

The Leader Does Not Fall

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Introduction

Of all the athletic competitions I have observed or participated in, one stands out to me as uniquely demanding and fascinating for a variety of reasons.

I would like to take you into the world of this exciting, and uncommon sport. Imagine yourself as an elite competitor, at a regional contest, for which you have trained for months. You have traveled to the event, held in a neighboring state, with some essential gear, your coach and a few supporters.

You join the other athletes prior to the specified start time, in a room or cordoned-off area aptly named "Isolation". You must go directly to isolation when you arrive, without even glancing in the direction of the competition venue. At the appointed time, isolation is "closed" and no one else can enter except the competition officials, not even the coaches. In isolation, you can talk with others in the restricted area – including your own teammates – but no electronics with Wi-Fi or cellular capability are allowed. You must turn in your cell phone when you arrive, and an official remains in isolation with you and the other athletes to ensure the rules are being followed.

Once the competition begins, athletes are called by name in an order pre-arranged by the organizers. Typically, 2 or 3 competitors will be called at one time and once they leave the isolation area, they will not return.

You have a designated official who accompanies you from isolation, at your appointed time, to the competition venue. Since it is of utmost importance that you not see the venue prior to competing, the official may require you cover your eyes, while being led by the hand to a seat positioned so your back is to the "field of play".

You must sit in the seat and continue to avert your eyes while another athlete, of your same gender and approximate age, tackles the challenge in hopes of a successful result. As you sit and wait, it is natural for you to feel some disappointment if the cheers of the spectators make it clear your predecessor has been successful, since

that outcome will directly affect your own results – even if that competitor is your own teammate.

When the bell signals the end of the round, it is time for you to stand up from your chair and interface with another event official. You will have one minute to complete pre-competition safety checks and to listen to the official give any specific instructions needed, before the bell signals the beginning of your allotted time.

At the sound of the bell, you can finally turn to face the “field of play” – a 30-foot high indoor rock climbing wall. (SLIDE 2)

You take several seconds to visually review the route, mapping out a plan in your mind while using your hands to do some “air-climbing” in preparation for the real thing. Another official is serving as your anchor (also known as the belayer), wearing a harness just like yours and connected to you by your climbing rope. You ask the anchor if he is “on belay”, which prompts the response of “belay on”. This is how the belayer lets you know it is safe to start up the route.

Your goal is to complete the climb “on-sight”, with no previous knowledge of the route, with no assistance from your coach or any spectator, without resting on the ropes – and without any technical errors or falls. If you can do all that, you just might find yourself in the running for a first place finish. (SLIDE 3)

Competitive rock climbing has become my youngest child’s passion. My 16-year-old daughter, Maggie spends 10-15 hours every week training at Rise Up, our local climbing gym in downtown Lynchburg, preparing for the type of competition I have just described.

I decided to write my SPHEX paper on rock climbing for two reasons:

1. People who ask me about my daughter's rock climbing activities are often equally fascinated by – and clueless about – the sport. I can relate to this because I knew next to nothing about competitive rock climbing before Maggie took up the sport several years ago. Which leads me to second reason I chose this topic.
2. My daughter's favorite sport has its place on a spectrum that connects back to at least the 1800's, when rock climbing was primarily something mountaineers learned to do out of necessity, just in case those skills were needed during an alpine mountain climb. The evolution of rock climbing as a sport unto itself in the 20th century weaves together many interesting aspects of American life. The colorful people, the iconic locations, the technology that transformed the sport – as well as some controversies that arose over the past century – are all pieces of the puzzle that make up the history of rock climbing.

Beginnings

For many years, rock climbing was primarily considered just one of the many skills needed by mountaineers, rather than an athletic activity in its own right. Although it eventually began to be recognized for its own merits, rock climbing was initially seen as a poor relation or stepchild to the prestigious sport of mountain climbing.

In Britain, poachers of the eggs of nesting sea birds developed early rock climbing skills on the sea cliffs. Some of those skilled cliff scalers moved inland in the 1900's when industrial job opportunities were created in urban areas, but their desire to scale high walls of stone remained.

Mountaineering was almost exclusively a sport for the very wealthy – those that could afford overseas travel, expensive equipment and the luxury of extended leisure time. Some in the British working class saw rock climbing as a sport they could call their own – something they could do on a day off of work, without traveling far. The new railway networks and roads accessible by bike or on foot, made it feasible to explore the peaks and cliffs in England's Lake District and other rural areas. Additionally, the physical exertion and the technical challenges made the sport of rock climbing particularly attractive to some members of the working class.

In the United States, rock climbing of today can be most directly traced back to the 1930's. Certainly aspects of today's rock climbing were used first by Native American scouts, and later by surveyors and prospectors, but technical climbing came later, creating opportunities that early explorers could not have imagined.

An 1860's survey team tasked with documenting the Sierra Nevada Mountains in California were able to get to the top of some of the larger peaks, but the team concluded that one of the mountains was, without question, unconquerable. The California Geological Survey team, which was led by Josiah Whitney, the namesake of Mt. Whitney, described Half Dome in Yosemite Valley as "perfectly inaccessible, being probably the only one of all the prominent points about the Yosemite which has never been, and never will be, trodden by the human foot".

This unambiguous claim, that Half Dome would “never” be climbed, was proven wrong – first by climbers using fixed ropes and bolts hammered mercilessly into the stone, then by non-climbers using handrails and foot rests installed to allow thousands to ascend the Dome each year.

This type of commercialized scarring of the natural beauty of mountains was in direct opposition to the philosophy of John Muir, the great Scottish-American outdoorsman and founder of the Sierra Club. (SLIDE 4)

Muir is considered by many as one of the patron saints of American environmental activity, and is referred to by some as the “Father of the National Parks”. John Muir’s priority was to put himself in harmony with nature, and to “leave it as it was”.

Over time, most rock climbers moved towards Muir’s preferred “clean” climbing methods, using technology for safety, but leaving little or no trace behind. Today, there are even a small handful of climbers – including the very talented 29-year-old named Alex Honnold - who have made it to the top of Half Dome without any gear at all – a method simply called “free soloing”. (SLIDE 5)

The varied climbing methods and philosophies seen at Yosemite offer a roadmap of the evolution of rock climbing over the past century.

Early in the 20th century, so-called aid climbing was commonplace. The main goal was to “get to the top” and it did not matter much how you got there.

Sketches done by a climber named George Flagg, who climbed Huntington Ravine in New Hampshire in 1910, document some techniques that would be frowned upon in later years. (SLIDE 6)

Pulling a lesser skilled climber up the pitch seems to miss the point, but was part of the process in the early days. Even pushing a climber over a difficult ledge was not considered unconventional. (SLIDE 7)

It was not uncommon for bolts to be hammered into rock faces by one climber and left behind as permanent aids for future climbers. Although the bolts were intended primarily to guide the ropes and provide safety, some people used the bolts as footholds, allowing them to literally step up the side of the mountain with little skill. Early on, disputes arose between climbers that used different methods – some emphasizing style and physical skill, and others primarily focused on “getting to the top”. (SLIDE 8) (EXHIBITS)

Although this cartoon provides an exaggerated view of this divergence of styles, it provides a glimpse into the varied schools of thoughts that have always existed in the climbing world.

As time went on, climbing techniques became more sophisticated. Robert Underhill, a Harvard professor brought the important European climbing method of “belaying” to the America west during his 1931 visit to the Sierra Nevada Range.

“Belay” is a nautical term meaning “stop” or “enough”, but in the climbing world, “belay” refers to the act of securing a rope to protect a climbing partner by, hopefully, arresting a fall. In the early days of climbing, belaying consisted of one person wrapping a rope around the hips and holding on tight, while the other person climbed with a rope tied around his waist. (SLIDE 9)

In the 1930’s, climbers primarily used hemp rope, which, in hindsight, had many drawbacks. The natural fibers of hemp rope had a tendency to hold moisture inside while appearing dry on the outside, leading to breakage from rot. Hemp rope’s low tensile strength, in general, meant that it might not withstand the force created by a free falling climber. As described in the book, *American Rock*, the natural fiber rope was only expected to “hold a sliding fall on a snowfield...but the huge forces that accumulate with a falling body would likely sever the rope.” (SLIDE 10)

For this reason, the mantra during the pre-World War II days was “The Leader Does Not Fall” (which is also the title of this paper). Not “the leader *should* not fall” but “the leader *does* not fall” – because in those days if the leader fell, it was likely that the hemp rope would break, possibly not only sending the leader to his death, but also dooming climbers below.

The following illustrations show the locations of the leader, first while climbing with a stationary anchor on a ledge below, (SLIDE 11) and then while belaying another climber from above. (SLIDE 12)

The second sketch, especially, shows the potential dangers if the leader was to slip and fall, causing the line to break while climbers below were suspended on the rock face. The likely outcome would be perilous for all.

Therefore, “The Leader Does Not Fall” became the refrain of the day during the early days of rock climbing.

The leader must not only be the *best* climber in the group, but the *smartest*, *bravest* and *calmest* one as well.

The inherent dangers in these early methods of lead climbing are important to understand because the hardest routes conquered by the prewar climbers pale in comparison to the accomplishments of the top climbers today. Except for those few daring individuals who practice free soloing and climb without ropes – today’s climbers have reliable safety equipment to fall back on and, as such, can push themselves to limits that early climbers could not have imagined.

As such, comparing the difficulty of prewar climbing accomplishments with climbs done in the 1950’s and later is not an apples-to-apples assessment.

Change was just around the corner, however. The wars years would be bring sweeping changes to just about every aspect of American life – and rock climbing was no exception. (SLIDE 13)

World War II

The advent of World War II put recreational rock climbing on hold, but it did not stop the advancement of the sport. In fact, the technological innovations of the war years greatly contributed to the future of rock climbing.

Arguably the most important wartime climbing-related development was nylon rope. Early Axis victories resulted in the drying up of the U.S. supply of both Italian and Manila hemp rope. In order to prepare for the possibility of mountain warfare, the American War Department charged several of the country's best climbers with finding and testing synthetic alternatives to natural fiber rope.

At the 1939 New York World's Fair, many Americans were first introduced to a thermoplastic material called nylon, which had been developed by a scientist at DuPont. Its first commercial use was in a nylon-bristled toothbrush; soon it was used in fabric and, most famously, in women's stockings, offering an alternative to expensive and delicate silk stockings.

Lore surrounded the origin of the name "nylon", with the most common, but inaccurate, explanation being that the name was a merging of "New York" and "London". ("NY" for New York and "LON" for London.) (SLIDES 14 – 15)

However, according to DuPont Company history, the name was originally intended to be "No-Run" - as in "no unraveling". Thanks to the lawyers, that name had to be modified, to avoid making a claim that – as most women will attest – was unjustified. After tinkering by various DuPont officials, the name morphed from "No-Run" to "nylon". (SLIDE 16)

In late 1942, no one was happier than a brand-new army bureaucrat named Bob Bates, when a coil of nylon climbing rope arrived at the War Department. Prior to joining the army, Bates was an English teacher from New Hampshire's Phillips Exeter Academy. He also happened to be one of the world's most accomplished mountaineers. So when the experimental synthetic rope was delivered to his Washington DC office, he literally took matters into his own hands.

After anchoring one end of the nylon rope to a radiator, Bates tied the other end of the rope to his waist and flung himself out of his upper floor office window. He started rappelling down the side of the building, hoping to learn that the synthetic rope was more elastic than the traditional natural fiber ropes used by climbers for decades. He only had a few minutes to test out the new rope, however, because his experiment was interrupted when a secretary in a lower level office, who thought she was witnessing a suicide, let out a blood-curdling scream. Several high-ranking military officers came running, bringing Bob Bates' first test of nylon climbing rope to an abrupt end.

However, it quickly became clear that nylon climbing rope was not just a substitute – but also a significant improvement – over traditional hemp rope. The synthetic rope was lighter, more flexible, absorbed less water and was much stronger. Nylon has tensile strength and elasticity that make it feasible for a leader to fall without breaking the rope – and this changed the climbing game for good. (EXHIBITS)

Nylon rope – and the talented men who learned to put it to good use – would play a critical role during the final months of World War II.

Back in 1939, prior to the United States' entrance into the war, the Soviets invaded Finland. Although they were vastly outnumbered, the Finnish soldiers were victorious over the Soviets in the first months after the invasion. Dressed in white camouflage uniforms and mounted on skis, the Finns could move quickly, and in near silence, through wooded areas covered in deep snow. The Russians were not equipped to follow them and, as a result, the Finnish soldiers were able to ambush enemy convoys, cut supply lines and ultimately destroy several Soviet divisions.

Even though Finland eventually surrendered to the dominant Soviets in March of 1940, the Finnish soldiers' ability to defend themselves in mountainous conditions impressed the Americans, who were watching the progress of the war from afar. A movement was soon underway for the U.S. Army to prepare soldiers to fight in high altitude and snowy conditions, in the increasingly likely scenario of a winter war in Europe.

Charles Minot Dole – known as Minnie Dole – was the Chairman of the National Ski Patrol in the years leading up to the United State’s entrance into the war. Minnie was passionate about the need to train a mountain division and he pleaded the case directly to the Army Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall. Dole’s case was persuasive and the War Department soon established the 87th Infantry Division, which later expanded to become the 10th Mountain Division. (SLIDE 17)

For four years, Dole took a leading role in recruiting and training the U.S. mountain troops, all without receiving compensation. He recruited some of the finest mountaineers, skiers and climbers from around the country, as well as many others with an aptitude for the outdoors and a desire to learn. In all, Dole helped recruit more than 7,000 men to the 10th Mountain Division.

The soldiers that would make up the 10th Mountain Division, trained in snow conditions on Mount Rainier near Fort Lewis in Washington State and at the newly built Camp Hale in the Colorado Rockies. Rock climbing instructors were dispatched to Elkins, WV to teach soldiers the intricacies of belaying and rappelling techniques. Members of the American Alpine Club and the National Ski Patrol advised the troops about climbing equipment, cold weather clothing and camping techniques.

In early 1945, the 10th Mountain Division was activated and sent to the North Apennine Mountains of Italy to face the Germans. The Germans were positioned along the Mount Belvedere ridge. (SLIDE 18)

Other Allied forces had attempted to secure Mt. Belvedere, but all had failed. The 10th Mountain Division was tasked with taking the ridgeline to the west, known to the Americans as “Riva Ridge”. Riva Ridge was used as a lookout by the Germans, providing a clear view of Mt. Belvedere, so gaining control of the ridge was critical. For several weeks, the 10th Mountain Division soldiers patrolled the area, some on foot and some on skis, preparing for the attack.

The Germans considered the 1,500 foot vertical ascent of Riva Ridge impossible to scale, so they only protected it with a small number of troops. On February 18, 1945, 700 well-trained members of the 10th Mountain Division made a daring night climb, using five carefully prepared climbing routes, two of which required the use of fixed ropes. The Germans were caught completely by surprise and by morning the Allies had control of portions of Riva Ridge. Opening up this gateway to Italy helped bring the war to an end in Europe.

The vision of Minnie Dole had been realized, and the immensely talented 10th Mountain Division troops had made a significant impact on the war effort. Nearly 20,000 men served in the 10th Mountain Division in Italy from January to May 1945; nearly 1000 of those were killed in action.

The list of 10th Mountain Division heroes who survived and returned home to achieve great things, is long and impressive. A sampling includes:

1. David Brower - the first executive director of the Sierra Club
2. Bill Bowerman – legendary University of Oregon track coach and co-founder of Nike
3. Paul Petzoldt – founder of NOLS - the National Outdoor Leadership School
4. Bob Dole - who was severely wounded in action in the Apennine Mountains, and went on to serve in the Senate and run for president
5. Freidle Pfeifer – who returned to Colorado as soon as the war was over to follow through on his dream to build a ski village that could be enjoyed by the public. Fellow 10th Mountain Division veterans, Percy Rideout and John Litchfield, joined forces with Pfeifer to open the Aspen Ski Resort and School within a year of the war's end.
6. Fellow 10th Mountain veterans, Pete Seibert, Bob Parker, Ben Duke, Dick Wilson and William Brown established Vail Mountain Ski Resort, where a run name "Riva Ridge" memorializes the successful mountain assault.

In addition to these impressive men, many others were diverted by World War II from the “peaceful victories” of their pre-war lives, to confrontations on enemy territory with much higher stakes. When the war ended, many soldiers came home to the United States hoping to return to their quiet, predictable lives. But others, bitten by the adventure and travel bug during the war years, longed for new endeavors – including for some, high elevation pursuits.

Yosemite

For those interested in rock climbing, some sought out the classic peaks in Europe, once peace returned to the continent. The Dolomites in Italy and Chamonix in France were places frequented by climbers from around the world. In the U.S., the Shawangunk Ridge in upstate New York, also known as the “Gunks” became a favorite spot for New England climbers. But for a certain breed of American climbers, the true climbing mecca was in California. In the 1950’s and 60’s, an epic gathering place for the adventure-minded, evolved in the western Sierra Nevada Mountains, at Yosemite National Park. (SLIDE 19)

The characters that spent time in the Yosemite Valley in the middle part of the 20th century were as varied as they were fascinating. Royal Robbins and Yvon Chouinard were two of the pioneers of the so-called “clean climbing” movement. They were climbing partners and allies, with comparable skills, priorities and values. And the tracks of their lives were remarkably similar.

Then there was a wild card – Warren J. Harding. Harding was a strong and courageous athlete, with a climbing philosophy often out of sync with the sage masters, Robbins and Chouinard. Most conflicts came down to the simple question of “is the most important thing to *get* to the top, or is *how* you get there the most important?” For Warren Harding and his cronies, the only thing that mattered was getting there, and he prided himself on using some unorthodox methods to achieve his goals.

The early protection practice of drilling bolts into the rock face was replaced over time when pitons were developed. (SLIDE 20)

A piton is a metal spike that could be hammered into a rock crevice. Pitons have a ring or eye on the end, which allows the climbing rope to be braced to the piton, typically by a spring-loaded carabiner. (EXHIBITS)

Early pitons were made of malleable metal, which was well suited for the irregular cracks in European limestone walls. Soft steel would deform to the shape of the crack, wedging the piton in tightly. Once pounded into the rock face, the misshapen piton could not be easily removed and reused, so they would typically be left behind for the next climber as a fixed anchor.

The malleable pitons did not work as well on the massive granite walls in Yosemite. The development of pitons made from chrome-molybdenum steel ("chrome molly") changed the game for American climbers. Chrome-molly pitons were very hard, and could be wedged into cracks in the granite walls without the piton losing its shape, making it much easier to remove and reuse them.

Chrome-molly pitons were a game-changer because their use made the concept of "clean climbing" possible. A lead climber could set a route using pitons for safety, and a following climber could remove the pitons once they were no longer needed, leaving the mountain face more or less unscarred.

Royal Robbins (SLIDE 21)

A quote from Royal Robbins provides some insight into his school of thought:

- “What a pleasure to climb a fine route and find no traces of those who have come before and to leave no mark of one’s passage...What a pleasure to take one’s time and work out the placements not obvious—to put one’s creative energies to work fashioning a lead that is both safe and silent.”

Royal Robbins was born in 1935 and got off to a tough start on the streets of Los Angeles. After spending some time in juvenile detention, he wised up and found a new crowd to hang around with – the boy scouts. Although Robbins claims he was not a very good scout and did not earn many merit badges, he was naturally drawn to the outdoor activities “probably because I was so bad at everything else”. In 1948, Robbins was selected to join scouts from 35 other L.A. based troops on what would prove to be life-changing backpacking trip to Yosemite National Park. On that trip, Robbins tried rock climbing for the first time and quickly learned that – although he was only an average hiker – his rock climbing skills were something else altogether. He loved the thrills and challenges of the heights, and before the end of the trip he was hooked.

Although he honed his climbing skills in southern California on Tahquitz Peak, it did not take him long to figure out that the place to be for serious climbers was where it all started for him - Yosemite. Royal Robbins became one of the “regulars” at Camp 4 – the infamous campground on the north side of the Yosemite Valley, where hordes of climbers would spend months-on-end camping, climbing, partying – and often trying to stay a few steps ahead of the park rangers, who did not hold the climbing commune in high regard. (SLIDE 22)

Robbins was a big proponent of “climbing in your mind” and thinking through each problem before attempting it. Robbins said he climbed Half Dome for two years in his mind before conquering it for the first time in 1955.

Here is another Robbins quote: “Before the deed comes the thought. Before the achievement comes the dream. Every mountain we climb, we first climb in our mind.”

It was with clean climbing methods that Royal Robbins and his partners completed several first ascents in Yosemite, including the first ascent of the northwest face of Half Dome in 1958.

In 1967, Robbins returned from a climbing trip in England with manufactured “chock stones”, also known as “nuts”, which provided another important step on the journey to clean climbing in Yosemite and elsewhere in the United States. Chocks were much less likely to leave permanent scars on the rock face – unlike bolts and pitons – and as such, over time they became the favored climbing aid for Robbins and others. **(EXHIBITS)**

In 1968, Robbins completed a legendary 10-day solo ascent of the Muir Wall on El Capitan, which solidified his mythical status in the climbing community. Perhaps buoyed by the success he found on rock faces, and the admiration he received when he would return to the ground, Robbins went on to achieve great heights in other endeavors as well.

Royal Robbins met his wife, Liz when she was working at Yosemite’s iconic Ahwahnee Hotel. In the 1960’s and 70’s, the conservative hotel management did not approve of the staff hanging out with the climbers living at Camp 4. To Liz, this only made the climbers more interesting, and soon Royal was teaching her to rock climb, and Liz happily left the Ahwahnee Hotel behind. Not long after his solo ascent of El Capitan, Robbins and his wife, Liz founded a very successful outdoor clothing company, which to this day operates under the name of “Royal Robbins”. The story goes that, when Liz and Royal saw a picture taken of them at the top of Half Dome, after Liz had become the first woman to successfully climb that route, they looked at their worn t-shirts and cut-off jeans, and said to each other “maybe we should get into the outdoor clothing business”. **(SLIDE 23)**

So they started Royal Robbins apparel company, and ran it until 2003 when they sold it. At the time of the sale, Royal Robbins was in 18 countries and had over \$10 million in annual sales.

To this day, as he nears 80 years old, Royal Robbins continues to spend much of his time outdoors.

Yvon Chouinard (SLIDE 24)

Yvon Chouinard, a few years younger than Royal Robbins, was born in Maine in 1938 and moved with his family to Burbank, California as a young boy. He had a rough time in school early on, because he barely spoke any English and he was routinely teased because his name, Yvon, was thought to be, according to many of his unenlightened southern California classmates – a “girl’s name”. Chouinard found solace in the outdoors, hunting along the Los Angeles River and eventually joining a falconry club – where he learned to rappel down the side of mountains to get to nests.

Chouinard became a prolific rock climber, and in the 60’s and 70’s, he took part in several significant “first ascents” in the Tetons, the Canadian Rockies, on Mount Kilimanjaro and, most notably, in Yosemite.

His French-Canadian father was a handy man, mechanic and plumber, which may help explain why – when Chouinard wants to solve a problem – he often takes matters into his own hands.

In the late 1950’s, Chouinard bought a second-hand coal-fired forge and started making his own hardened steel pitons from the blades of old harvesters. To support his surfing and climbing lifestyle, he sold pitons out of the back of his car for \$1.50 each. The climbers in Yosemite especially loved the sturdy pitons, and the success of his sales efforts led Chouinard eventually to found the Chouinard Equipment Company in 1966 in an abandoned slaughterhouse in Ventura, California. (SLIDE 25)

Yvon Chouinard along with his business partner and fellow climbing guru, Tom Frost, later invented an aluminum chockstone called Hexentrics. (EXHIBITS)

The patented Hexentrics were designed to minimize rock scarring, are still manufactured today, but not by a company named "Chouinard Equipment". In 1989, Chouinard Equipment Limited filed for bankruptcy to protect against equipment related liability lawsuits. The company's assets were eventually acquired by the employees, who reorganized the company under the name "Black Diamond Equipment, Ltd." (SLIDE 26)

No need to feel sorry for Yvon Chouinard, however. He continued to focus on the sister company, which he had started in the early 1970's. That company – Patagonia – grew tremendously in the 1980's when its products were offered not only in retail stores, but also by mail and through wholesale channels. (SLIDE 27)

The rise of the Internet in the past 20 years has only added fuel to the Patagonia fire, and annual sales eventually topped \$500 million. Although others now handle the day-to-day operations of Patagonia, Chouinard still lives near the Ventura, California facility and checks in on a regular basis. More importantly, he is out and about, getting ideas from their customer base – the outdoor enthusiasts of the next generation. (EXHIBITS)

Warren Harding

Now it is time to turn to a third Yosemite climber, one who frequently found himself at odds with Robbins, Chouinard and others – and seemed to love every minute of the conflict.

Warren J. Harding is not to be confused with Warren G. Harding, former resident of the White House and prolific author of steamy love letters. This Warren Harding (SLIDE 28) was born in 1925, and was raised in the Lake Tahoe area. He was attracted to hiking when he realized in his youth that he was a self-described “terrible fisherman”. In 1953, he took up technical climbing – where he found his true calling. Harding once said that rock climbing was the first thing he was really good at because he “could only do what required brute stupidity”. A high level of “brute stupidity” is not something you would expect to hear most rock climbers boast about, but Harding was clearly not like most.

Warren Harding was short and stocky. He had slicked back hair, a high voice – and was well known for his hard drinking and wild womanizing. He was quite a character and – although he found success on the big walls in Yosemite – he never quite got it together in the “real world”. Harding eventually wrote a book called “Downward Bound”, and said that he chose the title because “it reflected the failure of his career as a responsible wage-earner in the face of his urge to go rock climbing”.

His nickname was “Batso”, which could have been for any number of reasons, but especially for his habit of spending days on end living on vertical cliffs, hanging on the rock walls like a bat. (SLIDE 29)

If Harding was asked the question - “is the most important thing to *get* to the top, or is *how* you get there the most important?” – it seems likely that his answer would be something along the lines of “I don’t give a crap *how* I get there – as long as I am the first one to the top and I have a good time doing it!”

And get to the top he did – many times as one of the first, if not *the* first, to ascend a route. In 1958, after losing out on the chance to be the first to summit Half Dome to his archrival, Royal Robbins, Harding turned his sights to another iconic wall in Yosemite. Harding and his climbing team became the first group to summit the 3000-foot wall of El Capitan called the “Nose”. The climb took many months of preparation - setting lines, establishing bivouacs along the route and returning to supply camps as needed for rest and protection from the weather. As they neared the end of the ascent after many months of work, and with winter weather closing in, Harding even turned to carving out footholds in the dark of night, using a miner’s headlamp, so the team could continue toward the summit. When faced with criticism of his methods by the climbing purists, Harding said simply “you do it your way, and I’ll do it mine.”

In 1970, Warren Harding, along with his climbing partner, Dean Caldwell, completed what was arguably his most notorious achievement. El Capitan’s previously untouched face called the Dawn Wall was finally conquered by Harding and Caldwell after 27 straight days of climbing and sleeping in tented hammocks – like bats, all the while consuming large amounts of cheap red wine.

At one point during the nearly month-long climb, the park service was certain that the pair must be in trouble since the ascent was taking so long, and bad weather was rolling in. The rangers ordered a rescue, but when the helicopters swooped in, Harding and Caldwell unequivocally refused to be taken off the mountain.

The park rangers reluctantly left the climbers alone and several days later the duo reached the summit, greeted by a slew of reporters, well wishers - and more than a few detractors. Harding and Caldwell had drilled over 300 holes, and hammered over 150 permanent bolts into the beautiful rock face, to enable them to make their way up a previously inaccessible summit.

The liberal use of any aid devices, but especially bolts, was exceedingly offensive to the clean climbing proponents including Royal Robbins. Robbins and his partner, Don Lauria took matters into their own hands and set out to complete a second ascent of the Dawn Wall. The intent was to use the bolts set by Harding, but to then chop off each bolt as they passed them, restoring the rock to its original unspoiled state – and making it unlikely that others would follow using the dreaded aid devices. Ironically, after removing the bolts on the first part of the route, Robbins had to acknowledge how difficult – and impressive – Harding’s accomplishment was, even with the use of bolts. They decided to leave the remainder of the bolts in place, and completed the route using the aid devices. As remembered by Lauria, they stopped chopping off the bolts because "the quality of the aid climbing was much higher than (Robbins) had ever expected of Harding or Caldwell and, of course, it was also taking us an awful long time to chop all those (\$^%&#) bolts."

Robbins’ acceptance of the bolts placed by Harding, and the acknowledgement that these permanent aids enabled previously inaccessible rocks to be climbed, provide a glimpse into the school of thought that has led to a more recent version of rock climbing, known as “sport climbing”, and will bring us back to where this paper started – the climbing gym and indoor rock climbing competitions.

But before we leave the Sierra Nevadas, I want to share a few stories about a female climber, who found great success in Yosemite and beyond.

Lynn Hill (SLIDE 30)

To this day, Lynn Hill remains one of the most accomplished rock climbers – male or female – of all time. She was born in 1961 and gravitated to climbing at a young age after deciding competitive gymnastics was not for her. Lynn did not like the way gymnasts "had to smile and do cutesy little routines on the floor". Lynn made her first trip to Yosemite when she was 16, and was quickly hooked on the Camp 4 lifestyle, the climbing masters who gathered there – and especially, the challenges posed by the big walls.

Lynn's climbing took her far from Yosemite in her 20's and early 30's, when she climbed all over the world and joined the ranks of professional sport climbers when the recreation activity moved to a competitive one. She won over 30 international competitions before she retired from professional climbing in 1992 and returned to her first love – outdoor, traditional climbing.

Lynn was drawn to the clean climbing ideology embraced years before by Chouinard, Robbins and others, and whenever possible, she used only removable protection, rather than fixed bolts, and worked hard to avoid scarring the rocks.

It was in this manner that she accomplished her two most notable Yosemite feats. In 1993, Lynn Hill became the first person – male or female – to free climb the Nose of El Capitan. This accomplishment took four days, but she did not use a single fixed bolt or cable to assist her to the top; the only protection came from chocks placed by Lynn, and then removed by her climbing partner to clean the route behind them.

As impressive as it was to complete the first free climb of the Nose, it was not enough for Lynn. She wanted to do it faster. The next year, she returned to Yosemite, this time summiting the Nose in less than 24 hours. Lynn's hero, Yvon Chouinard, called Lynn's 1994 single day free climb of the nearly 3000 foot rock face "the biggest thing that has ever been done on rock". Her accomplishment remained unrepeatable for over ten years.

Summary

It is time to leave Yosemite behind and make our way back to the indoor climbing gym. But first I want to recap a few of the climbing terms discussed so far tonight. Then I want to introduce a few more concepts that are especially important in indoor climbing. (SLIDE 31)

Aid climbing meant different things to different people in the early days of climbing. Pulling your buddy up to with a rope, or even letting your partner stand on your shoulders so he could get up to the next pitch, were acceptable methods of aid climbing. Using bolts hammered into the rock face was a type of aid climbing that fell out of favor, at least for a while, with the invention of pitons, chocks and hexes. “Weighting the rope”, or letting yourself rest on the equipment during an upward climb, is another generally objectionable form of aid climbing.

Free climbing is the counterpoint to aid climbing, where the climber relies on his own abilities, strength and knowledge to ascend a route. A free climber places his own protective devices in the cracks of the rock walls, using ropes and harnesses to prevent injury in a fall – but not to assist in the climbing effort.

Until the late 1970's or early 1980's, climbers often took sides on whether aid climbing or free climbing was better. Some free climbers thought aid climbing was “cheating”. Many aid climbers believed that what mattered was “getting to the top”.

However, as Royal Robbins reluctantly discovered when he tried to chop off the bolts Warren Harding placed on the Dawn Wall route in Yosemite, using fixed protection can open up some amazing climbing opportunities that would not be feasible otherwise. As such, in today's climbing world there are two acceptable mainstream climbing methods – “traditional” and “sport”.

Traditional climbing (or trad) is basically an updated name for free climbing. Gear is used only as a backup to protect against falls; no bolts or fixed lines are used to aid the climber directly. **Free soloing** is a further variation of Trad climbing – one that is only done by a few very talented and brave individuals. No ropes, no protection – and no mistakes.

Sport climbing routes can be found both indoors and outdoors. Sport climbing differs from Trad climbing because permanent anchors are used. Outdoors that protection could be bolts or other devices, placed strategically to create a route of a certain difficulty rating. Climbers then use “quick draws” to clip into the protection on the way up the face. **(EXHIBITS)**

Outdoor sport climbing is generally faster than trad climbing, because the routes are already laid out by a previous climber or route setter. So a climber who only has an hour or two to climb, may choose to sport climb one weekend and then another time, when he or she can devote the entire day, the climber may choose a Trad route.

Climbing gyms offer another alternative for sports climbers. The walls in an indoor rock gym will typically be set with routes of varying difficulty, so climbers of all levels can enjoy. The “holds” – instead of being natural features like cracks and ledges, are manufactured resins blocks bolted into the wall. The holds are typically brightly colored and made in widely varying shapes. **(EXHIBIT)**

The first indoor climbing gym was opened in 1987 in Seattle, where climbers wanted a place to work out during the 9-month rainy season. The original gym is still open, operating under the name – Vertical World. Many more gyms followed Vertical World’s lead, and now there are nearly 1000 indoor climbing gyms in North America.

Indoor climbing gyms are often used by climbers preparing for their next great outdoor climbing trip. But indoor climbing has developed a life – and a language - all its own.

Similar to the varying schools of thought in outdoor climbing on how much assistance a climber should get from aid devices or from other climbers, there are several scoring methods in indoor climbing that are used in training and at different types of competitions. (SLIDE 32)

At the beginning of my paper, I described a competition that required the climbers to “**On-sight**” the routes. At this type of competition, the routes are set by certified route setters the day before the competition, and no competitors are allowed to have any prior knowledge of the routes before it is their time to climb. To get the full points for the climb, the climber must reach the top on the first try, with no falls, no weighting the rope and no technical errors.

In other competitions, climbers are allowed to “**Flash**” a route. This means that the climber must successfully complete the route without falling, but they don’t have to do it on the first try. The climber is allowed to practice the route at least once, and can fall on the earlier climbs, but then the climber must have a clean climb to get the full points for that route. If the climber does not reach the top without falling, points are given for the highest hold that the climber touches with control.

“**Redpoint**” competitions require a clean climb on the first try, but climbers are allowed to receive input from others before attempting the route. No isolation is required. The assistance could come from simply watching other climbers attempt the route, or it could be from receiving “**Beta**”.

Beta is the term used when a climber gets assistance from a coach or another climber on how to successfully complete the route. Not surprisingly, the term dates back to the early 1980’s –when home movies were offered in both VHS and Betamax formats. A Texas climber named Jack Mileski is credited with coining the phrase “let me run the Betamax tape for you” when helping a fellow climber, a phrase that morphed into “here’s the Beta”. Although Betamax tapes have been gone for decades, the term Beta is still widely used by competitive climbers.

The question I get most often from people who want to know about my daughter's climbing competitions is "do you win by being the fastest"? Although there are sometimes separate speed climbing events at large competitions, the primary goal in climbing competitions is to get the highest number of points by successfully climbing the most difficult routes. A top climber needs to have just the right mix of strength, courage and intelligence to master the challenges presented to him or her.

I want to end with a quote that sums up what climbing means for those that truly love the sport. I could have picked a quote from Royal Robbins, or Lynn Hill or others – but it just so happened that my daughter, Maggie was writing a paper the other night for her AP English class on - what else - her love of rock climbing.

So here is a quote from my favorite competitive rock climber – Maggie Doyle:

"Why do I rock? I rock because I climb. And I climb because it is my rock."

Julie P. Doyle
SPHEX Club
September 18, 2014

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The Leader Does Not Fall Synopsis

Julie P. Doyle
September 18, 2014

I decided to write my SPHEX paper on rock climbing for two reasons:

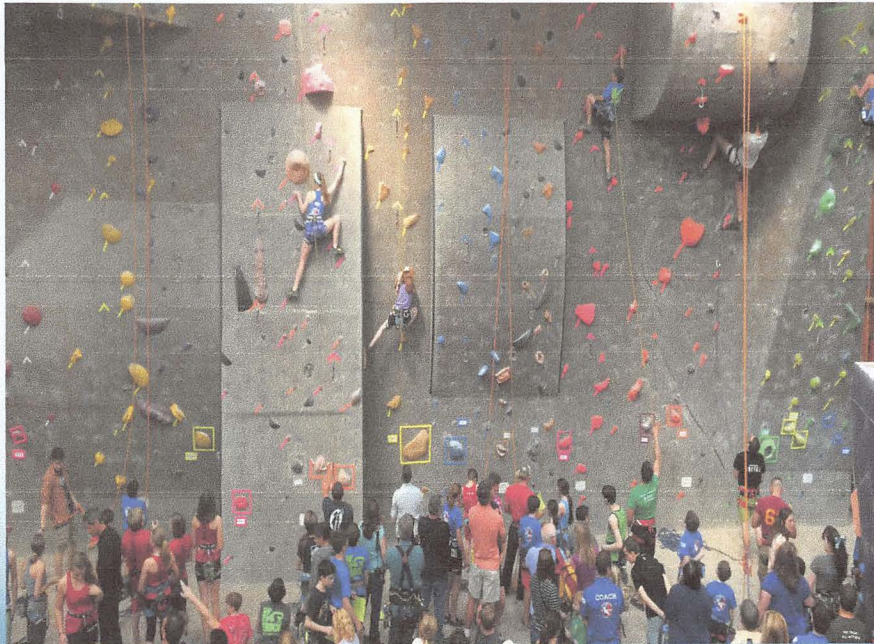
1. People who ask me about my daughter's rock climbing activities are often equally fascinated by – and clueless about – the sport. I can relate to this because I knew next to nothing about competitive rock climbing before Maggie took up the sport several years ago. Which leads me to second reason I chose this topic.
2. My daughter's favorite sport has its place on a spectrum that connects back to at least the 1800's, when rock climbing was primarily something mountaineers learned to do out of necessity, just in case those skills were needed during an alpine mountain climb. The evolution of rock climbing as a sport unto itself in the 20th century weaves together many interesting aspects of American life. The colorful people, the iconic locations, the technology that transformed the sport – as well as some controversies that arose over the past century – are all pieces of the puzzle that make up the history of rock climbing.

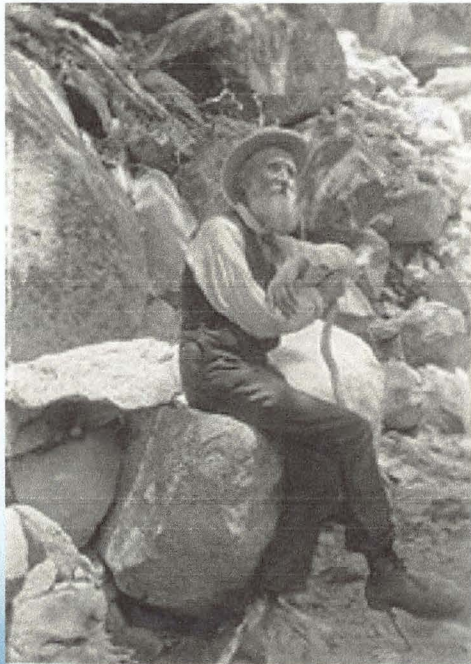
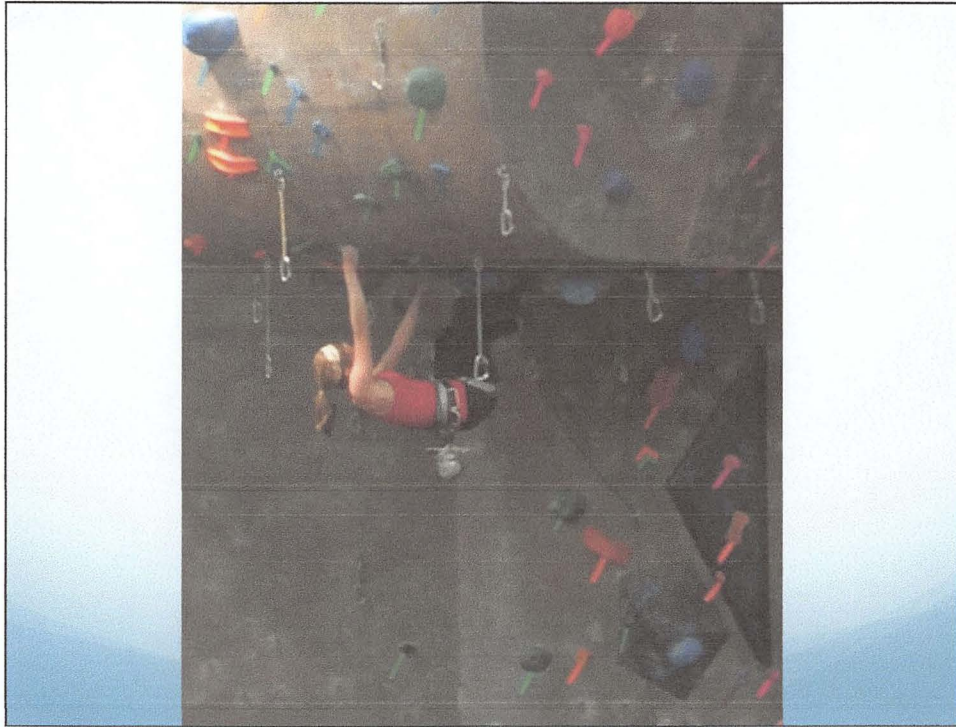
This paper provides an overview of how rock climbing became a recreation activity, separate and distinct from mountaineering. The type of climbing and the equipment used before World War II is explained, as well as the critical technologies that took climbing into a new age. The establishment of the 10th Mountain Division and the roles they played in defeating the Germans - using rock climbing and mountaineering skills - are explored.

The culture, character and personalities found in Yosemite National Park in the middle part of the century are illustrated by biographical sketches of Royal Robbins, Yvon Chouinard, Warren Harding and Lynn Hill.

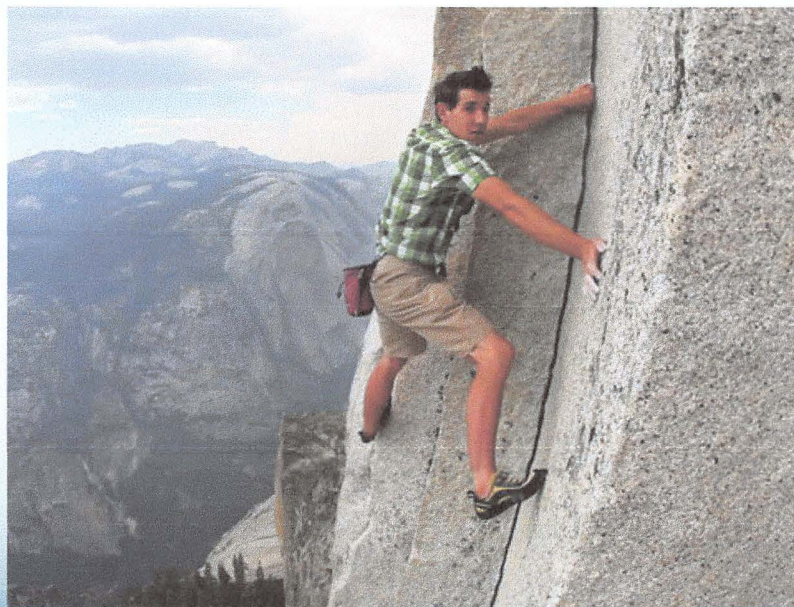
The distinct particulars of indoor climbing and climbing competitions are explored to provide the audience a broad picture of the climbing world today.

The Leader
Does Not Fall
September 18, 2014

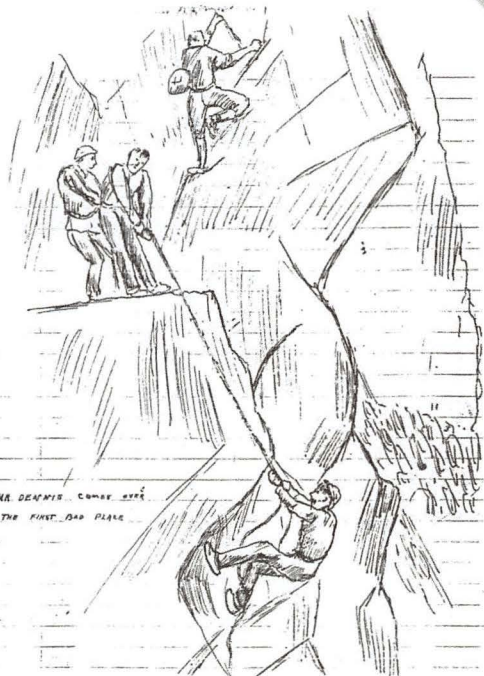




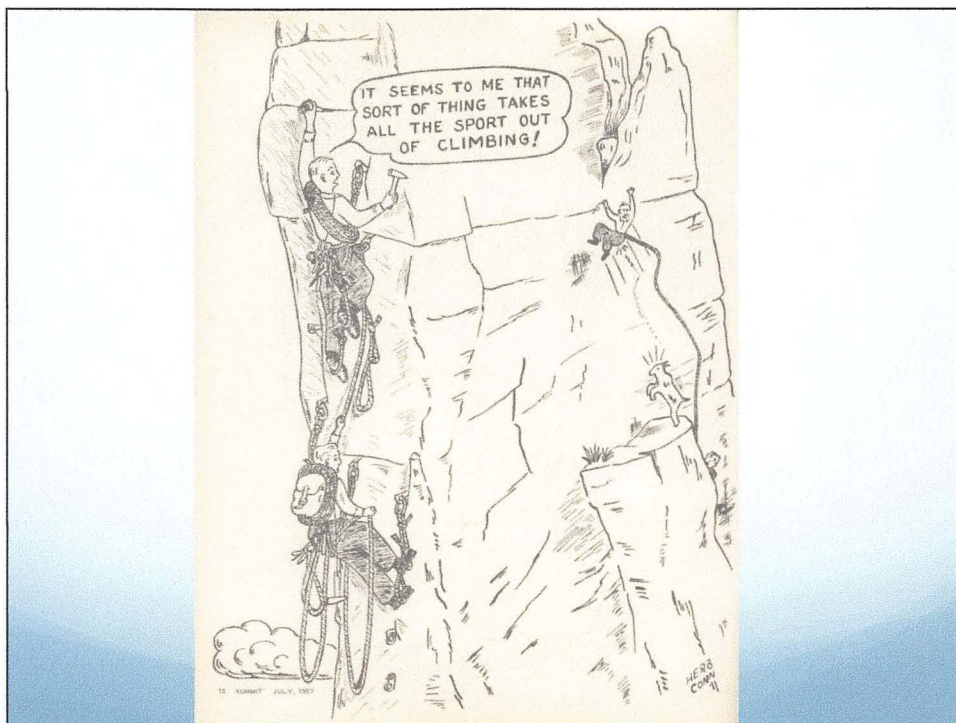
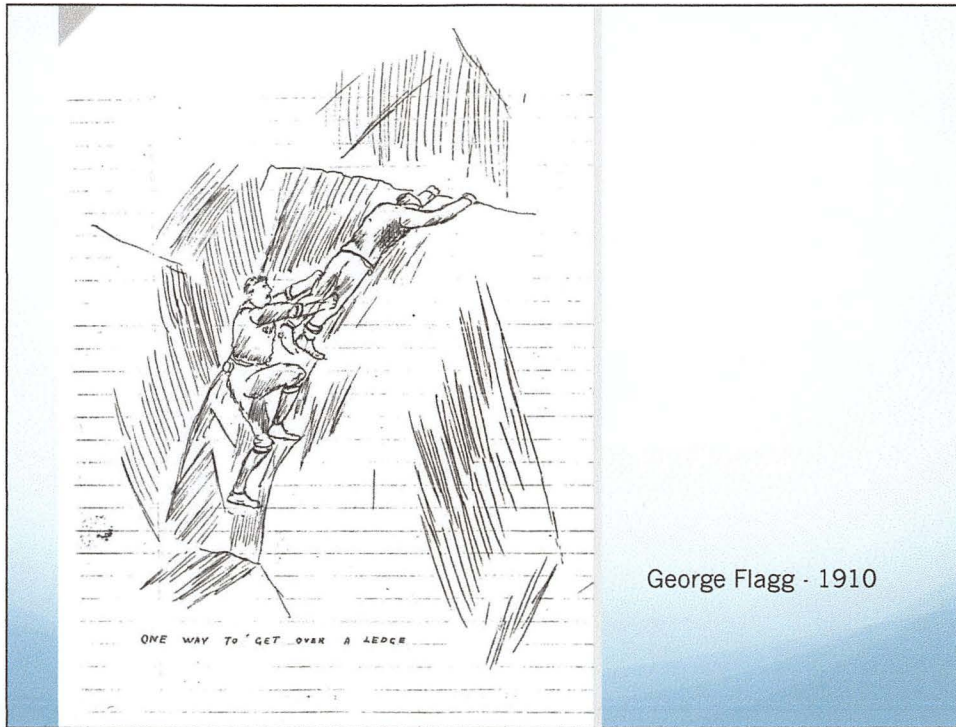
John Muir

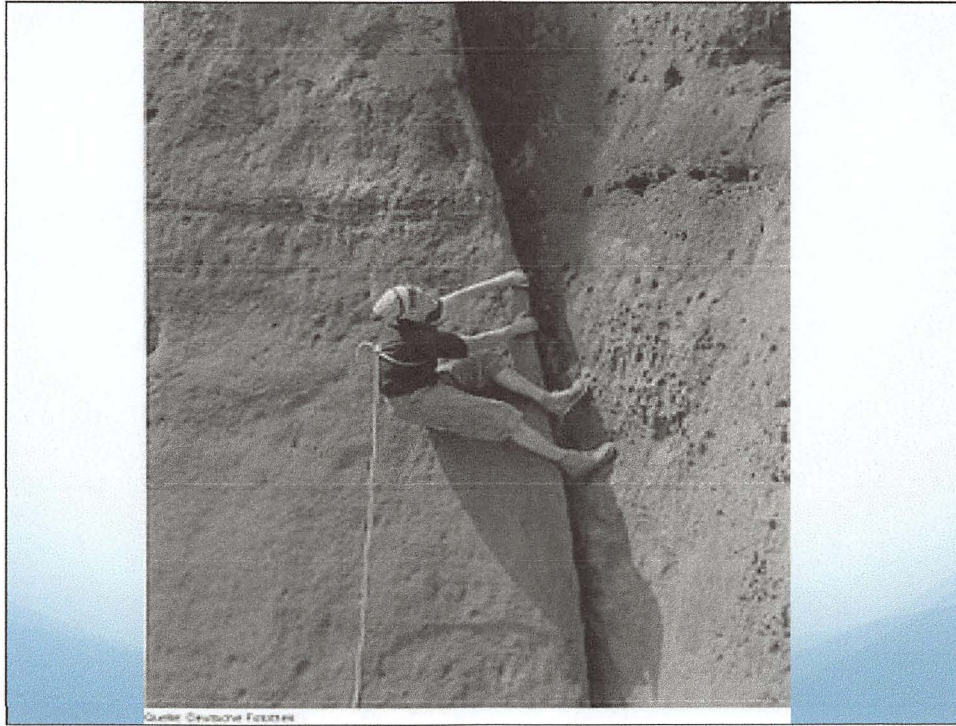


Free Soloist – Alex Honnold



George Flagg - 1910

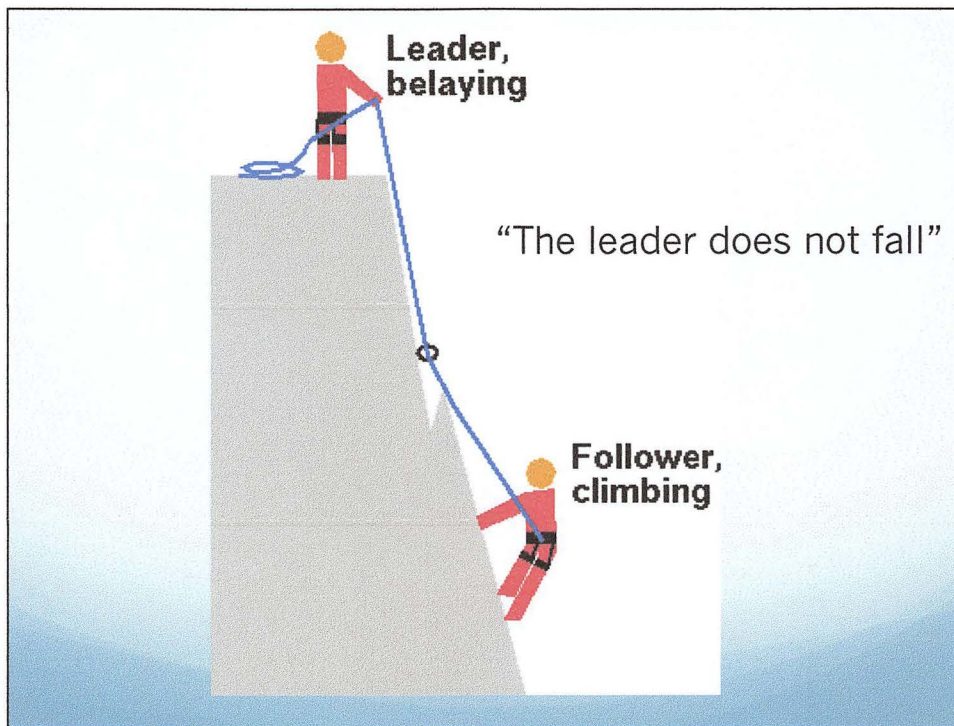
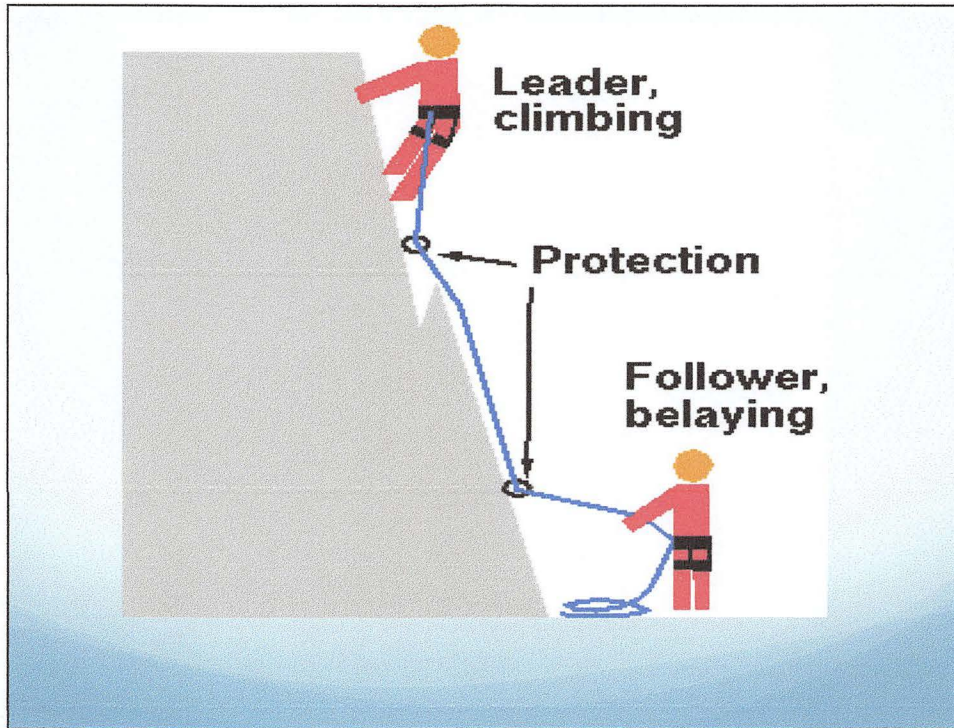


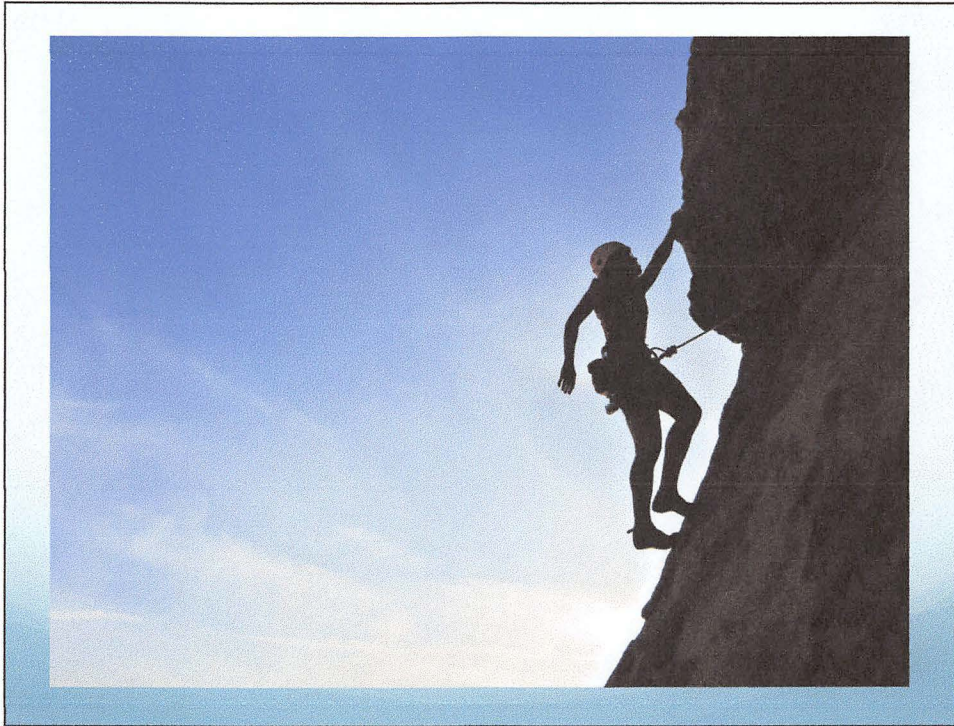


Quelle: Deutsche Fotothek

Hemp Rope







NYLON

NY = NEW YORK

LON = LONDON

~~NYLON
NY = NEW YORK
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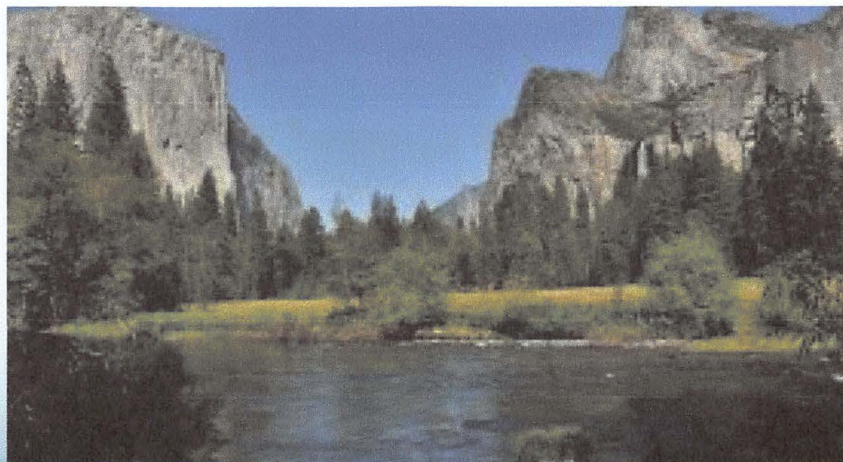
“NO RUN”
↓
“NYLON”

10th Mountain Division



Monte Belvedere – Monte Della Torraccia Ridge

Yosemite National Park



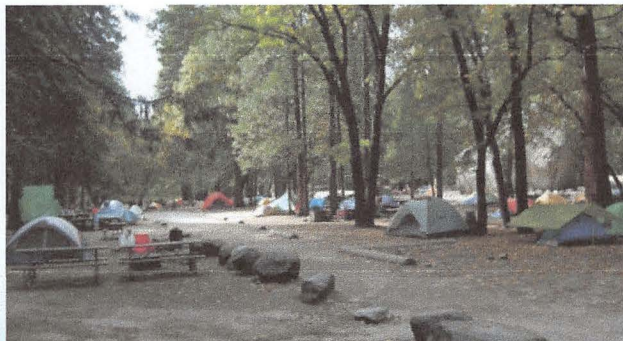
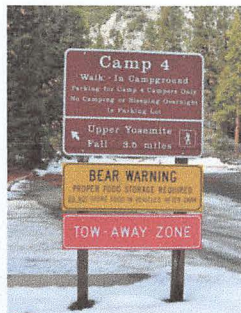
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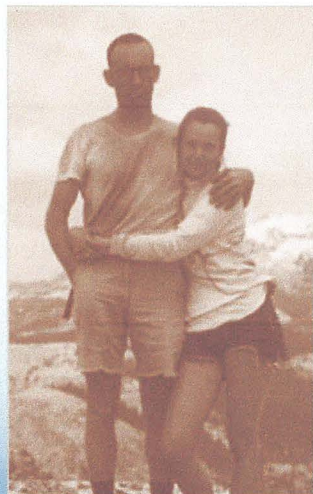
Royal Robbins



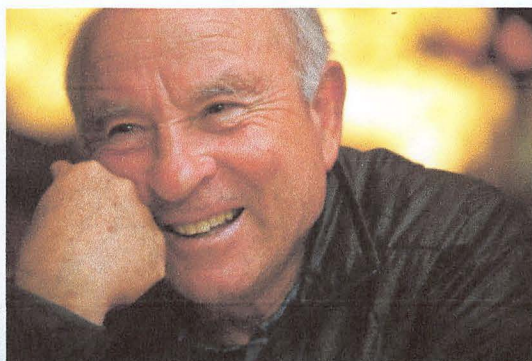
Camp 4 - Yosemite



Royal & Liz Robbins



Yvon Chouinard



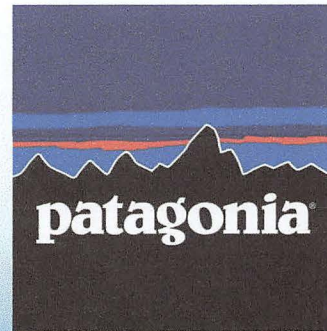
Chouinard Equipment Company



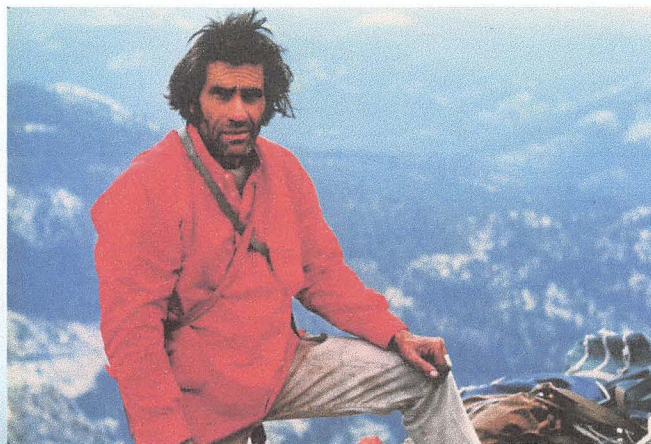
Black Diamond®



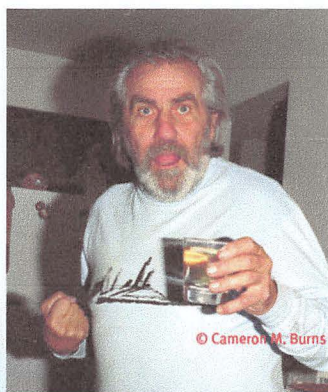
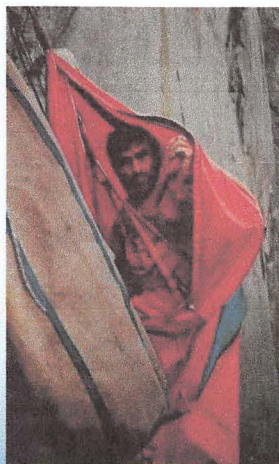
Black Diamond®



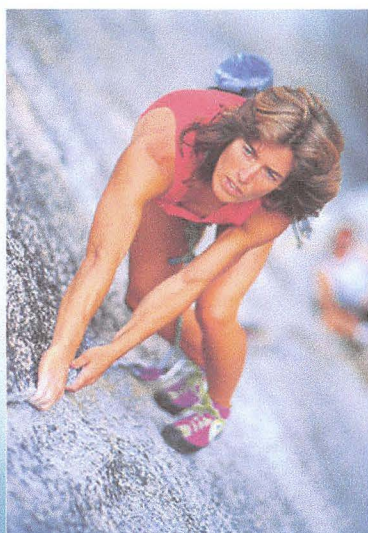
Warren J. Harding



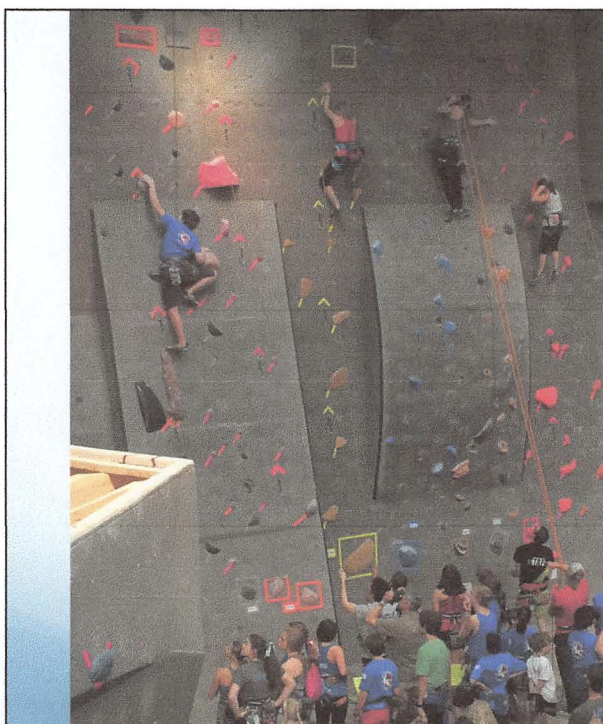
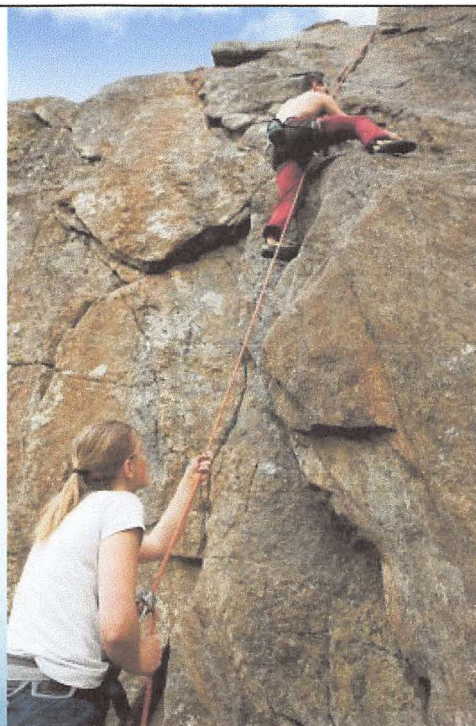
Warren J. Harding



Lynn Hill



- Aid Climbing
- Free Climbing
- Trad Climbing
 - Free Soloing
- Sport Climbing



- On-sight
- Flash
- Redpoint
- Beta

Why do I rock? I rock because I climb, and I climb because it is my rock."

Maggie Doyle

