

Rock Climbing Club's Kentucky weekend visit

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The IIT Rock Climbing Club, after planning for over six weeks with Finance Board and the Office of Campus Life went to Red River Gorge in Kentucky the weekend of November 2, 2012 to rock climb outdoors.

About sixteen climbers joined the club for the weekend, which included eight hours of driving there, one and a half days of climbing, and an eight hour drive back to IIT. When planning an outdoor camping and climbing trip months in advance you have to cross your fingers when it comes to weather. This time we were not the luckiest, but it could have been worse.

For those of you who are not familiar with Red River Gorge, it is one of the most well-documented climbing areas in the country, with routes that range from extremely easy to extremely hard, all on sandstone.

The best place to camp while in Red River Gorge is a climbers' destination called Miguel's Pizza. Miguel's Pizza has no campsites, just a field open for tents and a gravel parking lot for cars and vans.

Climbers pay \$2 per person per night to set up their tent and have full access to running water, restrooms, a \$1 shower, and most importantly, picnic tables at Miguel's Pizza. Miguel's Pizza sells the most amazing pizza any climber has ever had, and is prepared with your choice of approximately 100 different toppings. They also have soda, calzones, breakfast options, and a small climbers' pro shop.

Four cars left at various times throughout Friday afternoon and arrived at Miguel's between 11 p.m. and 2 a.m. and campers were all in tents by 3 a.m. At 8 a.m. the group woke up to start cooking breakfast on their camping stoves and was greeted with 30 degree weather and a nice, thick layer of frost over the campsite. Coordinating 16 people through breakfast and packing up to leave took almost 2 hours, but in time the group was on their way to Muir Valley, a short drive from the campsite.

Muir Valley is a private climbing area that is owned and operated by 2 owners with volunteers and donations keeping it alive. It costs nothing to climb there for the day and climbers can enjoy some of the cleanest and most well-kept routes in the Red.

Most routes are labeled at the base of the climb with their name and rating and the volunteers annually check up on the routes, permanent protection (bolts and hangers), and other aspects of it to make sure it is safe for the everyday users. The weather was chilly and had some spotty rain, but it was mostly a good day for climbing and hiking.

Enjoying several differently rated climbs in two different walls in Muir Valley, the group was able to challenge themselves physically and mentally and even teach a few new members how to belay and lead climb. After climbing, the group returned to Miguel's and enjoyed dinner among dozens of other climbers.

Sunday morning was similar to Saturday, as the group struggled to get 16 people moving, eating, and packing up all of their climbing and camping equipment. The group travelled to an area called the Gallery and the Volunteer Wall, and got to climb some of the best climbs in the Red, rated 5 stars by veteran climbers, among some of the best geological formations in the Red. Climbers returned to Chicago in different cars throughout the day on Sunday, some climbing until noon while others climbed until sundown.

Events like this are some of the most memorable for IIT students who are able to get off campus into the wilderness, away from the internet and the city for a weekend, and enjoy some physical, psychological, and mental challenges that are completely unique from the IIT experience.



Photos by Dan Zweig