Book Review: The Self Rehabbed Climber

There's something very apt in the timing of being asked to review a book on climbing injuries. This season has seen me feeling the niggles and strains, much as we all do when we spend our time relentlessly either working or playing on the rock, testing our bodies, straining on and off, over and over, day after day. Nothing is too bad that I might go and get some professional help but it certainly seems worse than previous years and has certainly got to the point where I need to do *something*.

It added an extra element of excitement when I opened the parcel, joining the existing air from the reputation this book seems to have gathered since it has been published. Its author, Andrew McVittie, is a qualified and licensed physiotherapist but also an experienced climber and coach and in his own words, offers "an attempt to give something back" with his combined knowledge from these various fields.

He may not be the first to attempt a book related to climbing-specific injuries but does seem to go about it in a different and unique fashion. Written for climbers, rather than coaches, he places the emphasis immediately on the reader: this is your body and it is up to you to feel what's going on and do the ground work to get healthy. Right at the beginning, McVittie makes clear who he is targeting with this text and, importantly, who it is not suitable for; advice well worth heeding. That being said, even those of us not playing a much as we’d like would doubtless benefit from a little rehab for those sore elbows, not to mention being able to convey advice better to our clients.

The book is split into three parts: the first on using the book, the second providing some physiology and the third focusing on a small handful of "some of the most common climbing injuries".

Part 1 involves a number of short, punchy chapters, with bright colourful pictures to maintain engagement and box-out sections for emphasis. While there's plenty of text here, I wouldn't describe it as wordy and is written in a very readable way, clearly designed to flow nicely. It is here that you’ll also find resources to help ascertain the extent of any issues, including charts for monitoring rehab with a QR code to download a copy for the future.

Part 1 also covers model warm ups, including seven pages of warm up exercises, shown through some clear and excellent photographs to guide you. However it is the chapter on Autoregulation that particularly grabbed my attention. So often, climbers seem to want to follow a hard-and-fast copy-and-paste model and McVittie stresses and explains the importance of listening to your own body and adjusting what we do accordingly: “the key aspect of autoregulation is to adjust rep by rep and set by set, according to the feedback you get from your body”. As a coach, that’s music to my ears.

Part 2 digs in to the Physiology that we need to know. Unlike other books on this topic, such as the recently released *Science of Climbing Training*, this section is not particularly in depth but that is not a criticism. Here, McVittie focuses on the *need to know* in order to deal with the topic at hand. Another fairly short section, the Physiology deals with Pain (it’s purpose, how we experience it and when it should stop); Sprains and Strains; Tendinopathy; Tissue Healing; and a fantastic chapter offering an enhanced alternative to the familiar RICE model (no spoilers on this one, you’ll have to get the book). And throughout all of this section, McVittie gives lip service to the inclusion of bio- psycho- social considerations; a popular common model that is gaining in popularity in various coaching literature.

These two sections are dwarfed by the third: Injury Protocols. Right from the outset, the author encourages those that have skipped to this point to go back and start at the beginning. Considering how accessible and easy to read these sections are, you really have no excuses. McVittie focuses on nine of the most common injuries in turn: A2 pulley injuries; wrist injuries; golfer’s elbow/medial epicondylosis; shoulder pain (four separate chapters); persistent mid-back pain; and heel hook injuries.

Each of these ailments are dealt with thoroughly, giving science-based background information before detailing detailed protocols for rehab. QR codes are provided as links to video instructions or the pictures are excellent to follow. Box out sections with bullet points or numbered lists offer highlights for the chapters for emphasis too and periodically, there are inspiring climbing pictures to remind you of what you’re aiming for with all this training.

I have yet to start my own rehab – there’s so much aching right now, I’m not sure which one to start with – but where it seemed daunting and unappealing before, now the thought of getting healthy again seems much more achievable. From a teaching point of view, I’ll certainly be recommending this book to clients too, as and when it is appropriate.