

DID YOU KNOW?

The “Climbing Wall” Is Actually a Volcano

Locals call it the climbing wall, but nothing about it was built. The columns at **Gunko**, Boquete’s best-known climbing sector, are natural basalt — lava from **Volcán Barú** that cooled and cracked into the vertical, geometric columns climbers now scale, just minutes from downtown.

The sport itself arrived by accident. In **May 2004**, **Gary Henning**, an internationally known climber, came to Boquete house-hunting for an investment property and stumbled onto the rock formations nearby. He taught a young local, **Cesar Augusto Meléndez Castillo** — then 21 and freshly graduated as a systems engineer — who became Panama’s first formally trained climber. Cesar cleaned routes, recruited other young Boqueteños, and founded the Boquete Climbing Club, turning Henning’s chance discovery into the country’s first organized climbing scene. In **2006**, a right-hand section of Gunko was cleared to reveal new lines, and a separate area nearby, “Maná,” produced one of the technically hardest routes in the country. By **2010**, Cesar had completed the hardest line of all, “El Ángel Caído” — proof of how far a chance real-estate trip and a volcano’s old lava flows could take a sport.

Sources: Cesar Augusto Meléndez Castillo, “Historia de la Escalada en Roca en Panama” (blog, 2010); Visit Panamá / Tourism Panama, “Boquete, Capital de la Escalada y el Rapel.”