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# Introduction

By Chris McNamara

More than anything else, Yosemite Valley is defined by big walls. To be in the presence of Sentinel Rock, El Capitan, or Washington Column is majestic. To climb these rocks, however, goes far beyond that. These walls are so big and powerful that the mind can barely take them all in. Sitting at the base of one of the climbs, you are gripped by a delicious mixture of fear and a desire to climb. You know at once that these walls are the medium for big adventure.

While it is a huge accomplishment to aid climb one of these monster cliffs, there is something more special about free climbing one. Sans haulbag or heavy rack, free climbs foster a pure and simple relationship between you, a small amount of gear, and the rock. There is nothing as exhilarating as holding onto a few tiny edges or jams with 1,000 feet of air beneath your feet.

If there is one climb that symbolizes mastery of Yosemite free climbing, it is Astroman. Astroman is to free climbing what The Nose is to wall climbing: long, flawless, and exceptional. Astroman is one of the best multi-pitch crack-climbs in the world and it is hard to imagine a more exquisite assemblage of granite features. It would be ideal if such an ultra classic climb was rated 5.8. Unfortunately, Yosemite routes that are even close to vertical are usually extremely hard and Astroman is no exception.

When John Bachar, John Long, and Ron Kauk made the first free ascent in 1975, Astroman became the hardest long free climb in the world. Today, Astroman remains a Valley testpiece for two reasons: First of all, it is sustained; nine of twelve pitches are rated 5.10

or harder. Second, from runout face climbing to difficult squeeze chimneys, you must have every Yosemite crack and face technique mastered. That said, climbing Astroman is difficult, but not impossible.

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## Welcome to the Road to Astroman

In this guide I will outline a method of building skills and confidence to help you climb Astroman. However, even if you do not aspire to climb Astroman, this guide is just as effective at enhancing your Yosemite trad climbing technique, especially in the 5.9 to 5.11 range. First, I will outline the basic philosophy behind training for Astroman. Next, I will take you through a detailed program that includes ten multi-pitch climbs and over 30 single-pitch routes. I will describe how each climb builds a particular strength or technique and how that climb brings you one step farther along the Road to Astroman.

This guide assumes that you are comfortable and confident on all of the climbs offered in SuperTopo's "Yosemite Ultra Classics" ([www.supertopo.com/packs/ultraclassics](http://www.supertopo.com/packs/ultraclassics)), an introduction to Yosemite's most classic 5.4-5.9 routes.

Our goal in this pack is to provide you with the best climbing beta on each of the included routes in order to prepare you for an awesome climbing adventure. We chose these routes to prepare you to climb Astroman and because these climbs feature exceptional rock quality, elegant lines, and outstanding views.

In addition, many of these routes played a historic role in the development of Yosemite rock climbing. As we do in all of our SuperTopos, we've taken the time to provide you with the history for each route as well as the climbing info. If you're like us you'll find the experience of climbing these classic routes enhanced by the rich history and stories of the colorful characters who pioneered the climbs.

We hope this guide helps you build the skills and confidence needed to take on some of Yosemite's most challenging and famous free climbs. Perhaps you will climb Astroman, or perhaps not. But, in any event, we hope you

enjoy climbing the routes included in this pack as much as we have.

### Essential Yosemite Beta

You will find a wealth of Yosemite information and links on the SuperTopo web site. We encourage you to check out the web site as it will have more current beta than we can include for you here. For the latest info, visit: [www.supertopo.com/yosemite](http://www.supertopo.com/yosemite)

There you will find essential beta on:

- Climbing safety
- Getting to Yosemite
- When to climb
- Road conditions; call (209) 372-0200
- Staying in the park
- Climbing gear and climbing guides

### Traveling the Road to Astroman

There are two essential ingredients to climbing Astroman: motivation and training. Motivation can only come from within—you must crave a grand adventure.

The training program to climbing Astroman is this: go to a Yosemite crag to build your strength and technique, then take those skills to progressively harder multi-pitch climbs. At the crags you will focus on your weaknesses and build your strength and endurance. On multi-pitch routes you will gauge if you are ready to climb all 11 of Astroman's demanding pitches.

Yosemite is unlike any other climbing area and it requires a wide variety of skills, many of which can only be learned in Yosemite. When training for Astroman it is essential to get to the Valley as much as possible.

That said, most climbers do not live near the Valley and will have to do a bulk of their training in the gym. The gym will not help you hone your offwidth technique or teach you to place a nut from an insecure finger lock. However, the gym can build much needed strength and endurance. For most people to climb Astroman, they will need to boulder about V4 and lead 5.12, plus or minus a few grades depending on your Yosemite experience.

If you are lucky enough to have a local granite crag, then do laps on as many cracks as

you can get your hands on. Remember, the key to Astroman is endurance as you will need to climb hard 5.10 and 5.11 pitches up high on the route. Most people will need to lead 5.11d or harder when fresh at a crag if they hope to lead the 5.11b and 5.11c moves on Pitches 7-9.

From the gym and the local crags, it is time to enter the Valley. The following program will start with the crucial cragging areas that will whip you into shape for Astroman.

### Reed's Pinnacle Area

There is no better place to start climbing hard cracks than the Reed's Pinnacle Area. **Reed's Direct Route (5.10a)** and **Lunatic Fringe (5.10c)** are steep and relentless—perfect training for the 5.9 and 5.10 cracks you will encounter on Astroman.

### The Cookie Cliff

The Cookie, Yosemite's best crag for 5.10 and 5.11 climbs, will help you hone every climbing technique you need on Astroman. As Valley veteran Clint Cummins puts it, "The Road to Astroman is paved with frequent trips to the Cookie Cliff." A great climb to break your way into the 5.10 realm is **Beverly's Tower (5.10a)**. From the top of this climb you can lead **Wheat Thin (5.10c)** and then set a toprope on the difficult finger crack **Butterballs (5.11c)**. Another must-do is **Outer Limits (5.10c)**, a pump 5.10 that is conducive to extended laps on toprope. This is a great way to build the necessary endurance you will need on Astroman's Enduro Corner. The burly offwidth moves on **Twilight Zone (5.10d)** will ready you for "The Harding Slot," Astroman's much-feared squeeze chimney. **Cookie Monster (Pitch 1, 5.12a)** and **Red Zinger (5.11d)** contain moves harder than on Astroman. However, you should eventually redpoint them to ensure you can onsight the 5.11 pitches high on Astroman.

### Pat and Jack Pinnacle

Astroman has a few sections of technical and runout face climbing. While the unusual giant knobs at Pat and Jack Pinnacle are not found on Astroman, this crag will help build your overall face climbing skills and the ability to

stay calm on a runout. A few great slightly runout 5.10s are **Knob Job (5.10b)**, **Book 'em, Dano (5.10d)** and **Skinheads (5.10d)**. Although **The Tube (5.11a)** is a crack climb, it demands just as much delicate foot and body work as any desperate face climbing pitch. It will prepare you for The Moratorium crux as well as many pitches on Astroman.

While you are honing your skills at the crags, you should start bagging some big climbs. Below I have outlined eight long routes in the hard 5.9 to 5.11 ranges. Ideally, you should climb all eight before heading up on Astroman.

#### **El Capitan, East Buttress (5.10b, 11 pitches)**

Though not considered a “true” El Cap route, the East Buttress of El Capitan gives you a taste of climbing the Big Stone without all the difficulty or commitment. The crux pitches appear mercifully low and after the second pitch the climbing is mostly 5.6-5.8 to the top. This is a great climb for breaking into the 5.10 range.

#### **Steck Salathé (5.9, 15 pitches)**

Steck Salathé is more sustained and demanding than the East Buttress of El Capitan. From the ground it appears that the entire climb is just one long offwidth. Indeed out of the 16 pitches, 11 require some type of wide climbing technique. This climb will hone the offwidth skills that are essential for the Harding Slot and Pitches 9 and 10.

#### **Higher Cathedral, Northeast Butt (5.9, 11 pitches)**

This is the next step up from the Steck Salathé. Like Astroman, this climb requires a little of every different technique, including some hard, wide climbing. This route will test your ability to climb back-to-back hard and physical 5.9 pitches.

#### **Serenity Crack/Sons of Yesterday**

Link Serenity Crack (5.10d) with Sons of Yesterday (5.10a) to climb the best multi-pitch 5.10 route in the Valley. It is rare to find such sustained and steep cracks, especially within a two-minute walk of the road. The crux pitch on Serenity will help get you ready for the hard

finger cracks up high on Astroman.

#### **South by Southwest (5.11a, 6 pitches)**

From the instant Walt Shipley and Keith Reynolds climbed South by Southwest in 1993, it has been recognized as a classic. The route is beautiful, extremely exposed, perfectly protected, with one of the most amazing summits in the country. South by Southwest is a great way to break into 5.11 multi-pitch climbing.

#### **Moratorium (5.11b, 5 pitches)**

Moratorium is a good step up from South by Southwest. The crux involves technical stemming and lots of liebacking: essential skills for many of the crux Astroman pitches. Link it with the East Buttress of El Cap (Moratorium tops out 40 feet from the start of East Buttress), for a full day of climbing.

#### **Middle Cathedral, DNB (5.11, 19 pitches)**

One of the most difficult climbs in the world when it was freed in 1965, DNB remains a burly testpiece. The lower pitches follow face and crack features while up high the route enters into the notorious chimneys. This climb will prepare you for the commitment and endurance required for Astroman.

#### **The Rostrum, North Face (5.11c, 8 pitches)**

The best eight-pitch crack collection in the Valley. Like Astroman, this route requires proficiency in every crack technique. This is the last climb in the training program and your performance on The Rostrum will be a good indication of how ready you are for Astroman.

#### **Astroman (5.11c, 12 pitches)**

The business. Start early, climb fast, and climb hard. Oh, and don't forget to take in the beauty—you will be on one of the most exceptional free climbs in the world.