



Catch me if you can!
It isn't just bouldering
that requires high
levels of concentration;
spotting does, too.

Last but not least, highball bouldering is probably the most spectacular variation of the sport. In this case, the boulder is so high that a safe landing past the “no-fall zone” isn’t guaranteed. The line between free soloing and bouldering is fluid here, and there are some “boulders” that are as high as about 20 meters (65 feet). However, mastering these is a job for the experts.

WHAT MAKES BOULDERING SPECIAL?

Bouldering is a more playful form of climbing. While tactical and psychological components play a major role in rope climbing, the central focus of bouldering is finding a solution to the problem of how you move your body. Bouldering dispenses with the distractions of safety equipment on the body and the actions this requires. The concentration on body positions and how you move, without the “distractions” of clipping positions, which demand “unnecessary” attention, prompted the British climbing legend Ben Moon to speak of bouldering as the “essence of climbing.”

Bouldering is incredibly diverse: Steep rock faces of varying gradients and textures, appearing at different angles to each other, as well as countless types of hand- and footholds, provide an apparently endless number of problems that need to be solved. One aim is to solve ever more difficult problems where smaller and slicker holds and hold shapes have to be held on to. Another aim may have to

do with the aesthetic quality of the smooth flow of movement and the ease with which the endless struggle with gravity is undertaken; this appeals to spectators.

SINCE WHEN HAVE PEOPLE BEEN BOULDERING?

As a very primal form of movement, we have probably been climbing throughout human history. There is historical evidence of climbing as a purposeful activity as far back as ancient Egypt; climbing was also a form of training for Roman legionaries; it was part of the training repertoire of the Philanthropists (a group of German educational reformers) in the second half of the 18th century; and it was a central component of the gymnastics movement initiated in the 19th century by the German gymnast Friedrich Ludwig Jahn.

The beginning of bouldering as a mountaineering pursuit can be roughly equated with the beginning of alpinism (the London Alpine Club was founded in 1857, and Le Club alpin français in 1874). At about the same time, in the English Lake District, and on the sandstone boulders around the town of Fontainebleau near Paris, efforts were being made to climb on boulders and not just alpine walls, with and without rope. Some protagonists, such as the Englishman Oscar Eckenstein (1859–1921), were already focusing on bouldering as an end in itself.