



Imperial College  
Yosemite Expedition 2013  
Report



## Contents

Contents.....	1
1 Introduction.....	2
1.1 Aims & Objectives.....	2
1.2 Area.....	2
1.3 Itinerary .....	4
2 Expedition Team.....	5
2.1 Matthew Lees (Murray) .....	5
2.2 Tom Wheeler.....	5
2.3 Joel Mendes.....	5
2.4 James Lawson.....	6
2.5 Ben Coope.....	6
2.6 Mike Jones (Fails) .....	6
2.7 Jo Robbings .....	7
3 Logistics.....	8
3.1 Maps and Guidebooks.....	8
3.2 Transportation .....	8
3.3 Weather.....	8
3.4 Wildlife and environmental impact.....	8
3.4.1 Squirrels .....	9
3.4.2 Bears .....	9
3.4.3 Racoons.....	9
3.4.4 Big Cats .....	9
3.4.5 Lichen .....	9
3.5 Visas/Permits.....	10
3.6 Living in Yosemite Valley .....	10
3.7 Climbing Teams.....	11
4 Diary .....	12
5 Big Walls Climbed.....	30
5.1 Washington Column .....	30
5.2 Half Dome .....	36
5.3 El Capitan.....	37
6 Climbing skills.....	43
7 Finance .....	44



# 1 Introduction

## 1.1 Aims & Objectives

The expedition's primary aim was to safely spend six weeks climbing big walls in Yosemite National Park, California. More precisely, our objectives were:

Primary Objectives:

- I. To arrive home safely
- II. To climb three routes, namely: The Nose, Half Dome, Salathe Wall

Additional Objectives:

- III. To produce a video blog of the expedition, with the intention of encouraging people to start climbing
- IV. To increase members knowledge of big wall climbing, as well as aid climbing

Big wall climbing and aid climbing are very inaccessible disciplines in the UK due to stringent UK ethics coupled with generally short routes; as well as gaining skills that are difficult to gain in the UK, we intend to encourage people (from Imperial, as well as from the wider UK climbing community) to start big wall/aid climbing.

## 1.2 Area

Yosemite national park, California, features incredibly diverse ecology, flora and fauna as well as a massive range of rock climbing. The national park in Yosemite is a UNESCO World Heritage Site. It has some of the best climbing in the world in nearly all disciplines of climbing, including: bouldering, big wall, aid, sport and traditional climbing.

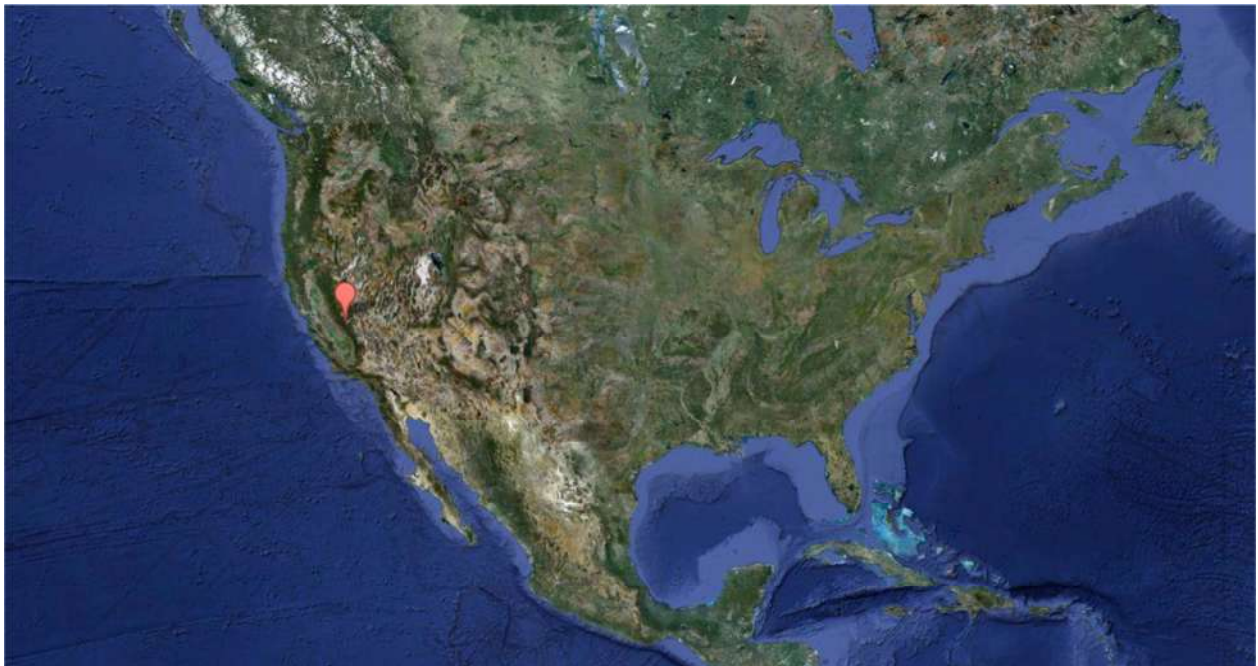


Figure 1 – A map showing the situation of Yosemite Valley, in California, USA

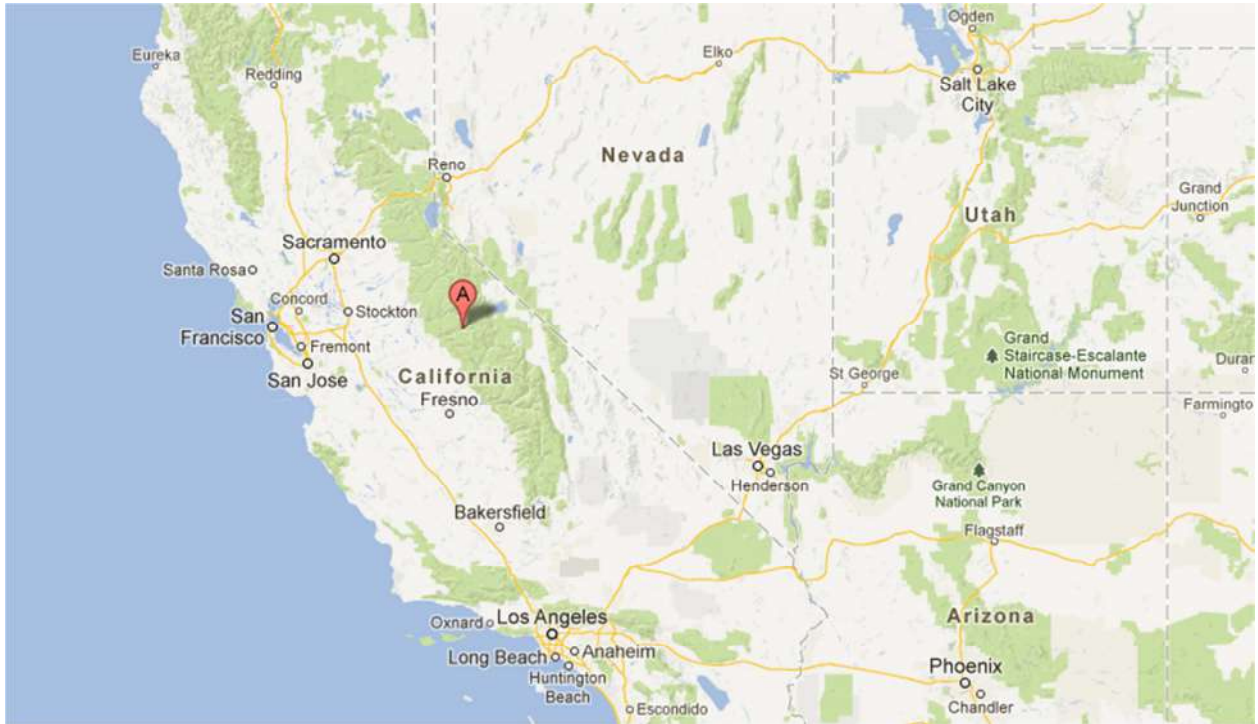


Figure 2 – A map showing the location of Yosemite Valley in California, USA

Native Americans inhabited the Yosemite Valley from around 10,000 years ago. European settlers failed to find the Yosemite Valley until 1833, and tourism in the region began in 1855. The Yosemite Valley and surrounding area was designated a National Park on the 1<sup>st</sup> of October 1890 under the Yosemite Act which stated: “for the preservation from injury of all timber, mineral deposits, natural curiosities, or wonders within said reservation, and their retention in their natural condition.” This was achieved largely due to the work of Galen Clark and John Muir.

The US Army administered the park from 1891 until 1914 and helped control illegal activity. In 1903 during a camping trip, John Muir convinced President Theodore Roosevelt to place the park under Federal control, which was achieved, but after a two-third reduction in the parks size. In 1916, park administration was handed from the US Army to the National Park service.

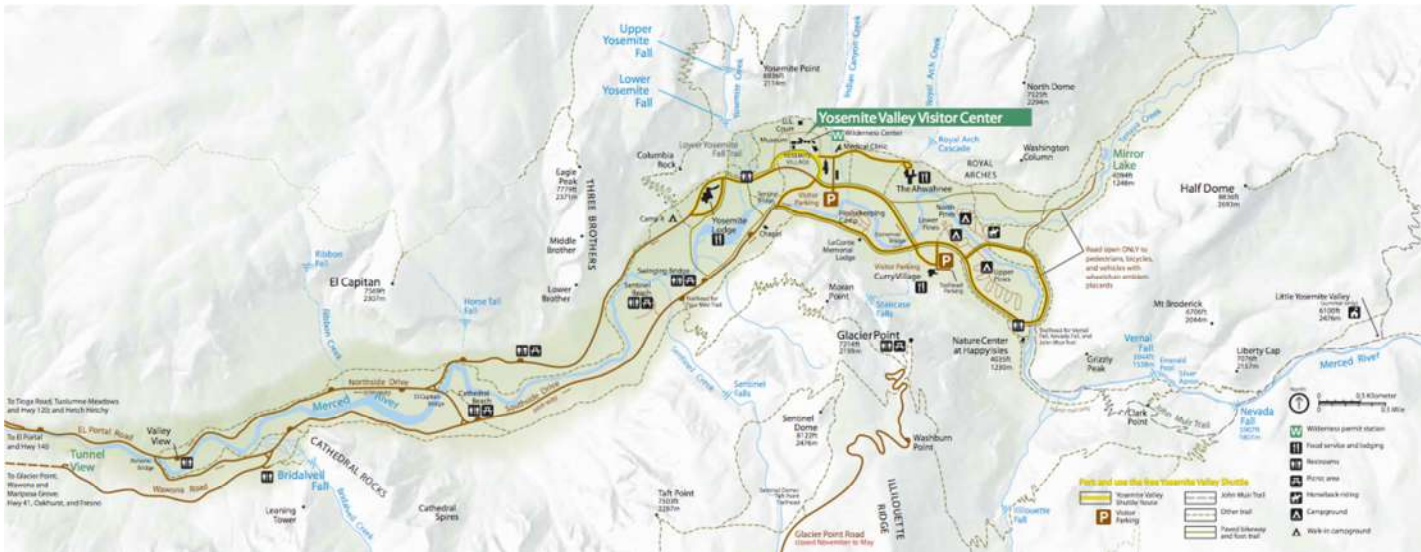


Figure 3 – A map of Yosemite Valley

### 1.3 Itinerary

The expedition dates were chosen to ensure we had the best possible conditions to maximize our safety and climbing ability. The region is busiest with tourists in June, July and August, but the walls are quietest due to the hot weather. The optimum time to climb (based on weather) is May-June or August-September. Due to exams the former was not possible. Because of job commitments, Matthew, Tom and Mike were not able to stay for the full trip. The expedition lasted six weeks, with Matthew departing after four weeks and Tom and Mike arriving after two.

8 <sup>th</sup> August	Flight from Heathrow to San Francisco
10 <sup>th</sup> August	Drove to Yosemite Valley, queued for Camp 4 campsite
16 <sup>th</sup> August	Travel to Tuolumne
20 <sup>th</sup> August	Return to San Francisco, pick up Tom and Fails
22 <sup>nd</sup> August	Return to Yosemite
4 <sup>th</sup> September	Return to San Francisco
7 <sup>th</sup> September	Return to Yosemite, drop off Murray at Airport
20 <sup>th</sup> September	Return to London



## 2 Expedition Team

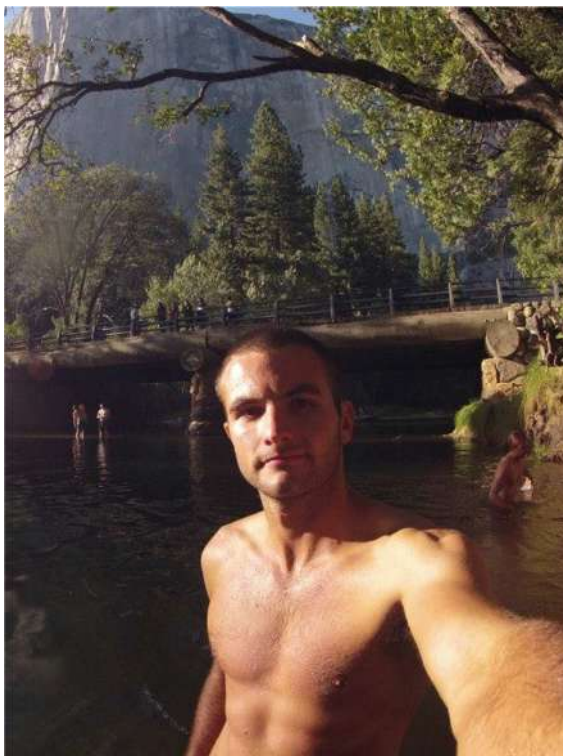
### 2.1 Matthew Lees (Murray)

Role: Expedition Leader

Age: 24

Graduated MEng Civil Engineering

Traditional climbing up to HVS, bouldering up to V5, sport climbing up to 6b. Travelled in Nepal for a month, including trekking to Everest Base Camp and 'Kale Patthar' (5545m). Planned two University tours to the Pyrenees and Mallorca.



### 2.2 Tom Wheeler

Role: Medical Officer

Age: 22

3<sup>rd</sup> Year MSci Physics

Experienced traditional climber up to E2 on over 100 routes in the UK. Scottish Winter climbing up to grade IV. Water Ice climbing in Norway, leading up to W14 and climbing W15. One season alpine climbing in Chamonix up to PD. Sport climbing up to F6c.

### 2.3 Joel Mendes

Role: Finance Officer

Age: 21

Graduated BSci Mathematics

Traditional climbing up to HVS, sport climbing up to F7a, and bouldering up to V6. Scottish winter climbing up to grade III. One season alpine climbing in Chamonix up to grade D. Qualified first aider and National Pool Lifeguard.





## 2.4 James Lawson

Role: Equipment Officer

Age: 24

2<sup>nd</sup> Year PhD Electrical Engineering.

Traditional climbing HVS, bouldering up to V5, Scottish Winter Climbing up to grade IV, Alpine climbing up to AD. International venues include France, Croatia and Greece, as well as extensive climbing throughout the UK.



## 2.5 Ben Coope

Role: Training officer

Age: 20

2<sup>nd</sup> year MEng Mechanical Engineering

Traditional climbing up to E4, sport climbing up to 7b+/c, bouldering up to V8. Two seasons Scottish winter, leading comfortably up to IV/V. One season in the Alps climbing up to AD.



## 2.6 Mike Jones (Fails)

Role: Logistics Officer

Age: 21

4<sup>th</sup> Year MSci Geology and Geophysics

Traditional climbing up to E1, sport climbing up to 7a+, bouldering up to V7, deep water soling up to 7a. International venues include Mallorca, Italy, Croatia and Spain, as well as a variety of locations throughout the UK





## 2.7 Jo Robbins

Role: Safety Officer

Age: 19

2<sup>nd</sup> year MSci Physics

Traditional climbing up to HVS, sport climbing up to 7a, bouldering up to V6, one seasons Scottish Winter up to II/III.







### **3 Logistics**

All information used in this report was gathered via the Yosemite National Park, Supertopo, UK Climbing websites as well as other Internet resources. Certain climbers have been consulted during our research and have proved to be extremely helpful. Boris Korzh and Hamish Legge are both previous Imperial College students and have experience of climbing in Yosemite and helped answer a few questions for us. Chris McNamara is an 'El Cap-addicted big wall climber' whose online guides and information pages proved to be treacherous.

#### **3.1 Maps and Guidebooks**

Climbing within Yosemite national park is very well documented and a number of guidebooks exist. The guidebooks used during our expedition were "Yosemite Big Walls", "Yosemite Valley Free Climbs" and "Toulumne Free Climbs" both by SuperTopo. We also referred to "Big Walls: A Falcon Guide", which contains information and tips for climbing big walls and the skills required for aid climbing. The SuperTopo guidebook contained a map to locate the climbs and major features in the climbing areas; these were invaluable during the trip.

#### **3.2 Transportation**

The largest and most accessible airport to Yosemite national park is San Francisco International, a four-hour drive away from the park; all team members flew to and from there. For the first two weeks, a seven-seater crossover SUV was rented from San Francisco International airport. Due to the increase in team size and amount of luggage, a minivan was hired for the final four weeks. This was the cheapest and most practical method of transportation to and from the valley. Within the valley a free bus shuttle service ran regularly throughout the day, which provided access to nearly all of the routes walk-ins.

#### **3.3 Weather**

The granite walls surrounding the Yosemite valley trap heat, causing it to be much hotter than the surrounding area. The temperature ranged from low to mid thirties, and was much hotter in early August, making climbing unpleasantly sweaty and draining. This also meant more water had to be carried up the route to prevent the risk of dehydration when climbing in direct sunlight all day. A vast majority of the climbing was sun facing; this caused the rock to heat up. Crack climbing in tight shoes was soon found to be a very bad idea. Around September time the temperature cooled, which gave much better climbing conditions.

#### **3.4 Wildlife and environmental impact**

Yosemite National park covers an area of 747,956 acres and is home to hundreds of wildlife species and thousands of plants. Yosemite supports more than 400 species of vertebrates, including fish, amphibians, reptiles, birds, and mammals. The high diversity of animal species falls in line with the striking elevational gradient and topographic variability of the park.



The park annually receives over four million visitors and is well equipped at minimising and monitoring the related environmental impact. The largest impact that climbers cause in the parks is at the campsite and on the big walls. Whilst staying on the campsites, it was ensured that all rubbish was disposed of properly in the appropriate bins. When on the wall, all excrement was stored, carried up and disposed of afterwards. This was achieved using an old water bottle that was duct taped shut.

The team were lucky enough to see wild Mule deer, Western grey squirrels, California ground squirrels, raccoons, scorpions, marmots, snakes, rainbow trout and.

### 3.4.1 Squirrels

Squirrels were a constant nuisance in the campsite. Hoards of squirrels patrolled the campsite day and night for food left out by unsuspecting campers. They were ready to pounce on any food the moment you weren't looking and made several raids on the team. The successfulness of the squirrels tactics was evident from the large size they had grown to, one was so big it struggled to move more than a metre before having to stop to catch its breath.

The team were driven to take drastic action against the squirrels. At one point they employed all their combined intellect to construct a trap. Small projectiles were used to deter attacks but the arms race got out of hand, escalating from tiny pebbles to lethal quantities of milk.

### 3.4.2 Bears

The team were warned continuously about bears destroying cars and tents however there seemed to be much talk and little action. No bears or even traces of bears were seen by anyone during the expedition. This lead the team to conclude that there are in fact no bears in Yosemite and it's all a ruse by the manufacturers of bear boxes. On the final day of the trip Ben Coope got a brief glimpse of a Black bear hurtling through the forest, which he described as "a large man in a guerrilla suite", this could have been Big Foot.

### 3.4.3 Racoons

A night time assault team of raccoons besieged the team but they survived the night of terror.

### 3.4.4 Big Cats

During an epic voyage of self-discovery traversing the wilds of Yosemite National park, team member Michael encountered a large wild cat at a distance of fifteen metres. The animal was later identified as most likely being a Bobcat. Bobcats are generally deemed as non-dangerous to humans, however, during our stay in Yosemite valley there were reported siting's and a number of warnings of a mountain lion within the valley. Mountain lions are rare but have been known to attack humans and have caused a number of fatalities.

### 3.4.5 Lichen

One of the core objectives of this expedition was to study lichen in Yosemite Valley. After extensive work studying the rocks and cliffs a lichen was discovered. It was



unaggressive and was happy for it's photo to be taken. It was assumed to be asleep and waiting in line for camp 4 as the team were at the time.



### 3.5 Visas/Permits

To travel to the US it is required to have an ESTA waver VISA. This has a cost of \$14 per person. No further permits are required for European citizens on trips shorter than 90 days, which applies to this trip. The park entrance fee applies to all visitors. If you arrive in your private car, the entrance fee is \$20 per car and is valid for seven days; alternatively it is \$40 for the whole four weeks under a 'Yosemite Pass'. This was the most cost effective way of entering the park.

### 3.6 Living in Yosemite Valley

The majority of the time was spent at a campsite within the Yosemite Valley, named Camp 4, which is within walking distance of a large amount of the climbing. Places cannot be reserved in advance and are allocated on a first come first served basis; registration for a place opens at 8:30am therefore we started queuing at around 5am to ensure a place. The cost was \$5 per person per night with a seven-day limit on the stay. This limit was overcome by visiting other campsites, spending a week in Toulumne, and also not needing to stay in a campsite for some of the nights whilst sleeping on the wall.

Although showers were available in Curry Village, the team washed mostly by swimming in the river. Every two weeks, whilst visiting Murray's godparents, all team members were able to have a proper shower (or a long relaxing bath, in Jo's case).



Internet was available at Degnan's café in the village for a small fee. This enabled the team to check route conditions and climbing beta on routes and update the trip facebook blog page with what was happening. The weather forecast was updated daily in the campsite.

### **3.7 Climbing Teams**

The climbing teams varied during the tour, depending mainly on who wanted to climb what. Most of the routes were climbed in pairs, or occasionally a three. This was because climbing in a pair is the most efficient and fastest method of climbing, an important factor to consider when climbing a route with big time pressures. Climbing in a three is a much more relaxed approach, as it means less leads for each climber.



## 4 Diary

**07/08/2013 Day 0**

Murray arrived a day in advance of the main team. He flew in from Seoul after spending some time in the Far East to see his godparents, Jim and Kate Slevin.

**08/08/2013 Day 1**



Kate drove Murray to the airport to meet Ben and Jo. The few hours before Joel and Kip arrived were spent sorting the hire car, which turned out to be more complicated than the team were expecting. Once Joel and Kip arrived, it became clear that the large amounts of luggage would not fit in an American saloon as planned, and so this was upgraded to a seven-seater crossover SUV. Several names were considered for the car but the winning name was Valerie, after the lovely saleswoman that served us.

After some cruising around the car park to get used to the automatic gearbox, light steering and turning circle that could rival Titanic, the road trip to Yosemite Park began. The afternoon was spent experiencing American cuisine in Taco Bell and shopping in Walmart, but by early evening the jetlag was hitting Kip and Joel, and so the team decided to spend an unplanned night at Jim and Kate's. Jim and Kate were only too happy to meet the team and rustled up some fantastic food.

**09/08/2013 Day 2**

Jim and Kate advised the team on better places to shop and all the necessary supplies were soon in the back of Valerie. Running a day late the team finally got on the road to the valley and managed to enjoy some long distance driving through spectacular Californian countryside made up from freeways with up to seven lanes and no rules on undertaking or overtaking.



Driving into the valley late at night proved a good idea as the rangers had gone to bed meaning that there was nobody guarding the gates and hence nobody to pay to get into the park. The team parked up in Curry village for a few hours nap.

**10/08/2013 Day 3**

Up at 5am to drive over to Camp 4 to get in line for camping. As dawn crept forward, ominous black shapes that reached high into the sky appeared. These were the great cliffs of Yosemite, which were unbelievably high (these weren't even the big ones).



Shortly before 8am the camp ranger came by to tell us all about the bears before checking us in. She seemed mildly confused that a group of climbers all wanted to check in for a maximum seven days. After a number of reminders that we could check out whenever we wanted and have our money back she eventually accepted a fistful of dollars and gave us our pitch.

Once the tents were pitched and the food was in the lockers it was time for a trip to the gear shop to buy bits and pieces that couldn't be bought in the UK easily. Unfortunately as everyone was very tired and didn't know much about gear the team were laughed out of the shop. Deciding to run away to the crag furthest from the shop everyone piled into the car and headed off to cookie cliff. The directions weren't particularly specific but eventually a crag was located which looked about right. Jo and Joel managed to free a 5.10b while Ben did some aid climbing. After everyone got tired the team went back to camp for dinner and a good nights sleep.

#### 11/08/2013 Day 4

Up bright and not so early but fully refreshed, it was time to go sightseeing. As the drive into the valley was at night nobody had yet seen the goal of the entire trip: El Capitan. The base of the wall was just a short drive away so this was the first stop of the day. El Cap was huge, everyone knew it would be and had seen the pictures but nobody was quite prepared



for it. The car parking is a reasonable distance away but everyone still had to run out into the meadow to get far enough back to see it all at once. The slabby start and overhanging end create an odd optical illusion that makes it seem even bigger than it is. It also looks like it's about to fall over at any minute. After some time the features of The Nose could be picked out and eventually some climbers were found part way up looking like fleas lost in a sea of rock.

The plan was to go climb a few single pitch routes at the base of El Cap and maybe a few short multipitches. Joel and Murray aided up the first pitch of Pacific Ocean Wall, an enjoyable C1, each taking approximately two hours to climb and clean the route. Ben, Kip and Jo headed off to climb up to El Cap Tree, a recommended four-pitch route. Kip enjoyed some hooking and swinging while the others looked on in disgust. After the first pitch they decided they had had enough and abbed back down.



Everyone had a go on the El Cap Swing before going swimming in the river. The river was rather brisk but very clear and magical when lit by head torches from the riverbank.



### 12/08/2013 Day 5

After a slow start and an eggy breakfast Joel, Ben and Kip took the bus to climb the Manure Pile. The route was a mega classic called Nutcracker. While not particularly hard at 5.8, there is an unbelievable roof hand jamming part, which really does go at 5.8. All three found that their shoes were too tight and that they would require new ones. Kip also took this opportunity to test his gear and the rope by taking a 7m fall from a tricky mantle move. Luckily he escaped with minor grazing after sliding down the slab below.

Jo and Murray headed back to El Cap and tried to take a short cut to avoid the very long walk in. Unfortunately this short cut took two hours and was clearly the wrong way. Jo climbed Pacific Ocean Wall, followed by Murray who cleaned. The pitch took about two hours in total, and there wasn't enough time for Murray to do a pitch of C2 so they headed down to the river to get the bus home.

As luck would have it everyone was reunited on the bus making the driver and all the passengers very excited at having so many climbers on board. Tales of the day's adventures were shared loudly with everyone on the bus. Joel, Kip and Ben all found their aggressive shoes for cold British climbing were too tight for the hot slabby Yosemite style. Kip had taken the first big fall of the trip (everything in Yosemite is big, even the falls). Fortunately he had escaped with grazes and no serious injuries. Murray and Jo had been considering Washington Column but by the time they got back to camp there wasn't enough time to pack so the climb was postponed.

### 13/08/2013 Day 6

Murray and Jo spent the day packing for Washington column. They had to buy tinned food and some materials for making poop tubes, which were all stuffed into the haul bag. Kip offered some helpful suggestions such as sharing a sleeping bag, which were all promptly ignored.

Everyone agreed it was far too hot for proper climbing, and so went to Swan Slabs, which is the closest wall to Camp 4, populated with fairly easy slab climbs. Ben roped the hardest route at the crag called "Aid Route" which required a bit of French free at the start but went free otherwise. Everyone else had a go and as the sun started to move over the climbing got faster and faster as the hot rock started to cook people's hands and feet. New shoes bought that morning were super effective.



A casual passer by stopped to talk to the group and offered some advice on climbing. Kip, being a master of climbing, quickly dismissed these remarks and asserted his superiority. In a vague attempt to not offend the man and his wife Kip joked that he was probably a notorious climber who had just been insulted by a punter, this made him and his wife laugh before they moved on. Soon after, someone got out the Falcon Guide Book for a read only to see a familiar face looking back from the front cover. As it turns out the casual passer-by who had been so ruthlessly dissed by Kip was none other than Jon



Long, notorious big wall climber responsible for the first one-day ascent of the nose.

Feeling rather humiliated Kip and the group (who were less humiliated) packed up the climbing and went down to the river to pray, praying out loud in the good old way. The group went to a large rock, which was good for jumping off of, where they met some other tourists. There were two children there, one of whom was pretty cool but the other was rather annoying. The annoying kid kept producing catch phrases such as "music is dead" and claimed to want to visit the town that Black Sabbath were from. Ben informed the kid that Birmingham is not that great.

**14/08/2013 Day 7**

Murray and Jo head off early for their attempt at Washington Column. Joel, Ben and Kip had a fairly relaxed day swimming where no events of interest occurred.

**15/08/2013 Day 8**

Murray and Jo decided to bail from Washington. Joel, Ben and Kip spend the day preparing to climb Half Dome following the guidance in the book to the letter (see montage to the right). Once Murray and Jo were picked up everyone went to the river again, this time Ben decided to back flip off of everything he could see.

**16/08/2013 Day 9**

Ben Kip and Joel were all dropped off at the end of the path for half dome for the walk in. The fixed lines up the death slabs would make the beginning of the ascent much easier and safer. Information from others at Camp 4 said that the spring at the base of the wall (after the death slabs) was still running, this meant very little water needed to be carried in which also made things easier. The plan was for a three-day ascent, climbing the death slabs on day one, reaching big sandy ledge on day two, topping out and walking off on day 3.







Jo and Murray didn't have enough time left on their camping to hang around in Camp 4 for the others so decided to travel up to Tuolumne. They packed up camp and loaded everything into Vallerie and headed out of the valley. After some exciting driving and spectacular scenery they reached a viewpoint at the eastern end of the valley, the whole valley could be seen but the view of half dome was the best. They couldn't see the team on the wall but then again they were very far away. The Toulumne meadows campsite was full, but the rangers gave directions to all the other campsites in the area, which should have had some space. After much driving and more spectacular views of lakes and mountains Jo and Murray were forced to give up and sleep in the car again.



**17/08/2013 Day 10**

Second in line for Toulomne Meadows campsite meant that Jo and Murray got in, this early start and long queuing turned out to be completely pointless as there was loads of space that day. As soon as the tents were set up Joel texted saying that they were bailing and needed a pick up. The reason

was unclear at this point but the team did not sound happy. Jo and Murray set up camp and stashed all the food in the bear box before heading all the way back to the valley for the pick up.

Ben Joel and Kip all looked like they has been through hell, and smelt like it too. They were put into the river to try and wash them but this may have led to a minor pollution event, as they were so filthy. It turned out that the static rope which was meant to be 60m was only 55m, this meant that hauling between the first and third pitch was not possible and caused some quite serious issues when the rope went tight with the climber just below the belay forcing them to bail. Many other useful lessons were learnt and communicated to Jo and Murray on the long drive back to Toulomne:



- Don't take a haul bag on Half Dome; it's too much of a pain to haul.
- Climb it in two days by going fast and light and sleep in your belay jacket avoiding big sandy ledge if possible.
- Chris MacNamara is "Just some guy from the bay area"
- Ripped trousers are very amusing and let everyone see rather more than they wanted of Ben.
- Abseiling through a wasps nest is a bad idea
- Abseiling past a knot with a haul bag on is a bad idea
- Walking off via the Muir Train is a bad idea, abseil back down the death slabs.



- Climbing in a three is a bad idea
- Listen to the locals

Joel had no spare clothes so elected to stay in his boxers for the rest of the day. On the way out of the valley everyone stopped to admire the views and were very impressed with the new scenery of Tuolumne. The cooler temperatures and cold night was a much-appreciated change from the valley.



**18/08/2013 Day 11**

The first day in Tuolumne was spent at East Cottage Dome. The climbs were quite different to the crack climbing in Yosemite; here it was face climbing on delicate feet and crimpy hands. Ben climbed a 5.10D, and Jo a 5.10c, which were then top-roped by Murray and Kip. A handful of other climbs were done before an early retreat due to storms being visible in the distance. The locals advised that you shouldn't stay on the domes if the rain was approaching, as it is

easy to be swept off the domes by running water.

A petrol station just outside the park gates was recommended to us by some of the locals at the campsite, so everyone piled into the car to go there. Just outside the campsite turned out to be quite a long drive and it was more of a grill that happened to sell petrol than a petrol station, but it was well worth it. Fantastic tasting huge steaks and burgers were on offer along with some wonderful views of the Atlantic Ocean. Joel was later informed that this was in fact just Lake Mono and that we were still in California and America is that big. Kip and Jo had been considering going to climb Mathers Crest, which is a rather unique rock formation, but the weather forecast for the next few days was not looking good. Since this was outside the park and it wasn't quite late enough for the rangers to all go to bed the team had to pay for entry to the park this time.





### 19/08/2013 Day 12

Today the team visited the south flank of Daff Dome to learn crack climbing. There was a range of hand and fist cracks from 5.6 to 5.10. Kip and Jo did a cool looking crack followed by a very run out slab, the locals said they'd never seen anyone bother with the top pitch before. Ben's finger was very swollen at this point after his fight with the wasp on half dome so he was taking lots of anti histamine. The rains came in at about 4pm so we quickly left the crag.



Upon returning to the campsite the rains started coming down much more heavily. All the bags were removed from the tents, as there wasn't much space so they all touched the sides, they were placed in the car. Everyone sat in the car hoping the rains would stop but they just kept coming. Dinner was cooked under the shelter of Valerie's enormous trunk. After dinner everyone crowded into the boys tent to watch Leon the Professional, which was the only good film on Kip's laptop. Sadly his battery died half way through the film. Jo didn't want to leave the boys tent, as she likes men so much, and took up all the remaining space. Jo also decided to punch and kick everyone within reach, which was everyone in the tent.



### 20/08/2013 Day 13

Time to leave Tuolumne. Everyone packed up the campsite and said goodbye to our neighbours. One happy camper who was staying next door was Bill, he had lived and visited Tuolumne all his life and was great to chat to. The main road back to San Francisco was highway 120, this was now closed due to the forest fire so the 140 was the only reasonable route back. On the way out of the park some unusual traffic lights and road works were found, the sign said to expect a 15-minute wait. It turned out that there had been a huge landslide, which had taken out

the whole road on one side of the valley for about half a kilometre of the road. All traffic was passing over 2 small temporary bridges to get to the other side of the valley to get round. This road also had some historic bridges, which were almost 100 years old, Ben pointed out that his house was older than America at this point. This all added approximately 2 hours' drive to the journey but allowed some different scenery consisting of immense farms.

For lunch the team stopped in Merced for KFC (Joel choice) and discovered that the Americans had misunderstood the names of various foods. They served 'biscuits' which turned out to be scones and they didn't even serve it with jam and cream.



When everyone finally arrived back at Murray's godparents they found Kate asleep on the sofa, she had taken a quick nap after a tough morning and had over slept. Everyone took a shower (not together) and began the cloth washing ritual. Jim and Kate bought a vast quantity of food and cooked up some incredible steaks for dinner.



Tom and Fails were meant to be picked up from the airport that night but unfortunately their flight was delayed so they had to suffer the misery of spending a night in the Washington DC Hilton.

#### **21/08/2013 Day 14**

Valery had all the junk in her trunk removed before kip went in her back door with the industrial vacuum cleaner borrowed from Jim and Kate. Once Valery's deep clean was over she was taken back to the airport and left with the airport car rental people. The new plan was to take two saloon cars instead of one big car. After speaking to the car rental companies and the new salesman, Faruk, this was changed to a 15-seat minivan, which was cheaper than two cars and more practical. The original Valery was happy to see us back buying more cars; she was not informed of the nickname we gave to the car she rented to us. In the new tradition the minivan was immediately named Faruk. Some handy free upgrades were also lavished on top such as having all five young drivers on the insurance for no extra cost.

Everyone jumped into Faruk and headed back to Sunnyvale. After a quick stop at Jim and Kate's house everyone went over to the climbing shop for more gear and then food shopping. Jim and Kate rustled up even more outstanding food before getting on the road back to Yosemite at about 11pm. On the way back a brief bathroom break was had in the middle of nowhere; there was a creepy wooden child and a dinosaur so everyone finished up quickly and jumped back in Faruk. The team arrived at Camp 4 nice and early to get to the front of the queue, this time Murray and Tom checked in.

#### **22/08/2013 Day 15**

Camp was promptly set up on a new pitch and we head off for some climbing. Tom, Fails and Ben climbed both pitches of 'Aid Route' at Swan Slabbs. The second pitch was very run out but well worth it. Murray and Joel napped in the bus after doing lots of driving the night before. Jo and Kip took advantage of the quiet campsite and snuck into the tent for a bit of alone time.

Once the afternoon sun appeared, it was too hot to climb, so we retreated to the river. Jo and Kip wanted some more alone time, so they decided to go for a second attempt of Washington Column the next day; they headed back early to pack.



**23/08/2013 Day 16**

Jo and Kip got up very early at 2am to ensure they were first on the climb and that they missed the worst of the sun on Washington Column. All their efforts were for nothing as Faruk's pacemaker was broken and his engine couldn't turn over. Fails took this opportunity to work on his charm and convinced a passing girl from Oklahoma to jump-start the car. Kip and Jo, now running very late, were taken to Washington Column and Faruk's battery was charged up during the drive.



The rest of the group headed to the other end of the valley to climb Reed's Pinnacle. Climbing in a group of two Murray and Joel took the easier route (5.8) while Ben, Fails and Tom took the harder 5.9 route. Murray topped out the first pitch of his climb and was surprised to find that the last 10 meters was the outside of a huge flake, which was hardly attached to the wall. This gave Murray quite an entertaining belay stance straddling the flake with some rather suspect gear. The second pitch started with a large stride off of the flake onto bridging on slick rock, which moved into easier climbing. Ben took the first pitch of the other teams climb which was sustained 5.9 finger crack, after his observing of other crack climbing in Tuolumne he was well prepared and destroyed the route stopping only momentarily to make sure everyone knew how difficult it was.

For the third pitch of the climb everyone's routes converged on an unusual tunnel through the cliff. While the caving club would have thought nothing of this it was rather unusual for ICMC members, none of which were experienced in this kind of climbing. Joel went first and started with some chimneying over a rather large drop, which tapered slightly so that if he slipped he would almost certainly get stuck. Fortunately



there was almost no gear, which ensured Joel pushed extra hard to make sure he stayed in. Half way along the chimney narrowed to a gap, which his helmet couldn't fit through and all the gear clipped to his harness made him rather too wide. After transferring everything to the rope and much squeezing and pushing Joel eventually slipped through the gap and made it to the next ledge. Joel led the final pitch, which turned out to be off-route and much harder than



expected. The other three followed behind Murray and Joel with Tom's huge body struggling to fit through. The view from the top was spectacular.

### 24/08/2013 Day 17

After a luxurious night with loads of space in the tent due to Jo and Kip being on Washington Column Murray, Joel, Tom, Ben and Fails got up late and had 'Brinner'. 'Brinner' is the traditional dish of Joel's people and is a cross between breakfast and dinner.

The five climbers then headed over to the La Conte memorial where there is a large boulder with a steep bolted overhang. This was recommended by the guidebook as a good place to practice steep bolt ladders. Time trials were held for both the fastest lead and the fastest second, Ben won both of these. Joel and Murray were planning to climb the North East Buttress of Higher Cathedral Rock the next day which is a ten pitch climb at 5.8 but with several easier pitches (it's usually climbed in one day) so they headed back to camp. Ben, Tom and Fails went swimming briefly before going back to the campsite for lunch.



The team was still short of one major piece of equipment: the portaledge. The plan had been to buy a 'Fish Double Whammy' which is a very good portaledge being both cheap and lightweight. The company Fish had, however, stopped replying to emails and so the team didn't manage to get the portaledge. Additionally the money for the portaledge had come from Harlington, and there was not enough money to buy a new one from the shop. Camp 4 has a notice board where second hand gear is often sold and a Black Diamond portaledge was up for sale at a bargain \$700. Joel and Murray met the guy who turned out to be a park ranger. The portaledge had never been used and so was in very good condition.

Everyone was surprised to see Kip and Jo arriving just as the food was finished. Kip announced loudly his opinion of Chris MacNamara. Due to the late start yesterday Kip and Jo had only made it to dinner ledge and hadn't fixed the Kor Roof and pitch 2 as planned. The next day the Kor Roof took much longer than expected due to the steepness of the bolt ladder. Kip climbed what he thought was the next pitch, which was a bolt ladder heading off to the right. Unfortunately this was not the route, which was meant to be climbing off to the left. What Kip was climbing was a difficult bolt ladder with spaced bolts and several hangers missing. This route turned out to be skull queen, which was the next page over in the guidebook. To save weight Kip and Jo had photographed the guidebook and so didn't have this page; this is standard practice in Yosemite. Annoyingly the bolts and the other route were not indicated in the topo for the other route. Skull queen was not significantly harder than the regular northwest face but not knowing anything about the route Kip and Jo decided to back off. This proved to be quite a challenge in winds that caused near-horizontal abseil ropes.



**25/08/2013 Day 18**

Murray and Joel were up early for their climb but were delayed somewhat by Murray forgetting sun cream. The walk in was supposed to take an hour to an hour and a half but eventually took 3 hours. The path was much less obvious than the guidebook suggested and covered much more challenging terrain. The landmarks mentioned were rather unclear, one direction told climbers to turn right at an ominous looking boulder, not particularly helpful when presented with a boulder field. Eventually they made it to the bottom of the wall but the guide book was still being unhelpful by not explaining where the base of the climb was, it also didn't help that Murray had photographed the topo and the photo of the photo of the climb wasn't very clear.

Murray started up what looked like the right bit of rock and after about 55m of climbing where he placed only 4 pieces of gear he found what could have been a belay ledge. The ledge was mostly dust and dirt which showed signs of recent land slide activity. There was a great crag find of a nut and quickdraw which were approximately 15 years old. There were several pieces of abt tat further along and a large sling on a spike further up. However none of this matched the guide book and didn't look like it had seen much traffic in a while so Murray decided to down climb. The climb down was rather dodgier than the climb up but nothing went wrong and Murray was soon back on the ground. Joel and Murray then headed back down feeling rather defeated. On the way they passed a tree which looked like it was covered in blood, not wanting to hang around they sped down the hill and walked over to camp 4 to get the bus. There was a guy with a telescope at El Cap bridge and he was showing tourists a group who had just done the King Swing on The Nose. Murray and Joel hopped onto the bus and headed back to camp. Everyone else was in camp and they were all rather surprised to see Murray and Joel back so soon. After some explaining of the days misfortunes everyone agreed on what Chris McNamara was and what he should do with himself.

The girl from Oklahoma turned out to have a name but nobody could remember it, she tagged along with the group as they went down to the river for a swim and wash. Ben was very keen to impress Oklahoma girl with his jumping abilities and back flipping. Once it became apparent she wasn't amused Ben decided to take her up to the El Cap swing to he could amuse her up there, Tom and kip decided to tag along and make sure nothing untoward happened. The swingers headed off up to El Cap. Joel and Murray went to get food and Jo and Fails went to chill out in the meadow. Due to a miscommunication Joel and Murray couldn't find Jo and Fails, and so drove back to Camp 4





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The lessons learnt this day were:

Take photos of the guide book in daylight, otherwise you can't read it

Photograph the entire topo including pages before and after your climb

Don't climb things with more than half an hour walk in or regular traffic, otherwise you'll never find it.

### 26/08/2013 Day 19

Ben and Tom went to climb Steck Salathe. Kip and Fales (Mike) went to climb Royal Arches. Murray, Joel and Jo sat around Camp 4 chillaxing, and then head to the climbing shop to check how much bouldering mats were. Unfortunately they started at \$200 ☹ We bought lunch at the grill and head back to camp via The Spirit of Yosemite, an incredibly dramatic video of the valley and its history. Some more chilling at camp 4, slacklining/testing portaledge. The others all returned exhausted late that evening. Jo cooked up some tuna pasta and then spent a while chasing racoons before being able to go to bed.

### 27/08/2013 Day 20

The team was fairly tired from the previous day of climbing, and so the morning was spent relaxing at Camp 4. Next, a swim in the river. Kensie joined us, so Ben had another go at wooing her with his backflips and dives.

Later Kip, Fales (Mike) and Jo head to housekeeping so they could practice aiding and jumaring – it took a while. Jo took 15 minutes for both, kip a quite a bit longer after some issues using jumars. We then head back to Camp 4, where we had the most enthusiastic introduction to smors there ever was. They were very tasty.



### 28/08/2013 Day 21

Fales and Jo went to climb Nutcracker in the early afternoon, a classic 5.8, which they both enjoyed a lot. They head to the river to cool down, where they bumped into the others, who'd spent their day doing probably not a lot. The rest of the afternoon was spent swimming, and then the evening sitting around the fire eating pork and chatting to the others on our pitch. Joel particularly enjoyed chatting extensively about guns to a chap called Patrick from Utah, and was disappointed to learn he wouldn't be able to smuggle one back to England very easily.





**29/08/2013 Day 22**

Ben and Fales queued up early for a camping spot. The team moved everything across the campsite to another pitch, and then went swimming.



**30/08/2013 Day 23**

Chilled day. Went to the bridge to swim. Joel and Murray were going to attempt the Nose. Joel prepared a wonderful breakfast of egg sandwiches, however after a single bite Murray turned around and vomited violently. Joel was rather embarrassed about his cooking efforts and their attempt at the nose was postponed. Ben and Jo climbed Serenity Crack, an awesome 5.10d line that follows a long crack.

Jo, Kip and Fales prepared for Washington Column.

**31/08/2013 Day 24**

Murray and Joel got up early for another attempt at the nose. Things were going well until Joel tried to make porridge for breakfast which ended in Murray vomiting again. Their attempt at the nose was postponed again.

Kip, Mike and Jo had an early start and head off for Washington Column. Tom and Ben spent their day preparing for Half Dome.

**1/09/2013 Day 25**

For the third time Murray and Joel got up early for an attempt at the nose, Murray again vomited up Joel's attempts at breakfast, this time it was protein shake. Since this was the last opportunity for Murray to attempt the nose they went anyway as they could always abseil down. The going was tough as Murray was struggling after his illness. Having already climbed the first 4 pitches before both Murray and Joel knew where they were going which helped matters. They reached Sickle ledge late in the day and set up for hauling. The three ropes that they brought up were tied together and lowered down for Joel to abseil on and attach the haul bag to. They started hauling and after a few adjustments got into the rhythm for hauling the very heavy bag up. It was well after dark when they were finally ready for bed on the small and rather uncomfortable ledge.



Kip, Mike and Jo topped out on Washington Column. It got dark during the abseil down, and so



they decided to spend a second night on Dinner Ledge. Meanwhile Ben and Tom spent their day walking to the base of Half Dome and fixing the first pitch.

**2/9/2013 Day 26**

Kip, Mike and Jo woke up early (Kip forced the other two up) and returned to Camp 4. The rest of the day was spent recuperating at the campsite. A few hours later Joel and Murray returned having bailed from The Nose due to Murray feeling ill. Tom and Ben returned in a highly excitable state at 2am after completing the Regular North-West face of Half Dome in 18 hours, an impressively fast return that none of the others were expecting.

**3/9/2013 Day 27**

After a very chilled morning, the group went to use the internet. Jo, Mike and Kip sat planning an adventurous trip to Toulumne, involving walking the Miur trail (as the road was shut from forest fires) and wild camping once there. After the plan was formed, the group went to Church Bowl, where Mike tried a very polished 5.10a, and slipped off at the top taking a large and spectacular fall. Kip decided to attempt the same route, but fell from the same place, flipping over and smashing his face against the rock. His teeth were bleeding and he had considerable pain in his ribs. Jo called 911 and Yosemite Search and Rescue (YOSAR) were soon on the scene as they were stood next to Mike and Jo and had watched the whole thing. Fortunately the only injury incurred was a chipped tooth, which could be seen once back in San Francisco as the Yosemite dental practice was unable to accommodate him.

**4/9/2013 Day 28**

The group packed up the campsite in the morning, whilst Tom and Murray went to climb Nutcracker (Murray's last climb before leaving the valley). A campsite pitch was booked for the following week at North Pines, and then the team left the valley via a quick dip in the river. Whilst swimming they bumped into some guys that had just got off of Zodiac (A2 5.7). After an interesting chat about the route, the team drove to Jim and Kate's, who cooked up an incredible meal.

**5/9/2013 Day 29**

After a slow start due to Kip having dental care (which conveniently cost the same as the upper limit on his dental insurance), the team head to San Francisco. Most of the day was spent wandering about the city, exploring Chinatown and Fisherman's Warf. The evening was spent eating dinner at Kennedy's Curry, playing pool, riding the cable car, and then sprinting for the train that was very nearly missed.

**6/9/2013 Day 30**

Shopping. Lots of shopping. Tom nearly bought another go-pro. Ben nearly bought a down jacket because he thought the valley just wasn't hot enough.



Everyone went to Dennys for lunch, a classic American diner. They consumed many, many calories (12000 in total according to the menu).

After crawling out of the diner some people went back to Jim and Kate's house to sleep off lunch while Jo, Murray, Joel and Fails went to a thrift shop. Joel realized his ultimate goal in life and bought a fur coat for 20 dollars and a twilight tee-shirt. Jo and Fales bought really cool hats.

For dinner everyone made pizza under the wise guidance of Jim. The evening was spent chilling, eating and chatting. Jo had never seen Anchorman so she was educated in popular culture.

### **7/9/2013 Day 31**

Murray flew home after an emotional farewell. The rest of the team head for the valley, arriving back in Yosemite in the early evening. Joel and Fails prepared for the Nose. Kip and Jo prepared for East Buttress of Middle Cathedral. Tom and Ben pre-bailed on Washington column and spent their evening drinking some kind of alcoholic beverage.

### **8/9/2013 Day 32**

6am start for Joel, Fales, Kip and Jo. Fales and Joel went to fix ropes and haul bags up to sickle ledge. Jo and Kip went to climb East Buttress of Middle Cathedral Rock.

Ben and Tom went to look at 'Separate Reality' (5.12) and did 'Church Bowl Tree'. They also chilled out at 'Generator Crack'. Tom climbed 'New Diversion', an awesome 5.10a.

That night Ben amazed everyone by fighting off a bear and saving everyone. Then Kensie turned up, Ben built a motorbike out of twigs and pine needles and went off into the horizon with Kensie. Joel ate Kip to try and get some meat, and was sad to find out he was actually made of vegetables. Meanwhile Tom chuckled to himself about things on his phone that he told people about 15 minutes after. Fales was arrested in the night because of his attire.

What was left of Kip was turned into a chilli that everyone except Joel enjoyed. It tasted very self-deprecating. Fales came back from the station the next day dressed in a suit with three wives trying to hand out copies of he book of Mormon which Joel ate. Ben returned with no shoes and refused to eat anything other than hemp.

Eventually Murray turned up in a train and basically ran everyone over except Joel who he carried off into the distance. Joel "shovelled coal" for the rest of his life and even darkened.

But seriously; Ben climbed Energizer 5.11b which is really hard.

### **9/9/2013 Day 33**

Fails and Joel woke up late, after assuming they would both naturally wake up at 3am and not setting an alarm. They got dropped at El Cap around 8am.

Rest of team spent morning chatting to a neighbour, called Pat, before moving out of the campsite; signing in and then out at the entrance booth by driving around it.

We then heard news that Fales and Joel had already bailed, so picked them up from the stables.



The rest of the day was spent swimming by Generator Crack, with Ben managing to top rope up the route (5.10c). Nearly all the guys decided to strip at some point during the afternoon, catching Jo by surprise most of the time and causing her to eternally lose the nut game several times. Not cool.

Evening was spent drinking copious amounts of XXX whisky and playing card games, whilst exchanging some interesting conversation in the local Saloon.

#### **10/9/2013 Day 34**

2AM start for Joel and Fails, who once again embarked up The Nose. Rest of group head to El Cap bridge and watched through the telescope. Joel and Fails bailed at pitch eight due to lack of psyche, incompetency, fear, weakness and Fails throwing the ascender leant to him by Murray off the cliff in a fit of madness caused by realising that he couldn't see the bouldering pad he left at the bottom of the wall. Kip and Jo were going to prepare for the nose, but then suddenly rain, so they snuggled in the tent and watched Die Hard.

#### **11/09/2013 Day 35**

Kip and Jo spent their day preparing for El Cap – practicing hauling techniques and sorting gear.

Everyone else went to see the giant secoyers, which were “pretty big”. They also played a lot of one-nut and I-spy.



#### **12/09/2013 Day 36**

Kip and Jo fixed up to sickle ledge on El Cap. Ben went to do ‘Separate Reality’ with the Auzzies, which he dogged up.

Tom and Joel did a multi-day ascent of Church Bowl Tree. Tom annoyed Tom Reuer by reaching past all his aid placements. Fails left the gang to go live with squirrels and wildcats for a few days in Touloumne.

#### **13/09/2013 Day 52**

Kip and Jo left early, juggled up to sickle, and then spent the day aiding their way to Dolt Tower. The others did jack-all.

Fails hit Cathedral Peak with a pack of bears, and then spent the day with Alex Honnald after losing track of days.

**14/09/2013 Day 38**

Kip and Jo had a duel with Dennis and John on Dolt Tower. Kip and John went first, each taking 10 paces before turning their handy pistols on each other. Unfortunately Dolt Tower is rather small so both lost that round. Thus the new climbing partners were determined. Jo and Dennis were soon climbing the next pitches, whilst Kip and John continued to the bottom of the wall.

The rest of the day went fairly smoothly for Jo, aside from not reaching camp IV (the next bivy) and her having to bivy on Eagle Ledge – a ledge the size of a small exam desk. Meanwhile Tom and Ben fixed to Sickle.

**15/09/2013 Day 39**

After an incredibly uncomfortable night of sleep Jo and Dennis set off early, aiming for camp V or VI, closely followed by a group of three Americans. They fixed the pitch after camp V and then slept there, along with team America.

Meanwhile Tom and Ben climbed to Dolt tower, with Tom practically breaking the speed of sound with his hauling along with the bag. They spent the night on Dolt Tower. Fails returned from Touloumne at some point with a lobster tan.

**16/09/2013 Day 40**

Jo and Dennis had another early start, and topped out for the sunset after an incredible day of climbing. Team America joined, and it was decided to all bivy on the top before descending in the morning due to the steep descent path.

Unfortunately Tom and Ben had to bail on their El Cap attempt, as the exposure had got to Ben who was still affected by the huge factor 1.9 fall onto a trad-gear anchor he'd taken on Half Dome.

**17/09/2013 Day 41**

Jo, Dennis and Team America descended from El Cap, getting down late morning. They head straight to the river, where the now quite cold water felt incredible. After being congratulated by the telescope team, and chatting to Tom Jones who had followed their ascent style with great interest (turns out they were the first team to switch partners whilst on the route), they then got picked up by the Imperial gang and head to curry village, where Jo had a nice hot shower.

The rest of the day was spent packing up the campsite, and eating pizza in the evening at the local pizza parlour in curry village.

**18/09/2013 Day 42**

The morning was spent packing the car. A few quick stops at the gift shop/bridge, and then a drive to this super cool old mining village (sierra?) to pick up the engraved rock for Kate and Jim. Kip and Jo had a very nice hot grilled sandwich. The others had a heart-destroying meal at 'J-dogs', which involved a mountain and a half of ice cream with deep-fried oreos.

The team reached Jim and Kate's in the late afternoon and had a lovely meal of pork/potatoes/salad/etc.



Much banter was had at Jo's various love polygons.

**19/09/2013 Day 43**

Relaxing day spent visiting various shops (Goodwill the thrift shop, Safewaus, etc) Jim and Kate cooked a lovely meal of some kind of risotto, and then the team watched Hunger Games, much to Ben's disdain. They also drank 'Yosemite' and 'Toulumne' made-up cocktail.

**20/09/2013 Day 44**

Ben and Jo got up early for their flight home. The others probably slept in, moped about drinking tea, and then went to return Feruk before mailing themselves home.



## 5 Big Walls Climbed

### 5.1 Washington Column

Attempt One: Murray and Jo

Murray and Jo awoke early for their first big wall adventure. The walk in was arduous and unclear, and they arrived at the base of the route later than intended. The plan for day one was to climb the first three pitches to 'Dinner Ledge', a "plush ledge for six", and fix the next two pitches before sleeping on the ledge. This would leave the final six pitches to be climbed on day two.



On arrival at the base they discovered a haul bag and ropes, which disappeared up the wall shortly before beginning the climb. The first pitch was a 5.8 lay-back climb, which Murray took a small slip on before finishing and reaching the belay. Once he reached the first belay the popularity of the route became apparent. There were two other teams on the wall already. One consisted of an experienced climber taking a novice up and the other was a solo aid climber. Whilst waiting for the solo aid climber to aid up pitch two, the other team decided to retreat due to one member getting heat exhaustion.

As time was pushing on, Murray and Jo decided to try an alternative C1 pitch to the left of the main line, but it soon became apparent that this was actually off route completely. On a delicately thin crack section of the line Jo's micro cam failed whilst being bounce tested, shock loading the camhook she was standing on and causing her to take a large somersaulting fall and twist her ankle. With no way to retreat and little ability to communicate in the howling winds, the best option was to continue to the anchor. This required aiding up to some dubious-looking tat, penduluming across to a parallel crack below the anchor, and aiding up that without leaving gear to reach the anchor. She reached the belay just as the solo aid climber was starting up the third pitch. After some difficulties removing the line of gear, Murray joined Jo at the belay stance. By this time the light was beginning to fade. There was one final pitch of 5.7 till dinner ledge, which Murray lead with a headtorch. It was quite late by the time both Jo and Murray were on the bivy ledge, so they ate dinner and went straight to sleep.



Murray and Jo decided to retreat the following morning. Jo's twisted ankle had swollen overnight, and was painful to stand on, making standing in an aid ladder very uncomfortable. They were also very behind the planned timings, after waiting for the solo-aid climber the previous day. It was unlikely that they would have reached the top and abbed back off before night. The pair packed up the haul bag and began the retreat, a set of two abseils and then the walk off. Several hours later they were back at Camp 4.



**Attempt Two: Kip and Jo**



Kip and Jo woke up at 2am, planning to approach the climb in the dark and be climbing during sunrise. Mike had kindly agreed to drive the pair to the Ahwahnee car park, where their walk in began. Unfortunately Faruk, the minivan, would not start up due to a flat battery. With the shuttle buses not yet running, there was no way of reaching the climb. Jo, who had not slept all night because of Tom's snoring, promptly fell asleep in the van. Kip returned to the tent feeling disappointed. This hurdle did not last for long, however. A few hours later Jo was woken up abruptly by Kip who, still psyched from the planning, was keen to still attempt Washington. Mike had convinced a girl staying at the campsite, Kensie, to help jump-start the car, and after a much later start than planned Kip and Jo were soon walking in to Washington.





The walk-in was quicker than the previous attempt, and Kip was soon leading up the first two pitches. Jo then took over for pitch three, and they reached Dinner Ledge by about 5pm. There was still a lot of light, and so Jo started up pitch four to fix a rope. This pitch started with some easy scrambling, and then a bolt ladder over Kor Roof. The bolts were tricky to reach between, and it took longer than expected.



By the time Jo got over the lip of the roof, the sun had set and the light was slowly diminishing. She'd not taken a headtorch, and so slowly aided her way up the final crack in darkness, blindly feeling and placing cams to reach the anchor. Once safe, Kip began to jumar up the route and clear the gear. Unfortunately his ascenders jammed on the lip of the roof because of the rope tension. Jo suggested him returning to the ledge, so that she could abseil down the fixed line and remove any remaining gear to save time. What she didn't realise, in the pitch black, was that the rope ran quite far to the left of the anchor, with the last piece of gear being just above the roof lip and far left. When she reached this last piece of gear, which was a piton and some tat, it was not clear how far across the anchor was to where she sat. Pulling herself towards the tat, she unclipped the rope and slowly lowered herself across as far as she could before letting go of the tat. Jo shot out underneath Kor Roof, taking a large pendulum into the air. The rope dragged across the lip of the roof, which caused it to vibrate and judder. Jo hung spinning in the air feeling terrified for a few minutes before the swinging reduced and she could quickly abseil down to the ledge. Once back at the ledge, Jo and Kip ate some food and collapsed into bed feeling tired and mentally drained. Having left behind the roll mats to save weight, they endured an uncomfortable night's sleep on the sandy gravel floor. The moon made a bright and stunning appearance halfway through the night, which only added to the sound of the sound of wolves howling from the valley forest floor.

The team woke as sun rose, and began jumaring up to the anchor point Jo had fixed the previous night. This in itself was surprisingly tiring, as the rope hung in free space beneath the roof. Once at the anchor, it was Kip's turn to lead.



The next pitch was unclear, as there seemed to be bolts to the left and the right of the anchor. The photograph of the topo seemed to follow the line on the right, and so Kip set off aiding up what turned out to be a long bolt ladder. It soon became clear that this was off-route as it gradually took Kip further and further right. Once Jo had reached the anchor too, the pair assessed the situation. By this time the wind speeds had picked up and, with only a picture of the Washington topo, it was impossible to know what the following pitches from the bolt ladder would be like. They decided to retreat to the previous anchor, which was located quite far left of where they were sitting. Kip went first, clipping the rope into bolts as he descended and slowly moved left of the anchor.



A few bolts away from the lower anchor he reached a piton. The next anchor was out of sight, as it was further left and around a small corner, and so he clipped the piton and waited for Jo to reach the same point. Unsure on whether they could reach the next anchor, Jo continued to abseil past Kip by lowering the rope through one hand and pulling herself back across the rock with the other, and after a desperate move around the corner whilst battling a lot of rope tension and opposing wind, she reached the anchor. Kip followed, and from there the pair abseiled back to Dinner Ledge. It was too late to attempt the right route, and it was with much reluctance that they decided to bail.



After some more abseils, the walk off, and a shuttle bus journey, they arrived back in Camp Four much to the others' surprise.

**Attempt Three: Kip, Mike and Jo**

The third attempt at Washington would take on a slightly different approach. This time the team was increased to a trio, with the hope to take a more relaxed approach to the climb. Day one went smoothly, albeit a little slower than anticipated. Kip led the first three pitches up to Dinner Ledge, and then stayed there whilst Mike and Jo fixed the next two pitches.



Mike lead Kor Roof, and then Jo followed on the following pitch in the dark, this time with a head torch. The two abseiled back down to join Kip, and the rest of the evening was spent eating Fajitas and watching Kung Fu Panda 2 on Mike's tablet, before heading to bed.





After an early start, Mike, Kip and Jo jugged up the first three pitches (hard with a bag!) and then Kip set off leading. Jo lead the last two pitches together – a short 5.10d crack followed by a 5.8. The 5.10d was short and felt fairly soft in the grade, aside from a large loose boulder that she precariously pulled up and stood on whilst it wobbled. The top out was sandy but extremely satisfying – they had finally conquered a big wall!



The abseil back down took a lot longer than anticipated, due to time spent finding where the abseil anchors were located, and so another night was spent on Dinner ledge. The group watched a film on Mike’s tablet (The 7 Psychopaths), ate an incredibly minimal dinner of 1/3 an apple and 1/3 a cliff bar, and then head to bed.





The following morning Kip woke up early and forced Jo and Mike, much against their will, to also get up.



The trio began the descent, which went smoothly, and they were soon on the bus heading back to Camp 4. A family that also got on the bus shuttle moved seats very quickly, probably due to the smell of three big-wall climbers that hadn't washed in days. The rest of the day was spent recuperating at the campsite, eating trail mix and generally celebrating the success.

## 5.2 Half Dome

To reach the base of Half Dome, Tom and Ben had to walk up the aptly named "Death Slabs". Several hours of very steep ascent led them to the base of Half Dome. The plan was to bivouac at the base overnight and wake up at 4am the following day to start the ascent. Due to the nature of the Regular North West Face route, hauling is not a favourable option as discovered during the previous attempt. Therefore, the climber seconding would carry a rucksack with overnight supplies, including a single bivi bag for the two climbers to share for an intimate nights sleep. This was also the sleeping arrangement for the night before the climb. Tom and Ben woke up at 4am, and jumped on the route. The first three of four pitches were climbed in the darkness before sunrise, so by the time they could see, there was already an incredible view of the Yosemite Valley, many hundreds of metres below. Ben made mincemeat of the free climbing pitches, and Tom had a fantastic time on the Robbins Traverse. The plan was to reach Big Sandy Ledge and bivi overnight, and then climb to the top the following day. However, Tom and Ben reached Big Sandy Ledge at 15:30, and had just enough daylight to reach the top in daylight. Unfortunately, the aid pitches turned out to be slower than expected, and Ben enjoyed his first huge fall. This occurred due to a crucial cam coming free during an aid move. Ben enjoyed a factor 1.8 fall, before pulling up the rope, and jumping straight back onto the route. Thank God Ledge proved to be a lot smaller than expected, leading to some memorable moments where Tom, seconding, managed to catch himself mid-fall, due to the problematic nature of climbing in a rucksack. Tom and Ben topped out at 21:30, and enjoyed some music and food, before walking the 9-mile trail back to Curry Village. They rejoined the team in base camp at 02:00am. The toughest challenge that faced the team was the exposure. The huge height of the Regular North-West Face, coupled with the fact that the base of the route is already very high



above the valley floor, meant that most of the climbing was higher than El Capitan, Washington Column, or Steck Salathe.

### 5.3 El Capitan

The following is an account of Jo's unusual ascent of The Nose

Kip and I woke up early, packed up the haul bag, and were soon being driven to El Capitan. I felt a mixture of excitement and nerves; the whole trip had all been building up to this moment. We soon reached the drop-off point. Kip took the haul bag, as I struggled to even stand with the weight, and I took the smaller rucksack with ropes and rack. We reached the base, and promptly dumped the haul bag beneath where sickle ledge was situated; the plan was to climb up to sickle ledge, abseil down and fix the haul line, and then haul from sickle. The belay station was situated at the top of some easy grade 4 scrambling, which we quickly made our way up.



Another pair had reached the base at the same time, so we sat enjoying the sun rays whilst they made their way up pitch one. Once they were both at belay station two, Kip set off. The climbing went smoothly, with some fun and straightforward aid climbing up to Sickle. We fixed the abseil/haul line by tying together three 60m ropes, and I abseiled down to the ground to fix the haul bag. We had decided it was quicker for me to stay on the ground, and Kip to haul the bag using his pro traxion and pulley system, so once the haul bag started I lay in the sun watching the haul bag gradually make its way up the wall. Several passer-bys stopped to chat and laugh at my choice to abandon Kip to do all the hauling. A good hour later, a rather exhausted Kip was back on the ground, and we walked back to the bridge to get picked up. Although tired from the day, we were both excited for the following few days. The day had been hard, but not impossible. El Capitan was feeling more and more like a achievable goal.

As we had left the portaledge for Tom and Ben, we needed to reach specific bivy spots each day. Depending on how the climb unravelled, the plan was to reach El Cap Tower or Dolt Tower. Kip and I had another very early start, and a much easier walk in



(although we did manage to get a little lost in the dark before reaching the base of The Nose). The climbing was tough but incredibly fun. A few problems were encountered throughout the day; gear that got stuck was left in place due to time constraints, and communication was hard at times due to strong battering winds.



I also had some big issues when lowering myself across a pendulum whilst following Kip; the rope jammed on a piece of in-situ tat, and I had to pull myself right back across the lower-out to release the rope, whilst facing a large pendulum potential into a big cornering wall. Thankfully no such pendulum was experienced, and I eventually joined Kip at the next belay point. Kip made his way up the Stovelegs, and then I took over for the last few pitches. Lots of fun was had on some huge run-outs whilst walking up cams in the parallel cracks. By the time we reached Dolt tower it was quite late, as we'd underestimated how long it would take to get through the stovelegs, and not expected to encounter so many problems. We ate some cans of spaghetti and promptly collapsed into our sleeping bags, whilst staying tied to the safety line. At about 2am a second team arrived at the belay ledge, also shattered from the day of climbing. We had seen them some hours ago lower down, and presumed that they'd retreated.

The other climbers' names were John and Dennis, as we discovered in the morning whilst chatting. Dennis was from Frankenjurah, Germany, and had paired up with John whilst in Camp Four hoping to climb The Nose. John had found the first day much more exhausting than expected, and drunk far more water than intended. It later transpired that he was also going down with some kind of bug. Whilst they were evaluating the situation, Kip and I evaluated ours. Kip was also feeling destroyed from the previous days' work. We had both drunken more water than planned, and did not have enough to get us safely to the top. It took a few minutes for this to sink in before Kip suggested the possibility of having to bail. I refused; to bail at such an early stage to me felt wrong. I had agreed already that, unless I broke a leg, I would not bail. But after careful consideration, it seemed like the only option. If bailing, we could provide enough water for the other pair to reach the top. We turned to them to propose giving them water. They agreed that it was best to send one team up with more water, but John suggested sending the two strongest members for best chance of success, as he didn't feel he could



complete the climb. As I was so determined not to bail, and less tired, Kip and I agreed for me to continue. Thus the new climbing team was determined. We packed together a haul bag, combining our things, and set off on a much later start than hoped. Meanwhile tales of a violent duel between Kip and Dennis on Dolt Tower were spreading on the valley floor.



Dennis and I had decided to save time by climbing the Jardine traverse, an alternative route to the King Swing. It was a shame that we had to miss out on the huge pendulum, but having had such a late start it seemed like the best option to get us to the next bivy spot before dark. We alternated leading every few pitches for the rest of the day and, although our styles were very different, we both were so fixed on the goal that it didn't matter. Unfortunately it got dark one pitch before Camp IV, our next bivy spot, so we decided to abseil down to Eagle Ledge. Eagle Ledge is a belay ledge about the size of a small desk, and definitely not suitable for sleeping on. To both fit on the ledge I tensioned my harness with a sling, allowing half of my body to hang in free space with shoulders and head curled on the corner of the ledge.







My feet were suspended by the belay seat, fixed to the haul bag, which was slightly higher than the ledge causing my feet to regularly lose all feeling as the blood drained from them.

After a night of no sleep, we set off as soon as dawn started to creep in. We both jugged up the fixed pitch, and then did the 5.7 traverse with some tricky cleaning and hauling (not much gear meant some interesting pendulums on my part). Next another 5.8/9 and then the great roof, which Dennis lead. This incredible pitch followed a crack that curved up and beneath the huge looming roof.



I then took over leading on Pancake Flake, which was very fun. The next pitch was an awkward pitch of C1, following a corner that tapered outwards. We reached Camp V, and Dennis slowly aided up the next pitch. It was dark by the time he reached Glowering Ledge, so he fixed the line and returned to Camp V where we spent the night. The ledge was split on several levels, so I took the lower level, an “okay bivy for one”, whilst Dennis took the slightly higher ledge to the side, a “good bivy for one”. Team America, a group of three Americans that had been tailing us most of the day, soon joined us at the bivy spot. They set up their portaledge above where I was sleeping, and we were all soon settled down and asleep.





In the middle of the night I woke up suddenly in a panic. It was raining. Rain can be very serious on El Cap, as it tends to fall very heavily and has been known to trap many climbers on the wall for days. After a long few seconds, I realised in my half-asleep daze that this, however, was not rain. Feeling slightly relieved but mostly disgusted, and not wanting to wake everyone else up by yelling, I rolled over and covered my face to try protect myself from the shower of urine that was now coating my sleeping bag. Vowing to make them pay in the morning, I quickly fell back asleep.



Day four on the wall; we were on the home stretch! We both jumarded up to Glowering Ledge, and I set off climbing the next two pitches. The second of these is the classic Changing Corners pitch. This followed a crack and then a line of bolts, before leaning around an arête and switching to a parallel crack in the corner. The bolts were obviously well travelled, and one began to pull out as I stood up in my ladders. I struggled to reach between the bolts, being forced to free climb between one pair of bolts. Crimping a small edge, I leant right across the face whilst balancing precariously on the lower bolt and a small rock feature. At full stretch I just about clipped the next bolt, and from there continued to the next anchor.





Dennis soon joined me and led the following three pitches, and then I the final pitch. The final pitch was a line of overhanging bolts with the full exposure of El Capitan beneath, an absolutely incredible experience pitch to lead. After some easy 5.5 climbing with much rope drag, I topped out. Dennis soon joined and we celebrated our success with yet more trailmix and a beautiful sunset. Team America joined us soon after, and it was decided to all bivy at the top before descending in the morning due to the steep descent path. We spent an evening chatting and exchanging stories. The team had names Dave, Buck and Andrew. It turned out that Dave was the culprit pee-er from the night before, which he was rather embarrassed about. We all retired to bed feeling exhausted, and head straight to the river in the morning, where the now quite cold water felt very refreshing.





## 6 Climbing skills

On first arrival to Yosemite national park we were presented with two completely new aspects of climbing with which we had little to no experience with. The first of these was the knowledge, experience and skills required to prepare and execute the logistical challenge of a big wall climb. The second, and immediately evident upon our first climbing attempt, was the completely new skill set required to climb the granite cracks of which the majority of climbs in Yosemite valley consist of.

The skills required to complete “big walls” are fairly unique to this field of climbing and are rarely used in other areas of climbing. There is no definitive definition of a “big wall”, however, the term is generally used to describe cliff faces in excess of 1,200feet that require multiple days to climb and generally require artificial climbing techniques to complete. Unfortunately there are no British candidates which qualify as big walls but this did not prevent us from practicing some of the many techniques required to master. Prior to the trip the entire team studied “A Falcon Guide: Big walls by John Long and John Middendorf” cover to cover. This book, along with training completed with a qualified instructor, helped prepare us for the trip. I’m sure the entire team would agree that, with hindsight, far more preparation could have been completed before the trip, practicing and honing the necessary skills required for “big walling”.

There are many different skills required to climb a big wall, arguably the most important being the ability to artificially or aid climb and the ability to ascend and clear a route. These skills, and others, are all described in detail in the Falcon guide previously mentioned, however, I shall go into more detail on these two key areas. Many climbs are too difficult to complete by using standard free climbing techniques and therefore “artificial climbing” is required. Put simply, this involves placing items of protection into constrictions in the rock face and then weighting the item. This is a far more time consuming process relative to free-climbing and requires a lot of practise in order to be able to complete quickly and efficiently, as we discovered during the trip. Either free climbing or artificial climbing is performed by the lead climber, the seconder (the climber which follows up after the lead climber) has the task of cleaning the protection placed. In order to maximise efficiency, which is a necessity in big wall climbing, the seconder ascends the rope which the leader has fixed at the top of the pitch. This is a skill which took every member of the team a while to master, it involves using ascenders which are a piece of gear which attach to the rope and can only be moved upwards, this allows the climber to safely and easily ascend a rope.

In Britain there are relatively few areas in which to practice the skills required for crack climbing. The advice given to us by members of the climbing community who had visited Yosemite valley was to learn while out there and allow at least the first week of the trip to become accustomed to the rock and the style of climbing, which is what we did. The skill or the art of crack climbing focuses upon the ability to place various body parts into a crack, preferably where a constriction is present, and to either tense or move said body part into a position which allows it to jam or lock into place through compression or locking into a constriction. The choice of body part depends on the width of the crack, for very thin cracks fingers are utilised to form finger locks and finger jams, the toes of climbing shoes can also be placed within very thin cracks. For slightly larger cracks the majority or the entire hand can be used to form a hand jam and for even larger cracks the fist can be placed. For these sized cracks and larger cracks it is possible to place either the tip or the entire rock boot into the crack to form a foot jam or foot lock.



Much practise was given to crack climbing in the first stage of the trip. Research to the technique required to crack climb was undertaken prior to the expedition, further invaluable knowledge was gained through word of mouth from numerous climbers met within the valley. Firstly the theory of the technique required for crack climbing was learnt which was followed by hours of practise. The team quickly learnt how to apply protective covering of tape to the hands in order to prevent the sharp crystals within the granite cutting into the skin.

## 7 Finance

A log of all expenditures was kept throughout the trip. The total costs are given below:

Item	Expenditure
Car hire	\$ 2434.00
Fuel	\$ 438.67
Accommodation	\$ 325.00
Food	\$ 2048.64
Flights	\$ 8500.00
Insurance	\$ 1500.00
Total	\$ 15246.31

The cost of the expedition was covered by a combination of members contributions and funding from the Imperial College Exploration Board:

Source	Contribution
Imperial College Exploration Board	\$ 9375.00
Members contributions	\$ 5871.31

Equipment and training costs are not included here. Each member bought their own equipment and so no complete record exists. The Imperial College Mountaineering Club bought some equipment and loaned it to this expedition, all of this equipment is not with the club. The majority of this equipment was bought in two orders directly from Wild Country and DMM which totalled approximately £5000, however a large amount of equipment was bought in country and from other suppliers which is not included. Each member already owned a considerable amount of equipment the cost of which cannot be estimated.