

Climbers learn to get a leg up

Many people who hike past the rock climbers at San Ysidro, Gibraltar or at Lizard's Mouth think, "I'd like to try that." Fortunately, through the UCSB Adventure Program (open to students and the general public), they can.

Veju Mathew, one of four climbing instructors with the UCSB Adventure Program and a veteran climber of 10 years, says people sign up for a variety of reasons: to get over a fear of heights, because a friend took and recommended the course, or because they are hikers and intrigued by climbing.

"For them," he said, "learning to climb is just the next step."

The program offers three levels of rock climbing instruction: Rock I, II and III.

Rock I is two-day class, with evening classroom and gym climbing on Tuesday and an all-day "lab" Saturday on the rock. The class starts on campus at the climbing area on the second floor of Robinson Gym.

Mathew starts his classes by explaining that the different types of climbing, from bouldering (the unroped climbing of relatively small rocks) to alpine ascents are linked by common technique, skills, tools, safety principles and communications.

He soon hands out lengths of nylon webbing and talks about the role of webbing in climbing (anchor set-ups, and so on) and demonstrates how to tie four knots key to climbing: the figure-8 follow through, the water knot, the girth hitch and the double-overhand (used to back up the figure 8), describing what purpose each serves in climbing.

"Students practice these knots until they can do them with their eyes closed," Mathew says. "Literally."

The students are then fitted for harnesses. They practice tying into the rope with the figure-8 knot. He briefs them on proper belaying techniques (how to stop falls) and communications signals. Once students grasp these critical safety aspects of climbing, Mathew talks about the ballet of climbing: technique.

He explains the basic principle of keeping three points of contact on the rock at all times and concentrating on your feet. Some aspects of climbing are counter-intuitive: It's better to keep your butt slightly out while climbing so you can see your feet rather than being

escape artists

GREGORY CROUCH &
DEANNE MUSOLF CROUCH

sucked into rock. He also teaches to always keeping your weight on your feet.

"As soon as you learn to trust your feet," he promises, "you won't burn out your forearms so fast." Otherwise, he warns, climbers end up doing a series of exhausting pullups while dragging their feet. "You'll see the next hold and want to go for it, but step up first," he advises.

Next, Mathew takes students to a wall that is slightly overhanging. Here, he says, different technique is required.

"When the rock is overhanging, you want to keep your hips into the wall," he says, and points out climbers doing well on the wall (the gym is open to the public during the school year.) "As you climb, you'll learn body english to move more efficiently up the wall."

Students get their first practice on the gym's bouldering area where climbs are low and no ropes are required. Once they're comfortable there, Mathew moves them on to the next phase, the main wall.

All gyms walls are set up with top-ropes (which means the safety line goes from the climber up to an anchor at the top of the wall then down to the belayer, who takes in rope as the climber moves up the wall). Together, three teams of two climbers each practice belaying each other, with either Mathew or an assistant backing them up with a hip belay.

The wall is about 30 feet high, with plastic holds scattered across its face. The first step off the ground onto a hold seems huge to some; from there, the new climbers carefully pick their way up the face, with lots of encouragement and advice from Mathew and other students. A few even make it to the top, then are lowered by their belayers.

Now they're ready for real rock.

The following Saturday morning at 8, the group meets at the Mission parking lot and carpools up to the Gibraltar climbing area on Gibraltar Road. The first half-day is spent at Hole in the Rock boulder, where Mathew refreshes stu-



GREGORY CROUCH PHOTOS

Rick Fredland, who manages Santa Barbara's Patagonia store, climbs at Lizard's Mouth as the day fades.

IF YOU GO

UCSB Adventure Program is for general public and students. The Rock I class is \$65 (plus \$6 community fee) for the general public; \$35 for students. Call 893-3738 for scheduling information. They also offer more advanced rock climbing classes. For days out on the rock, you'll want to bring a change of clothes, lots of water and fluids, insect repellent (though the biting flies should abate as soon as summer's over), sunscreen, lunch and munchies.

Goleta Valley Athletic Club, 170 S. Los Cameros

Road, also offers climbing classes. The Fundamentals of Climbing includes three one-hour sessions for \$99 for nonmembers, \$60 for members. Intermediate Gym Climbing includes six one-hour sessions area at \$120 for members, \$149 for nonmembers. (Each includes one-month access to the climbing area as well.) The third level, called Advanced Training, is a custom-designed program that runs \$45 an hour for members, and \$60 for nonmembers. Call 968-1023 for more information and ask for world-renowned climber Steve Edwards.

dents on knots, safety and technique by simulating belays on a gentle slope. He also goes over the difference between climbing real rock and climbing in a gym, then demonstrates on a low-angle slab how trusting your feet is still key. Students practice it on the same slab.

He then sets up two topropes on 15- to 20-foot climbs, showing the students the principles of top rope anchors and explaining the necessity of making these anchors solid, redundant, equalized and not extending.

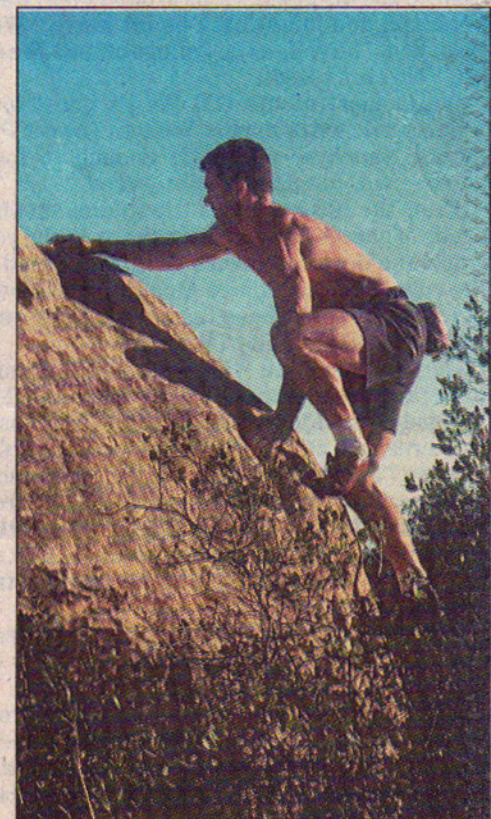
"This way you see it and know what's holding you up when you are told to lean back (when being lowered)," says Mathew.

Everyone climbs both routes; most top out on at least one. On one they practice

the rope and butterfly coiling it so that they can safely throw it back to the ground without tangling it, then shouting "rope!" to alert those below before throwing it. On the other route, they practice leaning back and being lowered — something that's very scary to most people.

"People want to grab the rope," Mathew nods, "but you want to keep your hands off the rope for balance; once you get the hang of it you'll be fine."

After lunch, climbers progress to rappelling and climbing the main face of Gibraltar, which seems to most students to tower at 80 feet. But by the end of the afternoon, most have been to the top at least once; some have even been calm enough to look over their shoulders at the spectacular views.



World-renowned climber Steve Edwards at Lizard's Mouth.

One student breathlessly rappels to the ground and says, "If someone had told me I was going to climb that, I would have