



Awesome Ascents

Indoor climbing walls are a fun and challenging way to stay active year-round

BY MATT ALDERTON

I'M AT FIRST Ascent Climbing and Fitness, a climbing gym on Chicago's Northwest Side. My host, co-founder Dan Bartz, secures a rope to my harness with a knot and carabiner, then sets me loose on my first climb: a three-story route I complete with surprising speed. It's easier than I imagined, but challenging in ways I didn't expect. I can see why people get into the sport.

"Climbing generally appeals to people who are active and adventurous and who want a great workout that doesn't feel like a workout," Bartz says. "Also, climbing is really social. Instead of slogging away on a treadmill ... you get to commune with people as you enjoy the sport."

LOS ANGELES

SENDER ONE CLIMBING

1 Sender One's Los Angeles gym (the other is in Santa Ana, Calif.) spans more than 35,000 square feet, with walls up to 60 feet tall. It offers climbing and yoga classes, personal training, saunas and an entire mezzanine dedicated to athletic training for climbers, with special equipment like "hangboards" to help climbers build finger strength. Parents will love "Sender City," an interactive climbing area with themed climbs for kids. Cost: \$24 day pass, \$7 gear rental. 11220 Hindry Ave., Los Angeles; 213-279-2000; senderoneclimbing.com

CHICAGO

FIRST ASCENT CLIMBING AND FITNESS

2 First Ascent's original gym (there are two other Chicago locations) has 26,000 square feet of climbing surface, with walls up to 60 feet high. Highlights include a 15-meter speed wall, climbing and yoga classes, a full gym and Kids Rock Blocks — instructor-led climbing sessions for kids. Cost: \$18 day pass, \$10 gear rental. 3516 N. Spaulding Ave., Chicago; 773-564-9815; firstascentclimbing.com



SOMERVILLE, MASS.

BROOKLYN BOULDERS

3 Brooklyn Boulders' second location in Somerville, Mass., totals 42,000 square feet with walls up to 50 feet tall. It offers a gym, personal training, climbing and yoga classes, saunas and youth programs. Its "active co-working space," perched atop a 22-foot-high bouldering wall, combines work and exercise with balance ball "chairs," communal tables and standing desks with built-in pull-up bars. This location joins the original one in Brooklyn, another in Long Island City, N.Y. and one in Chicago. Cost: \$29 day pass, \$11 gear rental. 12A Tyler St., Somerville, Mass.; 617-623-6700; brooklynboulders.com



CHATTANOOGA, TENN.

HIGH POINT CLIMBING AND FITNESS

4 At its location in downtown Chattanooga, Tenn., High Point Climbing and Fitness offers approximately 30,000 square feet of climbing surface, including indoor climbing walls with heights of up to 40 feet and — its showpiece — a back-lit outdoor climbing wall with elevations up to 60 feet. Amenities include climbing and yoga classes, a full gym and a 3,000-square-foot Kid Zone for children ages 3 and up. Other locations can be found in Riverside, Tenn., and Birmingham, Ala., with plans to open in Memphis and Huntsville, Ala., soon. Cost: \$16 day pass, \$5 gear rental. 219 Broad St., Chattanooga, Tenn.; 423-602-7625; highpointclimbing.com



FIRST ASCENT; ZEKE SMITH/BROOKLYN BOULDERS; HIGH POINT CLIMBING