

PILGRIMS OF THE VERTICAL

Yosemite Rock Climbers and Nature at Risk

Joseph E. Taylor III

HARVARD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge, Massachusetts • London, England • 2010

## 8. MORALISTS

The climber elevates his opinions into dogmas, which he maintains fiercely against all comers: there are occasions when he shows traces of that bigotry, a spice of that persecuting spirit, without which no true religion would ever be complete.

—H. E. M. STUTFIELD

Yin and yang, dark and light, good and evil: an elemental tension underlies drama, and all great tales have it, including Yosemite's morality play of Royal Robbins versus Warren Harding. The antagonists are inextricably linked, having dominated Yosemite Valley in the same era, but more was always at stake than simple ego. Each championed a significantly different interpretation of the sport and, by extension, of what counted as a legitimate climb and relationship with nature. Each drew inspiration as much from the other as from Yosemite, and their rivalry—itsself-equal parts philosophy and envy—was as crucial as any ascent. Their legacy was thus not just some truly awesome climbs but how they personified some irresolvable tensions concerning technology, ambition, and publicity. Through them we can see how the Beats altered sporting and environmental culture.<sup>1</sup>

The main theme is by now familiar, involving that ancient conflict over the aesthetics of adventure. Just like Victorians the Beats rued their reliance on technology. They needed ropes, pitons, and bolts to ascend, yet their tools cheapened victory. They tried to reconcile the contradiction by erecting an ethical approach to adventure that honored tradition yet accommodated innovation. Situational ethics reigned on rock, but in camp personal aesthetics reified into absolutes. The laid back got uptight, and even counterculturalists acted like grand muftis. Then things got really weird. A self-professed champion of diversity went medieval with a cold chisel, a blue-collar iron smith spat at the *hoi polloi*, and a carefree iconoclast ranted about the Spanishquisition. Camp 4 lost its sense of humor. Climbing lost its *joie de vivre*, and the Beats beat a retreat.<sup>2</sup>

By then, though, they had redefined how outdoor athletes and environmentalists related to nature. More than any previous generation, the Beats turned their sport into a competitive and existential endeavor. They climbed so much and so well that the impossible was probable, and that was a cri-

sis. Their talent had undermined adventure. Many looked inward for new ways to maintain difficulty, yet they still measured themselves against rivals. Their actions exposed ambiguous attitudes about the past and future. Some echoed C. F. Meade, that competition “will be the ruin of the pure tradition of mountaineering”; others invoked liberty, arguing that climbing was about individual freedom. Philosophical differences seemed clear but tended to blur on the rock because, when the going got tough, all climbed rather similarly. Thus the development of a uniquely Yosemite style really was a group effort. Yvon Chouinard, Tom Frost, TM Herbert, Bob Kamps, Chuck Pratt, Steve Roper, and Frank Sacherer played key roles, but Robbins and Harding were always at the center. Without them, this story loses coherence.<sup>3</sup>

To understand Royal Robbins's place in climbing history, we must begin with the parable of how he came to be. Born in West Virginia to Royal Shannon and Beulah Robbins, the boy had a father who was unfaithful and unreliable. Beulah divorced and married an even more violent man who insisted the boy adopt *his* name. They moved to Southern California for the wartime opportunities, but the abuse continued and Beulah divorced again. Like Dick Leonard, the fatherless boy found male companionship hiking with scouts. Then in one of those rare moments of true definition, he renamed himself, choosing his original name. Unlike anyone else in this history, Royal Robbins really was the architect of his own identity. In a childhood that often spun out of control, the story of Royal Robbins's name became the first chapter of an autobiography about self-fashioning. He was close to his mom and distant from others. He yearned to distinguish himself but struggled to find a niche. He excelled at sports but was out of place in school and church. He read adventure tales for escape, but the plot of his own life remained vague until he happened upon an image of a lone climber in James Ramsey Ullman's *High Conquest*.<sup>4</sup>

Robbins's reaction to that photo linked him to a long line of people seduced by mountaineering imagery. Albert Smith first demonstrated this in the 1850s. Smith dramatized his ascent of Mont Blanc by festooning London's stages with animals, plants, pictures, and people. What made it work was how he “encouraged his audience to imagine themselves in Switzerland, making their own ascent of Mont Blanc.” His visual triggers were probably more responsible for the ensuing rush to the Alps than any other climb or climber. Panoramas, etchings, and photos had lured men to mountains for a century before Robbins fixated on a “man clinging by his fingers and toes.” Robbins was not the last. Harding was hooked by *The White Tower*, Layton Kor by a film on the Matterhorn, Yvon Chouinard by a man on rappel, Scott

Davis by photos of Chouinard, and John Long by Spencer Tracy in *The Mountaineer*. The imaginative ability to transpose oneself into an image was a critical step, but imagery takes us only so far.<sup>5</sup>

What gave the photo meaning was Ullman's text. Without it the source of Robbins's values is less clear. Ullman was one of many mid-century climbing historians. Most were English and all were Anglophiles. They praised sturdy Brits and scorned those who perverted sport with pitons and carabiners. Some authors even equated aid climbing with Nazi zealotry, especially those 1930s assaults on the Nordwards and Nanga Parbat. To Ullman it was all "suicidal insanity." "Afame with the hero-philosophy of Nazi-Fascism and egged on by flag-wavers and tub-thumpers . . . brown- and black-shirted young climbers began vying with one another in what they conceived to be feats of courage and skill. All or nothing was their watchword—victory or death. No risk was too great, no foolhardiness to be condemned, so long as their exploits brought kudos to *Vaterland* or *patria*." Fascism was anathematic in the late 1940s, and Ullman tapped that stigma to create a philosophical touchstone for Robbins.<sup>6</sup>

Ullman honored a masculine form of climbing that stressed mastery of the self. "The history of mountaineering," he wrote, "is not merely a story of the conquest of mountains, but of the conquest of fear. It is not merely the record of stirring deeds, but of a great adventure of the human spirit." Ullman contrasted brown-skinned monks, cowering in superstitious fear of Chomolungma, with the undaunted will of the British climber Geoffrey Bruce, who even in defeat quietly vowed to Mount Everest, "We'll get you yet!" Such men saw "a great challenge to their own qualities *as men*; a chance to conquer their own weakness, ignorance and fear; a struggle to match achievement to aspiration and reality to dream." For Ullman and ultimately for Robbins, this was the harder but higher road. The emphasis on self-testing merged physical rigor with dignified manhood. Here was a recipe for an uncommon life and, as John Cleare argues, "a pastime which was both romantic and personal . . . and which demanded total commitment both physical and mental." Robbins's passion for these values helps explain the intensity with which he helped form and patrol the homosocial world of Camp 4.<sup>7</sup>

Over time Robbins would actually become as technologically oriented and ambitious as Ullman's bêtes noires. He even idolized some figures, yet he never abandoned his Anglophilia. Robbins always honored the ideals first imbibed from Ullman, and always defended a sporting ethos he compared favorably to bullfighting. He probably saw no choice. In a way matched by few others, his values and ascents merged with his identity. His reputation

was a product not just of his great climbs but of how he inscribed them with a particular sporting and environmental sensibility.<sup>8</sup>

Robbins came out of nowhere in the late 1940s. Scrambling with the scouts led to meetings with the Southern RCS, which saw an incredible but raw talent. He did not know even basic rope work, so John Mendenhall and Chuck Wilts tutored Robbins and he progressed rapidly. His first trip to Yosemite resulted in the first 5.9 free climb on Higher Cathedral Spire. The feat was astounding yet accidental—Robbins had wandered off route—but the next year he did it intentionally by freeing an aid route at Tahquitz Rock called *Open Book*. Except for maybe Mendenhall, no one in California matched Robbins's skill, and only one other North American climber had ever ascended a more difficult route.<sup>9</sup>

Robbins's talents were unrivaled, but his social skills were wanting. Since the early days of the RCS Yosemite climbers had been freeing pitches—essentially free climbing sections that had formerly required aid. There was at first a friendly rivalry in these efforts, but Robbins added a sense of righteousness. In 1953 he, Jerry Gallwas, and Don Wilson made the second ascent of Sentinel's north face, passing most of the aid Salathé and Steck had used. The climb was impressive, but they soured it by claiming Salathé and Steck had exaggerated difficulties to save face. Within a community that still observed genteel customs, this was poor form. Criticizing two highly esteemed members made the assault even worse. All conceded Robbins's strengths, but his brashness and habit of boasting every time he climbed something in better style was off-putting.<sup>10</sup>

Robbins's personality was always a double-edged force. His aloofness, itself largely due to shyness, awed and inspired some but irritated and alienated others. His awkwardness might even have bolstered his rivals' popularity. Whatever his strengths, Robbins's pious views about technology, style, and revelry were alienating. He treated the sport less as an avocation or way of life than as a cause. Climbing was a noble endeavor, a way for a high-school dropout to build a respectable identity on his own terms. For some, this was too serious. Climbing was supposed to be fun, and afterward they wanted to let loose. But Robbins disdained Camp 4's wild side, and his Victorian sensibilities drove as many away from him toward the licentious Powell and Harding as those charismatic climbers attracted on their own. It was a testament to his climbing prowess that so many admired Robbins despite himself.<sup>11</sup>

Thus for all his talent, Robbins was not at first highly regarded. One problem was that his job as a bookkeeper kept him in Southern California during

most of Powell's run. Another was that his only first ascent in Yosemite Valley was Liberty Cap, which Powell had dominated. Robbins had not yet made his mark, and by 1957 the only remaining plums were Half Dome, El Capitan, and Mount Watkins. Of those, only Half Dome's northwest face seemed feasible; the rest were too big and blank. Robbins had tried Half Dome in 1955 with Gallwas, Harding, and Wilson, but Wilson called a halt because of slow progress. It was a turning point. Robbins and Harding were eager to continue and bridled at Wilson's authoritarianism. Their frustrations precipitated change.<sup>12</sup>

Robbins's responses cast light on his personality. The first thing he did was assert greater control of his projects. He formed a team, inviting Gallwas and Mike Sherrick, a friend from Southern California, but discarding Wilson and Harding. Like most climbers, he relied on a small circle of friends, most of whom were Southern Californians. Robbins was also extremely ambitious. Several teams coveted Half Dome, including one led by Harding. Robbins admitted competitiveness later, but his obsession with speed on Half Dome suggests that besting others was always important. As soon as the NPS consented, Robbins moved onto the wall and hid, timing communications with friends when tourists gazed elsewhere. He also made a telling maneuver by leaving a rope across a key traverse to facilitate retreat, but tying the line so only his team could use it.<sup>13</sup>

Robbins's penchant for control—over himself, his team, and eventually Camp 4—would increasingly warp his actions, but the 1957 ascent of Half Dome seemed pure. He had merged aesthetics and technique to make Half Dome a nearly flawless expression of his vision. An ascent of 2,000 feet of dead vertical granite, the route was the longest and steepest not only in Yosemite but in all of North America. Moreover, Robbins was the driving force behind the Half Dome climb, unlike Liberty Cap. He climbed the tough leads, did the hard work, and made the daring pendulums. In a literal swoop he elevated himself to elite status in Yosemite and, soon, the world.

He also became the sport's conscience. Despite his earlier remarks, he respected Salathé. The old iron smith had committed to his routes, climbing bottom to top in single, self-contained efforts. The way Salathé limited himself increased the risks and, therefore, the adventure. Robbins similarly rationed food, water, rope, and, crucially, bolts. Half Dome was more than an ascent—it was a statement on style. He insisted they climbed “as safely as possible,” yet argued that even “enthusiasts must admit a certain amount of calculated risk on a climb of this kind.” This was the key to Robbins's ethos: a real climber was an adventurer who dared to fail.<sup>14</sup>

Robbins had begun a lifelong effort to make adventure an aesthetic standard. Like Salathé, he showed men how to find themselves. Half Dome was a vertical *Pilgrim's Progress*. Like the hero Christian, Robbins surmounted many challenges, only his landscape was not early modern England but a sheer wall in an incomparable valley. Both protagonists sought a state of grace, and both endured a masculine process of self-testing. Christian resisted Vanity Fair; Robbins cheap fame. Technology was an issue, however. Robbins tried to follow natural crack systems, but blank sections of Half Dome required twenty bolts, which contradicted his sporting and environmental ideals. Drilling violated the rules of natural protection because it altered the rock and could be done anywhere. Such acts required justification. He reasoned that “bolts (which can be placed only after arduous hammer-and-drill preparation of holes to receive them) were used only where they seemed essential for progress or safety.” Like the Anglophiles he read as a boy, Robbins would accept bolts only under extraordinary circumstances.<sup>15</sup>

If Royal Robbins was Camp 4's new philosopher king, then Warren Harding was its jester. They were perfect foils. Both had been blue-collar misfits who made climbing their identity, yet their views differed so starkly that it is hard to imagine them as anything but rivals. The more Robbins proselytized, the more Harding apostasized. Their routes became counterpoints in a debate about aesthetics and ethics, and the two were so good that each new climb made everyone consider the broader stakes. Robbins was a serious aesthete, always advocating high ideals, while Harding pursued hard climbing and hard drinking with equal commitment. Playing the fool, though, was a double-edged game. He could speak truth to power, but only by acting in ways that allowed people to dismiss him.<sup>16</sup>

In retrospect, Harding was born a decade too early. Raised in northern California during the Depression, he was “undersized . . . unambitious and aimless,” a wiry boy who could run forever but was otherwise uncoordinated. Like other Beats, he was also adrift. After the war he took a job as a surveyor “to keep the wolf from the door,” but work never defined him—play did. For a time Harding raced sports cars for glamour and excitement, but then a friend took him climbing. He had fun. The sport was edgy, and he was good. Then, fittingly, he read Ullman's heroic *The White Tower*, saw the movie, and was hooked. By 1950 he had joined the Bay Area RCS, found partners, went climbing, and improved rapidly. However, by the time he visited Yosemite in 1953, two years after Robbins had done the valley's first 5.9 at age sixteen, Harding was nearly thirty.<sup>17</sup>

Harding's age did not become an issue until later in his career. In 1954

he made the first ascent of Middle Cathedral Rocks North Buttress and East Buttress and the second ascent of Lost Arrow Chimney. Many more followed, and although he was later known for aid climbing, these were distinguished by his free-climbing ability. Harding worried up a fearsome tunnel in the Lost Arrow Chimney, an airy slot called *The Worst Error*, and a bottomless pitch on Washington Column. Yosemite was his candy store. By the end of the 1950s he had seventeen first ascents with fourteen partners; Robbins had three firsts with six rope mates. The two did share partners such as Mark Powell, Chuck Pratt, and Wayne Merry, but mostly they went separate ways and showed little interest in climbing with each other.<sup>18</sup>

Their estrangement developed in the aftermath of Robbins's Half Dome climb. Left off Robbins's team, Harding joined Powell and Bill Feuerer, but by the time they reached Yosemite, Robbins was well up the face. Harding hiked to the top to congratulate the victors, but his disappointment festered. He had lost the prize and felt snubbed. His team "grumbled around the valley for a couple days. . . . There were plenty of attractive routes to be done, but everything else seemed to represent some sort of 'put down' compared to Half Dome." All that is, except the 3,000-foot face of El Capitan. With typical self-deprecation, he explained that his team got lubricated on cheap wine, gazed in awe at a prominent corner where El Capitan's southwest and southeast faces meet, and screwed up their courage. Harding's girlfriend, Bea Vogel, recalled things differently. Harding was "pouting and moaning because he had been left out," so she shamed him: "Oh Hell! There are lots of other walls. Why don't you do El Capitan?" and then pointed out the route. Whatever the true inspiration, the climb that followed changed the game again.<sup>19</sup>

Climbers had contemplated El Capitan for twenty years, but it was all talk. Everyone was appalled by the amount of aid and especially bolts that it required. After Art Argiewicz lost a bet in 1943, *The Yodeler* teased that he would have to bolt his way up El Cap as payment. Five years later the Washington Rock Climbers wrote a futuristic "night mare" in which an eight-man team built a 500-gallon water tank and used 6,500 feet of rope and ten fifty-pound crates of bolts to engineer their way up. In some ways reality matched fantasy. Powell, Feuerer, and Harding rushed the first third in July 1957, but then they got mired in a route that took 45 days over 18 months, with 675 pitons, 125 bolts, and 2,000 feet of rope.<sup>20</sup>

The amount of gear and hype were unprecedented, and some called Harding a self-aggrandizing engineer. Several ascents drew this charge, but critics oversimplified in 1958. The line, called *The Nose*, was by far the most demanding in North America. Its length and problems were unprecedented,

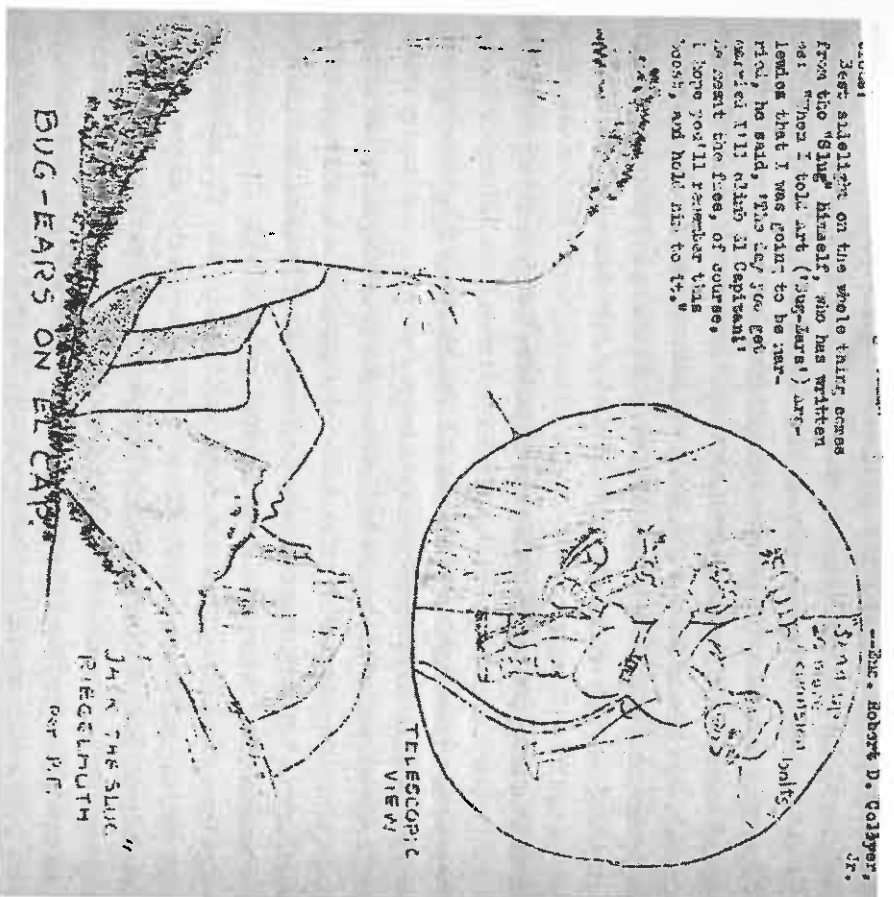


Figure 8.1. As this teasing cartoon from the early 1940s shows, climbers had considered climbing El Capitan long before the first ascent team started up *The Nose* in 1957, but everyone had assumed that it could only be done by incessant drilling and bolt placements. Here Arthur "Bug-Ears" Argiewicz supposedly requests "20 more expansion bolts" because he had to climb El Cap after losing a bet with fellow member Jack "The Slug" Riegelhuth. Sadly, Argiewicz died less than a year later while fighting in Italy with the 10th Mountain Division.

and as Robbins said later, the team adopted "the only possible tactics for those days." Critics also assumed Harding's leadership and the media attention were intended, but both were as much due to accident as assertion. The original trio were a true team. Powell was the driving force, Feuerer the technical genius, Harding the indefatigable will. But by fall 1957, Powell had shattered an ankle and Feuerer lost interest. That left Harding in charge.<sup>21</sup>

Harding seemed to need El Capitan, but he also needed help. His first invitation went to none other than Robbins, who was put off by the siege-style tactics. Harding then enlisted a platoon of friends including Powell,

Feurerer, Rich Calderwood, Wally Reed, Ellen Searby, George Sessions, Allen Steck, and John Whitmer. Sessions dealt with traffic, Searby with the press. The rest ferried food, water, and gear. Then attrition set in. Steck was out of shape, Reed distrusted the gear, and Calderwood lost his nerve. Only Harding stuck it out from the start, and only Wayne Merry and George Whitmore accompanied him to the top. The group dynamic was captured by a vignette on the final night: Whitmore perched atop a granite spike, Merry on endless belay, and Harding relentlessly drilling twenty-eight holes into the summit overhangs. As he "staggered over the rim," Harding wrote that "It was not at all clear to me who was conqueror and who was conquered: I do recall that El Cap seemed to be in much better condition than I was." Humor was easy because he had succeeded.<sup>22</sup>

The ensuing notoriety was more complex. Harding and Merry always credited everyone who contributed labor or gear, but the guidebook writers, some of whom detested Harding, followed a protocol of honoring only the summit trio. Thus his opponents helped foreground Harding, and his fame became an issue. Critics dwelled first on the "publicity." The climb drew coverage from the start, but this was mostly due to geography. El Capitan is the biggest thing in Yosemite Valley. The NPS still bills it as the "largest exposed granite monolith" in the world, and whatever its actual rank, it is huge. Driving west, El Capitan fills the windshield and beyond. Its two main faces meet in a prominent buttress (*The Nose*) that forces the road left, and this is the only feature with cracks from bottom to top. Thus the trio were climbing the closest feature to the road on the most conspicuous thing around, and because it was easy to park and gawk, roads clogged in July 1957. El Capitan Meadow was a mob scene, so the chief ranger ordered the team down after seven days. It was the first time the NPS had intervened in a climb.<sup>23</sup>

The rangers' main concern was a wholly preventable traffic jam. The chief ranger was none too thrilled with climbers in general, but the sport was deeply entrenched. So, with support from another timely letter by Dick Leonard, he let them resume from Labor Day to Memorial Day. By then Harding was in charge, which meant he also bore responsibility for the circus. A year later his evanescent team was still stuck in the middle of the face, and gawkers now included reporters. This is when Searby became press liaison, and Sessions, later a philosopher who defined deep ecology as a long-term, nonconsumerist engagement with nature, began to direct traffic. As the spectacle grew the chief ranger issued another ultimatum: finish by Thanksgiving . . . or else. Harding later dismissed the threat, but it had an

effect. The team made four assaults that fall, culminating in a marathon, twelve-day push covered nationwide.<sup>24</sup>

Unlike Robbins, whose Half Dome ascent was widely admired, Harding divided Yosemite. The park superintendent and the American Alpine Club hailed his expertise and attention to safety, but the NPS director called it a "trick or stunt." Conrad Wirth decried the spectacle and vowed to end all technical climbing in parks. Many defended Harding's techniques, and though not known then, the chief ranger even ordered Harding to place fixed ropes for rescue. Others were less supportive. Powell and Feuerer resented Harding's fame, and Robbins hated the Himalayan-style siege. A rumor spread that Robbins wanted to steal the route. Some also felt Harding's publicity debased the sport. Searby did sell photos to *Life*, and Harding and Merry did sell a story to *Argosy*, but profit was not the motive. Harding told Leonard that his "very slight financial gain" would barely pay for the ropes, and it "was not what prompted us to make the attempt. There certainly must be easier ways to earn 10¢ an hour and get one's picture in the paper!" Making money was not the issue. Even David Brower publicized his Shiprock climb in the *Saturday Evening Post*.<sup>25</sup>

The problem was how *The Nose* contributed to the erasure of risk. Robbins noted that Harding was "the first to break that fear" of El Capitan. He pierced a psychic barrier by proving that even the most intimidating faces could fall. Climbers remained wary, but now they knew they could succeed. *The Nose* was thus another blow in what Reinhold Messner called "The Murder of the Impossible," and the new cohort, all of whom trained at Tahquitz or Berkeley, redefined the limits. Frost, Kampps, Pratt, and Sacherer freed pitches with zeal, and by 1961, Pratt, Robbins, and Dave Rearick had free climbed three routes, each so significantly harder than anything before that the rating system had to include a previously unimagined level of difficulty. Climbers also did harder aid climbs. Harding and Pratt ascended Washington Column's overhanging east face. Frost, who was an aeronautical engineer, and Chouinard, who knew the working end of a hammer better than anyone since Salathé, made postage-stamp-sized pions called "RURPs," or "Realized Ultimate Reality Pions," that they smashed into incipient cracks on the southwest edge of Kat Pinnacle and the *West Face* on Sentinel. Joe Fischen and Robbins used RURPs on *Royal Arches Direct*. Again, these routes were so difficult they warranted a new aid grade.<sup>26</sup>

Although difficult routes were nothing new, the rate at which unprecedented climbs were successfully attempted in Yosemite around 1960 rede-

finned the valley as a globally important climbing center. As a result, things done there and the climbers who did them were by definition important. Just being there mattered. "What could be finer," Kor asked, "than to spend our strength, minds & desire toward the greatest thing in the world, the nose of El Capitan." The AAC agreed. In 1961 it opened membership to climbers who stayed on one continent in order to lure Yosemite climbers, and officers celebrated when Chouinard applied, noting "it has been hard for the Club to seem to offer much to many of the best Western climbers." Then in 1963, the *AAJ* featured the valley. The Beats were now insiders. Steve Roper boasted, "No one can seriously deny . . . that Yosemite Valley is the most influential and important rock climbing area of this country." A European called Yosemite the "Mecca of American rock climbers," and the label "Yosemite climber" became a mark of distinction. For Kor it meant "I finally belonged to this elite group." No one was more responsible for the valley's stature than Robbins and Harding.<sup>27</sup>

*The Nose* also clarified positions on sporting aesthetics. On one side stood Robbins, who personified a style of adventure steeped in natural lines, restrained methods, and decorum. On the other was Harding, who flinched at neither the spotlight nor critics. Whereas Robbins hid behind a rock in 1955 to avoid curious tourists, Harding hammered it up for reporters; and while Robbins said a mea culpa for his twenty holes on Half Dome, Harding was unapologetic about his 125 holes on El Capitan. He called Wirth's complaints about drilling "ridiculous" and explained matter-of-factly that bolts were "just a standard procedure of climbing where there are no natural holds." Robbins viewed issues through a moral prism; Harding was agnostic. By 1960, Yosemite's two stars seemed to inhabit polar positions about the ethics of adventure.<sup>28</sup>

Appearances were partly deceiving. In practice Harding and Robbins approached technical problems very similarly, but their rivalry was real. In the game of climbing second ascents are also important because they serve as a peer review. Subsequent parties confirm or critique pioneer performances, and repeated routes gain respect. *The Nose* showed how this worked. After the Army, Robbins prepared to repeat *The Nose* in one push without fixed ropes, as a comment on Harding's performance. His team, composed of Frost, Pratt, and Fischen, aimed to begin in fall 1960, but the route complicated their agenda. The length, multiple pendulums, and difficulty of retreat forced them to carry many supplies, and hauling became a problem. The team ultimately proved that they did not need an umbilical cord, but they did need all of the labor Harding had put into his bolts. The ascent, com-

pleted in seven days, produced contradictory messages. Robbins made his point about fixed ropes, but he also legitimated Harding and the route. Their rivalry was cemented. Thereafter Robbins was cool to Harding, granting his "abundance of energy and determination" but rarely complimenting his abilities.<sup>29</sup>

Robbins regarded his aesthetic of adventure as timeless, but it actually depended on a rapidly changing technological context. Climbers had innovated gear since the 1930s. The RCS developed designs that the Quartermaster Corps perfected during the war. Plymouth Cordage Company began to produce nylon ropes while the Ames Shovel Company made horizontal and angle pitons. Civilians acquired this gear after the war, but the pitons often performed poorly in Yosemite granite. Salathé made more resilient blades using vanadium. Raffi Bedayn designed stronger, lighter carabiners from aluminum. Chuck Wilts forged very thin "knife-blade" pitons from chromium-molybdenum. Each resulted from the close study of granite and metal, and all significantly diminished Yosemite's technical and environmental challenges.<sup>30</sup>

Other climbers produced an array of devices. Most, such as members of the Stanford Alpine Club who used the campus foundry, or Jerry Gallwas who made gear for the 1957 ascent of Half Dome, copied the work of Salathé and Wilts. Others followed unique paths, such as Bill Feuerer who turned aluminum into everything from bolt hangers to wide-angle pitons. The most famous effort is now enshrined in El Capitan's climbing escape. In 1956, Frank Tarver and Harding discussed Half Dome's challenges, including cracks too wide for the three-quarter-inch angles made by Ames. Tarver later roamed a dump and spied a stove from which he took three legs—he would have had to buy the stove if he removed all four. Then with roommate John Thune, he crimped, drilled, and braised the legs into the widest pitons ever. When Tarver went to Alaska in 1957, he offered his gear to Harding for Half Dome, and when Robbins got there first, Harding used them on a series of two- to four-inch fissures on El Capitan now known as the Stoveleg Cracks.<sup>31</sup>

In retrospect the long era of vernacular piton craft closed with the second ascent of *The Nose*. Some pre-1960 gear was very good, some very dangerous. Feuerer's efforts failed often, and Harding had so few stove legs that, even after Calderwood made more, he had to leap-frog gear, removing pitons from below to reinsert them above. At times he was so far above reliable protection that bolts were necessary just to gain some measure of safety, and the more he pounded the untempered gear, the more crumpled and unreliable it became. By the top of the Stoveleg Cracks, the pitons were useless.

In contrast, Robbins's team used Chouinard's RURPs to bypass some bolts, and Frost created wide-angle pitons, called "bong bongs" for the noise made when hammered, that were far more reliable than Tarver's gear. The result was an ironic turning point. Climbers called the first continuous ascent an aesthetic breakthrough, yet it was facilitated by technologies, including Harding's bolts, that meant Robbins's team actually faced less objective risk than Harding had just two years earlier.<sup>32</sup>

The nature of climbers also changed. The Beats were the strongest, most agile cohort ever as a result of the revolution Powell began. Leonard marveled at how they spent "the entire summer climbing every single day, so that their muscles get to be extremely powerful. . . . When we were climbing, we were quite proud that we used the side of our foot when climbing on little ledges because it would have less of a strain, but nowadays these climbers put the tip of their toe on the ledges. That puts a terrific leverage on the ankle. . . . They have the strength, and that forces the body in closer to the rock and gives better balance." Even those not climbing built strength with training programs. This was not new. To prepare for their ascent of Lost Arrow Chimney, Salathé and Anton Nelson practiced living on a pint of water per day and Harding worked out with weights before *The Nose*, but by 1960 many Yosemite climbers had formal regimens of running, lifting, and calisthenics.<sup>33</sup>

Climbers also sharpened their minds. Published articles in the *Sierra Club Bulletin* and *Summit Magazine*, and private route descriptions, were part of a vast database on nature, climbers, and technology. This began in 1934 when Leonard made climbers' maps, now called "topos," of Upper and Lower Cathedral Spire. By the 1960s this data had become a significant part of vertical experience. Kor remembered how Steve Roper gave "me a selection of pitons for the Lost Arrow Tip. . . . He knew precisely which pitons were necessary to climb the final section [and] even told me which piton to use where." Robbins similarly climbed halfway up *The North America Wall* just to reconnoiter the other half. However, the more Beats mastered the variables, honing body and mind, the more elusive uncertainty became. They had fetishized risk. Danger was integral to their sense of adventure, yet each advance eroded the thing that they craved most: doubt. Yosemite had ceased to be terra incognita. Something had to give.<sup>34</sup>

As the most intrusive and safest form of protection, bolts seemed the most threatening impediments to sport. In 1960, Chouinard revived this already well-worn issue by warning that abuses were "very real and grave" and that they derived from "the problem of ethics in the use of bolts in climbing."

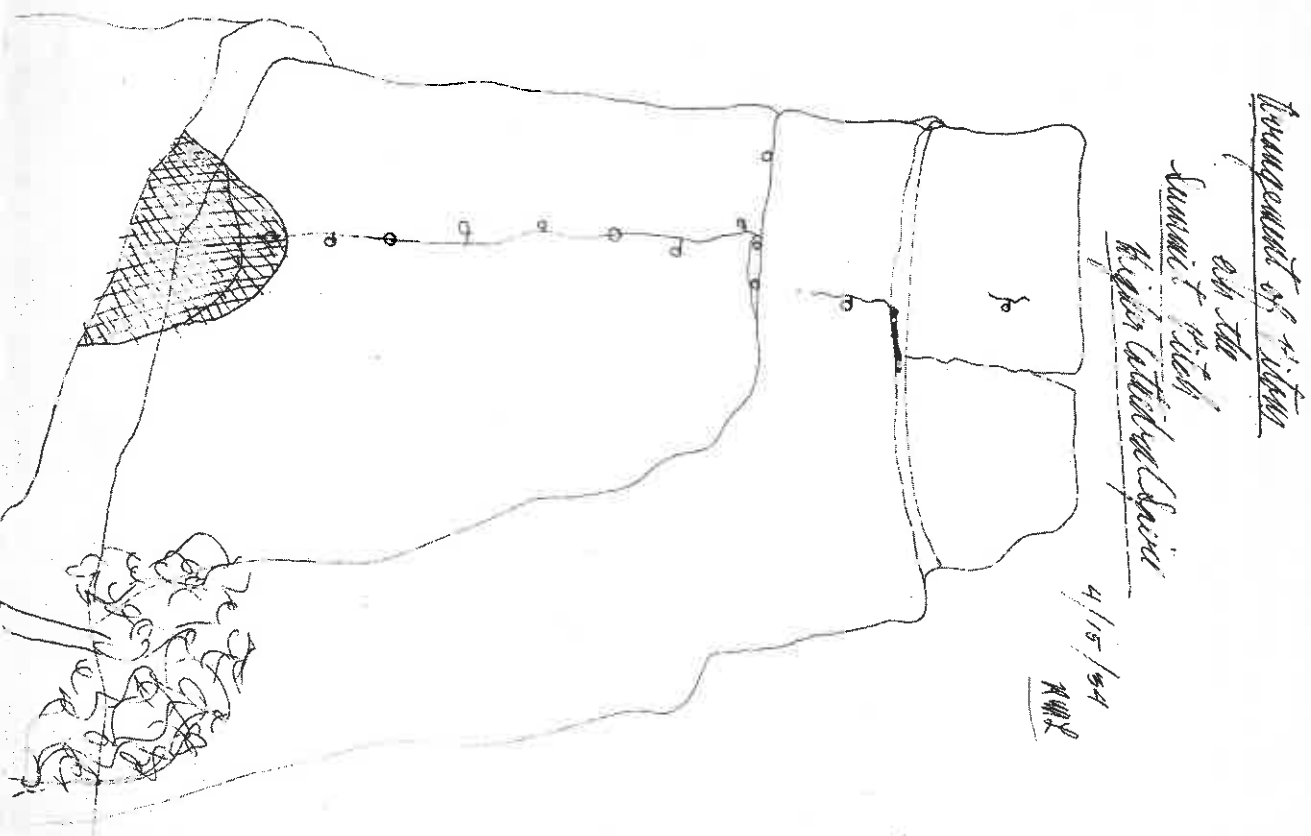


Figure 8.2. Although graphical representations of climbing routes had been produced since this mid-1930s drawing by Richard Leonard of the final pitch of Higher Cathedral Spire, these invaluable and closely guarded "topos" circulated only among small circles of friends. When entrepreneurs began to publish refined topos of popular routes in the early 1970s, Steve Roper, Royal Robbins, and others protested, claiming that publication would make climbing too easy and draw in the masses.



For Chouinard ethics was a communal issue. He argued that bolts "must be treated in the same manner as social morals. The problem is not one of individual taste, but rather one which must be determined by the entire climbing fraternity and adhered to by everyone who climbs." As always his metric was risk: a climber was "only justified" in placing a bolt "if he thinks that [a move] would be very dangerous even for a better climber than himself." Practically speaking, however, the "fraternity" was unfit to judge. Only "the very experienced and expert climber should even own a 'bolt kit.' It is incomprehensible for the average climber to know just what can be climbed safely by the expert on either free or artificial ground." Chouinard's sermon inspired a flood of responses. Robbins seconded his sense of crisis and the need for "a change in values." He, Fischen, and others began to enumerate the bolts they used, including the odd notation of "no bolts were placed," while others began to remove or "chop" superfluous bolts from existing routes.<sup>35</sup>

Chouinard and Robbins were inventing tradition and, through it, the means of regulation. British climbers had long treated the sport as more than a pastime. H. E. M. Stutfield remarked that "mountaineering had in our day ceased to be a mere sport, an agreeable relaxation for jaded workers. . . . our attitude towards it was marked with a fervour and an intensity of purpose characteristic of the genuine devotee." Climbing was "a joy, a passion, an inspiration—one might say 'a religion' . . . tinged with veneration that at times savours of worship." Some zealots even harbored "sectarian" bigotries. One British group known as "The Squirrels" regularly patrolled routes to "remove all pitons they regard as superfluous." Everyone else belonged to the "outside world." In broader perspective, Bear rants about bolts and culture change belonged to a longer tradition of local rule.<sup>36</sup>

Such attempts at community regulation were extremely divisive, and many climbers resisted. Several noted that Chouinard had equated physical talent with moral authority. He wanted to regulate climbing by elitist principles, even proposing an invitation-only "Yosemite Climbing Club" for those of "outstanding climbing ability" interested in "raising the standards." Even some who sympathized, including Wilts and Robbins, saw no practical way to police climbers. Steve McCrory wrote that "the question of ethics regarding the use of bolts remains solely to the individual climber." Others, most of whom were moderate or club climbers, rejected the notion that climbing was in crisis. Bolts enhanced safety, and that was a good thing. Some routes were even improved by the addition of bolts where pioneers had taken too

many risks. This was one of the implications of peer review, and even Robbins participated when he placed an extra bolt on *The Nose* in a state of fear and on *The Muir Wall* in a state of exhaustion. As for the environmental implications, David Brower noted that the 125 holes on *The Nose* meant "a total approximate excavation of a two-inch cube of granite, under more awkward circumstances than the highway excavator!" Critics were echoing Bestor Robinson's plea after Shiprock to "drop this childish prattle about the immorality of artificial aides."<sup>37</sup>

As a practical matter, the argument was moot. Only elites carried bolt kits because only they chose hard routes. From 1960 to 1965, many older routes were free climbed for the first time. Sacherer freed twice as many as anyone, but many participated in, as Chouinard put it, "raising the standards." The other key effort was the creation of "big wall" routes. In 1961, Robbins, Frost, and Fischen climbed the 1,100-foot outside face of Higher Cathedral Spire, and with Pratt that fall a second, circuitous line up the southwest face of El Capitan. Named in honor of the old blacksmith, *The Salathé Wall* required fixed ropes but hewed close to Robbins's ideal by using only nine bolts. As with the second ascent of *The Nose*, it was an aesthetic statement, and combined with routes such as the *Direct North Buttress* on Middle Cathedral Rock by Chouinard and Roper, and two on Sentinel by Robbins and Frost and by Chouinard and TM Herbert, philosophies jelled. Robbins took great risks, including an irreversible decision to climb free where failure would have resulted in a "long and thrilling" fall. Chouinard and Herbert so limited their bolts that they once had to retreat. The big boys were walking the walk, showing the rest how to climb in style.<sup>38</sup>

There were outliers, though, great and not-so-good climbers who ignored the moralists. In 1961, Harding countered Robbins by pushing a line straight up the Leaning Tower, which lurches 110 degrees over the south side of the valley. He, Glen Denny, and Al MacDonal fixed ropes and drilled holes up the severely overhanging cliff. As with *The Nose* there was no other way, but Harding's stature shielded him from criticism. This was not so for outsiders such as Ed Cooper and Jim Baldwin. Arriving in 1962 to try a line on El Capitan's southwest face, Cooper was marked as a Northwesterner who Camp 4 residents judged unproven and thus unworthy. He also had a reputation for unwarranted bolting and publicity, or as Denny wrote, of being "ruthlessly materialistic and sensationalistic." Baldwin befriended others with bawdy behavior, but Cooper was aloof and therefore suspect. When the two fixed ropes up disconnected cracks, locals heaped scorn. Robbins took it as a per-

sional affront after his declarations on siege climbing, and even those who helped, including Roper and Denny, called Cooper calculating and cold natured.<sup>39</sup>

Tensions boiled over in petty cause célèbres. Despite the criticism, Cooper pushed a difficult route that, in retrospect, was impossible without fixed ropes. How he finished was another matter. Waiting on top was a prearranged phalanx of reporters. Denny was crushed: "We all could have sat on the summit with this great thing, this experience, between us, and could have communicated in the phrases and actions of our own relationship through climbing. . . . But it could not happen, and the summit was dead. Cooper had contacted the world of sensationalism and the god damn thing ruined the summit." Robbins fumed, and even after seconding the route and conceding its quality, he did not compliment Cooper. The publicity was intolerable, so when Al Macdonald proposed a route on El Capitan done in similar style, locals made every effort to stop him. In a letter to a friend, Denny called Macdonald a "maniac" evincing a "*kind of climbing schizoid phrenia*" who "must be stopped before he rapes El Cap and its significance to the world of rock climbing." This pained Denny because he liked Macdonald and did not want to hurt him. Others were less considerate, berating in person and in letters until Macdonald quit in disgust.<sup>40</sup>

The moralists were reacting to apostasy. Climbing was a spiritual quest, Yosemite the temple, and Camp 4 the monastery where Victorian and Beat ideals melded in a new religion. Denny argued that the "*climbs on El Cap should be the particular expression of climbing that Yosemite contributes to the climbing world: amazing virtuosity in pure technical rock climbing of the greatest difficulty and magnitude.*" The problematic climbers, as he saw it, were those who "*cannot approach this goal.*" But what to do with the infidels and who exactly were they? The answers had everything to do with the homosocial world of Camp 4. Cooper, Macdonald, and even Harding to a degree were suspect outsiders; insiders got a pass. In 1963, for example, Kor started up El Capitan's 2,000-foot West Buttress in a manner much like Harding's early ascents. He fixed ropes, drilled holes, and dragged many, yet Kor never faced criticism. He was not climbing with much more style than Cooper or Harding. It was not his expertise that distinguished him; rather, he was one of the boys and, thus, he was worthy.<sup>41</sup>

This was not the case with Cooper, and it was only a matter of time before there was a confrontation. When Cooper and Galen Rowell began a new route on Half Dome's northwest face in June 1963, all eyes were on them, and when they descended after a few days to attend to school and work, the at-

tack came. The team left ropes in place to signal their intentions, and most climbers recognized their claim. Robbins perceived an incipient siege, however, so he asked Kor to help him pirate the route. When Kor balked, he turned to Dick McCracken, who agreed that Cooper deserved no quarter. It was Yosemite's first route theft. Robbins did not apologize. He snubbed a hated rival and kept control of Half Dome. When Cooper told the press about another route, locals expelled him. Cooper's only response was an impotent remark that "the spirit of competition in the Valley brings out weaknesses in some."<sup>42</sup>

By 1963, Robbins had become *the* moral authority of Camp 4, and along with a few others that one climber uncharitably called "Robbins' clique," they turned tribal. Except for Kor, Robbins was the best all-around climber in North America. He was also the most competitive of a very competitive group. If a route was climbed quickly or a boulder done with style, he immediately climbed it faster or better. Robbins kept tabs on new arrivals and seconded as many routes as possible, even his own, to assert himself as the reigning peer of aesthetic merit and moral fiber. He had to know who his rivals were and whether they were worthy. There was too much at stake. Yosemite was a treasure, and he and others wanted to ensure that their values would rule.<sup>43</sup>

Camp 4 was a rough place. Roper warned that if a climber "arrives in Yosemite with even a faint trace of arrogance, he is in for an unpleasant time: not only will he not gain the respect of the Valley climbers, but it is unlikely that he will ever fulfill his ambitious climbing schedules." Outsiders had to suppress their "desire for notoriety" and emulate "normal" climbers, who pertinaciously cling to their belief that climbing is pure and noble." The bolt debate also continued to rage. Kamps wrote about the "obligation to a purity of climbing" and criticized how bolt chopping was personalized as "a symbol of superiority—person above person, area over area." His protégé Tom Higgins emphasized "the moral side" of competition, or as Robbins put it after citing Geoffrey Windthrop Young, "*the way it is done.*" Most lurked or discussed issues privately, but Ross Petrie was "a little tired of reading this 'Ethics in Mountaineering' garbage. . . . a very small vocal minority, jealous of each other's accomplishments, is trying to create a tempest in a tea pot." He suggested a "shoot out with bolt guns at twenty paces to settle the question." Another privately regretted "the petty bickerings and rivalries in Camp 4. The mountains are big enough to accommodate all talents and interests. It's a pity the people who go into them are not."<sup>44</sup>

The rancor finally faded in late 1965, and in the end the only arguments

that mattered were on the rock. By 1964 no one, not even Robbins, had climbed a major wall without fixed ropes, so it was no small irony that the author of this aesthetic feat was Warren Harding. That spring he spied a line in the roadless Tenaya Canyon. In July he recruited Pratt and Chouinard to tackle the untested 2,800-foot face of Mount Watkins, accessible only by a backcountry approach, far from watchful eyes and without an umbilical cord. Big-wall ascents were usually begun in spring or fall. Watkins would reveal why. Temperatures soared over 100 degrees. The south face became a convection oven. Then cracks dead-ended. Bolts and water ran low. Delay-dration set in. The climb became an epic. Harding lassoed a tree to avoid the drill, then donated his water so the others could reach the top. Pratt, who translated the climb into a gripping tale, showed readers how far the elite were willing to push themselves.<sup>45</sup>

That November they went even further. Unlike the gleaming polish of its southwest face, El Capitan's southeast face was dark and rotten. Brittle diorite intrusions formed a hazy map of North America that was intriguing to view but frightening to climb. So much material had fallen away that the upper wall overhung. It was literally disintegrating, and the base was a vast blast zone of talus running hundreds of yards downhill. The technical challenges were extreme, and the proposed route wandered up some of the nastiest, most sustained difficulties. Balanced against this were Frost, Pratt, Chouinard, and Robbins, perhaps the four finest climbers in North America. They began in a heat wave and ended in a foot of snow. Robbins noted that "there were at least a dozen pitches which on almost any other climb would be the crux," yet they ascended relentlessly in ten days. Robbins called *The North America Wall* the hardest route ever, and his team claimed the valley's penultimate "virgin."<sup>46</sup>

By suasion and intimidation a core group had narrowed the valley's acceptable techniques and couched them in a strongly gendered aesthetic of adventure. Chouinard noted at the end of one climb that he and Frost felt "purified and happy; happy that for a few hours we had been free and happy to take some of this freedom back with us." Pratt remarked that for "five days the south face of Mount Watkins had dominated each of our lives as only nature can dominate the lives of men. With the struggle over and our goal achieved I was conscious of an inner calm." His mates were "united by a bond far stronger and more lasting than any we could find in the world below." Robbins described *The North America Wall* as an existential quest: "We climbed onward, searching, always searching. Searching for handholds and footholds, for picon cracks and the right picon. And searching ourselves for

the necessary human qualities to make this climb possible. Searching for adventure, searching for ourselves, searching for situations which would call forth our total resources." Many guffawed at the prose, but most agreed that big walls were ultimates. By 1964 a climber had to succeed by the Beat rules or start over to "preserve his own dignity."<sup>47</sup>

There were costs to this approach. At the conical end was an ascent of the 1,800-foot face of East Portal. Pratt described how he, Steck, John Evans, and Dick Long, "aided by a small band of porters [who] transported our tonnage to the Ribbon Falls amphitheater," hoped "to succeed by sheer weight of numbers." Hewing to the code of continuous ascent, they carried food for a week, but their loads reduced them to exercises in "hauling and tangling." Then they pelted themselves with stones, damaged ropes, and lost most of their food, water, and gear. Despite the mishaps, or perhaps because of them, the team had a blast as they struggled to the top. For others the rules were a torment. Famous for a rigorous opposition to technology, Frank Sacherer would climb unroped, expect similar commitment from partners, and punish any relaxation of principle. Occasionally he turned his climbs into ordeals, cursing partners' weaknesses and fraying at the seams. One noted that Sacherer refused "to plan hardware. When he does it is very bad. He is poor at getting it out. When under pressure there is a certain amount of hysteria in his voice and actions. . . . No wonder [TM Herbert] is psyched out." The rest of Camp 4 felt similarly.<sup>48</sup>

Sacherer was an extreme example of a general problem. The game was turning insidious. Each individual success heightened a general sense of crisis. By late 1964, valley climbers were feeling victimized by their skill. Even *The North America Wall* seemed anticlimactic. Chouinard remarked that climbing with Robbins was no fun: "He was like a crutch. You knew you were going to make it." To cure this plague of uber competence, he upped the ante by pursuing a new El Capitan route with only two people and thirty bolts. They hoped to cleanse their souls. "This purer form of climbing," he wrote, "takes more of a complete effort, more personal adjustment, and involves more risk, but being more idealistic, the rewards are greater." But this was a conundrum. If the struggle was indeed everything, then the more they did this the rarer adventure would become. Like an addict, climber highs grew ever more elusive. Robbins wrote, "a climber needs stronger brew. He needs to edge close to the edge of the pit so a glance therein will rekindle his taste for the sunrise. He needs to face terror, and control it, to remind himself that he is more than the pawn of the forces around him, more than an expendable piece in a monstrous chess game."<sup>49</sup>

During eight days in fall 1965, Chouinard and Herbert found their fix. Their ascent of *The Muir Wall* devolved into a modern spirit quest of bad weather, dwindling resources, and borderline hallucinations. Doug Robinson called it "visionary." Chouinard and Herbert had achieved a Bear ideal, first voiced in Kerouac's *Dharma Bums* and Gary Snyder's poetry, of the ecstatic state. Better yet, their method was replicable. One "need only copy the ingredients and commit," Robinson remarked. The recipe was actually first concocted in 1945 when Nelson and Salathé endured eerily similar hallucinations during their dehydrated, two-day ascent of Half Dome's *Southwest Face* in intense heat. The major change was that Yosemite climbers now sought such suffering.<sup>50</sup>

Logic thus dictated that the only reasonable response was more paring. Valley climbers began to emulate top Europeans such as Herrman Buhl and Walter Bonatti, both of whom were noted soloists. There had been several valley solos, including two first-free ascents by Frost and Robbins. They had also soloed several big walls. Robbins followed the *Steck-Salathé* route on Sentinel and made the second ascent of *The West Face* of Leaning Tower, Roper the *Lost Arrow Chimney*, and Eric Beck *The Northwest Face* of Half Dome. Still, no one had dared El Capitan, so in 1968 Robbins made the second ascent of *The Muir Wall*, solo. With allusions to Bonatti and Hemingway, he called it the "fullest expression of the climbing egoist." At age 33, it was also the greatest challenge he could find. He faced both the technical difficulties and psychic barriers of being alone in the vast vertical. Without backup, it really was his show. But no climber was better prepared, and as Chouinard said, few doubted he would "make it." Nine days, a few crises, and a bit of talking to himself later, Robbins did succeed, attaining a rarified stature. In 1970 he followed with a solo first ascent of *In Cold Blood* on Sentinel Rock.<sup>51</sup>

Elite climbing had effectively turned inward, testing by divesting, and each success escalated the game of one-upmanship. Some eschewed partners, others equipment, but all did a sort of technical and psychic striptease, discarding one crutch after another and all the while redefining the margins of reasonable risk. Underlying this self-imposed deprivation was that old British assumption, articulated most baldly by C. F. Meade in 1936, that minimalism would "recover some of the spirit of their predecessors and understand better the pioneers' feeling for the hills." Unlike skiers and surfers who connected to nature through equipment, climbers assumed their tools were impediments, yet evidence suggests the opposite. Achievements in fact revealed an ever more nuanced knowledge of the nature of gear, granite, bod-

ies, and minds. The Beats had grown so in touch that the game seemed predictable.<sup>52</sup>

Yet the inward turn, it turned out, did not prohibit bolts. Huge cliffs still beckoned, and one of the loudest critics of bolts was also one of the most ambitious drillers. The lure of "virgin" lines was too strong for Robbins. Time and again he hammered up challenging faces, including Royal Arches, Washington Column, Sentinel Rock, Cathedral Spires, and three more routes on Half Dome. His efforts on *Tis-sa-ack*, a sketchy line up Half Dome's northwest face, were particularly notable for pissing off two partners and leaving 110 holes, but he was unapologetic. He owned Half Dome, having pioneered all four of its major routes. He even "took a weird delight" in placing what he called the best and worst bolt ladders ever, but his transgressions still paled before those of his old rival.<sup>53</sup>

Quietly, Harding had refined a different aesthetic. If Robbins looked to British tradition and European aesthetes like Buhl and Bonatti, Harding seemed to emulate the Italian Emilio Comici, who argued that the most elegant route was as straight as "a falling drop of water." Harding chased this ideal on *The Nose*, Leaning Tower *West Face*, *Lost Arrow Direct*, and *Southwest Face* of Liberty Cap, even though it resulted in unrivaled hole counts of 125, 111, 55, and 29 respectively. The toll included not only bolts but a new device called the BAT Hook, short for "Basically Absurd Technology." Harding was mocking both himself and Chouinard's pretentious acronym for RURPs, but his device, essentially an altered hook, lessened the use of the drill. The filed hook required only a shallow depression, and because it was a temporary placement, it accelerated ascent and elevated risk.<sup>54</sup>

By 1970, the now forty-something Harding's hallmarks of *direttissime*, relentlessness, and aid directly contradicted Robbins's values. Since 1965, Harding had labored in figurative and literal obscurity on Half Dome's less known and unscathed 2,200-foot south face. The route followed a massive, 800-foot arch and then wandered up a longer, blanker wall. Several tries resulted in one injured and two freaked-out partners, interludes in Vietnam and an emergency room after a hit-and-run accident, six storms, and the second major rescue. Nothing deterred him. Drill firmly in fist, Harding and Rowell plugged away, finally summiting in July, five years, six attempts, and 180 holes later. Camp 4 reactions revealed that Harding could still push limits. Most considered *The South Face* an achievement, but many were appalled by the methods. Robbins derided Harding's "pendant for great smooth walls," which underestimated the team's ability to free climb and use hooks on rugosities to pass areas without cracks. Roper feared that "with

nearly all the more obvious crack systems climbed in the past decade, the inevitable trend is toward even more tenuous lines, ever more blank walls . . . ever more bolting."<sup>55</sup>

This distress set the stage for Harding's next route. *The Dawn Wall* traced a line between *The Nose* and *The North America Wall*, and it was a classic Harding ascent: 2,800 feet of overhanging and intimidating granite. All understood it would need many bolts. There had been two previous attempts, and most viewed any attempt as unnatural. Thus when Harding and Dean Caldwell roped up on 23 October 1971, they were trying something nearly everyone had dismissed. The team nevertheless lurched onto what became the valley's longest continuous climb. After twenty-seven days, 330 drilled holes, four storms, and one refused rescue, Harding clambered up to another swarm of canyons. He was once again a sensation, and this time he cashed in with an impromptu national tour.<sup>56</sup>

When the media tired, critics took over. Many flinched at the number of holes. Echoing his views of Robert Underhill's visit, Ansel Adams called Harding's ascent a "super-spectacular 'engineering' achievement [with] little relation to the spirit of mountaineering." TM Herbert likened him to Cesare Maestri, who had scaled Patagonia's Cerro Torre with a pneumatic drill. Chouinard called him the "mad bolter," and Robbins foresaw a future of bolt guns and "suction pads." The publicity also rankled. Robbins mentioned "Harding's adroit use of the press," which Rowell called "almost shameful," while Adams condemned the "obvious publicity effort." Herbert "felt like screaming, 'But they bolted the damned thing, and then they sold it to millions on television!'" For all the heat, the sin now seems unclear. Some critics were among Yosemite's most ambitious entrepreneurs. Robbins and Rowell wrote prolifically; Chouinard had equipped most of the community, and no one sold Yosemite's beauty longer or more effectively than Adams.<sup>57</sup>

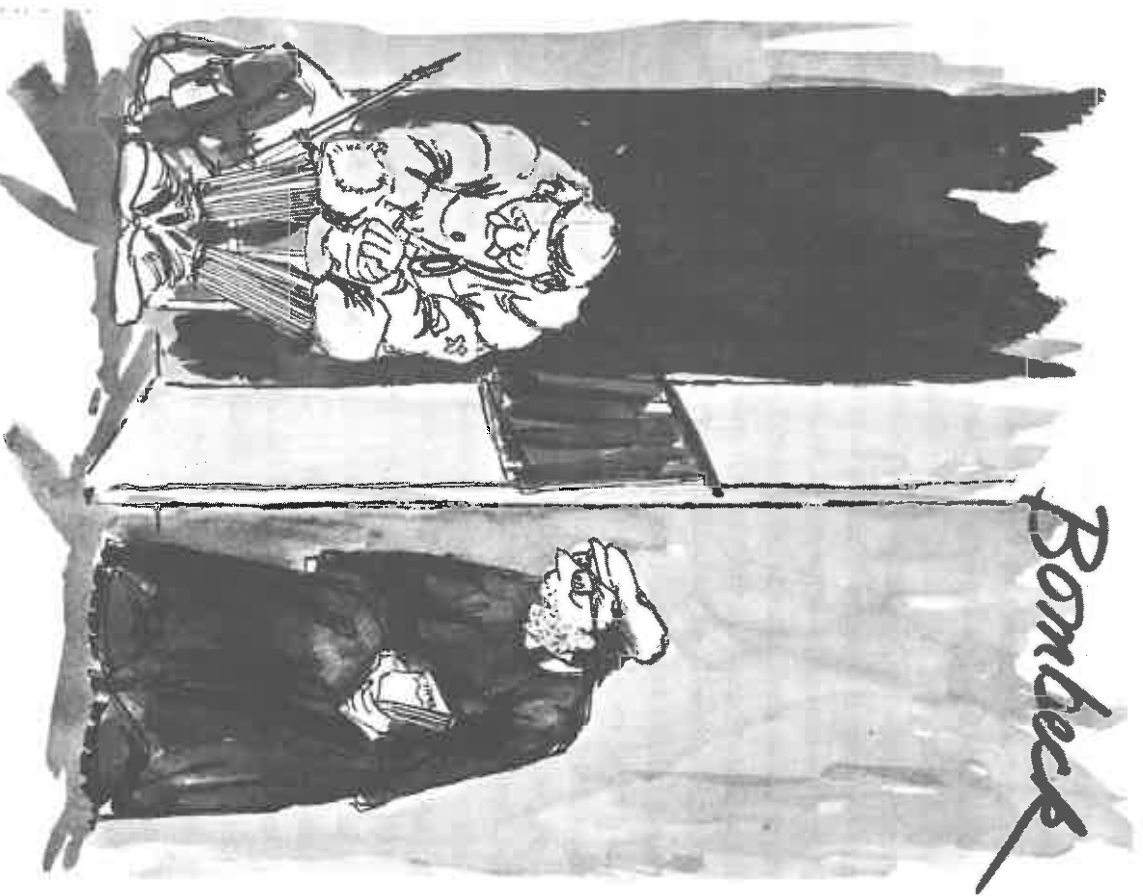
The media's involvement revealed just how convoluted things got. Critics were correct that Harding sought publicity. While surprised at the number of reporters on top, he and Caldwell had schemed to sell photos, but editors were uninterested in another El Cap climb until the two were caught by a storm on Day Twenty. Then they saw a hook in raw endeavor amidst comfort. Interest heightened when the team refused a rescue initiated by critics who claimed they were overmatched and by a ranger who did not want climbers dying on his watch. This is when national media crews arrived, but Harding was hardly a publicity genius. He had failed to pique interest until nature made things dicey and his opponents intervened.<sup>58</sup>

The tempest was a brew of many contingencies, but climbers' opinions

tended toward black and white. Some celebrated Harding's tenaciousness; others vilified his sensationalism. Robbins was all mixed up. He began by praising Harding's "eccentric individualism," saying it was "good to have a man around who doesn't give a damn [sic] what the establishment thinks." He cherished Camp 4's diversity and cautioned, "we can better spend our energy than ripping and tearing." What followed was bizarre. Like a mountaineering Carrie Nation, Robbins took chisel in hand and seconded *The Dawn Wall* with the intent of "erasing" it. Observers were stunned. Not only had Robbins contradicted his recent remarks but nearly everything he had written. In 1965 he had lectured, "reckless bolt chopping is just as irresponsible as indiscriminate bolting. . . . [I]f we respect the established nature of routes, and refrain from bolt chopping and placing, there will be plenty of climbs for all shades of abilities and tastes—and much less bitterness." Three years later he railed at NPS restrictions, asking "Who are those who would police climbing?" Now he was playing judge and jury and looking like a hypocrite, and he knew it. When asked afterward to justify himself, Robbins replied, "It will be difficult."<sup>59</sup>

Even worse, he did not finish the job. Robbins began with righteous fervor, chopping every bolt regardless of whether he had used it—a breach of his own "First Ascent Principle" in his instruction manual—but his indignation faltered. Partner Don Lauria recalled that "Royal really began questioning his reasons for erasing the route. He was having difficulty rationalizing his behavior. . . . He decided that the quality of the aid climbing was much higher than he had ever expected." Robbins admitted "there was one good lead after another. And that, of course, complicated the whole thing enormously." The upshot was obvious. Robbins called bolts a "plot" and drilling "rape," but his metaphors backfired because of his own routes. Ultimately he conceded that "Harding won," which frustrated TM Herbert, who had lobbied for the aborted rescue and then called the erasure "one of the most important events I have witnessed."<sup>60</sup>

Outwardly Harding was merely annoyed. He did not "give a rat's ass what Royal" and the other "Valley Christians" did. "If all or most other climbers feel a need for the comfort and shelter of structured thinking—if there are those who feel a need to establish and promulgate these principles and lead the masses to a better 1984-ish life, fine with me. . . . As long as the V.C. don't get their own secret police and employ Spanish Inquisition methods, I won't worry about being imprisoned, stretched on a rack, and forced to confess my sins." He again played the clown. Mixing Vietnam and religious symbols in the farcical journal *Descent* and an autobiography titled *Downward Bound*,



"... A bolt eh? ... Say twenty five Hail Mary's and do Half Dome free."

Figure 8.3. Eventually the moralists began to wear on climbers, and more and more pleas to drop the sermonizing made their way into journals and magazines, such as this caricature of Royal Robbins as father confessor.

Harding mocked his peers but also had the better end of the argument. "I've always played the basic climbing game to the best of *my* ability," he wrote. It was not "a matter of . . . morals" because there was no way to patrol the mob. It really was about individual ethics because there were simply too many contingencies of nature, talent, and technology, even on a day-to-day basis, to realize Robbins's and Chouinard's idealized order.<sup>61</sup>

Unfortunately for Harding, his joking style allowed critics to dismiss him. Some shared a weariness of righteous posturing, but most balked at his crude humor. Nor did they believe he did not "give a damn." Nobody seriously engaged his insights about the unresolvable tension between the individual and the group. Instead, Robbins made him a fetishist of blank walls. Chouinard said he trampled risk and inspired "the average Joe to do climbs that are normally over his head and . . . experts to do incredibly hard climbs without having to stick their necks out." Harding led "the common man" to bring "the Art down to his own level of values and competence." Roper called him "the master bolter," a selfish man driven by "glory" who cared "little what his peers thought." But on this point even Robbins demurred. Harding may have avoided thinking "deep and heavy when it's deep and heavy," but he did care. His routes were his legacy, and he was proud that none had "been criticized by the 'big boys'" once they had climbed them. He tried to shrug off the controversy but ended up writing an open letter wishing for "nothing better than to forget" the hardest, most important climb of his life.<sup>62</sup>

The conclusion was straight out of T. S. Eliot. Robbins made one last bid in 1972, soloing a new, even edgier line on El Capitan's southeast face. He got 700 feet before the prospect of continuous bolting forced retreat. In 1975, Harding climbed another smooth, overhanging wall west of Half Dome called *The Porcelain Wall*. The route was unexceptional, but Harding, Steve Bosque, and Dave Lomba committed the ultimate self-effacement by chopping their own bolts, summarily erasing the route to preempt critics. Harding climbed two last routes, and then both were done. Their era ended with a whimper, but the values inscribed in their climbs and writings had already reshaped the sport.<sup>63</sup>

Robbins and Harding did not invent the debates that framed them. Rather, they came to embody longstanding rival principles and, as such, became place holders other climbers invoked in their own arguments. As contexts evolved, though, they were extracted from their Beat heritage and mythologized as timeless warriors of tradition and liberty. Some regarded adventure and risk as transcendent values that buttressed a singular moral-

## 9. ENTREPRENEURS

ity. Others saw these as highly contingent concepts with no consistent meaning given the mutable talents, ambitions, and nature even within the narrow confines of Yosemite Valley. Either way, the historical Robbins and Harding often faded into irrelevance.<sup>64</sup>

But their passions were critical contingencies. The Beats risked their lives for their ideals, and that fervor sometimes led them to see disputes in absolutes. As Daniel Duane observes, Robbins desired “a coherent way of being in the world, an orderly philosophy . . . a means to self-improvement and self-mastery.” He felt so strongly about this that at times he could see no right place in this upright, self-made man’s world for a Warren Harding, who reviled in the dissipation and relativity Robbins rejected. Thus Robbins could not agree when Harding insisted they were “really saying [and doing] the same thing.” At a basic level their estrangement *was* personal. Passion helps illuminate this human dimension. It also helps explain how a group of misfits created “not just the modern culture of rock-climbing, but . . . contemporary outdoors California.” The Beats remade themselves through climbing, and a few became famous and wealthy. As avocations became vocations, each success reshaped not only the game but how future athletes and environmentalists interacted with nature. The Beats created a context in which people increasingly related to nature through consumption, because the Beats did much more than just climb. They sold themselves and their way of life, and many people bought the product: a new environmental culture.<sup>65</sup>

I have begun my campaign to wipe out CMI and Long and Leeper too. Fuck them all. Leeper gets fucked up for even *thinking* he can make a better pin than I can.

—YVON CHOUINARD

The Beat movement was a reaction to middle-class values, but Beat climbers rejected the style more than substance of normative society. Their pursuit of success and acceptance was thoroughly bourgeois, and their pursuit of virtuous sport flowed from conservative ideals about amateurism that were deeply rooted in middle-class culture. Reconciling these contradictions was awkward and, ultimately, impossible. Beats remade their avocation into a vocation, and the most zealous purists were also most responsible for turning climbing into a consumable activity. They literally “sold out,” but the underlying reasons were more complex than greed or hypocrisy.<sup>1</sup>

One motive was simple: climbers had to eat. In the 1950s they developed new strategies to keep food on the picnic table. Some followed Mark Powell’s lead and relied on off-season work. Layton Kor, Steve Komito, Chuck Pratt, and Steve Roper served as temporary laborers or clerks, saving up for extended periods of play. The seasonal rhythms of education appealed to Powell, George Sessions, Willi Unsoeld, and other teachers and students. Dave Dorman and Wayne Merry joined the Park Service so they never had to leave. A number also made goods and sold services to the sport’s growing consumer base.<sup>2</sup>

The Beats were the first generation of outdoor athletes to make a living from play, and chief among these mongers was Yvon Chouinard. His journey from burn to businessman to environmental guru mirrored that of many entrepreneurial climbers. There was no grand plan, and in many ways he was indeed a reluctant success story. In other respects, though, no one was more cutthroat. Each move was calculated to raise his profile in the sport and industry. Each essay marked him as an elitist among elites. Each product distinguished him among a growing field of competitors. He was extremely ambitious, but the broader story is less about his immense ambition than the contexts and contingencies. It is how serendipity helped Yvon Chouinard be

31. For Robbins see Ament, *Royal Robbins*, 34–35, 52, 57. For “oneness” see Chouinard to Roper, 16 January 1964, for “freedom” see Pratt to Roper, 18 March 1965, both in Roper.
32. Yvon Chouinard to Roper, 16 January 1964, Roper.
33. For “violence” and “combine,” see Chouinard to Roper, 16 January 1964, Roper. George Leigh Mallory, “The Mountaineer as Artist,” *Climbers Club Journal* (March 1914), 28–40; also Doug Robinson, “The Climber as Visionary,” *Ascent* (May 1969), 6–9.
34. For orientalist see Chouinard to Roper, 14 April 1963; for “truth” see Chouinard to Roper, 16 January 1964, both in Roper. For orientalism and Beas see Michael K. Masatsuga, “Beyond This World of Transiency and Impermanence”: Japanese Americans, Dharmma Burns, and the Making of American Buddhism during the Early Cold War Years,” *Pacific Historical Review* 77 (August 2008), 435–41. For safety see Morgan Harris, “Safety Last?” *SCB* (August 1942), 65–78.
35. For defiance and soloing see Ament, *Royal Robbins*, 7, 36, 235; personal conversation with Gail Wilks, Pasadena, California, June 2001; Michael Borghoff, “A Song of Stone,” *Summit* (January 1960), 12–15. For reactions see “Using a Rope for Safer Climbing,” *Summit* (June 1956), 3–6.
36. For “searching” see Royal Robbins, “The North America Wall,” *AAJ* (1965), 336. For “experience” see Glen Denny to Roper, 29 November 1962; for “right” see Chuck Pratt to Roper, 18 March 1965; for “bug” see Eric Beck to Roper, 2 March 1964; for “righteousness” see Mark Powell to Roper, 2 March 1966, all in Roper. For “real” see Rawlings, *Stanford Alpine Club*, 128. For “amenities” see Kor, *Beyond*, 138.
37. For communities see “RCS Newsletters,” c. summer 1968, carton 7:28, SCSFBCR. For declining popularity see “Llatson with Young Climbers,” *AACN*, 6 November 1959, 1. For AAC see Carl and Helen Weisner, “Rock Climbing Section,” *Yodeler*, 1 June 1959, 3; *AACN* (January 1968), 1, 2.
38. For “resurgent” see Powell to Roper, 24 March 1964, Roper.

## 8. Moralists

The epigraph is from “Mountaineering as a Religion,” *Alpine Journal* (1918), 243.

1. Steve Roper, *Camp 4: Recollections of a Yosemite Climber* (Seattle: Mountaineers, 1994), 59–232.
2. Lawrence Hamilton, “The Changing Face of American Mountaineering,” *Review of Sport & Leisure* 6 (Summer 1981), 15.
3. For “ruin” see C. F. Meade, “The Perversion of Mountaineering,” *Quarterly Review* 267 (1936), 25.
4. Pat Ament, *Royal Robbins: Spirit of the Age* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1998), 2–7; Royal Robbins to author, “Re: Research question on early years,” 19 August 2006, personal email (20 August 2006); Royal Robbins, *To Be Brave* (Ojai: Pink Moment Press, 2009), 80. For photo see James Ramsey Ullman, *High Conquest: The Story of Mountaineering* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1941), 120.
5. For “imagine” see Peter H. Hansen, “Albert Smith, the Alpine Club, and the Invention of Mountaineering in Mid-Victorian Britain,” *Journal of British Studies* 34 (July 1995), 305. For “clinging” see Ament, *Royals Robbins*, 7. For climbers see Layton Kor, *Beyond the Vertical*, ed. Bob Godfrey (Boulder: Alpine House, 1983), 14; Warren Harding, *Downward Bound: A Mad Guide to Rock Climbing* (Englewood Cliffs, N.J.: Prentice-Hall, 1975), 98; Yvon Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman* (New York: Penguin Press, 2005), 12; John Rawlings, *The Stanford Alpine Club*

- (Stanford: CSLI Publications, 1999), 86; John Long, *Rock Jocks, Wall Rats, and Hang Dogs: Rock Climbing on the Edge of Reality* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1994), 18.
6. For reaction see Royal Robbins, “Standing on the Shoulders: A Tribute to My Heroes,” in *Voices from the Summit: The World’s Great Mountaineers on the Future of Climbing*, ed. Bernadette McDonald and John Amatt (Washington: National Geographic Society and The Banff Centre for Mountain Culture, 2000), 190. For literature see Walt Unsworth, *Hold the Heights: The Foundations of Mountaineering* (Seattle: Mountaineers, 1994), 105. For Anglophilic literature see G. R. De Beer, *Alps and Men: Pages from Forgotten Diaries of Travelers and Tourists in Switzerland* (London: Edward Arnold, 1932). For “suicidal” and “afame” see Ullman, *High Conquest*, 73. For Nazi symbolism see Robert Jewett and John Shelton Lawrence, *Captain America and the Crusade Against Evil: The Dilemma of Zealous Nationalism* (Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2004), 6–7, 34.
  7. For “get you,” “history,” and “ner” see Ullman, *High Conquest*, 18, 22. For “romantic” see John Cleare, *Mountains* (New York: Crown, 1975), 102.
  8. For bullfighting see Royal Robbins to Steve Roper, 17 June 1966, Roper; Daniel Duane, *El Capitan: Historic Feats and Radical Routes* (San Francisco: Chronicle Books, 2000), 34.
  9. Royal Robbins, “Introduction,” in *Woman on the Rocks: The Mountaineering Letters of Ruth Dyer Mendenhall*, ed. Valerie Mendenhall Cohen (Bishop, Calif.: Spotted Dog Press, 2006), 11. Pat Ament, *A History of Free Climbing in America: Wizards of Rock* (Berkeley: Wilderness Press, 2002), 51–53, 61–62.
  10. Ament, *Free Climbing*, 51–53; Chris Jones, *Climbing in North America* (Seattle: Mountaineers, 1997), 187–88.
  11. For Robbins see Ament, *Royal Robbins*, 11; Roper, *Camp 4*, 153; Duane, *El Capitan*, 35. For licentious see Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 195–96, 261.
  12. For bookkeeper see Ament, *Royal Robbins*, 15. For 1955 see Dion Wilson, “N.W. Face of Half Dome,” *Mugelloos*, 14 July 1955, 3; Ken Wilson, Allan Steck, and Galen Rowell, “Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins,” *Mountain* (November 1971), 27–28; Harding, *Downward Bound*, 107.
  13. For competitiveness see Wilson et al., “Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins,” 28–31. For denial see Cleare, *Mountains*, 103. For other efforts see “Show Me the Way to Go Dome!” *Yodeler*, 18 June 1956, 3; Mirilla Tenderin, *Gary Hemming: The Bearnik of the Alps*, trans. Susan Hodgkiss (Glasgow: Ernest Press, 1995), 42–43; Harding, *Downward Bound*, 106–8. For ascent see Royal Robbins, “Half Dome—The Hard Way,” *SCB* (December 1957), 12–13. For rope arrangement see Michael P. Sherrick, “The Northwest Face of Half Dome,” *SCB* (November 1958), 22.
  14. Robbins, “Half Dome—The Hard Way,” 13.
  15. For “arduous” see Robbins, “Half Dome—The Hard Way,” 13. For temptations see Sherrick, “Northwest Face,” 23.
  16. Don Mellor, *American Rock: Region, Rock and Culture in American Climbing* (Woodstock, Vt.: Countryman Press, 2001), 213; Wayne Merry to author, “Details,” 20 April 2003, personal email (20 April 2003); Wayne Merry, “The Longest Climb,” *Mariner* (1979), 24.
  17. For “aimless” and “wolf” see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 98, 172. For RCS see “Applications for Membership in the San Francisco Chapter of the Sierra Club, Listed November 1, 1949—Date of Election January 2, 1950,” *Yodeler*, 21 November 1949; James Ramsey Ullman, *The White Tower* (Philadelphia: J. B. Lippincott, 1945).
  18. For climbs see Warren Harding, “Worst Error,” *SCB* (October 1959), 76; Roper, *Camp 4*, 75, 86–87, 99–104. For later reputation see Steve Gardiner, ed., *Why I Climb: Personal Insights of Top Climbers* (Harrisburg, Pa.: Stackpole Books, 1990), 100. Harding’s partners



- were Rich Calderwood, Gerry Czamanske, Jack Davis, Bill Feuerer, Craig Holden, Wayne Merry, Mark Powell, Chuck Pratt, Wally Reed, Bob Swift, Frank Tarver, Bea Vogel, John Whittier, and George Whitmore. Robbins's partners were Jerry Gallwas, Joe Fischen, Tom Frost, Mark Powell, Chuck Pratt, and Mike Sherrick.
19. For "grumbling" see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 108. For "pouting" see Rawlings, *Stanford Alpine Club*, 63.
20. For "send" see "Bug-Bars on El Cap," *Yodeler*, 19 July 1943, 5; "Rock Climbers' Day Dream—Or Night Mare," *Mugehnoos*, 14 October 1948, 5-6. For ascent see Warren J. Harding, "El Capitan," *AAJ* 11 (1959), 184-89.
21. For "tactics" see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 108-16; also Glen Denny to Steve Roper, 19 August 1963, Roper Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 326.
22. For accident see "Powell's Climbing Accident," *Mugehnoos*, 14 November 1957, 3. For team see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 108-16; personal conversation with Mark Powell, 14 May 2002, Woodland Hills, California; Mark Powell, Warren Harding, Ken McNitt, Dick Sykes, and Don Laura, "The Dolt—A Eulogy," *Climbing* 37 (July-August 1976), 28-32; Merry, "The Longest Climb," 23-24. For "staggered" see Harding, "El Capitan," 184.
23. For credit see Harding, "El Capitan"; Steve Roper, *A Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1964), 59-60; Jeremy Collins and Timmy O'Neill (Jer-Co Studios), *A Brief Biased History of Big Wall Climbing*, [http://www.alpinist.com/doc/ALLP19/video\\_history\\_cartoon](http://www.alpinist.com/doc/ALLP19/video_history_cartoon) (accessed 7 May 2007). For 1957 see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 111-12. For immense see John Sheard, "Pilgrimage," in *Yosemite Climber*, ed. George Meyers (Modesto: Robbins Mountain Letters, 1979), 17.
24. For delay see Dick Leonard to John G. Preston, 3 October 1957, carton 77-11; Wayne A. Merry and Warren I. Harding to Dick Leonard plus cover sheet, 16 December 1958, and Hal F. Olson to Sierra Club, 16 December 1958, carton 88:27, all in SCR. For roles see John Rawlings, "Ellen Seaby Jori: An Interview for the Stanford Oral History Project, Conducted by John Rawlings," p. 5, 1988, SAC. For 1958 see Roper, *Camp* 4, 76-80. For club reports see "El Capitan Cliff-Hangers Put on Show for Tourists," *Mugehnoos*, 12 September 1957, 2; Mark Powell, "El Capitan???" *Mugehnoos*, 9 October 1958, 6; Howard Frohlich, "President El Capitan Warren Harding," *Yodeler*, 17 November 1958, 1-2. For media see "El Capitan Climb, November-1958, OFFICIAL HISTORY FILE" in "Rock Climbing," Vertical Files, YRL.
25. For support see SupMR, December 1957. For opposition see E. T. Scoyen to Dave Brower, 29 January 1959, carton 88:27, SCR; "Park Service May Ban Climbing Aids," *Fresno Bee* in "Rock Climbing," Vertical Files, YRL. For defenders see Wm. D. Loughman to Secretary of the Interior, 28 January 1959, Warren Harding, Wayne Merry, George Whitmore, and Seaby to Conrad L. Wirth, 29 January 1959, both in carton 88:27, SCR. For order see Wayne Merry to Gary Collier, 19 March 1993, "Wayne Merry," Biographical File, YRL. For resentment see Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 28; personal conversation with Mark Powell, 14 May 2002. For threat see Doug Robinson, "Grand Sieges and Fast Attacks," *Martiah* (September 1979), 26. For "slight" and "prompted" see Merry and Harding to Leonard, 16 December 1958; Warren Harding and Wayne Merry, "We Conquered El Capitan," *Argosy* 348 (April 1959), 24-28, 104-7. For criticism see Roper, *Camp* 4, 74, 186, 231.
26. For "fear" see Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 28. Ament, *Free Climbing*, 90, 107-8; Roper, *Camp* 4, 130, 181-84. For aid see Steve Roper, "Washington Column Climbers Encounter Rats, Thist, Overhangs," *Summit* (October 1959), 16-17; Royal Robbins, "The Royal Arches Direct," *SCB* (October 1961), 56-57; Roper, *Camp* 4, 108.
27. For elsewhere see Ament, *Free Climbing*, 55, 196-97; Mellor, *American Rock*, 136, 233, 235. For "greatest" see Kor to Roper, 17 February 1963, Roper. For AAC see Art Gran to Steve Roper, 7 May 1964, Roper; personal conversation with Nicholas Clinch, 24 May 2002, Palo Alto, California. For "hard" see John S. Humphreys to Yvon Chouinard, 10 April 1963, AAC Archives Membership, Box C-1, AAC. For "influential" see Roper, *A Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley*, 23. For "Mecca" see Don Whillans and Alick Ormerod, *Don Whillans: Portrait of a Mountaineer* (London: Heinemann, 1971), 244, 249. For joining see AAC By-Laws and Registers, AAC. For "elite" see Kor, *Beyond*, 151.
28. For "ridiculous" and "standard" see "Labels 'Trick Climbing' Charge As Ridiculous." For hamstringing see "Perpendicular Yosemite Peak Scaled for First Time." For hiding see Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 325.
29. For "determination" see Royal Robbins, "Climbing El Capitan," *SCB* (December 1960), 47-55. For animosity see Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 258-59; R[oyal] R[obbins], "El Capitan—First Continuous Ascent," *Mugehnoos*, 13 October 1960, 4. For peer review see Layton Kor to Roper, 20 December 1964, Roper; also Jim Bridwell and Keith Peall, *Climbing Adventures: A Climber's Passion* (Merrillville, Ind.: ICS Books, 1992), 28; John Long, "Foreword," in *Climbing Free: My Life in the Vertical World*, by Lynn Hill with Greg Child (New York: W. W. Norton, 2002), xi; Joseph E. Taylor III, "Mapping Adventure: Mapping Class and Gender in Yosemite Valley's Climbing Landscapes," *Journal of Historical Geography* 32 (January 2006), 209-11.
30. For innovations see Arnton Nelson, "Five Days and Nights on the Lost Arrow," *SCB* (March 1948), 104; Charles Wills, "The Knife-Blade Pion," *SCB* (June 1954), 71-77; "Rope Dope," *Mugehnoos*, 16 May 1946, 1; Chouinard, "Modern Yosemite Climbing," 322-23; Steve Roper to author, "Re: Army pitons," 4 February 2007, personal email (4 February 2007). For vanadium see Roper, *Camp* 4, 33; Christopher W. Wells, "The Road to the Model T: Culture, Road Conditions, and Innovation at the Dawn of the American Motor Age," *Technology and Culture* 48 (July 2007), 518n41.
31. For individual manufacturing see "Hardware Hard Wear," *Mugehnoos*, 20 April 1939, 3; *Yodeler*, 16 December 1949, 2; Rawlings, *Stanford Alpine Club*, 57, 59; Sherrick, "The Northwest Face of Half Dome," 19-20; Chuck Wills to Dave (Brower), 6 May 1954, and Brower to Wills, 28 May 1954, carton 23:36, SCMP; Powell et al., "The Dolt—A Eulogy," 28-31.
32. Steve Roper tells the stove leg story well in *Camp* 4, 69-70, 72-73, 75. The number of the original stovelegs was unsettled, so I asked Frank—whose wife Julia edited my first book—to clarify details. Phone conversation with Frank Tarver, 31 January 2007. Some did still craft tools. See Eric Beck to Steve Roper, 16 March 1964, Roper. For second ascent see Robbins, "Climbing El Capitan," 49-50; "Seven and a Half Days on the Face," *Summit* (September 1960), 6. For doubts see Arthur C. Lembeck, "Are Ring Pitons Safe?" *Summit* (December 1960), 8-9. Robbins wanted guidebooks to note first continuous ascents. Royal Robbins to Steve Roper, 22 December 1962, Roper.
33. For "powerful" see Susan R. Schrepfer, Richard M. Leonard: Mountaineer, Lawyer, Environmentalist" (Bancroft Library, University of California/Berkeley Regional Oral History Office, Sierra Club History Series, 1975), 11. For training see Will Gadd, "John Salathé," *Climbing* (December 1988), 96; "Runners Seek Company," *Yodeler*, 18 December 1950, 6; Phil Arnot, "A Physical Conditioning Program for Mountain Climbing," *Summit* (January 1960), 20-21; Tex [Floyd] Bossier to Steve Roper, 15 January 1963, Roper.
34. For "Roper" see Kor, *Beyond*, 136. For Robbins see Royal Robbins to Roper, 31 May 1964, Roper. For reconnaissance see Ament, *Free Climbing*, 101. For adventure see Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing*, 15-18.

35. For Chouinard see Yvon Chouinard, "Are Bolts Being Placed by Too Many Unqualified Climbers?" *Summit* (March 1961), 10–11. For "values" see "Discussion on Bolts. . . ." *Summit* (June 1961), 25–27; Ray de Saussure, "Looking Ahead on Expansion Bolts," *Yodeler* 3 March 1952, 7. For "no bolts" see Royall (Robbins), "North Face of Lowe Cathedral Rock," *Mugehnoos*, 14 July 1960, 3. For chopping see "Winter (hrrr) Ascent of the Lost Arrow," *Mugehnoos*, 8 January 1959, 4; Eric Beck to Roper, 19 May 1964, Roper. For "outside" see Stutfield, "Mountaineering as Religion," 241. For Squirrels and "superfluou's" see Lunn, *A Century of Mountaineering*, 157.
37. For YCC see Yvon Chouinard to Steve Roper, January 1960, and Chouinard to Roper, 23 February 1960, Roper. For elitist clubs elsewhere see Lunn, *A Century of Mountaineering*, 196. For "solely" see "Letters," *Summit* (July–August 1964), 23. For "cubic" see Robbins, "Climbing El Capitan," 49. For "prattle" see Bestor Robinson, "Shiprock," *AAJ* (1940), 56. For Robbins on *The Nose* and *Muir Wall* see Roper, *Camp 4*, 173; Royal Robbins, "Alone on the John Muir Wall, El Capitan," *AAJ* (1969), 322. Chouinard did not reject bolts or safety but wanted to control placement. See "Your Letters," *Summit* (June 1963), 28.
38. For usage see Ed Leeper, "Testing Drills and Anchors in Granite," *Summit* (April 1963), 18–23; "Your Letters," *Summit* (June 1963), 28–29. The principal free climbers were Pratt, Roper, Bob Kamps, Tom Gerrigty, Frost, Mort Hempel, and Chris Fredericks. For "thrilling" and "harmless" see Royal Robbins, "North Wall of Sentinel Rock," *Summit* (March 1963), 9.
39. For "ruthlessly" see Glen Denny to Steve Roper, 14 January 1963, Roper. For climbs see Allan Macdonald, "Realm of the Overhang," *SCB* (December 1962), 5–22; Edward Cooper, "Direct Southwest Face of Yosemite Valley's El Capitan," *AAJ* (1963), 337–43. For reactions see Roper, *Camp 4*, 116.
40. For prearrangement see Chic Scott, *Pushing the Limits: The Story of Canadian Mountaineering* (Calgary: Rocky Mountain Books, 2000), 332–33. For "dead" see Glen Denny to Steve Roper, 29 November 1962; for "maniac," "schizophrenia," and "rape" see Denny to Roper, 14 January 1963; for Robbins's reaction see Mark Powell to Steve Roper, 18 June 1964 and 9 August 1964, Robbins to Roper, 9 August 1964 and 12 December 1964, Eric Beck to Roper, 12 October 1964, all in Roper.
41. For "expression" see Denny to Roper, 14 January 1963, Roper; Kor, *Beyond*, 142–48. For insider see Royal Robbins, "Foreword," in *Beyond*, 8.
42. For incidents see Roper, *Camp 4*, 173–74, original in italic; Jones, *Climbing in North America*, 329. For rules see Hill and Child, *Climbing Free*, 141.
43. For "clique" see Allen Steck to Steve Roper, 1 June 1964, Roper. For ranking see Kor, *Beyond*, 152. For competitiveness see "Bouldering," *Summit* (June 1961), 9–11; Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 28–29, 30. For speed see Clhuck [Wilks], "Classic Climb Conquered: Time Cut," *Mugehnoos*, 11 July 1957; Royall (Robbins), "More Yosemite Ascents," *Mugehnoos*, 13 October 1960, 5. For seconding climbs see Doug Scott, *Big Wall Climbing* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), 150–51; Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 28–29. For England see Brown, *The Hard Years*, 67.
44. For "arrogance," "overt," and "noble" see Roper, *A Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley*, 23–25; for denatural see Royal Robbins, "Summit Reviews," *Summit* (November 1964), 31. For "obligator" and "superiority" see Bob Kamps, "Bolt Ethics. . ." *Summit* 11 (July–August 1965), 28. For debate see Chouinard, "Modern Yosemite Climbing," 323–24; Steve Roper, "Overuse of Bolts," *Summit* (June 1964), 24–26. For "moral" and "wag" see "Let-
- ters," *Summit* (September 1965), 33, 34. For "shoot out" see "Letters," *Summit* (October 1965), 33. For "pity" see Steve Komito to Steve Roper, 11 February 1966, Roper.
45. Charles Pratt, "The South Face of Mount Watkins," *AAJ* (1965), 339–46.
46. For "crux" see Royal Robbins to Steve Roper, 12 December 1964, Roper. For "virgin" see Royal Robbins, "The North America Wall," *Summit* (May–June 1965), 3.
47. For "freedom" see Chouinard, "Sentinel Rock," 331. For "dominate" and "bond" see Pratt, "The South Face of Mount Watkins," 345–46. For "courage" see Royal Robbins, "The North American Wall," *AAJ* (1965), 336. For "dignity" see Roper, *A Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley*, 25. For big walls see Royal Robbins, "Letters," *Summit* (April 1968), 35. For reactions see Joe Kelsey, "The Oceania Wall," *Summit* (April 1970), 24–27; Tom Higgins, "In Due Time," *Ascent* (1972), 18–22.
48. For Ribbon Falls see Charles Pratt, "Ribbon Fall, East Portal," *AAJ* (1965), 412–14. For "psyched" see Kamps to Bonnie, 6 July 1962, Kamps, Roper; Roper, *Camp 4*, 133, 182–84; Jim Bridwell, "Bird's Eye View," *Alpinist* (Winter 2006–2007), 68.
49. Chouinard's "crutch" quoted by Don Laurie in Harding, *Downward Bound*, 167; also Chouinard to Roper, c. June 1964, Roper. For "purer" see Yvon Chouinard, "Muir Wall—El Capitan," *AAJ* (1966), 46. For "brew" see Royal Robbins, "Arcturus—A New Route on Half Dome," *Summit* (April 1971), 6.
50. For hallucinations see Chouinard, "Muir Wall," 48–50. For "visionary" and "ingredients" see Doug Robinson, "The Climber as Visionary," *Ascent* (May 1969), 6, 9; Doug Scott, "On the Profundity Trail," *Mountain* (May 1971), 12–17; Ax Nelson, "First Ascent of West Wall," *Yodeler*, 4 November 1946, 4.
51. For "egoist" see Robbins, "Alone on the John Muir Wall," 319, 322; Royal Robbins, "Solo Ascent of El Capitan," *Summit* (March 1969), 13–15. For solos and influence see Lunn, *A Century of Mountaineering*, 172; Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 31; Chuck Pratt to Steve Roper, 18 March 1965, Roper; Steve Roper, "Mountaineering Notes," *Ascent* (May 1970), 45. For *In Cold Blood* see *AAJ* (1971), 359–60.
52. For "recover" see Meade, "Perversion of Mountaineering," 25. For testing see Hamilton, "Changing," 26. For comparison with skiing and surfing see Annie Gilbert Coleman, *Ski Style: Sport and Culture in the Rockies* (Lawrence: University Press of Kansas, 2004); Nick Ford and David Brown, *Surfing and Social Theory: Experience, Embodiment, and Narrative of the Dream Glide* (New York: Routledge, 2005). For technology see R. E. Stone, "Meanings Found in the Acts of Surfing and Skiing" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1970), 60–61, 78, 86–88, 108. For "impedimenta" see Steve Roper, *Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley* (San Francisco: Sierra Club, 1971), 18.
53. For "delight" and climbs see Royal S. Robbins, "Tis-sa-ack," *AAJ* (1970), 7–8; Robbins, "East Wall of Upper Yosemite Fall," Royal Robbins, "The Prow," *Summit* (July–August 1970), 2–7; Royal Robbins, "Arcturus, Northwest Face of Half Dome," 358–59.
54. Comic's "falling" quoted in Roger Frison-Roche and Sylvain Jouy, *A History of Mountain Climbing* (New York: Flammation, 1996), 100; also Warren Harding, "Reflections of a Broken-Down Climber," *Ascent* (July 1971), 34. For books see Galen Rowell, "Two New Yosemite Routes," *AAJ* (1970), 10; Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 33; also Glen Denny to Steve Roper, 28 August 1963, Roper.
55. For Half Dome see Galen Rowell, "Twenty Five Days, South Face of Half Dome," *Summit* (December 1970), 2–9. For "penchant" see Royal Robbins, "Incident on Half Dome," *Summit* (January–February 1969), 2. For "trend" see Steve Roper, "Mountaineering Notes," *Ascent* (May 1970), 45. For confusion see Royal Robbins, "Tis-sa-ack," *Ascent* (May 1970), 19.

56. "A Three-Week Trip Up El Capitan: Ordeal on a Sheer Rock Face," *Life*, 20 November 1970, 46–48; Harding, *Downward Bound*, 124–64; Royal Robbins, "The El Capitan Climb," *Summit* (December 1970), 30–31; Robert Grow, "The El Capitan Climb," *Summit* (December 1970), 31; "El Capitan, Wall of Morning Light," *AAJ* (1971), 360. For "engineering" and "obvious" see *San Francisco Chronicle*, 1 December 1970. For "millions" see TM Herbert, "Comment on the Two Ascents of the Wall of Morning Light," *AAJ* (1971), 361. For "suction" and "shameful" see Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," For "mad" see Yvon Chouinard, "Coonyard Mouths Off," *Ascent* (June 1972), 50. For similar scandals see AACN, November 1970, 3; Douglas Tompkins, "Second Thoughts on Cerro Torre," *Ascent* (July 1971), 47. For "adroit" see Robbins, "The El Capitan Climb," 30. For others cashing in see "Technical Rock Climbing Seminars," *Summit* 35 (May 1968), 35.
58. For media see Roper, *Camp 4*, 226–30. For Harding's denial see Harding, "Reflections," 33–34. For rescue see SAR Reports FY 70, Sept–Dec, YOSAR; phone conversation with Pete Thompson, 25 March 2002.
59. For reactions see Don Lauria, "El Capitan, Wall of Early Morning Light," *AAJ* (1971), 360; *Summit* (December 1970), 30–31; *Summit* (May 1971), 41. For "eccentric" and "hipping" see Robbins, "The El Capitan Climb," 31. For "reckless" see Royal Robbins, "Toward a Climbing Ethic," *Summit* (October 1965), 34. For "police" see Royal Robbins, "T-I-M-E for a Change," *Summit* (November 1968), 2. Harding compared Robbins to Carrie Nation and Elmer Gantry in "Reflections," 35. For second ascent see AACN, May 1971, 1. For "difficult" see "Dawn Wall—Revisited," *Summit* (April 1971), 38.
60. For "rationalizing" see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 166–67. For "complicated," "essentially," "plot," and "rape" see Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 33–34. For "witnessed" see Herbert, "Comment on the Two Ascents of the Wall of Morning Light," 361. For principles see Royal Robbins, *Basic Rockcraft* (Glendale, Calif.: La Siesta, 1971), 62; Roper, *A Climber's Guide to Yosemite Valley*, 24–25. For reversal see Royal Robbins, *Advanced Rockcraft* (Glendale, Calif.: La Siesta, 1973), 79; Robbins, "A Review of 'Downward Bound,'" 314–16. For Robbins's reassessment see Gardiner, *Why I Climb*, 88. For "Rat's," "Christians," "Inquisition," and Herbert see Harding, "Reflections," 33–35. For "best" see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 88; also Christian Bomington, "Too Cold for Ethics?" *Mountain* (May 1972), 17. For "morals" see Chris Jones, "Mountain Interview: Warren Harding," *Mountain* (May 1970), 16.
62. For support see "Letters," *Summit* (May 1971), 41. For "damn" see Harding, "Reflections," 34. For dismissal see Royal Robbins, "Yosemite Renaissance," *Summit* (November–December 1971), 31. For blank walls see Royal Robbins, "Incident on Half Dome," *Summit* (January–February 1969), 2. For "Joe" and "Art" see Chouinard, "Coonyard Mouths Off," 50. For "master" and "peers" see Roper, *Camp 4*, 104, 231. For Harding caring see Wilson et al., "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," 34. For "boys" see Harding, *Downward Bound*, 88. For "heavy" see *Recollections: The Wall of Early Morning Light, an Interview with Warren Harding* (They Solberg and Roger Derryberry, Downward Bound Productions, 2001). Harding's open letter quoted in Roper, *Camp 4*, 229.
63. For climbs see Royal Robbins, "El Cap Commentary," *Mountain* (January 1973), 32; "Basecamp," *Climbing* (November–December 1978), 4; Arce, *Defying Gravity*, 94–95; Kerry Drager, "Back on the Nose," *Outside* (November 1983), 17.
64. For continued weariness see AACN (May 1972), 2; AACN (November 1972), 3.
65. For "mastery" and "contemporary" see Duane, *El Capitan*, 40, 52. For "saying" see Jones, "Mountain Interview: Warren Harding," 16.

## 9. Entrepreneurs

The epigraph is from a letter to Steve Roper, c. June 1964, Roper.

1. For Beats see Barbara Ehrenreich, *The Hearts of Men: American Dreams and the Flight from Commitment* (Garden City, N.Y.: Anchor Books, 1983), 55; Craig Leavitt, "On the Road: Cassidy, Kerouac, and Images of Late Western Masculinity," in *Across the Great Divide: Cultures of Manhood in the American West*, ed. Matthew Basso, Laura McCall, and Dee Garceau (New York: Routledge, 2001), 226.
2. For seasonal work see Layton Kor to Steve Roper, 29 April 1964; for school, teaching, and research see Powell to Roper, 18 June 1964, both in Roper; Robert Roper, *Fatal Mountaineer* (New York: St. Martin's Griffin, 2002). For NPS see Dave Dorman to Roper, 9 March 1960, Roper.
3. Yvon Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing: The Education of a Reluctant Businessman* (New York: Penguin, 2005).
4. Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing*, 7–12; Jeremy Bernstein, "Ascending," *New Yorker* (31 January 1977), 42.
5. Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing*, 12–18; Bernstein, "Ascending," 42–43; Ken Wilson, Allen Steck, and Galen Rowell, "Mountain Interview: Royal Robbins," *Mountain* 18 (November 1971), 28–29.
6. Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing*, 18. For Gallwas and Feuerer see Michael P. Sherrick, "The Northwest Face of Half Dome," *SCB* (November 1958), 22; Wayne Merry, "The Longest Climb," *Mariah* (1979), 24.
7. For "bitter" and "delay" see Bob Kamps to Bonnie, 6 July 1962, Kamps. For "studying," "super," "blueprints," and "think" see Yvon Chouinard to Steve Roper, 31 December 1963, Roper. For Army see Bernstein, "Ascending," 46–47.
8. For "evening," "biners," "concrete," "campaign," and Long see Chouinard to Steve Roper, c. June 1964; Dick Long to Roper, 4 June 1964, both in Roper. For producers see Tom Frost, "Yosemite & Frost, First Ascent of 'Rixon's West,'" *Mingheos*, 8 October 1959, 5; Gregg Blomberg to Roper, 10 April 1964, Roper; C. Don Widiel, "Manufacturing an Alley Piton," *Summit* (May–June 1965), 42–44. For surfing parallels see Douglas Booth, "Surfing: The Cultural and Technological Determinants of a Dance," *Culture, Sport, Society* 2 (Spring 1999), 41.
9. For growth see "More Climbers Scale U.S. Peaks, Step Up Equipment Spending," *Wall Street Journal*, 21 September 1960, 1. For retailers see Harvey Manning, *REI: 50 Years of Climbing Together* (Seattle: REI, 1988), 1–79; Bob Woodward, "Industry Trailblazers," *GearTrends@Outdoor* (Summer 2006), 14–19; Bob Woodward, "Industry Trailblazers, Part II," *GearTrends@Outdoor* (Winter 2007), 36–40.
10. For manufacturers see Woodward, "Industry Trailblazers," 14–19; Woodward, "Industry Trailblazers, Part II," 36–40; Glen Denny to Roper, 6 March 1963, Roper. For shops see *Summit* (April 1960), 26 and (June 1961), 20; Pat Ament, *Royal Robbins: Spirit of the Age* (Mechanicsburg, Pa.: Stackpole, 1998), 218; Roper to Allen Steck, 11 June 1964, Roper. For prototypes see Mitrella Tenderini, *Gary Hemming: The Bearnik of the Alps*, trans. Susan Hodgkiss (Glasgow: Ernest Press, 1995), 76; Gregg Blomberg to Steve Roper, 10 April 1964; Chouinard to Roper 18 June 1963 and 21 May 1964; Steve Komito to Roper, 20 January 1969, all in Roper. For hiring see Tex [Flyod] Bossier to Steve Roper, 21 December 1962; Steve Komito to Roper, 6 March 1965, both in Roper. Chouinard, *Let My People Go Surfing*, 23, 25, 29–30.