

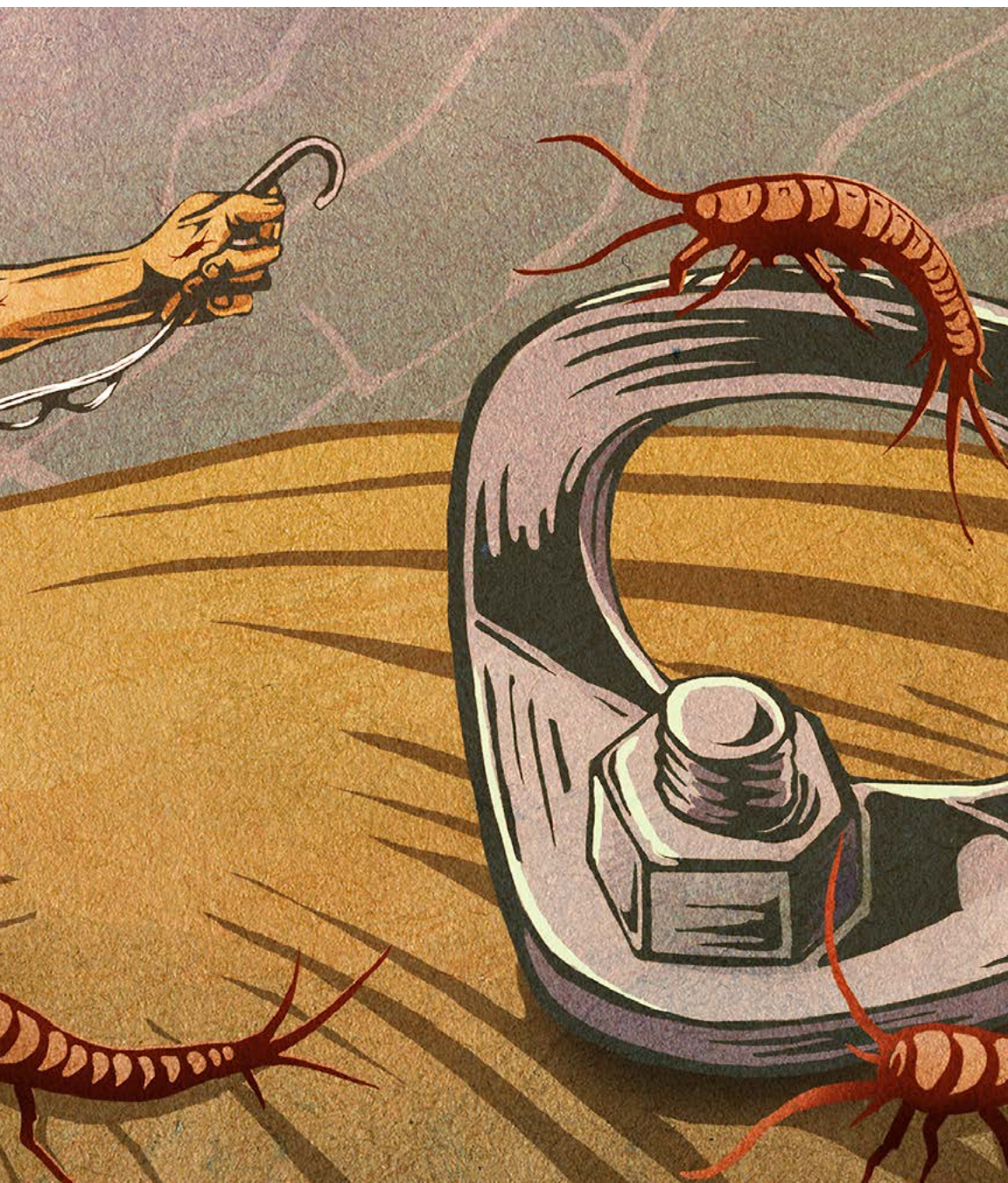
# THE TRIPLE





WORDS  
**ALEX HONNOLD**

ILLUSTRATIONS  
**ANDREAS SCHMIDT**





## SOLOING WATKINS, EL CAP, AND HALF DOME IN 19 HOURS

Ever since Jim Bridwell, John Long, and Billy Westbay climbed the Nose in a day in May 1975, people have been trying to do bigger and bigger linkups in Yosemite Valley. John Bachar and Peter Croft linked El Capitan and Half Dome in 1986; Timmy O'Neill and Dean Potter added Mt. Watkins 15 years later. The obvious remaining challenges were to climb Yosemite's three largest faces free or solo. Or, I suppose, free solo, but that's for another generation.

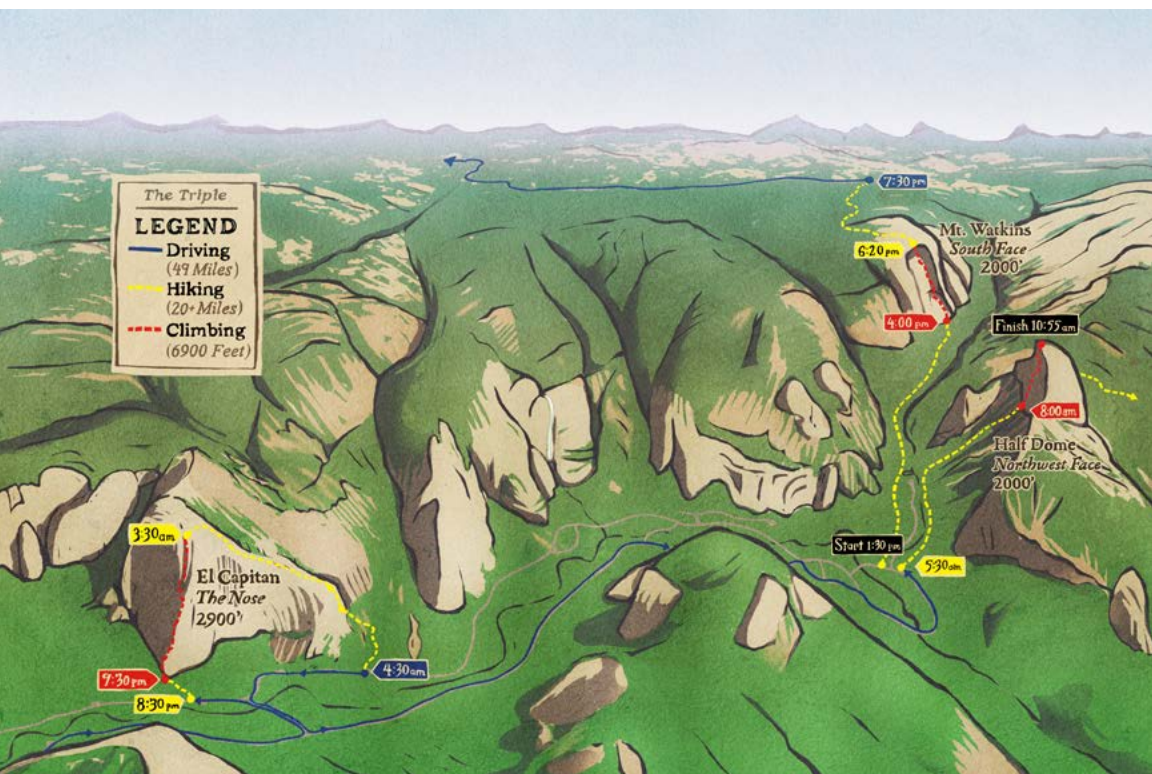
I'd thought about both goals since 2010, when I first soloed El Cap and Half Dome in a day. In 2012 all the pieces finally came together: Tommy Caldwell was super-motivated to do the free Triple; it had been a dry winter so the routes weren't seeping; and Hans Florine was psyched to try the Nose speed record. I had partners to practice every part of the linkup.

On May 19, Tommy and I free-climbed the south face of Mt. Watkins, Free Rider on El Capitan, and the

Regular Northwest Face on Half Dome in 21 hours 15 minutes, from the base of Watkins to Half Dome's summit. Two and a half weeks later, starting on June 5, I soloed the three walls in about 19 hours. Freeing the Triple gave me a good idea of how tired I would feel 20 hours into the day, and what I would feel comfortable soloing. Overall, freeing it was physically harder, since we had to climb 5.12 pitches after already doing two walls. But soloing it felt a lot more intense, probably because I was just a little on edge the whole time.

**[Previous spread]** "It had dumped rain the day before, so the first half of Watkins and the Nose were running with water in places. It's 5.10 crack climbing, so not a huge deal, but it made things a little slower and scarier. Up higher on Watkins the silverfish were out of control, just swarming all over everything. They don't bite, but they were getting all over me and made it harder to concentrate."





**[Previous page]** "When I got to the base of the Nose, I realized I'd forgotten my chalk bag. Thankfully, an aid climber sleeping on Dolt Tower hooked me up. I still remember the sublime feeling of dipping my hand into a completely full chalk bag—after soloing 800 feet of wet cracks in the dark it was blissful to have chalk again. At the Great Roof, I met up with Sean Leary, who was filming. We wound up talking about speed climbing on the Nose (he was then the record holder), chit-chatting about strategies and stuff. It's really nice to have company when soloing through the night. It can be really lonely."

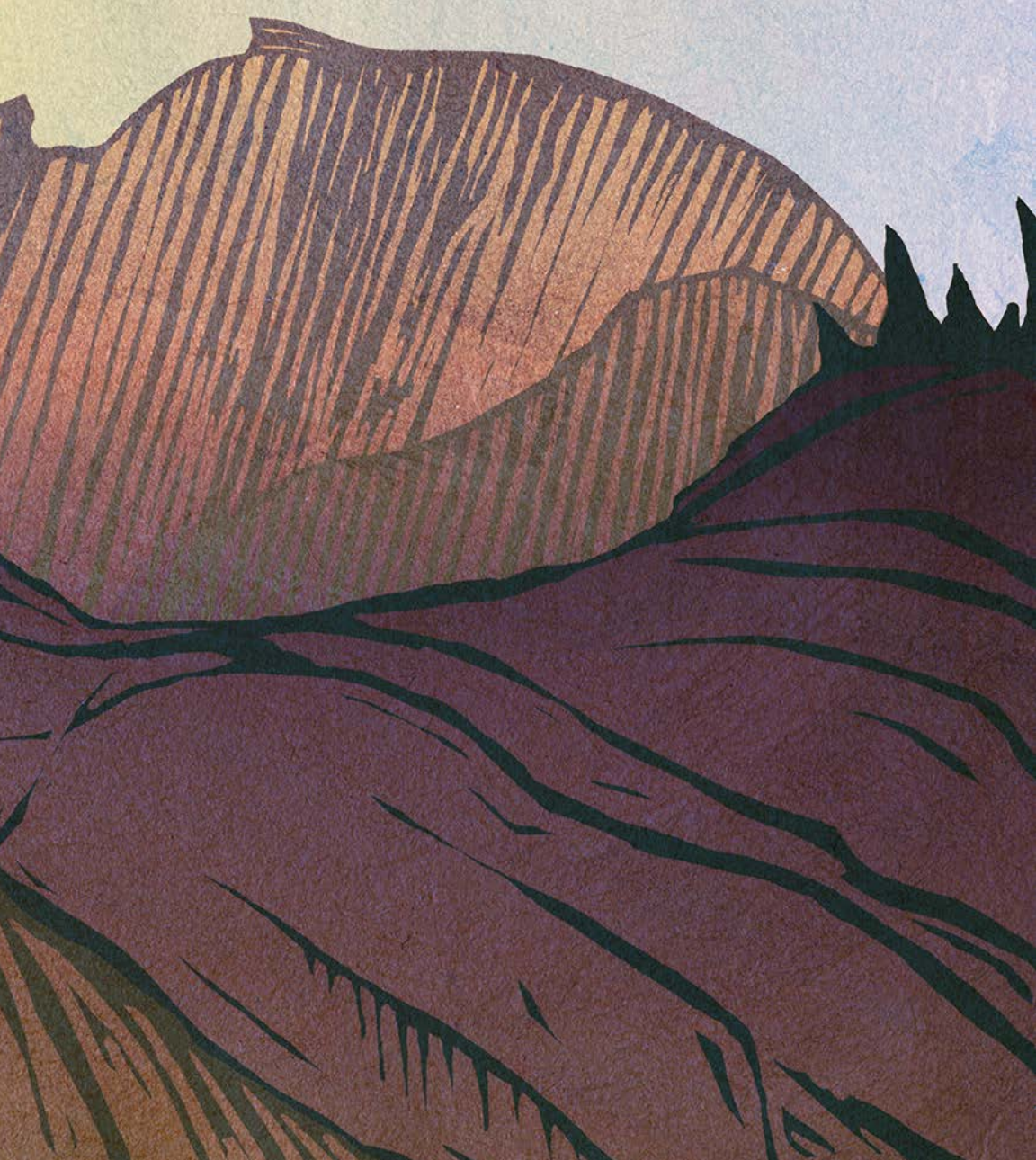
**[This page, map]** *Watkins, South Face* (19 guidebook pitches). *Time*: 2 hours 20 minutes (new speed record). *El Capitan, The Nose* (31 pitches). *Time*: 6 hours (solo speed record is 5:49, Honnold, 2010). *Half Dome, Regular Northwest Face* (23 pitches). *Time*: 2 hours 55 minutes (solo speed record is 1:22, Honnold, earlier in 2012).

**[Gear Notes]** "*Watkins*: I used a rope for a pendulum on the first pitch, then threw it down and daisy soloed to the top. I carried two quickdraws, about 10 small cams up to 0.5 Camalot. *El Capitan*: daisies, two draws, roughly a double rack from green C3 to 0.5 C4, and single green and red Camalots. I borrowed a 60m cord, about 7mm, for pendulums and short belays. *Half Dome*: two draws, single set of cams up to about 0.4 Camalot. I have Half Dome pretty wired."



**[This page]** "After descending from El Cap, Sean Leary and I got a ride over to North Pines campground to wake up my girlfriend and get some food. She gave us a ride to the Mirror Lake trailhead for the Death Slabs approach to Half Dome. Maybe I should have eaten more, because I started to bonk on the approach. It's a pretty brutal hike to do after a big evening of climbing. I sat at the base of Half Dome for quite a while, trying to get motivated. There were two other climbers waiting to get on the route, and we chatted a bit, and eventually I set out. I felt super slow and tired, though it only took 2:50 or so to climb the route, so I guess it wasn't that bad."





#### ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

*Andreas Schmidt, 45, began climbing in the Cascades and now works for Black Diamond in Salt Lake City. These illustrations, he says, are “most influenced by mid-century European travel posters and German expressionist woodcuts.”*

#### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

*Born in 1985, Alex Honnold has racked up an unparalleled record of free-solo and speed ascents in Yosemite and Zion national parks. He lives in his van.*