

# On Belay!

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## Welcome

By Joe Welch

Welcome from the Sam Houston Area Council Climbing Committee from our first (of many) "On Belay" Newsletter.

Did you know that SHAC had a Climbing Committee? We have been around since 2000 and have grown from 2 to 12 members and trained over 100 adults. We have also helped out at Camporee's, Winter Camp, Summer Camp, OA events and 100's unit Climbing events. So if you want to help out in someway please let us know.



This Committee is dedicated to providing quality training and activities above and beyond the basic camping experiences of the Boy Scouts of America.

This is a quarterly newsletter which will be published sometime during the first month of

each quarter. If you would like to see something specific in the Newsletter or willing to help please contact Steve Robertson. I would also like to encourage you to have your youth write a store about their recent climbing trip and we will try to include the story. And don't forget the pictures!

## December 2008 Real Rock...the largest class!

By Andrew Wilde

The Real Rock class conducted in December 2008 at Enchanted Rock was the largest climbing class taught by SHAC. A total of 29 signed up for the class which included 9 needing the class to complete their certification and 20 instructors that needed recertification. This also included a group that received training at summer camp but

wanted to increase their exposure to setting anchors in a real rock environment. Training a group of this size and varied experience was possible by the large number of Climbing Directors that assisted in training. A total of 9 council directors assisted in training the class which is also a record in the number of directors assisting in teaching a class.

A classroom session was held at SHAC headquarters on the Wednesday prior to the Real Rock training. This session goes over the various pieces of protection used to build our anchor systems and provides a refresher on the various knots that were taught in the Topping Out Class. The classroom session gave the group a head start on the equipment and



## What's on Allen's rack?

By Allen Corneau

First, a little introduction: This little article will be a spot where I spotlight a particular item I carry on my rack as well as any recent innovations of that particular item. Since this is the first article in this series, I thought I'd start with the absolute foundation of any rack: nuts.

The original nuts were actual machine nuts, the kind that get put on the end of a bolt (think hardware store) with the inner threads filed out and a loop of chord tied through the hole. (This is also where *Hexcentrics* came from, but that's for another article.) Luckily we don't have to carry around steel lug nuts any more!

Nuts, Chocks, Stoppers... they come in many shapes, sizes, brands and names. My personal set is the **Wild Country Rocks**, but there is no major importance why I choose that brand other than that's what they had at the store and they were on sale.

Most brands are made of aluminum with steel cable, range from 8-14 sizes in a given set and are pretty much similar in design and strength. Some special designs to note are aid-only nuts (rated at only 2-4kN each) and sets like the **DMM Alloy Offsets**, which are tapered to fit in flaring placements.

The main thing to look for in a set of nuts is a basic shape that you will use all the time. I have found that

the straight-sided nuts do not seem to fit as well in the crystal-infused granite of Enchanted Rock, which is where I do most of my trad climbing. A full set should give you a wide range of placements, from quite small to over an inch in width.

Here are some sets to consider, although not an exhaustive list:

- \* **Advanced Base Camp (ABC) Rocks**: almost exactly like the **BD**'s, but cheaper.
- \* **ABC Huevos**: Curved nut design.
- \* **Black Diamond (BD) Stoppers**: tried and true.
- \* **CAMP Pro Nuts**:
- \* **DMM Alloy Offsets**: tapered design fits where others won't, but pricey for 5 nuts.

- \* **DMM Walnuts**: curved and scalloped design
- \* **Kong Chocks**
- \* **Metolius Ultralight Curve Nut**: same sizes as other folks, but with less weight.
- \* **Omega Pacific Wedgies**
- \* **Trango Chockstones**:
- \* **Wild Country Rocks**

I'm personally looking to add a second set of nuts to compliment my first, probably the **DMM Offsets** because of their ability to fit where other nuts don't work well.

Be safe out there!

## National Director's Course at PHILMONT

By Joe Welch

What could be better than spending a week at the beautiful Philmont Scout Ranch? Yes you could be there during the summer, providing that you win the coveted Philmont lottery two years in advance just to spend it with several thousand of your closest scouting buddies. Or you could take the Climbing and Rappelling course during the 3<sup>rd</sup> week of September. The numerous advantages of this

time period is the weather, come on mid-fall in the mountains, what could be better? You stay in the staff cabins at Cimarroncito backcountry camp eating hot meals in the staff dining hall. (No worries about wrestling with mini-bears over the last cracker and jalapeno squeeze cheese either!)

This week long course was developed to help teach safe and effective climbing techniques to the Scouting

community. It is divided into two sections, depending on experience: Essentials of Climbing and Rappelling and Advanced Climbing and Rappelling. Upon completion, participants may qualify for a climbing instructor certificate or climbing director certificate. Climbing experience is highly recommended but not required. Participants must pass the Philmont backcountry physical, as this course takes place in the backcountry and

strenuous activity and rock climbing/rappelling will be involved.

For the first time in over 8 years, there were no SHAC participants enrolled in the 2008 Climbing Director's Course, which is really a missed opportunity. If you are interested in attending the course please send me [Joe Welch] an email at [jmwelch@bsaclimber.org](mailto:jmwelch@bsaclimber.org).

The 2009 Director's Course will be September 20 - 26.

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## Camp Strake Outdoor Climbing Activity Center

By Steve Robertson

As you are aware the Camp Strake climbing tower was retired on January 1, 2007 per the latest BSA adopted ACCT guidelines. Primarily because the anchor pole used did not have a manufactures date branded on it.

Several Directors met during the 2006 Winter Camp to

conceptualize a new, world class outdoor climbing activity center for Camp Strake. After reviewing numerous designs and alternatives, a clear favorite evolved. The favored design is made of a galvanized steel sub-structure and removable fiber cement panels. Several manufacturers

were considered and the preferred vendor is Entrepriise of Oregon.

The center also includes fiber cement artificial boulders and a gazebo. A detailed proposal was generated and submitted to SHAC. However the cost (\$275k) was a bit steep for SHAC's budget and so alternative sources of

funding are being explored. So if you know a company that would like to sponsor this project, please contact Steve Robertson or Joe Welch.

*Many thanks to Mike McKenna for securing a \$7500 donation from Apache, our first!!!!*

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## SHAC Instructor Recertification Process

By Andrew Wilde

Becoming a Climbing Instructor requires your attendance at the Council provided courses conducted at the Hamman Scout Camp (Topping Out) and at Enchanted Rock (Real Rock). Some of you may also have attended the climbing courses offered in conjunction with the Council's summer camp program. SHAC recognizes this training for a period of two years. After the two year time period SHAC will require that you attend the courses again in order to maintain your status as a SHAC Climbing Instructor.

Being a SHAC Climbing Instructor allows you to operate the climbing

facilities at Camp Strake and Hamman Ranch for your troop, other troops or other SHAC activities (such as OA, Camporee's etc) provided enough instructors are present. Two Instructors are required to operate a SHAC climbing facility but more are always welcome.

SHAC offers a second method for maintaining your status as a Climbing Instructor besides attending the Topping Out and Real Rock Courses. Any Climbing Instructor that assists in teaching parts of one of these courses within the two years of receiving your last training will get credit for attending the course.

This will extend your status as a Climbing Instructor for another two years. This is a great opportunity to help SHAC train new instructors and to refresh your climbing skills on a regular basis. There is no charge for attending the course as an instructor and getting your training renewed.

Do not feel intimidated by having to teach a part of the class. You will not be alone. There is always a core group of instructors that have taught the previous classes present and ready to provide any assistance you would need.

To sign up to teach at one of the courses just look for the email announcements

from Climbing Committee or contact the Climbing Committee to volunteer. The course schedule is on the SHAC Calendar of Events.

Every climbing class offered by SHAC has been well attended and each class has been improved based on the previous classes and the new experiences of the instructors. We hope that all of our instructors take advantage of this opportunity to help teach the courses, to refresh their climbing skills and to share climbing and scouting experiences with the class.

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**Our Motto:**  
*Any good ideas?*

**We're on the Web!**  
**(Actually not quite yet...but we're getting closer!)**

## Upcoming Training Courses & Council Events

**SHAC TOWER INSTRUCTOR'S COURSES (Part 1):**

February 28 – March 1: Hamman Scout Ranch, Tarpley, TX.

October 10 – 11: El Rancho Cima, San Marcos, TX

**SHAC REAL ROCK INSTRUCTOR'S COURSES (Part 2):**

May 2 – 3: Enchanted Rock State Natural Area, Fredericksburg, TX

December 5 – 6: Enchanted Rock SNA, Fredericksburg, TX

**SHAC SCOUT FAIR:** April 18 at Reliant Center, Houston, TX

**NATIONAL CLIMBING DIRECTOR'S COURSE:** September 20-26 at Philmont

**SHAC WINTER CAMP:** December 26-31 at Camp Strake

**OUR MOTTO:**

~~GOOD TO THE LAST DROP! ANCHORS AWAY! HELMETS ARE FOR SISSIES~~

If you have a good suggestion for a motto, send us an email at [committee@bsaclimber.org](mailto:committee@bsaclimber.org) we'd love to read your suggestions. The winning submission will receive some really cool climbing stickers, public adulation (courtesy of this newsletter), and the envy of everyone else.

## December 2008 Real Rock...the largest class!

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allowed the group to go directly to the training area to start building anchors.

The large number of directors allowed the group to be divided into three groups with various stations located in the park to work on various climbs, rappels and types of anchors. In spite of the large group the training was very productive. Our second day was devoted to additional anchor building for those that wanted more practice while others tried their hand at

building anchors and climbing various routes at the Motorboat climbing area.

As can be expected at our December Real Rock Class the temperatures dipped down below freezing in the evenings. The days were sunny with little wind and made the training classes very pleasant. Unfortunately the park instituted a burn ban the day we arrived so we could not build our typical campfire in the evenings. We conducted our recap of the day's events by lantern and answered many questions about climbing

areas at Enchanted Rock and other places in Texas. Some scrambling was also required to get sufficient stoves together to cook our evening meal but in the true Scout spirit all adversities were overcome cheerfully.

The size of this class shows the continued enthusiasm of the troops and instructors in SHAC to get instructors, maintain certifications and to improve their anchor building skills so they can provide a safe and fun climbing experience for their scouts.