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The Dawn Wall: Rapid Second Ascent

California, Yosemite Valley

On November 21, Adam Ondra from the Czech Republic completed the second free ascent of the Dawn Wall (VI 5.14d), the 32-pitch El Capitan route generally regarded as the world's hardest big-wall free climb. The route on El Cap's southeast face, freed by Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson over a 19-day push ending in January 2015 (concluding nearly seven years of work by Caldwell and later Jorgeson) took Ondra eight days on his final push. Ondra's arrival garnered worldwide attention, as his intentions were pre-announced and because many wondered how his sport climbing, bouldering, and competition skills would translate to the mythic walls of Yosemite during his first visit. [Ondra wrote a feature article about climbing the world's first 9b+ (5.15c), the route Change in Norway, for *AAJ* 2013.]

After arriving in Yosemite in October, Ondra quickly set to work. In a nod to traditional Valley style, he went ground-up on the Dawn Wall, using a mix of free and aid tactics to fix lines up the route. After several weeks of rehearsing the pitches, with a brief interlude for an onsight attempt on the Nose (VI 5.14a) with his father, Ondra began his free push from the ground on November 14.

After climbing the first 13 pitches over two days and resting the third, he made eight unsuccessful attempts to redpoint the 14th pitch on November 17. The following day he sent both pitch 14 and pitch 15, the two hardest pitches on the route, in a single afternoon. Ondra felt the second of these traversing pitches was 5.14c (graded 5.14d on the first ascent); he also upgraded pitch 10 from 5.14a to 5.14b.

On November 19, his sixth day on the route, he redpointed two 5.14 pitches and four of 5.13 to reach the top of Wino Tower. Ondra followed the Loop Pitch variation on pitch 16 (5.14a), avoiding the famous sideways dyno that only Jorgeson has redpointed during a free ascent of the route.

After waiting out a storm atop Wino Tower, Ondra climbed the 12 remaining, relatively moderate (up to 5.13a) pitches and reached the summit of El Cap on the afternoon of November 21. "Hats off to Tommy and Kevin, who believed that the whole climb was possible," Ondra said in an update published by Black Diamond before the final push. "I have the advantage that I know that the climb is possible and that helps me to keep the faith that I might be able to do it as well. I am humbled and impressed by what Tommy and Kevin did!"

– Andy Anderson, with information from Eric Bissell and published reports

Images

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