

BERND ZANGERL

# BOULDERING

CLIMBING, NO ROPES ATTACHED

gestalten



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"Is bouldering just training to climb real mountains?" I was once asked. "No, these are my mountains," was my reply.

# MOTIVATION

*Bernd Zangerl*

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Anyone who spends five hours traveling in order to try out two moves on some unknown block of rock, which has not as yet been solved by anyone, is surely going to be considered crazy. For me, this was a totally normal thing to do. When the motivation takes hold of you, you lose all sense of reality.

There are many reasons for climbing mountains. There are even more reasons for climbing a boulder. Philosophers have long been pondering the origins of motivation for human activities, but whatever these driving forces may or may not be: Leave behind everyday life and enjoy yourself.

Motivation is our inner wellspring of energy for every action. If you want to keep pushing your limits over and over again in bouldering, you really need this source of energy. Anyone who “pulls on” again after the hundredth failed attempt, and still gives it everything, will know what I mean. Every athlete dreams of always feeling motivated, but it is in the nature of things like this that you can never reach this permanent state. It takes days to reflect, recover, and define your next goals—and to revive your motivation.

Motivation was not one of my problems in my first few years of climbing. After my first day of bouldering, I did everything I could to get back to Ticino as soon as possible. I had been infected by the bouldering bug. To be able to go bouldering as often as possible, I needed not only time but also money for every trip. So, I packed my lectures at

university into a few weekdays and climbed on the other days. I did odd jobs to finance my passion.

I also gave in to the temptations to limit my diet to oatmeal with milk and to donate excessive amounts of blood to get more money for bouldering. In retrospect, I do not recommend this path to anyone.

Once my passion had been ignited, I took every opportunity to go to Ticino. In the beginning, I used a discarded mattress instead of a crash pad. Often, the mattress just lay at the base as a matter of form. We could only boulder where the landing zone was not too dangerous and you would not expect to break your ankle if you fell. My mattress’s cushioning effect was modest, but this did not dampen our enjoyment, and a year later, I got my first proper crash pad, sponsored by a locksmith company in Landeck. I am still grateful today for their support.

From then on, my friends and I went bouldering in all weather conditions. Off we went to Ticino, chugging along at 20 miles an hour in the wild snow, with snow chains, overloaded with five passengers, as many backpacks, a crash pad, and a mattress. Winter, wild adventures, and beautiful memories.

We optimized our daily bouldering routine to suit us. We started as early as five in the morning, had breakfast at 8:30 am in Bellinzona, and made the most of the cool morning hours for bouldering.



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In mythological terms, the Kinnaur range on the India-Tibet border is not only the seat of the gods but also the region where the wild ones go. Alex Luger during his first ascent of *Bahjii's Line*, 7B.



Chris Sharma is bouldering  
at an old aqueduct in  
Sant Llorenç, Spain.

At midday, we let the Ticino sun shine on our stomachs so that we could tackle the problems again in the afternoon. Often, we climbed till late at night by lamplight and only got home around midnight. We carried on in this way until early June. Then, even we had to admit that bouldering got more and more difficult as the temperatures rose. The holds that we could still use in winter now felt like gripping soft, wet soap, and we were constantly slipping off our footholds.

It was time to look for new problems. We did our research and once again combed our native mountains. We inspected almost every alpine pass, systematically covering central and eastern Switzerland. Our search led us into the most beautiful valleys and far up into the high mountains. If we believed there were rock formations over the horizon, we went there. If there were rumors about new boulders, we followed them up. Wherever there were signs of boulders, where there was even the slightest chance of finding anything to climb, we were there. Of course, we found a lot of blocks. But only a few of them inspired us. We were very demanding in this respect, and that is still true today.

You could use a biblical saying to describe our search for the right boulders: He who seeks, finds. We found our areas, we romped around in them for years, and one first ascent followed the next. Averstal, today's Magic Wood, the Silvapark, and the Gampernun: they all became my living room,

which I shared with my friends. Everyone was looking for their "line," and one by one, they were deciphered. But in the space of a few years, the areas that were once our home became hotspots, and they are now playgrounds for many people from all over the world.

According to Oscar Eckenstein, the climbing and bouldering pioneer from 1895, climbers should be vagabonds. Unconsciously, I embraced this spirit: I went everywhere looking for the perfect line, from the Peruvian highlands to the Himalayas to the endless coastlines of Norway. Whenever I find a new area, it reminds me of my first day of bouldering in Cresciano. I am still overcome by a certain nervous curiosity when I start my search. Walking and searching, searching and walking, trying to bring order to a new world, which until recently seemed infinitely remote. When I reach my goal, I feel a sense of joy, the air seems to be electrified, tension builds at every turn, at every boulder. This must be how Columbus would have felt.

After all, you can boulder anywhere, but the quality of the rock has to be right.

Just doing some hard moves on any old piece of rock is still uninteresting for me. When I started bouldering, we had our own rating system: Yes, maybe, no. We used stars to rate the quality of the climbs or moves.

Ten stars were our dream, the ultimate goal. Grading difficulties by a number, as we know it



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As a primal form of movement, climbing is in our genes, and we have been climbing throughout human history.

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Angie Payne against a fantastic backdrop in Greenland.



Brione, Switzerland:  
Bouldering icon Alex  
Puccio in a key position  
on *Marilyn Monroe*, 8A.

#### HOW DO YOU BOULDER?

There are several ways of approaching how you climb a boulder. You can climb up and on to the very top of a boulder—often referred to as “topping out”—or you can stop at a specific hold which is the target (“top”). Sometimes, a boulder leads laterally from one side of the wall to the other; this is called a traverse. Although bouldering for fun has no rules, if you want your climb to “count,” there are unwritten rules you need to follow, for instance about the way you start a climb. It’s all about bouldering “ethics.” Mostly, the starting hand holds of a climb are pre-defined; in a competition, so are the footholds. You may have to start from a lying, sitting, or standing position, or even jump from the starting holds. Some boulders, especially those that require you to jump to a starting position, often have no real starting holds. You just stand in front of the boulder and press yourself into a position from which you can lift yourself off the ground. An example is the famous Stem Gem boulder in the American bouldering paradise Joshua Tree National Park.

Another technique is the jump start: You run towards the boulder and try to catapult yourself onto the wall in the direction of the handholds by stepping on the wall once or twice. Problems requiring jump starts are mainly popular in competitions and indoor bouldering, but there are also some famous outdoor challenges, such as the jump-start version of the ultra-classic boulder called A Streetcar

Named Desire. You can boulder along small gaps between rock faces or between two boulders. In such cases, the rule usually applies that only some parts of the rock wall are surfaces considered “in,” otherwise the problem won’t be difficult enough; so, some areas are “out” and you should not spread out across or on them.

are not machines! We are creative thinkers, with considerable intelligence about how to move and a great instinct for playing. You only need to look at how children climb to see that it is in our genes! In the course of our conformist lives, we just keep un-learning things we know instinctively.

#### TRAINING FOR BOULDERING: FITNESS TRAINING

Of course, there is no denying that bouldering also requires strength. You can make time for specific strength training while you set about learning basic techniques. I think it’s more important that you stop yourself from developing an imbalance of strength and flexibility by making sure you follow a balanced regimen of exercises for both. Otherwise, the imbalances could get aggravated by climbing, and over time this can result in strains. So, read up on fitness training in the relevant literature, and also follow exercise tutorials, or even better, do a training course. Personal training with an experienced coach is the best and most sustainable method.

At a more advanced stage of your bouldering career, you might want to think about targeted

# PROJECTS AND THE ART OF FAILURE

*Bernd Zangerl*

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For many people, it might be a piece of chocolate that arouses a craving, but for others it is bouldering. Again and again, we climbers typically jump at the chance—we must get to that boulder—but we have no idea exactly where this desire actually springs from. It is simply a feeling to which we surrender ourselves. These feelings of desire and longing come from deep within our subconscious. We need these constant confirmations to satisfy our egos. The ego, in turn, constantly creates new demands and desires to which we could surrender. These cravings keep recurring and are not easily and decisively sated. Like a craving for chocolate, they keep coming back. Bouldering is basically just a desire, a need to which we like to give in. Or is it devotion? Is that perhaps the right word? Devotion leads to passion. And once passion is aroused, there is no turning back.

## MY PROJECT

I can't remember exactly when it all began. Suddenly, I was seeing lines everywhere: on every stone, every rock face, every building, every other scalable structure. As soon as I thought I had spotted a few resting points, in my mind they merged into a line. They became my project. Whenever I visited an area, it wasn't the existing routes that caught my eye; the boulders that caught my attention were the ones that no one had tried to climb before. I enjoy working on something that nobody

has yet explored. Not knowing whether I would ever succeed, and yet still believing that if everything went perfectly, I would succeed: fortunately, this state of mind is both motivating and inspiring, and to this day nothing has changed for me in this regard. Hand- and footholds are everywhere. Compared to climbing, bouldering has become much more refined, more demanding, more elaborate, more playful, and more powerful. A foothold isn't just a foothold, a handhold isn't just a handhold. It's the detail that counts. The end of a route isn't the end goal; every single square inch of rock is the goal. Details, creativity and imagination, these are the ingredients that make bouldering interesting. Holds, cracks, scoops, every unevenness in the rock surface and of course the friction on the rock, its roughness—everything has to be examined closely, analyzed and remembered. The "boulder problem" is then unpicked, part by part, that is, it is dissected into single moves. Every detail can help to solve a problem. The aim is to find the most economical solution for the project or, in fact, any feasible route. This unpicking, looking for and finding a solution, has become a passion. It is a game of nature that I have to understand. Every boulder is different. Sometimes I have devoted all my energy to deciphering a single passage, only to find that I was no longer particularly interested in solving the problem. Once you master the single moves, you know that it is possible to climb the boulder, and

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Kinnaur, India: The obvious impossibility of a problem becomes the catalyst for high performance.



# WHY BOULDERS DESERVE OUR RESPECT

*Klaus Haselböck*

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For some decades now, the Society for the German Language in Wiesbaden has been choosing the word, and especially, the *un-word* of the year. In recent years, the concept of “sustainability,” in particular, has had an increasing chance of being honored with this dubious title. Over the past few years, this term has been so misused and overused in politics and business that we can no longer bear to hear it. This is quite surprising, because the word actually stands for positive developments and essential considerations: namely, how we human beings could act ecologically, economically, and fairly. It is about how we could carefully protect the planet that has been given to us by previous generations, so that it remains worth living on for the generations to come.

The idea has its origins in forestry. As early as the 18th century, people realized that forests had to be logged carefully, i.e., only in sections. If you cut down all the trees at once, this may mean maximizing profit in the short term, but you risk losing the forest as a source of income and as an equally valuable natural habitat. If, on the other hand, you act carefully and only fell as many trees as can grow back in the medium term, the forest will be able to regenerate. It will remain intact, in ecological balance, and also profitable in economic terms, i.e., sustainable for both nature and humankind.

However, sustainability does not only apply to forests, but is understood as having a

wider application today. In 2015, the United Nations (UN) formulated 17 goals for “sustainable development,” placing human beings at the heart of them. The scope of these Sustainable Development Goals ranges from gender equality and decent work for all to the protection of ecosystems. These ambitious goals, which usually require complex solutions, can only be achieved through global partnerships. Communities of nations must be just as involved as companies. The idea of sustainability has long since ceased to be a philosophical luxury. We all bear responsibility for a life free of conflict and, in extreme cases, even for the survival of humanity within an intact natural environment, and we must all make our contribution to this.

What do these considerations have to do with boulders? Boulders were often created millions of years ago and will probably still be part of the landscape when we humans no longer exist. In other words: Why do we have to think about sustainability in terms of bouldering as well? After all, it is a sport that requires minimal equipment and follows very simple rules, and nothing is drilled—apart from the regular removal of plant growth and the use of chalk, the rocks remain largely intact and undamaged. Which in itself is very sustainable, isn't it?

This is true in principle, but it is equally true that in the last few years the sport of climbing as a whole has experienced a huge boom, and therefore

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Over the years Bernd Zangerl has, along with the local population, developed a strategy to deal with bouldering. It is necessary to regulate the influx of tourists to preserve the area for the future.





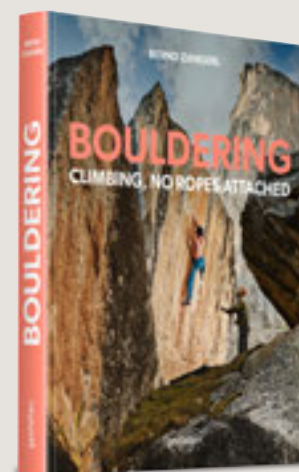
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Climbing,  
No Ropes Attached

By: Bernd Zangerl  
Features: Full color, hardcover,  
stitch bound, 232 pages,  
21 x 26 cm, 8 ¼ x 10 ¼ inches  
Price: € 39.90 (D) £ 35 \$ 60 (US)  
ISBN: 978-3-89955-024-5



RELEASE: FEBRUARY 2021



SAMPLE COVER

Lift yourself into the world of bouldering  
and teach the body and mind new extremes.

Bouldering goes beyond being just a pastime, it is a sense of community that teaches you to challenge your physical and mental boundaries. Power, discipline, and pure focus that pushes you to new heights. *Bouldering* shows the different motifs behind bouldering and the inspirational figures of this high-performance sport. The joy of experimenting teaches perseverance and how to deal with failure, bouldering forces the body to new limits.

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## WHAT TO EXPECT

- A comprehensive look into the sport with expert insight from famous boulderers
- A guide to the right way of training
- Profiles and personalities that inspire and motivate individuals
- Spectacular photography, equipment tips, tips for bouldering with children, plus the history of bouldering

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## BERND ZANGERL

is regarded as one of the best boulderers of all-time. Born in 1978 in Tyrol, he was surrounded by mountains and began bouldering at a young age. After great success in alpine climbing, he later turned to bouldering and found his true passion here.

