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# Road to The Nose

A training guide for climbing the best big wall route on the planet.

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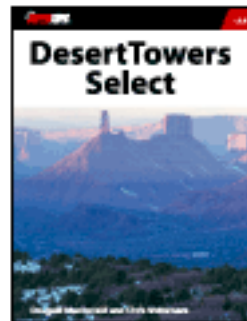
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# Road to The Nose

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**S U P E R T O P O S**

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Special thanks to the many volunteers who helped to test these topos.



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**Climbing is an inherently dangerous sport in which severe injuries or death may occur. Relying on the information in this guide may increase the danger.**

When climbing you can only rely on your skill, training, experience and conditioning. **If you have any doubts as to your ability to safely climb any route in this guide, do not try it.**

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*By Chris McNamara*

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## The Final Pitch



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## Introduction

The first time I stood in front of El Capitan I was terrified. From the base of The Nose, the granite wall in front of me more than filled my field of vision. I felt really, really small. Only the Pacific Ocean rivaled El Cap in scale. I had no thoughts of ever climbing this wall. It was impossible in my mind.

Two years later, at 4 a.m. I stood, again, at the base of The Nose. This time, in addition to the terror I had brought before, I had a rack, a few candy bars, a rope and a ropegun named Mark Melvin. For 18 hours Mark mostly led and I mostly followed up the most incredible stretch of rock I had ever seen in my life. There was no mistake: this was the most amazing rock climb on the planet.

I was lucky. A master took me under his wing and taught me how to climb in the supreme classroom. He dragged me up El Capitan before I ever led a four-pitch climb. Since then I have climbed El Capitan over 50 times and The Nose four times. Every time, I find El Cap awesome and intimidating.

Most climbers will take a different path to climbing The Nose. Their path will take a little longer and involve a little more self sufficiency but in the end will take them to the same spot—the summit of El Capitan. What follows is a road map for that path. This guide takes you through a graduated series of 14 climbs of increasing difficulty to help you build skills, speed, endurance and comfort with big wall exposure. A SuperTopo for all 14 climbs is included, along with special tips and beta to help you. Read this guide. Train, practice and



Looking straight at The Nose from El Capitan Meadow. Photo by Chris McNamara.

prepare for The Nose. Read as many “how to” books as you can and most importantly, find an expert to give advice and encouragement.

Many people think that The Nose is impossible. Others think that The Nose is easy. My goal is to show you that it is neither. Climbing The Nose is a huge undertaking that is possible for anyone who is dedicated to it.

Good Luck,

Chris McNamara

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## Chapter 1

# Overview of Your Road to The Nose

On paper, at 5.9 C1, The Nose sounds easy. It's not. With over 31 pitches of steep, exposed and strenuous climbing, The Nose is an immense physical and psychological drain. Extensive climbing experience on long routes is mandatory. The failure rate is high. That said, anyone who is deeply committed to training for this climb can do it.

As you read below, refer to the SuperTopo for The Nose in Chapter 5.

### Where to Start Training

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For many, training begins in the climbing gym. The gym is the perfect place to learn the basic jumar and aiding technique. Going bolt to bolt in the gym will allow you to work out your aiding system without fear or the complexity of carrying a rack and placing gear.

On a wall that has lead bolts, set up a circuit where you lead the wall using aiders, set an anchor, rappel and then jumar up and clean the pitch. Repeat this circuit again and again and time yourself. Constantly look for ways to make your systems more efficient and try to set as fast a time as possible for the circuit. It is essential that you get the fundamentals of aiding and jumaring perfected because as soon as you add all the gear, logistics and 3,000 feet of exposure, aid climbing gets more difficult.

Many gyms may not allow you to practice aid techniques. If this is the case, improvise by using a tree or building. My training for my first El Cap ascent consisted mainly of making over 70 ascents of my backyard tree.

### Your First Outdoor Aid Lead

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After you have mastered the fundamental aid techniques in the gym, the next step is to start aid climbing single pitch free climbs that require gear placements (do not aid on popular free routes). Start on top rope where, unencumbered by fear, you will be able to explore a variety of aid placements. Fiddle around with nuts and cams in as many different ways as possible. Sketchy placements that you would never dare place on a free climb can make suitable aid placements. You will be amazed at what will hold body weight.

On your first aid lead you will discover a fundamental law of aid climbing: You are always moving slower than you think. You will feel that you are moving at a moderate pace, but your belayer and the clock will tell you otherwise. Do not be discouraged. After you have logged in 20 or more pitches, you should see the time required for your aid leads cut in half. Also, be sure to clean some of your own leads, as you will learn more about the quality of your placements and how difficult they are to remove.

With your leading and cleaning skills honed, introduce the hauling and belay management elements. First experiment on the ground, then practice on a climb. Lead a pitch, set a belay, and haul the bag. This is one of the essential elements of training. Most people retreat from The Nose not because they lack skills. Rather, failure comes from not being able to efficiently integrate all the systems. Practice the transitions from leading to hauling to cleaning a pitch by setting up an "aid course" either at the gym or the crag. Keep track of your time on the aid course and try to better your previous time.

The essential next step is to take the above process to multi-pitch climbs and begin to practice changing over the lead. The changeover is where most of the time on a big wall is lost. Consider what it means to take 30



minutes to change over the lead instead of 15. The Nose has 31 pitches and 15 minutes lost at every belay means additional days worth of climbing and possibly missing a key bivy ledge.

### Guides

This guide gives tons of information on general training tips for The Nose. It does not give tips for basic aid or free climbing technique. To learn those skills, explore the following resources:

The Yosemite Mountaineering School is the only organization legally allowed to teach aid climbing in Yosemite.

[www.yosemitepark.com/html/mountain.html](http://www.yosemitepark.com/html/mountain.html)

The Yosemite Mountaineering School is also the only organization legally allowed to guide people up The Nose (a three-day ascent will run you around \$3,000).

I found a friend to teach me aid climbing instead of using a professional guide. If you take this option, be sure that your friend is qualified to teach you.

### Books and Videos

My favorite “how to” book for aid climbing is *How To Rock Climb: Big Walls!* by John Middendorf and John Long (Falcon Press). My favorite video is *The Video Guide To Aid Climbing* hosted by Don Reid. These two resources will give you a great overview of the skills you will need on a big wall. Other aid climbing books include: *Climbing Big Walls* (ICS Books) and *Mountaineering: The Freedom of the Hills* (The Mountaineers).

### Historical Resources

The Nose has one of the most fascinating histories of any big wall climb in the world. It is a crime to climb the route without first reading some of the epic tales of the first ascents. The following are my “Top Five” historical resources for The Nose:

Arce, Gary, 1996. *Defying Gravity: High Adventure on Yosemite’s Walls*. Wilderness Press, Berkeley, CA.

Duane, Daniel, 2000. *El Capitan: Historic Feats and Radical Routes*. Chronicle Books, San Francisco, CA.

Roper, Steve, 1994. *Camp 4: Recollections of a Yosemite Rockclimber*. The Mountaineers, Seattle, WA.

Roper, Steve and Allen Steck, 1979. *Fifty Classic Climbs of North America*. Sierra Club Books, San Francisco, CA.

Rowell, Galen, 1974. *Vertical World of Yosemite*. Wilderness Press, Berkeley, CA.

### Additional Nose Information

The “route beta” page for The Nose on the SuperTopo website has a host of resources for The Nose including:

- links to first ascent accounts on the web
- photo gallery
- up-to-date beta from climbers
- additional links on the web

Find all this info at:

[www.supertopo.com/routebeta](http://www.supertopo.com/routebeta)

### Essential Yosemite Beta

You will find a wealth of Yosemite information and links on the SuperTopo website. We encourage you to check the website as it will have more current beta than we can include for you here. However, we’ve included a summary of all you need to know in this introduction.

For the latest info, visit:




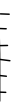







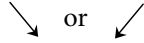


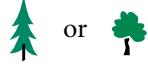



[www.supertopo.com/yosemite](http://www.supertopo.com/yosemite)

There you will find essential beta on:

- Climbing safety
- Getting there
- When to climb
- Road conditions—call (209) 372-0200
- Staying in the park
- Food
- Climbing gear and climbing guides
- Bears

# Understanding the maps






## Topo symbols

Right facing corner 	Ledge 	Bolt or rivet 
Left facing corner 	Slab 	Hook placements 
Straight in crack 	Belay station 	Face climbing 
Groove 	Pitch length 	Pendulum 
Chimney 	Optional belay 	Tree 
Roof 	False belay 	Bush 

## Topo abbreviations

ow = offwidth  
awk = awkward  
lb = lieback  
p = fixed piton

## Overview graphics

Road	
Bike path	
Park service trail	
Climber approach or descent trail	
Parking area	



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# Aid Climbing Ratings

## Grade Ratings

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Grade ratings give a sense of the overall commitment required on a climb. Grades I and II refer to short crag routes. These ratings are seldom used.

**Grade III** refers to half-day routes. *Examples:* Royal Arches, Nutcracker.

**Grade IV** refers to full-day routes. *Example:* East Buttress of El Cap.

**Grade V** refers to shorter big wall routes. Fast parties may only take a day, but most parties will spend two to three days on the wall.

*Examples:* West Face of Leaning Tower, Prow, South Face of Washington Column.

**Grade VI** refers to longer big wall routes. All but the fastest teams require at least two days and usually many more. *Examples:* Regular Northwest Face of Half Dome, all routes on El Capitan.

**Grade VII** refers to extreme alpine big walls that require at least 10 days of suffering on a huge wall in poor weather in a remote area.

*Examples:* Great and Secret Show, Baffin Island; Grand Voyage, Great Trango Tower, Pakistan.

## Aid Ratings

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In the early '90s the "new wave" rating system was introduced to wall climbs in Yosemite Valley. Although it was originally touted as being more precise than the previous A1-A5 system, it is now clear that the new wave system only brought more confusion to the ratings process. This book ignores the new wave system and reverts to the system introduced 30 years ago, with a few modifications. That said, this new system will have problems, and it is in no way

the final word in aid ratings.

Keep in mind that aid ratings are only one measure of the difficulty of a wall climb. Weather, the length of the climb, skill, physical condition of the climber, the number of previous ascents, approach and descent, and many other factors all combine to determine the overall difficulty of a wall. Pitch ratings also can't include the dangers of bad bolts and poor fixed gear. Bolt ladders on Tangerine Trip, which should theoretically be "A1", have scored many 30- to 50-foot falls when rivets broke. Big airtime has also been logged on the Groove pitch of the Shield when numerous fixed pieces pulled. Don't trust fixed gear and be prepared if it should pull.

Aid ratings are based on the number of bodyweight placements in a row. How is a "bodyweight" placement differentiated from a "bomber" placement? The only way to know for certain is to take a fall. The next best way to find out is to ask yourself, "Would I belay off this?" If the answer is "no" then it is probably a bodyweight placement.

**A0** Pulling on pieces for progress while in free climbing mode. Generally no aiders are used.

**A1 or C1** Easy aid: all placements are bomber. Little danger of falling except through pilot error. Most A1 pitches take from one to two hours. *Examples:* many pitches on Half Dome's Regular Route, the Nose, and South Face of the Column.

**A2 or C2** Moderate aid: one or two bodyweight placements over bomber gear. Five- to 30-foot fall potential. *Examples:* many pitches on Zodiac, Prow, and Direct on Half Dome. Most A2 pitches take one to three hours.

**A3 or C3** Hard aid: three to five bodyweight placements in a row. Thirty- to 50-foot fall potential. *Examples:* many pitches on Pacific Ocean Wall, Mescalito and Ten Days After. Most A3 pitches take two to three hours.

**A4 or C4** Serious aid: Six to eight bodyweight placements in a row and a 50- to 80-foot fall potential. *Examples:* many pitches on Sea of Dreams, Atlantic Ocean Wall and Native Son. Most A4 pitches take more than three hours.

**A5 or C5** Extreme aid: more than nine bodyweight placements in a row. Eighty-foot plus fall potential. Most A5 pitches take more than four hours. *Examples:* most El Cap routes, such as Reticent Wall and Nightmare on California Street, put up in the '90s.

**"C"** This pitch goes hammerless without relying on fixed gear. It is highly unlikely that you will need a hammer on these pitches. *Examples:* all pitches on the Nose, Regular Route on Half Dome, and the South Face of Washington Column.

**"A"** This pitch generally requires a hammer to place pitons or copperheads. *Examples:* all pitches on the Reticent Wall and many pitches on Native Son, Lost in America, Zenith and Sea of Dreams.

**"F"** comes after a "C" rating and denotes a pitch that relies on fixed gear in order to go hammerless. Ninety-five percent of the time, pitches marked with "F" will go hammerless, but to be safe, put a hammer and a couple of copperheads and pins in the bottom of the haulbag in case fixed gear is missing. *Examples:* many pitches on the Leaning Tower, Prow and Zodiac.

**"R"** Dangerous fall potential because of the possibility of hitting a ledge, swinging into a corner or running the rope over a sharp edge. *Examples:* Black Tower pitch on Zodiac (A2R or C3R) where a fall is possible onto a ramp, Pitch 13 on the Reticent Wall (A5R) where the leader must do numerous hook and head moves above a ledge.

*Note: Just because a pitch does not have an "R" or an "X" rating does not mean you can't become injured or die on that pitch.*

**"+"** indicates a tricky or strenuous section. Found on either strenuous terrain (roof or deep corner) or an unusually tricky "boulder problem" aid move (expanding flake, huge reach). Pitches marked with a "+" are thought

provoking and often more time consuming. *Examples:* the Nipple Pitch on Zodiac (C3+(F)), Shield Roof (A2+), and Pitch 5 of the South Face of Washington Column (C1+).

Many people wonder why aid ratings change over time (e.g. a route that was A5 in 1970 might be A3 today). The reason is that all routes go through a life cycle in which pin placements become more solid and the strongest copperhead placements are found and left fixed. Also, bolts are added both as "chicken-bolts" and because rock features fall off. To give a general understanding of this process I have provided the metamorphosis of a typical Yosemite A5 route:

Ascents	Rating	Route condition
1-5	A5	Little fixed gear. Fragile features.
6-20	A4	Half the heads are fixed. Some features pull so bolts are added. Pin placements are more solid. A few chicken rivets added. Belay bolts added.
21-40	A3/A4	Most heads are fixed. Most fragile features and loose rock are gone. More belay bolts and chicken bolts added.
41+	A3	Route reaches "equilibrium" as all heads in crux and sections are fixed and pin placements beat out to take hammerless gear.

Because some routes within the same grade are harder or easier than other routes in that grade, I have listed all the routes in order of overall difficulty in the appendix.

# El Capitan

As Denali, Mt. Rainier and the Grand Canyon dominate and define their respective national parks, so does El Capitan loom, tower, and rule over the entrance to Yosemite Valley. You can pick any synonym for “dominate” and it will still work. Overshadow. Domineer. Intimidate. Overwhelm. Not enough such words exist in our language to properly describe the effect this cliff exerts on climbers and tourists alike.

– Steve Roper

## Approach

For all routes on El Cap it is recommended that you start on the main trail described here. There are other trails that may be more direct to your route, but they will also be more strenuous and covered with talus.

From the triangle at El Cap Meadow, pick up the distinct trail that starts 50 feet west of the sign directing drivers to Routes 120, 140 and 41. Follow the trail to a large clearing. When facing the wall, walk at 10 o'clock and pick up the distinct climbers' trail that eventually leads to a point 200 feet in front of the toe of the Southeast Buttress and the start of The Nose. From here, the trail diverges to skirt either the base of the Southeast Face or Southwest Face.

It is about a 0.25 mile and a 10 to 15-minute walk from the road to the toe of the Southeast Buttress and the start of the Nose. From there, it is an additional 20 to 30 minutes to reach the start of East Buttress.

## Descent

The East Ledges is the fastest and most convenient way to descend from El Cap leaving you at the Manure Pile Buttress parking area, about one mile from El Cap Meadow. The Falls Trail descent, which can be picked up from the summit of El Cap is long and tedious, but may be a viable option if you are caught in a storm or must descend at night and are unfamiliar with the East Ledges descent.

From routes that finish from the Salathé Wall and east, hike east staying within 100 feet of the edge until you reach a 40-foot wide drainage, near the Zodiac top out. Follow the drainage until about 80 feet before the edge (Horsetail Fall) and enter the manzanita on a well worn trail that eventually parallels a wall on the left all the way to the end of the bushes. (Parties that do not find the wall on their left will end up doing low angle rappels and 5th class slabs to the start of the main rappels.) From the end

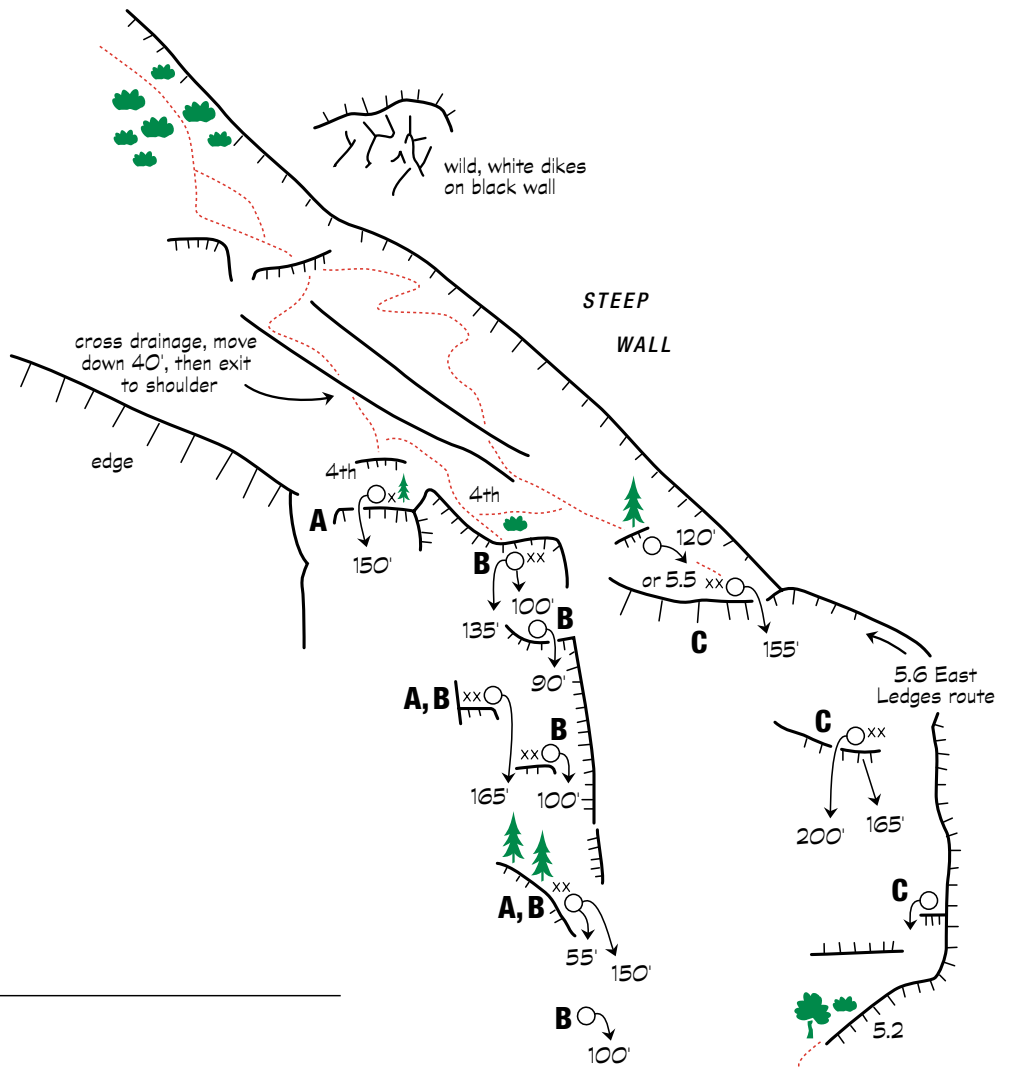


Mark Kroese

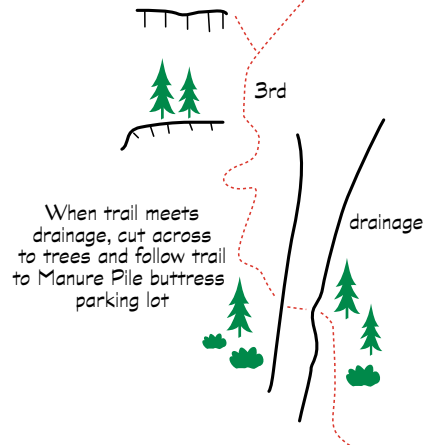
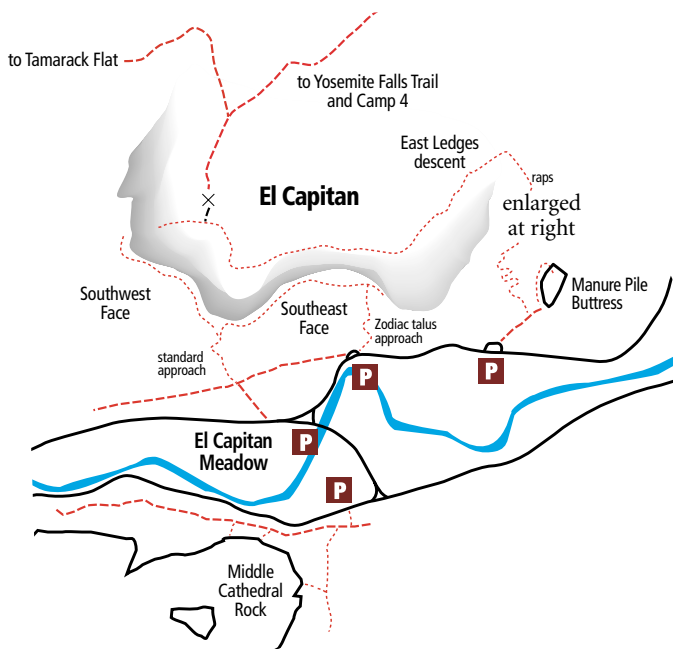
- |   |                    |   |                           |
|---|--------------------|---|---------------------------|
| 1 | Sacherer Cracker   | 4 | Salathé Wall              |
| 2 | Little John, Right | 5 | The Nose                  |
| 3 | Moby Dick, Center  | 6 | East Buttress (top shown) |

of the bushes, scramble down 3rd class terrain for about 100 feet to a ledge that is roughly perpendicular to “The Wild Dikes”. For rap route C (not recommended), wander down 4th class to a tree below a large flat ledge. For rap routes A and B, move down 15 feet of 4th class and then cut right (south) across a 20-foot wide drainage gully. Walk/slide down the right side of the gully for 30-50 feet and then exit onto the right (south) shoulder and cruise down 40 feet to a ledge. For rap route A, continue towards the edge and down a 20-foot 4th class section to a tree wrapped with slings. For rap route B, head left and down 30 feet of scree then right onto 3rd class. Work right, through a bush, to a four-foot by six-foot flat ledge with a small tree.

From the base of the rappels head east down multiple 3rd class sections joined by faint trails. Eventually a defined climbers' trail will emerge. Follow it down to a wide drainage and cross to a trail that parallels the east side of the drainage for 300 feet before breaking off into the trees to the Manure Pile Buttress parking lot.



Area Overview



# The Nose, El Capitan

VI 5.13+ or 5.9 C1 ★★★★★

v 1.1

**Time to climb route:** 5 days

**Approach time:** 10 minutes

**Descent time:** 4 hours

**Number of pitches:** 31

**Height of route:** 2900'

Long, sustained and flawless; The Nose may be the best rock climb in the world; it is certainly the best known. At 5.9 C1 this route is technically easy, but don't be fooled. The Nose, like all El Cap routes, is huge exposed and terrifying.

## History

After missing a chance to make the first ascent of Half Dome, Warren Harding knew there was only one other accomplishment that could surpass it—the first ascent of El Capitan. Because no technical rock climb of this scale had ever been attempted, Harding employed expedition tactics of using supplied camps linked by fixed ropes. In addition, the Park Service mandated that the climbers use fixed ropes so that a rescue would not be necessary. On July 4, 1957, six days after the first ascent of Half Dome, Harding and his team began their historic journey.

After reaching Sickie Ledge in three days, the team pulled off two wild pendulums and faced the next obstacle, a series of 300-foot long, 2–3" wide cracks. Standard pitons that large did not exist, but Harding had come prepared. He had four enameled stove legs that Frank Tarver had scrounged from a Berkeley dump. Leapfrogging the 9" monsters up the continuously wide cracks, the team made it to within 100 feet of Dolt Tower before descending.

The climb was a huge tourist attraction, and traffic became so tangled that the Park Service

ordered a halt to the project until fall. Even under the best of circumstances climbers were viewed as a nuisance by the Park Service—“Somewhere between hippies and bears,” noted Wayne Merry, a member of Harding’s team. Despite the lack of warm feelings for the project, the Park Service lifted the ban as promised and Harding’s team pushed up to Dolt Tower before descending for the winter, leaving fixed ropes attached to the wall. Fixed ropes reduced the fright of being on such a colossal wall, but because they were made of manila and left swaying in the wind for months on end, the ropes presented a danger in themselves. Steve Roper describes a close call: “Wally Reed had just begun prusiking up a section of rope when suddenly he plummeted back onto a ledge. The rope had broken. Luckily the ledge was a fair-sized one and he didn’t roll off.”

In May 1958, Harding and the team reached the Boot Flake, a feature that mysteriously floats on the wall with no visible means of attachment. Each pin placement caused the whole feature to groan and expand. On top of the boot, seeking the next crack system, Harding unleashed the wildest pendulum ever done, now renowned as the King Swing.

By fall the route was pushed up to Camp IV, and both climbers and the Park Service wanted to wrap things up. Harding had been the leader from the start, and as problems arose and partners bailed, it was his determination that kept the project alive. Of the eight climbers who contributed to the first ascent, only Harding was involved for the

duration.

On November 1, 1958, the team, now consisting of Harding, Merry, Rich Calderwood and George Whitmore, prusiked to their high point at 1,900 feet and launched their summit campaign. The Great Roof, although appearing from the ground to be the crux of the route, was easily dispatched, and the climbers moved steadily up to Camp VI. At this point Calderwood suddenly dropped out, leaving Whitmore to move loads and Harding and Merry to

○

**WALLY REED HAD JUST BEGUN PRUSIKING UP A SECTION OF ROPE WHEN SUDDENLY HE PLUMMETED BACK ONTO A LEDGE. THE ROPE HAD BROKEN.**

STEVE ROPER



		Pitch																															
		1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	13	14	15	16	17	18	19	20	21	22	23	24	25	26	27	28	29	30	31	
<b>The Nose</b>																																	
<b>Aid</b>	A5/C5																																
	A4/C4																																
	A3/C3																																
	A2/C2				C																												
	A1/C1	C	C		C		C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	C	
<b>Mandatory free</b>	5.8-5.9				•											•																	
	≤5.7					•		•					•		•						•	•	•	•								•	





swing leads up the spectacular upper dihedrals.

After enduring a storm on November 10, they reached a small ledge 180 feet below the summit. Above them loomed a blank and overhanging wall. At 6 p.m. the next day Whitmore came up the fixed ropes, which now spanned 2,800 feet of the wall, and delivered a fresh supply of bolts to Harding. What followed was described by Steve Roper in *Camp 4* as “the most famous single episode in Yosemite’s illustrious climbing history.”

For 14 hours, from dusk till dawn, Harding endured the unimaginable pain of hand drilling 28 bolts in a row by headlamp. At 6 a.m. he stood exhausted but triumphant on the summit, greeted by hordes of friends and media who created a huge commotion unlike that prompted by any previous climb. Scaling El Capitan had required 45 days of climbing over 18 months and had consumed 125 bolts. The triumph shook both the climbing and non-climbing worlds and would change big wall climbing forever. The term “impossible climb” would never again be used as easily. Within a few years the rush was on to climb in Yosemite.

In 1960, Royal Robbins, Tom Frost, Chuck Pratt and Joe Fitschen made the second ascent of The Nose. This significant ascent, the first continuous ascent of El Capitan, proved that an enormous wall could be climbed without siege tactics, and it paved the way for the bold big wall ascents of the '60s. Jim Bridwell, John Long and Billy Westbay made the first one-day ascent of the Nose in 1975. Their 15-hour dash laid the groundwork for the speed climbing that would grip the valley in later years.

In 1981, Ray Jardine, the inventor of Friends, launched the first major attempt to free climb The Nose. Just below El Cap Tower the possible free route traversed 30 feet on what Jardine hoped would be 5.11 terrain. He found the moves were actually much harder, so he used a cold chisel and manufactured 5.11. Jardine’s motive was his vision of “Numero Uno,” a route up El Cap that was moderate and accessible to the masses.

In 1993, Lynn Hill approached the climb with a much different philosophy. After Jardine, many top climbers had attempted to free climb The Nose, but none was able to unlock sequences on the Great Roof or the Changing Corners. On her first attempt in 1993, Hill freed every pitch to Camp VI including the Great Roof—an incredible feat still unrepeated on

lead. A few pitches higher on the Changing Corners pitch, a fixed piton lodged in a crucial finger lock blocked the free ascent. Returning to the summit a few weeks later with Brooke Sandahl, Hill removed the offending piton and worked the extremely technical moves. It looked like it would go!

Hill and Sandahl returned to the base and began their ground up free ascent. Hill climbed the Great

Roof first try and moved to the crux Changing Corners pitch. Here she employed “a bizarre sequence of moves involving delicate smears, stems, back-stepping, laybacking, arm bars, pinching, palming, etc.” Again, she sent the pitch first try and after four days of spectacular free climbing, Hill and Sandahl stood on the summit. The Nose was free.

It is hard to top one of the great free climbing achievements of all time, but

the next year Hill herself found a way. Starting at 10 p.m. on a September evening, Hill spent the next 23 hours climbing every pitch free, making the first one-day free ascent of The Nose.

– Chris McNamara



**AS I HAMMERED IN THE LAST BOLT AND STAGGERED  
OVER THE RIM, IT WAS NOT AT ALL CLEAR TO ME  
WHO WAS CONQUEROR AND WHO WAS CONQUERED:  
I DO RECALL THAT EL CAP SEEMED TO BE IN MUCH  
BETTER CONDITION THAN I WAS.**

WARREN HARDING



## Strategy

The Nose requires a fast and light strategy. Although many parties climb the route in more than four days, hauling that much food and water is not pretty. The route has little mandatory free climbing, but it will be more enjoyable and go faster if you can free 5.10. The Nose is the most popular route on El Cap, so prepare to wait in line for two days at the base. Most parties spend the first day hiking loads to the base and fixing to Sickle Ledge. Fixing gives a head start but increases the logistics of the climb. If you aim to do the route in two nights, bivy at El Cap Tower and Camp V. If you are aiming for three nights, bivy on Dolt Tower, Camp IV and Camp VI. The ASCA and others have replaced almost all lead and belay bolts.

## Retreat

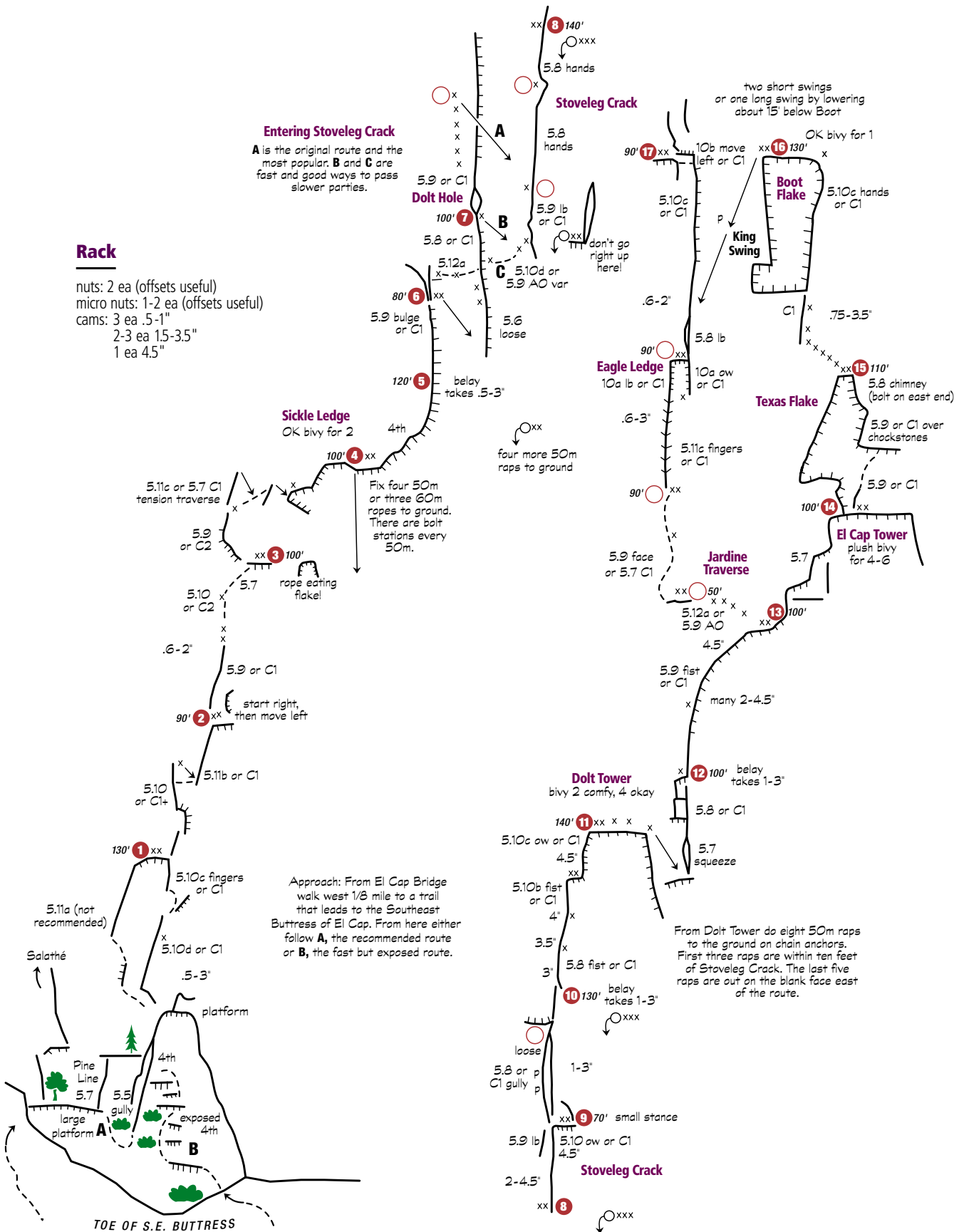
The Nose is set up for easy bailing from the last pitch all the way to the ground. It is much easier to retreat from the route with 60m ropes. In a storm the upper part of the wall, especially Camp VI, receives much runoff. Many rescues and a few deaths have resulted from parties not being equipped with adequate storm gear.

**Rack**

nuts: 2 ea (offsets useful)  
 micro nuts: 1-2 ea (offsets useful)  
 cams: 3 ea .5-1"  
 2-3 ea 1.5-3.5"  
 1 ea 4.5"

**Entering Stoveleg Crack**

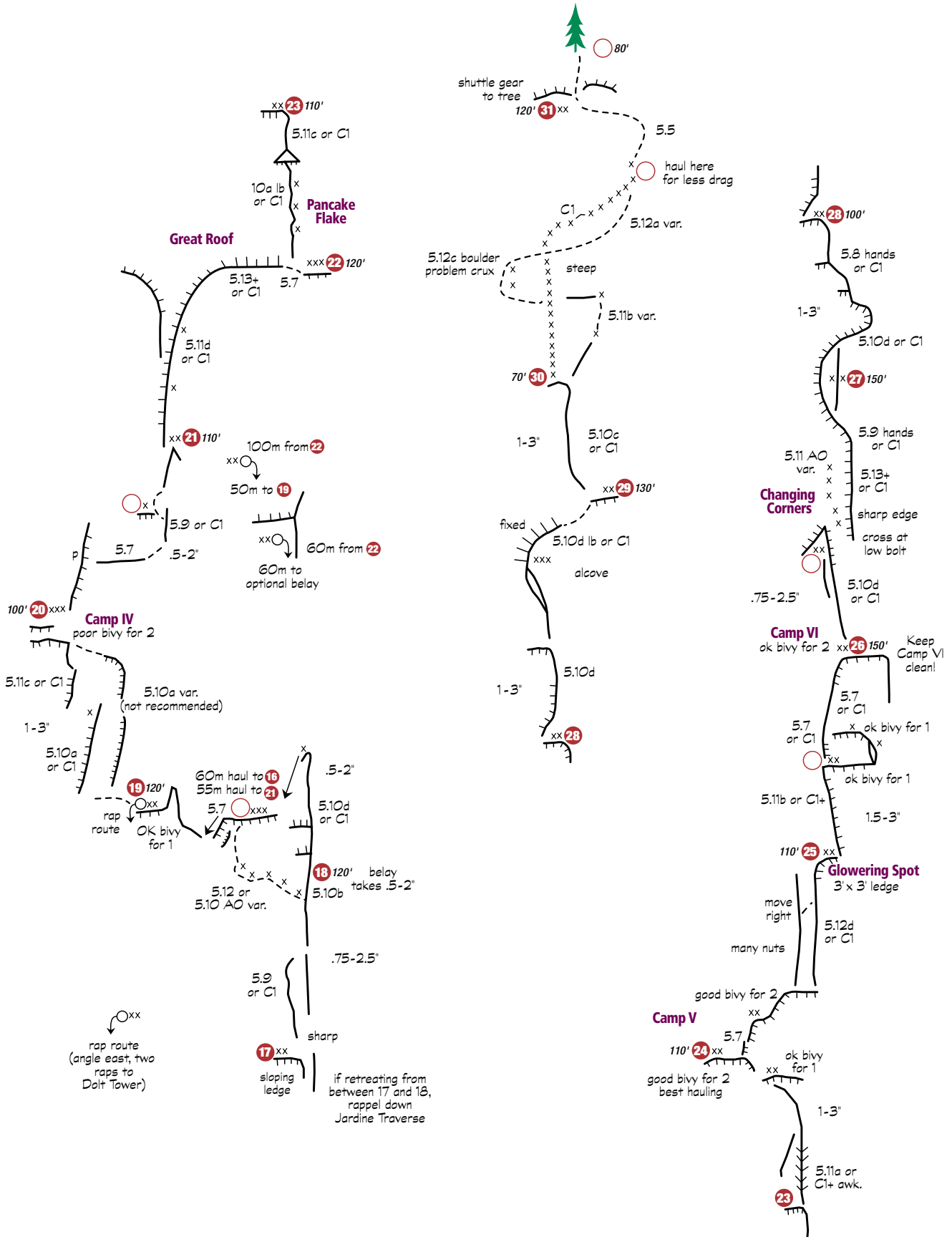
A is the original route and the most popular. B and C are fast and good ways to pass slower parties.



Approach: From El Cap Bridge walk west 1/8 mile to a trail that leads to the Southeast Buttress of El Cap. From here either follow A, the recommended route or B, the fast but exposed route.

From Dolt Tower do eight 50m raps to the ground on chain anchors. First three raps are within ten feet of Stoveleg Crack. The last five raps are out on the blank face east of the route.





Topo by Chris McNamara



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## The Final Pitch

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El Capitan after winter storm. Photo by Chris McNamara.

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Thanks again,

Chris McNamara  
Founder and CEO  
SuperTopo

