

# BIG WALL TIPS by Mark Hudon

## All Things Haul Bag

### Haul Bags, You love ‘em!

You better love them since they are going to be your constant and ever present companion on any wall. You hump them up to the base, you drag them up the wall, unloading and loading them every evening and morning. You haul them up every pitch and carry them down off the top.

Haul bags have come a long way from the old army duffel or potato bags of the 50s and 60s. New strong, durable materials, storm collars and carrying systems are the norm and common.

Warren Harding called big wall climbing “vertical freight hauling” and not many climbers would disagree with him even now. Back in the Olden Days, light was the way to go, clothes, sleeping accommodations and food all sucked and at the merest hint of bad weather, retreat was the only smart option. Nowadays though, portaledge and their flies, small efficient hanging stoves, modern dehydrated food, synthetic sleeping bags and rain gear have taken away a lot of the old big wall fears. Even with new lightweight materials, we’ve added considerably more weight to our haul bags than earlier climbers ever imagined. Our bags are bigger, beefier and far heavier than bags in the past. Dealing with these large, heavy and cumbersome pigs in the vertical realm requires new techniques and attitudes.



### Packing the Pigs

In another Big Wall Tip I’ve touched briefly about packing a haul bag. My technique is to have everything in bags that are tough enough and secure enough to hang off the straps off my ledge for easy access. I have color coded bags for Clothes, Food, Kitchen, Technology and Body Maintenance. I start off at home by lining my haul bags with a layer of cardboard. In the past the technique was to use a sleeping pad to line the bags but it proved impossible to repack the bag after one hanging night. I get a few large cardboard boxes and line my bags with those. Some people use Coroplast, those real estate signs you see everywhere are Coroplast. Coroplast is light and pretty tough, cardboard could get wet and soggy but so far, for me, in four walls, I’ve not had a problem. I start by filling the bottom of my bags with all the water we will be taking. You could go to the grocery store and buy as many bottles as you need but those tend to be flimsy bottles that last only one climb. I’ve collected the fruit juice bottles I drink during the winter and now have enough bottles to last me the rest of my life. Some of my bottles will be going up on their fifth El Cap route this spring! I tie a loop around their





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necks so that I can hang them outside the haul bag for easy access during the day, and off my ledge straps at night. I have a few dozen half gallon bottles and four or five gallon jugs. In the spaces between the bags I'll stuff my bivy sac, sleeping pad and other soft gear.

### Big Tip Here!

Don't forget to take the shoulder straps, waist band and suspension system components off the bag before starting to pack it. A tight bag makes that stuff hard to remove! I toss all those items into the very bottom of the bag since I won't need them till the hike down from the summit.

Next, comes pretty much everything else in no particular order. I don't usually dig

into my haul bag during the day since I find it quicker and easier to dangle a "daily needs bag" from a Tether cord attached to the Main Haul Bag Biner. I have an extra climbing gear bag also dangling from a tethered cord along with my ledge, Waste Case and garbage bag.

### Short Strap, Long Strap

Haul bags these days have one long strap and one shorter one. The shorter strap is one biner's length shorter than the longer one so that when it's unclipped from the longer one, it allows the bag to hang open better. This is a great solution to the problem but an incomplete implementation of it. Have you ever tried to unclip that biner while the bags are under a load? Maybe all tangled up in all the usual cords and cluster? Ever tried to unclip it with the other bag leaning against it? Forget unclipping it, try pulling up that short sling to get the biner clipped in the morning with swollen hands and the bags fully packed. You like frustration? You like to work hard? I don't.



My solution is to tie a three foot loop of 5 mil to the short strap as show above. Take the loop of 5 mil and thread it through the Main Haul Bag Biner which is clipped to the long strap and then back down through the short strap. You now have created for yourself a 3 to 1 mechanical advantage and you now need to apply only

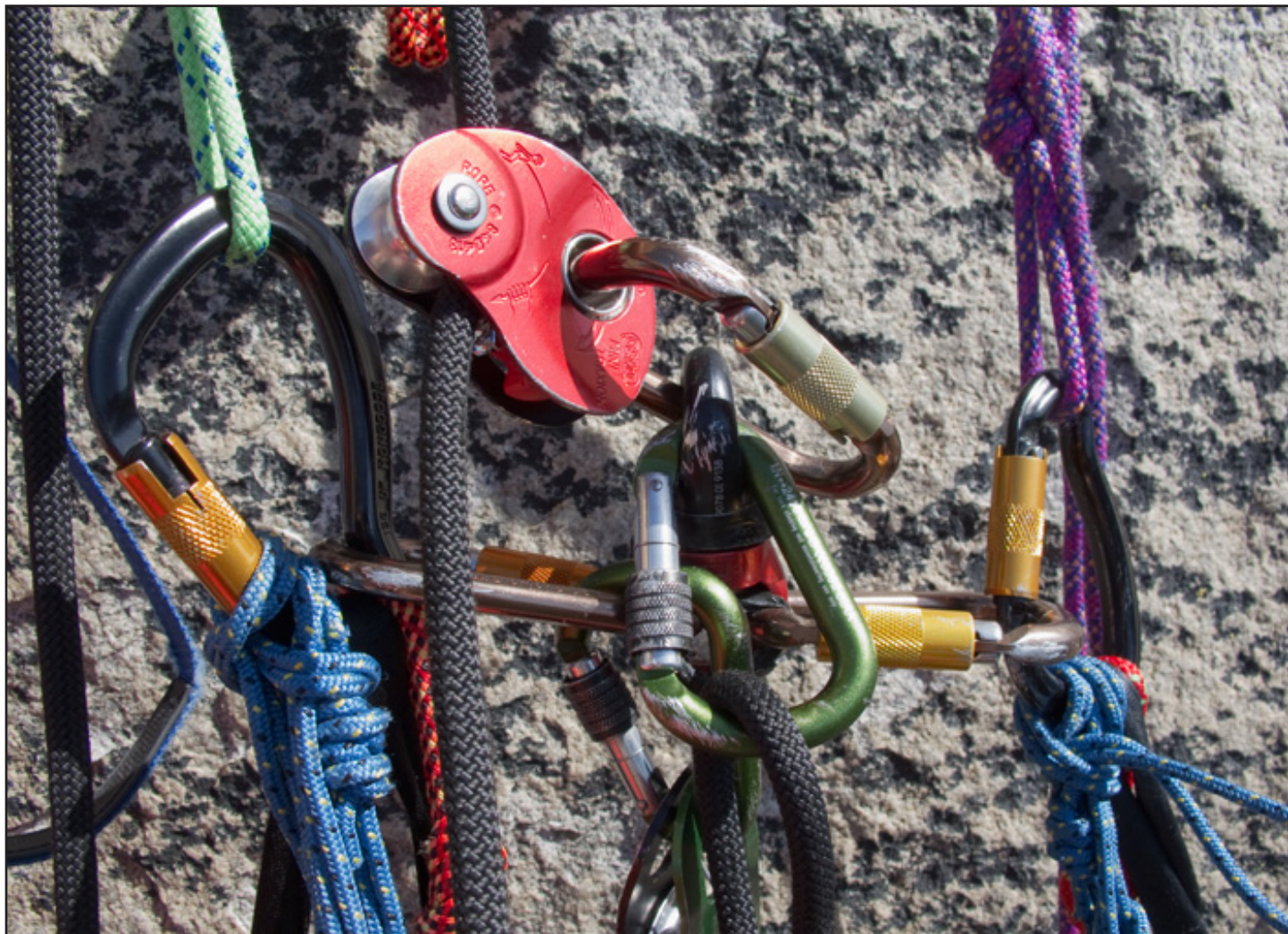




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50 pounds of upward force to lift your 150 pound bag! Run the 5 mil yet again through the Main Haul Bag Biner and tie a Munter Hitch, encompassing all the 5 mil strands going up and down. Secure it with a Half Hitch or two and you're done. To untie, simply loosen your Half Hitches, the Munter will release itself and then lower out the short strap till it is slack. Typically during the day, the Main Haul Bag Biner will flip over and your Tether Cords will be on top of the 5 mil. The beauty of using a loop in this situation is that now you can worm a



finger or two through the loop and pull the cord out from underneath anything easily and quickly!

I've left the photo above full size so that you can see what is going on and study and refer back to it often as there is a lot going on and all of it is important.

You can see the blue, 5mil short side cords for each haul bag tied into the black biners (Yates Gecko), the Main Haul Bag Biner. Those, in turn are clipped to a large locking biner and then into the bottom of a swivel. You can see that on this route I was dragging two bags side by side and I have the same set up on the other bag. You can see my red Tether Cords clipped to the Geckos and the green and purple Docking Cords that the whole gig is hanging from.





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### Tether Cords

Not everything is going to fit in your haul bag, in fact, there are a few things that don't need to be in it and a few things you don't want it in, your Poop Tube, for instance. Your ledge, your wall garbage bag, your bucket,



maybe a gear bag or a "comfort clothes" bag are best hung from 8 mil Tether Cords attached to the Main Haul Bag Biner. I take a 15 foot piece of 8 mil, double it, tie an 8 knot loop in the middle and at the ends and clip it to my Main Haul Bag Biner. It makes two tether cords and I have one for each bag, so four cords hanging down. My Ledge gets it's own cord and I tie it directly to my ledge bag so that I can never drop it (the ledge is, of course, always clipped to the Tether cord in case the bag itself rips). My Waste Case and empty water bottles hang from another Tether cord, gear bag from another and Bucket from the last. I'm experimenting with tying Butterfly knot loops into the cords to act as hand holds for when I need to pull any of those bags up to get something. People sometimes complain about Tether Cords getting hopelessly tangled but, in my few years of experience with them, that has never been a problem.

### Docking Cords

I use cords similar to my Tether Cords as my Docking Cords. Again, 15 feet of 8 mil, doubled, tie an 8 knot loop in the middle and clip it to the Main Haul Bag Biner. When you reach an anchor, reach down and grab both strands of one

Docking Cord. Run them up through a biner on the anchor (I hang a biner down from one of the large lockers of my "Anchor Kit") and tie a Munter Hitch using both cords. Once the Munter is tied, separate the cords and wrap them in opposite directions around and down the Docking Cord coming up from the haul bag. After five or six wraps secure the ends with a simple square knot. Each haul bag has its own Docking Cord so my feeling is that one is backing up the other. In four walls, probably 80 pitches, I have never had the Cord slip or untie. Releasing this knot and the bags is one of the great features of this system. Simply untie the Square knot and





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unweave the 8 mil cords. Only when you get to the Munter will you feel any pull on the cords from the bags. It's casual to let the cords slip from your hand and set the bags free. If I'm with a partner, I can hold both bags with one hand and only one Munter, while waiting for the haul line to come tight and the bags to start moving.

Notice in the photo on the right, my configuration of biners from the swivel to the Main Haul Bag Biner. Do you see how easy it would be for me to separate one bag from the system if I needed to for some reason? My system gives you **OPTIONS!** If I had only one biner connecting the haul bag to the swivel (or even a rigging plate) it would be very difficult or impossible to separate the two in the situation shown at right.

### Lowering out the Bags

Since I'm on the subject of Docking Cords and releasing the bags, I might as well write about lowering out the bags. In the situation shown on the right, I would shorten the haul line by pulling all the available slack through the Mini-Traxion and tie a safety knot to the top of the swivel. I'd then run the slack end of the rope up to a biner at the anchor and down to the Gri-gri on my belay loop. I'd pull it tight, release the docking cord at the appropriate time and then continue lowering out the bag with my Gri-gri. Easy-peasy!

### The Mini-Traxion on the Haul Line Advantage

If you were soloing you would set up a Mini-Traxion on top of your swivel so that you could Far End Haul if the bags got stuck while you were hauling. The Mini Trax in that position also provides you many options even when climbing with a partner. First of all, it's easy and quick to pull the slack through it to shorten up the haul line and gain some cord to lower the bags out on a traversing or diagonal pitch. My static haul line tends to develop some pretty solid knots when they've been weighted and following my rule of avoiding using strength at all cost while on a wall and having to untie those hardened knots after every pitch was something I gladly eliminated.





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Another use for them is when the bags arrive at the anchor and you need to release the haul system and lower the bags onto their Docking Cords and the anchor. If you are hauling 1 to 1 you probably have enough personal weight to not need this tip. But for the rest of us, old, light, limp wristed wall climbers who don't want to lift heavy things, will love it.

When you've hauled the bag as tight to the hauling system it will go, and you've tied up your Docking Cords, you now have to release the hauling system and lower the bags onto them. With the 2:1 system and a Mini-Trax as the attachment point from your haul bags to your haul line, this is easy. If you take a bit of the slack end of haul line and clip it up somewhere on the anchor, through your Revolver biner (the one with the little roller in it) and down through your Gri-gri you can weight the rope, lift the bags a bit (you have a 2:1 advantage), release the cam on the lower Mini-Trax and then slowly lower the bags onto the Docking Cords.

You don't *need* to run the rope up through the anchor, you could apply a little bit more pull on the 2:1 system, gain some slack in the 2:1 Mini-Trax and release it's cam. Don't forget that you are going to



move twice as far up as the bags need to lower and this might cause your Zed Cord tie in to jam against the Mini-trax, stopping further progress. To avoid this, just before that last pull, give yourself a bit more Zed Cord slack. This adds another potential problem though, when you pull, you might be too far away from the top Mini-Trax to be able to reach it to release it. The first method, my usually choice has only advantages and no disadvantages.

