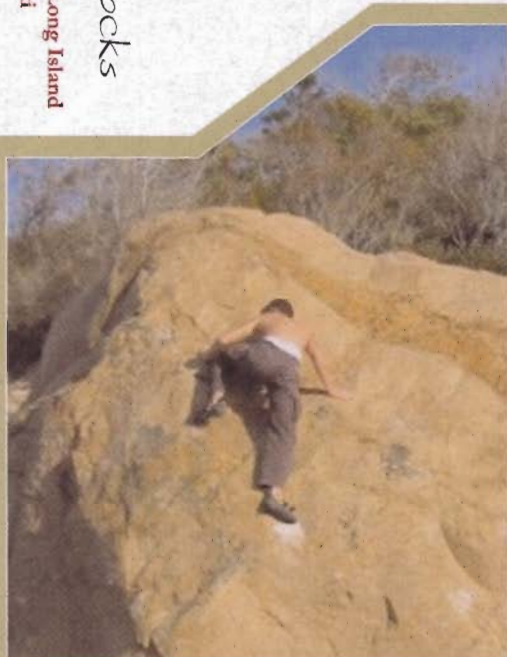


ROCK CLIMBERS ON LONG ISLAND FACE a cold, hard reality. They live on a 400-foot-tall pile of sand and pebbles, with nary a solid cliff to be found. It's the glaciers' fault really, forming Long Island by scraping bits of granite into the Atlantic like a waiter swiping crumbs off a tablecloth and leaving few big rocks behind. For any "real" rock climbing, Island-born rock rats must make a weekend pilgrimage to the Gunks, a series of world-famous cliffs in the Hudson Valley. In between pilgrimages, climbers satiate their appetite with a trip to the local indoor rock climbing gym, such as Island Rock in Plainview, where I first donned a harness, chalk bag and rock climbing shoes more than a decade ago.

But such a bleak local outlook for climbing is changing thanks to the advent of bouldering. An outgrowth of rock climbing, bouldering has evolved into a sport all its own. Whereas the goal of rock climbing is to move vertically up rock faces, using a system of ropes and protective devices to ensure safety, bouldering takes on a wholly different focus. Routes remain close to the ground, eliminating the need for ropes or other specialized equipment, and all the difficulties are crammed into the span of only a few moves, as opposed to being stretched out along the height of a 100-foot section of cliff.

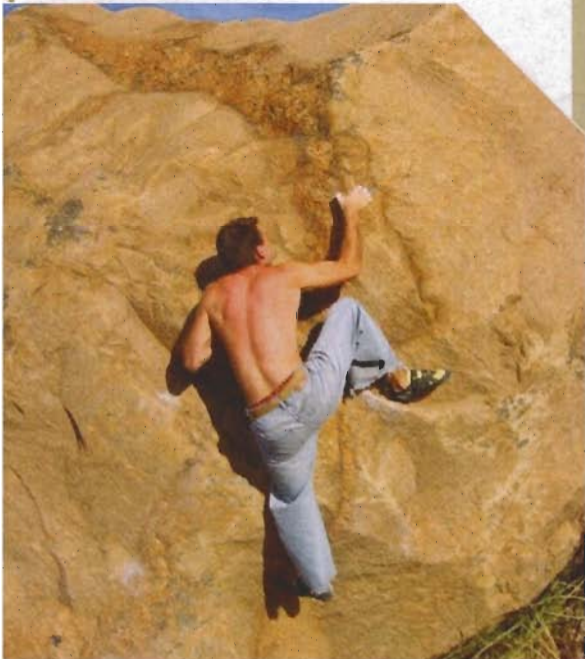
As bouldering splintered off from the climbing mainstream, so too did the sport's lingo. Instead of rock climbing routes, bouldering has "problems." Uncompleted problems are called "projects." Successfully climbing a problem is known as "sending." Information about how to best climb a problem is "beta." And the foam mats placed beneath landing zones are called "crash pads."

Island Rocks
Bouldering on Long Island
by Peter Bronski



Naturally, bouldering takes place on boulders and, much to the surprise of typical Long Islanders, if there's one thing that Long Island has, it's boulders. Geologists call them erratics, but to climbers, they're a gift from the glaciers, a series of playgrounds littered along the North Shore. And improbably, beyond the potato fields and vineyards of the North Fork, you'll find the Island's premier bouldering destination: A stretch of beach between Greenport and East Marion. "It's the flagship of the fleet," says Jack La Russa, a 36-year old climber from Oyster Bay. La Russa started climbing at Island Rock eleven years ago and now is part of a group of 20 or so climbers from Nassau and Queens who regularly head out to the boulders. A local climber named Chris Ortiz first developed a handful of problems over ten years ago, but it's only in recent years that the boulders—Fatman, Little Boy, and the Secret Beach boulders—have really seen steady climbing activity. The problems—Fisherman's Friend, Talk is Cheap, Big and Spacey, and Equinox—now number more than 20 and span the difficulty spectrum, which ranges from V0 to V16.

At last, Long Island bouldering has come of age. It may not be Yosemite, but for Island climbers, it'll do. "Most people are like, 'Bouldering on Long Island?'" says La Russa. "There's not a lot of climbing, but what's here is great." 📷



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