



Doug Robinson is Coming to BKB!

Brooklyn Boulders blog posting by Cyrena Lee - October 6, 2014

You may recognize Doug Robinson from:

- a) the best-selling instructional video of 1988, *Moving Over Stone*
- b) as the founder of the American Mountain Guides Association
- c) as a persona from the recent film *Valley Uprising*
- d) the writer of the new book *The Alchemy of Action*
- e) all of the above.

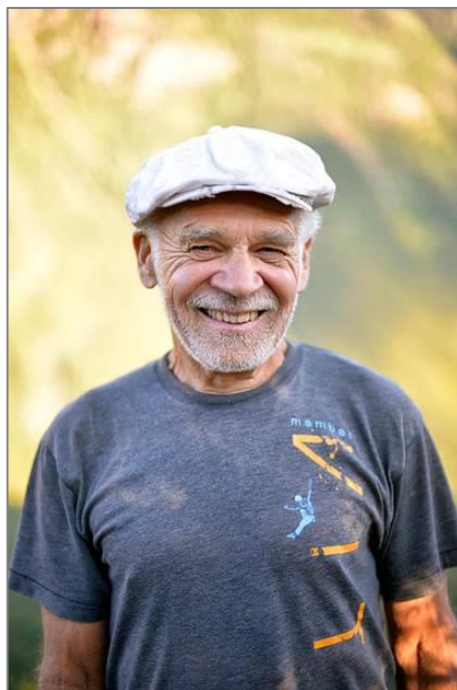
The answer (if it weren't obvious already) is – duh, all of the above. And now on this Wednesday at 8pm, you can meet this rock climbing legend in the flesh at Brooklyn Boulders! He'll be giving a presentation on his latest book, which explores the euphoric high climbers get when sending routes.

We chat with Doug and get a little insight on the *Valley Uprising* film and his take on how the climbing world is evolving and growing.

Any behind the scenes secrets of *Valley Uprising*? Or rather, what is your take on the film? Is it an accurate portrayal of the time?

Valley Uprising was in production for over four years. It's the first feature-length piece from Sender Films, and they pulled off a good one! Impossible, of course, to squeeze the entire history of Yosemite climbing into an hour and a half. Even shortening that down to the last sixty years they necessarily skipped big chunks. Peter Croft, for instance, who stunned the climbing world by soloing Astroman, got barely an afterthought mention. They made up for being necessarily selective by very entertaining storytelling. Playing up, for instance, the Harding-Robbins feud as a driving force of the Golden Age Sixties. Accurate? Yes. And dramatized for effect? Sure. Then they animate a tab of blotter acid on Jim Bridwell's tongue, leading to his eyes spinning psychedelically, to segue into the Stonemaster era. Emblematically perfect.

But you asked for a glimpse behind the scenes. They interviewed me two years ago for a couple of hours, which led to 3-4 snippets of a few seconds each in the film. That gives a sense of how much work is behind the finished product. They also digitized my 1988 video *Moving Over Stone* and then didn't use one scene from it. So the research behind it was massive, and the writing that pared it down to a manageable length had to be incisive. I don't even want to think about the years of bleary, late-night sessions that took. The result is incredible! A fitting testament to one of the leading climbing areas on the planet. Its influence will project many years into the future.





It is an amazing film. Do you think the concept of “clean climbing” has impacted how many people free solo climb?

Free soloing is an intense and very personal engagement with the wilder sides of nature. Always with an awareness of the consequences of self-sufficiency. Clean climbing could be viewed as a nudge in that direction, toward finessing your safety on steep rock instead of forcing protection by blows with a heavy hammer. But long before that point in our lives, every kid feels the challenge of scrambling upward toward a high point on the horizon.

Definitely. Can you summarize in one word what the psychedelic high from climbing feels like?

Flow.

Seems similar to a yoga flow! Is it possible for each and every climber to achieve that mind state?

People are different. More so inside our heads than even the obvious physical differences. That includes how readily we can slip into a visionary state of awareness. Saints and prophets, some of them, have been blessed with a low threshold of profound awareness. Others among us run themselves ragged and swear they never got even a runner’s high. I think some of the problem is tuning in to relatively subtle changes. Do you step out of the shower after a workout feeling a tingling sensation of extra aliveness? That’s a good start. Notice how different that is from, say, barely dragging yourself into the gym an hour before. Now, emotionally, do you maybe feel a little more open to what’s around you? A notch more magnanimous? Those are real changes in your consciousness. Being subtle is not a reason for brushing them aside. And later, did you get a creative flash, or act with more generosity toward your partner? Hmm...

So is this kind of awareness only possible while outdoor climbing?

Indoor climbing gets a bad rap. Especially from trad climbers. Sure, climbing loses a lot when you take it from under the arching sky and stuff it into a box lit by glaring lights. But some of its essence survives nicely. Movement, for starters. The poise of a body torqueing in space with precision and finesse. You can't squeeze the athletic effort and dancelike grace of moving over stone out of climbing just by substituting plastic for the stone. The felt achievement, the power glow in your body afterward, lingers. The beauty of nature, of a day in the open, is of course lost. And that's why those of us who thrive outdoors hope to tap gym climbers on the shoulder and say, hey, come with me and try this... Yes, you have heightened your body-mind to a nice glow and an increased pitch of awareness right there in the gym. Now is your chance to apply that extra degree of serene awareness to our natural home, this planet which after all deserves some attention as the ground from which our beings have sprung.

Indoor climbing is an excellent way to lead people to discover outdoor climbing. How do you feel about how much the climbing industry has changed and grown? What's different, what do you like the least?



More people getting more immersed in wild nature is great to see. More fit, more active, more aware, more appreciative. The growth of the outdoor industry facilitates that. And the more we as a species grok the beauty and the profound wholeness of the natural world, the better we can immerse in its lessons, be grounded in our lives, and maybe quit screwing up our home, the only world we've got. Increasing corporatization, with the holding companies of the outdoor industry traded on Wall Street is the downside, but overall people getting outside is a great thing.

Agreed. You should read this [poem a BKBeasts team member wrote after visiting The Gunks](#) – you'd love it! What is your most ideal future of climbing?

That we can invite more people into the experience of climbing. After all, it grabbed us, didn't it? Changed our lives. The more people can experience that — or similarly edgy adventures like skiing, surfing, trail running, mountain biking — the more grounded, powerful, serene and grateful we the people can become. Compared to that, petty annoyances like a bit more crowding at your favorite climbing area mean little. There's so much rock on this planet it's ridiculous.

Okay, last question: your favorite climbing memory?

I like [Alex Lowe](#)'s notion that the best climber is the one having the most fun. My favorite in a long string, a lifetime of climbing moments, is the freshest. Yesterday I climbed Old Rag Mountain in Shenandoah National Park. Starting as a trail, it morphs into scrambling passages winding through fine granite that leads up a ridge to the summit. Challenging yet ropeless, it commands the attention of everyone who passes by. Today there's a glow in my body and a smile on my face from it. Can't wait for the next one...

Come see Doug Robinson speak & talk about his new book, *The Alchemy of Action*, this Wednesday October 8th at 8pm!