









CAROLINA AMELL

Climb On

THE GLOBAL CULTURE OF CLIMBING

PRESTEL

Munich · London · New York



Denitsa Mireheva

I started climbing by chance. I come from a small town where your parents could sign you up for two things – football or ballet. I did both. But we didn't have gymnastics, climbing, skiing or really anything that sounded exciting.

When I moved to the capital at age 14, I thought things would be different. But instead I spent my teenage years not finding the right people or the right environment. Everyone around me seemed to have their own groups, their own passions, and I kept looking for something I couldn't name.

Then came my first year at university, and with it a twist I didn't expect. Part of my curriculum required choosing a sport. The list of possible sports was long, but they were mostly ball sports. I loved basketball when I was a kid. Then suddenly everyone grew taller, and I didn't. Volleyball was the same story – too short, always left out. Football? That was even worse. I'd get asked whose sister I was and why I was even there. Slowly, I grew allergic to ball sports.

Then I noticed something on the list I had never heard of. Sport climbing.

Whaaat? What even is this?! I had no idea, but I had to try. So I enrolled.

I was hooked from the very first lesson. Suddenly, everything made sense. I started going every single day. Back then, the climbing community in Bulgaria was so small that you'd easily find yourself sharing a wall with some of the best climbers in the country. It felt like stepping into a hidden universe I didn't know I was missing.

I made friends, cut distances fast, got invited to my first outdoor climbing day. Soon afterwards came my very first climbing trip abroad. Suddenly, I wasn't just in a gym, I was in the world. Enrolling in climbing was hands down the best decision I've ever made.

But here's the truth: I used to feel bad about it, too. About finding climbing so late. About finding the mountains so late. By the time I discovered it, I already carried too many fears, doubts and prejudices. I thought I'd never be really good at something I hadn't started as a child. I kept telling myself I was behind. That I had missed my chance.

Yet over time, I realised I was missing the point. Climbing isn't about how early you start, or how 'good' you are. It's about what it gives you. And it gives me everything.

Climbing pulled me outside, away from screens and cars, into places I never knew existed. It gave me the feeling of my body moving in a language it somehow always knew. The rhythm of breath and movement, the flow that made everything else fall quiet. It gave me the mountains – the sun on my skin, the wind in my hair, the smell of pine on the hike to the crag. It gave me places I would never have gone otherwise, countries I wouldn't have travelled to, trails I wouldn't have walked, cliffs and rivers that I now can't imagine my life without.

It gave me peace. Those rare moments on the wall when nothing else exists – no worries, no doubts, no noise. Just breath and the next move.

Multi-pitch in Datça,
Turkey

It gave me an education I never found in school. How to fall and try again. How to face fear instead of running from it. How to risk something and discover the reward on the other side. How to see beauty in small things – a single move, a patch of light, a shared beer after a climb.

Unlike the ball sports that made me feel too short, too female, too out of place, climbing never cared about my height (sure, reach can make some moves easier, but there's always another way) or gender. On the wall, what matters is creativity, persistence and the way you solve the puzzle in front of you.

And climbing gave me joy. Pure, stubborn joy. The joy of moving upwards even when my arms are screaming. The joy of reaching a hold I thought was impossible.

In climbing you're always beginning again. Even the strongest climbers face new routes that strip them back to beginners. Every project starts at zero. Every fall forces you to restart from the ground. Climbing is basically a series of first steps, over and over. So why should it matter when I took my very first one?

Climbing has no final arrival point. It keeps humbling you, resetting you, making you start fresh. That's its quiet gift.

I used to think I had missed my chance. Now I know I was lucky to find it at all.

**Above turquoise waters
on the west coast of
Sardinia, Italy**









Left page Welcoming the first sunrise of July on Vitosha mountain, Bulgaria

Top Van-life moments in the Pordoi Pass, Dolomites, Italy

Bottom Morning coffee before climbing in Vlychada, Greece





Late-night talks on the Greek coast,
Parga, Greece