

Meet Monique Forestier – Australia’s Leading Female Rock Climber

First impressions can be a misleading. When you meet Monique Forestier from Dexion Office, you get the impression that she is a professional and dedicated staff member, which she is, but with her slight frame and casual air you would never pick her as an elite athlete, let alone Australia’s leading female rock climber.

Monique openly admits that her job is a means to an end, enabling her to pursue her passion. She works in a dynamic role as Commercial Manager for Dexion Office and assists in the sales process by conducting filing and storage audits for new projects and assessing data and floor plans



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Monique Forestier

to ensure the most efficient storage solution is presented to the customer. However, working as a contractor, Monique has the flexibility to take time off and climb all over the world.

“I first got into the sport nine years ago and started off in the gym once a week which soon became twice a week and tried my first outdoor climb five months later. It was about five years ago that I realised rock climbing was more than a sport or a hobby, quite simply I was addicted,” said Monique.

For Monique, there are a number of reasons why rock climbing fascinates her. “It presents such multi faceted challenges, apart from the obvious physical challenges there is an element of puzzle solving,” said Monique. “Your mind must be sharp, in a split second you have to work out and visualise the sequence of moves that will enable you to get to the top and then hope that your body will follow suit,” she said. “Then there’s the beauty of being at one with the environment. There is no

better feeling than sitting on a ledge hundreds of feet above the valley watching birds cruise the thermals, or watching the sun cross a valley as you climb, just being an observer. There’s a sense of peace and correctness with the environment; climbing takes you to some beautiful places.” she said.

All climbs are graded with factors such as the size, spacing and orientation of the holds, the steepness of the rock face and the length of the route contributing to the grade of the climb. The combination and severity of each factor determines the degree of power and endurance required by the climber to complete the route. Grades range from 1 to 34 where 1 is a moderate scramble and 34 is an extreme gymnastic undertaking so far only managed by three Australian climbers.



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Over the last few years Monique has caused a few ripples in the Australian climbing community with her ascents of hard sport climbing routes. These ascents include three routes with a difficulty rating of grade 32 and several others graded 30+, putting her at a level of perhaps 15 women world-wide. In Australia no other women has climbed harder than grade 30.

“These are only numbers, what’s really important is believing in myself, I know

that I can climb harder still and I won’t rest until I’ve given it my all. Some people must think I’m crazy climbing rocks, but climbing keeps me honest, humble and extremely focussed on something I’m very passionate about,” said Monique.

Earlier this year Monique successfully climbed a route in the Blue Mountains called Larger than Life. With a grade 31 it’s not the hardest thing she’s done but in some ways it was the most challenging so far.

“For me the route held special significance as it showed me how dogmatic perseverance and hard work can finally pay off. I first tried the route a year ago but there were two moves that I couldn’t do and I decided that it would be impossible for me,” she said, “but the climb really inspired me.” “It took a line that traversed around a massive amphitheatre for 40 meters and tackles a couple of big jutting overhangs to finish. It was such an

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appealing route that one day I decided to get back on and work it some more.

“Although I still couldn’t do the moves I started to see perhaps how to do them. In the end it took me attempts on fifteen different days before I pieced it together and climbed it all in one push,” she said. “I think the fact that it seemed impossible at first made it all the more satisfying to do in the end.”

As well as the climbing that Monique does on rock, on the cliffs, she also competes in organized competitions held on purpose built walls. Thanks to Dexion, Monique was able to complete in a string of three World Cup competitions held earlier this year in China, Singapore and Kuala Lumpur.

“I was ecstatic when I found out that I could attend the Asian comps, I couldn’t have done it without Dexion. I had been training very hard with the hope of somehow getting over there. I find international competitions particularly appealing because there you are competing with the world’s best in a professionally organised and executed event.” said Monique. “Although I came 15th in the lead event which is my best result so far, I certainly think I could do a lot better in future competitions. I learnt so much from this experience.”

For Monique competitions are a nice change but they aren’t everything. “I find that competitions can be disappointing and negative, you can get caught up in the comparison game and be hard on yourself. Competitions imply winners and losers and in my book as long as you’re out there having a go then you’re a winner,” she said.

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For Monique one of Australia’s most famous climbs holds a special meaning; the Totem Pole is a stunning 65 meter high dolerite column off the Tasmanian coast.

“The Tote has always been special to me,” she said. “One of my favourite photos is the original Totem Pole shot by Simon Carter. When I first saw that shot I was absolutely blown away, both by the photography and the wild place. I just remember looking at it and thinking “Oh my God, those guys are absolutely crazy, I could never do that”.

“I could never see myself getting on that thing. Then over the years I gradually built myself up thinking maybe one day I could get the courage to be able to go out there and do that,” she said.

“When the trip came up it was very quick, so I didn’t have too much time to think about it and get nervous. I was there before I knew it. When I first arrived it was very intimidating. On the day of the ascent I got really psyched and everything went perfectly – and I managed to climb it on my first attempt without any falls. To actually climb the Totem Pole, well, it’s one of the best things I’ve done. I had to really overcome my fears for that one,” she said.



Totem Pole



Some climbing terminology

The bolt, the quickdraw, the rope and the belayer are the four important elements which create the climber's safety net," explained Monique. "The bolt is a permanent fixture set into the rock providing anchor points along the length of the route. The climber clips the quickdraw (two alloy carabiners joined by a nylon sling) to the bolt and then clips the rope into the bottom carabiner as they climb; thus completing the link between the climber to the belayer and the rock. Climbers sometimes have their weight taken by the rope so that they can stop, rest and practice hard sections of a route, this is known as 'dogging' the moves," she said.

The belayer is the anchor person and very important in this equation as the climber's life depends on them to arrest a fall. The belayer uses a belay device allowing the rope to be safely fed out during an ascent and assists in catching a falling climber by clamping down on the rope.

The rope used in climbing is a highly specialised but colourful piece of string made to international standards with a breaking strain of about two tonnes. It is a 'dynamic' rope which means it stretches under load in order to absorb the force of a falling climber. In sport climbing the ultimate goal is to ascend the route without weighting the rope (falling off) this is called a 'free' ascent (not to be confused with free soloing where no rope is used).

Climbers also carry a chalk bag containing Magnesium Carbonate, the same stuff that gymnasts use. The chalk assists in absorbing sweat from the climber's hands creating better friction between the rock and the climber's fingers thus giving them gecko-like qualities. Climbing shoes utilise the latest in advanced rubber technology the formulas of which are highly guarded corporate secrets. The shoes have a rubber sole, heel and toe box upper which is modelled into a tightly fitting ballet slipper number, embellished with mandatory fluoro trim and definitely are not recommended for a walk in the woods. The combination of suction tight fit and sticky rubber enables climbers to stand on tiny edges and 'smear' their feet into slight irregularities in the rock. Good foot work is essential for positioning the body to reach the next hold. The fear of falling would be enough to put anyone off.

"In sport climbing, they say if you're not falling, you're not pushing yourself hard enough!"

"I guess I love the buzz when you take that whipper (fall) from the final hold, hitch a ride with gravity down to Earth and when the rope takes up the adrenaline fills your veins. You gotta love falling. Mmmm," said Monique.