

Big wall

Waypoint Namibia

What makes a climb impassable? I'm 215-meters up a first ascent of a granite crack climb in the heart of Namibia, and all I have to hold onto is a bush. Lots of bushes. Trees, too. In order to get where I'm going - the summit - I need what's behind the bushes, the thing these bushes are choking, the thing that I have travelled 15,400 kilometers by plane, truck, and foot for: a perfect crack.

Namibia is not known for its climbing, which is exactly why I wanted to go there. It's better known as Africa's newest independent country, the source of the continent's largest stores of uranium and diamonds, the Namib Desert, the Skeleton Coast, and its tribal peoples. Previously known as Southwest Africa, this former German colony and South African protectorate holds some of the most coveted, and least visited, natural sites in Africa. In the middle of all of these lies Spitzkoppe, a 500-meter granite plug with over eighty established climbs. When I learned about Spitzkoppe in December 2007, I automatically started wondering what else might be possible to climb in Namibia. I pick unlikely climbing destinations because I want to learn what happens on the margins of adventure. War, apartheid, and remoteness have all combined to keep many of Namibia's vertical landscapes relatively unexplored. When I found an out-of-focus photo of a 1,000-meter granite prow with a mud Himba hut in the foreground, I knew I had found my objective. The Himba are southern Africa's largest pastoral tribal group and have maintained their strong cultural identity despite being on the borderline of battle, resources, and landscape.

I wanted both of the things I saw in that photo: the culture and the climbing. We focused our expedition on getting there - to the Marienfluss Valley - and arrived after five long days on dirt roads averaging, at times, 15 km/hour for entire days of driving. It only took us fifteen minutes to realize that our climbing objective would be unwise. We were eighteen days into our expedition. We turned to the Himba instead.



© Peter Doucette



© Gabe Rogel



© Maka Burhard

The anti-bush brush after the testing phase!

We learned how to mix butterfat and ochre into a paste to protect ourselves from the sun, how to track shade in 45-degree heat, and when to adapt a goal and opt for understanding. Maybe, in the end, that final action gave us the Southern Crossing. After a few days, we left the Himba and the north to try one more region for climbing: the Brandberg, Namibia's highest peak. We had passed it on the way to the north. We came back to give it more attention. And that's how we got to the bushes.

We, at that point, were Peter Doucette and I. Kate Rutherford, our other team member, was temporarily laid up in camp with a watery stomach. We were on the Orabeskopf wall, which rises just under 600 meters to a summit of 2,200 meters. It's pure granite. It's riddled with cracks, it's steep, and it's in the shade all day, every day. It had been climbed once before in 1974, when R. Lichman and R. Blumgart ascended the long, central chimney system to the summit. The remoteness of the cliff has largely kept it off climbers' radars and out of the realm of possibility due to the four-wheel drive road, four-hour approach, lack of water, and technical descent. But to us, it was far more feasible than the wall in the northwest. We'd started with a reconnaissance trip and had come back with six days of food, a triple set of cams and nuts, twelve bolts, seven hangers, a hand drill, and a single set of pins. We had exactly one week before we were all to fly back across the Atlantic.

Our first day on the climb, we went all of 60 meters. It took us over two hours to navigate a 10-meter-tall loose block that threatened to keep us from ever climbing a second pitch. There were bushes down there as well - bushes we would later learn were novice bushes. Peter and I quickly developed a routine of finding a stance with our feet and one hand, and using the other to attack the offending foliage, sometimes with a nut tool. We had one goal for those first two days: to make it to the brilliant orange and green corner above. This right-leaning, hanging corner was the first feature I'd picked out on the face as climbable. From the moment I saw it I knew that if we got there, we'd find

success. Looking back at that first moment, I remember seeing the bushes. I remember thinking they were fairly regularly spaced. I remember thinking: that might take some work.

"I learned just what that work would mean in the last hours of daylight on our second day, starting into the hanging corner. It took me thirty minutes to go three meters."

The bushes I'd spied from below were the ones that grew out of the crack. What I could not see were the bushes filling the crack. These didn't move with the force of my hand. They laughed at my nut tool. They only yielded to the hammer. And then I had to reverse these steps to make the crack passable; using the nut tool at the next layer, then my fingers, and finally even my fingernails to scrape the root systems from the inside of the crack. Once I cleared the way, I got a finger jam or hand jam, a piece of protection, and the possibility of turning my attention to my feet.

2009 was the wettest fall on record for Namibia in over two decades. Before climbing on Orabeskopf, I thought this was a good thing. By the fourth time I had dug my hand into the root system of a prickly succulent surrounded by maggot-like beetles, I reconsidered my opinion. Any other crack, and I would have given up. But this one had started to matter; this one had become personal - this one was shaping into a phenomenal climb. Peter and I fought our way over those precious 70 meters for a total of eight hours in two days. The belayer would mark the climber's progress with the telltale streak of black silt raining down the face below the crack. For the climber, progress was directly proportional to a tolerance for ingesting bird excrement and dirt.

Each night we came back to camp by the light of our headlamps, filling our water at a 25 x 75 cm hole along the way, so that we carried up to 18 liters on each trip home. It was winter in Namibia, and we only had twelve hours of daylight a day. By 6:00 pm, we'd be emptying our pockets of the wrappers from



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© Gabe Rogel

The Himbas dye their skin red with a paste composed of animal fat and hematite powder.

our day's ration of bars and starting in on dinner. By 6:30 we'd be nursing cut hands and expectorating noses in the tent. And we'd be happy.

I didn't expect to find great climbing in Namibia. I expected a brief stint of good climbing, followed by a long search for what would likely be passable climbing. I was going to Africa, after all, to do first ascents. I was going to Africa, after all, to merge climbing and culture. I'd done this before, in Ethiopia and South Africa, and I knew to keep my climbing expectations low and my life-broadening hopes high. And maybe, somewhere along the way during the 30 days of 45 degrees, dirt roads, and crumbly faces leading up to that final day of climbing, I had told myself that utter climbing success would be impossible. I didn't say it out loud, thankfully, because if I had, we might not have found Orabeskopf. And we might not have found a climb that was far more than passable, and was maybe even great.

On the last day of our expedition, we woke up before dawn and placed our homemade grass brushes in our backpacks, filled our water,

and hiked for the last time across talus and grassy slopes filled with puffed adders, horned adders, and spitting cobras. We made it to the base and racked up. We started from the bottom and climbed thirteen pitches to the top without stopping. I sank my hands into freshly cleaned cracks and smiled at the grit that still pressed into my flesh. I brushed, blew at, and kicked the dirt off footholds - dirt we had put there from our efforts at the crack hanging above. We chimneyed, off-widthed, jammed, laybacked, and stemmed to the top of Southern Crossing, V, 5.11+. It's climbing I would travel to do anywhere.

Majka Burhardt

Majka Burhardt is a writer, climber, and guide living in the United States and traveling the world in search of places where climbing and culture collide. Learn more about Namibia, including the upcoming film about the expedition, at www.majkaburhardt.com

Peter Doucette in the chimney of Painted Giraffe, 5.9, at Brandberg.



Big wall products

CALIDRIS

The waistbelt and wide leg loops of the CALIDRIS provide all the comfort, support and ventilation needed for long aid routes and other activities requiring extended periods of hanging (cleaning and equipping routes, etc.). Lightweight and comfortable, with large gear-carrying capacity, it is perfect for big wall climbing. The CALIDRIS is sized to fit larger users for all types of climbing. Frame Construction technology: bias webbing transfers load and distributes pressure over entire surface area of the waistbelt and leg loops. DoubleBack buckles adjust the leg loops for total comfort when suspended. Dual waist buckles allow tie-in point to be centered and equalize the equipment loops. Reinforced tie-in points for increased durability in this high-wear area. Multiple options in the front and back for organizing and carrying gear. Two CARITOOL slots.

Reference: C57
Sizes : 1 and 2
Weight: 600 g, 685 g



ALTIOS

Ultra comfortable multi-purpose helmet. The hybrid suspension system, composed of a mesh panel and expanded polystyrene liner, makes this helmet extremely lightweight and comfortable to wear. Helmet 'floats' above the head. The space between the head and the liner allows for effective ventilation with the Climate Control System. Durable ABS shell. This helmet is very ergonomic, adapting to any head shape, and offers two options for attaching a headlamp: clips or a removable ADAPT system-compatible mount. Easy-to-use molded adjustment wheel quickly dials in the headband size, even while the helmet is being worn. Adjustable chinstrap, nape height and headband for an extremely comfortable fit.

References: A450R - A45PL - A45WH
Available in two sizes:
- size 1:48-56 cm (weight: 305 g)
- size 2:53-61 cm (weight: 335 g)



GRIGRI®

The GRIGRI's self-braking function helps the belayer catch and hold a climber. Ergonomic design. Also great for rappelling on single ropes. Use is similar to that of conventional belay devices: paying out rope is done using both hands; arresting a fall is done by holding the free end of the rope. For lowering and rappelling, the rate of descent is controlled by the hand holding the free end of the rope (the rope is released with the handle).

References: D14 - D14 B - D14 R
Weight: 225 g
For use with single ropes between 10 and 11 mm in diameter

PRO TRAXION

Very efficient progress capture pulley. The PRO TRAXION is designed for hauling heavy loads and is ideal for aid climbing and rescue. Highly efficient large diameter sheave mounted on sealed ball bearings. Trigger cam with teeth and cleaning slot works even on dirty or icy ropes. Swinging side plate permits the rope to be installed once the pulley is in place. Auxiliary attachment point for creating different types of hauling systems. Cam can be locked in open position so device can be used as a simple pulley.

Reference: P51
Weight: 265 g
Efficiency: 95 %
Working load as pulley only: 3 kN x 2 = 6 kN
Breaking strength as pulley only: 11 kN x 2 = 22 kN
Working load as self-jamming pulley: 2.5 kN
Breaking strength as self-jamming pulley: 4 kN
For use on ropes between 8 and 13 mm in diameter



• Integrated cam.

• Aluminum sheave mounted on sealed ball bearings

ASCENSION

Ergonomic handled rope clamp for rope ascents. The performance of the ASCENSION has been refined to provide greater comfort, efficiency, ease of use. The ergonomically shaped handle is over molded with dual density grip for greater friction and better grip. The grip is wider at the bottom, providing better comfort for your fingers during use. The index finger indent has also been increased, offering greater efficiency when pulling on the ascender. The cam's angled teeth provide secure grip in the worst conditions while reducing the effort required to slide the device up the rope. The geometry of the single piece aluminum frame ensures optimal handle orientation when the device is loaded and will maintain solid, comfortable performance for ascents of any length.

References: B17SLN (left) - B17SRG (right)
Weight: 195 g
For use with ropes between 8 and 13 mm in diameter



At a belay on Southern Crossing.



OWALL

The oval OWALL is a general purpose carabiner for trad and aid climbing. Oval shape is ideal for pitons, aiders, racking wired nuts and other protection. Great for racking. Keylock system.

Reference: M41
Weight: 68 g
Breaking strength:
- major axis: 24 kN
- open gate: 7 kN
- minor axis: 10 kN
Gate opening: 22 mm



OK

Many pulleys need an oval-shaped carabiner to work properly. The OK carabiner is designed for just that. It is also very useful at belays. Keylock system. Available with manual or auto-locking system.

SCREW-LOCK (M33 SL): 75 g
TRIAC-LOCK (M33 TL): 77 g
Breaking strength:
- major axis: 24 kN
- open gate: 7 kN
- minor axis: 10 kN (M33 TL: 8 kN)
Gate opening: 19 mm
For more information on carabiner locking systems, go to www.petzl.com



WILLIAM

A large carabiner can come in handy in many places. The carabiner's shape and size make it useful for belaying and rappelling with the Munter hitch with single or double ropes, anchoring multiple ropes and slings and keeping the belay station organized. Pear shape also facilitates use with the Munter hitch for single or double ropes. Keylock system. Available with manual or auto-locking system.

SCREW-LOCK (M36 SL): 90 g
BALL-LOCK (M36 BL): 94 g
TRIAC-LOCK (M36 TL): 88 g
Breaking strength:
- major axis: 25 kN
- open gate: 7 kN
- minor axis: 7 kN
Gate opening: 24 mm (TL and BL), 25 mm (SL)
For more information on carabiner locking systems, go to www.petzl.com



QUICKSTEP

Adjustable single-step etrier for aid climbing. Rapid length adjustment via the DoubleBack buckle. Equipped with a STRING protection, which allows the carabiner to be held in position and protects the sling from wear. 3 mm hole in buckle for attaching a release cord to facilitate adjustment. Loop on the free end of the webbing for attaching a piton during placement. Foot retention system helps keeps your foot in the step while jugging.

Reference: C09
Weight: 142 g



QUICKFIX

Adjustable positioning sling for aid climbing. Rapid length adjustment via the DoubleBack buckle. Equipped with a STRING protection, which allows the carabiner to be held in position and protects the webbing from wear. Attaches easily to the harness with a simple lark's head hitch. 3 mm hole in buckle for attaching a release cord to facilitate adjustment. Loop on the free end of the webbing for attaching a piton during placement. Warning: the QUICKFIX is not intended to hold falls and is not to be used as a lanyard (breaking strength 150 daN)

Reference: C09100
Weight: 68 g



PAW S

Rigging plate for organizing the belay and creating a system with multiple anchors. Useful in aid climbing and for setting up Tyrolean traverses. Three anchor point holes. Helps to equalize loads. Lightweight and durable: made of aluminum.

Reference: P63 S
Weight: 55 g
Breaking strength: 36 kN



CORDEX PLUS

These medium weight belay/rappel gloves offer extra protection without sacrificing dexterity. Double-layer leather and padding protect the palm from heat generated during long rappels. Fingertips and other high-wear areas are reinforced for increased durability. The back is made of leather with abrasion-resistant stretch nylon at key flex areas. The low profile neoprene cuff with Velcro closure features a reinforced carabiner hole for attaching the gloves to your harness. Durable double layer of leather at high-wear areas: palm, fingertips, between thumb and index finger.

Available in four black sizes:

- S: K53 SN
- M: K53 MN
- L: K53 LN
- XL: K53 XLN

Available in five tan sizes:

- XS: K53 XST
- S: K53 ST
- M: K53 MT
- L: K53 LT
- XL: K53 XLT

BONGO

Piton hammer. For trad climbing, aid climbing or for equipping new routes. Rubber grip reduces vibrations. Hole in shaft for attaching a keeper cord. Hole in head for attaching a piton removal device. Curved head to facilitate piton removal.

Reference: P27
Weight: 680 g
Length: 33 cm



ROCPEC

Hand drill that accepts SDS drill bits. Can drill holes of varying depths and diameters for all types of anchors. Set-up and dismantling without the need for tools.

Reference: P26
Weight: 198 g



BANDI

The BANDI's classic round shape with reinforced large opening allows for easy access. It can be opened with only one hand. The closure system is efficient, thanks to a central cordlock, and it has an integrated emergency whistle. Reinforced rim maintains the shape of the bag. It is made of the same abrasion resistant material as our mountaineering range harnesses. Double loops for stability allow easy attachment to a belt or carabiner.

Reference: S38 P
One-size-fits-all



PITONS

For anchors or progression points in cracks. Range adapted to different types of rock: granite, limestone, hard rock. Can be placed and removed with the BONGO hammer. Hold by jamming or deforming. Available in numerous sizes.

V CONIQUE: 7 cm (66007), 11 cm (66011)
ROCHER MIXTE: 6 cm (65106), 8 cm (65108),
10 cm (65110)
LIVANOS: 4 cm (65504), 6 cm (65506),
8 cm (65508), 10 cm (65510)
UNIVERSEL: 5 cm (65406), 7 cm (65408),
9 cm (65410)
U: 10 cm (65312), 12 cm (65314)

FIXE new

The lightweight, compact FIXE pulley is designed for hauling systems and deviations. It offers a good balance between weight and strength. Fixed side plates allow quick installation and coupling with a rope clamp. Sheave mounted on self-lubricating bushings for efficiency.

Reference: P05SO
Weight: 90 g
Efficiency: 71 %
Working load: 5 kN (2.5 kN on one rope end)
Breaking strength: 23 kN
For use on ropes between 7 and 13 mm in diameter



SWIVEL S

Sealed ball bearing swivel. Positioned between the rope and the load, the swivel allows the load to turn without twisting the rope. Accepts up to three carabiners on the load side.

Reference: P58 S
Weight: 95 g
Breaking strength: 23 kN
Working load: 5 kN



TIKKA PLUS^{®2} new

The TIKKA PLUS^{®2} headlamp offers five lighting modes and integrates two light sources for versatility: one white, high-output LED and one red LED. The white LED delivers 50 lumens in maximum mode and lights up to 35 meters. In economic mode, it can reach a burn-time of 140 hours. The red LED provides spare lighting to preserve night vision or to become a strobe light for increased safety, for example in an urban environment, etc. The TIKKA PLUS^{®2} can be used with lithium batteries to decrease weight or increase performance in cold weather.

References: E97 PM, E97 PP
Degree of protection: IP X4 (Water-resistant)
Weight: 83 g including batteries
Light quantity: 50 lumens
Maximum lighting distance: 35 meters
Maximum light duration: 140 hours
For complete headlamp performance information, go to www.petzl.com



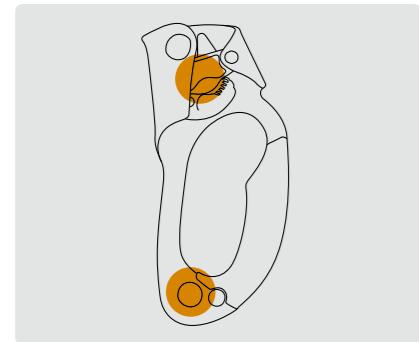
Taking a break on the Spitzkoppe in Namibia.
© Gabe Rogel

Other big wall products:

- CORAX comfortable and adjustable harness
- CARITOOL harness tool holder
- NITRO 3 energy absorber
- ATTACHE 3D ultralight carabiner
- LOCKER asymmetric carabiner
- SPIRIT carabiner
- ST'ANNEAU Dyneema sewn sling
- PROTEC rope protector
- GOUTTE D'EAU and REGLETTE progression hooks
- FIIFI suspension hook
- MAILLON RAPIDE N° 5
- POWER CRUNCH chalk
- BOLTBAG equipment pouch
- BUG backpack
- SPATHA knife with carabiner hole
- POCHE TIKKA^{®2} pouch for compact lamps
- e+LITE emergency headlamp...

Find all products on pages 140 - 154.

Technical information Checking your equipment



Handled rope clamps

Handled rope clamps are submitted to rough treatment in aid climbing. They are used for ascending ropes and for hauling packs loaded with equipment. They therefore run over kilometers of rope and must be in perfect working order.

Before each use, verify:

- the general condition of your ASCENSION handled rope clamp: no cracks, deformities, or sharp edges on the frame. Check that the rope runs freely through the device. Inspect the cam stop.
 - the condition of the cam. It must be clean, all teeth should be present and in good condition, no traces of wear or corrosion.
 - connection holes
- Test the functioning of the opening and closing mechanisms of the cam; do a test on a rope (with a back-up belay), check that the device blocks.
- Retire your rope clamp after a major impact.

[... www.petzl.com/ppe](http://www.petzl.com/ppe)

Information is non-exhaustive; consult the details of the inspection procedure to be carried out for each item of PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) on its technical notice or at www.petzl.com/ppe

Technical information Basics

1 Prepare your equipment and provisions precisely

Get information about the equipment needed: adapt your equipment to the route you are planning to do, and don't forget the gear required if you need to retreat. Don't underestimate the supplies you will need (water, etc.). Anticipate the effects of isolation: a small injury can seem very big at the end of the world...

Spread the equipment, provisions and rescue gear between many packs so that everything is not lost if a bag falls.

2 Organize your gear

To be efficient on a big wall, you should organize your gear and distribute it to each climber according to his/her role. A well organized gear sling and harness will save precious time.

3 Establish a communication protocol

Communication is extremely important. It is essential to establish rules before starting. For example, when the leader says "off belay", the belay station is installed and the fixed ropes are anchored.

4 Set up solid belay stations

Be careful, on a big wall the station is used not only to belay, but also to haul bags, install a portaledge, etc.

5 Protect your ropes from rubbing and adapt your rope ascent technique

For fixed lines, think about setting up intermediate anchors, deviations, and rope protectors, or use a bag to protect a rub point. During an ascent, always stay on two independent systems (two ascenders or one ascender and one GRIGRI). Always remain connected to your ascender with a lanyard. Adapt your ascent techniques to the route's features. Ascender/ascender, ascender/CROLL, ascender/GRIGRI, ascender/CROLL with PANTIN (big overhang).

Beware: A fall, even a small one, on a webbing lanyard, such as a daisy chain or other such lanyard, may transmit an extremely violent shock to the harness and the climber.



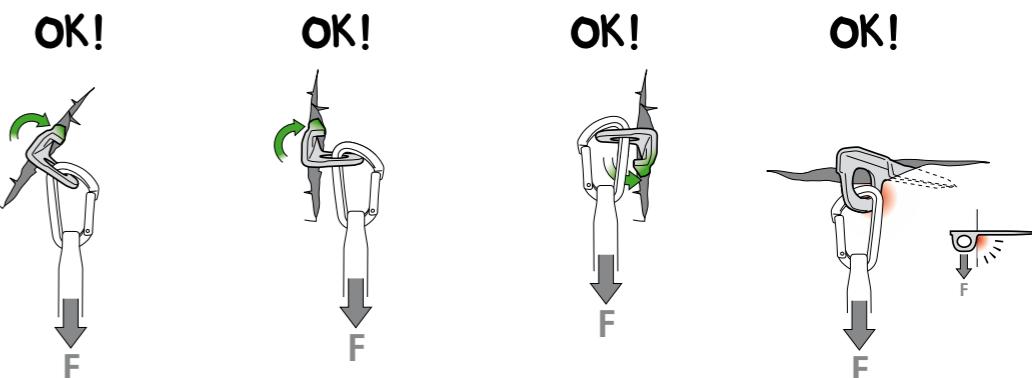
Technical information Tips

A. Pitons

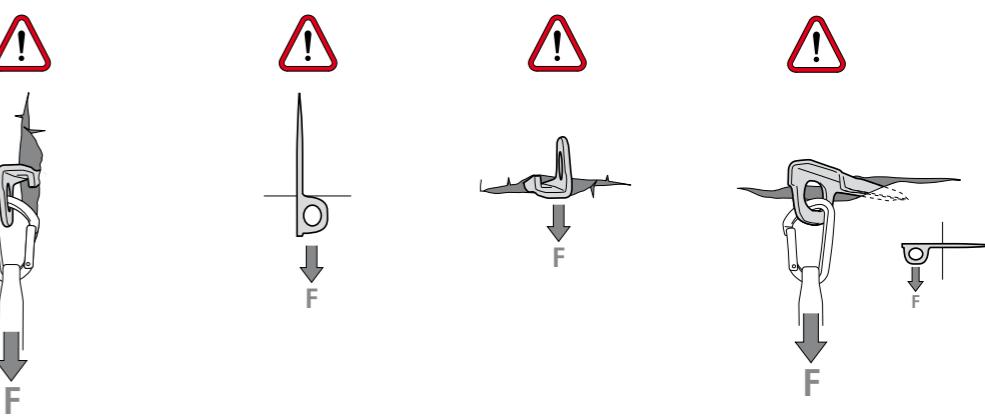
The strength of a piton placement depends on the shape of piton, how it is placed, rock quality and the experience level of the climber that placed it.

Working principle: during a fall, the piton must lock into the crack. Force (F), applied to the carabiner torques the piton blade. This torque locks the piton into place. A piton placement must not rely only on friction or compression.

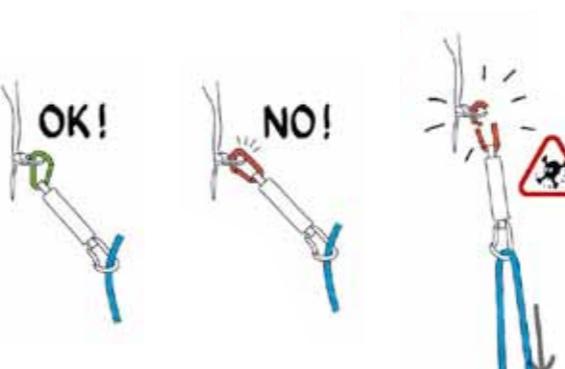
Well placed pitons.



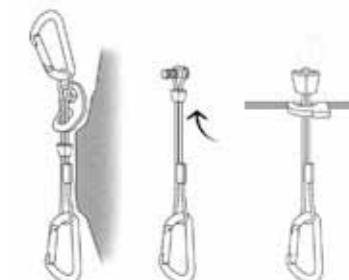
Poorly placed pitons.

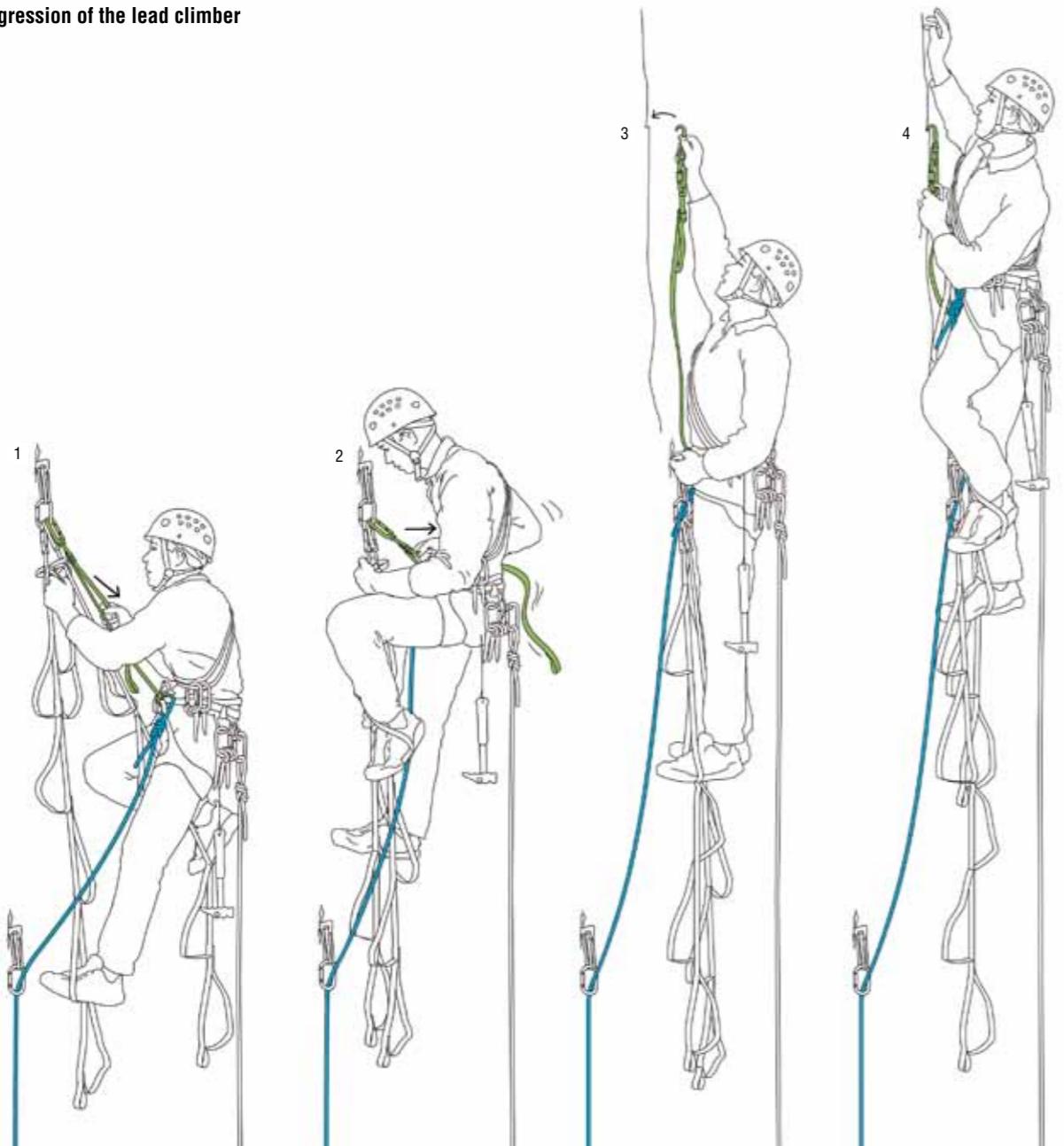
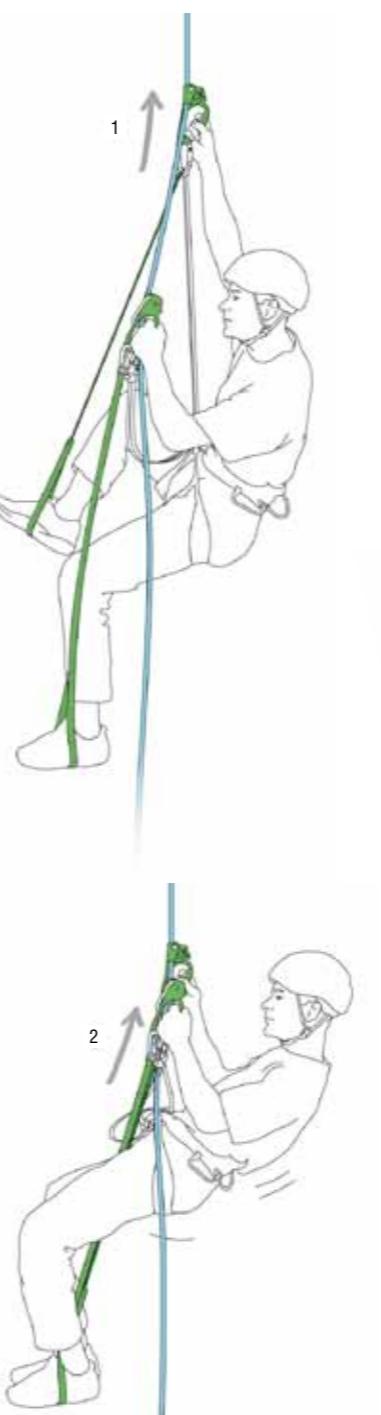


Clipping pitons.



Tip: clipping otherwise unusable anchors



B. Progression of the lead climber**C. Ascending the rope: double ascender technique****D. Cleaning an aid route with the GRIGRI****E. Hauling a bag with a progress capture pulley**

Information is non-exhaustive. Refer to the other pages as well as to the user instructions and technical manuals. Technical training is essential.

PETZL