

Gear I Love As A Routesetter

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in [CWA Blog](#)



Climbing gear is an endless, ever-evolving topic. Whether you're a gearhead or not, it's an undeniably fascinating industry feature. As technology provides creative solutions and improves margins of risk, there are some categories of items that are timelessly useful. These are the items we'll be focusing on today.

Article At A Glance

- **Writer:** Andrew Carter Smith, Head Coach at Triangle Rock Club in North Carolina. He specializes in content for both coaches and routesetters.
- **Who Should Read:** This article is for routesetters, managers of routesetting, and folks who manage budgets.
- **What Will You Learn:** The basic, possibly overlooked items that should be part of every routesetter's toolbelt and/or work day.
- **Tie-Ins, Resources, or Further Reading:** In addition to the items in this list, we've got a best practice-based list of items from the most recent rendition of the CWA's Routesetting Guide.

Since this topic is overplayed, I thought I'd shake things up by sharing a few timeless items that have made my life as a routesetter and coach a bit easier. These aren't just another pair of climbing shoes, harness, or some other "essential" piece of job gear. Instead, these are five practical, non-obvious things that I always keep in my bag.

5. Wrist magnets

Coming in at number five is the simple but game-changing wrist magnet. You'll immediately understand the appeal if you've ever juggled a tool belt or kept bits in your pocket while setting. The first time I used one, I was floored by how much smoother and less awkward everything became.

Wrist magnets are strong enough to hold onto bits securely without constantly worrying about dropping them, and while still being able to climb without feeling like they get in the way. One heads-up: the material doesn't always breathe super well, so it can get stinky if you're a sweaty person like I am.

Spraying it down with a shoe spray or finding a way to air it out regularly is a solid move to avoid any unwanted unpleasant odors.

4. Real food (seriously!)

Topics involving food can be a trigger for some people, so please feel free to skip ahead. If it is, please feel free to take a pause and read this awesome article [about the LIGHT Documentary by Caroline Treadway](#).

Bringing "real" food to eat during a setting session is one of the most underrated things a routesetter can do.

Yes, snacks are great, but let's be real—living on protein bars and granola gets old fast and doesn't give your body the same fuel.

I typically bring leftovers from dinner the night before and a few extras like fruit, nuts, or easy-to-eat things like carrots. It might feel like a hassle to pack and eat a proper meal at work, but the difference in how I feel during long, grueling setting days is undeniable.

Remember: setters are athletes, and athletes need fuel to perform well, recover, and feel good while doing it. Don't underestimate the power of a solid meal!

It's understood that this is a touchy topic, and it can be hard to make time for meal prepping. Little changes in this department go a long way. Even drinking more water makes a huge difference. Fresh fruit, especially fruit that doesn't need to be refrigerated, is a great in-between for folks who are more snacky.

3. Quality socks

Let's talk about socks.

I'm not going to wade into the debate about climbing shoes or approach shoes because preferences and needs vary wildly, but one thing that's non-negotiable for me is having comfortable, moisture-wicking socks.

Keeping your feet dry during your day job will save you lots of discomfort and help keep you healthy. Odor isn't the only problem; let your imagination fill in the myriad reasons why not keeping your feet dry day in, day out can be an issue.

When you're wearing approach shoes for hours on end or working on a rope, good socks are an absolute must. Prioritize socks that offer good moisture management, durability, and comfort. Picking a company that has a solid warranty program is also helpful.

2. Skin care

Skin care isn't just for climbers focused on sending hard projects—it's equally important for setters who spend long hours handling holds.

Look for a skin care lotion that combines a bit of non-aluminum antiperspirant with moisturizing ingredients to keep your skin tough but pliable. I apply it before bed a few nights a week, and it's been a game-changer for maintaining my skin's health.

Pro tip: follow the storage instructions carefully. If it gets too hot or cold, the formula can separate or lose its effectiveness. Learn from my mistakes, and keep your lotion at the right temperature instead of in your car's cup holder!

Editor's Note: Without being a routesetter myself, I can back this one up. [When I interviewed Jamie Cassidy, IFSC World Cup Routesetter in 2021](#), he told me that one thing all routesetters could use more of is skin. Take care of yours.

1. Bluetooth ear protection muffs

Finally, the number one item on my list is these life-changing ear protection muffs with built-in Bluetooth speakers.

Unless I'm wearing a helmet for a rope-setting session, you'll often see me wearing these. They're great for drowning out loud noises while you're working, plus the Bluetooth lets me listen to music or podcasts while I set if that is something your team allows and you can do safely. I've even used them as headphones for Zoom calls (though fair warning—the mic isn't amazing). The battery life is wild, I have probably gone 40+ hours of (literal, music-listening) use between charges, which is long enough that I sometimes lose the charging cord! But that is easy, because it is a micro-USB instead of some other, less common cord. If you're looking to make routesetting more enjoyable while protecting your hearing, these are a must-have.

Sidebar: The Pros & Cons of Bluetooth Headphones

Pros:

- Ear pro is ear pro! In addition to hearing damage, loud noises can impact you negatively! I tend to get bad headaches from loud noises on top of any tinnitus-type things I or other people may develop.
- I like the over-ear style since I can pop them on/off much more easily than I can take

earplugs in/out. This can improve communication or otherwise let you hear what is happening around you when you're not actively blasting bolts and set screws!

- Especially when boulder-setting, I find that having some music or a podcast in the background lets my mind be calmer and aids in getting the creative juices flowing when I am trying to come up with ideas for what I want to put on the wall.

Cons

- Doesn't work (well or at all) with a helmet! Especially at-height/on ropes (even if you're belaying/ground crew), many routesetting teams require (or perhaps ought to consider) having their routesetters wear helmets. One team I work with does not require helmets for bouldering, but does require helmets for rope days. In that case, I wear earplugs or a reusable form of earplugs called Loops.
- Can impact communication--as I said above! If I am working with other setters or am speaking with people, I am generally not having the Bluetooth playing anything, and I may even have one or both ears out. Usually, I'll sometimes have music playing during the skeleton-setting portion, then turn them off and use them just as passive ear-pro for forerunning/tweaking holds.
- Sometimes they may not dampen noise enough for what you're doing! EG: Some ear protection is not rated for use in certain contexts. It is important to read any regulations and ratings for safety/PPE equipment you use so that you can use them within the scope of what they are appropriate for! For example, some earplugs may not be rated for decibel levels created by chainsaws. Some people refer to this as the Noise Reduction Rating (NRR), and different products may be better than others (or overkill) in some contexts.

Our Standards: Routesetting Gear for Work at Height

The CWA Certification Program now has a Professional Routesetting (PRS) Certification. For folks all along their career ladder, this new offering from the CWA will give you even more tools to move up throughout routesetting effectively. You can learn about that and our Work at Height (WAH) Certification on the **Certification Dashboard**.

Ready to Get Certified?

About the Author



Carter Smith is a coach, routesetter, and outdoor educator. He is currently the Head Coach for Triangle Rock Club and lives in North Carolina with his partner and 2 dogs. Carter received his Masters in Experiential and Outdoor Education from Western Carolina University in 2022. Carter's passion lies in helping children and adults to use climbing as a vehicle for self discovery.



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