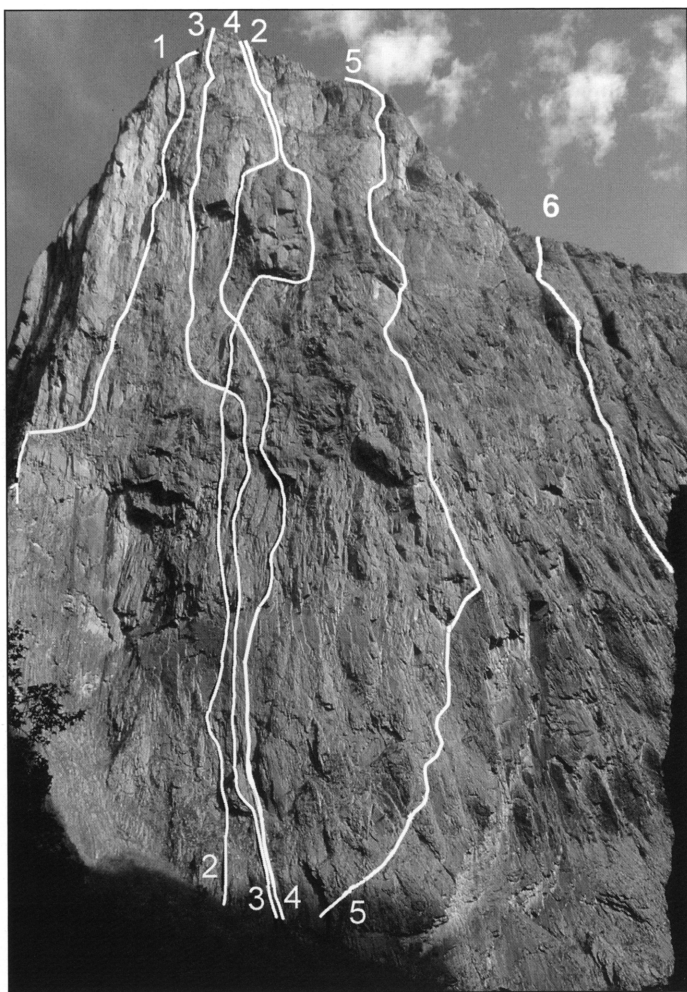


A LOGICAL DILEMMA

When “logic” is seen as an ethical failure, one climber’s “progress” becomes another’s “regression”—or worse, a theft from the future of adventure.

*Herewith, another installment in the eternal argument
on bolts and how they’re placed.*



The 2,900-foot face of El Gigante: 1. Yawira Batú (Buil-Garcia, 1999). 2. Simuchi (Buil-Garcia, 1998). 3. Logical Progression (Baumeister-Laeser-van Lint, 2002). 4. La Conjura de los Necios (Albert-Fengler-Glowacz-Heuber, 2001). 5. Faded Glory (Edelen-Hüfner, 2002). 6. Blade, Scars, and Stars (Edelen-Gajda-Llewellyn, 2000).
Andrej Grmovsek *Uncredited small photos by Peter Baumeister*

This year's lead articles on El Gigante had already made it to my editor's desk when an electronic bomb went off on my monitor. The following email arrived on March 7, 2003:

***Subject:** elimination of a rap-bolted route on Mexico's El Gigante*

Hello John!

Maybe you have heard already something about El Gigante. It is an 800m wall. Onto it has been installed a 400-bolt sport-climbing route named Logical Progression. It is a desecration of that face. Worse, the German magazine Klettern printed an article implying support, calling the manner of ascent a "new style."

With Nicholas Mailänder I am organizing the erasure of the bolts and would like international support. I would like opinion leaders to give moral support, while I myself will give financial support.

Please let me know whether you would take part and whom else I could contact.

Best regards,

Alexander Huber

It seemed that action might take place even before the AAJ went to press, before the controversy could be widely discussed. So I quickly wrote to a number of climbers familiar with Mexican climbing, with big walls around the world, and with the ethical issues involved in bolting. The following pages offer a sampling of the responses, all edited for clarity and brevity, but not intended to affect the ideas of the authors. I have tried to be unbiased in my editing and in the selection of climbers involved, though I must disclose that my personal ideology stresses tolerance over other issues in the debate, as explained in the Preface to this Journal. The following discussion seems particularly relevant coming as it does on the heels of the Tyrol Declaration, also published in this Journal.

JOHN HARLIN III, *Editor*

In general I'm against routes such as Logical Progression going up so early in an area's climbing history. But I'm also no fan of erasure. In the Black Canyon we have a strict no-rap-bolting tradition, but a history of routefinding and cleaning on rappel. Air Voyage, Stratosfear, and the Nose—three of the most adventurous free climbs in the canyon—used top-down tactics. Dangerous blocks and flakes were pried off and secret passages discovered. A multiday, heavily armed, stay-on-the-wall ground-up approach (such as has been used on "traditional" El Gigante climbs) also might have worked, but would not have added to the first-ascent adventure—both Air Voyage and Stratosfear were first climbed in a day, in committing, lightweight style. The recon of the Nose spent a long time discovering how best to connect two major weaknesses; the wall was eventually climbed employing a minimum number of bolts. I feel that a pure ground-up ascent would have resulted in more bolting, and an inferior and more difficult line.

How do you determine what constitutes the best style? Is ground-up always superior? In the Verdon Gorge it makes the best "mountaineering" sense—it's the most efficient, straightforward tactic—to approach



many objectives via rappel. You arrive at the top of the cliff, and there's no logical way up to many sectors from the Gorge bottom, save pointless bolt ladders, since many sectors are undercut by poor rock. Most Verdon routes were bolted on rappel, but many are highly adventurous. The local guidebooks have an "overbolted" symbol for routes with bolts spaced more closely than three meters. Thirty-foot runouts are common. The original style of rap-bolting made it a point to maximize the adventure of climbing in the Verdon. And given the approach to these routes from above, it seems to me that they were done in the best possible style—for Verdon. Unfortunately, rap-bolting seems to have deteriorated stylistically into "making routes safe," which I think is both false and misguided.

JEFF ACHEY, March 19, 2003

Jeff Achey is a widely traveled American climber who made the first ascents of the Free Nose on North Chasm View (AAJ 1997) and the Serpent, a free variation to the Dragon Route on the Painted Wall (AAJ 2000), both in the Black Canyon of the Gunnison.

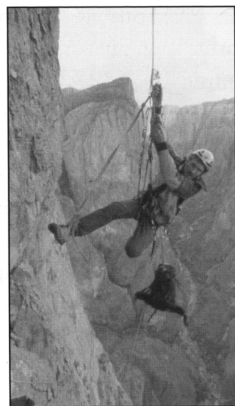
I recently came back from Kenya, where we tried a ground-up first ascent on the 600-meter wall of Mt. Poi. We stopped after five pitches because the rock was too fragile for a ground-up first ascent. We instead climbed the rap-bolted Slovenian Route, which is just to the right of the American Route, also rap-bolted. It is a brilliant free climb, and we said, "Thank you very much," for the work and cleaning the Slovenians did. Rap-bolted first ascents on big walls are not what I am looking for, but we really enjoyed repeating such a route. Without the Slovenians' and Americans' efforts the only routes would be bushy corners climbed by British far to the right of the main wall. The rock of the main wall is just too fragile. In my opinion it would be sad if arrogant climbing police chopped these routes. Their creators invested a lot of energy and gave us something enjoyable to climb.

When we did our ground-up first ascent on El Gigante, La Conjura de los Necios, we were fighting bad rock and vegetation, and did not enjoy the climbing so much—but it was a great adventure.

After we fought our climb to the top, we repeated Subiendo el Arcoiris, a 300m wall to the left of the Cascada de Basaseachic, which was set up by rap-bolting. It is one the best climbs I have done, and we said, "Thank you very much, Peter and friends."

Variety in climbing is a good thing, and I enjoy everything: adventurous ground-up ascents, soloing, repeating rap-bolted routes. I dislike missionaries who want to tell me how to climb. I have ethics and dogmas, but only for myself. There are still new routes to do in the Candameña Cañon, possibilities for hair-raising ground-up first ascents. I think it would be better if those who arrogantly want to chop invested their energies in new routes, in that way leaving their vision of what they want climbing to be. It would be sad if great routes get chopped.

KURT ALBERT, March 25, 2003



Kurt Albert on La Conjura de los Necios.
Stefan Glowacz

Kurt Albert has been a leading German free-climber for over two decades, with major first ascents on five continents. His team made the first ascent of La Conjura de los Necios, the first free route on El Gigante (AAJ 2002, pp. 288-289).

If these ethical violations had been done in a U.S. national park, this climb would not be reported as a triumph. It is a common Mexican perception that many U.S. climbers (and tourists and spring-breakers) come here to do what they don't dare do in their home country.

RODULFO ARAUJO, *March 20, 2003*

Rodolfo Araujo is Director at Large of the Mexican Federation of Mountain Sports and Climbing.

Chopping bolts as a unilateral act leads to more resentment and more conflict.

The way to deal with the bolt issue is through talk and education. I don't think you can say, "All bolts are bad," but I do believe that using natural protection gives a much better experience. The climber is attuned to the rock and its natural features, accepting them for what they are, rather than imposing his will upon them. On crags which have natural lines I believe blank spaces between those lines are best left blank until, you never know, someone is bold or good enough to climb them with whatever is there. There are crags, however, which either have a long tradition of bolted climbing or have no natural protection, and I believe sport/pleasure climbers should be able to enjoy their version of the sport on these crags. What is needed is a dialogue between all users of the crags and mountains to understand each other's point of view, and to thrash out agreements that enable all of us to enjoy the mountains without damaging the environment or spoiling them for others.

SIR CHRISTIAN BONINGTON CBE, *April 1, 2003*

Chris Bonington was one of the leading British Alpinists of the 1960s and Himalayan climbers of the 1970s and '80s. At the age of 69 he continues to make at least an expedition each year. He was the closing speaker and a style-and-ethics working-group member at the 2002 Tyrol Declaration.

I feel that Logical Progression is a crime done to a beautiful wall. Carlos and I opened the first two routes on El Gigante, in 1998 and 1999. We also bolted 58 sport routes in the Rancho San Lorenzo, putting in hundreds of bolts—which appears to be the excuse for Logical Progression on El Gigante. However, our sport routes are 10 minutes from the road, are outside the park, and are 50 meters high, maximum. Even so, we bolted around 20 of them ground up, using hooks, because the rock is perfect for that.

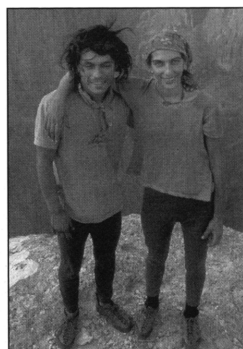
I think there is a huge difference between our short routes and El Gigante. It isn't fair to shrink such a difficult wall by bolting it. Logical Progression is close to the wall's first route and eliminates the wall's adventure. El Gigante is not like El Capitan. The cracks are small, discon-



Drilling anchors on Faded Glory.
Brent Edelen

tinuous, and difficult to protect. Loose blocks and dirt are part of the wall. We should change the nature of big walls as little as possible, even if most climbers will never be able to free the route. For me this discussion about how to climb new routes on big walls is like discussing the rules of an established game, such as football. It doesn't matter where you play; the rules are the same. That El Gigante is the biggest wall in Mexico, with world significance, should earn it respect as a ground for adventure.

I favor erasing the bolts and will help if it happens. I have a special love for El Gigante as the place where I learned what a real wall is. To promote the Logical Progression type of route is to kill the spirit of adventure and to forget that strength of mind is the main tool for improvements in climbing. I think safe, bolted climbing is the base for becoming a good climber, but it has its place. As a lover of all types of climbing, I hope this place is clear in the climbing community.



Carlos Garcia and Cecilia Buil after Yawira Batú.
Chris Giles

CECILIA BUIL, March 17, 2003

Cecilia Buil, from Spain, is putting up new routes in Kyrgyzstan and elsewhere. Her climbs in the Basaseachic are documented in Carlos Garcia Ayala's lead story earlier in this Journal, in AAJ 1999 pp. 60–66, and in AAJ 2000 pp. 247–249.

Most Mexican big-wall climbers begin in Yosemite. There, everyone knows the “rule”: no drilling unless there are no natural placements. If you drill bolts where others didn't, you are not prepared for that climb. Rock climbing is growing fast, and we must take care in which direction it moves. If there is a sport route on El Gigante, people are going to climb it, because it is safer and easier: no cams, hooks, pins—just quickdraws. Where is the challenge and charm of the big wall? It is important to respect the ethics and values of other countries, communities, and climbers. I am against this route, though not sure if it is a good idea to remove the bolts.

ARMANDO DATTOLI, March 24, 2003

Armando Dattoli, 34, is the rock-climbing commissioner of the Mexican Federation of Mountain Sports and Climbing. He has climbed El Cap three times, and also in the Alps, the Andes, and the Karakoram twice, including an ascent of the Trango Tower.

Basaseachic is a long way to travel just to chop some bolts. I bet Logical Progression is the best route there. My new route in the canyon, Soy Caliente, was ground-up power drilling and trad gear, a grungy adventure. The best thing that could happen is for someone to retro rap-bolt it and make it worthwhile. The climbing is similar to limestone: the worst rock is in the cracks where the pro is; the good climbing and rock has no pro. Soy Caliente went 90% free at 511+, with some A1. It could be straightened out with bolts to make a fun sport route—which would be a lot of work, though.

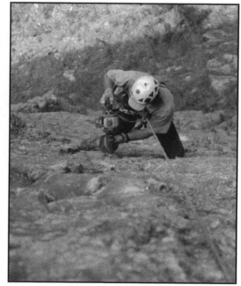
I like ground-up adventures and have never put up a true sport route, but I have nothing

against a well-designed multipitch clip-up. Why does a rap-bolted sport route degrade the rock more than a ground-up route? If someone wants to put up a low-commitment, secure bolted route, I think that is great; there is room. Whoever gets onto the rock first can determine the style of the first ascent. Just don't go messing with established routes.

Would someone erase the dream, hard work, and fruition of Lucas et al's efforts? And deny climbers interested in repeating this route? Anyone can put up the remaining lines in trad style; then they won't become sport routes. Future generations will still have a vast reserve of unexplored rock. No need to ban bolts yet. If rap-bolters want to come to the Rockies, we have potential for HUGE top-down alpine sport routes for those willing to invest the time and money. I would love to repeat a sport route on some of the huge limestone or quartzite faces here, but there is no way I would put in the effort to create one.

SEAN EASTON, May 2, 2003

Sean Easton is a climbing guide from the Canadian Rockies who has established big, bold new routes in Baffin Island, Patagonia, Peru, Canada, Alaska, and Mexico. Soy Caliente is described in AAJ 2002, pp. 289–90.



Drilling down on Logical Progression. Luke Laeser

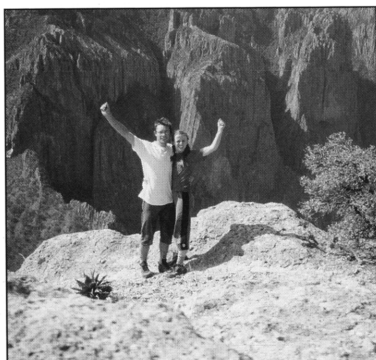
Logical Progression is negative evolution. The challenge is to preserve the ethics of climbing big walls. The canyon offers the world a chance to enjoy and preserve it. Early ascents were made in good style. Other activities in the canyon, like the 50 sport routes and the two solo ascents alongside the Basaseachic Waterfall, were hard, because we had a strong background in climbing ethics. All routes were done from the ground-up; we hung from hooks when necessary for placing bolts. I demand respect for the principles of climbing. Respect for other climbers. I have a question about Logical Progression: Where is the challenge of climbing a big wall? Where is the opportunity for the next generation? Where is the progression? Stronger climbers need to push for better ascents

LUIS CARLOS GARCIA AYALA, March 18, 2003

Carlos Garcia, from Mexico City, with Cecelia Buil, discovered the climbing potential of the Parque Nacional de Basaseachic and made the first ascents of El Gigante. His lead article "El Gigante" appears earlier in this Journal. Garcia is perhaps the leading activist on Mexico's many newly discovered big walls.

El Gigante is unique. I have climbed many walls around the world, including walls in exotic places like Madagascar, vegetated walls like Norway's Kjerag, and very loose walls in the Slovenian Alps. But El Gigante is much more vegetated than anything else I climbed and extremely loose and rotten. I can understand the climbers who rappelled, cleaned the wall, and bolted what is probably a nice sport route.

I live in central Europe, where many Alpine walls have traditional routes, ground-up bolted routes, and rap-bolted routes. Walls are part of nature, and everybody has access to them, the



Andrej Grmovsek and Tanja Rojs celebrating their ascent of El Gigante. Andrej Grmovsek

same as rivers and lakes, which are used by fishermen, kayakers, and others. I don't like rap-bolting, because it gives me no adventure and no satisfaction. But I'm against chopping bolts, especially on Logical Progression. I think nobody has the right to destroy another's work, and rap-bolting was not prohibited when the route was made. Maybe the trick is to develop worldwide ethical regulations, which would tell young climbers that rap-bolting exotic and alpine walls is bad style.

I hope most climbers know the difference between ground-up free ascents, ground-up aid ascents, and rap-bolted ascents. The climbing media should report rap-bolted ascents critically, because they are a step back and not acceptable. It's a pity that some young climbers speak about their rap-bolted routes as the hardest free routes in the world. Such routes can't be compared with ground-up ascents. Rap-bolting is fitting the wall to your abilities, instead of fitting your abilities to the wall!

Finally, I must give my opinion about aid climbing on El Gigante. El Gigante's rhyolite is more featured than granite, where aid is sometimes the only way to climb thin cracks. Because of El Gigante's featured rock, aid climbing isn't the best style. La Conjura de los Necios and Simuchi share some pitches. The climbers on Simuchi drilled many bat-hook holes where relatively easy free climbing (5.11) is possible a few meters above good pro. Such aid climbing has to give way to free ascents.

ANDREJ GRMOVSEK, April 13, 2003

Andrej Grmovsek, a widely traveled young climber from Slovenia, made the second ascent of El Gigante's La Conjura de los Necios. See "Conspiracy of Fools" earlier in this Journal.

El Gigante has the features of an alpine face: size, remoteness, quality of rock. In the Alps, as in all mountain ranges, a ground-up ascent is considered the only acceptable way to establish a climb. This point of view is backed by paragraph 3 of the article on first ascents in the Tyrol Declaration: "In alpine regions, first ascents should be done exclusively on lead (no prefixing from above)."

The establishment of Logical Progression clearly challenges this international consensus and implicitly advocates a laissez-faire approach.

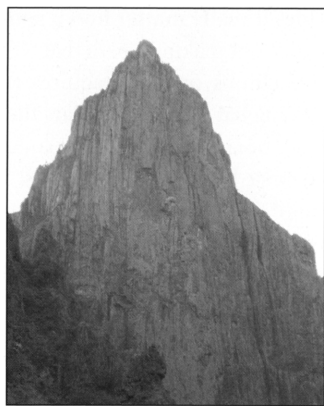
If the example set by Baumeister & Co. and publicized in *Klettern* is unopposed, there is a good chance it will lead to innumerable routes put up in the same style. This would rapidly diminish the potential for first ascents on all alpine faces and big walls. For instance, a team of 20 "route-setters" could reduce the time to put up—and equip—all climbs on the classic south face of the Schlüsselkarispitze from nine decades to a month.

This would be in conflict with point 3 of Article 8 of the Tyrol Declaration: "Rock and mountains are a limited resource for adventure that must be shared by climbers with many interests and over many generations to come. We realize that future generations will need to find their

own NEW adventures within this limited resource. We try to develop crags or mountains in a way that doesn't steal opportunity from the future." It is clear that people like Baumeister and his friends—under the guise of "tolerance"—are stealing projects from parties who are willing to stick to the slow and honest ground-up approach.

For this reason we are in favor of erasing Logical Progression. But the decision should lie with local Mexican climbers and their national climbing association. It would be a mistake if foreign climbers chopped the route.

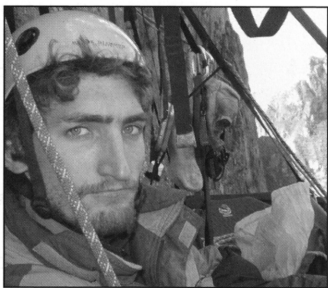
The situation gives the international climbing community an excellent opportunity to thoroughly discuss the issue of legitimate styles of first ascents on alpine faces and big walls. This discussion could be organized by the UIAA and include leading rock climbers from the whole spectrum of the game. A decision in the case of Logical Progression vs. The Tradition of Climbing should be made only after all aspects of the problem have been discussed.



El Gigante looming large. Brent Edelen

NICHOLAS MAILÄNDER & ALEXANDER HUBER, April 17, 2003

Nicholas Mailänder was one of the architects of the Tyrol Declaration and is a leading activist in access issues for climbing in Germany. Alexander Huber is one of today's top big-wall free climbers, with groundbreaking new routes in America and Europe. Both are German.



Alard Hüfner on Faded Glory. Brent Edelen

For that crag—El Gigante—I strongly disagree with the style in which Logical Progression was bolted. Four other routes had been opened ground-up. Why could Logical Progression not have been opened ground-up? It took about six weeks to bolt top-down. I think that in six weeks the team could have climbed it bottom-up. The route might not have been as perfect, but it could have been done. I think of Yosemite. If people abseiled down with power drills, there would be millions of bolts on El Cap.

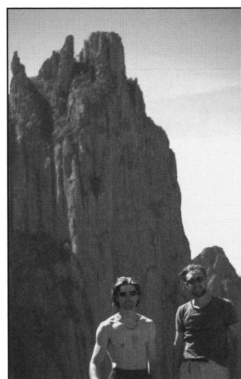
To chop the route or not? That is the question. Yes, Logical Progression will see many more ascents than our route, Faded Glory, because it is bolted. But it was opened in a style that does not suit El Gigante. So I think the bolts should go. If we don't take a stand now, a hundred more routes could be bolted top-down on El Gigante. Where is the challenge? I believe we go to places like El Gigante to push our limits. I have pondered this decision for many months since my visit to El Gigante.

ALARD HÜFNER, April 11, 2003

Alard Hüfner, from South Africa, is a leading new-route activist throughout southern Africa, and specializes in big-wall climbing. He made the first ascent of Faded Glory on El Gigante, described earlier in this Journal.

Does it really matter how a sport climb is established? Our project was about making a path that will challenge all who attempt it. Bolting free climbs on lead requires making poor choices. For example, drilling bat-hook holes scars the rock, and placing a bolt in a certain place because it was all you could reach and being unable to know in advance if a section is the best choice for free climbing results in a weird, indecisive line. It's hard labor to bolt a big route, and when the wall is steep, you're hanging off gear or a rope either way, so going ground-up or top-down is a silly dispute; only the final product is important.

In 2001, before establishing Subiendo, we explored the canyons for other lines. We saw many potential great sport routes. The andesite, rhyolite, and welded tuff walls offer discontinuous, blocky, fractured systems—typically filled with bushes, grass, and cactus—but with clean faces to either side. Artificial climbing, where the rock must support only body weight, can force through any crap. A free climb, where you're grabbing the rock, requires a higher quality. The future of free climbing in this area lies on the faces, where the rock is featured and covered with pockets. By forcing a line into a natural weakness, one displaces plants with pitons. Placing a bolt on a face, so as to not disturb the flora and fauna that live in the cracks, is a more respectful gesture. Ponder this: Once a route has been bolted, it doesn't change. It's the same for every climber. Scars aren't growing, eroding, or being re-excavated by pins.



Luke Laeser (left) and Pete Baumeister. Bert van Lint

LUKE LAESER, *February 23, 2003*

Luke Laeser, from New Mexico, is a graphic designer at Climbing. He established Subiendo el Arcoiris in 2001 (a 10-pitch rappel-bolted route on the Cascada Wall), and Logical Progression in 2002. See "Logical Progression," earlier in this Journal.

Climbers are killing the sacred word Adventure, even on small cliffs close to Mexico City.

There are climbers who, to improve the difficulty of a route, rappel from the top and install bolts or, worse, glue a piece of rock or chop holds. They believe they are the ultimate climbers, and have the right to "improve" the rock. They think that they can cheat because no one could climb the route another way. In Mexico it seems to be acceptable to climb this way. However, I also I think that our sport represents the last chances for Free Will and Free Living; these are the essence of climbing. So I do believe that the bolts installed on Logical Progression should be left in place. And that route will allow Mexican climbers to move from small sport cliffs to real adventure environments. It is a pity that Mexican climbers are now playing the sport in gyms and sport routes.

I read about the Dawn Wall on El Capitan, which Warren Harding climbed with many bolts. Royal Robbins chopped some of the bolts, but then decided to respect the line. I agree: I do not think that anyone has the right to remove bolts that other climbers have fixed. That is the way our sport has developed.

MARIO ANDRÉS OÑATE, *March 15, 2003*

Mario Andrés Oñate, of Mexico City, has been climbing for 35 years. He made his first trip to Yosemite in 1984 and has climbed El Cap three times. He mostly climbs cracks, and works as a guide on the Mexican volcanoes.

A rap-bolted route on El Gigante could have its place in the future, when most lines have been climbed on aid, from the ground up. But this is not the time for a rap-bolted route. There are so few lines on the cliff now, and Carlos Garcia and others have made such good efforts. They have climbed fairly and exposed themselves to the risks that ground-up and aid climbing involve.

Still, I don't see the point in chopping the route now that it is there. I do support a discussion between climbers interested in doing new routes in this area. If they decide the place should be for ground-up climbing only, that should absolutely be respected. If, after this kind of agreement has been reached, someone decides to put up a rap-bolted route, I do think the route should be chopped.

HÉCTOR PONCE DE LEÓN, *March 27, 2003*

Héctor Ponce de León is a Mexican mountaineer with considerable experience in the Himalaya, Andes, and Alps. He says he is neither a sport climber nor a big-wall climber.

The name Logical Progression is brilliant—the climb was a logical next step by “modernists” in the attack on the classical mountaineering approach.

The next logical progression would be to do the same thing on El Capitan, but why not add the “logical” step of chipping holds by quarrying the granite with hammer and chisel? One of the things we most love about climbing is the sense of freedom it gives. I believe anyone has the right to put up a route in any fashion he or she pleases. It follows



that anyone else has the right to remove any route he or she pleases. I notice that those bold and visionary climbers who created Logical Progression didn't ask permission. Why do we need an international consensus to erase the route? If it is up to consensus, nothing will happen. One of the things I admired about Warren Harding, who was on the opposite side of the style debate from myself, is that it never occurred to him to suggest that I didn't have a perfect right to remove any bolts he had a perfect right to place. If the route is allowed to stand and we say politely that we don't like it and there shouldn't be more like it, more such routes will be established, if for no other reason than the pleasure of thumbing noses. I vote for erasing the route in question, but I believe that it won't be done. So I prefer to ignore what I have no control over, and concentrate on what I admire and respect: ground-up adventure climbing!

ROYAL ROBBINS, *May 2, 2003*

Royal Robbins was the leading Yosemite climber during its big-wall explosion of the 1960s, and was known for his strong stance on climbing style. In 1971 he began erasing Warren Harding's heavily bolted Dawn Wall route on El Capitan, but he stopped chopping after the first of five days on the route.