



# Wrestling the Rocks of Palestine

By Bisan Samamreh



**T**ake a minute to imagine feeling unstoppable and having the skills, incentive, and resilience to overcome all obstacles and accomplish anything. Imagine realizing what it would take to perform to the maximum of your abilities and truly believe that you are capable of doing so. Imagine being able to identify and welcome the risks of failure and advance as though you had no doubt you would succeed. This is what I experience through rock climbing.

When I first heard about rock climbing in Palestine, I was intrigued and frankly quite skeptical, as I could not understand how it was geographically feasible here. I have to admit that the occupation has managed to narrow my perception of space and restrict my sense of movement. I met Tim Bruns and Will Harris, professional climbers and founders of Wadi Climbing, back in July last year when they arrived in Palestine. During my conversation with them, they mentioned that when they first visited Palestine while studying Arabic in Jordan in 2012, they were surprised by the lack of recreational activities in the area. This triggered the idea of creating a rock-climbing community, as a first step to building the first indoor climbing gym in Palestine.

It was not until earlier this year, in January, that Wadi Climbing organized its first climbing trip. Driven by curiosity and love of nature, I decided to join along with my friends. My first climbing experience took place in Yabrud, northeast of Ramallah. Despite a minor fear of heights and an anxious mind, I was impressed by my ability to go all the way up, especially as a first-time climber! After that trip, I signed up for a level-one climbing course with Wadi Climbing, where I learned more about the sport in terms of terminology, gear, belaying,



*Bisan Samamreh climbing Ein Qiniya rocks, near Ramallah. Photo by Svetlana Lebedeva.*

and safety measures. Since then, rock climbing has become a regular activity in my weekly schedule.

As an outdoor enthusiast who easily gets bored, I naturally dread going to the gym, and so I never developed a habit of committing to such things.

For me, exercise must be challenging but also entertaining, regardless of the endorphins released after the physical effects of working out. When I go rock climbing, I never worry about constantly observing the clock and counting how many more times I have to run, pull,



The team at Wadi Climbing has developed two climbing sites less than 20 minutes from Ramallah, in Ein Qiniya and Yabrud. There are now nearly 60 bolted climbing routes that range in difficulty from easy to very difficult. These routes are engaging for everyone from first-time climbers to experienced climbers. Since beginning outdoor guiding operations in January 2015, Wadi Climbing has engaged nearly 850 participants (44 percent female, 65 percent Palestinian, and 47 percent recurring). Wadi Climbing runs a variety of rock-climbing programs to engage all types of demographics. It offers an introduction to climbing trips, climbing courses, private trips, summer camps, a monthly membership club, and corporate leadership development.



*Two Bedouin boys rock climbing near their home in Ein Qiniya. Photos by Adam Rouhana.*

or lift. The absence of routine and lack of repetition definitely keeps me engaged. In addition, it is a great way to move all my muscles, even the ones I was not aware of. Besides the physical effort, an essential component of rock climbing is mental, as one focuses on finding the best way up. One main reason why people engage in rock climbing is the fact that it involves problem solving as a technique that takes you further

than merely relying on physical strength or prowess. Not only does rock climbing build muscles, it enhances self-confidence as well. It is also a perfect stress reliever, away from the city and office work. Moreover, rock climbing is a great way to build trust within a group, as climbers put their lives in the hands of their partners to belay them.

Living under military occupation inevitably generates tension and mistrust, in the midst of a world of other unpleasant things. In such an environment, activities in which absolute trust and vulnerability are required are quite rare. The term *belaying* describes the securing of a person or object with a rope. In rock climbing the climber typically relies on one person on the ground who belays for them. That is to say, the climber is secured by the presence of another who stands below, holding one end of the rope, which is in turn secured to his/her own harness. In the midst of a life often fraught with second-guessing and uncertainty, there is a placid liberation in the act of letting go, if only for a moment, of the rock face one is attempting to conquer and hanging in the air, suspended on a gentle cloud of trust. It flies in the face of the absence of freedom, which we as Palestinians aspire day and night to remedy. It is an act of liberation, not only to remain suspended in the air, but also to then reacquire a firm grip on that same rock and make your way to the very top.

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*Photos by Adam Rouhana.*