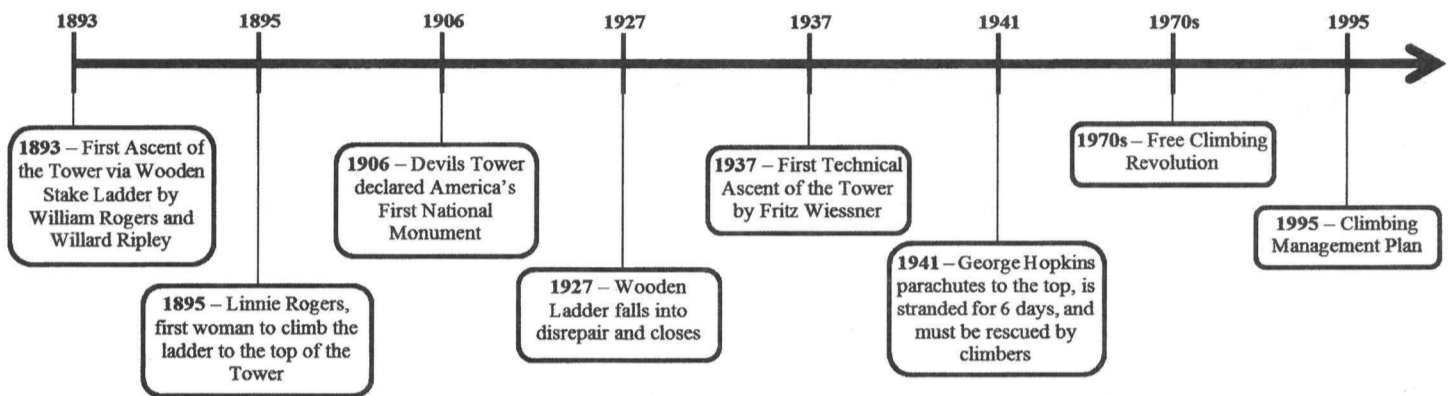




How Do Climbers Get Up There?

For over a hundred years, climbers have tested their skills on the vertical faces of Devils Tower. Using specialized techniques and equipment, climbers have inched their way up - and down - the steep walls. Hundreds of parallel cracks divide the Tower into large hexagonal columns. These features make it one of the finest traditional crack climbing areas in North America. The cracks vary in length and width: some are wide enough to fit your entire body, others barely have room for your fingers; the longest crack extends nearly 400 feet upwards. As you gaze at the Tower, you will likely see climbers clinging to the precipitous rock.

Climbing History



Early Climbing Stories

In 1875, geologist Henry Newton recorded the first detailed description of Devils Tower as “inaccessible to anything without wings.” It was not long before someone challenged that description. William Rogers and Willard Ripley, two local ranchers, were determined to climb Devils Tower!

The men built a 350-foot wooden ladder into one of the Tower’s cracks. They hammered stakes into the crack and connected them with wooden boards. On July 4, 1893, about eight hundred spectators watched as William Rogers ascended the ladder. Upon reaching the summit, he raised an American flag up a flagpole, likely brought up the day before. Devils Tower had officially been climbed!

Others quickly followed in Ripley’s and Rogers’ footsteps. On July 4, 1895, William’s wife, Linnie Rogers, became the first woman to climb the ladder to the top of the Tower. The last time the stake ladder was used was in

1927. Portions of the ladder can still be seen today from the south side of the Tower Trail.

The first technical rock climb of the Tower occurred in 1937. Fritz Wiessner, Lawrence Coveney and William House summited in 4 hours and 46 minutes, a respectable time even by today’s standards. Jack Durrance pioneered the classic and easiest route to the summit the following year. Today, the Durrance route sees about a thousand ascents per year.

In 1941, as a publicity stunt, George Hopkins parachuted onto the summit of Devils Tower. Unfortunately, his plans for an easy descent did not work. Living off of air-dropped supplies, Hopkins awaited rescue. After six days a climbing party was assembled and successfully brought Hopkins down. He remains the only person ever to reach the top of the Tower without climbing.

Frequently Asked Questions

How long does it take? The average summit climb is 4-6 hours. This varies based on route, group size, and climber skill.

What is it like on top? The summit is just over one acre in size. It is slightly domed and rocky with native grass, cacti and sagebrush.

How tall is the Tower? The Tower is 867 feet tall. Most climbs are about 450 vertical feet.

What side do they climb? There are over 220 routes, and all sides have been climbed.

Is there a climbing speed record? In the 1980s, Todd Skinner free-soloed (without ropes or protection) a route in 18 minutes.

Has anyone ever been killed? From 1937 to 2017, there have been six climbing fatalities.

Does climbing damage the rock? Aside from bolted anchors used for belaying and rappelling, there is no permanent damage to the rock. Modern safety equipment is designed to be efficient, removable and non-damaging.

Can climbers spend the night up there? Park regulations prohibit camping on the Tower.

Who can climb/Is there an age limit? There are no restrictions based on age or skill. All climbers are required to register. The youngest recorded climber was six years old, and the oldest was ninety-one.

