

THE CLIMBING BIBLE

PRACTICAL
EXERCISES

MARTIN MOBRÅTEN &
STIAN CHRISTOPHERSEN

Translated by Bjørn Sætnan





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Jarl Gåsvær taking in the view from Vesteggen (the West Ridge) on Stetind, Norway.

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CONTENTS

HOOKED – foreword by Cecilie Skog	9
INTRODUCTION	11
THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF CLIMBING	13
WARMING UP	14
THE WARM-UP PROGRAMME	16
CHAPTER 1 TECHNIQUE	20
FOOTWORK	23
GRIP POSITIONS	36
BALANCE	40
TENSION & DIRECTION OF FORCE	54
DYNAMICS	62
TRICKS	73
COMBINATION EXERCISES	81
TRAINING FOR TRAD & ALPINE – by Martine Limstrand	86
CHAPTER 2 STRENGTH & POWER	88
EXERCISES ON THE WALL	91
IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR STRENGTH TRAINING	92
STRENGTH EXERCISES	94
POSITIONING EXERCISES	103
POWER EXERCISES	114
ISOLATED STRENGTH EXERCISES	120
EXERCISES USING A PORTABLE FINGERBOARD	126
ARM & UPPER BODY STRENGTH EXERCISES	128
VARIATION IN TRAINING – by Tina Johnsen Hafsaas	141
CHAPTER 3 CHILDREN & YOUTHS	143
WARMING UP FOR CHILDREN	144
CLIMBING GAMES	147
TECHNIQUE EXERCISES	164
TRAVERSING	174
STRENGTH TRAINING FOR CHILDREN & YOUTHS	180
WHY SHOULD CHILDREN & YOUTHS TRAIN STRENGTH?	182
HOW SHOULD CHILDREN & YOUTHS TRAIN STRENGTH?	184



'FOR MANY YEARS I DIDN'T TRAIN,
I JUST CLIMBED. IT TOOK YEARS FOR ME
TO REALISE I HAD TO TRAIN TO IMPROVE.'

HOOKED

FOREWORD BY CECILIE SKOG

I'M RELISHING THE sound of metallic jingle jangle as I cram the 14 quickdraws into my backpack, where the rope is already waiting. I remove the now flat sandwich I forgot to eat earlier, and replace it with my shoes and chalk bag – which lets out one last puff of dust for the day. I cinch my backpack up tight and blow on my sore fingertips. My skin has worn thin after numerous attempts. *Next time*, I think to myself as I throw the backpack on to my shoulders. *Next time I'll send it.*

The backpack feels lighter than on the way in. So do my feet. And head, I think. Thoughts of this and that have been replaced by moves and movements. A warm sense of community reminds me of who I am. My body is tired and numb. The world is weightless and anything is possible. *Next time.*

And to think, I don't need to climb sky-high or haul a sled to the end of the world to experience this feeling of trembling satisfaction. The feeling of spring, and the onset of an everlasting summer. I don't even need the euphoria of being newly in love. What is it with climbing? Why should this activity come with a red warning label: 'Highly addictive.' Why do we get so addicted?

For many years I didn't train, I just climbed. It took years for me to realise I had to train to improve. I learned how to warm up, and I got pushed outside of my comfort zone – provoking reactions like 'What? I'm going to lead a hard route without first practising it on a top rope? What if I fall?' Falling on lead could at that time be classified as my greatest fear. Perhaps only second to spiders. With a mouth full of sand I trembled upwards, quickdraw after quickdraw, and somewhere along the way I took my first fall on lead. I let out a primal scream, but was laughing hysterically on the inside. My fears drifted out from my ears like smoke from a peace pipe. It was liberating.

I decided on my first goal as a sport climber. My goal was to climb Norwegian grade 8- (approx. French 7b). But more importantly, to climb 8- before Aleksander Gamme. On a crisp autumn day, after lots of training, trying and failing, I finally sent *Prosessen*, 7+/8- (approx. French 7a+) at Hauttjern. I raised the flag and thought I had won this very serious competition, but I was disqualified by Aleksander, as the route and grade were scrutinised, evaluated and found to be too easy. The grade couldn't just involve the right number, it should be solely comprised of it. Period. To win the competition he resorted to the dirtiest trick in the book. He got me pregnant. Twice! He sent many 8-routes, and it was while losing my voice cheering him on that I realised I was not going to be better than him, nor anybody else. My goal will always be to become better than myself.

Two kids later my life suddenly revolved around being at home. Making routines and wonderful weekdays, between sleepless nights. I joined maternity bouldering sessions several times a week. The continuity helped. It's not like I was going anywhere, and I was motivated by the thought of being 42 years old and feeling stronger than ever. It was at that time that I realised the source of much of my motivation was to be found in progression, and that I was only just getting started. Even though I had been climbing for 25 years.

For Mother's Day I got the best present ever: five hours of coaching with Stian. My weaknesses weren't hard to uncover, all he had to do was place me in front of a bouldering wall. This became my focus – this and being less of a chatterbox when climbing. Stian put together a programme, which I mostly managed to follow for 12 weeks. It was surprisingly comfortable to know exactly what to do for every session. I didn't put in any more hours than before, but the results were noticeable.

Since then life has wandered hither and thither, as it does – and then came the pandemic.

But, this winter I'm going to use this book to write a plan. A 'training for climbing' plan, to give myself some out-of-this-world motivation. I want to play together with wonderful people, who can give me a kick in the butt and blow a sendy breeze my way when I need it. I want to go somewhere with them. Preferably to a crag where I can also swim and be so present I almost forget to pick the kids up from kindergarten.

Or at least forget to eat my sandwich.



JOE PROFFEN

Joakim Louis Sæther sends
Crassostrea Gigas (F8b, trad),
Bohuslän, Sweden.

INTRODUCTION

‘IN THEORY THERE’S NO DIFFERENCE
BETWEEN THEORY AND PRACTICE.
IN PRACTICE THERE IS.’

AFTER TWO DECADES of climbing, training and coaching we have built up a large and ever-growing library of exercises. *The Climbing Bible*, first published in Norwegian in 2018 and English in 2020, was an extensive project where we wanted to include the different performance factors and the underlying theory, which led to us having to limit the selection of exercises because of a lack of space. Therefore, in the backs of our minds we knew we had to also write the book you are now holding in your hands.

This book focuses on technique, strength and power, as we wanted to explore these topics further to create variation in and new challenges for your training. Endurance, flexibility and the mental aspects are left out as we feel these are explained in enough detail in *The Climbing Bible*. In this book, chapter 1 describes exercises to improve anything from the precision of your footwork to long dynos, while chapter 2 features exercises to train specific strength and power. We hope this book will end up with its pages filled with chalk marks and its cover worn out after living in your gym bag. Our recommendation is that you carry it with you and try at least one new exercise in every training session.

In addition to inspiring both young and old to vary their training, we wish to help parents and coaches create great sessions and make kids even more psyched for climbing. As Stian says, happiness is seeing your children find the same joy in climbing as you do yourself. Chapter 3 therefore features games, technique exercises and physical training ideas for children.



Stian Christophersen climbing
in the 2019 National Lead
finals in Oslo, Norway.

THE 10 COMMANDMENTS OF CLIMBING

- 1.** You have to climb a lot to become a good climber.
- 2.** Vary your climbing between different styles and angles – both indoors and outdoors.
- 3.** Train technique before physical training.
- 4.** Learn to use your feet – they will be your best friends on the wall.
- 5.** Rid yourself of your fear of falling.
- 6.** Train finger strength.
- 7.** Find your strengths and weaknesses, set yourself targets and adapt your training accordingly.
- 8.** What and how you think is critical to your success – become just as strong mentally as you are physically and technically.
- 9.** Create – or become part of – a supportive and challenging community.
- 10.** Preserve the joy – climbing is all fun and games.

WARMING UP

WHY SHOULD I WARM UP?

WARMING UP PREPARES us to perform physically, technically and mentally, and also reduces our risk of injury. The warm-up should consist of a general part and a specific part. The general part can include running, jumping, push-ups, squats and similar activities, with the goal being to activate the whole body and to use the larger muscle groups. The warm-up is also a good time to incorporate some injury prevention exercises, where you can practise movement patterns that are the opposite of what you'll face when climbing. For youths and adults the general part should last for at least 10 minutes, while it should last a little while longer for children – for at least 20 minutes.

The specific part should be climbing based. The most common approach is to start with some easy climbing on good holds, before progressing to increasingly harder climbing. For this part of the warm-up you can – and should – add technical elements that you wish to work on. To properly warm up your fingers to reduce the risk of injury, it is recommended that you do over 100 moves during your warm-up and before you increase the level of difficulty. Your warm-up should also be specifically targeted towards whatever the main part of your training session will consist of. If you're going to do steep bouldering, the last part of your specific warm-up should consist of steep moves to make sure that your arms, upper body and core muscles are properly warmed up and ready. If you're going to do vertical lead climbing, your warm-up should reflect this, by focusing on warming up your fingers and adding in hip-mobility exercises. In addition to preparing yourself physically, warming up will also mentally prepare you for performing. Having the specific part of your warm-up resemble what you'll be doing in the main part of your session will have a positive effect on how well prepared you will be mentally for what is about to happen.



Begin with easy traversing on good holds or some easy top-roping. Then progress to more dynamic moves. One simple exercise is to double-dyno between good holds while keeping your feet on the wall. Remember that climbing is all about fun and freedom of movement, so try to let loose mentally and climb dynamically, playing around with dynos, to get some flow in your movement. In our experience, many climbers are more agile during the main part of their session if they take this approach during their warm-up.

THE WARM-UP PROGRAMME

GENERAL PART

Start your warm-up by activating your blood circulation and larger muscle groups. For example, you can use a skipping rope, go for a run, or walk or run up some stairs. To activate your upper body you can add in some burpees in sets of 10. Alternate between these variants for about 10 minutes, and you'll be ready to move on with the following exercises:



COSSACK SQUATS: Complete one set of ten repetitions to each side.



STANDING ROTATIONS: Complete one set of ten repetitions to each side.



THORACIC BRIDGE: Complete one set of five repetitions to each side.

SPECIFIC PART

As mentioned earlier, we recommend completing at least 100 moves during your warm-up, independent of what you will be training afterwards, and this is best accomplished on a rope or by traversing the bouldering wall. During this part of your warm-up you have the opportunity to practise clipping technique, footwork, resting and dynamic moves. The last part of the specific warm-up should resemble what you'll focus on during your main training session. We have included suggestions here for exercises to do before your most intensive sessions, where you'll need some extra warming up before you're ready to really start training.



PULL-UPS:

During your warm-up we recommend that you drop all the way down until your arms are straight and start the pulling motion by pulling your shoulder blades down and together, rotating your elbows in towards each other and steadily pulling up through the whole movement. Complete three sets of five repetitions. Use an elastic band or a pulley system to take some of the load off, to ensure it's an actual warm-up and not strength training.

POWER PULL-UPS:

Use an elastic band and complete four to six pull-ups where you generate as much speed as possible when pulling up. If you're going to be bouldering or climbing hard you can add some high-speed pull-ups at the end of your warm-up to activate the upper body musculature.



DEADHANGS:

Use a pulley system to take some of the load off. Complete five sets of 5- to 10-second hangs using different grip positions (for example, open hand, half crimp, three-finger open, and so on).



KICK STARTS:

Start with one hand and one foot on the wall and spring from the floor to catch a hold on the wall with your free hand. Complete six different-length kick starts for each arm, varying the holds.



JUMP TO EDGE OR HOLD:

Jump to and grab a one- or two-handed hold. Complete six jumps in total and vary the hold type and distance to the hold/s.

CHAPTER 1

TECHNIQUE

AFTER READING THE *Climbing Bible* you'll be familiar with the fundamentals which underlie all climbing movement. You should also know which specific techniques you can use to move around on the wall in a controlled and efficient manner. In this chapter we cover different exercises to train these fundamentals and specific techniques. We also show you efficient exercises for training footwork and grip positions. We begin with the easiest exercises and move on to gradually more challenging ones, so start working on your technique with the first one and work your way up from there.

Before you begin, we want to repeat some of the most important things you should keep in mind when practising technique. First and foremost, it is important that you reserve some of your training sessions – where you are rested and motivated to learn – for focusing only on technique. These exercises require you to concentrate, so avoid practising technique when you are tired. You can practise technique in the same sessions as when you train strength or endurance, but it should always come before the hard physical training.

You should also have separate focus areas for each session. For optimal progression it is important to target what you feel are your weaknesses as a climber. However, you should further develop what you are already good at as well, so continue to cultivate your strengths while working on your weaknesses. If you're unsure of your strengths and weaknesses, you can ask a climbing partner or get help from an experienced coach.

When the session starts, it's important that you have a sense of how the exercise should be carried out and how you're performing it. By first observing others and then filming yourself while doing the exercise, it will be easier for you to get a sense for how you're doing and get direct feedback on your performance. If you also have someone you can discuss the exercise with, the chances of learning will be greater. A climbing partner with more experience than yourself or an experienced climbing coach are the best people with which to discuss the exercise.

Joakim Louis Sæther on *Maraton*, Norway's first F8b. *Maraton* is located at the Demperhylla sector at Damtjern. The crag is known for vertical walls, small holds and technically demanding climbing.

INTENSITY

In most sports, athletes train technique at low intensity levels. In climbing, however, we have a tendency to always try our hardest to top a boulder problem or route in every single session. This is not optimal! By conducting specific sessions at lower intensities and focusing on proper execution, you'll soon become much better at moving around on the wall.



Jarl Gåsvær sending
Storpillaren (N7, approx.
E5 6a) on Vågakallen,
Lofoten, Norway.

CHOOSING SHOES

As a general rule, you shouldn't wear worn-out shoes when working on refining your footwork. Trusting your feet is something that will come naturally when you're actually standing on holds that you consider difficult to stand on; the likelihood of this happening with worn-out shoes isn't great. On the following pages we highlight the advantages of soft or stiff shoes where choosing one or the other has an impact on the exercise, but for most of the exercises any good all-round shoe will do.



FOOTWORK

YOUR LEGS AND feet can and should take a large part of the load that is necessary to keep you on the wall. To be able to do this, you need to be precise when placing your feet on the holds to ensure that they don't slip off, and you should lower your body such that as much of your weight as possible is distributed on to your feet and off of your upper body. The following pages feature some exercises to target exactly this.



LOOK UP – LOOK DOWN

Many climbers, especially beginners, forget to look at where they are placing their feet. Therefore, make it a rule to always look down at your foot when you're placing it on a hold. It's important that you do not look up before you have actually placed your foot exactly where you want it. When your foot is in place you can look up and move to the next handhold. Your gaze should therefore alternate up and down every time you move a foot or a hand. Try climbing a route where you consistently move your gaze to the foot or hand about to be moved. If you forget, reverse the move and do it again.



This can quickly become

rather pumpy, so begin with routes well within your ability level.



BABY STEPS

To help practise your footwork, try making three moves with your feet for every individual hand move. This is perhaps unnecessary to climb a route or a boulder problem, but it's a good way to practise precision footwork and it makes you more aware of how important it is to actually look at your feet when you are placing them on a foothold. It's a good idea to start with routes with large footholds before progressing to smaller and smaller holds.



It can be a good idea to choose lines on the wall with multiple routes as this way you can choose to use footholds from another route if necessary.

IMPORTANT CONSIDERATIONS FOR GETTING THE MOST OUT OF YOUR STRENGTH TRAINING

WHEN PLANNING TO train specific abilities during a session it's imperative that you're familiar with the training facilities. If your goal is to train finger strength on the bouldering wall, you either have to know which boulder problems are suitable for this, or you have to make up your own problems. Many climbing walls have their own training walls with a good selection of holds but without any pre-taped/set problems. This gives you the opportunity to make up problems that fit your exact needs for a session. Making up your own problems also has the added benefit of training your understanding of movements, so if your local wall has a section like this we highly recommend using it as much as possible.

The most important aspects to consider if you're focusing on physical training when bouldering are grip type, the lengths of moves and wall angles. If your goal is finger strength, you should be climbing on small edges or pinches. If you're focusing on compression strength, you should climb on poorer holds that don't allow you to release tension between the holds. If you want to direct your training towards upper body and arm strength in order to be better at pulling through, the holds should be good enough for you to do the moves without matching.

When you're making up boulder problems for sessions like this it's easier to choose equally sized holds that have an equal distance between them. If you can do one move with a slight margin, you can do four to six similar moves. To begin with you can use any footholds. As you get more proficient in making up problems, you can up the complexity by choosing specific footholds.

As the walls get steeper, the more physically demanding it becomes for your fingers, arms and upper body, and you'll get less help from your legs. For less experienced climbers it can be challenging to train finger strength on walls steeper than 30 degrees, as the holds have to be relatively good just to be able to hang on. In this situation, walls steeper than 30 degrees can be used for training the arms, upper body and core, while less steep walls can be used for finger strength training as you then can allow yourself to use poorer holds. As you become stronger and more experienced, you'll be able to use poorer holds on steeper walls and hence increasingly be able to combine your training.

You can also use the size of the moves – the distance between the holds – as a variable. When doing short moves on bad holds, you can focus more on finger strength and tension between the fingers and toes, as the holds are too poor for you to cut your feet loose. Big moves on steep walls will require most of us to use relatively good holds independently of whether we're moving fast or slow between the holds, and the training will mostly target the arms, upper body and core rather than finger strength. Significantly increasing the distance between the holds is also a simple way to target power in your training.

To show how you can train specific elements on the bouldering wall, Stian will share some of his experiences from his own training:

MOVING SLOWLY WHEN YOU'RE GOOD AT MOVING FAST!

When I started climbing, I wasn't physically strong, neither in my fingers, nor in my arms or upper body. I was a rather petite little kid, something which isn't necessarily bad for climbing in general, but steep climbing and physically demanding positions definitely and literally weren't my strength. This wasn't something I reflected on too much when I was younger, and slowly but surely I developed a dynamic climbing style because this allowed me to solve harder moves by moving faster between holds. As I grew taller and stronger, I was able to do bigger moves on smaller holds. The dynamic style of climbing suited me well for bouldering and redpointing sport routes, but still I knew I had to become stronger. I had to become stronger in my fingers, stronger at moving slowly between holds and stronger at holding positions, so that I could lock off when the holds were too poor to do the moves while carrying a lot of speed.

So, one winter I decided to really focus on this, both through specific strength training and especially through my climbing. I made up steep boulder problems, removed any technical trickery like heel and toe hooks, and tried to climb with much less speed than what I normally would do. For example, I would try to lock off for a couple of seconds for every move, pulling slowly and steadily through a move without matching, or start the movement from down below and keep my feet on the wall throughout the problem. Over the course of the winter I noticed a gradual progression, but, rather worryingly, I also noticed I was doing worse on the not-so-steep climbing. Had I been training so much on my weaknesses that I had forgotten about my strengths? I couldn't find the natural flow and dynamic way of moving I was used to, and I noticed that I was making use of the slower movement pattern when I strictly didn't need to. When I realised this, I chose to create a more noticeable distinction in my training. I became more conscious of climbing dynamically and without restraining my technique for most of my climbing training, but I continued focusing on my weaknesses as a specific part of my training sessions.

I have on multiple occasions experienced that training our weaknesses can have a negative impact on our strengths, and albeit not as obvious as on this occasion it still emphasises the point – know thyself. Know your strengths and optimise them. Acknowledge what parts of your climbing you need to improve in order to progress, considering the physical, technical and mental factors. The trick is to maintain a balance between training your strengths and your weaknesses, and thereby develop your skills as a climber, step by step, for many years to come.

STRENGTH EXERCISES



When you start training, we recommend using large, positive footholds.

MOUSE MOVES

The ability to hold on to small holds is one of the hallmarks of hard climbing and requires a great deal of finger strength. For this exercise you'll choose (or make up) one or more boulder problems on small holds with short moves. All the holds should be roughly the same size, all the moves roughly as hard, and you should be able to climb them with a controlled movement tempo. The focus should not be on pulling far or creating speed, but rather on using holds so small they barely enable you to hang on and move between them.

NUMBER OF MOVES PER PROBLEM: 6 to 8
REST: minimum 3 minutes
NUMBER OF TRIES IN TOTAL: 15 total, preferably 5 tries on 3 separate problems
WALL ANGLE: 15 to 60 degrees overhanging
HOLDS: small edges, pockets



THEMED BOULDERING

We're often stronger or weaker with different grip positions, and by making up problems with different themes we can choose to train specifically on both our strengths and our weaknesses. Make up problems consisting solely of pinches, edges, slopers or pockets. It can be a good idea to vary between different grip types throughout the session as this will increase both the technical and the physical benefits of the session and reduce the risk of injury caused by uniform training.

NUMBER OF MOVES PER PROBLEM: 5 to 6

REST: minimum 3 minutes

NUMBER OF TRIES IN TOTAL: 15 total, preferably 5 tries on 3 separate problems

WALL ANGLE: 15 to 60 degrees overhanging

HOLDS: small edges, pinches, pockets, slopers



A photograph of an indoor climbing gym. In the foreground, a young boy in a blue t-shirt is running on a white mat. To his left, two young girls are standing on the mat. The background is a large, colorful climbing wall with various colored holds (red, blue, yellow, green, black) and abstract shapes. The wall is decorated with blue and yellow patterns. The ceiling is a white grid pattern.

CHAPTER 3

CHILDREN & YOUTHS

THIS CHAPTER DESCRIBES exercises for children and youths. These exercises are designed to keep a large group active, while the coach can also follow-up individually with each climber. The chapter starts with a few thoughts on warming up before presenting examples of play-based climbing exercises you can use as a coach. Finally, more specific technical and physical exercises are presented. These are more appropriate for slightly older and more experienced children and youths.

The exercises in this chapter are a selection of the best exercises used by clubs all over Norway. We want to especially thank Oslo Climbing Club, Kolsås Climbing Club and Trondheim Climbing Club for their valuable contributions.



WARMING UP FOR CHILDREN

PHYSIOLOGICALLY, ADULT BODIES will start to prepare for an activity before getting started, through an increase in heart rate and body temperature, among other things. These changes in the transition from rest to activity are not seen in prepubescent children, and the warm-up must therefore be set up differently and last longer for children than for adults. Ideally, we want to gradually increase the level of activity, divided into short intervals of activity and rest, for a total period of 30 to 35 minutes. Since the warm-up will be a major part of the training session itself, it's important that it contains both fun and educational elements.



AREA OF FOCUS

As a coach, it's important that you have an area of focus for the session, and that all the parts of the session reflect this. If you're focusing on footwork, the general part of the warm-up should, more so than normally, activate the larger muscles in the legs. In the main part, you should choose different games and technique exercises that focus on different elements of footwork. To finish, you can gather the children and talk about what they have learned.

As with adults (page 16), we start with a general warm-up, before moving on to a more climbing-specific part. The general part should be play based and consist of exercises that challenge both physical and mental skills, as well as coordination. Games like 'Simon says', 'red light, green light' or 'crocodile challenge' are always popular, and you can be creative and adapt the exercises to your group. In the climbing-specific part, we preserve the playfulness while introducing exercises that primarily encourage activity on the wall but also focus on technical elements like footwork, weight transfer and balance.

SHARK ATTACK

All the children start sitting on the mats at an equal distance from the wall. When you call out 'shark attack', everybody should climb on to the wall as quickly as possible. The last one to leave the floor gets eaten by the shark.



Make up variations around the same theme. For example, a tsunami could mean they have to climb higher up the wall, or a storm might mean everybody has to get back down on to the mats again.

CLIMBING GAMES

HERE ARE SOME examples of climbing games. Mix them up to stimulate variation in the training, but return to some of them on a regular basis. Your group is guaranteed to have a favourite, and kids like repetition and predictability.



THE KING COMMANDS

All the children should start on the wall, preferably on a slab or a vertical section. They now have to do exactly what you tell them to do. If your command is to move their right hand, they have to do so, and if your command is to touch their right foot with their left hand, they have to do so. Your only limitation is your own imagination. You can adjust the level of difficulty by placing the children in different locations.



Be inventive and add technique training to the exercises. For example, have the children look at the footholds and hover their foot above the foothold for 2 seconds to train footwork precision. You can also command them to only use sidepulls in order to train balance.