



Princeton Alumni Weekly

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Norman Augustine '57 *59:
How America can compete

Views of work and spending
from two non-economists

Media Lab director
Frank Moss '71

TECHNOLOGY AND ECONOMICS ISSUE

A different angle on **WORK**

TEN ALUMNI AND THEIR DREAM JOBS

Majka Burhardt '99 climbing in
the Restonica Gorge outside
Corte, Corsica, in May 2005.

Majka Burhardt '99

* *Professional climber*

Is Ethiopia the next must-see destination in adventure travel? Professional mountain climber Majka Burhardt '99 plans to find out. Burhardt, who also works as a freelance writer, was in the once-famine-stricken country last year to write a story about Ethiopia's growing coffee trade. She met a British climber who had established two climbing routes in northern Ethiopia and showed her pictures of the terrain — "600-foot towers that no one's ever touched," Burhardt says. She soon began making plans to bring two partners back to the region to climb some of the unexplored sandstone faces.

Burhardt grew up in the relative flatlands of Minnesota, but after she took a summer climbing course at age 15, she was hooked on life in the mountains. Now, climbing is Burhardt's world, professionally speaking, with her work split into three occupations: climber, writer, and guide. Foundations and gear companies support her climbing excursions, magazines pay her to write about her trips and other stories she encounters, and when she returns home to Colorado, private clients hire her to lead them through challenging climbs in the Rockies.

What is more difficult: climbing up a mountain or coming back down?

For me, climbing up is always the most fun, and coming down requires the most attention. Sometimes you are lucky and can hike down the backside of a vertical cliff. Other times you have to do a series of complicated rappels and down-climbing through technical terrain.

Which muscle groups are most important for a climber?

The big misconception is that climbers need strong arms. Your legs get you up a climb — from a sheer muscle-mass point of view, your quads, hamstrings, glutes, and calves are much bigger, and thus have more juice to burn, than your arms and shoulders.



In her job as a climber, Majka Burhardt '99 knows all the ropes.

Is there a reason why climbing ropes and gear tend to be brightly colored, or is that just the style?

Climbing gear comes in different colors so that you can easily sort through the multitude of sizes for each type of protection you put in the rock on your way up the cliff. Each company has its own color scheme, so if you use a variety of gear, which most of us do, you tend to look like a vertical rainbow.

What makes Ethiopia so interesting for a climber?

It's sandstone, and really hard sandstone is amazing to climb. There are these cracks — we call them "splitter cracks" because they split a face — and

it's this perfect line. You shove your hand and your toes and your fist and sometimes your head in the cracks to figure out how to get up them. It's about the purest crack-climbing that you can get. ... I almost have to pinch myself. There are these beautiful towering pieces of sandstone. You have to say, "How do I get up there? How do I link all these cracks together?" The adventure element of it is pretty supreme. ■

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