocacy Around the world

The American Alpine Club is the U.S. representative to the International Climbing and Mountaineering Federation (UIAA), which is comprised of 92 member associations in 68 countries representing approximately three million people. Through the UIAA, the American Alpine Club promotes the growth and protection of mountaineering and climbing worldwide by preserving the spirit and traditions of mountaineering, advancing safe and ethical mountain practices, promoting responsible access and supporting the advancement of climbing in the Olympics.

Additionally, there are numerous organizations working worldwide to conserve access to outdoor spaces. Some of these organizations include:

- [Access PanAm](#), an international organization dedicated to protecting climbing access throughout the Western hemisphere, specifically in Latin America.
- There are access societies across Canada, such as the [Climbers’ Access Society of British Columbia](#) which works to facilitate access to the cliffs and mountains of BC.
- There are also numerous national climbing organizations, which have an important presence on the international stage. For example, the [Alpine Club of Canada](#), a close partner of the American Alpine Club, and the [German Alpine Club](#), the world’s largest.



Noted

When public lands are privatized or developed, we lose a beloved landscape. Fortunately, climbers and the organizations that represent them are not the only groups who care about protecting these treasures. With help from the broader outdoor recreation and conservation communities and countless other advocates, climbers are well-positioned to ensure that wild landscapes remain healthy and that climbing on public lands continues to be part of our national heritage.

Our work to engage lawmakers and advocate for climbers are ongoing. As the 116th Congress begins its work in 2019, it is more important than ever that we work together to ensure that future generations of climbers have the opportunity to climb in our country’s wild landscapes.

50

Conservation & Stewardship

As climbing gains popularity all over the United States, our most beloved climbing areas—iconic destinations and once-secret backyard crags alike—are seeing unprecedented numbers of visitors.

In many ways, this is exciting: there's a new generation of climbers who care deeply about our climbing areas. In other cases, it means that some of our community's most beloved landscapes are facing irreparable damage.

As climbers, we have a responsibility to take care of the places we treasure. Thanks to the leadership of Access Fund, American Alpine Club, and other climbing nonprofits, the climbing community is taking on stewardship projects, clean-up events, traveling trail crews and using scientific research to better understand human impacts on our mountain and climbing environments.



Stewardship

Boots-on-the-ground stewardship is key to caring for our favorite climbing areas. **Access Fund's Adopt a Crag program** brings the climbing community together with land managers to care for local climbing areas. The **Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Teams** consist of three pairs of professional trail builders/conservation specialist that travel throughout the U.S. helping to care for and restore our climbing areas. Together, these two stewardship programs rally volunteers from local communities all across the country to do litter clean-ups, graffiti removal, trail restoration and construction, erosion control, and invasive weed removal. Through the program, local climbers build productive relationships with land managers, develop a deeper connection with their local crags and boulders, and help to build a community of people committed to stewardship, volunteerism and conservation. The amount of positive work that has been accomplished throughout the history of the two programs is staggering. In 2018 alone, these efforts included:¹

- ✚ The Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Team (a traveling crew of professional trail builders and conservation specialists)
- ✚ Organizing 372 Adopt a Crag events around the country;
- ✚ Engaging 10,924 volunteers in stewardship work; and
- ✚ Putting 65,544 volunteer hours to work at climbing areas.

Land Acquisition

For nearly 30 years, Access Fund has pioneered a unique and powerful land acquisition program that permanently protects and conserves climbing resources on private land. Since 1990, Access Fund has assisted with acquisition of 76 climbing areas, helping to conserve over 17,000 acres and more than 11,400 climbing routes nationwide.² Access Fund is the only nationally accredited land trust working specifically for climbers.

Hueco Rock Ranch

This was a great example of a joint effort between two leading climbing organizations. Access Fund facilitated the due diligence, negotiations, and closing of the acquisition, and providing the American Alpine Club a \$100,000 loan for the \$204,000 acquisition. AAC continues to own and manage the Ranch, which serves as the primary lodging facility and guiding headquarters for climbers visiting the stunning bouldering and climbing of Hueco Tanks State Park & Historic Site outside of El Paso, TX.



The conservation community

The conservation and stewardship communities span well beyond climbers; however, this section will focus on the climbing-specific organizations devoted to caring for our climbing areas. Below are the six largest national climbing organizations engaged in conservation and stewardship:

- + Access Fund
- + American Alpine Club
- + Appalachian Mountain Club
- + Colorado Mountain Club
- + Mazamas
- + The Mountaineers

Local Climbing Organizations (LCOs) are powerhouses in the stewardship of climbing areas. According to Access Fund, there are 130 local climbing advocacy organizations across the country. These advocates help resolve access issues and work with stakeholders to care for the climbing areas in their backyards. Additionally, local mountain clubs across the country and groups like them make significant positive impacts on our climbing landscapes.

Community Action

The climbing community tackles conservation and stewardship projects in a variety of ways, including the following national efforts:

- The Access Fund Jeep Conservation Team: a traveling crew of professional trail builders and conservation specialists
- Access Fund's Adopt-a-Crag events: Trail restoration projects and cleanups at local climbing areas: 314 events in 2017
- LCOs stewardship projects
- AAC's Craggin' Classic stewardship events
- Access Fund's Annual Climbing Advocacy Summit
- AAC's Volunteer Summit

Other, more regional efforts include: Yosemite Facelift, Front Range Climbing Stewards, Yosemite Climbing Stewards, Smith Rock Spring Thing, Construction of human waste solutions at high use climbing areas, Climbing Ranger programs in National Parks, "Friends" groups at key climbing areas nationwide, and many more.

Types of Projects

There is a broad range of conservation and stewardship projects taken on by the climbing community:

- Trail construction and reconstruction
- Re-vegetation and reforestation
- Installation of drainage structures
- Maintenance of retention walls
- Human Waste Solutions
- Trash removal & graffiti clean up
- Trailhead improvements
- Road and parking lot improvements
- Education and trail signage and kiosks
- Stewardship education
- GIS Mapping
- Land Acquisitions

Boulder Climbing Community and Front Range Climbing Stewards

Indian Creek is one of the most sought-after desert climbing destinations in the world. For years, climbers have tested themselves on its sandstone faces and infamous splitter cracks. As with most climbing areas across the country, it is confronting greater environmental impacts as more climbers are drawn to the area—and desert landscapes are particularly susceptible to human impact

In 2018, the Boulder Climbing Community (BCC) was awarded an AAC Cornerstone Conservation Grant to improve access trails to the Scarface Wall. Access Fund led the planning of the project with the land manager. The work was led by the Front Range Climbing Stewards (FRCS) and included additional support from:

- Access Fund-Jeep Conservation Teams
- Friends of Indian Creek
- Rocky Mountain Field Institute
- Montrose High School volunteers
- The High Mountain Institute
- The Moab Craggin' Classic stewardship day

Liberty Bell Conservation Initiative

The Liberty Bell Group, a cluster of five granite spires at Washington Pass outside Mazama, is home to some of the most popular and iconic alpine climbing in Washington State, including classic Fred Beckey first ascents like the Beckey Route on Liberty Bell and the West Face of North Early Winter Spire. Over the last decade, rapidly expanding use led to deteriorating trail conditions, severe erosion, and unsafe approaches to and from the climbs.

This conservation initiative project was a joint fundraising effort spearheaded by Access Fund. It included the Mountaineers, the Washington Climbers Coalition, and American Alpine Club. In total \$130,000 was raised to undertake major trail reconstruction efforts and save one of the most iconic alpine granite climbing areas in the United States.

A scenic view of a mountain range with rugged peaks and a lake in the foreground.

334K



Noted

The Colorado Fourteeners Initiative (CFI) estimates 334,000 people hiked a 14,000-foot peak in Colorado in 2017—a 7% increase from 2016.³

According to their research, the high volume of hikers and climbers has damaged places within alpine landscapes “past the point of natural recovery.” Organizations like CFI mitigate human impacts on our natural resources and facilitate stewardship projects to engage local communities.⁴



Funding Sources

The outdoor industry and conservation partners generously support many conservation and stewardship initiatives with funds managed by climbing nonprofits. For example, the Washington Pass initiative received funding from national organizations such as the National Parks Foundation and Conservation Alliance. Smaller projects often receive funding from local nonprofits and companies including organizations like Conserving Carolina and BETA Fund in Illinois. The AAC and the Access Fund provide conservation grants to LCOs across the country and encourage local members to give back through stewardship.

AAC's Cornerstone Conservation Grants:

Since 2011, the AAC has awarded between \$25,000 and \$35,000 annually for projects in climbing areas and mountain environments across the country, powered by REI and Clif.

Access Fund Conservation Grants:

\$55,000 awarded in two grant cycles each year for projects at areas where technical climbing predominates. Since its inception in 1991, Access Fund has awarded over \$1.2 million in funding to 359 projects. In 2019, Access Fund announced that it would be increasing its grant program from \$40k to \$55k per year with the generous support of the First Ascent Foundation.

Anchor Replacement Fund:

Access Fund and American Alpine Club awards \$10,000 to replace aging bolts through the anchor replacement fund annually.

AAC Research Grants:

In addition to conservation and stewardship, research on human impacts on the environment is critical to our ability to protect and conserve climbing resources. Since 2010, AAC has awarded nearly \$68,000 to researchers and universities around the country to enrich our understanding of sustainable mountain environments and habitats.

Around the world

A number of organizations around the world seek to understand and address human impacts on our climbing landscapes. Below are a few examples of climbing organizations addressing these issues on the international stage.

UIAA Mountain Sustainability

The UIAA, the international federation for climbers and mountaineers, formed in 1932 with a global responsibility for “the study and solution of all problems regarding mountaineering.” Today, the UIAA represents the interests of more than 3 million international climbers and mountaineers. It maintains a proactive position encouraging responsible and sustainable mountain recreation practices as well as sustainable mountain development and conservation.

Sustainable Summits

Denali, Mt. Fuji, Mt. Kilimanjaro, Mt. Everest, and additional high-profile alpine environments are reckoning with overuse concerns and the proliferation of human waste. To address this reality, in 2010, the AAC hosted Exit Strategies: Managing Human Waste in the Wild, a conference to approach these issues from a global scale. Now a biennial event, the renamed conference Sustainable Summits convenes an international consortium of land managers, researchers, representatives from NGOs and non-profit organizations, outdoor companies, guides and mountaineers to share knowledge and seek solutions to high-mountain-specific issues.

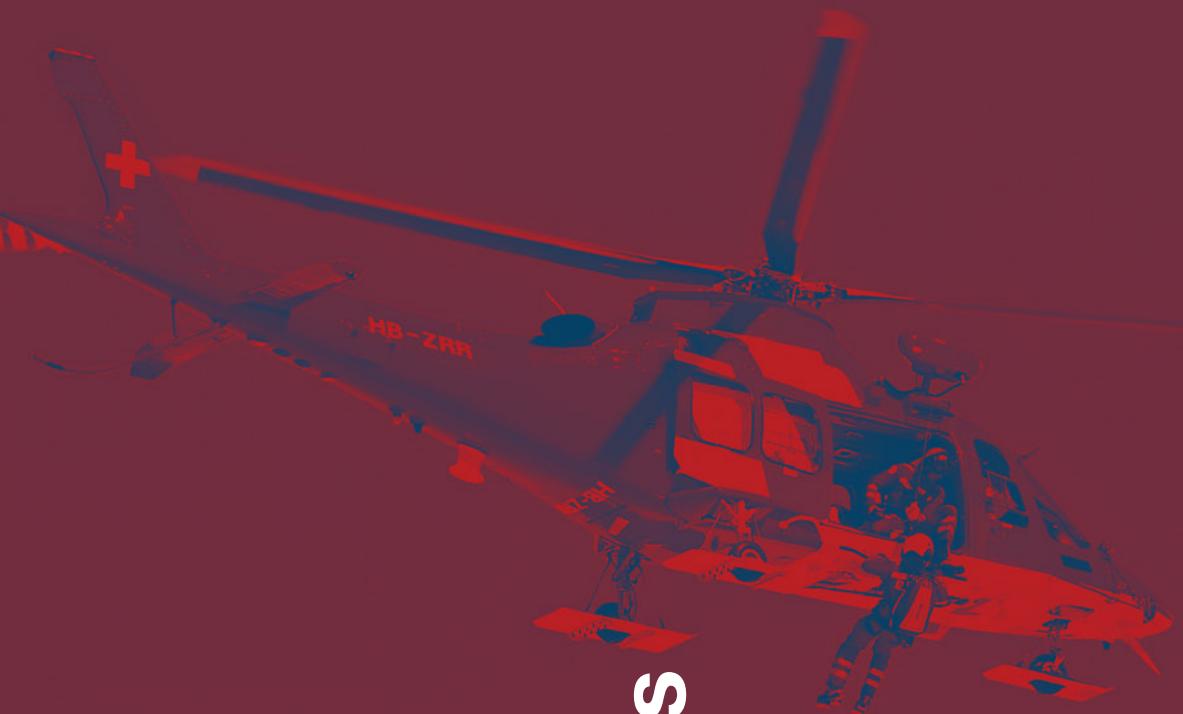


Noted

Growth in the number of climbers nationwide is not only a burden. It can be a gift, too. As more climbers are drawn into the fold, we have a greater community of people making connections with public and private climbing areas across the country. With sufficient resources and education, today's new climbers can become tomorrow's leaders in conservation and stewardship.

86

Accidents & Rescues



Is climbing safer now?

Accidents in North American Climbing, published annually by the AAC, has tracked climbing injuries and fatalities since 1951.

These numbers grew steadily through the mid-1980s, but since then they have leveled off or even declined—despite substantial growth in the number of U.S. climbers.

The data collection for the *Accidents* publication is not scientific; we rely on independent sources (national parks, search and rescue teams, media, and climbers) to submit incident reports. Definitions and methodology for this data collection have varied over the past six decades. And climbers who self-evacuate after an accident—whether injured or not—often never show up in our data. **So these numbers definitely do not include every accident.** Nevertheless, the editors are confident they receive good information on the great majority of technical climbing fatalities each year, and this number does not seem to be growing.

What's going on? Climbing gear has improved dramatically since the 1970s, as have safety techniques and instruction. Perhaps even

more important, the styles of climbing have evolved, with much higher percentages of climbers focusing their time on relatively safer sport climbing, gym climbing, and bouldering versus traditional rock climbing or mountaineering. (Bouldering and gym injuries seldom require formal rescues and rarely show up in our data tables; however, we do record most such fatalities.)

If technical climbing's fatality rate, as a percentage of all climbers, is lower than it was in the past—and lower than widely perceived—it's important to learn exactly why this is true, why the injury and fatality rate remains higher in some climbing areas or styles of climbing, and what could be done to make the sport even safer. The AAC hopes to zero in on these issues in coming years.

— Dougald MacDonald, Executive Editor of *Accidents in North American Climbing*



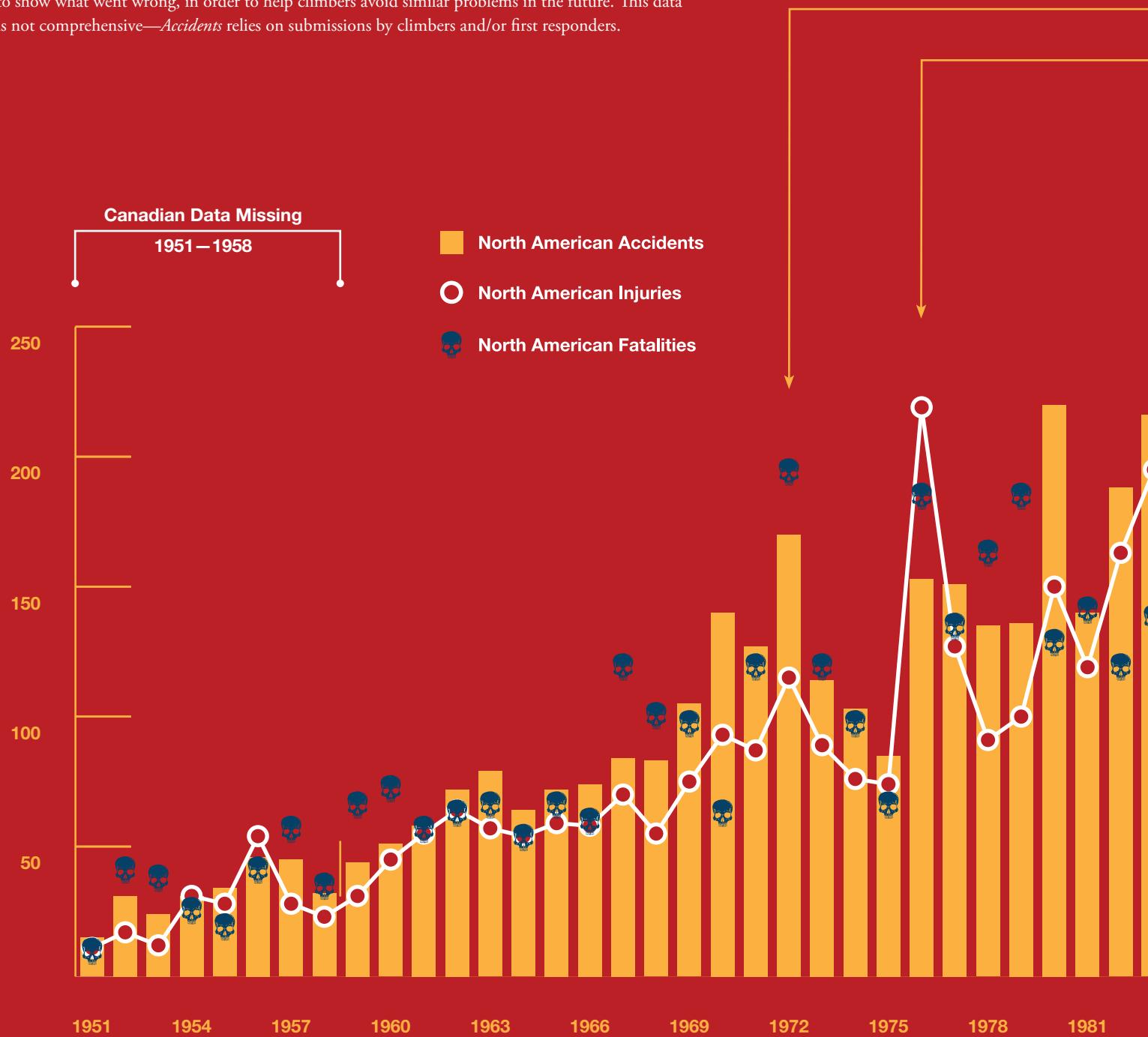
Quick Summary

- ✚ On average, a climber who is injured outside is 32 years old, male, and climbing in the western United States (WA, OR, CA, NV, ID, MT, WY, UT, CO, AZ, NM).¹
- ✚ There is no definitive record of the number of technical climbing accidents and injuries nationwide each year.²
- ✚ According to *Accidents in North American Climbing*, the deadliest year on record was 1972 with 62 North American casualties.³
- ✚ According to the Climbing Wall Association (CWA), within climbing gyms in 2017 the rate of accidents resulting in injury per 1,000 visitor hours was 0.0888.⁴



Outdoor climbing accidents, injuries, & fatalities in North America, 1951–2017

This data is provided by *Accidents in North American Climbing (ANAC)*. Published annually since 1948, ANAC documents the year's most significant and teachable climbing accidents. Each incident is analyzed to show what went wrong, in order to help climbers avoid similar problems in the future. This data is not comprehensive—*Accidents* relies on submissions by climbers and/or first responders.





Noted

The deadliest year in ANAC's records was 1972, when 62 North American climbers died in 170 reported accidents. 1976 marked the highest number of injuries reported with 219 individuals injured out of 153 accidents. In 1986, 234 total accidents were reported in ANAC, the highest on record.

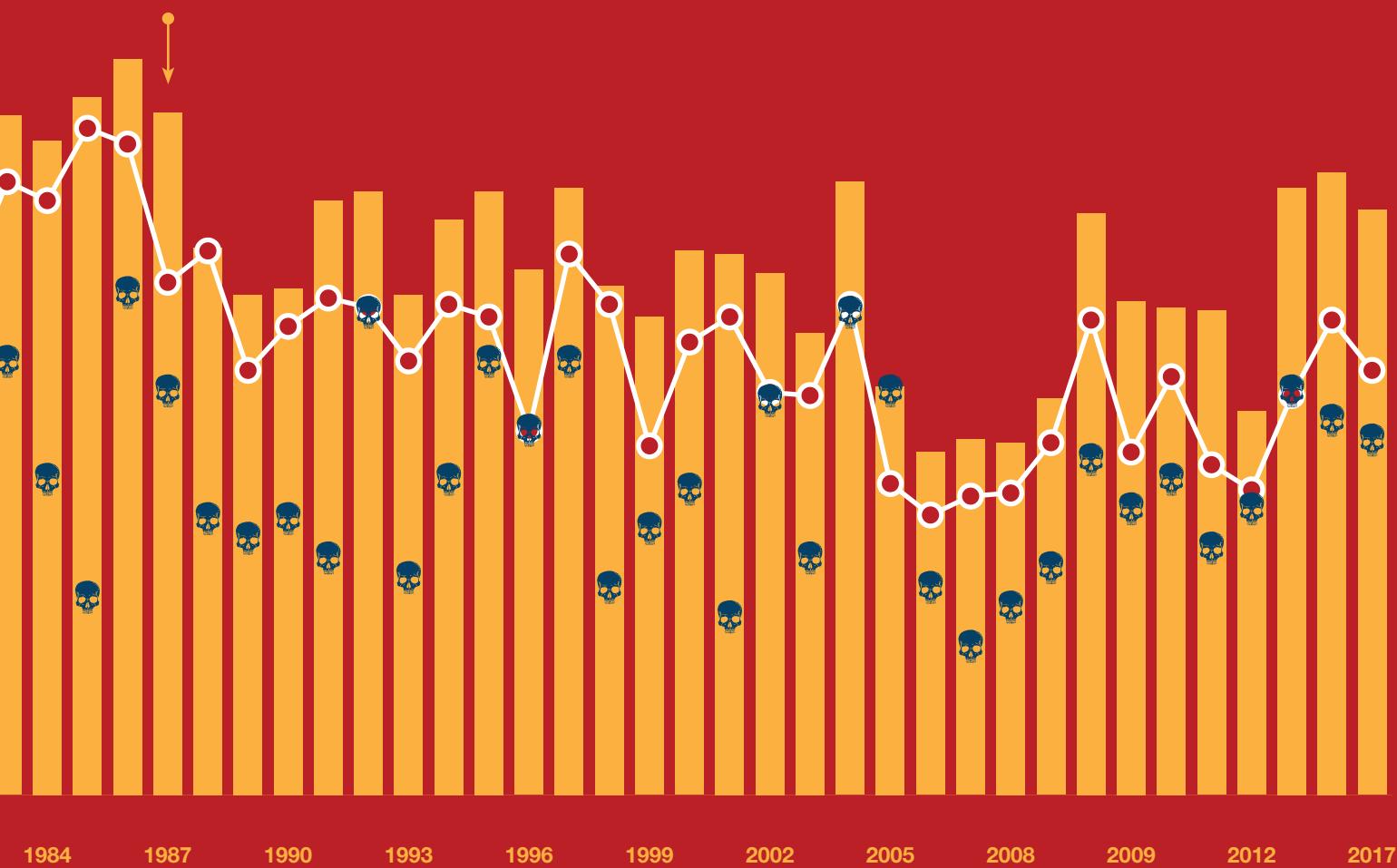
The number of climbing injuries and accidents reported appears to have leveled off since the 1980s. However, it is likely that accident totals are under-reported.

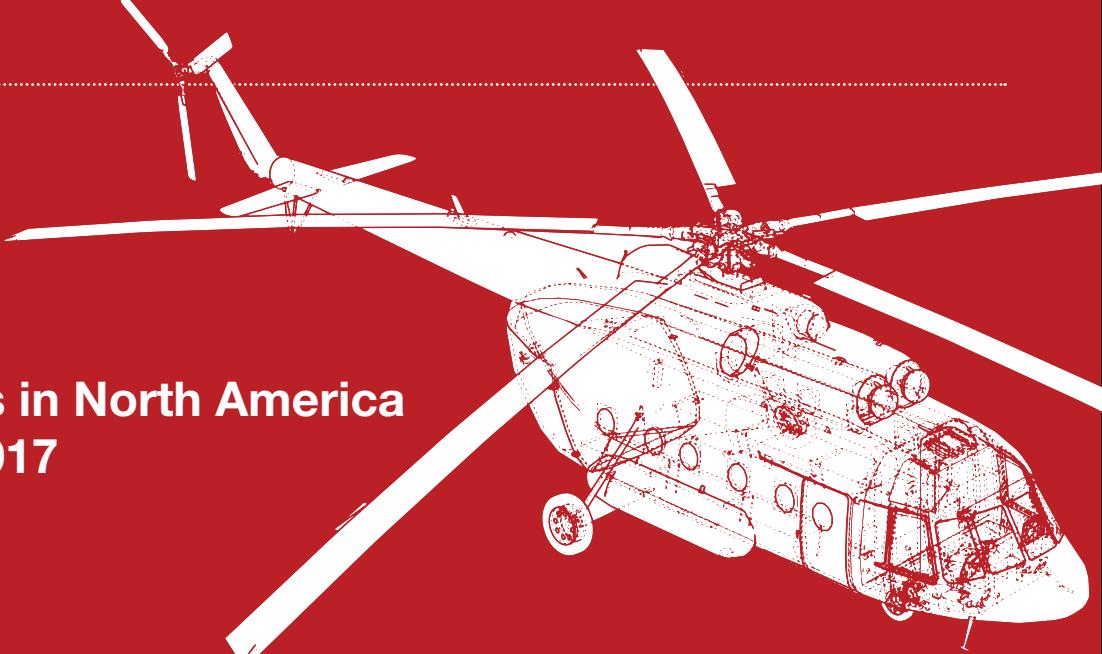
Certain forms of modern climbing, including bouldering, cause many accidents that do not require a rescue or result in a documented visit to the hospital. These accidents may never be reported officially.

It remains crucial for local, regional, and national organizations such as the American Alpine Club to continue their efforts to educate safer climbers.

Canadian Data Missing

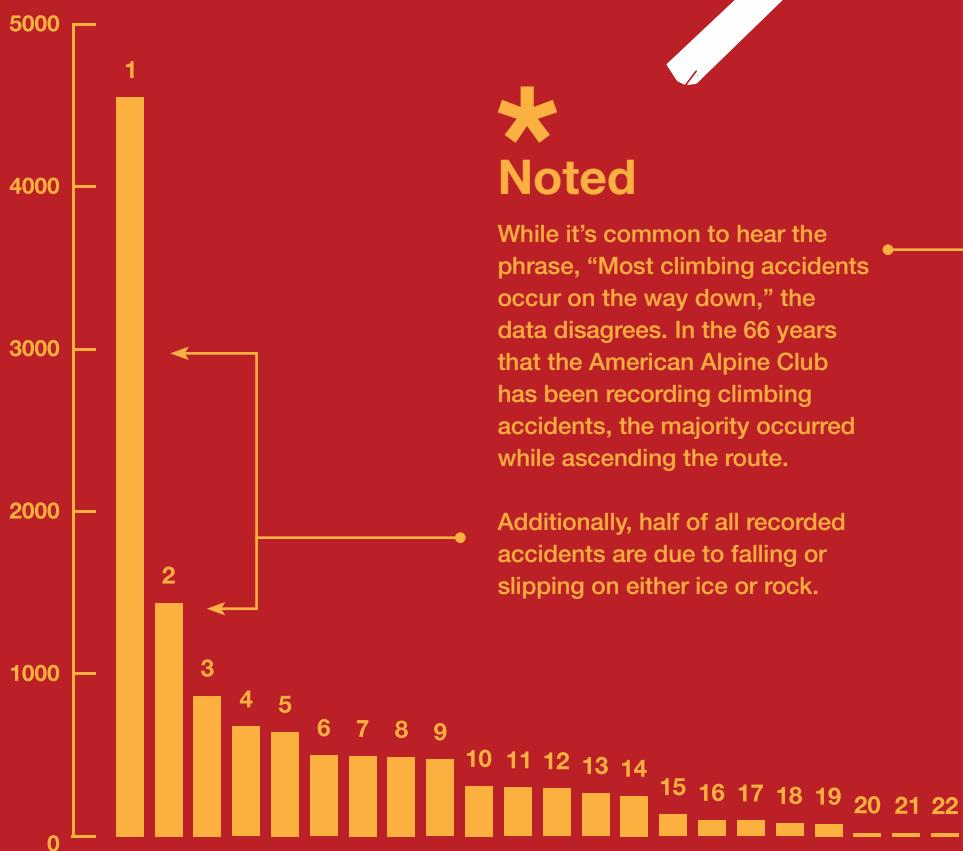
2006–2011





Climbing accidents in North America by cause, 1951–2017

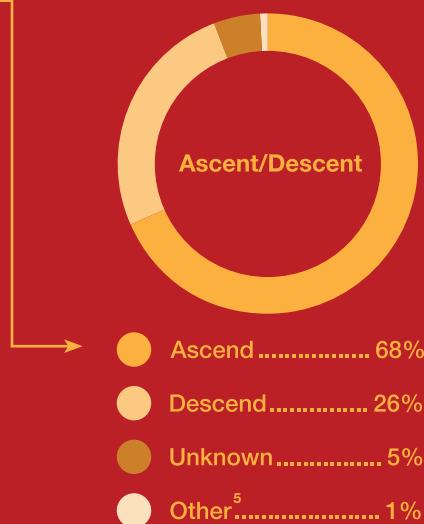
From *Accidents in North American Climbing*



Noted

While it's common to hear the phrase, "Most climbing accidents occur on the way down," the data disagrees. In the 66 years that the American Alpine Club has been recording climbing accidents, the majority occurred while ascending the route.

Additionally, half of all recorded accidents are due to falling or slipping on either ice or rock.



- | | | | |
|--|-----|---------------------------------------|-----|
| 1. Fall or slip on rock..... | 38% | 12. Failure to follow route | 2% |
| 2. Fall or slip on ice | 12% | 13. Loss of control/Glissade..... | 2% |
| 3. Falling rock, ice, or object | 7% | 14. Fall into crevasse/moat | 2% |
| 4. Other ⁶ | 6% | 15. Faulty use of crampons | 1% |
| 5. Exceeding abilities | 5% | 16. Unknown | <1% |
| 6. Illness..... | 4% | 17. Skiing ⁸ | <1% |
| 7. Stranded/Lost | 4% | 18. Ascending too fast | <1% |
| 8. Rappel failure/Error ⁷ | 4% | 19. Lightning | <1% |
| 9. Avalanche..... | 4% | 20. Piton/ice screw pulled out. | <1% |
| 10. Nut/cam pulled out..... | 3% | 21. Equipment failure | <1% |
| 11. Exposure | 2% | 22. Lowering error ⁹ | <1% |

| | |
|--------------|-----|
| Rock..... | 63% |
| Snow | 32% |
| Ice | 4% |
| River..... | <1% |
| Unknown..... | <1% |

Climbing-related injuries

The places we love to climb don't always leave us unscathed. A 2018 study, "Climbing-related injury among adults in the United States: 5-year analysis of the National Emergency Department Sample"¹⁰ analyzed data from a nationally representative sample of visits to emergency departments across the US. The study identified emergency room visits that may have been the result of rock climbing, mountain climbing, and indoor wall climbing accidents between 2010 and 2014. During that time, the study identified more than 15,000 rock climbing and mountaineering injuries—more than 3,000 per year, on average—and that's likely an underestimate, given that the data is comprised of injuries resulting in a visit to the emergency room.

On average, an injured climber was about 32 years old, male, and climbing in the West. The study likely misclassified many patients as climbers who were actually hikers or other outdoor enthusiasts who suffered a fall. However, the authors also pointed out that many climbing injuries never result in a visit to the emergency room.

The study estimated that \$20 million is spent annually in emergency departments on climbing-related injuries, and that's likely an underestimate, as physician, outpatient, rehabilitation, and lost work-time costs are not included

\$20 million

The estimated amount spent annually on emergency department costs of climbing-related injuries.

15,116

The number of climbing and mountaineering injuries identified by U.S. emergency departments from 2010 to 2014. As with *Accidents in North American Climbing*, there are many reasons this number may overstate or understate the real frequency of climber injuries. More study is needed.

18-44

The age range of 74% of all injured climbers, 2010 to 2014. The average age was 32 years old.

62

The percent of injured climbers that were male.

Accidents in the gym

The Climbing Wall Association (CWA) is the United States' organization for helping the indoor climbing industry manage risk.¹¹ In order to understand how dangerous indoor climbing is—and whether the industry is doing its part to educate new climbers, promote personal responsibility, and manage the risks involved in the sport, they administered a survey to gyms around the country.

The survey asked participants to record their rates of "incidents" and "accidents" to get a picture of what's really going on in climbing gyms. ("Incidents" are defined as close calls that did not result in injury; "accidents" resulted in an injury to a patron or staff member.)

The study found that the rate of accidents among climbing gym patrons is .007 per 1,000 visitor hours. Compared to an activity like CrossFit (2.3 injuries per 1,000 athlete training hours¹²), this is an exceedingly low rate of injury.

Nearly seven in ten facilities reported accidents among patrons in 2017, but the average number of accidents was only 2.2 for the year. This compares to 45% of facilities that reported staff accidents, with a mean of 3.0 for the year. Those numbers overall show that patrons and staff of indoor climbing facilities experience very few injuries per year.

This information is an indicator that what climbing gym operators are doing to educate and train their customers and staff is working, and that the industry should continue those efforts. 91% of facilities have written curricula for climbing classes, 81% have written criteria for climber assessments, and the vast majority offer technical training classes, such as top-rope and lead belay training. These programs are clearly paying off in creating a responsible climbing community.

—Laura Allured, Climbing Wall Association

07

Appendix

01

02

Demographics

1. Consumer Segmentation Study, Outdoor Industry Association, 2014
 2. Outdoor Industry Association
 3. Outdoor Industry Association
 4. Annual Climbers' Survey, American Alpine Club, 2018
 5. Indoor Climbing Industry Report, Climbing Wall Association, 2018
 6. Outdoor Industry Association
 7. Data provided by American Mountain Guides Association, 2019
- Data on this page is from the American Alpine Club, AMGA, Climbing Wall Association, and Outdoor Industry Association

Competition Climbing

1. Carpenter, Hayden. "Ice climbing proves it's worthy of the Olympics." Outside Online. Published March 31, 2019
- Data for this chapter provided by USA Climbing, USA Ice Climbing, and U.S. Ski Mountaineering Association.

03

Economic Report

1. Consumer Segmentation Study, Outdoor Industry Association, 2014
2. Indoor Climbing Industry Report, Climbing Wall Association, 2018
3. Climbing Wall Association, May 2019
4. Outdoor Industry Association
5. “US outdoor sports equipment POS monthly, Category: Climbing,” NPD Group, Inc., 2019. Data available from January 2015–November 2018
6. NPD Group
7. Outdoor Industry Association
8. NPD Group
9. Outdoor recreation satellite account: Updated statistics for 2012–2016, United States Bureau of Economic Analysis, 2018
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04

Climbing Policy/Advocacy

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05

06

Conservation/Stewardship Accidents/Rescue

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5-year analysis of the National Emergency Department
Sample. *Wilderness Environ Med* 2018;29:425-30

2. Data from *Accidents in North American Climbing*

3. Ibid

4. Indoor Climbing Industry Report, Climbing Wall Association, 2018

5. Some accidents happen when climbers are at the top or
bottom of a route. They may be belaying or setting up a rappel,
for example. This category was created in 2001. The category
“Unknown,” is primarily because of solo climbers.

6. These included failure to self-arrest, dropped rope, cornice collapse,
anchor failure, belayer pulled into wall, intoxication, and earthquake.

7. These included inadequate anchors, uneven ropes, no knots in rope
ends, simul-rappelling errors, pendulum swings, and attaching device
incorrectly. Prior years’ data may have included lowering errors.

8. This category covers ski mountaineering. Backcountry
ski touring or snowshoeing incidents, including those
involving avalanches, are not counted here.

9. This category was introduced in 2016. Lowering errors included
rope too short, miscommunication, and lowering with wrong rope.

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