



*"We'll make it!" So began the conquest of El Capitan by (from left) Harding, Calderwood, Merry.*

## WE CONQUERED EL CAPITAN

**W**hatever happens, we'll be equal to it!" That egotistical motto had brought Wayne and me over some terrifically difficult rock climbs in the past, but now, as we huddled in our sleeping bags beneath a wildly flapping bit of rubberized nylon high on the south face of El Capitan, we recalled that it had also got us into some very uncomfortable situations.

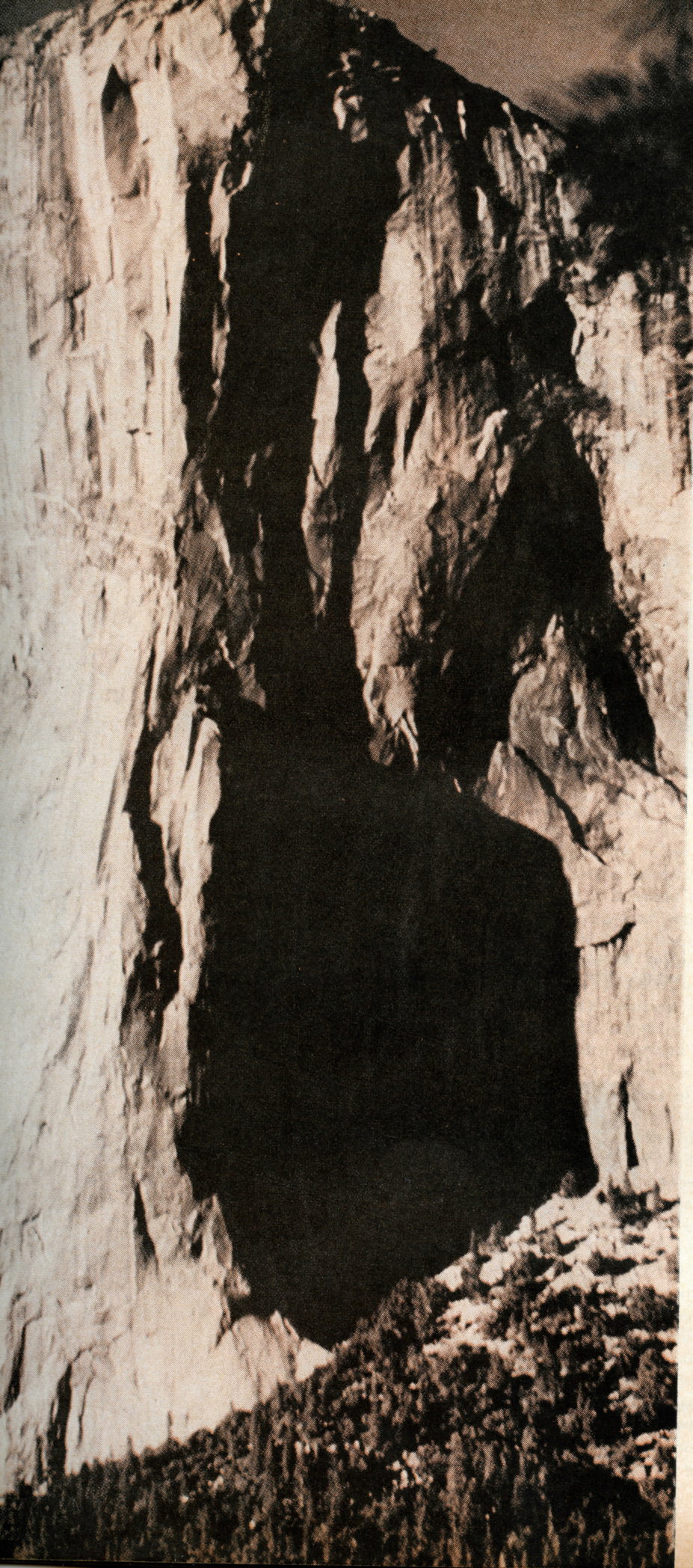
Our feet dangled over the edge of the tiny triangular ledge, exposed to the wet snow that whirled in the violent gusts of wind. Directly below our hanging feet lay the floor of Yosemite Valley, invisible now in the misty half-light of the snowstorm. The slender rope, anchored between us and plunging vertically into the clouds, was our only link with the safety of level ground; and in the entire 2,500 feet, there were only three places where a man could as much as sit comfortably. This we knew well, for it had taken dozens of man-days of the most sensational rock climbing ever done to put those fixed ropes in place, and each of us would have parts of that route etched forever in his memory.

Only 400 feet above us was the summit. Four hundred feet of vertical, almost crackless, wall, studded with jutting overhangs; so breath-takingly steep that one could rarely see more than a hundred feet of the

PHOTOGRAPHS BY WARREN HARDING, WAYNE MERRY, ELLEN SEARBY

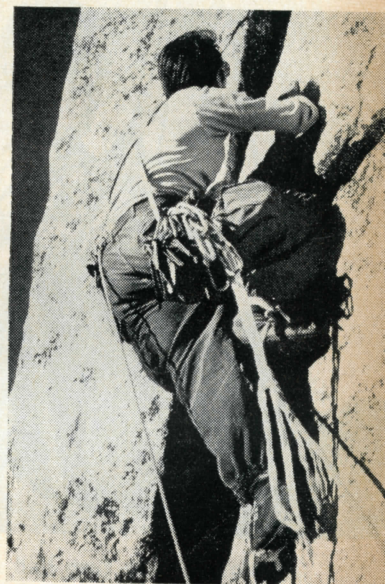
*El Capitan, world's largest exposed monolith, climbs 2,900 feet—straight up!*





*Challenging the deadly granite façade of El Capitan, 2,900 feet above Yosemite's valley, a handful of human flies faced almost certain death—to make mountain-climbing history in the greatest adventure of the year*

**by WARREN HARDING  
AND WAYNE MERRY**



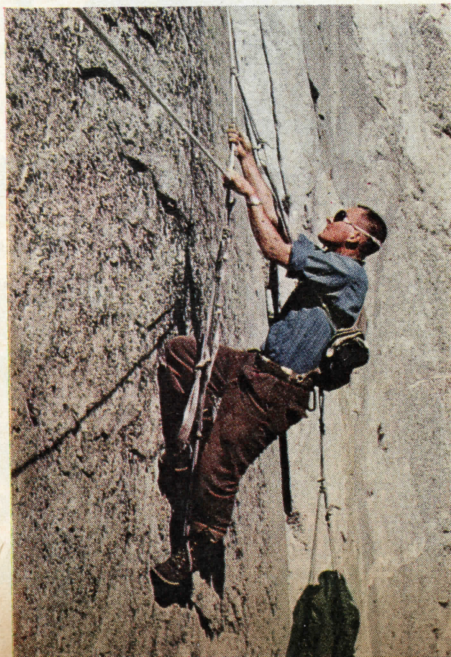
*Harding, in lead, hammers piton above Sickle Ledge.*



*Whitmore and Harding prussik up to last camp, dragging supplies for exploratory climb to summit.*



*After manila rope broke under climber's weight, crew tested all-new nylon gear.*



*Merry completes pendulum traverse developed to pass blank spots.*

*Using prussiking technique—slip knots tied in loops attached to feet and chest—George Whitmore inches up last yards before storm broke.*

route ahead. Under these conditions it might as well have been a mile. Climbing was impossible. Even descent on the fixed ropes below would be too hazardous to dare except in the most extreme emergency. There was nothing to do but sit in the bags, holding the tarp down, and pray for the weather to break. As we waited, we let our minds play back over the dreams and planning and struggles that had brought us to this spot.

Most of the millions who have visited Yosemite are familiar with the bold front of El Capitan. Its towering south face soars an overpowering 2,900 feet, well over half a mile, in one clean sweep from the valley floor. It is believed to be the largest exposed granite monolith in the world, and its face is smoothed and polished by the glaciers that ground through the valley thousands of years ago.

Many a mountaineer has craned his neck and wondered if it would ever be climbed, searched among the glowering overhangs of the upper face for the semblance of a route, and consigned it to the corner of his mind reserved for dreams. Among climbers, El Capitan was long a synonym for "impossible."

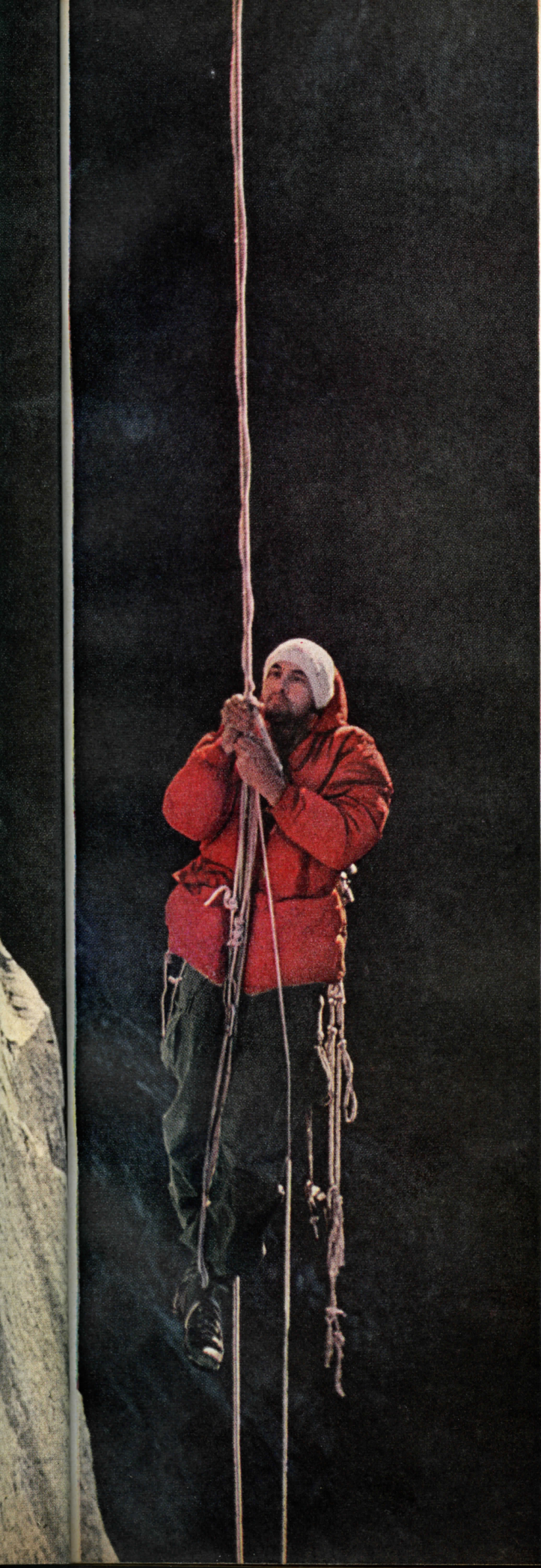
But time brings advances in all fields, and, in climbing, the growing use of the spike-like pitons enabled walls to be scaled that had been out of the question earlier. One by one, Yosemite's most impressive faces and spires fell to the pioneers of artificial climbing. In 1947, John Salathé and Ax Nelson won the summit of the Lost Arrow after a grim five days. In 1952, Salathé and Al Steck staggered over the top of the bleak north face of Sentinel Rock after an ordeal which lasted five more days. Finally only two of the greatest walls remained untouched for those who dared to dream of them: the faces of Half Dome and El Capitan. Both were entirely too much for the vast majority of climbers, and they kept respectfully away until June of 1955, when Royal Robbins, Jerry Gallwas, Don Wilson and I made an exploratory attempt on the face of Half Dome.

We didn't get far. Two and a half days of dangerous and difficult climbing got us only 500 feet. We descended, determined to improve our technique and plan more carefully for the next attempt.

This came in June of 1957. Our original party had split up, and so it was that the team of Royal, Jerry and



*Nylon ropes pass through carabiner held fast by piton.*





*For a week climbers were roped to vertical face, slept tied to narrow ledge, guarding every move.*

## WE CONQUERED EL CAPITAN

CONTINUED

Mike Sherrick struggled higher day after day, and on the evening of the fifth day finally pulled themselves over the summit. I was there to welcome them, having driven to the valley and dashed up the trail when it became apparent that they would make it. My congratulations were hearty and sincere, but inside, the ambitious dreamer in me was troubled. There was only one thing left—the appalling south face of El Capitan. Could it be done? There was only one way of finding out.

No time was wasted in organizing an exploratory push. Mark Powell, with whom I had climbed often, was in the valley with quite a bit of equipment, unbounded enthusiasm, and Bill Feuerer, a relatively new climber. Bill was a quiet, stocky fellow from Illinois. His mild blue eyes and magnificent full blond beard gave him a vaguely biblical appearance. His great strength and slow, deliberate manner earned him the affectionate nickname of “Dolt”—a name which was to grace many of the important points on El Capitan.

Mark was a superb climber who had already become well known for his amazing exploits on the rocks. He was from Fresno, and had been able to get enough time off from his job with the CAA to get up most of the best climbs in the Sierra. He was tall, slim and blond, and had terrific strength in his hands and an absolute disregard for danger, a characteristic that had led to a couple of hair-raising falls that should have killed him, but which somehow left him unharmed. This was our team for the first attempt.

We started on the Fourth of July, and spent seven days on the rock. The climbing was more difficult and tech-

nical than anything any of us had ever done; yet somehow we managed to gain 1,050 feet.

The week was not without excitement. No less than four times, one of us dropped into space and was checked by the alert teammate on the other end of the rope. One fall in particular nearly had serious consequences.

I was leading, hammering a series of pitons into a vertical crack above Sickle Ledge (a curved ledge about 550 feet up) and standing in a sling attached to each piton while I reached as high as possible to drive the next. The wall was perfectly smooth and straight, and there was nothing below my feet but 1,000 feet of air. I had just stepped into a new piton and was starting to drive another when my support began to pivot slowly downward. It was obviously coming out!

I shouted to Dolt for a little slack, jerked one foot from the sling and placed it on the piton below. I was leaning outward at this point, trying to remove the rest of my weight from the shifting piton, when it popped out with a *ping* and I plunged over backward into space! The fall lasted only a second, then the rope snapped tight around my waist as Bill threw his strength into holding me, pulley-wise, through one of the lower pitons.

I was upside-down when the rope tightened, still gripping the rope with one hand when the jerk came. It slammed me into the wall, unfortunately head first, and I dangled limply for a few minutes trying to regain my swimming senses and catch my breath. My hand was badly rope-burned, and my ribs had been bruised by the rope so that each gasping (*Continued on page 104*)

*After twenty-three hours of hanging in slings, hammering pitons and yanking on ropes, Calderwood and Whitmore strain up last yards to summit. Below them—the whole wide world!*



# We Conquered El Capitan *Continued from page 28*

breath was agony. But there was nothing really serious, and the others, as they calmly remarked, "hadn't felt a thing."

Nevertheless, I was somewhat shaken, so I returned to the relative security of a narrow ledge to recuperate while Mark took over the lead.

One of the most amazing maneuvers on this attempt was the airy forty-eight-foot pendulum swing Mark made to reach a new crack pattern. The crack up which we had been working petered out on an overhang. There was nothing to do but look for a crack somewhere nearby that ran higher. Such a crack was quickly spotted about forty feet to our right across a perfectly blank wall. How to reach it? Possibly a pendulum traverse—but what a swing!

Mark, high above me, called for me to lower him on a tight rope from his highest piton. I let the rope slip gradually through my fingers until he swayed gently in the wind at the end of 100 feet of free rope.

Calling to me to hold him at that point—"and for God's sake, *tight!*"—he began to run back and forth across the sheer face, his body almost at right angles to the rock, going farther and farther with each swing.

Clawing for the crack at the end of a swing, the tips of his fingers caught for a moment, but the weight of his body tore them free and he spun backward, temporarily out of control. After a few more swings he was able to sink his fingers deep into the crack, and hang on with one hand as he drove a piton with the other. Then the pounding began again as we worked up the new crack pattern.

An unpleasant surprise was in store for us. The crack grew so wide that even our biggest pitons would not hold, and it obviously continued that way for several hundred feet. Bolting would take forever; it was out of the question. We would need special pitons, which we didn't have.

And our nerves were fraying. There is

something about living for a week roped to a vertical face, sleeping tied to a narrow ledge and guarding every move lest it be your last, that tends to cause a certain nervousness in the toughest of us. But enough excuses. We descended on the seventh day, leaving a fixed rope to our high point so we could return to the attack later.

A rude shock awaited us on the valley floor. Visitors to the park, spying our tiny figures high on the cliff, had stopped to watch along the road. Cars had backed up, causing a traffic jam which sorely tried the temper of an overworked ranger. We were requested by the Chief Ranger to do no more climbing on El Capitan between Memorial Day and Labor Day, the tourist season. This was a terrific blow to our plans, as the period of best weather and long climbing days would be forbidden to us, and provisions for possible bad weather would drastically increase the supply problem. But nothing could be done about it.

Early in the fall, disaster struck again. Mark, taking a "sweet young thing" up the relatively easy little Arrowhead Spire, made a bad mistake and fell forty feet onto the jagged rocks. Fortunately, he was able to twist around and land on his feet, saving his life, but his left leg was horribly smashed. It was a "compound dislocation."

**D**r. Sturm did a fantastic job. Mark would walk again, sometime, with his own leg. But he would no longer be the ball of fire that had got us up some really grim pitches on El Capitan. The loss was a great one, to him and to us.

We enlisted the aid of Allen Steck and Wally Reed for a Thanksgiving push. Wally was a quiet college student, an up-and-coming climber who had been doing some fine climbs in the valley. Al was an old buddy, a veteran of Himalayan and Peruvian expeditions, and one of the team which made the first ascent of Sentinel north face.

Starting late Thanksgiving Day, we worked up the fixed ropes left from July's attempt, by a system known as "prusiking." Slip-knots tied in loops attached to feet and chest are slid up the fixed rope, binding when weight is applied, but capable of being slid upward when weight is removed. The system is safe, but spectacular and very, very tedious.

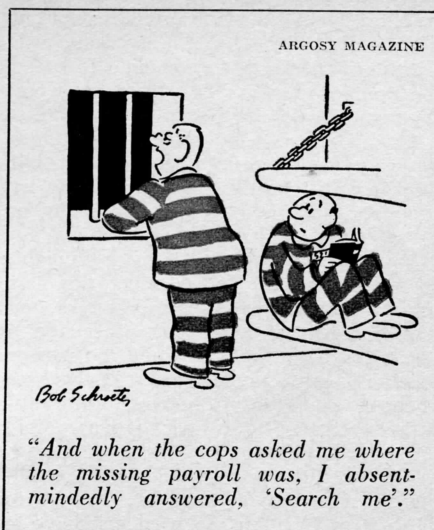
The manila ropes seemed to be sound, despite their long exposure to the elements. Reaching a corner, I was horrified to find one had abraded almost halfway through!

Wally had tested the rope and started up. A few feet above the ledge it had broken! Fortunately he fell back to the ledge and caught himself easily, but the experience shook us. We had underestimated the effects of weather and abrasion on manila. Henceforth, all fixed ropes would be nylon—and expense be damned!

We reached Sickle Ledge at evening and immediately threw a long rope down to our support party. They tied on a roast turkey with trimmings, provided by my mother, which was promptly hauled up and done away with.

The climbing the next day was a rugged fight. Time after time we drove the huge "stoveleg" pitons, drilling a hole and placing an expansion bolt when it became obvious that a fall would be too long. Toward the end of the day we realized there were only a few feet between us and the top of "Dolt Tower," the buttress on which we were counting for a good camp site. Struggling up the last feet, I came up against a boulder of about 300 pounds lodged in a crack just at the edge of the ledge. It would make a perfect handhold to get me over the top, so I hooked a hand over it and began to transfer my full weight from the piton on which I was standing. A scraping, a lurch, and the boulder moved outward, balanced on the point of falling! I dropped back onto the piton, frantically shoving the rock back into place. It would stay, but would require only the slightest touch to bring it crashing down on the ropes below. Gingerly I climbed around it, and my first move on Dolt Tower was to sacrifice one of our precious climbing ropes to lash that rock to a bolt. It could easily have wiped us out.

Dolt Tower became our high point for the Thanksgiving push. We roped down to the base. A few weeks later Dolt and I replaced the frayed and rotting manila



"And when the cops asked me where the missing payroll was, I absent-mindedly answered, 'Search me.'"

ropes with nylon, which could survive the winter with little deterioration.

Early in the spring we got back to the assault. In the course of a series of week-end "work parties," we reached a new point at 1,600 feet.

On Memorial Day we suspended operations until fall, according to our agreement with the rangers. But there was no rest. New and better equipment had to be developed, and more climbers had to be recruited, a definite problem since very few even considered the ascent possible.

By Labor Day the personnel of our party had changed radically. Dolt had written to say that he was dropping out. He was uneasy about the condition of the weathered ropes and had little time to spare from his work. He was quite willing to leave much of his specially made and essential equipment with us, and without it the climb would have been considerably slowed.

The day after Labor Day we started another big push. No less than six climbers were on hand to move supplies to Dolt Tower and four of these were willing to climb beyond. On the ground, our all-girl support party included Dick Calderwood's wife, Cookie; Mark's girl, Beverly Woolsey, and mine, Ellen Searby. They ran errands, carried food and water up to the base and tied loads on the aluminum-framed, bicycle-wheeled "Doltcart" to be winched up.

A lack of organization, though, fouled things up pretty badly. A tremendous amount of food and water was hauled up to the tower, but seemed to be consumed as fast as it arrived. After three days of winching up supplies (with Dolt's specially made winch) Wayne and I went on above to the high point and began climbing.

We had beaten our way up a couple of hundred feet when a sudden violent thunderstorm hit us. We retreated down the fixed rope to El Cap Tower 300 feet below, arriving miserably wet and cold.

After a wretched night of struggling with a flapping plastic sheet, we found the weather apparently settling a bit by morning. We took off at midmorning, only to be turned back by a second storm almost as soon as we reached the high point. Down to camp and more flapping plastic.

Back on the ground again, we realized that we had a deadline to meet. There was also the possibility that winter might set in before Thanksgiving, and none of us had the slightest inclination to trust our-

selves to ropes that would weather through another winter.

The remaining 1,000 feet looked absolutely horrible—but then, so did the part we had done. With the wisest possible use of our time, and with careful organization, perhaps we could finish it off in a matter of weeks. We decided to whittle away at the remaining distance with a series of week-end climbs and finish at Thanksgiving.

The first week-end drive accomplished very little. We gained a hundred feet.

#### November first

At one-thirty p.m. we started up the ropes for what we hoped would be the last time. Carrying only light loads, we climbed fast and were at Camp IV by dark. As we pawed through our gear in the dark getting organized, we laid plans for the attack. The previous high point was an expansion bolt about 100 feet up toward the Great Roof, a truly fearsome-looking overhang which could well be a barrier to our future progress. Fortunately, a crack led up to and along the base of the overhang. If pitons could be made to hold, it might just go.

With the gear more or less ready for the next day's efforts, and dinner over, we turned in—a bit of a job, since Camp IV consisted of one fairly level ledge about four by four feet and a smaller sloping shelf a few feet above it. There was enough room so that it seemed we *should* be able to get comfortable, but we were wrong.

#### November second

After the inevitable delays that seem to be an inherent part of rock climbing, Rich and I got started, but not nearly as early as we should have. We quickly ascended the ropes to the high point. After Rich rigged up a "comfortable" sling arrangement and suspended himself from the bolt, I began nailing up the crack that led to the roof. At first it went well; then I found, that, as I drove each new piton, it tended to loosen the one on which I was standing—just the sort of thing that had caused me a nasty fall during one of our week-end climbs last spring. For the next twenty feet I alternated pitons and tiny, quarter-inch bolts.

**F**inally my head butted against the underside of the Great Roof, a fantastic block of granite that jutted twenty feet out into space. Now I was at the spot I had often wondered about: could the traverse be made on pitons? Just one way to find out. Reaching as far as I could to the right, I drove a piton straight up under the huge block—the worst possible way, but it had to follow the crack. Clipping my rope and slings into it, I swung over underneath. I was vastly relieved that the piton was sound. In a surprisingly short time I had covered the remaining distance to the ledge past the edge of the overhang—and what a precarious spot it was! Four inches wide and about a foot long, with a clear view of the ground 2,000 feet below.

Balancing there, I placed two bolts. Rich worked up the rope, removing pitons while I surveyed the route beyond. It looked mighty grim. Worse, if possible, than anything up to now. We knew from photographs that about 300 feet above was a series of ledges which might do for a camp site, but we'd never make it today.

#### November third

Wayne and I returned to the attack and I "graciously" turned the lead over to him. The pitch turned out to be a real beast, re-



quiring most of the day to lead. The edge of the flake was so thin that bits had to be chipped away before pitons could be placed. Even then, one piton would often wedge the crack wider, loosening those below it. The sun was settling below the valley rim as Wayne finally pulled up onto a foot-wide, sloping ledge. He called down that the next lead looked quite straightforward and there might be some small ledges about forty feet up, perhaps room enough to spend the night.

**A**s fast as I could, I came up the rope that Wayne had anchored. As darkness fell, I "roared up" the easy-looking crack. Reaching the top in short order, I found no comfortable ledges, just tiny sloping knobs—not especially inviting places to spend the night. But we'd decided not to return to camp that night, so we'd have to make do.

#### *November fourth*

In the morning, to our amazement, we felt great and tackled the next pitch with more enthusiasm than we had been able to muster thus far on the climb.

It was just as well that I started the day with enthusiasm, for I had none at all by noon. The crack was a real mess, wide and filled with dirt and moss which had to be dug out in order to place pitons. After four dust-choked hours, I reached the ledges that would serve as Camp V. We were now at about 2,000 feet.

Wayne struggled up to join me and the last hours of daylight were spent hauling up supplies and exploring our new camp site. Two "bed-size" sleeping ledges were nearby. Forty feet above, was the "sun deck," a comfortable two-foot ledge at the base of the next pitch.

Above, what we had expected to be a chimney wide enough to climb, turned out to be a streak of dark lichen on a blank face.

#### *November fifth*

We wriggled carefully out of our sleeping bags at first light, and I started up the next lead.

After ninety feet of fairly straightforward pounding, I found myself peering into a fine little triangular niche, a perfect little cave to crawl into and glow out at the world. It was named the Glowering Spot.

Hearing a conversation below, I looked down and greeted George Whitmore, who had just arrived on Wayne's belay ledge with a load of supplies. George had started from the base a day after the rest of us and had been at the rugged, thankless job of relaying loads to Camp IV ever since. He was quite ready for a change of scenery, so Wayne exchanged jobs with him and went down to haul loads; while George joined me to belay from the Glowering Spot. We worked all day with the dirt-filled cracks to gain only a few feet, then returned to Camp V to spend the night.

#### *November sixth*

The next day I quickly reached a small and very airy ledge that had no right to be there at all. I edged cautiously across the ledge to the base of a very narrow chimney. About forty feet above, there seemed to be ledge which might be big enough for a new camp site. Things were looking up. Another camp was practically essential if we were to get a really effective shot at the final few hundred feet.

I drove a good, sound piton at the base of the chimney for protection, then edged into it and started up. By mid-afternoon we

were fully established at our new camp, but not at all happy with it. The ledge was narrow and sloping, a poor place to spend the next few nights. To add to our woes, the route above didn't look any too good.

I would have been willing to let things stand as they were until the next day, but George felt it would be worthwhile to try to go ahead on the chance that there might be a better ledge somewhere above.

We still had an hour or so of daylight, so I halfheartedly looked over the next pitch. The face above us was smooth and free of cracks or holds. On either side, a crack, too wide for pitons and too narrow to climb easily, ran upward. At the base of the crack on the left, perched precariously, was a large, loose rock. It was poised directly above the climbing route below, and the slightest touch would send it crashing down on Wayne and Rich. No way to move it or tie it up, so we'd just have to stay away from it. The crack on the right was the only possibility. Too wide to hold a piton, it would have to be climbed with what natural holds the rock afforded.

Reaching high and jamming a hand deep into the crack, I hauled myself up a few inches and thrust in a foot. With the foot supporting my weight, I tore the hand free and wedged it higher. With immense effort, I gained ten feet, then felt my strength ebbing as I began to slip downward.

After a short rest I tried a different technique. With hands pulling sideways on one edge of the crack and feet pressing against the other, as though I were trying to spread the fissure wider, I was able to inch upward with a bit more security. But the strain on my fingers was terrific and I was trembling with the effort when I finally found a tiny foothold fifteen feet higher. Balancing on this, I managed to place a bolt for protection, and felt much better when the rope was snapped into it. The remaining forty-five feet were not quite as vertical, but it looked as though there would be no place to rest. But I would have to try it.

Back into the crack, feet pressing, fingers tearing against the edge; upward inch by inch until at last my fingers closed over the lip of a tiny ledge, and I was safe! Just above was a flat, triangular shelf about six feet on a side. Checking to make sure the rope would run freely, I hauled myself onto it and flopped down.

**D**arkness had come, so we wasted no time hauling gear up to what we named Whitmore's Towers, Camp VI, the assault camp. A celebration was in order, so after getting camp in some semblance of order, we ate dinner and dug out a carefully guarded half-bottle of fine port wine.

We had been climbing continuously for five days, advancing over 100 feet a day. According to our calculations, this should put us just 200 feet or so below the summit. Looking up at the walls soaring out of sight above us, this didn't seem to be quite right. We were "lost," but making good distance! Best of all, the weather had been superb and showed no sign of deteriorating.

#### *November seventh*

While I struggled with the overhanging, dirt-filled cracks above, Wayne and Rich arrived at camp with a fresh supply of food and water. We decided that George and Rich would go back down to the lower camps while Wayne and I would stay and launch what we hoped was the final assault.

At the day's end I had gained only about ninety feet, but I didn't really care. All I wanted to do was get down to camp and rest and wash the dirt out of my eyes.

That evening, while eating and rummaging through our gear, we made an unpleasant discovery: we were practically out of the tiny quarter-inch-diameter bolts which were so quick and easy to place.

There was no telling how long our good weather would last, and we could ill afford to spend a day going down to Camp IV for more bolts. We tried shouting down to George and Rich on Camp IV, but we couldn't tell if they understood us.

#### *November eighth*

Wayne practically zoomed up the thin crack which led above and was soon ninety feet up under a huge overhang. There was no real ledge, so he would have to protect me, while dangling in slings. Wayne started drilling a three-eighths-inch hole for a good bolt anchor, but after an hour of battling with a badly worn drill, he gave up and smashed home a couple of mediocre pitons. They would have to do.

Wayne was still cursing at the drill as I reached him and prepared to climb over and above him. I took his hammer and began nailing toward the overhang. On the third piton the head came clear off the hammer. We were stopped!

I tied off the rope at the highest piton, still fuming with frustration, and we slid down to Camp VI. No amount of shouting could raise anyone in the lower camps, but we could see someone in the parking lot a quarter of a mile from the base of the cliff. I tied a note and some red plastic ribbon around the hammer and dropped it over the side, hoping some of our ground crew would find it and send some hammers up to us.

**W**e continued to shout down to the lower camps. Finally, to our surprise, we got an answer from Wally Reed, just a few feet below us. Wally had come up for the week end to haul up a load of water and food.

"Yes, I have a hammer."

We dropped a rope down to Camp V and Wally tied on a two-gallon can of water and his hammer. By now it was too late to go back up and resume climbing, but at least we were back in business.

#### *November ninth*

Early Sunday morning, Wayne and I started up the ropes to our high point.

I reached the belay anchor and had just started up the next rope when the highest piton suddenly popped out, dropping me about four feet.

Just after my fall, Wally arrived at Camp VI with a load of food and the distressing news that Rich had succumbed to a bad case of nerves and gone down and probably wouldn't be back up. This was a real loss; Rich had been doing a marvellous job.

It was late morning when we finally got under way again. The overhang didn't go too badly, but it was terribly strenuous. By early afternoon I reached a small, triangular niche, obviously the accustomed roost of some large bird, with just room enough for one person to stand. I decided we just had to have a secure bolt anchor here, and spent two cursing, fuming hours rigging it.

Wayne pounded his way up the next pitch, which ended on a small, sloping ledge. We debated the advisability of push-

ing on further today. The weather had become downright threatening, driving more "bombproof" pitons. Wayne anchored the rope and we rappelled back to camp.

#### *November tenth*

By morning, the rain had given way to swirling, wind-driven snow. The obvious question was how long it would last. Difficult sixth-class climbing in bad weather was terribly dangerous. Maybe some real experts would do it, but not us! We had no choice but to sit it out.

By nightfall, the weather seemed to be clearing. Was it possible we were going to get a real break? If so, we intended to take full advantage of it, for, as nearly as we could figure, our high point was surely no more than 200 feet from the top. In a really determined effort, we might make it in one day. We decided that if it was clear in the morning we would go for the summit.

#### *November eleventh*

Shortly after daylight we moved up to the high point. The next pitch was rather routine sixth-class but much longer than I had anticipated. And the nice "cone" I had seen at the top proved to have only a high-angle trough for a floor. I anchored here as best I could with pitons; we had just two quarter-inch bolts left. There was a nasty-looking pitch above us and George had only reached Camp VI, 300 feet below. From our little alcove, we could see only twenty feet up, but we had heard a yodel from the top, so we must be getting close.

Wayne led the overhang, a short but frightening pitch. In spite of loose, flaky cracks and shifting pitons, he used only one of our precious bolts to get up. At the top he could see John Whitmer peering down at us from the rim. He could also see that above us was a long crack which led about sixty feet up to the final overhangs.

At four p.m. I shouldered a heavy sling of big pitons and attacked the crack. By six I had reached the top of the crack and waited until George, who was nearly up with Wayne, could tie the bolts and headlamp to my hauling line. The wait was a long one and I was soon shivering with cold.

When the gear at last reached me, I was in no particular rush to tackle the two overhangs above. Drilling bolt holes on high-angle or vertical rock is hard enough, but on an overhang it's nearly impossible. Placing the bolts became a backbreaking task and painfully slow. The hours dragged by and slowly the ladder of bolts crept upward until both of the overhangs were below me. It was now four a.m., and a twenty-foot traverse led to a small ledge at the rim. Drilling while leaning sideways is no joy. It would take a few hours to pound across.

But there it was—two hours and twenty feet away—the goal we had struggled toward for so many nerve-wracking days.

I hammered in another bolt, yanked some slack into the climbing rope, which was binding badly, clipped in and moved three feet nearer the top. The same thing over and over, until at last I could see that with one more bolt I'd be there. Shouting encouragement to George and Wayne, who were cramped and cold on the tiny ledge 150 feet below, I drilled the last hole.

When at last the bolt was in, I mechanically clipped climbing rope and slings into the carabiner, and stood up and pulled over the rim. Then, with faltering, uncertain steps, I made my way up the few remaining feet to where Ellen and John were waiting.

• • •