

ORAL HISTORY INTERVIEW GUIDE

National Museum of Climbing Oral History Project



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1. Welcome and purpose

Who helped build your climbing community? Whose story should we preserve? The National Museum of Climbing (NMOC) invites volunteers to record the voices of people who witnessed, shaped, and shared climbing. Together, interviews from many places, generations, and roles will preserve a broader history of climbing. This guide takes you from the first invitation through a clear recording and a complete submission. A smartphone, a microphone if you have one, and a willingness to listen are enough to begin.

2. What an oral history interview is

An oral history is a recorded conversation about a person's experience and memory. It can reveal how climbing worked in a particular place and time: who taught whom, what people valued, how routes and access were maintained, and what changed. It is not a résumé, a quiz, or a verdict on disputed events. Ask for specific stories and let the person being interviewed lead.

3. Choosing and approaching a narrator

In oral history, the person sharing their story is often called the narrator. Think beyond famous climbers and first ascents. A partner, route developer, access advocate, guide, gym worker, photographer, organizer, belayer, landowner, or longtime community member may remember people and decisions that never appeared in a guidebook.

- To get started, email info@nmoc.org and say you would like to conduct an interview. If you have someone in mind, include their name; if you are still deciding, say so. NMOC will check for overlapping outreach and reply with the next steps.
- Wait for NMOC to confirm who will approach the narrator. If NMOC confirms that you should do so, invite the person to talk about their experiences. Explain that the conversation will be recorded and offered to NMOC for preservation and possible future use, subject to the signed deeds and NMOC review. Give them room to ask questions or decline.
- If the person agrees, send NMOC their preferred contact information in the existing email thread so NMOC can arrange the deed before the interview.

4. Permission and informed consent

Before recording, make sure the narrator understands the project, that their voice will be recorded, and what the Narrator Deed of Gift says about preservation, access, and use. NMOC sends that deed directly to the narrator and interviewer for signature and confirms both signatures before the interview. NMOC also sends you the one-time Volunteer Interviewer Deed of Gift to sign. An authorized NMOC representative signs it for the organization. NMOC confirms that deed is complete before your first interview and keeps both completed deeds. After recording, the narrator has an opportunity to review and edit the interview, and you have an opportunity to review it, before NMOC makes it available for historical research.

Read-only copies of both deeds are included at the end of this guide. NMOC will send the versions used for electronic signature and confirm when the required signatures are complete. The deeds control the participants' agreement; this guide gives practical instructions.

5. Preparing for the conversation

Arrange a quiet place and reserve about 60 to 90 minutes; the recording need not fill that time. Learn enough about the person's climbing places, period, and roles beforehand to ask informed questions. Prepare questions or prompts and bring a copy you can glance at during the interview. Offer the narrator a copy beforehand if they would like to see the questions or think about their answers. Explain that these are starting points and that the conversation can follow their memories. If you interview a friend, ask them to explain shared memories for future listeners who were not there.

6. Simple recording setup

- Use a smartphone recording app, such as Voice Memos, preferably with external lavalier microphones, wired or wireless. A dedicated recorder also works. Charge all devices that need charging, including the microphones, check available storage, and silence calls and notifications.
- **What is a lavalier mic?** It is a small microphone that clips to a person's shirt. Placing a mic near each speaker's mouth helps capture both voices clearly, even when the phone is on a table. Inexpensive two-microphone wireless sets are sold on eBay and other online marketplaces; NMOC has tested a set purchased for about \$12. Choose a set with a receiver that fits your phone's charging port, and make a short test recording to confirm that both voices come through.

- Choose a quiet indoor space if possible. Wind, other voices, music, traffic, and active climbing can overwhelm an otherwise good interview.
- If you have two microphones, position one for each speaker near the upper chest, clear of clothing rub. With one microphone, test its position so both voices are clear.
- Record ten seconds, play it back, and listen for both voices, distortion, clothing rustle, and background noise. Fix problems and test again. Select the best recording quality your device offers.

7. Conducting the interview

When the narrator is ready, begin the recording. Say the date, location, narrator's name, and your name. Start with how they first came to climbing, then let the conversation unfold.

- Ask one open question at a time. "What was that like?" and "What happened next?" invite stories without suggesting an answer.
- Listen for relationships, local practices, decisions, and changes. Follow a vivid thread before moving to a prepared question. Allow silence and resist finishing sentences.
- Clarify names, dates, places, and who did what. If the narrator is unsure, leave that uncertainty in the record. Avoid debating or correcting their recollection.
- If the narrator wants to stop or raises something sensitive, pause and listen. Do not promise to alter the original recording. Tell NMOC about any concern so it can be addressed during review.

Close by asking what you missed, who else NMOC should speak with, and whether related photographs, documents, recordings, or artifacts exist. Thank the narrator and stop the recording.

8. Questions and conversational prompts

Choose prompts that fit this person. They are invitations, not a script or checklist. Follow a useful answer with "Can you tell me more?" or "Can you give me an example?"

Getting started

- How did you first come into climbing? Who was there?
- What did climbing feel like when you began, and what drew you back?

People and local culture

- Who helped you learn, and what did they teach beyond technique?
- What was your local climbing community like then? Who found a place in it?
- What behavior was respected? How did people handle disagreements?

How climbing happened

- How were routes developed, maintained, or shared where you climbed?
- What equipment, practices, or unwritten rules shaped the way people climbed?
- What did access to climbing places depend on, and who helped sustain it?

Change and reflection

- When did you notice climbing changing? What happened?

- How did gyms, guidebooks, media, money, or new equipment affect your community, if at all?
- What do you think climbing gained, lost, or kept as it changed?
- What do you understand differently now than you did at the time?
- What have I not asked that someone needs to know about this history?
- Whose story should be recorded next, and why?

9. What to do after recording

- Play enough of the beginning, middle, and end to confirm that the complete original recording was saved and both voices are intelligible.
- Note any technical problem and identify which voice is the narrator and which is the interviewer in the brief summary while the interview is fresh.
- Keep the complete original recording intact. Do not trim pauses, correct statements, splice sections, or overwrite the recording.
- Label the complete original recording with the narrator's name and interview date when possible.
- Keep the recording on the recording device until NMOC confirms that it has received and can open the recording.

10. Submitting materials to NMOC

Write a brief summary while the conversation is fresh. Include the narrator's full name and preferred public name, your full name, the interview date and place, the climbing areas or communities discussed, and the approximate period covered. State which voice belongs to each speaker, and flag any names, dates, or spellings you are unsure of. Leave private addresses and phone numbers out of the summary.

Follow the instructions NMOC provides in the existing email thread to send the complete original recording and the brief summary. Give NMOC the narrator's contact information and any suggested future interviewees separately, including who suggested them. NMOC already holds both signed deeds; you do not collect or submit them. Keep the recording on the recording device until NMOC confirms that it has received and can open the recording. NMOC will keep the complete original recording intact. Before making the interview available for historical research or public use, NMOC will give the narrator the opportunity to review and edit the interview, give the interviewer the opportunity to review it, and address any agreed edits or concerns.

11. Quick troubleshooting

The voices are hard to hear. Move closer, reposition microphones, reduce noise, and repeat the ten-second sound test.

A call or interruption stopped the recording. Begin recording again and say what happened.

The narrator remembers a name or date differently. Ask a neutral clarification; record uncertainty instead of correcting the story.

The narrator asks to remove or limit something. Pause or stop the recording if they wish. Note the narrator's request in the summary submitted with the recording. NMOC will address the request during the narrator's review; do not promise a particular restriction yourself.

NMOC has not authorized the interview to proceed. Do not record the interview until NMOC confirms that both completed deeds are in its possession and authorizes the interview.

12. One-page interview-day checklist

Before you meet

- Confirm the narrator, time, quiet location, and NMOC coordination.
- Bring your prepared questions or prompts, a charged device, microphones if available, and any needed adapter. Check that NMOC has confirmed completion of both deeds before the interview.
- Check storage and your recording settings. Silence calls and notifications.

Before you press record

- Explain the interview and discuss the narrator's questions. Record only after NMOC has confirmed the signed narrator deed and your one-time volunteer deed.
- Position the microphone or microphones. Record ten seconds, play it back, and check both voices.

During the conversation

- Record the names, date, and place at the start.
- Ask open questions, listen, follow the story, and clarify names and places.
- Ask what you missed and who else should be interviewed; then stop recording.

After you leave

- Confirm that the complete original recording was saved, and identify the narrator's and interviewer's voices in the brief summary while the interview is fresh. Keep the recording on the device until NMOC confirms that it has received and can open the recording.
- As described in Section 10, write the brief summary while the interview is fresh. Include the narrator's full and preferred public name, your full name, the interview date and place, the climbing areas or communities and period discussed, speaker identification, and any uncertain names, dates, or spellings.
- Follow NMOC's instructions to submit the complete original recording and the brief summary. NMOC already holds the signed deeds. NMOC will arrange the narrator's review and edit opportunity and the interviewer's review opportunity before making the interview available for historical research.

Thank you for giving your time, care, and effort and for helping us preserve the voices and stories that make up our living climbing history!

APPENDIX A

DEED OF GIFT AGREEMENT

National Museum of Climbing Oral History Project



The mission of the National Museum of Climbing ("NMOC") is to preserve the past, share the stories, and connect the community to inspire the future of climbing. An important part of this effort is collecting oral history interviews with knowledgeable people from throughout the climbing community. For your interview to be placed in NMOC's archive for future historical use, you must sign this Deed of Gift Agreement. Before signing, please read it carefully and ask any questions you may have about its terms.

NARRATOR / INTERVIEWEE NAME

INTERVIEWER LEGAL NAME

NARRATOR STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, AND ZIP CODE

PLANNED INTERVIEW DATE OR DATES

INTERVIEW FILE NUMBER FOR NMOC USE ONLY

I hereby permanently donate and convey my oral history interview identified above to NMOC, whether recorded on the planned date or a rescheduled date, including the audio and/or video recording and any transcript of the interview.

In making this gift, I understand that I am conveying to NMOC all right, title, and interest in the copyright that I own in my contributions to the interview. I retain a nonexclusive license to use and share my interview during my lifetime. I also grant NMOC the right to use my name, voice, image, and likeness in promotional materials, publications, or projects relating to NMOC and its mission.

I further understand that I will have the opportunity to review and edit my interview before NMOC makes it available for historical research in audio, video, and/or transcript form. NMOC may then make my interview available for research without restriction. Future uses may include quotation, publication, exhibition, or broadcast in any medium, including the Internet.

SIGNATURES

Narrator / interviewee signature

Interviewer signature

Date: _____

Date: _____

APPENDIX B

DEED OF GIFT AGREEMENT: VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWER

National Museum of Climbing Oral History Project



The mission of the National Museum of Climbing ("NMOC") is to preserve the past, share the stories, and connect the community to inspire the future of climbing. An important part of this effort is collecting oral history interviews with knowledgeable people from throughout the climbing community. The NMOC Oral History Project depends in substantial part on volunteer interviewers. To ensure that interviews you conduct for the project can be archived and used for research, you must sign this Deed of Gift Agreement. Before signing, please read it carefully and ask any questions you may have about its terms.

VOLUNTEER INTERVIEWER NAME

EMAIL ADDRESS

STREET ADDRESS

CITY, STATE, AND ZIP CODE

PHONE NUMBER

EFFECTIVE DATE OF AGREEMENT

I hereby permanently donate and convey to NMOC all oral history interviews that I conduct as a volunteer for the NMOC Oral History Project on or after the date of this agreement, including my questions and any recordings, transcripts, notes, indexes, or other interview materials that I create for the project.

In making this gift, I understand that I am conveying to NMOC all right, title, and interest in copyright that I might hold as a joint author or otherwise in those interviews and materials.

I understand that I will have the opportunity to review the interviews before NMOC makes them available for historical research in audio, video, and/or transcript form. Subject to any review and edits agreed to in writing by NMOC and the narrator, NMOC may then make the interviews available for research without restriction. Future uses may include quotation, publication, exhibition, or broadcast in any medium, including the Internet.

SIGNATURES

Volunteer interviewer signature

Printed name: _____

Date: _____

Signature on behalf of the National Museum of Climbing

Printed name: _____

Title: _____

Date: _____