



the versatile runner

by jan and herb conn

Since men first started climbing with ropes they have continually looked for ways to make that climbing safer. They started by flipping the rope over projecting knobs and behind trees.

Then they developed the piton and carabiner which can be used wherever there is a satisfactory crack. And now with the advent of the bolt, which can be driven anywhere that the climber can spare two hands for the job of drilling a hole for it, it is possible to lead with safety pitches which would be dangerous without this added protection.

With all this new and excellent equipment the modern rock climber is likely to overlook the simple but effective "runner". This is no more than a loop of nylon sling web with a carabiner attached. The one inch flat nylon web tests at 2,000 pounds and makes an excellent runner. Remember, though, that *the loop is only as strong as the knot that holds it*. At present there is still much controversy regarding what knots are best to use when tying nylon. The square knot is to be avoided because of its tendency to turn and slip. We use a fisherman's knot with half hitches in the ends¹. With a good

strong knot joining the ends of a five or six foot length of nylon web and a carabiner snapped onto it you have a runner, which will serve you well in a variety of ways.

(1) Thread it around a tightly wedged chockstone, and snap your rope through the carabiner. If it's a big chockstone join two or more runners to reach around it.

(2) Loop it around a tree as you pass. You'll find it quicker and easier than squeezing behind the tree, and your protection will be better because it will retain its effectiveness no matter which side of the tree you are on as you climb above it.

(3) Tie to one when belaying and leave the full length of climbing rope available for the leader. See picture.

(4) If your piton is in the back of a deep crack and the resulting friction makes it hard to pull slack, insert a runner between piton and carabiner and the rope will run more freely. See picture.

(5) If you've driven a piton, only to find that a projecting rock makes it impossible to put your carabiner through it, you can still use the piton by threading a runner through

the eye.

(6) You can use your runner around a horn of rock or knob. Runners used in this way are often unreliable as the leader climbs above them as they tend to be pulled off. However, when used with intelligence and judgment they can be most effective. See picture.

(7) Last, but not least, you have with you a ready made rappel sling in case you have to make a fast retreat.

Runners are quick to attach, and unlike pitons which become worn out just being pounded in and out, they are not under a strain unless the leader actually falls.

We carry three of varying lengths along with our pitons and carabiners, and we thoroughly recommend them to any climber as a practical supplement to the more generally accepted safety measures.

Footnote (1). The field of knots in nylon is one that is of vital importance to the mountaineer, and there is still much to be learned on the subject. We'd like to see an article in Summit compiling the known data, and pointing the way to more research.



*A runner around a horn
of rock
makes a good
tie-in for the belayer.*

*With his runner
around a spur of rock
the leader is protected for
the traverse ahead.*

Photos by the Authors



*The piton under the
overhang causes
too much friction to let the
leader get slack.*



*With
a runner through the piton
the rope runs
easily.*



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