

# Climbing Folklore

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# Climbing Background



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# Who are the folk?

- Dartmouth undergraduates
- Members of the Dartmouth Mountaineering Club (DMC)
- Mixture of outdoor and indoor climbers
- Mixture of competitive and casual
- Most have been climbing for several years

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# DMC-Specific Folklore

Customary/Polymodal Folklore



# Wine Game

**Informant:** Alex Derenchuk, Dartmouth '19, climbing since freshman year, leader in DMC

**Context:** circle around a campfire during a trip between terms or at a off campus apartment;  
Inter- and intra-class year bonding within the DMC

**Item:** Wine Game: Christening of jug;  
Drink a gallon of Carlo Rossi; Win the game for your class year by finishing it



# The Feed

**Informant:** Marlee Montella- Dartmouth Class of 2021, member of Dartmouth Climbing Team, climbing since early high school.

**Context:** DMC members bond, builds friendship

**Item:** The Feed: Weekly dinner with DMC members. Includes introduction games, food, mingling, speakers.



# The Devil's Tower Legend

**Informant:** Decker Wentz '21. Philadelphia, PA.  
Long time outdoor climber.

**Context:** Dartmouth runs trips in the breaks between terms to climb away from campus. This story is told around the campfire on the trip.

**Item:** Legend has it that a man parachuted to the top of the Devils Tower and got stuck there. He was unable to be rescued by helicopters or even the military until the founder of the DMC climbed it and rescued him.





# Vernacular Folklore

Textual/Oral Folklore

- Climbing emerged as a counter culture
- Vernacular serves to enforce community (create bonding and exclude outsiders)
- Serve to capture ideas that either don't exist in other folk groups or replace vocabulary accepted in wider society

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# Whipper

**Informant:** Kayla Lieuw '19. Potomac, MD. Long time competitive climber.

**Context:** Used in conversations between climbers to describe climbing events.

**Item:** Used to describe when someone takes a big fall during a climb.



# Sandbag

**Informant:** Matthew Rube '19. Westchester, NY. Long time competitive climber.

**Context:** Climbs are graded by more experienced climbers. There's no formal rubric. Just that you "Know". Experienced climbers can underestimate how difficult easier climbs are.

**Text:** Sandbag describes a route, a gym, or an area where the climbs are graded easier than they actually are. Like climbing wearing sandbags

# ROCK CLIMBING GRADES SYSTEM

[WWW.PUSHCLIMBING.COM](http://WWW.PUSHCLIMBING.COM)

## Route Climbing

Yosemite

French

Australian

British

NOVICE

5.4 4a 12 4a S

5.5 4b 13 HS

5.6 4c 14

5.7 5a 15 4c VS

5.8 5b 16 HVS

5.9 5c 17 5a

5.10a 6a 18 E1

5.10b 6a+ 19 5b E2

5.10c 6b 20

5.10d 6b+ 21 5c E3

5.11a 6c 22 6a E4

5.11b 6c+ 23

5.11c 7a 24 E5

5.11d 7a+ 25 6b E6

5.12a 7b 26

5.12b 7b+ 27 E7

5.12c 7c 28 6c

5.12d 7c+ 29 E8

5.13a 8a 30

5.13b 8a+ 31 E9

5.13c 8b 32 7a E10

5.13d 8b+ 33

5.14a 8c 34 E11

5.14b 8c+ 35 7b

5.14c 9a 36

5.14d 9a+ 37

5.15a 9b 38

5.15b 9b+ 38

5.15c 9b+ 38

## Bouldering

V-Scale

Font  
(French)

V0 4

4+

V1 5

5+

V2 6a

6a+

V3 6b

6b+

V4 6c

6c+

V5 7a

7a+

V6 7b

7b+

V7 7c

7c+

V8 8a

8a+

V9 8b

8b+

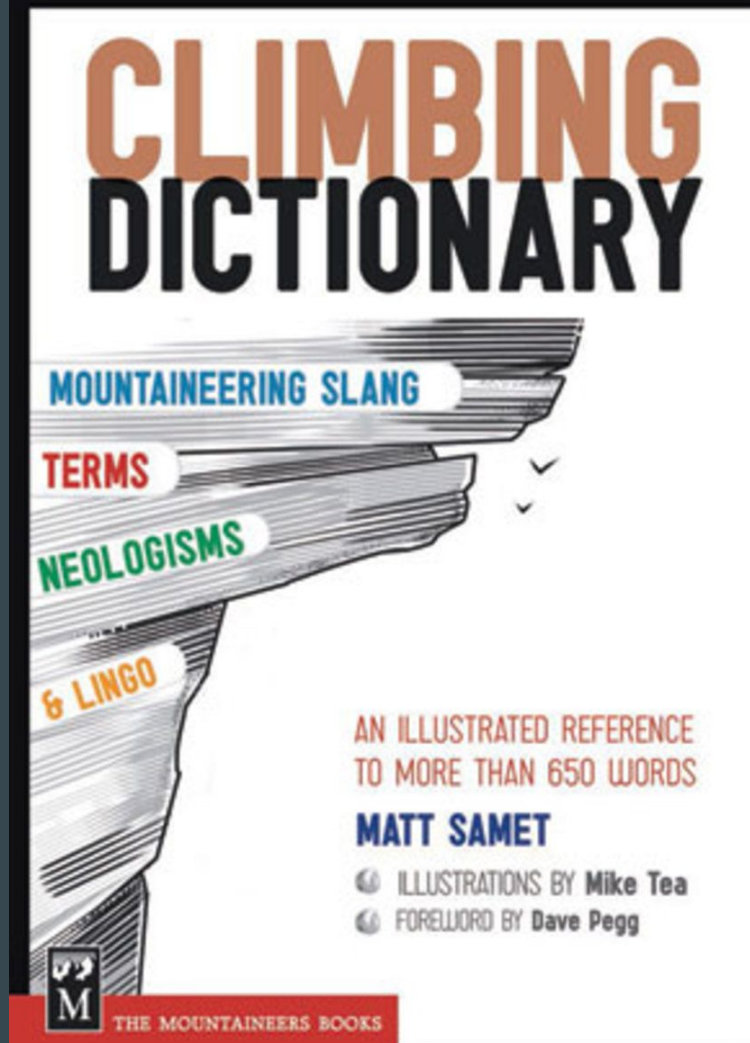
V10 8c

8c+

# Other Examples

- Pumped
- Beta
- Chossy
- Flapper
- Jug
- Dyno
- Flash
- Send

Basically another language!





# Status Symbol Folklore

Material/Customary Folklore

- Elitism at every level of climbing
- People always trying to assert that they are at a higher level

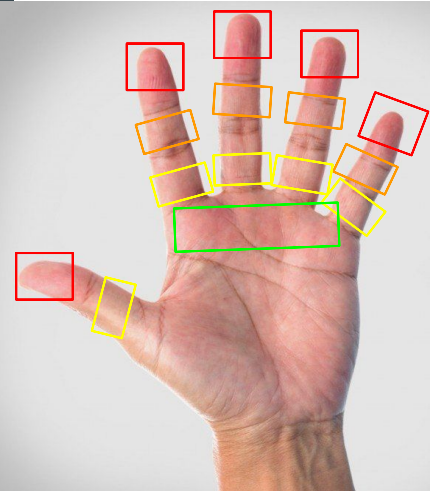
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# Calluses

**Informant:** Emma Rafkin '21. Chicago, IL. Long time competitive climber.

**Context:** As you climb, you develop calluses. Where those calluses are located indicates how difficult of hand holds/how difficult of climbs you are doing. Calluses are so important to climbing that climbers won't even put on lotion or swim.

**Text:** Point of personal pride where calluses are located. Will share with others when climbers develop new calluses. If you have many calluses and climb so hard you break them, that's also a point of pride. More calluses, the better a climber you are.



# Miguel's Pizza

**Informant:** Decker Wentz, Dartmouth '21, climbing since 4 years old, current chair of DMC

**Context:** Logo is a status symbol: Red River Gorge is famous; Recognizes climbing ability

**Item:** Miguel's Pizza logo on merchandise bought and displayed by climbers

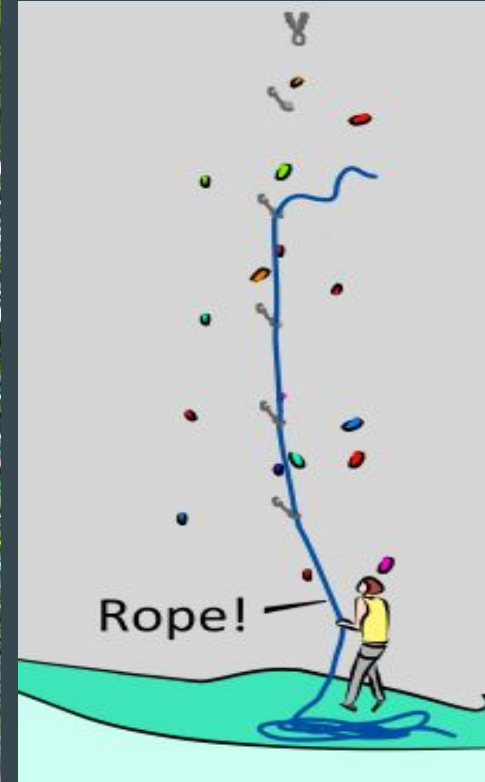


# Thumb on the Rope

**Informant:** Sarah Jennewein,  
Dartmouth College class of 2021.  
Dartmouth climbing team.

**Context:** Game performed with other  
climbers when top rope climbing  
outdoors- for enjoyment, friendly  
competition, and team building.

**Item:** As you release the top rope, try to  
catch it within a thumb length from the  
top. If you do, someone buys you a beer  
or other beverage.





# Purpose of the Folklore Described

- Vernacular
  - Group Identity
  - Exclusivity
- DMC specific
  - The Feed, Wine Games, The Legend
    - Group identity
    - Group values
    - Group origins/history
- Status Symbol
  - Group Identity
  - Fun
  - Enforce social hierarchies