

# **“They all have a different vibe”: A rhythm analysis of climbing mobilities and the Red River Gorge as place**

Tourist Studies

## **Abstract**

This paper integrates a mobilities perspective and Lefebvre's notion of rhythm analysis as a means to interrogate place as an entanglement of mobilities, moorings, and rhythms. By investigating one popular rock climbing destination, this paper demonstrates that mobilities invite encounters with and enactments of place such that travel rhythms, everyday rhythms, and natural rhythms coalesce, interrupt, and even emerge anew. Focusing on lifestyle rock climbers (a particular type of lifestyle mobility dedicated to the pursuit of climbing) and events provides evidence for the ways informational and physical mobilities contribute to and even regiment rock climbing travel rhythms, while the everyday rhythms of place illustrate embodiment as crucial to the enfolding of rhythm and mobilities. Building from Lefebvre's theory of rhythm and Edensor and Holloway's (2008) re-articulation of its potential for mobilities studies, this paper emphasizes the ongoing relationality of embodied mobilities and bodily rhythms, seasonal rhythms and informational mobilities, collective mobilities and institutional rhythms.

Keywords: rhythm, rock climbing, place, mobilities, community, co-presence

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## Introduction

I've been here in the spring and in the fall every year for at least six years. Always in the spring and in the fall. (Male, mid-30s, lifestyle climbing for 6 years)

While increased mobility, telecommunications, and globalization once inspired notions of “placelessness” (Relph, 1976), “non-places” (Auge, 1995), and “in-between” places (Thrift, 1996), a mobilities perspective as a relational approach sheds light on place as points of encounter, embodiment, and connection in constellations that comprise lifeworlds (see Cresswell, 2006). Mobility affects place; yet, Simonsen (2008: 14) argues, the relationship between them is “not as one of erosion, but as a complex intertwining contributing to the construction of both”. Such assertions affirm Massey’s (2005; 1991) description of place as “throwntogetherness” and suggest that a sense of place can grow stronger through the connections that mobility facilitates (Baerenholdt and Granas, 2008).

This has considerable implications for tourism studies, which have traditionally worked from the concept of the destination – a bounded space with specific attractions in which tourists as outsiders stay for short durations, and as such, can develop only weak senses of place. Instead, approaching destinations as places, which are constellations of meaning and association, allows for attention to the ways space and significance are produced through mobilities (see Coleman and Crang, 2002; Hannam, 2009; Rickly-Boyd, Knudsen, Braverman, and Metro-Roland, 2014). In particular, as the above quote illustrates, embodied mobile practices (see for example Lewis, 2000; Borden, 2001; Wylie, 2002; 2005; Saville, 2003; Michael, 2006; Spinney, 2006; Wunderlich, 2008; Rossiter, 2008; Edensor, 2010a; Barratt, 2011; 2012; Ness, 2011), engage participants in intense interactions with place, for

varying durations, and sometimes repetitively (often seasonally). This paper builds from the performative and mobilities turns in the social sciences by integrating Lefebvre's notion of rhythmanalysis as a means to reorient our perspective on place as an entanglement of mobilities, moorings, and rhythms.

Place, mobility, and rhythm are performative, requiring ongoing enactment. As Mels (2004:5) notes, "human beings have always been *rhythm-makers* as much as *place-makers*." The work of previous rhythmanalyses (see Mels, 2004; Edensor and Holloway, 2008; Edensor, 2010a; 2010b; Vannini, 2012) suggests that this is a useful analytical and methodological perspective for travel mobilities, as it draws attention to the ways movement and rest create various overlapping, competing, and merging rhythms that can be observed and interrogated. Further, the mobilities of bodies, objects, information, and so on, have the potential to discipline, and to be disciplined by, rhythms. Lefebvre (1991: 205) observed, "rhythms are forever crossing and recrossing, superimposing themselves upon each other, always bound to space [...] some operate on the surface, so to speak, whereas others spring from hidden depths". Rhythmanalysis aims to uncover not only the rhythms of everyday life, but the wider socio-political relations from bodies, gestures, and practices. So while rhythmanalysis was a "rather unfinished project", Lefebvre championed that its greatest utility would lie in the interrogation of rhythmic distinction and conjunction of the self/other, private/public, and presence/representation (Simonsen, 2005).

Employing rhythmanalysis, thus, expands upon one of Cresswell's (2010) six facets of a politics of mobility, rhythm, adding depth to this key factor of mobilities studies by fleshing out Edensor and Holloway's (2008) observation that place is not simply a

point in the constellations of mobile rhythms, but rhythm and mobility continually fold into one another.

By investigating one popular rock climbing destination – Red River Gorge, Kentucky, USA – this paper demonstrates that mobilities invite encounters with and enactments of place such that travel rhythms, everyday rhythms, and natural rhythms coalesce, interrupt, and even emerge anew. More specifically, it interrogates the ways informational and physical mobilities (Hannam, Sheller, and Urry, 2006) contribute to and even regiment rock climbing travel rhythms, particularly for the subculture of lifestyle climbers. Because this is a rhythmanalysis of climbing place, it is focused exclusively on the rhythms and mobilities that course through and are situated in The Red, rather than following specific rhythms between and across different places and points of mooring. As Edensor (2010a: 69) explains, places “possess distinctive characteristics according to the ensemble of rhythms that interweave in and across”. Thus, it is important to note that rock climbing is not the only rhythm-maker in this region; this area of Appalachia is home to a relatively stable community of permanent residents who have little to no interest in or relation to the practice of rock climbing. In many ways, this sedentary community would have been exemplary of earlier theorists’ notions of space and place based upon the importance of duration and rootedness to a sense of place (see Relph, 1976; 1981), or more recently, that immobilities can produce isolated and insulated rhythms (see Vannini, 2012). The Red is place to many communities, however, as it is a popular destination for outdoor recreationalists, including camping, hiking, ATV usage, and canoeing, as well. This paper focuses on a particularly mobile community, lifestyle climbers – full-time traveling rock climbers. Through their hypermobility, lifestyle

climbers forge strong emotional connections to and embodied knowledge of place thus exemplifying the significance of co-presence – face-to-face, face-to-place, and face-the-moment (Urry, 2002) – as they follow seasonal rhythms, produce travel rhythms (in the form of circuits), inspire institutional rhythms, and merge natural rhythms with rock climbing practice in the everyday enactments of The Red as climbing place.

### **Place as encounters and entanglements**

Mobility and place were once considered mutually exclusive (see Relph, 1976; 1981). The performative turn in geography, however, has shed light on the relational qualities of place (Thrift, 1999; Cresswell, 2002; 2006; Simonsen, 2008), such that it has come to be understood as the result of intertwining processes of roots *and* routes (Gustafson, 2001; Massey, 1991; 2005; Baerenholdt and Granas, 2008). Without the weaving together of these relations – absence and presence, emplacement and displacement – “place would simply not ‘happen’” (Johannesson and Baerenholdt, 2008: 155). Places are enacted; they are points of embodiment, encounter, connection, and change. Simonsen explains, “place is a specific conjunction of social practices and social relations, it will consist of particular interweavings or networks which have over time been constructed, consolidated, decayed, and renewed” (2008: 16). Place is not construed out of “nowhere” (Baerenholdt and Granas, 2008), but engages the body, materialities, rhythms, politics, and imagination.

Rhythm is an important component of mobility and place (see Mels, 2004; Cresswell, 2010). According to Lefebvre, the entanglement of space, time, and expenditure of energy produce rhythm; thus rhythm is central to the production of everyday life. Edensor (2010a: 70) elaborates that the “ongoing mapping of space through repetitive, collective choreographies of congregation, interaction, rest and relaxation produces situated rhythms through which time and space are stitched together to produce what Seamon (1980) calls ‘place ballets’.” However, Cresswell (2010: 23) asserts that rhythmanalysis, as a richly phenomenological methodology, targets deeper processes – political and biological – by focusing on and following rhythms. In this sense, “rhythms are composed of repeated moments of movement and rest, or, alternatively, simply repeated movements with a particular measure” (Cresswell, 2010: 23). In an increasingly mobile world, rhythm is interwoven with mobilities relating everyday rhythms of place to mobile rhythms (informational, travel, technological, etc.) that are not always situated in any one place.

As some rhythms must be enacted, and others perceived or felt, processes of embodiment are also essential to rhythmanalysis. “[R]hythms are bound up with place and corporeality” (Mels, 2004: 5). The body is the center of interaction among the biological, the physiological/natural, and the social/cultural rhythms, with each of these dimensions having its own rhythms (Lefebvre and Regulier, 1999: 11). Furthermore, it is the body’s capacity to sense rhythm that enables it to inhabit space (Deleuze and Guattari, 1988; Simonsen, 2005; Duffy, Waitt and Gormann-Murray, 2011). That is, it is the body’s ability to sense the social and biological processes that characterize particular spaces, and then adapt to them, which enables it to experience and connect to place. Human bodies are spatialities of position and

situation so that our bodies are not in space/time but inhabit it (Simonsen, 2005; 2008). Through bodily performance, place is actively constructed as the current position of the ever-changing world. So while bodies inhabit space, they also produce space.

Rock climbing (see Lewis, 2000; 2004; Rossiter, 2008; Ness, 2011; Barratt, 2011; 2012), like skateboarding (Borden, 2001), cycling (Spinney, 2006), walking (Wylie, 2005; Michael, 2006; Wunderlich, 2008; Edensor, 2010a), and parkour (Saville, 2003), is an embodied mobile practice. Embodiment is thus central to the way the climber makes meaning from the performance of climbing, while simultaneously producing a space of rock climbing (see author, forthcoming). In other words, the lived experience of climbing is a process of embodiment, shaping (and shaped by) the rock, the body, and the social relations of climbing (see Lewis, 2000; Rossiter, 2011). The process of embodiment considers the individual body as centrally connected to larger, multiscale, networks of meaning, so that social and cultural relations are produced through and by the body (Cresswell 1999; Grosz 1994). Embodiment is thus acknowledged as a crucial factor in the production of space and the experience of rhythm, and is therefore central in the enactment of place. However, embodiment is not examined in-depth here, as previous work has interrogated these relational processes explicitly (see author, forthcoming). Needless to say, the embodiment of rock climbing as a practice is underlying this rhythmanalysis, always in the background, even if mobility and community are the concepts foregrounded in this paper.

## **Research site and methodology**

The Red River Gorge of Kentucky, USA, is a relatively new rock climbing destination. Route development began in the 1970s at a slow pace and was mostly the work of traditional<sup>1</sup> style climbers. But in the early 1990s a young climber named Porter Jarrard quickened the pace of sport route development. New technology for bolting routes, particularly better power drills, brought the once unclimbable, pocketed, and overhanging sandstone walls into play. In 1990 alone Jarrard bolted 20 new sport lines (Ellington, 2007). The publication of a new guidebook in 1993 contained nearly 700 routes (Bronaugh, 1993). Just a few years later, in 1998, Bronaugh added another 300 routes to his guidebook.

While most of the route grades<sup>2</sup> of 1970s-80s were of moderate difficulty, routes of the 1990s pushed the scale to the highest grade of that time period, further attracting the world's top climbers and adding to the region's growing reputation. According to Ramsey (2007: 10), "Climbs considered 'bad' here would be four-star classics at most places." Yet, only a small portion of the region's potential has been uncovered. Mellor (2001: 111) exclaims, "when all the southern canyons are explored, all the escarpments of the Cumberland Plateau discovered and documented, the state of Kentucky will probably show the most rock, will probably turn out to be the mother lode of southeastern sandstone". Indeed, the year 2000 The Red recorded one of the most difficult routes in the world, experienced lines of climbers waiting for some of the gorge's most popular routes, and witnessed overwhelmed campgrounds (Ellington, 2007). Ellington's first guidebook, published in 2005, contained over 1300 routes, the 2007 edition increased the number to over 1600, and by 2009 there were



over 2000 recorded routes. Indeed, the reputation and popularity of The Red continues to solidify this destination among climbers near and far.

Research took place in The Red during its peak climbing season – August through November. The Red is a burgeoning world class climbing destination, and as a result thousands visit each year for durations of days to weeks to months. While most are sport climbers, it also attracts a considerable number of traditional climbers along with a small gathering of boulderers. Conducting research in The Red during the autumn allowed for participation in and observation of the three-day climbing festival – Rocktoberfest. This festival is an optimal space in which to observe the diversity and dynamics of the climbing community, as climbers of all styles, proficiency, and levels of dedication come together. At the 2011 event, 148 completed surveys were collected from climbers regarding frequency of rock climbing practice and travel for the sport.

Miguel's Pizza is a staple of the rock-climbing community in the Red River Gorge, and as such, it functioned as a base for research where the majority of interviews were conducted. At the crags, however, observation and only informal conversation were employed, as in these situations climbers were less interested in long interviews and were easily distracted by the climbing taking place around them. While at most destinations climbers are dispersed across a series of small campgrounds, The Red is one of the few locations that has a primary social space where the vast majority of climbers camp. Thus, there is a long relationship between Miguel's Pizza and the climbing community. Miguel Ventura started his pizzeria in 1985. By the late 1980s he set up a small campground which has expanded several

times over since, with the addition of other amenities including restrooms, token-based shower and laundry facilities, and most recently Wi-Fi. As the climbing community has grown so has the pizzeria and campground. It can now accommodate more than 150 tents or about 500 campers.

This research primarily focused on a small subculture of the rock climbing community, lifestyle climbers, who exhibit a passionate dedication to the sport by maintaining minimalist, hypermobile lifestyles. Importantly, these are non-sponsored climbers and thereby do not earn an income from the sport. Employment takes the form of temporary jobs at local establishments and/or internet-based work. Spending years in the pursuit of rock climbing, lifestyle climbers travel circuits of climbing destinations informed by climbing style, regional preferences, and personal circumstances. As such, lifestyle climbers give up permanent residences, and in turn many fashion a vehicle into a mobile abode, a van most commonly.

In total, 21 lifestyle climbers were interviewed – 6 females and 15 males – complemented by numerous informal conversations. This gender disparity is representative of the observed lifestyle climber population. The age of participants ranged from 22 to 56 years. Mobility varied and the time spent travelling for full-time climbing extended from just six months to 17 years. Interviewees were, as reflected in the rock climbing population in general, predominantly white (Erikson, 2005). All but two interviewees were Americans, with the exception of one Canadian and one person from France. Two respondents self-identified as gay and lesbian, respectively.

In addition, popular climbing websites, principally rockclimbing.com and redriverclimbing.com, were investigated throughout this project. Data collected from online forums thus informed many observational cues and interview questions. In an age of increasing globalization, social media and networks can foster communities that span vast distances (Urry, 2002; Hine, 2008; Germann Molz, 2012). Indeed, as Urry's (2002) concept of co-presence suggests, sociality is not exclusively about being in the same space, but that a sense of connection and belonging that can be sustained. Thus, "one should investigate not only physical and immediate co-presence, but also the socialities involved in occasional co-presence, imagined co-presence and virtual co-presence" (Urry, 2002: 256). While climbers do meet and perform group identities on the ground, in specific locations, the website's forums facilitate community development and maintenance, illuminate the geographic reach of the climbing community, as well as reveal fractures and tension. As a community, lifestyle climbers depend upon physical *and* information mobilities, that they themselves can travel and that they can communicate across mobility and distance is crucial to co-presence. They are an example of "intermittent co-presence" (Urry, 2002), as elements of virtuality are interwoven with corporeality and mobility such that their circuits coalesce from time to time, allowing for dwelling together in place.

### **The Red as climbing place**

According to Lefebvre (2004: 15), "where there is interaction between a place, a time, and an expenditure of energy, there is *rhythm*". In addition to biological and physiological rhythms, rhythms can be social – "institutionally inscribed (marked by national festivals, religious occasions, hours of commerce or television schedules),

locally organised (via hours of work and local folk customs), or form synchronised collective habits (eating, playing, sleeping and working together)” (Edensor and Holloway, 2008: 484). In advocating for rhythmanalysis, Lefebvre also draws attention to measure, frequency, and the harmony of bodies, objects, and sensations by way of foregrounding the phenomenological-hermeneutic relationality of these aspects to the body. He explained that rhythmanalysis has as its aim to interrogate the “multiple articulations of individual and collective; the subjective and the intersubjective; nature and society; body and world; and the spaces of experience, memory, symbol and action” (Lefebvre, 2004: 9) Yet, while he aims for a holist methodology, Lefebvre’s writings on the topic remain vague and unfinished, resulting in what feels like “a theory without a purpose”<sup>3</sup>. As an analytical approach, however, Edensor and Holloway (2008: 498) propose rhythmanalysis as a way to “highlight the experience of both mobility and situatedness, and the ways in which they are blended” in a processual, dynamic, flow of becoming. Agreeably, this paper works to further demonstrate that rhythmanalysis can find a purpose when integrated with mobilities studies, in particular. Examining the relations of rock climbing to mobility, rhythm, place, and community in *The Red* is illustrative of this potential.

For lifestyle climbers, it is the act of rock climbing that most motivates this lifestyle choice and the resulting travel behavior. These climbers do not spend weeks to months in a single destination for the local culture or the natural scenery, but for the quality of climbing it offers. When this quality diminishes, as a result of seasonal changes (natural rhythms), climbers move on to other locations. Traveling in circuits produces rhythms of movement and mooring where place is enacted, fostering co-presence, a sense of community, and intimate connections to places through

synchronization with local rhythms, while also infusing new rhythms into place. These travel rhythms are not the work of seasonality alone, but sociality, along with physical and informational mobilities, also inspire and alter them. Individuals travel rhythms are repeatedly coupled with and uncoupled from “other people’s paths, institutions, technologies and physical surroundings” (Mels, 2004: 16). When they intersect, climbing co-presence (face-to-face, face-to-place, and face-the-moment (Urry, 2002)) is performed with community becoming grounded in place. The locations of mooring become climbing places, points of entanglement in which uniquely situated, everyday rhythms encounter and interweave with mobilities that course through and across other climbing places. Mobility and rhythm are entwined and enfolded in the enactment of place, with rock climbing as the impetus and medium in this particular scenario.

### *Mobilities and moorings*

At the Red River Gorge there is a strong correlation between weather conditions and the population of rock climbers. Rock climbing is a sport of friction. It is about attempting to cling to relatively small holds on the rock faces of overhanging cliff lines. Because moisture reduces friction, climbers covet drier conditions. In The Red, such conditions are best experienced in the autumn as the heat and humidity of the summer fades and cooler, drier air settles in the region. As a result, the number of climbers swells beginning in late August and then dissipates by early December, with the community reaching its peak in October. Then, again, in the spring from mid-March until early May there is another smaller spike in the number of climbers who visit before the heat and humidity of summer takes hold. While few lifestyle climbers stay during the winter months, there is a handful that remains despite the

closing of Miguel's Pizza (the main campground) from December until March. They do not climb exclusively at The Red, but do consider it their "home base" from which they travel infrequently for shorter durations, and then only regionally. The following lifestyle climber succinctly summarizes the rhythmic nature of lifestyle sport mobilities as:

I travel, you know, basically seasonally, kind of chasing the season. (Male, late 20s, lifestyle climbing for 7 years)

Rhythms are both biological and social, and thereby complement the linear and cyclical time that frames our everyday. As this climber points out, it is primarily seasonal rhythms that discipline his hypermobility. Importantly, though, these climbers often travel circuits, where climbing destinations are repeated in yearly cycles. Nevertheless, they are not required to be regimented or repetitive in their travel rhythms. In comparing travel behavior, lifestyle climbing is abundant with potentialities and differentiation.

As a small subculture of the climbing community, lifestyle climbers prioritize rock climbing and are therefore hypermobile so as to maximize their time spent climbing. In "chasing the season", some follow well-defined, scheduled itineraries of the same locations year after year, whereas others are more flexible and spontaneous. As such, individual circuits rarely overlap at more than a few destinations. For example, these two lifestyle climbers spend autumn in The Red. The remainder of the year, however, one maintains a North American itinerary, whereas the other travels a widely international circuit.

Last couple of years, my schedule has been The Red all [fall] season, go to Squamish [British Columbia] in the summer for at least a month [...] After Thanksgiving I usually move to Chattanooga [Tennessee] for December, then to Hueco Tanks [Texas] for January, February. (Male, late 20s, lifestyle climbing for 7 years)

I was spending from spring to summertime in U.S., then I was going back to France and what I've been doing is going to Thailand in wintertime, then Greece, Kalymnos, in March, then coming back. That is kind of my circuit now. (Female, mid-30s, lifestyle climbing for 5 years)

Such itineraries are examples of individual travel rhythms that are informed as much by seasonality and climbing style as by personal preferences and informational mobilities. For example, the first climber (above) has a preference for sport climbing and bouldering, while the second focuses on sport climbing while also appreciating a major change in place as she travels. While they encounter and perform places as the points at which they moor, there is neither origin nor final destination to their mobility. Once engaged in the pursuit of lifestyle climbing, their world is becoming, always in formation. Individuals' movements resonant rhythmically with others', whose journeys they share and paths they cross (Ingold and Vergunst, 2008: 2), demonstrating face-to-face co-presence.

The most visited climbing destinations are known as “scenes” and have rich histories in the climbing community as well as reputations for subcultural identities. The climbing film, *The Scene* (2011), follows some of the world's top climbers as they travel to four renowned destinations – Moab, Utah; Boulder, Colorado; Innsbruck, Austria, and Catalunya, Spain – illustrating not only different climbing styles that develop in relation to the geology of a region, but also the social and cultural variation of the local populations (climbers and not). Being in these different climbing places, as this climber explains, one adjusts to everyday rhythms of place.

Moreover, the social, cultural, and material variation influences one's climbing style, making a more versed climber and are, thus, essential to face-to-place co-presence.

Most places I can't get comfortable in less than two weeks. So two weeks to get used to it [...] Then, also, you just get a sense of the area and what it has to offer. If you're climbing in Spain, it's going to be a lot mellower, nobody is going to get to the cliff until 1:00, after five cups of cappuccino or espresso. In an alpine climbing area, if you're in Tuolumne [California],

everybody's up before the sun so they can start that hike to get in. And those are all good; they all have a different vibe. (Male, late 20s, lifestyle climbing for 10 years)

Extending beyond mobility and route to mooring and duration produces a more sophisticated rhythm analysis (Vaninini, 2012). “Different places move at different paces” (Vannini, 2012: 242), and this climber is keen to observe the different “vibes” of climbing places, illustrating the social conventions and natural rhythms that affect one’s biological rhythms and sense of place. Further, this quote echoes Lefebvre (2004: 19): “He listens – first to his body; he learns rhythm from it, in order consequently to appreciate external rhythms”. The enactment of climbing place happens through processes of embodiment. First, as this climber notes, it takes time (“two weeks”) to get comfortable, to get “a sense of the area”, and the ways co-presence socially interprets and enacts the linear time of the day. He gives examples of the differences between Spain as a place that is “mellower”, in rhythm with the sun, in that climbers become active later in the day and with a slowly growing intensity, and an alpine climbing area where one rises “before the sun”, as a fast and steady pace is necessary to get to the climb and back again in a day’s time. It is through the act of climbing, its rituals (packing gear, hiking to the cliff line, climbing, and resting), sociality, and practice, that one feels out, adjusts to, and moves with the everyday rhythms of place.

Climbing places, as “scenes” with distinct “vibes” corresponds to what Lefebvre (1999; 2004) referred to as “animated space”. He suggested that rhythms, by way of their extension from the space of the body, produce space. The Red as a climbing place is an animated space that is produced as a result of mobile rhythms and rock climbing converging with seasonal rhythms. The co-presence of many climbers is crucial to animating space, as they infuse the space with multiple bodily and travel



rhythms. Similar to Duffy et al.'s (2011) analysis of festival spaces, the embodied responses to travel rhythms, everyday rhythms of The Red, and bodily rhythms of climbing mark out a space of community and belonging.

### *Everyday rhythms*

According to Edensor's (2010b: 8) interpretation and extension of Lefebvre's concept, "the rhythmic structuring of the day is not merely individual but collective, and relies on the synchronisation of practices". This is demonstrated in the everyday practices and climbing rituals performed individually and in synchronization at The Red. During the climbing season, the everyday rhythm of Miguel's Pizza begins with a slow, steady rising of campers with the sun, accompanied by movements towards the pizzeria for coffee and breakfast. Individuals use this time to organize small groups based on the crags at which they want to climb. This is followed by a flurry of movement as everyone packs their gear, crowds into a few shared vehicles, and departs. (See Figure 1) For the remainder of the day the pizzeria and its campground are quiet as only a handful of people who are taking a rest day mill about, nap in hammocks, read on the patio, or watch a movie in the basement of the pizzeria. The rhythms seem slow and mellow. Yet, inside the pizzeria workers are busy preparing the kitchen for the flood of customers that will come in just a few hours.

[Insert Figure 1 about here]

This rhythmic production extends from this larger social space to more intimate gatherings at dispersed crags. For the first to arrive, much of the crag is still

shadowed by the overhanging cliff line. (See Figure 2) A thick dew remains on the foliage and the birds are still sounding their morning territorial calls. Climbers are slow to begin – stretching and negotiating who will climb a warm-up route first as they slip into their harnesses and climbing shoes. Once decided, both rope up and check one another's knots. The climber, then, chalks up as s/he approaches the rock face.

[Insert Figure 2 about here]

By mid-morning a couple of routes are active and chatter begins to fill the space. As more climbers arrive, late morning now, the sun is peaking over the cliff line, the temperature is rising, and the air is clearing of its morning humidity. The energy at the crag is growing; most have finished warm-up routes and have moved onto their project routes. Rhythms of the body are the means by which rhythms of place are appreciated. The climbing body warms up not just in waking with the sun and hiking to the crag, but in moving against and across the rock face. Not only is this polyrhythmic, but through climbing the body tests its eurhythmic capacity – the ability of different organs of the body to work in harmony. The active, lively, climbing body (Lewis, 2000) – its ‘respirations, pulses, circulations’ (Lefebvre, 2004: 20) – works efficiently, as limber and loose muscles move between hand and foot holds in complement to shifting and positioning body weight.

At mid-day multiple routes are active, with several climbers on the rock face at once. The potential energy of the morning is being transformed into kinetic energy. As climbers push their limits, the space of the crag is filled with their vocalizations –

grunts, screams, and gasps, as well as words of encouragement, taunts, and teases. Calls between the climber and belayer are exchanged – “take” yells the climber, telling the belayer to take up as much slack in the rope as possible, just before s/he slips off a hold, ejected from the rock face. A sudden drop, the sound of the rope rushing through the carabineers, then a twang when s/he is caught. A brief moment of quiet stillness, and the climber is lowered to the ground. They trade-off and the belayer prepares to climb.

Observing several different climbers at once, one can assess the experience each climber has with a respective route. With repetition and practice, the route becomes an embodied choreography such that a climber exhibits more grace and flow. However, the rock face is apprehended at a slower and more staccatic rhythm for the climber who is attempting a new route. Similarly to Edensor’s (2010a) description of walking, bodily interruptions impede advancement – “the body is not a machine” – scraped hands and cut fingertips, sore muscles, and fatigue create friction and disrupt a climber’s rhythm. Looking out across an active crag, climbers produce varied rhythms influenced by their familiarity with the routes, embodied choreographies, and even their position within the route’s sequence. Each route has a “crux”, which is the most difficult segment of the climb. While a climber might move smoothly through the beginning holds, conserving energy for the crux, their rhythm often changes at the crux as one’s abilities are being tested, demanding focus and precision in movement.

In late afternoon, the crag is starting to calm. Those who arrived earlier in the day have finished; they are relaxing and watching others climb. Bodies have been

worked, minds exercised, and as a result, hands hurt and muscles ache. Climbers slowly pack up and depart for an evening meal and socializing at Miguel's Pizza. By dusk, only a few remain. The crag is quiet again and falling into deep shadows, and the chirps of crickets overtake the sounds of climbers. The moving, lively body produces a pulsing space, an animated space, so despite this sense of quiet and the exodus of active climbers from the crag, the scene is not inert. Humans are but one "rhythmic constituent in a seething space pulsing with intersecting trajectories and temporalities" (Edensor, 2010a: 71). Rather, the rhythms of non-human bodies continue to activate the space, disciplined by natural, biophysical polyrhythms.

Back at Miguel's Pizza, climbers reconvene and inquire as to the success of one another's efforts. Inside the pizzeria, tables overflow and climbers spill out on to the picnic tables that dot the campgrounds and to folding chairs that form semi-circles around vans and RVs in the parking lot (Figure 3). Reporting their progress, or lack thereof, precipitates solicitations of advice (or "beta") regarding particularly difficult sequences. With darkness falling, the only lights that illuminate the campground are individual headlamps, a few campfires, the large security lights projecting from the pizzeria, and the glow from inside it. By midnight it has fallen quiet, as most have gone to sleep. And, yet, as the still of night seems to correspond to the stillness of climbing bodies at rest, there are bodily rhythms that remain active. Not only in circulation and respiration, but in the repair and building of muscles as a result of the day's straining embodied practice.

[Insert figures 2 and 3 about here]

Nothing is inert, Lefebvre (2004) asserts. The production of the social space of the crag overlaps and disrupts some natural rhythms; yet, this new space – natural and social – has its own rhythm, as multiple rhythmic scales converge. “Rhythms may be linear or cyclical and operate at circadian, weekly, monthly, seasonal, annual, lifetime, millennial and geological scales”; what’s more, argues Edensor (2011: 189), “[t]hey can be regular or irregular and vary according to the time and space between events, tempo and intensity, degrees of predictability and disruption, and the coinciding effects that produce polyrhythmicity, synchronicity or dissonance.” Indeed, the spatial rhythms of The Red range in scale from the campground to the crag to the region, but they also vary seasonally and between weekdays and weekends. While so far illustrations of rhythms produced by the active practice of rock climbing have been presented, when the rhythms of place prevent climbing a very different space is produced – an arrhythmic space.

Inclement weather is particularly disruptive to rhythm at The Red, as this climber describes the campground on the third consecutive day of rain:

It’s quiet. People disperse, you know, anything and everything to keep your mind occupied so you’re not thinking about not being able to go rock climbing. You sleep a lot, drink in the afternoon, whatever. I don’t know, just anything you can to stay busy. Whatever to keep your mind off rock climbing. (Male, early 20s, lifestyle climbing for 1 year)

When unable to climb, lifestyle climbers tend towards boredom, irritation, frustration, and even depression, which leads to tension in the community. As a result, the space feels off beat, out of rhythm, muffled, and anxious rather than lively with climbers coming and going from the pizzeria. While their minds, indicative of bodily habits, return again and again to the thought of climbing, they fight these thoughts and daydreams by doing “anything and everything” to keep their minds occupied when their bodies cannot be. This arrhythmic space, in particular, illustrates the

subcultural differences in the experience of The Red as place. Whereas inclement weather might prevent a leisure climber from venturing to The Red, or inspire them to prematurely end their visit and return home, for lifestyle climbers such challenges are part of the ways mobility and climbing have been integrated as everyday practice. While most lifestyle climbers are living in mobile abodes (see author et al, 2014), and therefore have the ability to leave such conditions, their tight budgets offer few opportunities for other activities. As such, most wait out the rain in the confines of their mobile abode in the parking lot or campground of Miguel's Pizza. Their hypermobile lifestyles, in such instances, afford them less mobility and results in everyday rhythms that are more disciplined by place.

Place, contends Edensor (2011:190), is "continually reproduced through the mobile flows which course through and around them, bringing together ephemeral, contingent and relatively stable arrangements of people, energy and matter". Indeed, The Red as climbing place requires mobility, with climbers repeatedly moving through the space and interacting with social, cultural, and ecological rhythms that are imbedded in this particular locale. Thus, it is important to note that while some rhythms are more place-based and others more mobile, they are not mutually exclusive but feed upon and into one another in the production of a sense of place.

### *Events*

The mobile rhythms of climbing in The Red operate at multiple spatial and temporal scales, with movements in and out of the region corresponding to weather conditions and everyday rhythms that are highly repetitive at a finer scale and include both the mundane rituals of daily life along with the act of climbing. But The Red also

experiences annual events that punctuate the yearly cycle of rock climbing mobilities. “No rhythm is a finite entity”, Vannini (2012:253) explains, “but rather an intersection of open events, some of which are regular and even repetitive in nature; and others which are unique and irregular.” As such, rhythms of mobility, community, rock climbing, and seasonality, fold into one another in the enactment of The Red as climbing place. Annually organized climbing events are, thus, institutionalized rhythms transposed over the seasonal and mobility rhythms that bring climbers to The Red year after year, while also inspiring the mobility of others. The informational mobility of event details as circulated and exchanged via online climbing forums and websites influences the mobilities of individual climbers. Events, thus, exemplify the notion that mobility begets interdependence (Urry, 2000; Hannam, Mostafanezhad, Rickly, 2016), and demonstrate face-the-moment co-presence.

The largest event in The Red is the Rocktoberfest, which marks the height of the climbing season. Rocktoberfest requires registration (with fee) and includes gear vendors (with discounts), technique clinics (each with a separate fee), live music, food, and competitions for prizes. It attracts over 1000 climbers each year and proceeds from the event benefit the Red River Gorge Climbers’ Coalition, which is the main organizer of the event. Illustrating the centrality of the act of climbing for this community, most festival events do not begin until the early evening. While fieldtrips and workshops might start in the morning, it is unspoken that the majority of climbers will spend the daytime hours at the crag and the evening partaking in festivities. Thus, the natural rhythms of place dictate the institutional rhythms of the festival.

As the number of corporate sponsors on the poster illustrates (Figure 4), it is deeply embedded in the rock climbing community, and its related media, and as a result draws a variety of rock climbing identities, including leisure, lifestyle, and professional climbers. The informational mobilities that propel the distribution of the details of this event begin with the organization and publication of arrangements by the Red River Gorge Climbers' Coalition. Further distribution is not only the result of climbers sharing this information (online and by word of mouth) but also as corporations employ their marketing networks and promotional teams to disseminate the event. While most lifestyle climbers who frequent The Red spend much of the autumn season (September through November) there, most leisure climbers schedule their annual visit to The Red to correspond with the festival so that they can partake in their recreational pursuit that maximizes co-presence with the larger climbing community and industry. They align their work/holiday rhythms with the annual occurrence of Rocktoberfest such that their mobilities are disciplined by the informational mobilities (social, political, and corporate) that publicize the event details.

[Insert Figures 4 and 5 about here]

The Red River Reunion, however, is a much smaller event in March that celebrates the re-opening of Miguel's Pizza and the short-lived return of good climbing weather before the heat and humidity of summer dissuade climbers from The Red (see Figure 5). This is a more intimate gathering and rather informally organized, compared to Rocktoberfest, with a few hundred mostly regional climbers and lifestyle climbers attending. The informational mobilities associated with The Reunion are



limited to [redriverclimbing.com](http://redriverclimbing.com) and rarely do details appear in larger climbing forums or media. While Rocktoberfest emphasizes the “rock climber” identity more broadly, The Reunion highlights a sense of community by including those predominantly connected to The Red as place. Even the names of each event suggest their different community purposes. Whereas Rocktoberfest focuses on rock climbing during the region’s peak season, The Reunion draws attention to the specific place and describes a coming together, again, of the local climbing community, demonstrating the significance of co-presence. As a result, lifestyle climbers who favor this region will usually be in attendance at The Reunion, while it is less likely to encounter leisure climbers who travel for the event. Further, while Rocktoberfest and The Reunion are specific to The Red, similar events can be found at many climbing destinations as they manifest from a sense of place that mobility facilitates.

Additionally, throughout the year, albeit most frequently in the spring and autumn, there are other rock climbing community events including trail days (building and maintenance of hiking trails and other trail infrastructure) and an annual inter-regional basketball competition. Indeed, the basketball competition between the Red River Gorge and the New River Gorge of West Virginia illustrates the interweaving of mobility, place, and community at its most playful, but nonetheless evocative and meaningful for climbers. What started in 2011 as a one-time event has since been repeated annually, creating an event that moves between the two locations and fostering a rhythmic connection between them. This competition has been described as a culmination of an informal, inter-regional rivalry for the right to claim “Best Crag in America” (Parker, 2012: 56).

Despite the general proximity of The Red and The New within the Appalachian region (less than 250 miles apart) they exhibit quite different climbing styles. While The Red is a sport climbing destination of overhanging cliff lines comprised of the softer, pocketed Corbin Sandstone, The New is mostly Nuttall Sandstone, a harder rock, which lends itself to a traditional, technical climbing style along its cracked surfaces. Nevertheless, the relative youth of each destination in relation to other US climbing destinations and their geographic location, in the south-eastern region, have resulted in not dissimilar social “vibes”. Both are known among the climbing community for their hospitality, gregarious nature, and antics. Further, among the climbers surveyed at The Red, the most frequently visited climbing destination (after The Red itself) was The New, illustrating the connectivity of these climbing places in climbing circuits.

Rhythms of place are not isolated, but as the mobilities literature suggests, they feed off, entangle with, and interrupt rhythms that course through nearby, as well as distant, places as a result of the networks that connect them. While the climbing styles of these two places are quite distinct, their proximity lends to greater interaction among climbers. But it is not so simple as spatial distance. Despite each place having a distinct local climbing community, the mobility of climbers and the recognition of the quality of climbing at each location motivates their movement, quite frequently, between the two. As such, their communities have greater interaction, cultivating a wider scale of co-presence. And while this does foster more similar community rhythms, it also creates tension and the desire to distinguish themselves beyond their namesake locations and geologic features. The recurring basketball game is one result of this playful tension. In this event, those who

maintain loyalties and local identities to each place are able to employ their mobility, and the mobile rhythms of climbers who move through these destinations, to both come together and reaffirm their sense of place. Therefore, the timing of this event is not surprising. Taking place mid- to late August, just as lifestyle climbers are starting to arrive and prior to the appearance of many leisure climbers, it lies outside the apex of the rock climbing rhythms. Further, the occurrence and outcome of this competition does not remain isolated to these locations, but it is mobile. Informational mobilities disseminate these details, including video montages of the games' highlights, giving weight to the "winner" as social capital.

The Red and The New are both climbing places performed individually, collectively, and in conjunction by climbers whose mobility is not isolated to these localities or to this region, but is nationwide and even international. As climbing places, they are spaces of co-presence, with spheres of co-presence that overlap, thereby demonstrating Urry's (2002: 266) argument that the "relations of co-presence always involve nearness *and* farness, proximity *and* distance, solidity *and* imagination" (see also Wheaton, 2004). These are not distinct climbing communities but subcultural associations with mobile rhythms crafted to favor The Red or The New (or any other climbing place), while not excluding the other. By way of rhythmanalysis, The Red (and likewise The New) can be observed as a climbing place at a number of scales, from the seasonal rhythms that entice climbers at particular times of the year, and the events that are born out of these overlapping rhythms, to the everyday rhythms that extend the social space of climbing from the crag to the campground. The Red exhibits the ways rhythms, mobility, and place fold into one another to produce an embodied sense of place and co-presence for climbers.

## Conclusion

Lefebvre argues that space is animated by overlapping, competing, and merging rhythms, it is a useful perspective from which to approach the ways mobilities facilitate senses of place. However, Edensor and Holloway (2008: 486) note that a limitation of Lefebvre's rhythmanalysis lies in the fact that in its original formulation it can never fully grasp the manner in which non-human, technological, and material rhythms co-evolve with the body as an assemblage to produce an unfolding of space and time. Their re-interpretation has been applied to this rhythmanalysis of *The Red* to emphasize the ongoing relationality of embodied mobilities and bodily rhythms, seasonal rhythms and informational mobilities, collective mobilities and institutional rhythms.

While a sedentary perspective on place correlates mobility with "absences" – "the absence of commitment and attachment and involvement" – and therefore "placeless" (Cresswell, 2006: 31), a mobilities approach understands flows, encounters, and connectivity as emplacement processes, as the means by which place is encountered and enacted. Places are ongoing entanglements of flows. The speed, rhythm, and relationality of these flows "play an important role in performing a sense of place and time that is as unique as the flows themselves" (Vaninini, 2012: 266). A sense of place is not limited to an individual's encounter with situated flows and rhythms, but also draws upon the co-presence of space that elicits a sense of belonging and community. Thus, places require proximities, if only momentary – "the bodily co-presence of people who happen to be in that place at that time, doing activities together, moments of physical proximity between people that make travel

desirable or even obligatory for some” (Hannam et al., 2006: 13). Mobility allows for encounters with place and co-presence. This mobility is itself often rhythmic, interlacing or interrupting local rhythms of place, thereby connecting multiple places of significance. These different rhythms of space and place are “the rhythm analyst’s object of study” (Edensor and Hollaway, 2008: 485). Yet, this paper has sought to extend rhythm analysis further in order to integrate more explicitly with mobilities studies and thereby shift the analysis from the ‘why’ and ‘means’ of mobility to ‘how’ meaning is produced and sustained through an engagement with mobilities and rhythms that influence and fold into one another.

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**Figure 1 – Packing gear, early morning, late November. Photo by Bryan Boyd, used with permission.**



**Figure 1 - Red River Gorge, Mother Lode Crag, late morning, mid-September. Photo by author.**





**Figure 3 - Inside Miguel's Pizza, evening mid-October. Photo by Bryan Boyd, used with permission.**



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## Notes

<sup>1</sup> Rock climbing has witnessed a tremendous diversification of styles and approaches in the last century. Most commonly climbing divided by these styles - traditional climbing, sport climbing, and bouldering. In traditional climbing temporary protective gear are placed in natural rock features (usually cracks) by the lead climber and removed as the second climber ascends. This style emphasizes adventure, danger, and management of risk. Sport climbing developed in areas where, because of the type of rock or overhanging cliff lines, traditional climbing was not possible. It places permanently placed protection, and as a result, utilizes less equipment, so that sport climbers are more focused on endurance, strength, and gymnastic ability. Bouldering takes place within a shorter distance from the ground. No ropes are used, just a “spotter” and “crash pads” for landing; with this minimal use of gear, bouldering emphasizes strength and power.

<sup>2</sup> American climbing routes are classed using the Yosemite Decimal System (YDS), which was developed from German alpinist Willo Welzenbach’s 1920s system (Taylor, 2010). The original system rates climbs in first through sixth class, so that steep trails are in the first class and hiking that involves scrambling and requires some handholds are second and third class. The hardest levels of free-climbing, “where ropes and other gear are used only to stop a fall” are a part of the fifth class, and the sixth class includes aid climbing “where the climber ascends by standing in stirrup ladders attached usually to pitons driven into cracks” (Mellor, 2001, p. 28). In the 1950s a group of Tahquitz climbers took the fifth class and expanded it into grades to apply to rock climbing, specifically, by adding a decimal component so as to describe the difficulty levels (Mellor, 2001). Route grades start at 5.0, and those rated 5.10 and higher are further delineated by a letter grade (a, b, c, d), so that a 5.13a route is easier than a 5.13d and a +/- suffix is sometimes added to be further descriptive (Cinnamon, 1994; Mellor, 2001; Taylor, 2010). The highest grade of route successfully ascended is recorded at 5.15. Grades are based on the most difficult move in the route. These grades are, therefore, quite subjective. While the climber who completes the first ascent assigns a route’s grade, subsequent climbers can challenge it. Adding to this subjectivity, some climbing regions have developed reputations for “soft” and “hard” ratings. Therefore, most guidebooks accompany a route’s grade with a 5-star quality scale. Other countries and regions of the world use different grading and classing systems than the United States for rock climbing, mountaineering, bouldering, ice climbing, etc. For rock climbing, in particular, the most well known systems include the British, UIAA (Central Europe), French, Saxon, Brazilian, and Ewbank (Australia, New Zealand, and South Africa).

<sup>3</sup> This phrasing comes from an anonymous reviewer.