

## Guide to buying a basic Trad climbing rack

When I decided to write an article on putting together a basic trad rack (collection of equipment for outdoor lead climbing), I thought it would be really straight forward.

However, what it made me realise is how personal our 'racks' are and how over time they become tailored to the kind of climbing we like and the rock we use them on.

Some people will only ever lead with their own rack – full stop, whilst others are happy to use anyone's! Some won't leave the ground unless they have their 'lucky no 7 nut'. Whether a climber prefers to take everything they own on every route or chooses to cherry pick items according to what they think they need it's still all about having the options to hand that allow you to keep yourself safe.

I'm lucky enough to have built up a very extensive selection of equipment, probably enough for 2-3 racks, so that I have the luxury of choice. It also enables me to provide kit for my clients to use when on my courses and to that end I think it's important that they get to try a wide variety of equipment – well that's my excuse and I'm sticking to it... Writing this article made me take a close look at what I take from my 'cupboard of dreams' as I call it and why. It made me think back to my early climbing days and the rack I had back then. So what you have here is my considered opinion on the kit you'll need to get you on the rock with enough options for protection.

And that's what it's all about – options, the more pieces of protection (nuts, slings cams etc) that you have the more options you'll have for placements. It's the difference between having to find a feature in the rock that fits the gear you have (limiting) or selecting the piece of gear from your rack to fit the feature in the rock that you've found.

So how much gear and of what type will give you the most options without breaking the bank? What's the best return on investment I guess?

So here's my recommendation along with some explanations and then followed by some rock specific amendments. I'm assuming you already have an appropriate belay device and karabiner, helmet, chalk bag and rock boots.

### Slings

3x 120cm and 1x 240cm either dyneema (lighter/thinner) or Nylon (cheaper).

Essential as they have a multitude of uses like slinging trees, spikes and threads for use as protection or for belays, joining pieces together to form solid redundant and equalised belays and for creating cows tails.

### Extenders/Quick draws

2x 12cm, 4x 18cm, 4-6 slingdraws (60cm open slings with a karabiner on each end and threaded in such a way that makes them about 20cm long but then can be easily extended to 60cm when required). Having different lengths will give you more options when extending the pieces to prevent them from lifting out and ensuring the rope runs nice and straight.

With all extenders make sure that you have a dedicated karabiner for the rope and one for the protection. This way you'll ensure the rope always runs over a nice smooth surface and not one with nicks and burrs.

If you've already got a bunch of short (12cm) quickdraws that you've been using for sport climbing then there's no need to go out and buy a whole bunch of extra extenders – it's cheaper to just buy some longer slings and swap out the short ones.

### **Screwgate Karabiners**

A debate that has raged through the ages! How many screwgates should you take?

I've seen climbers take what looked like ALL the screwgates and others that take only the one needed for their belay device.

When starting out I'd recommend that each climber takes one large HMS/pear shaped karabiner (DMM Boa, Black Diamond Rockloc) and two D shape or sml HMS karabiners (DMM Shadow, Petzl Attache). This will enable you to securely build belays and if you need any more then use back to back snap gates.

### **Prussik loops**

Don't leave the ground without them and, as importantly, how to use them!

Each climber should have 2x 1.5m lengths of 5 or 6mm accessory cord tied into loops using a double fishermans knot. The cheapest yet most invaluable pieces of kit that you can own.

### **Nut Keys**

One for each climber not just for the second. Useful for the leader to have so they can thread slings, clean cracks (gently) and remove misplaced gear.

### **Passive Protection**

The backbone of any rack being strong and cheap whilst giving lots of options for placements.

Since most climbers in the UK use either DMM or Wild Country nuts I would recommend them over the US nuts from BD or Metolious – Purely because over time the rock placements themselves begin to take the form of the nuts constantly placed in them. Quite often I'll come across what seems like a 'perfect' number x nut placement that looks as if it was made for that nut which isn't far from the truth. Nuts from the US and Europe will still work but some placements will just suit a UK nut better.

Every wired nut gives 2 sizes of placement depending on whether is placed on its Major or minor axis. See pic.

Also those clever manufacturers have overlapped every other size nut so that in effect with a set of 11 nuts you actually have 22 size options with some sizes double up. So if you place your only number 6 nut (major axis) and then later on the route find you need another one you can use a number (minor axis) as it's the same size.

Large nuts such as Hexes, Torque nuts and Rockcentrics offer 3 sizes of placement per nut and again overlap to give you more options.

To start you off I'd go with the following;

1x set of nuts on wire size 1-11

DMM Wallnuts, Wild Country Rocks, Black Diamond Stoppers

1x set of Large nuts on slings (5-8nuts)

Wild Country Rockcentrics, DMM Torque nuts. Camp Dyneema Carvex

½ set of nuts size 6-10/11

DMM offsets or ½ set of DMM Wallnuts, Wildcountry Rocks etc

This will give you a total of 23-25 nuts that will give you 49-52 size options (some doubled up) covering crack sizes from 2mm-90mm. This selection will also allow you to protect tapered, flared and parallel cracks with a bit of practice.

You'll need to carry your nuts somehow and whilst any karabiner will do I'd recommend Black diamond Wire gate ovals as their wide radius allows the nuts to sit nicely and not bunch up. I rack my nuts 1-6 on one karabiner and 6-11 on another. Some like to rack sml, med and lge nuts on separate karabiners – With large nuts on slings you can either put them all on one or two karabiners or rack them individually on their own colour coordinated karabiner. It's up to you to find a way that works best for you but make sure you have some sort of system and stick to it so that you can find what you need without looking, one handed and whilst fighting a 'pump' in the other arm!

The above kit will serve you very well and for many years I climbed with a rack very similar on Limestone, Granite, Grit and Rhyolite. When I could afford them I got myself a couple of Spring Loaded Camming Devices otherwise known as 'Cams' or 'friends' and whilst I'd got by without them for years on certain rock they became invaluable.

### **Active protection/ Spring Loaded Camming Devices**

Cams come in a variety of formats and sizes each with their own pro's and con's. When buying cams cost will almost definitely be a consideration as they cost from £40-120ea.

Continuing with our 'best return on investment' approach then I'd recommend DMM's Dragon Cams which can be bought in bundles of size's 1,2 and 3 which is a good place to start (whichever cams you buy). Their double axle design gives them a greater range of placements over the single axle DMM 4cu's and Demons, Wildcountry Helium Friends and Metolious Master cam and their extendable sling saves extenders which is a bonus over the Black Diamond Camalots.

However any of the afore mentioned cams would be a safe bet and if cost isn't an issue then things like weight, ease of use or number of cams for your money might dictate which you buy.

If a set of cams is a bit out of your price range then consider a set of Camp tricams. These often overlooked pieces can be used as camming units or passive nuts and offer a good range of placement size options per piece at a fraction of the cost. They work well in tapered, flared and parallel cracks (even pockets) and come in a massive range of sizes covering 10-140mm. On the downside they take a bit more care and effort to place and you'll need to make sure your second knows how to get them out.

## **Beyond the basic**

If you've already got this equipment and want to increase your rack or want to buy a comprehensive one from the off then these would be my recommendations;

Nuts - 2<sup>nd</sup> full set of nuts or if you already have ½ a set then get the other half and some DMM offsets/Wild Country Superlights or micro nuts so you have a total of 2 ½ sets of wired nuts.

Cams –After you've got sizes 1,2,3 to start then I've found larger cams like sz 4's/5's to be really useful before then in filling with ½ sizes and small/micro cams.

What you're looking at doing is to fill the gaps in your range of options by adding larger/micro pieces depending on what you find yourself needing of different routes and rock types. You might also find that you want to double (or triple) up on certain pieces that you tend to use a lot.

One of the many beauties of UK climbing is the wide variety of rock types available and the differing features and challenges that they present both in terms of protection and climbing. If you climbing is predominantly going to be on one certain rock type then here are some rock specific considerations:

Limestone – Favour nuts/passive pro over cams as the lower (to non-existent) frictional qualities of the rock can lead to anything but perfect cam placements ripping out.

Gritstone/Granite – Go for one set of wired nuts, one set of large nuts on slings and then cams size 1-4. The shape and frictional qualities of the rock are perfect for cams and allow for placements to be made where no nut would dare to go!

In time the rock and type of climbing you do will dictate what kit you'll want/need. Your rack will grow along with your climbing ability and will be the faithful silent companion that will accompany you on, and facilitate, many climbing adventures