

# Rock Climbing Club conquers refurbished grain silo

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In Bloomington, Illinois; a company named Upper Limits has re-purposed an old grain silo into something a little unexpected: a rock climbing gym.

After cutting doorways into the base of the silos through one foot of solid concrete, and drilling thousands of holes on the inside to attach different climbing holds, they transformed these 70 foot storage containers into one of the tallest climbing gyms in the country. It has been a few years, but the gym is also known for creating giant ice waterfalls off the side of the silos so ice climbers can practice ascending with ice axes in a more controlled environment.

With such an early three day weekend this semester some students decided they would take advantage of the time off and relaxed homework load to make the trip out to visit the gym. Five students; Danielle Kreie, Dan Zweig, Kate Manwaring, Jessica Carlson, and Maraya Morgan, took the two hour drive from Chicago out to Bloomington, Illinois to experience this gym over Martin Luther King weekend. For a steep \$18 per person, the group climbed for over four hours with swarms of Central Illinois children and other aspiring climbers.

Most routes were rated between 5.7 and 5.11, with added plus or minus depending on difficulty. According to the IIT climbers, the routes were noticeably different than any in the gyms near Chicago, which makes sense as each gym's routes are set by different climbers.

However, these routes seemed easier to climb in general, and difficulty didn't come from complexity of the route and its moves, but from distance between holds and their awkwardness. The gym also was extremely strict about safety, with patrolling staff inspecting climbers every few minutes; If anyone climbing was caught breaking a basic safety rule the climber and belayer were each charged \$10.

The IIT Rock Climbing Club tends to visit two gyms per week, when their budget allows, and climbs outdoors maybe four or five times during the semester depending on the weather and scheduling conflicts. The gyms within reach of the university that do not require gym memberships are Climb On, Vertical Endeavors,

and Hidden Peak. Each gym offers a different experience and different crowd of climbers.

At Climb On, a friendly gym in Homewood, 45 minutes south of Chicago, climbers are introduced to a medium sized gym with about twelve top ropes to climb, and hardly any lasting crowd of climbers.

Most routes have historically been harder, mostly 5.10s, 5.11s, and 5.12s, but their most recent route setters have provided an assortment of 5.8s and 5.9s. Still, however, we would not consider it the best beginner's gym.

Vertical Endeavors, or VE, is 45 minutes west in Warrenville, and is a feature of an enormous gym called Lifetime Fitness. VE offers climbers dozens of top ropes including an entire section of automatic belays where climbers can safely climb without a belayer or spotter below.

The gym is set up for large crowds and a variety of climbing, with enough routes of all ratings to entertain any level of climber; from the beginner 5.6 climber to the advanced 5.12d lead climber.

The third gym is Hidden Peak, tucked away in a basement of an gymnastics studio near the intersection of Chicago and Milwaukee, this gym is by far the closest of the club's favorites. This gym offers no top rope climbing, only bouldering, and a climber will never find himself more than a few feet off the mats and crash pads.

This gym is small, compact, and popular, with dozens of routes over top one another and a crowd of climbers, elbow to elbow waiting for routes to open up. Some of the best climbers in the country have trained at this gym, and there is always a group of advanced climbers, hanging from holds that most climbers find impossible to grab. Overall this gym is meant for better climbers to hone their skills and technique, although the newest set of routes and rocks installed caters well to all difficulties of climbers.

And then of course, sometimes, when the IIT clubs cannot fund or program enough events, the students must find entertainment for themselves. On most occasions that means taking advantage of the city of Chicago, but sometimes it means taking random, spontaneous trips to rock climbing gyms two hours away for a new and unique climbing experience.



Photo courtesy of Dan Zweig