



AAC Publications

Glen Denny, 1939–2022

The shout came from far above: “Get that redhead from the Lodge to help you!” It was a command I couldn’t refuse, coming from my hero, Warren Harding. He and Chuck Pratt were high on Yosemite’s Washington Column, fixing ropes and moving slowly up the route that later would be called Astroman. The heat that July of 1959 was intense—my job was to keep the lads above supplied with water.

The redhead in question was Glen Denny, a 20-year-old who was working as a busboy at Yosemite Lodge. Harding had taught Glen the basics of rope management, but I worried the tall busboy wasn’t ready for ascending fixed ropes with a heavy pack of water. Part of the route was overhanging, making for strenuous progress, especially in the days of prusik knots, before mechanical ascenders.

But Glen was a powerful, fearless man, full of energy. I forget how many trips he made up those daunting fixed lines, but he was a member of the summit team, bivouacking with Harding and Pratt on their last night.

So this is how I met my lifelong friend. We didn’t climb much together, but the highlight was the third ascent of El Capitan’s Nose in 1963 with Layton Kor. We had a delightful time. Glen put it well in his 2016 memoir: “We had become perfectly adapted to the vertical world, and it seemed like we no longer needed the comforts of terrestrial life.”

Glen and Harding also hit it off immediately. Following Astroman, they went to the High Sierra to do the imposing southwest face of Mt. Conness with Herb Swedlund. The next year, the duo climbed the sharp fang of Keeler Needle in the Mt. Whitney massif. Back in the Valley, Glen and Harding were hardly idle. With Al Macdonald they spent several months in late 1961 establishing the first route up the wildly overhanging west face of the Leaning Tower.

Although Glen was not a great free climber, he excelled in aid work, placing tiny pitons that merely kissed the rock. One of the best examples of these skills is a route he did with Frank Sacherer in 1961. This was the El Cap Tree Direct, a daring line up a mostly blank wall.

Glen’s ascent of the Dihedral Wall on El Cap in 1962 was undoubtedly the high point of his climbing career. This was the third route on El Cap, and the lower part had been fixed by Ed Cooper and Jim Baldwin when Glen joined the team. Very difficult and strenuous aid climbing over many days (seven on the final push) dominated the route. The threesome topped out to find newsmen and friends swarming about the summit slabs. Cooper, like Harding, was not averse to publicity, and he had contacted the press. Denny was outraged and wrote me four days later: “I regret that the fine thing the summit could have been was ruined by such a foul thing—the very antithesis of the moment.”

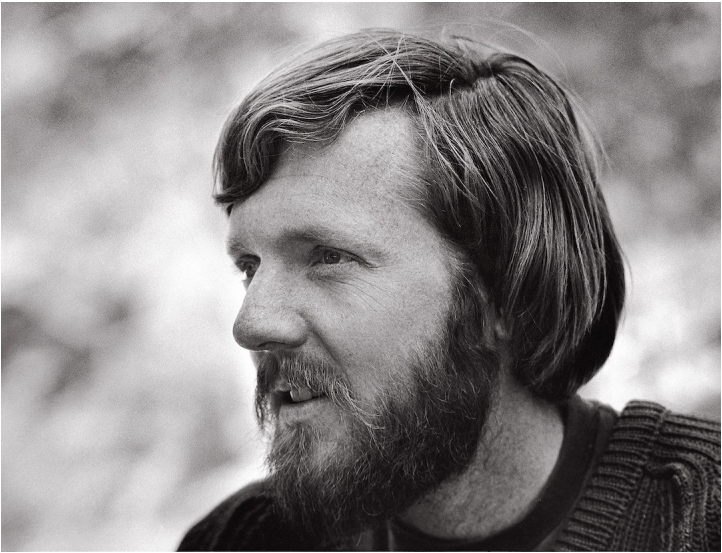
Soon after, Glen withdrew from the competitive climbing scene, apart from first ascents of Jirishanca Norte in Peru (1964) and The Prow of Washington Column (1969). For the rest of his long life, he was involved in photography, filmmaking, and long-distance hiking. For many years he was a Camp 4 paparazzo, camera always at the ready, capturing images without bothering the denizens. His photos appeared in every book written about the Golden Age of Valley climbing, including *Yosemite in the Sixties*, *Camp 4*, and *Valley Walls: A Memoir of Climbing and Living in Yosemite*.

For many years, Glen worked part-time as an acquisition librarian at Stanford University. During this

time, his vibrant personality, wit, and intelligence were ever present. Late in life, he almost died when his organs began to fail. His lovely wife, Peggy, donated a kidney, and Glen, at age 80, once again strode among the mountains and cliffs that so enthralled him.

– **Steve Roper**

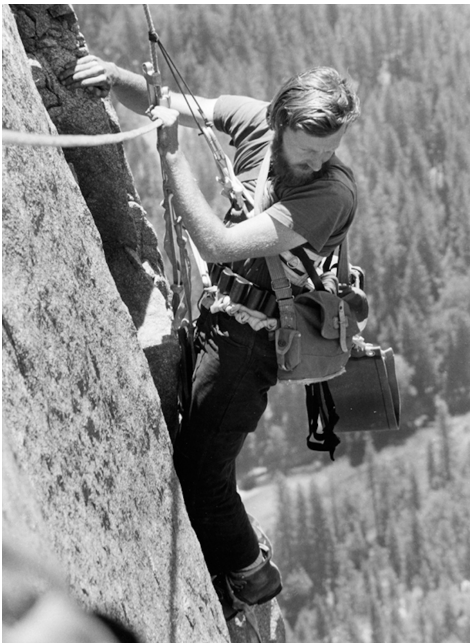
Images



Glen Denny in 1968.



Glen Denny during the first ascent of the Dihedral Wall of El Capitan in 1962.



Glen Denny working as a videographer on El Capitan in 1968 or 1969. The film "El Capitan" was eventually released in 1978.



Glen Denny in southern England in 2004.



Glen Denny in recent years.

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