

CRACK CLIMBING

Crack climbing is a style of rock climbing that involves ascending cracks in a rock face. It requires specific techniques and gear to help climbers move upward by utilizing the natural fissures in the rock. Here's an in-depth look at crack climbing, including techniques, gear, and types:

What is Crack Climbing?

- Crack climbing involves climbing rock faces where the primary features are cracks, rather than holds or ledges. These cracks can range in width from a few millimeters to several inches, and climbers use a variety of techniques to "jam" body parts (hands, fingers, feet) into the cracks for leverage and grip.

Types of Crack Climbing Based on Crack Size

- **Finger Cracks:** Very narrow, usually less than an inch wide, where climbers use their fingers for jamming.
- **Hand Cracks:** Roughly one to two inches wide, allowing the entire hand to be jammed into the crack.
- **Fist Cracks:** Larger cracks that require fists for jamming. Climbers wedge their fists or even forearms into the crack for stability.
- **Off-width Cracks:** Wider than fist cracks but narrower than body-width. They're often the most challenging, as they require a unique set of techniques and are uncomfortable to climb.
- **Chimneys:** Very wide cracks that allow the entire body to fit inside. Climbing chimneys often involves pressing the back against one side and feet against the other to move upward.

Crack Climbing Techniques

- **Jamming:** The fundamental technique, which involves wedging a part of the body (fingers, hands, or feet) into the crack and twisting or locking it to create friction. Different types include:
 - **Finger Jamming:** Using fingers to wedge into narrower cracks.
 - **Hand Jamming:** Placing the hand in the crack, creating a "cupped" position to lock it in.
 - **Foot Jamming:** Inserting the foot sideways and twisting to hold.
- **Laybacking:** Using tension between the feet and hands to push outward and create upward momentum. It's effective in wide cracks or when there are edges alongside the crack.
- **Chicken Wing and Arm Bars:** Primarily for off-width cracks, these techniques involve wedging the arm and shoulder into the crack to maintain balance.

- **Leverage with Opposition Force:** Common in chimney cracks, this technique involves pressing the back against one side and feet against the other side to “shimmy” up.

Gear for Crack Climbing

- **Climbing Shoes:** Specific crack climbing shoes often have a more rigid, low-profile design to fit into narrow cracks while providing maximum toe support.
- **Tape:** Crack climbers often tape their hands and fingers to protect them from abrasions while jamming.
- **Protection Devices:**
 - **Camming Devices (Cams):** These spring-loaded devices fit into the crack and expand to hold the climber’s weight.
 - **Nuts and Hexes:** Used in smaller cracks where cams might not fit, nuts are passive protection devices wedged into constrictions in the crack.

Safety Tips

- Practice jamming techniques at lower grades before tackling more challenging routes.
- Use protective tape on hands and fingers to avoid injury.
- Bring a range of cams and nuts, especially when climbing in unpredictable rock formations.
- Focus on placing gear securely and frequently; cracks can be unpredictable in how they hold gear.

