



AAC Publications

Scott Cosgrove, 1964 – 2016

When you're 20 years old, living in Yosemite and climbing every day, the Earth seems to spin a bit slower. Time seems stretched out and relaxed as you rope up with a friend on another big day. In 1984 I tied in with Scott Cosgrove for our first big climb together, Space Babble, a very bold and sparse route on Middle Cathedral Rock, put up by Ron Kauk and Kevin Worrall. There was no chalk, no string of bolts as on modern routes. We played the ground-up, onsight game and tried to play with no mistakes. I was nervous but confident in the Coz; he had the reach, the strong mind, and good footwork to get the job done. Our friendship was cemented that day and would continue for 32 years.

It's sad to think he will be climbing with me no longer. Scott Cosgrove was a survivor, one of the toughest guys I know. In 2014 he was on a rigging job when I got a call from Jeff Constine: "Cosgrove is in the hospital and he may not make it." I was stunned speechless, but deep down inside I knew the Coz had the will to live. He had proved doctors wrong many times before.

Scott slowly but surely crawled back from the brink. We started swapping emails and phone conversations. My son was born six months after his accident, and he was the first to reach out to congratulate me and offer his support. Milo was three months premature, and Scott's energy and support got me through some dark times that winter. We made plans to climb again, and he wanted to be there when Milo got tied into the rope for the first time.

Scott was one hell of a climber, bold and tough as nails. He was the first American to establish a 5.14a (New Deal at Joshua Tree). He and Dave Schultz made the first free ascent of Half Dome's legendary Southern Belle (5.12c R/X). He climbed a new route on the Central Tower of Paine in Patagonia and on Mt. Proboscis in northern Canada. He guided throughout the world and was a world-class rigger, working on many films and working with a team that won an Academy Award in 1985.

In the mid-1980s, he survived getting his finger crushed in a climbing accident, almost having it removed, and doctors saying he would never climb again. A few years later, he was thrown from the back of a pickup truck, while asleep, at 80 miles an hour. His ankle was so shattered that the first two doctors wanted to remove his foot. He finally found a doctor that pinned him back together. That doctor, who did not know the Cosgrove that I knew, said he would never climb again. After two years of intense pain and physical therapy, he was back to guiding in Joshua Tree for Bob Gaines and climbing incredibly well.

In the winter of 1993 I was sitting in his living room with Greg Epperson, the yellow Valley guidebook open to page 62: the Muir Wall. I showed them some pictures and told them I thought the route could go free. We ended up spending about three months working the route, from the bottom up, the next summer, following in the footsteps of TM Herbert and Yvon Chouinard, who did the route in 1965 with no fixed ropes or support. We wanted to find the same kind of adventure and honor the first ascent in the same style.

Through our ordeal, our bonds grew each day. Scott was a technician on that route: a big-wall rigger and badass climber combined. Dealing with a swollen ankle each day, humping loads, and freeing every other pitch flawlessly. Never complaining, toiling along, each week getting us higher on the wall, with free pitches below and the unknown still above.

In the end we came up short, managing to free all but 30 feet of the wall. And then a drama with the park service ensued. We had used a power drill to replace old anchors and add a handful of bolts to our variations. We got busted on the summit in an undercover sting operation, a surreal way to finish an epic wall.

I'll never forget sitting on the summit with Scott after the rangers left, reeling from the final push on the wall, depressed and bewildered by what had just happened. Scott was quick to remind me of what we'd done as a team and what we had just free climbed. "Man, we spent the times of our lives up there, sending perfect pitches of Yosemite granite and living the dream. Cheer up, man!"

In the end it's the stories we tell and friendships built that make climbing rocks so special. I'm grateful to have grown up with Scott, spending hours with him in the boulder fields and chasing John Bachar around the Tuolumne solo circuit. Hiking around Joshua Tree, looking for elusive new lines that would take us to the next level. Scott, you will be missed by many and never be forgotten in the annals of climbing. I know someday we will meet up with Bachar and continue that solo circuit from days long passed.

– Kurt Smith

Images



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