

We wake up half an hour before the 4am alarm to a light drizzle. It's the fifth day my partner Sam and I are on El Cap. We are expecting a tiny amount of precipitation, and the earlier wake up gives us an opportunity to start sooner on the crux pitch. As we make coffee, the drizzle turns into rain. 5 hours later, instead of climbing on the crux pitch, we are huddled around a tiny stove, struggling to stay warm with no rain gear. I curse my soaked down jacket, Sam shivers.



Sam appeared in the valley at the end of April of 2014. We met up in the parking lot below El Cap after not seeing each other for 10 years. 10 years ago, I was a punk, and Sam was a dirtbag. 10 years ago, we spent time bumbing around the Red River Gorge during the summer time. While Sam was just starting out with climbing, I clipped my first bolt climbing out of my baby crib. At first, I was warming up on Sam's projects. After a couple months, we were both warming up on his old projects. Sam was progressing through the grades fast despite the humid summer months at the Red. We stayed up late drinking cheap beer on the campground deck bought with Sam's pay from Miguels, the local pizza joint.

Now, things are a bit different. I am a working stiff. The most exercise I get during the week is punching keys on my work laptop writing software. Sam took a different path through life. He is a professional climber, world traveler, all-around badass. He warms up on my projects.

During a quick handshake, we decided to start putting in work on the preMuir route on El Cap. preMuir mostly follows the iconic Muir aid route, taking a few variations to detour un-freeable terrain. preMuir was free climbed by Yosemite legends Rob Miller and Justin Sjong in 2007 and was repeated just once by an absurdly strong team from Great Britain. While many Yosemite climbers would recommend the route, no one knew much more about it. I did have previous El Capitan experience, with two free routes under my belt. But, preMuir was always a pipe dream as the climbing is simply too long and hard: 35 pitches total, 6 5.13 pitches with 5.13c/d, and lots and lots of 5.12.



Our first day together, we hiked up to the top of El Cap and rappelled 400 feet down. It was one of Sam's first days on El Cap. While leading back out to the top, I slipped on the slick granite, fell, ripped out gear, and gashed my head. In the evening, over beers, we analyzed this failure. We ordered a couple helmets. Over the course of the next two months, Sam and I previewed parts of the wall, discovering stunning corners, wild and exposed face climbing, and absurdly intricate down climbs. Sam was motivated to go on the route every weekend, and I simply couldn't resist the pull of the wall. I raced from work meetings to meeting Sam in Yosemite on Saturday mornings.



But now, the push is over. Wet and shivering, we frantically text friends for the YOSAR number. We tell them not to worry and that we are not in trouble. I ask Sam "How do you define trouble?" It has been a heroic effort to get to this point in the climb. I started falling on a technical 5.12a 3rd pitch and managed to catch a hold right before gravity stole the ascent. Later on the first day, a stubborn, hard traverse pitch resisted our attempts in the shade, only to let us sneak through as the hot June sun started frying the sweat off the sloppy holds. Sam led the "5.13b" Silverfish corner on day 2. It was the most incredible effort I have seen on rock that defined what it is like to put your heart and soul into movement and stands as the best lead I have had the pleasure to watch. On day 3, I took a 40 foot runout on a layback 12b pitch, too pumped to place gear.

I think about all the almost-falls, all the work we put into the route. It was all worth it, I don't care that we are finished. I got to see an incredible route with an amazing friend.

The downpour lets off, and we dance on the ledge to stay warm. We finish off the last of the whiskey. Absolutely wrecked from 7 hours of trying to avoid hypothermia, we sprawl out on the 3 foot by 20 foot shelf we call home and fall asleep. We wake up to afternoon sun and the voice of Elliot rappelling from the top. He says we look "tired, but good" and supplies us with cookies, cans of chicken and stove fuel. I hug Elliot and let him know how much the help means. He surveys our camp, and I can tell he is worried about our state.



Instead of going down to the ground, Sam and I commute to our next pitch, a 5.13+ blank stem corner. I eat a cookie and try to lead the pitch. I take a 25 foot fall in the middle, and adrenaline is coursing through my body. "Warm up go" says Sam. I pull the rope, and climb again

immediately. I don't think about falling. I press my feet and hands so hard against the walls, I feel like I am opening the corner a few degrees. I channel all my emotions into the movement: the fear of failure, the exhaustion of the past 4 days. In the blink of an eye, I am at the anchor. Sam follows flawlessly.

At night we are destroyed. We heat up Elliot's chicken and scheme over the next day. It will be day 6 on the wall, and we have to get out. The exhaustion, the heat, the lack of sleep, the emotional roller-coaster have taken a toll.





We dispatch the introductory pitches of day 6 with ease and arrive to the final crux: a 5.13b blank layback corner. After a 5 hour siesta, we are ready. Each failing on the first attempt, we dispatch on the second try. An hour later we are at the top. We hug, and I tell Sam how inspired I am by his climbing and how much I learned from him.



As I drive back to San Francisco, I feel completely hollow inside. The climb that has occupied a spring and half a summer is finished. I burned through a gallon of adrenaline. The only person who knows how I feel is Sam, and he is driving the opposite direction to Salt Lake. Eventually, pride and sense of accomplishment will percolate into the empty hole left by tearing preMuir out of my heart and mind. But today, I fill the cavity with coffee, and IPA, and a bit of sad music. It's funny: sometimes you want to stand on the summit more than anything in the world. But as you mantle the summit block, you wish you were still tying the figure eight at the base.