

# URBAN CREEP

IF THE PRESSURES OF CITY LIFE SOMETIMES  
MAKES YOU WANT TO CLIMB THE WALLS,  
GIVE IN TO THE URGE

TEXT **NARINA EXELBY**

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The final stretch is so close. Maybe just a metre, but it feels like seven. I can do this; I am strong. This has been my mantra since I left the ground.

But my body isn't responding. My left arm is stretched up high, fingers curled round a comfortable yellow hold. My right hand is just below my right shoulder. I'm clinging to an insanely narrow piece of cement, fingertips burning. I can do this; I am strong... if I can just pull myself up.

My right knee is tucked under an armpit. My left one. Pressure from the tippy toes of my right foot against another rather small yellow hold is the only connection my feet have with something solid. Right leg's starting to shake.

I can do this; I am strong...

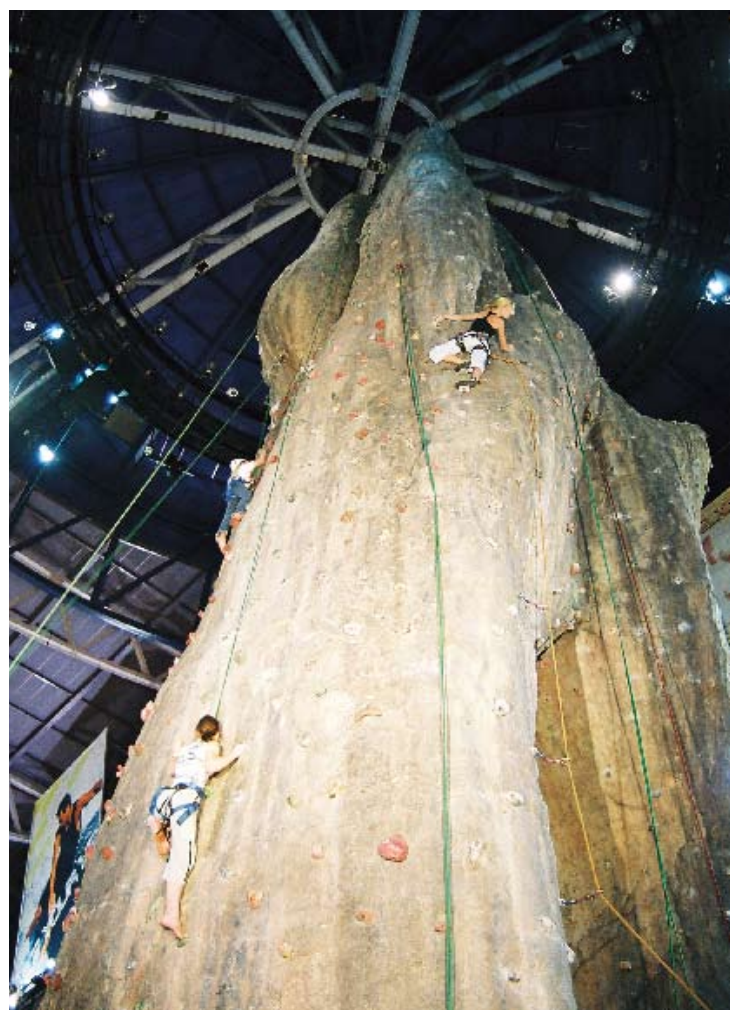
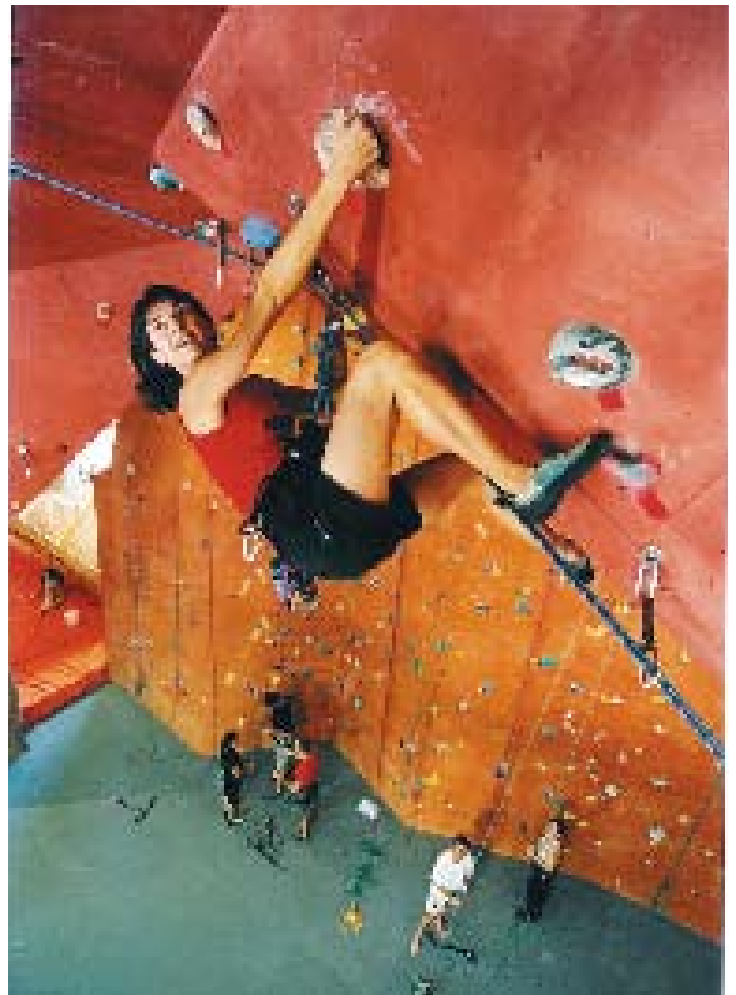
Yet strength has very little to do with getting to the top of a climbing wall – it's all about technique. It's also about focus, and awareness of your body in space, and thinking about how you're going to move, where you're going to move to, and shutting out the pain in your fingers or the shaking in your calves.

The beauty of climbing is that almost anyone can do it – you can't be too big or too heavy or too short. The movements are always fluid, so there's no impact on the body's joints and, huge bonus, it's a holistic workout – it uses most of the body's muscle groups, as well as the mind. Climbing develops fitness and tones muscles without bulking them up.

Climbing is also about trust. Right now, a guy I've only just met is standing eight metres below me; he has my life in his hands. If I were to slip or fall, and when I'm on my way back down again, he's the one who'll take my weight and bring me safely to the ground. Then we'll redo our knots and reverse our roles. I might be 30kg lighter than him, but that's no problem – with my gear, I'll be able to hold him.

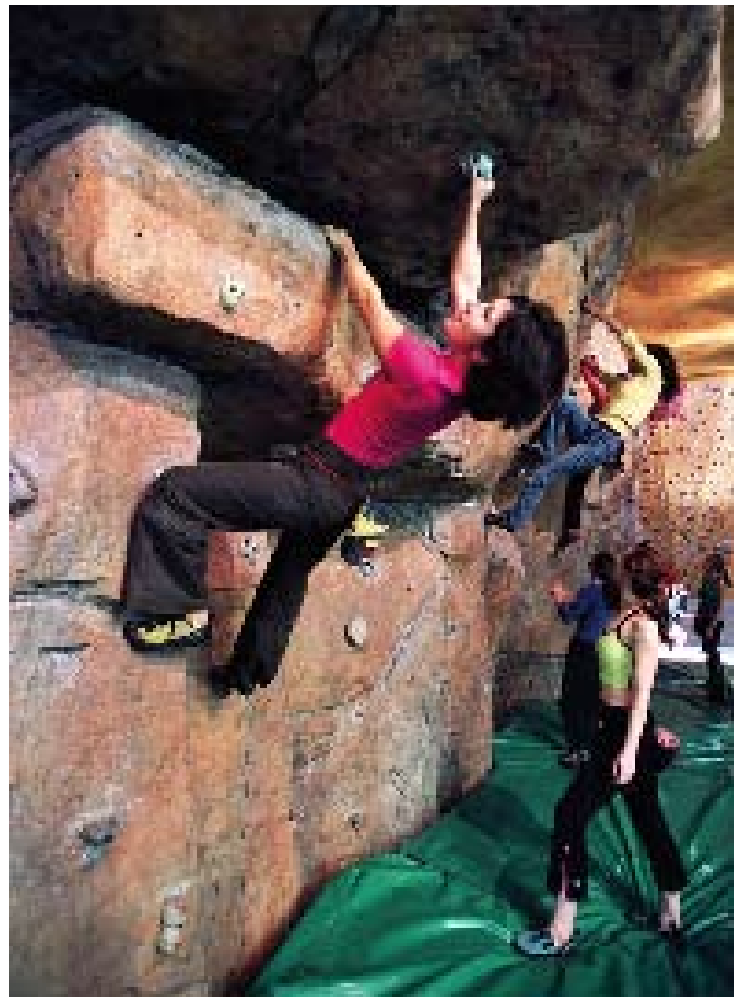
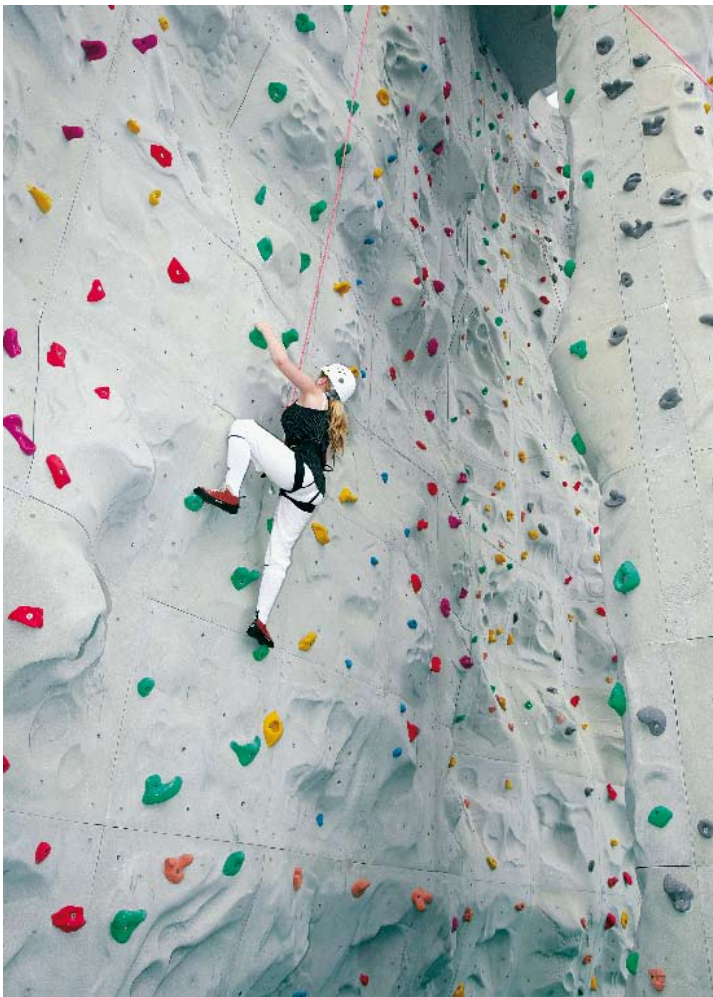
Someone once told me that rock climbing is probably the only sport where men and women are equal. As beginners, he explained, a man is often stronger than a woman and he'll use his power to climb. But a woman has to use the correct technique to get up there. Power will only get you so far, so a man has to learn the technique to get up. By using her technique, a woman will develop strength and power. And they will be on an equal level.

So while it's not totally correct, my mantra keeps



**TOP RIGHT** City Rock in Cape Town has 400m<sup>2</sup> of climbing wall

**RIGHT** There are 30 different routes at The Rock in the Gateway Centre in Durban  
**PREVIOUS PAGE** Climbing is not only a workout for the body, but for the mind too



me going. It gives me a rhythm to work with, a beat on which to base fluid movements. As the climb gets harder, I have to think more about what I'm doing, where I'm going to place my limbs, how I'm going to move. Right now, there's a temptation to put a foot on a blue hold to get me out of this mess – but that'd be cheating.

On an indoor climbing wall there's a jumble of coloured holds – red, blue, yellow, green, white. Isolate a colour and you'll see it's a route to the top. If I were sport climbing (outside, on a real rock face), I could put my feet, hands or body anywhere that would help me get to the top. The challenge indoors, and what often makes it harder than sport climbing, is to follow a set route.

Climbing gyms do have easy routes set up as starting points for people who want to get into the sport. These provide a controlled environment where a climber can grow his or her confidence. The really difficult routes on indoor climbing walls offer experienced climbers somewhere to exercise their passion – after work, on rainy days or when they don't have the time to get to the crags.

The big advantage is that the weather and time of day have very little impact on whether you climb or not; all you have to worry about is whether the gym is open. You can hire any gear you need from the gym and if you don't have a climbing partner, you'll usually be able to find someone to help you out on belay.

It's an addictive activity. I crave the thrill of reaching the top, and the exhilaration that comes with achieving what you set out to do. But right now, there's just a metre left to go on the wall. I can do this... ●

**ABOVE** Climbing uses all the body's muscles groups and is gentle on the joints. It's an excellent way to get strong

## AS THE CLIMB GETS HARDER, I HAVE TO THINK MORE ABOUT WHAT I'M DOING, WHERE I'M GOING TO PLACE MY LIMBS, HOW I'M GOING TO MOVE

### WHERE TO CLIMB IN SA

- **PRETORIA** The Climbing Barn has more than 450m<sup>2</sup> of climbing wall and 100m<sup>2</sup> of bouldering. If you don't have climbing gear you can hire it or buy your own from the gym. 082-335-3220
- **ROODEPOORT** Adrenalin Rush has walls that are from 5 to 14m high, and grades from very easy up to 25. There's also a bouldering wall, which is great for those times you don't have a partner. 083-419-5850
- **CAPE TOWN** City Rock offers courses for beginners, and has a great shop where you can buy almost anything you need for the sport. There is 400m<sup>2</sup> of wall-climbing area and a 150m<sup>2</sup> bouldering wall. 021-447-1326
- **STELLENBOSCH** The Perfect Wall has both top-rope and lead climbs on more than 400m<sup>2</sup> of climbing surface; there's also a bouldering cave. The gym offers a variety of courses. 021-882-9805
- **DURBAN** The Rock at the Gateway shopping mall is open every day. It's 22.5m high and has 30 different routes that range from easy up to grade 28. You can do a once-off climb or take out annual membership. 031-570-9200