

# What grade *could* you climb?

What grade *do* you climb is a fairly common question but I'd like to ask another- what grade *could* you climb?

I'm not talking about it theoretically given this amount of time spent doing that type of training but now today or at least the next time you go climbing.

Before we go any further I'd like to point out that I do not think that the enjoyment or the quality of a climber is based on how hard they climb- I've seen people climb very hard with appalling technique but a lot of strength and I know people that never want to climb hard as they get enormous fulfilment from the grades they operate in. I've also witnessed elation and misery in climbers at all grades.

Part of the attraction of climbing is the mental, physical and at times emotional challenge and as our capabilities improve our attentions are drawn to more challenging climbs and problems to feed the attraction.

Years ago when a climb or problem was too hard you heard "I need to get stronger" as that was seen as the only solution. Thankfully now in addition to this you'll hear "I need to work on my technique" or "my footwork needs improving" and as a result the quality of peoples climbing across the board is improving as awareness of correct climbing technique increases.

But back to my question: What grade *could* you climb now?

With no improvements in strength or technique and no weight loss but with the following;

- A thorough and I mean thorough warm up-not rushed or half-hearted but time well spent preparing your entire body and mind.
- A mental rehearsal/reading of the route/problem including rests, gear placements or clipping positions (and with what hand), fall zones/directions/landings, cruxes...
- Good tactics like pre placing possible nuts for a tricky placement on an extender and clipped to you in a easy to reach place, keeping your shoes squeaky clean, removing excess clothing and gear, having a trusted belayer or spotter.
- Having a mind clear of clutter- you can't do anything about your rent or bills during this climb so put them in a little box in your head and pick them up later. If you read/rehearsed the route then there should be very little thinking required on the route, just doing..
- The determination to only stop when your body not your mind gives up (if safe to do so).

This list is in no way definitive but you get the idea.

When was the last time (if ever) that you actually used your current strength, knowledge and ability to its full potential and that you can honestly, hand on heart, say that the only way to improve further would be to get stronger?

More strength and more power are all great and at some point essential but to use the car based analogies that I use a lot in instructing and coaching there's little point in having a lot of power if your clutch is slipping and the hand brake isn't fully off.

Why is it so hard to use what we already have? Is it because we'd have to address some negative personality traits like impatience and trust issues? Does modern life place so many demands on our time and attention that to fully un-clutter our minds so that we can focus purely on one task for a period of time is something were just not practised in?

There have been a few times in my climbing career when I've felt that I've physically, mentally and emotionally climbed at my very best and these occasions have been the most fulfilling even if they weren't always the hardest climbs I'd done. It's this elusive feeling that I'm always after but perhaps by actively seeking it I'm making it harder to find? I know that I don't climb to my current full potential or anywhere near and am constantly intrigued by what it's going to take to realise that potential.

I'd be really interested to hear the thoughts and experiences of others. When you've had those 'nirvana' moments when everything came together what were the circumstances? Where was your head at leading up to it?

What would a really good warm up be worth? Half a grade? A whole one?

What about a good understanding of the route? Half a grade again or more?

Good tactics? Complete trust in your belayer?

Then there's an uncluttered mind which I reckon would definitely gain you a grade...

What about all of the above?

So...warmed up, prepared, relaxed, determined and un cluttered, right now what grade *could* you climb?

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