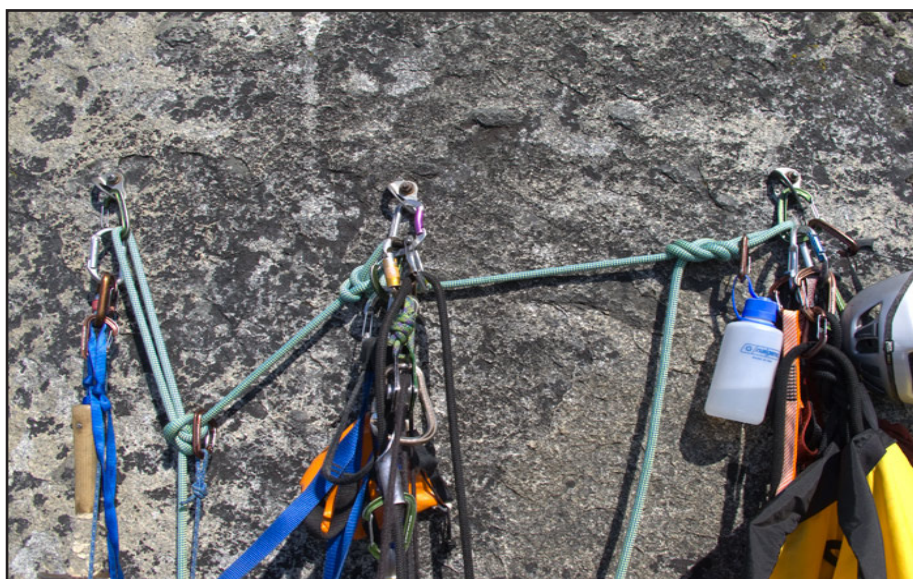


BIG WALL TIPS by Mark Hudon

Anchors

Anchors

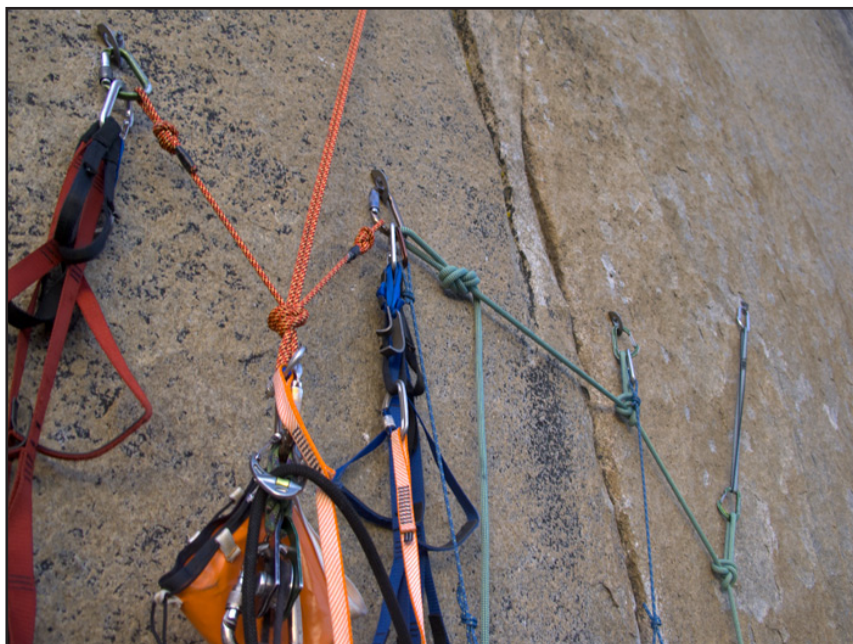
You have to love anchors! I mean, without them, where would we be? They are fun to set up, and obviously pretty important in the climbing safety system. Setting up a solid anchor on a wall doesn't have to involve a ton



of gear, an engineering degree and a lot of time. I'm mostly talking about Yosemite and wall routes specifically El Capitan. Out of the almost two hundred routes on El Cap, probably 30 or so get 95% of all the traffic. The Nose alone probably gets 50% of all El Cap traffic and The Zodiac gets 50% of the remainder. Let's call these 30 routes, the "trade routes". On these trade routes, most of the anchors will be three, four or more bolts. A couple of the bolts will certainly be newer 3/8 inch bolts and the others might be old quarter inchers or even buttonheads.

I'm not going to get into the safety issue of more bolts since I regard two 3/8" bolts and a couple of quarter inchers safe enough for a three man team and all the big wall gear they care to haul. My tip here is more about how to tie into those bolts quickly and safely using the rope you have with you.

The anchors pictured on this page are both on the Shield. The one to the right is above the Triple Cracks and the upper photo is the anchor below Chickenhead Ledge. In both photos my knot tying sequence would have been from the 8 knot and out to the Butterfly knot on the end. Notice how I've used the Butterfly knot to equalize two or more of the bolts. A Butterfly knot is a great knot since you can move it up and down the rope and also increase and decrease the size of its loop without untying it. This means you can estimate its position on the rope and length of loop, tie the knot and then adjust its position and loop to optimize spreading any weight it will carry to two or more bolts. In the photo on the right, notice how I have used two Butterfly knots to distribute any weight on the rope between three bolts. It was actually right at that anchor that John Fine and I



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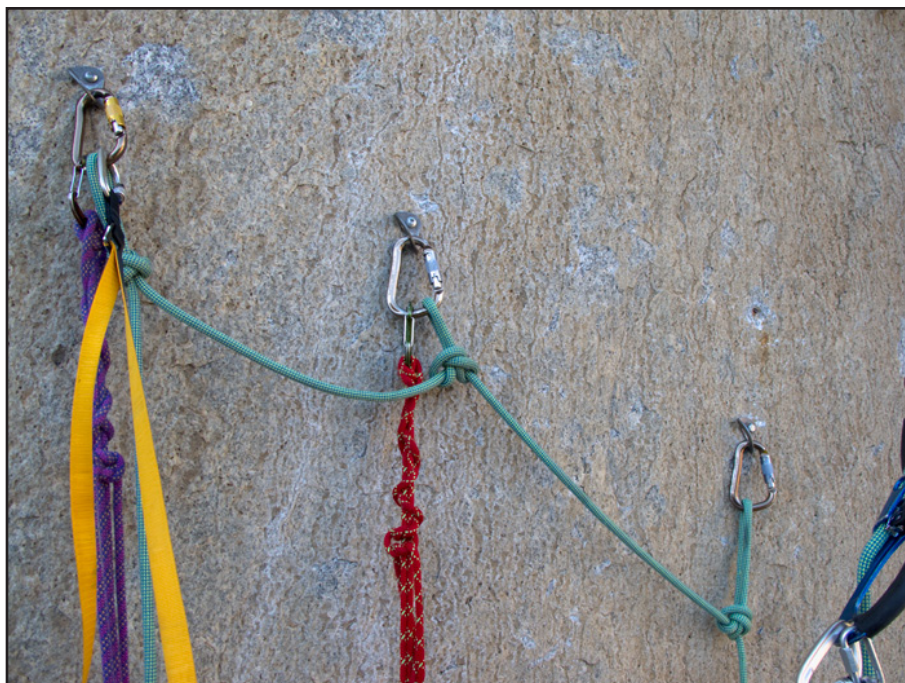
decided to never use a cordalette again in setting up an anchor. We reasoned that once you have two 3/8" bolts equalized, the shit can in fact hit the fan and nothing worse will happen than you ending up with a dirty fan.

I can arrive at a three bolt anchor and be yelling for my partner to "jumar when ready" about five minutes later. I'm always amazed when I hear a leader yell "off belay" and then it's fifteen or twenty minutes before he yells "jumar when ready"! I mean, WTF, how long does it take to tie three knots? With my hauling "kit", I can be ready to haul within five minutes of the ready to jumar call. I never yell, "ready to haul" since wtf does my partner think I'm doing up there with the haul line? My feeling is that the second has been down at the lower anchor for a few hours or more and since I usually give my partner a "25 foot warning" I expect them to get busy putting things away, getting their jugs ready, pulling the slack out of the haul line and short tying the haul bags so that they have some extra rope to lower them out on if they need it and making damn sure the haul line is clear (a real good argument for rope bags) and ready to go. Once the haul line comes tight, they lower out

the bags take apart the anchor and get cleaning.

The Anchor Kit

I always carry what I call an "Anchor Kit" of three large locking biners. I carry them for the anchor bolts more because they are large than that they are lockers. When you're at an anchor, it's easy for it to get clusterized with things clipped all over the place, on top and underneath each other. This is a big source of wasted time on a wall. Given that I'm on the downhill side of my lifeline and that I want to spend as much time up on walls as I can you would think that anchor clusters would give me an added reason to spend more time up there. Well, walls are also an exercise



in frustration control and I don't like to be frustrated. The anchor in the photo above is on the South Seas and I was only seconds away from jugging off of it. The climb came up from the right so not much "Y" was needed to spread the load to the middle bolt, I hauled off the middle bolt and used the left most bolt as a backup. When in use, this anchor differed from what you see here only in that I had my belay lounge clipped to the middle and left bolts. The red and purple cords are my haul bag docking cords and the second the haul line comes tight, I'll loosen and remove them, untie the three knots, grab those biners, my Anchor Kit, and be off cleaning in a flash.

The large biners that I like have a flat enough side that they don't force other biners tight into a bend where they would get pinned if another biner were clipped onto the anchor biner. I always try to clip things to the anchor in a First In, Last Out sequence. In the above anchor photo, if I had clipped the red docking cord to the right of the lead line knot, there would be no way I could take that knot off that biner without untying myself and unthreading the rope. Really, that's not a game breaker but it might be deadly in an emergency situation



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Anchors

where you needed to get the rope free quickly. With a little forethought you don't have to lock yourself into those kinds of situations.

Anchor Architecture

When I climb up to a wall anchor I'm always thinking of how best to set it up for maximum efficiency, speed and comfort. I might set the anchor up differently if I'm planning on spending the night there. If I'm just climbing through, I'll try to haul the bags away from where the climb approaches the anchor. If I'm going to spend the night there I'll always put my ledge on the right and my bags on the left. The door to my ledge fly is on the left so it makes sense to put the bags there. If the bolts are close together, the bags will sometimes hang over the ledge. On my Metolius Double portaledge, the person on the inside sleeps so that his head is to the right and feet to the left. Hanging the bags on the left leave them hanging over his feet rather than his head.

I have a Yates Adjustable Daisy attached to my ledge clip in point so that I can raise or lower it to any position I need. I position the ledge so that it's about a foot lower than the bottom of the bags. I then tie a cord from some secure point to the inside ledge corner so that I can stand on that end and not have the ledge swing out the other direction. Typically, once the ledge is setup and the rack and rope arranging chores are done for the day, if I'm soloing, I'll grab a couple dozen free biners and empty out my haul bags of everything I'll need for the night and the next morning. I'll initially clip all my bags to the ledge straps and drop them to the ledge and then arrange them where I want them when the haul bag is empty. If I'm with a partner, usually the guy who is getting the inside sleeping berth that night will sit on the far side of the ledge since that's where his head will be when he lays down, I'll empty his haul bag first, giving him everything as he clips it in to where he wants it on his end of the ledge. I'll then empty my haul bag and clip my stuff to my end.



BIG WALL TIPS by Mark Hudon

Anchors

Rope Bags

I have poo-pooed rope bags in the past as I thought they were yet just another piece of gear to waste your money on. In my latest Big Wall incarnation though, I have fallen in love with them (okay, that might be a bit strong) as useful tools to reduce cluster and frustration. The large size Metolius Wall Stuff Sacs I use easily hold a 70 meter rope and hang open nicely.

A great tip to get a bunch of rope into a rope bag quickly is to go out and get one of those Revolver biners with the little roller in it. This biner works well as an all around pulley for small and light duty jobs. Clip the biner into a spot just above your rope bag, get both of your hands into the rope bag and quickly hand over hand the rope into the bottom of the bag. With a little practice you'll be able to stuff a 70 meter rope into a bag in about three minutes. You're going to have a hell of a time pulling the rope out of the bottom of the pile so make sure you feed the correct end in first. After that, sit back, relax and enjoy your time belaying knowing that you'll never have the ropes get tangled or looped under the haul bags and stuck.

Another nice thing about rope bags is that in bad weather, you can quickly put them in the haul bag or take them in with you under the fly and keep them dry and, if the weather gets very cold, unfrozen. You will NOT be able to rappel on a frozen rope, cleaning with one will be very difficult and leading with one will be a nightmare.

