CHAPTER TEN

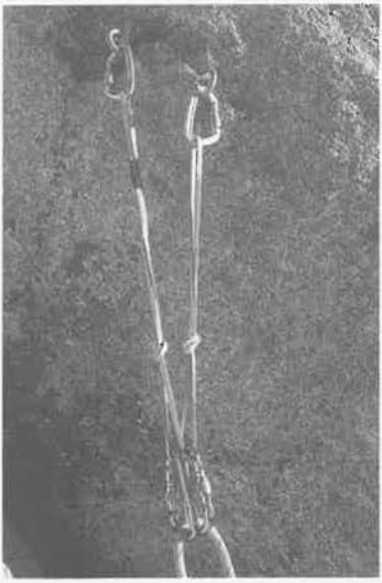
Other Anchors

TOPROPE ANCHORS

Toprope anchors must hold a load that is generally downward, though some sideways pull may also occur. Forces on a toprope anchor never approach those possible on a belay anchor, but can reach 500 pounds or more due to the addition of weight from the belayer and dynamic loading in the system. When setting toprope anchors, keep in mind the following considerations:

- Evaluate any hazards at the site, especially loose rocks that the movement of a running rope could dislodge.
- Extend the anchors over the edge at the top of the cliff to prevent rope drag and damage. Professional guides prefer to rig this extension with a length of static rope. Pad any sharp edges at the lip. Make sure the rope sits directly above the climb, and make sure to run two independent strands of rope or webbing over the lip to maintain redundancy.
- Set the chocks and SLCDs fairly close together near the top of the climb when possible to reduce the number of slings and carabiners required.
- Avoid setting pieces behind detached blocks, flakes or other questionable rock features. Also, avoid having the rope near these features.
- Connect the rope to the anchors with two opposed carabiners, at least one of which is locking. If a spare locking carabiner isn't available, be sure the gates are opposed, and add a third carabiner. Climbing schools and outdoor programs routinely use three ovals opposed and reversed as their standard operating procedure, as do a growing number of recreational climbers. I have done my share of toproping, and whenever a locking carabiner is unavailable, I always triple the carabiners.

"Good enough" toprope anchor. The bolts are 5-piece Rawls installed with FIXE ring anchors. The high-tensile cord (4,000 pounds *single-loop strength* with triple fisherman's knot) is doubled then tied with a figure eight, leaving a four-loop power point. The rope is attached with three oval carabiners opposed and reversed. Clean, simple and strong. As discussed, any off-axis loading will put most or all of the force on one bolt, but in this situation it's extremely unlikely the anchor will fail.



A two-bolt equalette rigged with webbing for an absolutely bomber toprope setup. Note how the gates are opposed and reversed on the carabiners. Owing to the sliding power point, this equalette can remain almost perfectly equalized between the two bolts, even if the direction of pull should change.

Two-bolt "quad" rig for toprope setup. Lab testing suggests that for two horizontally oriented anchor points (as shown here), the quad setup is basically indestructible. Field testing suggests that for those who frequently belay from, or toprope off, two horizontally oriented bolts (as found on top of countless sport and toprope climbs), a quad rig is your best friend. Simply keep it rigged (with the limiter knots tied) on a piece of 7mm nylon, or 5mm high-tensile cord, and break it out for use in these situations. Brute strength and fantastic equalization are achieved just as quickly as you can clip off the bolts and the power point.

Simple two-bolt toprope anchor featuring a cordelette with two-loop power point. Rope is attached with two oval carabiners, opposed and reversed. The problem here is the way in which the carabiners rest right on an edge. This can cause the gates to open and create a dangerous situation. Always extend your toprope anchor over the lip of any such edges.

This toprope anchor consists of a 7mm nylon cordelette attached to two bolts with locking carabiners, pre-equalized with a figure eight on a bight and an overhand. The rope is attached with three ovals, opposed and reversed. The rope runs cleanly on this rig due to the fact that the power point has been extended beyond the lip. An extra figure eight knot has been added to shorten the rig and situate the power point exactly where desired.

- Belay toprope climbs from the ground whenever possible. It's more fun and easier to watch the climber, and far easier to micro-feather the belay if you can anticipate falls. (And falls should be expected. That's the very reason you rig a toprope in the first place.)
- Avoid belaying directly below the climber, in case rocks come off. Remember, though, that the force increases as you move away from the wall, or if the climber is built like Mike Tyson and you're a slender little chap.
- A ground anchor merely needs to provide extra ballast to help you counterweight the climber, so one bombproof piece is usually sufficient. Know, however, that the most common accident at Joshua Tree (one of America's most popular climbing areas) is a belayer accident, where the belayer is outweighed by the toproped climber, who falls and drags the belayer roughshod over uneven terrain.
- If you're in an exposed situation where getting yanked from your ground belay would be disastrous or even fatal, set up a redundant anchor system. Remember that an anchored belayer is a sitting duck for loose rocks, so don't lash yourself down in a shooting gallery.

Don't Be Nonchalant

Toprope anchors do pop on occasion. Several factors contribute. There's a nonchalant air about most toproping, since, in theory, it's a relatively harmless vocation. This nonchalance can spill over to the anchor setup. People can be impatient to get climbing and get lazy with the one thing that truly matters: the anchor. The most common danger is to trust old slings on a long-standing toprope anchor—clipping into the slings, rather than rigging a safe setup off the anchors themselves. Not good. When a toprope anchor fails, it's a very ugly affair. Generally there's a crowd at the bottom, eagerly waiting their turn. All eyes are on the present climber. He pops and splashes into the deck at your very feet. That can sour the sunniest day at the most enchanted crag. Take the extra time and rig it right.

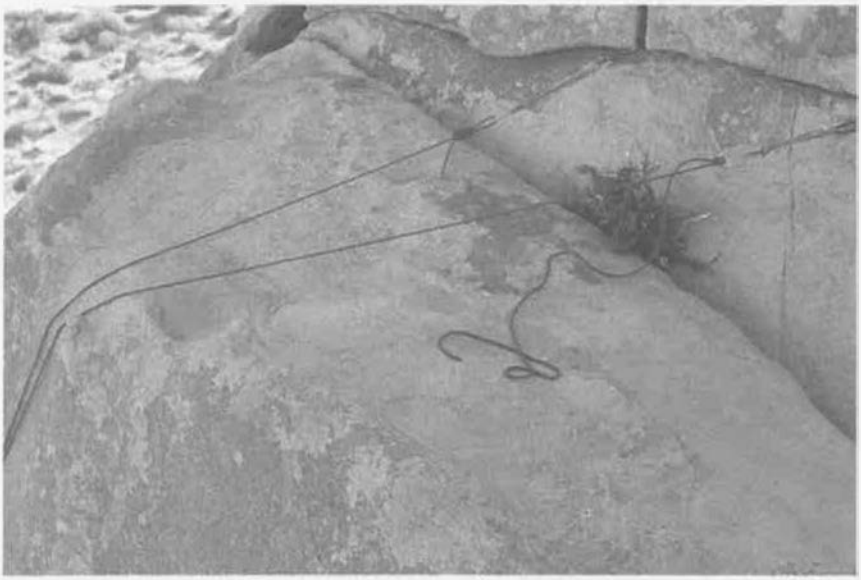
The Ten-Point System

An increasing number of beginners are taught to create good-enough anchors through a standardized, criteria-based method called the Ten-Point System. Because beginners often toprope climbs, we present this system here. In basic form, it works like this: Hand-placed primary placements (nuts, cams, etc.) are assigned a score from one to four. A poor nut, for instance, receives a one; a decent cam that can hold much of its maximal load will be given a three; a no-doubt-about-it taper or hex in an ideal bottleneck placement likely gets the maximum four. The only primary placements that can earn five points are new bolts and natural anchors such as bombproof trees and blocks. After the anchors are set, SRENE is applied per the rigging, then you add up the score for the primary placements. If you attain a score of ten or more, your anchor is deemed good enough and no additional pieces are needed.

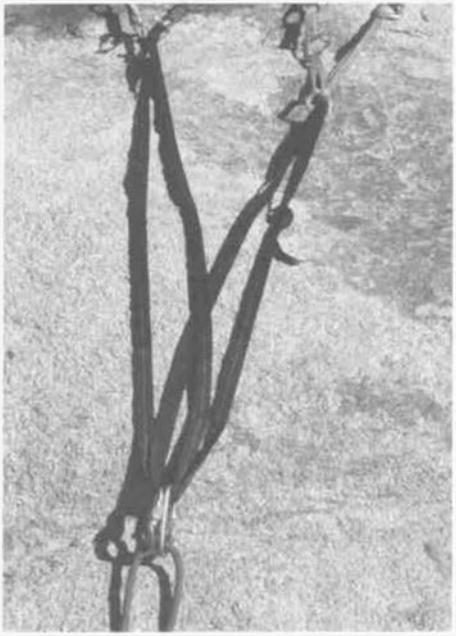
Of course, no criteria can perfectly guide a climber's judgment in awarding a score to a given placement, and one climber's "good enough" might rate only an eight or nine on another climber's scale. Nevertheless, the Ten-Point System has proven a very useful tool in teaching beginning climbers a sense of what is good enough, while casting doubt on most all two-piece anchors save those featuring bolts or burly natural features.

Here's a streamlined version of anchors that stand up to the Ten-Point System criteria:

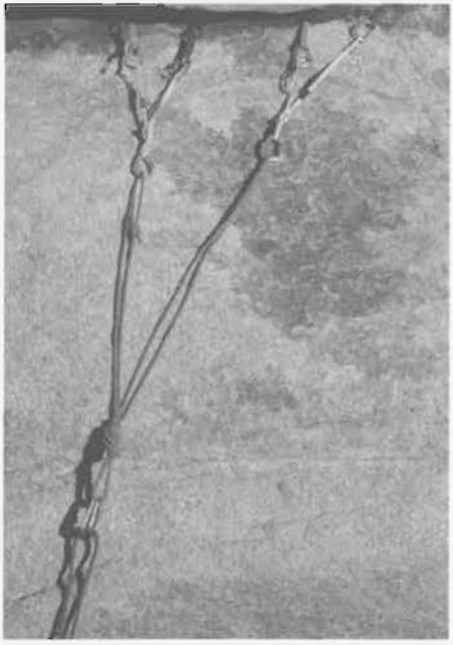
- One tree;
- Two modern bolts; or
- Three solid pieces, *plus* one solid piece for an upward pull if you are building a belay anchor and any of the primary placements are not omnidirectional. (Solid means the piece alone would likely hold a worst-case scenario fall. If not, equalize it with an additional piece or pieces until the grouping meets the criteria.)



Clean and straightforward use of a static rope to extend a TR anchor over the edge. Both ends of the "V" have two camming devices statically equalized with cordelettes, tied with a figure eight on a bight on the left side and a clove hitch on the right side (for easy adjustability for the final equalization).



The primary placements are solid, secure and well equalized. but why not tie a limiter knot near the power point to limit extension? If you can determine the exact direction of pull/loading—and normally you can on any toprope setup—there is little to gain by using the sliding X. And in this case there's no redundancy at the webbing. All this anchor needs is a limiter knot at the power point and then you'd have it: Solid, Redundant, Equalized, and No Extension.



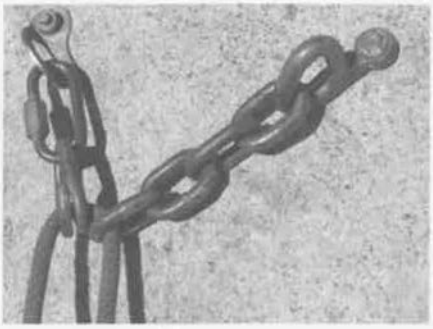
Same TR anchor as in the previous photo, but here the anchors are tied off with pre-equalized slings and joined with a cordelette. Providing the direction of pull is straight down, and it is on this toprope route, such a setup is superior to the set up in the previous photo, with its sliding X. The point is, you need not worry as much about building a multidirectional anchor when the direction of possible loading is only in one direction.

RAPPEL ANCHORS

Perhaps the most gruesome of all climbing stories is the case of the climber, high on a big wall, rappelling back down to a hanging bivouac after fixing a pitch. He raps off the end of the rope and windmills down into the void. Though this has happened, it is extremely rare. Far more frequent (though still very rare) is the case of the rappel anchor failing.

Rappelling is probably the most dangerous procedure in all of climbing, even though no actual climbing is involved. For this reason extreme caution should always be paid to every rappel, particularly toward the anchor.

Rappelling forces you to rely completely on your equipment and anchors. Walking is usually the safest mode of descent, but rappelling may be necessary, or more convenient. Don't take any chances with your rappel anchors—they must also conform to the SRENE concept. Check the integrity of existing anchors. Sometimes rats or other varmints will chew on fixed webbing, so check the entire length of any existing slings in the system. Also, aluminum rappel rings can be worn through, especially in soft sandstone areas (sand gets in ropes and abrades the aluminum ring). Always inspect the rings, and back them up when possible. The rings can be backed up with a second ring, or just a loop of webbing that the rope



Two ⅜-inch bolts. The left bolt has a stainless steel hanger, then a steel quick link to a steel lap link through which the rope is threaded. The right bolt has a welded cold shut with chain. The tackle on this anchor is a witless medley of various hardware store fixtures, none of which are designed for climbing anchors. The equalization looks good, and the rope is threaded through two different points for redundancy. Most climbers are leery to trust *two* hardware store fixtures and would never trust just one (like a single lap link) as the quality of the metallurgy is poor. When you come across one of these rap anchors featuring a mishmash of rusting chains and queer doodads, an easy way to give yourself an extra margin of safety is simply to tie a loop of nylon webbing through both bolt hangers as a backup.

While the two lengths of rusty chain would offer redundancy, it is lost where it all comes down to that one, measly lap link of unknown origin and vintage. Why trust your life to an aging hardware store relic some skinflint bought for 79 cents? This chain rig was easily backed up by threading a length of 1-inch webbing through both bolt hangers and tying it with a water knot. Though serious, these hardware store horror shows are rarely fatal owing to the modest loads generated by rappelling. As belay anchors, such setups are truly widow makers.

Rap rings. Left to right: FIXE stainless steel (12,500 pounds), SMC aluminum (3,400 pounds), Ushba titanium (6,750 pounds).

RAPPEL ANCHORS

Statistically, rappelling is one of the most dangerous procedures in all of climbing.

Rappelling forces you to rely completely on your equipment and anchors/rigging.

Simple and avoidable rigging failures, not displaced nuts, cams, etc., are statistically the highest cause of rappelling accidents.

Never trust, and always thoroughly check, the integrity of fixed rappel anchors (especially the rigging), and back them up if necessary.

Excepting huge trees and titanic natural features, at least two bombproof anchors should be established at rappel stations.

Avoid the American triangle rigging system. Anchors should be rigged using equalized slings, or at least slings of equal length.

Never run the rope around a chain connecting the anchors.

Double-check all connecting links (anchor placements/slings, slings/rope, rope/rappel device, rappel device/harness) before you start down.

Always rappel slowly and smoothly to keep a low, static load on the anchor.

passes through but doesn't load. Don't toprope off aluminum rappel rings, either—use a locking carabiner instead. Avoid the sloppy habit of trusting whatever fixed gear exists. Back up existing anchors if you have any question. Don't save a dollar and be a mother's lament.

At least two bombproof anchors should be established at rappel stations. Occasionally rappel anchors consist of a single tree or set of slings on a rock feature, but climbers should back up anchors whenever possible. Anchors should be rigged using equalized slings, or at least slings of equal length.

A triangular sling configuration, also called the American triangle, is sometimes seen when two fixed anchors are side by side—two bolts on a smooth wall, two pitons driven into a horizontal crack, etc. There probably is not a cliff in America that doesn't sport this configuration, most likely as a popular, fixed rappel point. Unless the anchors are turbo-bomber and the slings are brand new, tie the anchors off individually and rappel or belay from two or more slings, or equalize the force on them with the sliding X.

Never run the rope around a chain or sling connecting the anchors. If one of the anchors fails, the rope simply pulls through and you're finished. Never lower from anchors with the rope running through a nylon sling, or the rope may burn

The American "death" triangle is something of a myth when it comes to rappel anchors. The fear is that this setup multiplies the loading force by pulling the bolts together. Under body weight the angle of the sling, at both bolts, is about 90 degrees. This is poor engineering by any definition. But given that rap anchors basically sustain body-weight loads, the American triangle, though always a wretched rigging strategy, is by and large only deadly when rigged to abysmal primary anchors.

Now we're talking—much better than the American triangle. Here we have two slings, fed independently through each bolt, and two rap rings. With this narrow of an angle the load is distributed nearly 50/50 on the bolts.

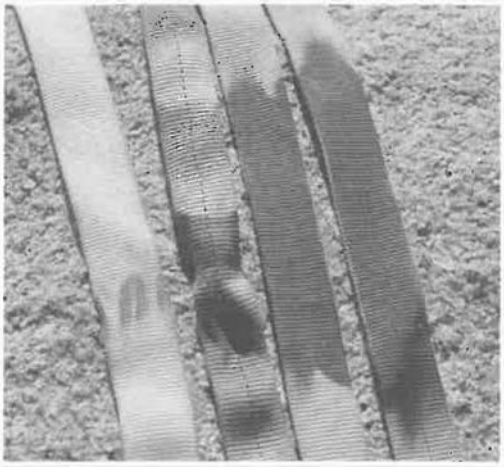
Two 5-piece Rawl bolts installed with FIXE ring hangers. Such ring anchors are becoming more commonplace owing to brute strength, simple setup and fluid rope removal. Visually unobtrusive, the welded stainless rings are stronger than the hangers. Over time, however, the rings often show signs of wear—from people toproping and lowering directly off the rings, as well as from countless rappel ropes being pulled through the rings. Always inspect the rings for wear.

This two-bolt rap anchor is well engineered. All the components are stainless steel. Both bolts are 5-piece Rawls. The left one has a stainless steel FIXE hanger with stainless chain attached to a final quick link; the right bolt has a Petzl hanger with a quick link/welded stainless ring combo. The positioning of the bolts combined with the hardware rigging makes for a narrow angle of pull between the two bolts. Good to go.

This setup is ideal save that the slings are too short and don't achieve enough coverage behind the top of the flake. If the rappeller should bounce or swing about during descent, the slings might shift on the anchor and slip off the left-hand, rounded edge of the flake.

That's what we're talking about. Two longer slings of 1-inch tubular nylon webbing tied with water knots, rigged with two rap rings. If you don't know the water knot, learn it (see the knots chapter). Many accidents have occurred with webbing rigged at anchors when some funky knot (something other than the water knot or double fisherman's) came untied. One knot that has failed in several instances (with fatal consequences) is the flat overhand, probably loosely tied and with no tail.

This sturdy granite rock horn looks bomber: well attached, thick and solid rock. However the tangle of old slings is stiff and degraded, the color faded from years in the sun. Worse is the fact that the sling is festooned with a single, hardware store quick link, providing no redundancy. If you find yourself on trad routes that may necessitate rappels from natural features such as trees and rock features, prepare yourself with a small knife, some spare nylon webbing and rap rings to re-rig old tat like this.



Old webbing, faded except where knot was tied. The sling on the left has the burn/melt mark from rope being pulled over it. Slings degraded by UV light will be faded and stiff. Worse yet is any sling with a slight rip or tear on its edge. Always replace such slings with newer material if you want to climb another day.

through the sling and deposit you on the deck fast as you can scream "Shiiiiit!" Rappelling with the rope running through slings is okay because the rope doesn't slide across the nylon slings when loaded, only when you pull to retrieve the ropes. Here a standard strategy is to clip a backup anchor into the main anchor so that when the main is weighted, the backup still has a few inches of slack in the sling. The biggest climber goes first, humping all the gear and testing the main anchor. If

it holds, the second climber, who is lighter and gear free, removes the backup and raps off.

Smooth rappelling basically places a low, static load on the anchor. But when you start Ramboing down the cliffside in huge arcs, and especially when you slam on the brakes between bounds, the forces on the anchor can skyrocket. If the anchor is less than 10 ton strong, or even if it is, keep the forces low by trying to descend fluidly and light as a feather.

BIVOUAC ANCHORS

If you are bivouacked on a ledge, the main anchor is your principal security, though you often will slot a couple of regional nuts if you're sleeping at a distance from the anchor, or at a place where you can't easily tie-off taut to the main anchor (for instance, when the anchor is too far off to the side). Unless you're literally hanging over the edge, allow yourself enough slack so you can turn over in your bag, but not so much that you can roll off the ledge. Other considerations have to be worked out provisionally. It's mainly common sense.

Hanging bivouacs can get complicated, depending on the location and the number of climbers and bags you have along. Since portaledges came into vogue around 1980, the process has been greatly simplified. These are single-point suspension units, and most of the time climbers simply tier them one above the other. If you're all on a steep, sheer wall, it's simple—you just clip off to the haul line that is tied to the anchor. But if you're in a dihedral, or if the rock is peppered with roofs or other features, you might have to spread out horizontally. In these situations, most climbers will climb off to the side and place a provisional anchor or a rivet to actually sleep from, with the main anchor providing the real security. Whatever you're sleeping from, make sure it's bomber. If your bivy anchor fails, you're in for a horrifying plunge, and at least an hour of grievous cocking around to get things right.

One of the most jackass fads to ever sweep Yosemite Valley passed through in the early seventies. I don't know what blockhead conceived it, but for a while, at the time when wall climbing was the rage, it was the vogue to see just how meager an anchor you could hang from for the night. You were backed up by an absolutely bombproof anchor, of course, but what you actually were hanging from was as dicey as you were foolish.

Let me relate a few anecdotes to show how asinine this game was: There was talk once that the great Canadian wall climber Hugh Burton had slept hanging from a Leeper hook. It was twenty years later that he told me he hadn't slept, so scared was he to even wink, lest the hook pop and his reputation be ruined. For my own part, I can remember being halfway up a new line in the Sierras and slinging my

Scott Cosgrove hanging out on his portaledge, Higher Cathedral Spire, Yosemite, California. PHOTO BY BOB GAINES.

hammock from a number 1 Stopper. I was with Richard Harrison, who sleeps like Methuselah's father—deep and sound; but I've always slept like I was on deck for the gas chamber, more so when hanging from a harp string and squashed into a hammock designed for people skinny enough to shower inside a flagpole. Who could ever really saw some quality logs in those blasted hammocks, anyhow? Not me. And when later that sleepless night Richard farted, or a carabiner shifted, or something caused some such noise, I can promise you Lazarus didn't vault out of his sarcophagus any faster than I got the hell out of that hammock and onto the main anchor. That fad was a short-lived one.

BIG WALL ANCHORS

One of the difficulties in studying big wall anchors is in photographing them. Or trying to. On a genuine big wall, so much equipment (the bulk of which has little to do with the anchor) is on hand and the climbers are so close to the wall that getting a clear shot of the anchor is nearly impossible. We can replicate systems near the

Climbers on *Space Shot*, Zion National Park, Utah, one of the great big-wall destination climbing areas. PHOTO BY BOB GAINES.

ground, but they are not true representations of what you'll likely find on a wall.

The business of anchoring on big walls is a special study taken up in detail in *Big Walls!*, also in the How to Climb series. But understand this much: Big walls mean big loads, which means equalization is all the more important; and big wall anchors are complicated, requiring more time to rig, evaluate and to make sure things are as they should be.

REVIEW

No matter the particular anchor construct—bivouac, belay, toprope, rappel—the bottom line is that unless you make a habit of climbing on junk rock, or have a penchant for trashy routes, the majority of your anchors will be straightforward to rig and clean. In real world climbing it is rare that an experienced leader will yell down "Off belay" and not yell "On belay" within a few short minutes, the belay anchor rigged and inviolate. Keep it simple. Nine times out of ten, simplicity equals safety.

Experience will teach you much about building belay anchors. Always watch for innovative and slick setups other climbers may rig. You are never too old to learn a new trick, especially if it provides an easier, more straightforward method of dealing with an otherwise complicated setup. But no matter how simple the setup, always double-check your partner's work, watching for poor or sloppy anchors. Don't be afraid to insist on better anchors and more secure rigging if things look slipshod. Many climbers set sketchy anchors, and it's up to the rest of us to set them straight before the Four Horsemen gallop into view.

In closing let me reiterate that the anchor is the single most important part of the roped safety system, and that part of that anchor is the first placement off the belay, the Jesus Nut. But should the Jesus Nut fail, the anchor itself is your last line of defense. Remember the Golden Rule: The anchor must be able to sustain the greatest load conceivable in a given instance, or it is not good enough.

CONCLUSION

From choosing the individual placements, to rigging these into a power point, to securing the Jesus Nut directly off the belay, anchor-building choices are so varied they can stagger the novice and stall the veteran. With so many options, how can we be sure we're building good-enough anchors, or something less? We square off with that question on every belay, and one thing remains certain: without solid anchors, technical climbing is a swift way to die. The fact that total anchor failure happens so rarely—despite millions of climbers scaling millions of pitches a year—reassures us either that building secure anchors is routinely accomplished, or factor 2 falls onto the belay are extremely uncommon. And in those rare cases of catastrophic anchor failure, analyses suggest that the majority were avoidable.

WHEN OVERBUILDING IS NECESSARY

Several years ago, on the *Direct North Buttress* of Middle Cathedral (one of America's most fabled long free climbs), two strong climbers fell to their deaths, probably from the upper chimneys over 1,000 feet up the wall. Analyses of the rigging suggests a four-piece gear anchor ripped out, most likely from a factor 2 fall directly onto the belay. This alerts us there's a crucial call for anchors that would normally be considered "excessive" in cases where reliable Jesus Nuts are hard to find and where you could realistically take factor 2 falls onto the belay. Having made the fourth free ascent of the *Direct North Buttress*, and several forays onto the route later on, I recall many places where a leader is fortunate to arrange *any* protection 15 feet, or even 20 feet, off the belay. And up high, the belays themselves involve scratching around the back of grainy flares, looking for anything remotely sound. I mention this because such scenarios are not uncommon on the upper rungs of adventure climbing. Granted, by the time you get there you'll have considerable experience in building anchors. But as the tragedy on the *DNB* points out, the worst can befall the best of us. It cannot be overstated: Build every anchor for a worst-case scenario because some day you might experience one.

While initially puzzling and complex, mastering anchor-building fundamentals, and the ability to fashion variations on the themes, naturally comes with time and practice. Most experienced climbers can quickly tell if a given nut, cam or anchor is good or otherwise, just as a mason can tell at a glance if the bricks have been properly placed and mortared. Staying current with the literature, and taking an anchor seminar, can radically increase your learning curve and protection-placing/anchor-building competence. Every instructor will have favored ways of doing things, but the basic, field-tested principles will be the very ones we have covered in this book.

Can you always quickly and simply build an anchor? No. But you can and should strive toward simplicity and efficiency, avoiding needless slings, biners and garish setups. In many instances, the cordelette—even with its stated limitations—along with the sliding X and now the equalette, have streamlined the business of rigging, especially where the placements are spread around. And so long as you understand that a sound Jesus Nut placed directly off the belay is crucial to keep peak forces off the belay anchor itself, you are far along indeed.

In closing, let's return to a topic mentioned in the introduction: In the context of technical rock climbing, what does secure really mean? Or more importantly, what should it mean?

For some, security is an idea blind to the real life demands placed on climbers attempting to scale multipitch adventure climbs. On adventure routes from Col-

FOR THE LAST TIME . . .

Conforming an anchor to the letter of every sound principle does not guarantee that the anchor will hold a single pound. The best rigging can do no more than exploit the potential holding strength of the primary placements. Hence the first rule in building all anchors is to get sound primary placements. With bomber primary placements, the rules of thumb and modern rigging methods stack the odds in our favor that the anchor will do its job and do it well.

orado to Chamonix, time and equipment are variables that must be managed for a climbing team to consistently achieve success. On big routes, simplicity and efficiency—the Twin Pillars of this text—must extend beyond setting pro and building anchors, to the team's modus operandi. In alpine settings, where days are short and storms frequent, "speed equals safety" is a common refrain. When, in the name of safety, a climbing team wastes time and limited resources, at some place, on some route, the team will either have to bail or rush the process up high to compensate for time squandered below. And sometimes, the loss in time was due to building anchors that exceeded actual need.

The standard rationalization for over-building belay anchors is that an anchor is never too strong. An extreme view on this would consider ten bolts better than three. Here, appreciation for real world requirements gets clouded over by phobic engineering masquerading as safety. This view also fails to recognize that the top piece of protection always sustains the highest loading, and that the most critical job is to rig things so the topmost pro, and never the anchor itself, catches any and every fall.

As for belay anchors, there is good enough, then there is beyond good enough, the domain of the ideal, the perfect, the purely theoretical. Canadian climber Jeb Stillman recently put the subject into practical context: "Most of us try to construct anchors that somewhat exceed the standard of just barely good enough. Not by tons and miles, but by some acceptable margin that provides adequate peace of mind. Beyond building an anchor that will hold, most experienced climbers consider a couple possible what-ifs, then decide if it's worth the trouble of addressing them versus their actual likelihood and consequences. Every anchor I have built has been good enough. I'll admit that the margin has been tighter on a few, but clearly, every single one exceeded the threshold of good enough. Those of us who can't determine 'good enough' will naturally go overboard adding features that would, in theory, make the anchor better. But at some point, is it really? I mean, if the question is whether your anchor can hold one truck or three, one has to ask: Are you there to climb, or suspend trucks?"

That much said, efficiency is the last thing to come when learning to build anchors. In the early stages, the focus must remain on the absolute holding power and the security afforded by the rigging of your anchors, not on how fast you can build them or how much gear you can save in the process.

Before you truly know if your anchors are good enough or not, it's wise to build anchors strong enough to suspend two trucks, instead of one. Later if your ambition drives you up the rungs of adventure climbing, you will by that time have refined your technique to the point that you can settle for one truck anchor strength, which you can fashion simply and efficiently. And you will have to if you're ever to savor the spoils of adventure climbing.

At some time in your climbing career, be it one or twenty years into it, you'll seriously question why you are climbing at all. This is nothing less than squaring off with the Main Question of why are we alive, what are we doing, where are we going? The Main Question sneaks into the context of climbing because, well, because we're climbers. And every climber is on a voyage of discovery, no matter how unstated or unconscious the voyage might be. We can answer the Main Question with fancy opinions and second-hand beliefs. We might even throw the question back on itself, which is like telling God to ask somebody else. I reckon any meaningful response follows the requirements of building a solid anchor. In fact, your answer to the Main Question is your anchor in life, and in that sense your primary placements must be bombproof and the rigging simply and efficiently arranged. The noted chef Wolfgang Puck professed his own anchor matrix in a simple but telling motto: Live, Love, Eat. For many of us, it's Live, Love, and Climb. Perhaps the Main Question bubbles up when we temporarily misplace the first two placements in the matrix, or when we're belaying off only the third, instead of being equalized between all three. Everyone must answer the Main Question in their own way, but one thing remains the same for us all: To see this great voyage of discovery all the way through, we've got nothing if we don't have solid anchors.

We come to the cliffside to climb, and we build good-enough anchors and immediately slot that Jesus Nut, in order to safeguard our lives. Without a secure safety system, climbing is absurd. And without efficiency, climbing becomes a plodding, fear-based sham. Let us never forget that the safety system was devised to facilitate climbing. That's the name of the game.

Climb safely. Climb efficiently. Climb on.