

the **CrossFit**
JOURNAL ARTICLES

Zone on the Rocks

Fueling Performance

Rob Miller



Is it strange that I know exactly how many grams of protein, carbohydrate, and fat I'm eating at every meal and snack?

It was at one time.

Now, even when I'm not actually weighing and measuring my intake, I know how much of each macronutrient I'm putting into my body. It's second nature now. It required only two weeks of strict measuring before I had the clear understanding of exactly what to do to increase athletic performance with the food I was already eating.

The realization that I needed to fuel my body differently began on a stationary bike. Spinning away, getting warm for the day's workout, I heard Coach over the drone of the bike, "We can keep working out like this, Robbie, and we'll achieve some results, but it will take us only so far."

I was intrigued. Three weeks earlier I was more debilitated from a twenty-minute workout than I had been from climbing twenty-one hours straight on the two largest cliffs in North America: the Nose route on El Capitan and the Regular Northwest route on Half Dome. As long as I was doing this CrossFit thing I was interested in going all the way, and willing to make the changes required for total success.

Coach's voice continued, "If you give me your diet, I can guarantee results for another seven to eight years."

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Zone on the Rocks (continued...)

The workouts were hard. I wasn't interested in experiencing the pain of exertion and the nausea of metabolic duress without getting the absolute maximum possible benefit from it.

"You can eat whatever you want, Robbie, you'll just need to become aware of the protein-to-carbohydrate ratio. If you're exacting and make sure you get the right amount of fat to accompany the 7 grams of protein for every 9 grams of carbohydrate at every meal, we'll be able to take this all the way."

That was over three years ago, and since then I've persisted in following Coach's advice. You'll never find me very far from the Zone and that balance any more.

Just do it

It's surprising to me how few CrossFitters take the suggestion for a balanced diet to heart. It's as much a part of the program as the workout of the day. Food fuels the intensity expressed in workouts and underlies our recovery. It's utterly *foundational* to all the rest, yet very few CrossFitters follow through with a commitment to do it.

The resistance is real—and understandable, to an extent. The word "diet" is loaded with assumed infringements on personal freedom. True, discipline is required to change habitual eating patterns, but what about the effort and fortitude to face the WOD with all that you have? Apply what you've learned and practiced on the gym floor to your eating. They're pieces of the same puzzle—complementary, intertwined, and essential to the pursuit of true fitness.

It's about lifestyle. For a CrossFitter, it's about intense physical movement and the food that fuels those rigorous demands. As the puzzle starts to take shape, other choices become easy: what we purchase at the grocery store, what we pack for lunch, how and what we prepare for dinner. Actually, things are simplified with the Zone. Knowing the priorities and realities is clarifying, not complicating.

Whether you're seeking the best possible performance as an athlete, intending a long healthy life, or wanting children or clients to learn by example and experience something valuable about nutrition—whatever motivates you—simply try it.



Justen Sjong's Zone breakfast on the rocks.

Zone on the Rocks (continued...)

Taking it to the rocks

If making these kinds of exacting changes to the portions of protein, carbohydrate, and fat in our meals at home can be difficult, how is the Zone feasible while on vacation or in the field? What's the plan when refrigerators, stocked cupboards, and fresh groceries aren't at our convenience? How do we pack for that kind of situation? What do we pack? Is it even possible?

For those who are savvy enough to have already implemented the Zone template for day-to-day intake but have trouble taking it out into weekend adventures or duties in the field; I've written out a seven-day Zone menu for two. It's simply the list of foods my partner and I ate while establishing the first free ascent of the PreMuir route (grade VI 5.13d, in climber lingo) on Yosemite's El Capitan in May of 2007.

If eating within the parameters of the Zone can be done on a vertical camping trip up the side of a cliff with no cupboard, fridge, or grocery store, than surely it can be done within the convenience of your day-to-day life. Perhaps it could convince you to try it for two weeks.

For a CrossFitter (i.e., one who eats for athletic performance) the Zone ranks up there with some of the other "must do's" in life—things like seeing the Grand Canyon, visiting the Louvre, scuba diving, or skydiving. At some point in your life you just have to do it. If you haven't sincerely tried committing to good nutrition, maybe it's time you looked at your reasons. What are your excuses? How valid are they, really? Are you so invested in them that you're willing to sacrifice your potential?

As an example of the kind of challenge the PreMuir climb represents, let's translate it into CrossFit workout terms. If the PreMuir were a "thruster" workout, let's say it would be 30 thrusters in length. Fifteen of them are at 185 pounds, ten are at 155 pounds, and five are at 135 pounds. If we turned The Nose, another free route on El Cap, into a thruster workout, it would also be 30 thrusters. But only two would be at 195 pounds, one at 185, seven at 135, ten at 95, and ten would at 65. These are two totally different workouts.

Even though the Nose workout has a couple thrusters that are significantly heavier, seventy-five percent of the work is done at very manageable loads. Comparatively, we maintained a very high level of power endurance, which was sustained for an entire week in relation to



Rob Miller counts his nuts.

a route like the Nose. The food we were eating was critical to fueling our stamina and success.

Every situation has its own specific demands. The menu offered here is specific to the needs of two climbers spending seven days on the side of a cliff where the possibility of replenishing our water supply is next to none. The water we leave the ground with is the only water we get! Despite our taste buds, we favor canned food, especially milk, soups, and meats. They're a lot heavier than dehydrated foods but cans include water, they aren't perishable, and they protect the food in the bags we haul, which often get slammed into corners as they're dragged up the side of the cliff.

Access to fresh running water would certainly change my menu choices, but the beauty in this menu is that it actually fueled a real-life athletic feat—two people scaling a cliff 3,000 feet tall using only their gymnastic skills (imagine Spiderman without radioactive powers)

Zone on the Rocks (continued...)

while facing the inherent risk of falling. Ropes and safety gear came into play only in the event of a fall; they did not provide any upward assistance. Mental acumen over all seven days had to be maintained not only for the physical success of the ascent but, more importantly, to insure our combined safety on the wall.

I have many a blurry memory from pre-*Zone* days on the wall. They include bad choices, slow vertical progress, nodding off at belays, and having partners hitting the figurative wall, whacked-out on Jolly Ranchers and Power Bars. I also have vivid memories from those days of being back on the ground after days of climbing and camping on the side of the wall. I remember an overwhelming craving for whole milk and cottage cheese that would last for just as many days as we had been on the wall.

Packing for a multi-day wall climb is much easier after discovering the *Zone*. No more waffling choices because I now know what works while on the wall: 18 blocks of protein, 18 blocks of carbohydrate, and 90 blocks of omega-rich fats per person per day. (My normal at-home block prescription is 16 blocks of protein, 16 blocks of carbohydrate, and 64 blocks of fat for day-to-day training and living.) I used to labor over menu content for climbing trips. I would pack and repack several times before settling on the food I would bring. Precious time and needless stress is omitted by employing the simple parameters of knowing how to eat a balanced meal.

At home

No one appreciates limitations or restrictions being placed upon them. In fact, my favorite climbing partner hates the word “diet” so much (because of those very restrictions), that he’s offered endless banter and ridicule to my well-*Zoned* meal every time we eat. Sarcastic as it is, I’ve confessed to him that I do count my nuts...every handful. Luckily, sarcasm need not get in the way of what works. As it turns out, because he’s experienced the benefits of proper fueling firsthand—in a very demanding environment—he’s a reluctant believer. Consequently, I no longer feel that I have to dine defensively around him.

The next time you’re at the grocery store picking up steaks, simply grab some black beans, peppers, and an avocado to go with them. Maybe you want steel cut oats for breakfast. Just buy some eggs or cottage cheese to help it burn a little further into the morning. If you add some slivered almonds to your bowl of oats, you will

feel nourished and energized as long as you should.

If you’re packing for a backcountry adventure or long ruck and concerned that you can’t go *Zone*, perhaps you’re missing something about how to do it. It actually makes things easier, not more difficult. Got a packet of tuna? Stir it in with a can of soup.

Whether you’re carefully building a meal, planning snacks for your workday, shopping for the fridge at home, or packing for a seven-day climb up a 3,000-foot wall, consider building your meals for performance. It improves your health, saves you time, and provides simplicity to your life. It’s as easy as counting your nuts.



“Zone on the Rocks” continues on the following pages with “PreMuir Zone Menu”...

Rob Miller has been investigating the art of human movement through two decades of extreme sports experience, from snowboarding the backcountry to climbing vertical cliffs over a half mile high. He is internationally recognized for his pioneering free-ascents on many of Yosemite Valley’s big walls, including Washington’s Column, Higher Cathedral Spire, and El Capitan.

Since finding CrossFit several years ago and delving further into the art of human performance, he is climbing less but getting stronger as a big-wall free climber, his passion in life. He maintains that he’s simply training smarter. As a trainer with CrossFit HQ and [CrossFit Santa Cruz](#), he is committed to teaching other climbers—and folks from all walks of life—to train more effectively to reach their goals. He is particularly invested in seeing the next generation learn to optimize their health and performance via the [CrossFit Kids](#) program.

PreMuir Zone Menu

Day 1

Rob	Justen
<u>Snack #1</u>	<u>Snack #1</u>
Think Thin bar (20g P, 27g C, 7g F)	Builders Bar by Clif (20g P, 30g C, 8g F)
12 macadamia nuts	12 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #2</u>	<u>Snack #2</u>
Think Thin bar	Honey Peanut Balance Bar (15g P, 20g C, 6g F)
12 macadamia nuts	8 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #3</u>	<u>Snack #3</u>
1 precooked basil pesto sausage (21g P)	1 precooked basil pesto sausage (21g P)
1/3 bag snap peas (9g C)	1/3 bag snap peas (9g C)
1 apple	2 Ryvita rye crackers (16g C)
36 salted cashews	36 sweet & spicy cashews
<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
Chicken (broth) noodle soup (28g C)	Chicken (broth) noodle soup (28g C)
1 precooked basil pesto sausage (21g P)	1 precooked basil pesto sausage (21g P)
36 Marcona almonds	36 Marcona almonds
<u>Snack #4</u>	<u>Snack #4</u>
1 string cheese (8g P)	Soft cheese (Betabel) (7g P, 9g F)
4 macadamia nuts	1/4 bar dark chocolate (10g C)
1/4 bar dark chocolate (10g C)	w/ evening tea
w/ evening tea	

Day 2	
Rob	Justen
<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Breakfast</u>
1 cup cottage cheese (28g P)	1 cup Greek strained yogurt (13g P, 6g C, 18gF)
1 apricot-mango bran muffin (35g C)	1 Cup GoLean high-protein cereal (13g P, 30g C, 1g F)
1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee) 6g P, 9g C, 2g F	1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee) 6g P, 9g C, 2g F
25 macadamia nuts	20 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #1</u>	<u>Snack #1</u>
Builders Bar by Clif	1 string cheese
12 macadamia nuts	1 ProMax Bar (20g P, 38g C, 8g F)
	16 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #2</u>	<u>Snack #2</u>
Think Thin Bar (add 12 Mac Nuts)	Honey Peanut Balance Bar (add 8 Mac Nuts)
<u>Snack #3</u>	<u>Snack #3</u>
1 string Cheese	Honey Peanut Balance Bar
1/3 bag snap peas	8 macadamia nuts
5 macadamia nuts	
<u>Snack #4</u>	<u>Snack #4</u>
Miso soup (8g P, 18g C, 6g F)	Miso soup (8g P, 18g C, 6g F)
1/2 can smoked trout (6g P)	1/2 can smoked trout (6g P)
8 macadamia nuts	8 macadamia nuts
<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
1/2 can premium chicken stew (17g P, 24g C, 21g F)	1/2 can premium chicken stew (17g P, 24g C, 21g F)
<u>After Dinner</u>	<u>After Dinner</u>
4 oz beef summer sausage (18g P, 20g F)	4 oz beef summer sausage (18g P, 20g F)
1/2 bar milk chocolate (22g C)	1/2 bar milk chocolate (22g C)
w/evening tea	w/evening tea

Zone on the Rocks (continued...)

Day 3	
Rob	Justen
<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Breakfast</u>
1 cup high-protein cereal	1 cup high-protein cereal
1/4 cup canned milk (with cereal)	1/4 cup canned milk (with cereal)
1 string cheese	2 soft cheese (10g P, 20g F)
1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)	1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)
25 macadamia nuts	10 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #1</u>	<u>Snack #1</u>
2 string cheese	1/2 small bag jerky (16g P)
1 apple	3 pieces dried & sweetened mango (21g C)
10 macadamia nuts	10 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #2</u>	<u>Snack #2</u>
Think Thin Bar (add 12 Mac Nuts)	Honey Peanut Balance Bar (add 20 Cashews)
<u>Snack #3</u>	<u>Snack #3</u>
1 can kippered snacks (herring) (12g P)	4 Mini Cheeses 20gP/40gF
1 small pita pocket (13g C)	1 small pita pocket (13g C)
10 mini carrots (3-4g C)	40 mini carrots
10 macadamia nuts	
<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
1/2 large can minestrone soup (28g C)	1/2 large can minestrone soup (28g C)
1/2 large can premium white chicken (36g P)	1/2 large can premium white chicken (36g P)
20 mini carrots	20 mini carrots
48 Marcona almonds	48 Marcona almonds
1 oz Jameson Scotch whiskey	1 oz Jameson Scotch whiskey
Nightly tea	Nightly tea

Zone on the Rocks (continued...)

Day 4	
Rob	Justen
<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Breakfast</u>
1 bagel (36g C)	1 bagel (36g C)
15 slices low-fat salami (21g P, 16g F)	15 slices low-fat salami (21g P, 16g F)
1 oz Vermont sliced cheddar (7g P)	1 oz Vermont sliced cheddar (7g P)
2 tbl cream cheese (18g F)	2 tbl cream cheese (18g F)
5 macadamia nuts	15 salted cashews
1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)	1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)
<u>Snack #1</u>	<u>Snack #1</u>
Builders Bar by Clif	Honey Peanut Balance Bar
36 almonds	8 macadamia nuts
<u>Lunch</u>	<u>Lunch</u>
Miso soup	Miso soup
1/2 bagel	1/2 bagel
2 tbl cream cheese	2 tbl cream cheese
10 slices low-fat salami	10 slices low-fat salami
12 salted cashews	12 salted cashews
<u>Snack #2</u>	<u>Snack #2</u>
Think Thin bar	ProMax bar
36 almonds	1 string cheese
	16 macadamia nuts
<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
Italian sausage soup (16g P, 30g C, 12g C)	Mexican tortilla soup (8g P, 28g C, 14g F)
1 string cheese	10 slices low-fat salami
15 macadamia nuts	15 salted cashews
Evening tea	Evening tea

Zone on the Rocks (continued...)

Day 5	
Rob	Justen
<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Breakfast</u>
1 cup cooked oats (27g C)	1 cup cooked oats (27g C)
1/4 cup canned milk (with oats)	1/4 cup canned milk (with oats)
1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)	1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)
1 mini soft cheese (5g P, 10g F)	4 mini soft cheese (20g P, 40g F)
1/2 small bag beef jerky (16g P)	
20 macadamia nuts	
<u>Snack #1</u>	<u>Snack #1</u>
1 ProMax bar	Honey Peanut Balance Bar
36 almonds	8 macadamia nuts
1 string cheese	
	<u>Snack #2</u>
	Honey Peanut Balance Bar
	8 macadamia nuts
<u>Lunch</u>	<u>Lunch</u>
1 bagel	1 bagel
15 slices low-fat salami	15 slices low-fat salami
1 oz cheddar cheese	1 oz cheddar cheese
2 tbl cream cheese	2 tbl cream cheese
<u>Snack #2</u>	<u>Snack #3</u>
Think Thin bar	Think Thin bar
36 almonds	12 macadamia nuts
<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
1/2 large can lentil vegetable soup (32g C)	1/2 large can lentil vegetable soup (32g C)
1/2 can tuna in olive oil (18g P, 14g F)	1/2 can tuna in olive oil (18g P, 14g F)
1 oz cheddar cheese	1 oz cheddar cheese
20 salted cashews	20 salted cashews

Day 6	
Rob	Justen
<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Breakfast</u>
1 cup cooked oats	1 cup high-protein cereal
4 mini soft cheeses	1 string cheese
1/4 cup canned milk (with oats)	1/4 cup canned milk (with cereal)
1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)	1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)
15 almonds	20 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #1</u>	<u>Snack #1</u>
1/2 small bag beef jerky (17g P)	1/2 small bag beef jerky (17g P)
3 pieces sweetened & dried mango	3 pieces sweetened & dried mango
12 macadamia nuts	12 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #2</u>	<u>Snack #2</u>
Think Thin bar	Cookies and Cream ProMax bar
36 almonds	1 string cheese
	16 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #3</u>	<u>Snack #3</u>
Miso soup	Miso soup
1/2 can smoked trout	1/2 can smoked trout
24 salted cashews	24 salted cashews
<u>Dinner</u>	<u>Dinner</u>
1 can southwestern vegetable soup (23g C)	1 can southwestern vegetable soup (23g C)
1 can tuna (32g P)	1 can tuna (32g P)
Rye cracker crumbs (from hauling bag; 10g C)	Rye cracker crumbs (from hauling bag; 10g C)
20 macadamia nuts	20 macadamia nuts
1 oz Jameson Scotch Whiskey	1 oz Jameson Scotch Whiskey
<u>Snack #4</u>	<u>Snack #4</u>
2 mini soft cheese	2 mini soft cheese
1/4 bar milk chocolate	1/4 bar milk chocolate
w/ evening tea	w/ evening tea

Zone on the Rocks (continued...)

Day 7	
Rob	Justen
<u>Breakfast</u>	<u>Breakfast</u>
1 small can pineapple (28g C)	1 cup cooked oats
3 mini soft-cheeses	1/4 cup canned milk (with oats)
3/4 oz beef jerky	1/2 small bag jerky
10 macadamia nuts	1 string cheese
1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)	1/4 cup canned milk (in coffee)
	25 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #1</u>	<u>Snack #1</u>
Think Thin bar	ProMax bar
12 macadamia nuts	16 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #2</u>	<u>Snack #2</u>
Honey Peanut Balance Bar	Builders Bar
24 cashews	12 macadamia nuts
<u>Snack #3</u>	<u>Snack #3</u>
Rocky Road Balance Bar	Rocky Road Balance Bar

Meat Lover's pizza and beer upon arriving back on the ground!