

# safe klettersteig climbing

- Climbing klettersteigs involves risks. If you are not well prepared, use inadequate equipment or do it wrong, you risk a fall.
- The alpine associations recommend you treat yourself to via ferrata training with qualified experts
- if the “iron ways” are beckoning to you.

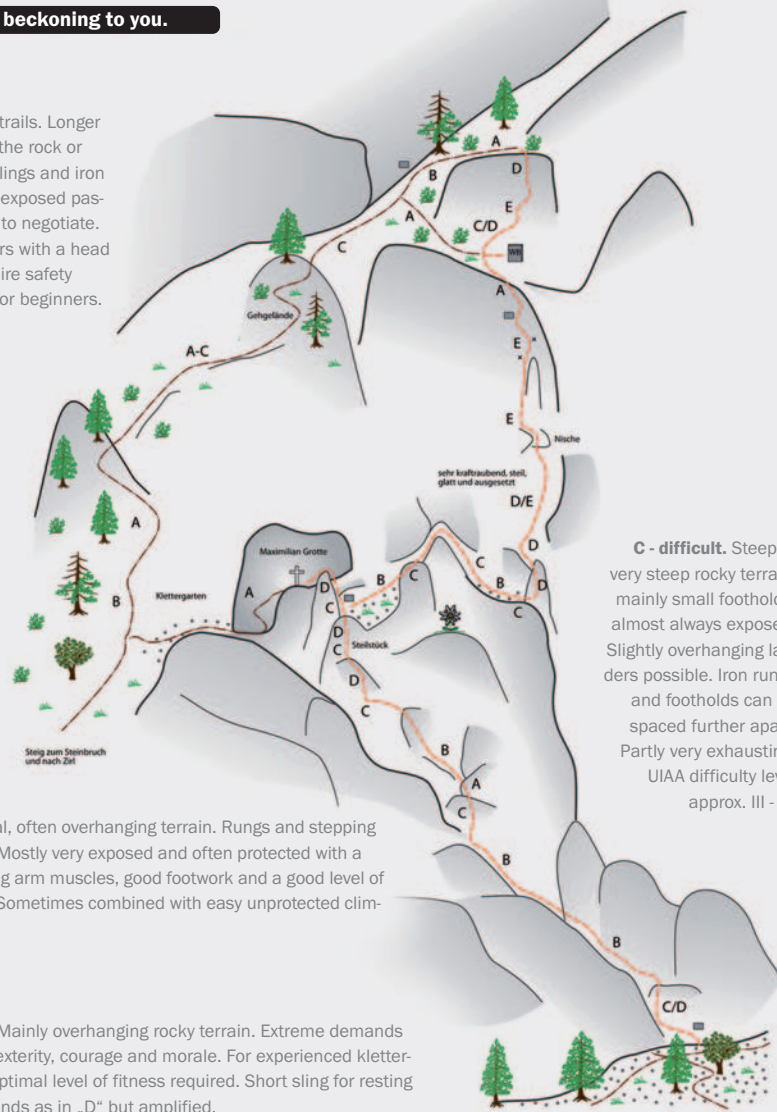
**A – easy.** Easy, secured trails. Longer ladders leaning against the rock or shorter upright ones, railings and iron stemple rungs. Very few exposed passages possible but easy to negotiate. Sure-footed mountaineers with a head for heights may not require safety equipment. Well-suited for beginners.

**B – moderately difficult.** Steeper rocky terrain, some exposed passages with small footholds. Vertical, longer ladders, iron stemples and footholds. Can be strenuous and exhausting. Even experienced mountaineers use safety equipment. UIAA difficulty level approx. II - III.

**D – very difficult.** Vertical, often overhanging terrain. Rungs and stepping pins are often far apart. Mostly very exposed and often protected with a wire rope only. Very strong arm muscles, good footwork and a good level of fitness are prerequisite. Sometimes combined with easy unprotected climbing (I - II).

**E – extremely difficult.** Mainly overhanging rocky terrain. Extreme demands on strength, footwork, dexterity, courage and morale. For experienced klettersteig aficionados only. Optimal level of fitness required. Short sling for resting recommended! All demands as in „D“ but amplified.

Difficulty rating according to Schall using the topo of the klettersteig „Kaiser Max“, Martinswand, near Innsbruck (alpenvereinaktiv.com).



## 1 plan carefully

Careful planning is key for safe and pleasant hours on klettersteigs. Make sure you have all the information about difficulty and length, approach and descent, weather and current conditions. You can find detailed descriptions including topos in guidebooks or on the internet for all klettersteigs. Pay special attention to the difficulty rating when planning an outing since getting stuck due to exhaustion is the most frequent emergency on klettersteigs. Do not only consider the difficulty rating of single passages but also the continuity of the difficulties and as such the overall demands of the klettersteig. The following checklist will help you gather the information:

### Tour?

- Do you know the overall demands of the klettersteig plus the difficult passages, as well as distances and altitudes of the tour?
- Do you have information about approach and descent and the expected demands?
- Do you need to bring additional equipment for approach and descent, e.g. crampons and ice axe?
- Will you need to negotiate unprotected passages with increased danger of falling from height on your descent?
- Are there perhaps any escape possibilities?

### Current conditions?

- Is the klettersteig dry?
- Must snow be expected on the klettersteig or old snow patches on the approach or descent?

### Weather?

- Is the planned tour suitable for the weather forecast?
- Are thunderstorms expected in the course of the day?
- Is a cold front approaching, possibly causing snowfall in higher regions?
- Does great heat require a shady route or an early start?

### Group?

- Are all group members up to the tour (fitness and psyche)?
- Is the group size appropriate for the tour?
- Did you let responsible people know where you are going?
- Are children in your group?

### Equipment?

- Is your footwear appropriate for the tour?
- Are your harnesses and lanyards modern and in impeccable condition?
- Did you bring your climbing helmets and klettersteig gloves?
- Did you bring a first-aid kit, bivouac bag, mobile phone (charged battery!) for an emergency and a headtorch for long klettersteig tours?
- Did you pack food and enough fluids as well as clothing to protect you from the cold, wind and rain?
- Are children with you? Bring an additional climbing rope and know how to use it!

## 2 choose a tour suitable for you

If you choose a tour too difficult for you, it will diminish the overall experience and can even lead to dangerous situations.

Being stuck due to exhaustion is the most common cause of emergency on klettersteigs. Long tours with a low difficulty rating but continuous climbing may lead to physical and mental overload and to dangerous situations. Conserve energy by climbing as effortlessly as possible: Keep your arms straight as much as you can, focus on your footwork and let your leg muscles do most of the work. Hooking the crook of your arm over the stanchion while clipping also saves energy.

Be careful! Even though a lanyard prevents a "total fall", falls are a taboo! As opposed to falls in sport climbing, a fall on a klettersteig can result in serious injuries!

Is it the right tour for the group?



A good head for heights?



Strength and Endurance?



Flexibility?



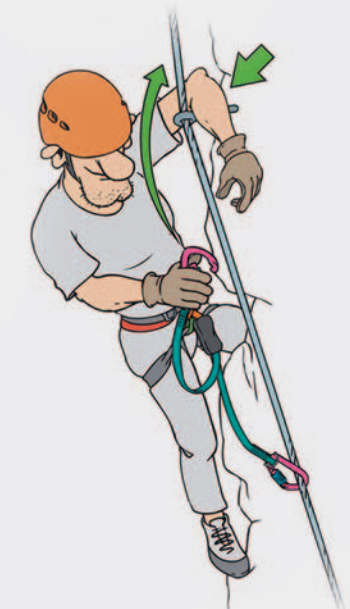
Sure-footedness?



Hubris can lead to dangerous situations on the klettersteig.



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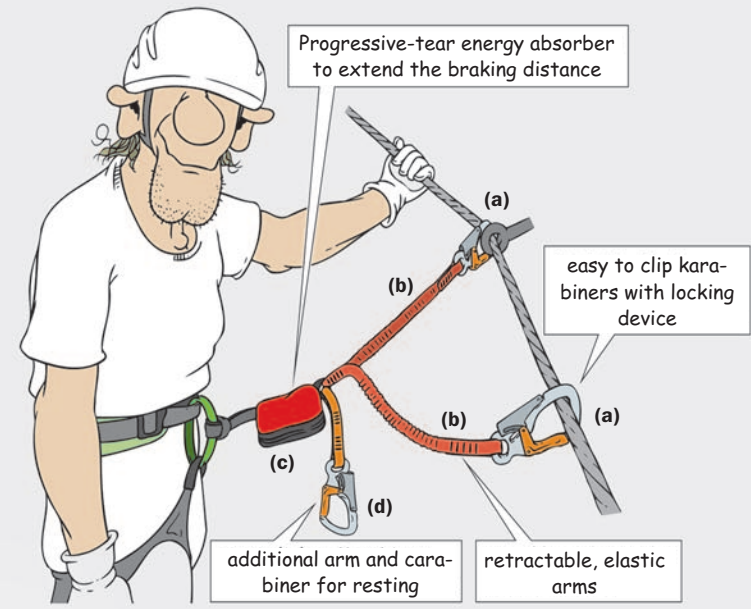
Hooking the crook of your arm over the stanchion while clipping also saves energy.

## 3 use complete standard equipment

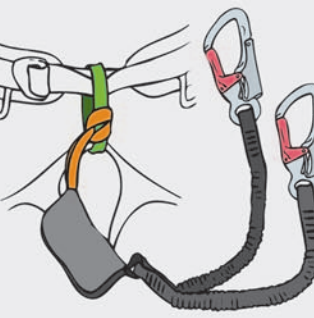
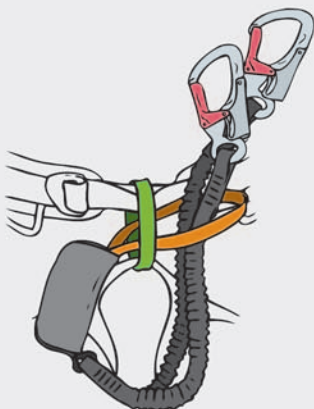
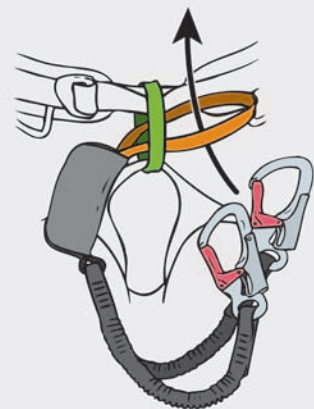
Climbing harness, via ferrata lanyard and helmet: You can only climb “iron ways” safely if you use your equipment consistently and correctly. Pack your first-aid kit and mobile phone for any emergencies (Austrian Mountain Rescue emergency number 140, European emergency number 112).

The crucial components of each purpose-built lanyard are the specially designed karabiners (a) with their automatic locking device, two arms which connect to the cable with the karabiners (b) and the energy absorber: The latter is the “heart” of the lanyard and gradually absorbs the energy of a fall, braking the fall “dynamically”. There are two types: threaded rope energy absorbers and - state of the art today - progressive-tear energy absorbers (c). Additionally, some lanyards have a very useful shorter third arm for resting and traversing (d). Make sure you always have one carabiner attached to the cable when you clip and unclip from one segment to the next at the stanchions.

Careful! Never use a DIY lanyard made from cords, short lengths of rope and ordinary slings for climbing klettersteigs! Even a short fall generates forces which most items of climbing equipment cannot withstand.



Only via ferrata lanyards that conform to the norm can take full effect in the case of a fall.



Correct kitting up using a girth hitch.

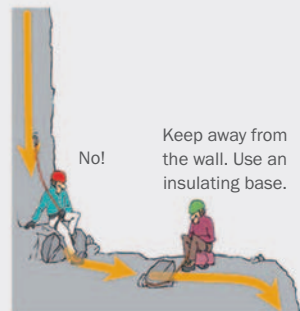
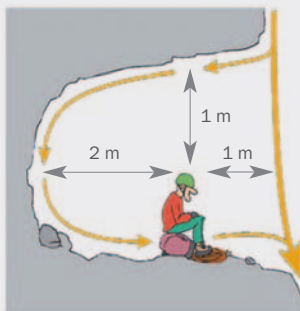




#### 4 do not start climbing if there is a chance of thunderstorms

**Lightning equals mortal danger. Rain, wet conditions and cold increase the risk of falling.** Electrical storms can often be expected in the course of hot and humid midsummer days. Pay special attention to any mention of thunderstorms in the weather forecast and make sure you are back home in good time. Plan some buffer and turn around in good time if typical signs of an incoming storm like quickly growing cumulus clouds or gusty winds develop. Anvil-shaped clouds, electrically charged atmosphere and beginning showers? Don't waste any more time!

If you should nevertheless get caught in a storm you can save yourself by taking right action. Avoid getting stuck in steep, technical terrain, no matter what!



#### 5 critically examine the cable and stanchions

**Rockfall, snow pressure, frost weathering or corrosion can cause damage to protection. Do not climb closed klettersteigs.** Very old, alpine klettersteigs, especially, (e.g. in the Dolomites) require a certain degree of caution - do not trust every route blindly! Very often the first few metres give you a taste of what lies ahead in terms of overall condition of the installations. Do pay special attention to find out if the klettersteig is officially "open" or - due to maintenance work - "closed". Damage to the cables and stanchions may appear in spring, especially. Pay particular attention to the steel cable ends after the last stanchion: Some of them are loose!



Cardfolder & German-language booklet "Klettersteig" orders: [www.alpenverein.at/shop](http://www.alpenverein.at/shop)



#### 6 partner-check at the start

**Check each other: harness buckle, connection of via ferrata lanyard with harness, helmet.** Four-eyes principle: Check (1) that your partner's harness waistbelt fits snugly above the waist, is tightened and buckled correctly, (2) that the via ferrata lanyard is tied directly into the belay loop using a girth hitch (no carabiner!) and (3), that their helmet fits snugly and comfortably against their head and that the chinstrap is fastened.



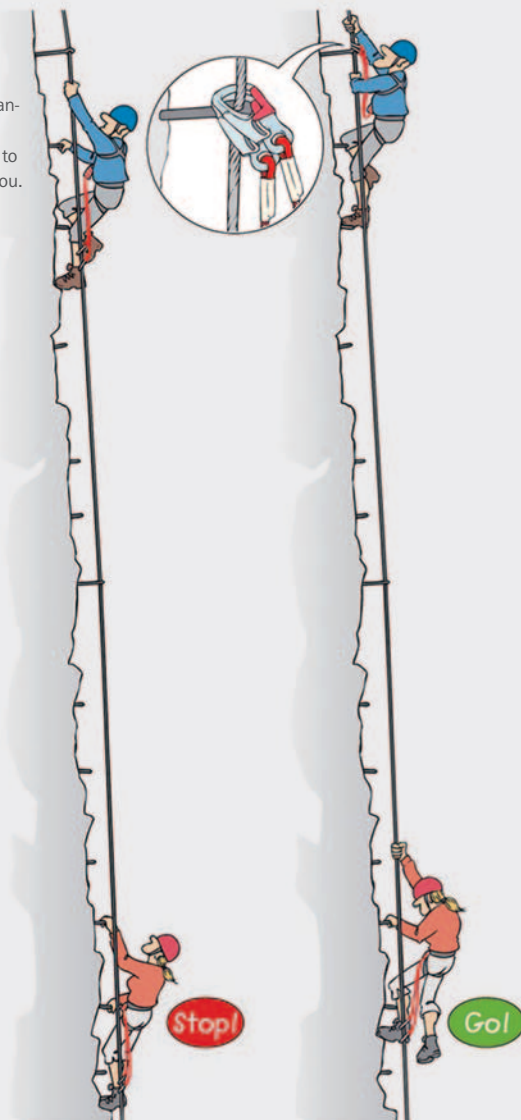
Partnercheck: Climbing partners check each other and themselves.



#### 7 keep sufficient distance

**Only one climber is allowed between two stanchions.** Make sure only one climber is clipped into the respective cable segment (= section between two stanchions). The second, lower climber must keep enough distance to the top end of their own cable segment because if climbers fall, they will fall a few metres past this stanchion while the breaking device extends.

Be careful: In case of a fall, climbers fall below the last stanchion they passed. Therefore, make sure to keep a distance to the cable segment ahead of you.



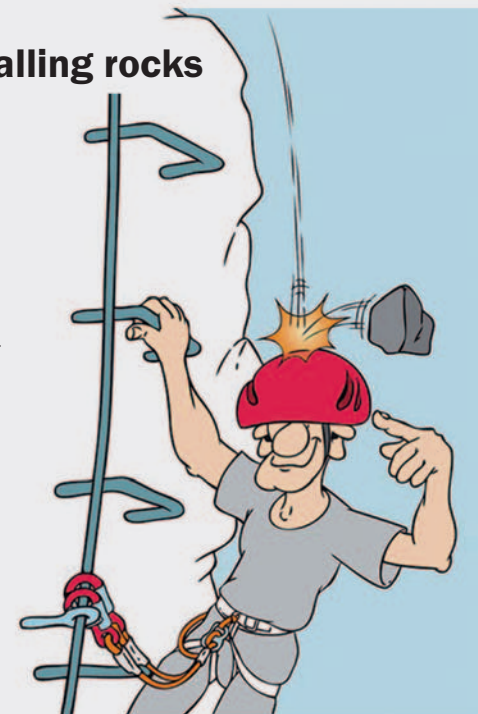
#### 8 clear communication when passing

**Do communicate and be considerate in order to avoid dangerous situations when passing or meeting climbers coming the other way.** Even if you master the difficulties of the klettersteig without the slightest effort, make sure you are always clipped into the cable when you meet other climbers. Do not pass before a quick word with the other climbers. Wait until a safe section to do so. Avoid popular, overly crowded tours prone to becoming one long queue of slow moving people.



#### 9 beware of falling rocks

**Treading gently prevents rock-fall.** A helmet protects you against rockfall. Additionally, avoid dislodging rocks by climbing carefully and don't move too hurriedly. The same is true for approaching and descending. When a rock starts moving, scream "Achtung Stein" (or "Rock, rock, rock!"). Do not look up but hug the mountain and wait until the rockfall is over.



#### 10 respect nature and the environment

**Use public transport or car-share to get to the trailhead. Do not leave any waste behind, refrain from making noise.** "The Alpine Associations advocate that the right of access to nature and backcountry be preserved and restrictions be imposed after due consideration of interests only. Consideration, prudence and a willingness to turn back in justified cases are necessary to avoid conflict." (Basic policy of AVS, DAV, ÖAV on environmentally friendly mountaineering.)

## reinhold messner 1979

Having met so many happy people on them,

I must be in favour of them.

Like Fritz Peterka, I myself also believe

that the future belongs

that the future belongs

of walking.

The Alpenverein is ...

- an alpine club with a social, ecological and cultural mission, rich in tradition.
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