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HEALTH & FITNESS



Women in Extreme Sports

How Women Are Roughing It Just for Fun

BY DIANA BOCCO

By day, she might be a pharmacist, public accountant, journalist, or stay-at-home mom. But on weekends, she suits up with a harness, crash helmet, and kneepads and becomes the daring woman who enjoys climbing trees, speeding down a mountain, or tumbling around on a track. What drives these otherwise everyday women to take up extreme sports like solo rock climbing, roller derby, or competitive tree climbing?

Some women have felt "the call" since childhood. That was the case of Rhonda Wood. Growing up, she regularly climbed trees with the neighborhood boys. That led to a career in

botany and a job as an arborist manager at the Disneyland Resort, where she climbed trees in order to shape them as Disney characters. When she crossed paths with the organizer of the Western Chapter Tree Climbing Championship, it was a match made in heaven.

"Before I knew it, I was in Arizona, climbing with all these great guys that were so supportive," Wood says. "It was such an exhilarating thrill to be climbing in these trees on pure adrenaline, scampering through the branches like a squirrel."

Meghan Goldmann, an art curator who belongs to the New York City's Gotham City Roller Derby League, is motivated by the pure love of the sport. She said it was love at first sight

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PHOTOS COURTESY OF OPTICAL EDGE, INC.



after seeing a championship game in 2005. "Roller Derby is a relentlessly hard game to play, but it's also fantastic to play since it's so energetic and lively," Goldmann says.

Aside from the intense physicality of the sport, many women are also attracted to extreme sports because of the camaraderie. Holly Harmon, an account manager with a Phoenix-based PR firm, said that she doesn't play team sports because she doesn't have a competitive nature. But extreme sports keep your workout going, and also helps build and extend friendships.

"In extreme sports, you can be competitive (with yourself) and still enjoy the company of friends that are working toward the same goal," Harmon says "You can support, encourage, and learn from each other without having an agenda."

Chris Ashford of Optical Edge, Inc., a company that specializes in pocket-size adventure trips, says there has been an increase in women earning salaries in the last ten to fifteen years, and that has led to them wanting to make their own decisions about how to spend the money. "They often want to try something new and exciting," Ashford says.

For Harmon, there's no question that she's made up her own mind about her choice of leisure time—if it can be called that. Despite the potential hazards, expense, and considerable amounts of time that snowboarding and rock-climbing take, she is delighted at the chance to be outdoors to clear her head and decompress. The need to pay attention at all times to her surroundings and her body also gives her the chance to appreciate them. And, of course, there's the joy of pushing her body's limits.

"The feeling afterwards of making it to the bottom of a hard ski run without stopping or ascending a 150-foot rock face is unexplainable," Harmon says. "It helps me to realize how much I am truly capable of and helps to put other areas of my life into perspective, both the physical and nonphysical." ❧

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