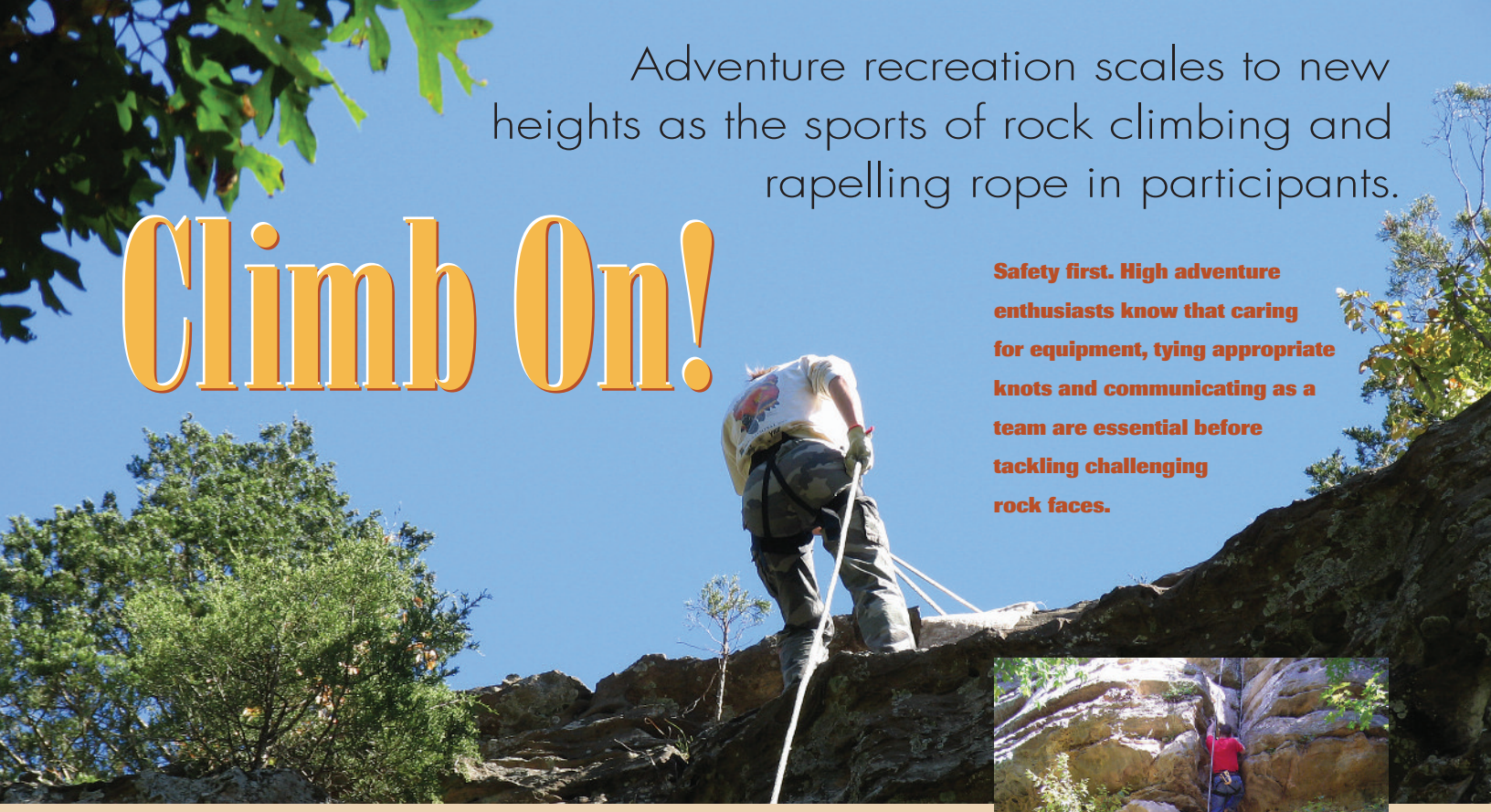
Adventure recreation scales to new heights as the sports of rock climbing and rapelling rope in participants.

Climb On!



Safety first. High adventure enthusiasts know that caring for equipment, tying appropriate knots and communicating as a team are essential before tackling challenging rock faces.

Story By Kathy Andrews
Photos By Joe McFarland

"A clean rope is a happy rope," Scott Enkoff said as he spread a tarp on the dusty, loose soil at the base of a rock bluff at Ferne Clyffe State Park.

Commander of Shelby County Dive Rescue, Enkoff's reputation for safety and communication carry over to one of his favorite outdoor activities: rock climbing.

"First thing we'll do is set up a top rope with three points of projection to provide protection for the climber," Enkoff explained of the meticulous process necessary before attacking climbing routes with monikers as descriptive as Two Times Tough, George of the Jungle, Miles From Nowhere, Divine Intervention and Standing on Air.

Sitting under one of the stately American beech trees flanking the dimpled rock face, the climbers watched Beth McDonald scale the sandstone bluff, providing friendly suggestions for her next foot placement, the air tense with her quiet concentration as her nimble fingers searched for a tiny crevice. Confident in her next move, she pushed herself upward.

Rock climbing in Illinois

Indoor rock climbing and artificial outdoor climbing walls are gaining in popularity and businesses exist throughout the state. These are great places to learn the basics of climbing, and meet experienced climbers.

Rock climbing, rappelling and bouldering are permitted in specific areas of Department of Natural Resources parks (www.dnr.state.il.us/lands/landmgt/PARKS/index.htm) and on the U.S. Forest Services' Shawnee National Forest (www.fs.fed.us/r9.shawnee). Contact each site for specific safety requirements and information on the areas open for rock climbing.

- Cedar Bluff and Big Rocky Hollow at Ferne Clyffe State Park, Goreville. Call (618) 995-2411.
- Devil's Standtable and the bluff at Shelter #1 at Giant City State Park, Makanda. Call (618) 457-4836.
- Mississippi Palisades State Park, Savanna. Call (815) 273-2731.
- Jackson Falls, Vienna Ranger District. Call 1-800-699-6637.

(Photo By Kathy Andrews.)

And from their position midway up—or down—these high adventure recreationists have a view of nature few others experience. Seasonally, the scenery shifts from the wildflowers, ferns and mosses belonging to unique and fragile plant communities, to the feathery parade of spring migratory birds, the rich jewel tones of autumn leaves and asters, and cascades of ice glistening in the winter sun.

Climb with care

- Only use designated areas.
- Avoid disturbing plants on the rock faces.
- Be courteous to other visitors.
- Be alert for slippery rocks and, in southern Illinois, venomous snakes sunning on rock ledges.
- DNR requires minors have direct adult supervision. Participants assume all risks and liability for injuries.