Big Wall and Aid Climbing

How to Climb the Big Stone

VDiff Climbing


Sample
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How To Climb the Big Stone
E-Book Edition

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Photographs by the author unless otherwise stated.

Front Cover: The author and Callum Coldwell-Storry on Mescalito, Yosemite.
Photographer: Tom Evans

Frontispiece: Callum Coldwell-Storry on The South African Route, Torres del Paine, Patagonia.

Warning: Big Walls are Dangerous!

This book is intended for competent trad climbers who are proficient at skills such as:

- Placing trad gear
- Building trad anchors
- Abseiling
- Multi-pitch climbing
- Self-rescue

This book is designed to be supplemented with practical instruction from qualified professionals. Do not rely on it as your primary source of big wall climbing information. If you are unsure about any of the information given in this book, it is strongly recommended that you seek qualified instruction. Failure to do this may result in serious injury or death. The writers and employees of VDiff disclaim all responsibility and liability for any injuries or losses incurred by any person participating in the activities described in this book.

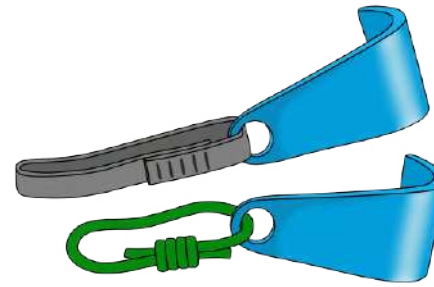
Terminology

To simplify and standardize the terminology in this book, the following terms will be referred to as:

In this book	Other names
Abseil	Rappel
GriGri	Assisted-braking belay device
Prusik	Friction hitch
ATC	Tube-style belay device
Munter Hitch	Italian Hitch
Girth Hitch	Lark's Foot
Daisy Chain	Lanyard

Slinging Cam Hooks

Cam hooks normally come with a sewn sling pre-attached. If yours doesn't, you can tie a loop of 6mm cord through it with a double fisherman's bend.



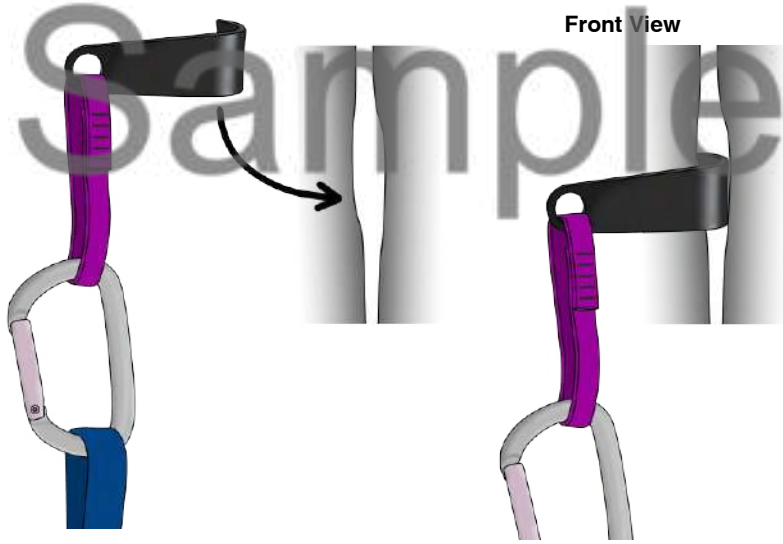
Cam Hooks — The Placement

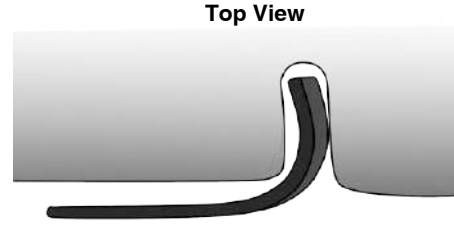
Step 1 — Clip

Clip the cam hook to your aider.

Step 2 — Place

Place it deep in the crack. A textbook placement is in a slot-like widening (e.g: a pin scar) of a parallel sided crack. A flared placement is less secure.





Step 3 — Weight

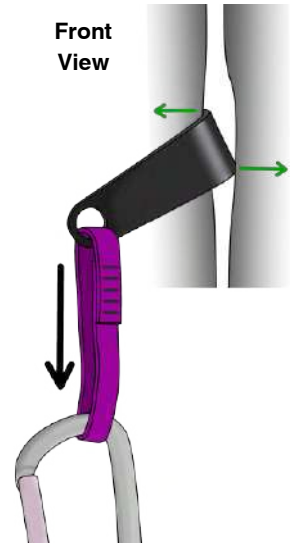
Carefully weight it. The leverage of a cam hook exerts a high force on the sides of the crack, which locks it in place.

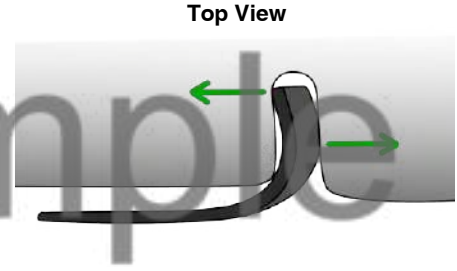
Step 4 — Test

Test the cam hook's stability by applying a *little extra* force than bodyweight in any conceivable direction of pull. Do not bounce test it — this will most likely break the rock or cause your cam hook to fold flat.

Step 5 — Move Up

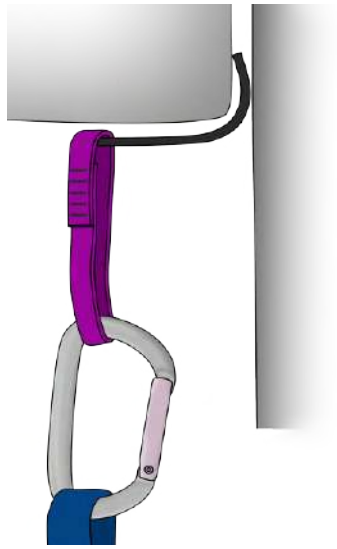
Once you're happy, commit to it and continue up slowly and gently. Be careful if bounce-testing the next piece — this will momentarily unweight the cam hook and may cause it to fall out.

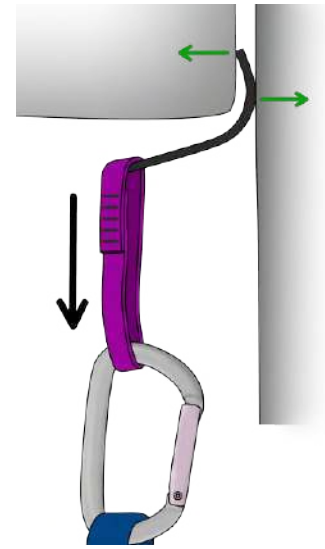


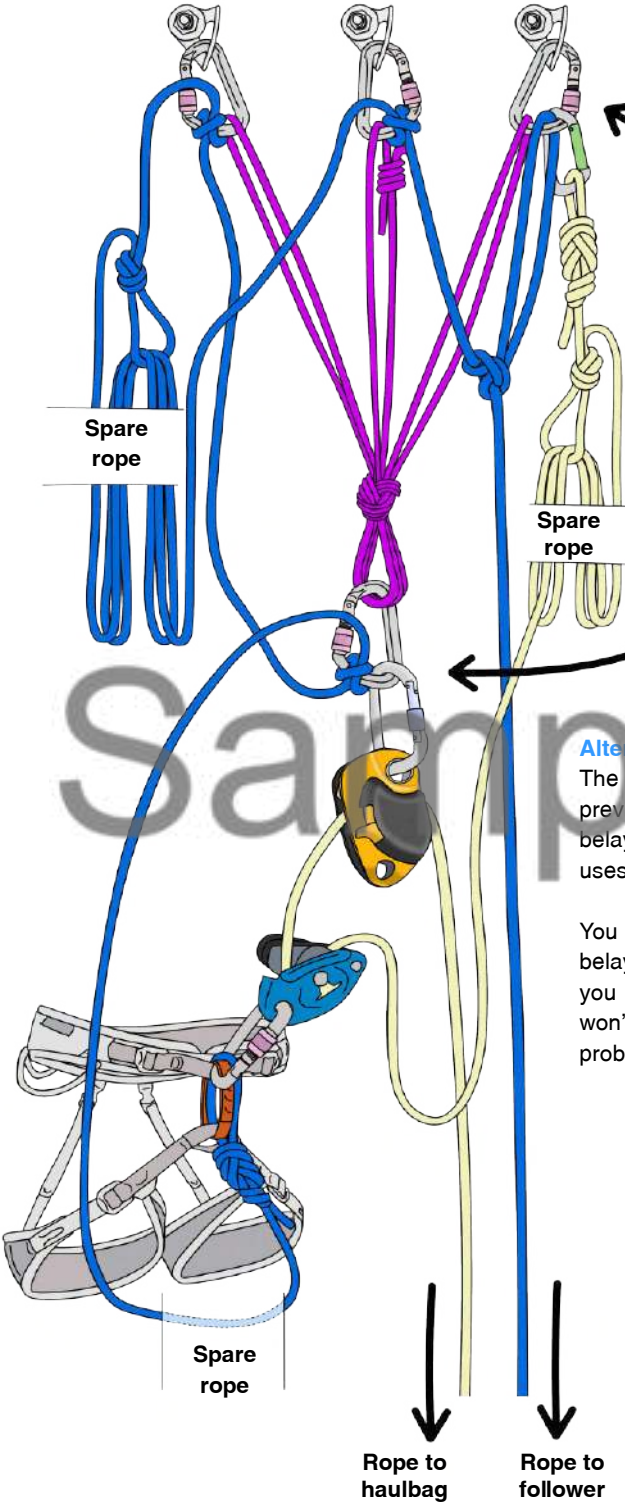


Cam Hooking Roof Cracks

Cam hooks can be placed in roof cracks as shown below. They will flex a lot in this position, so be gentle.







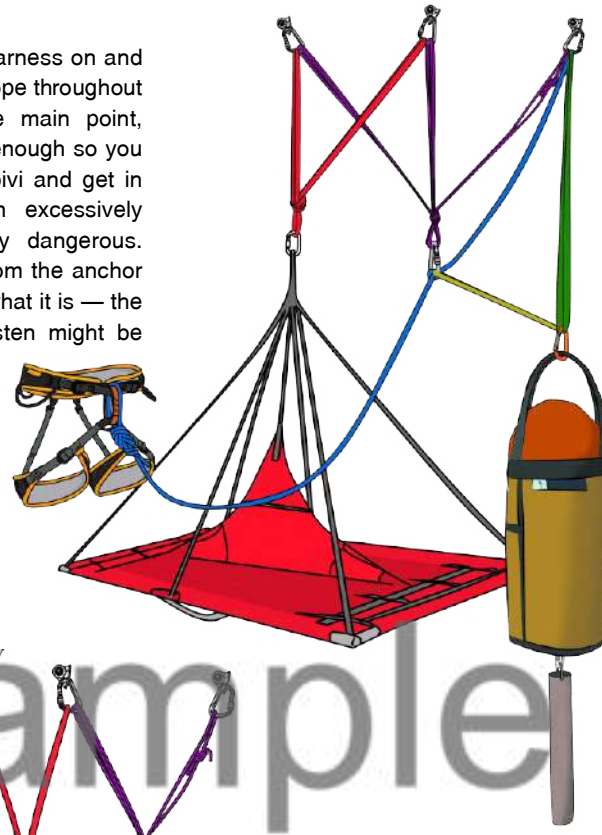
Alternative Setup

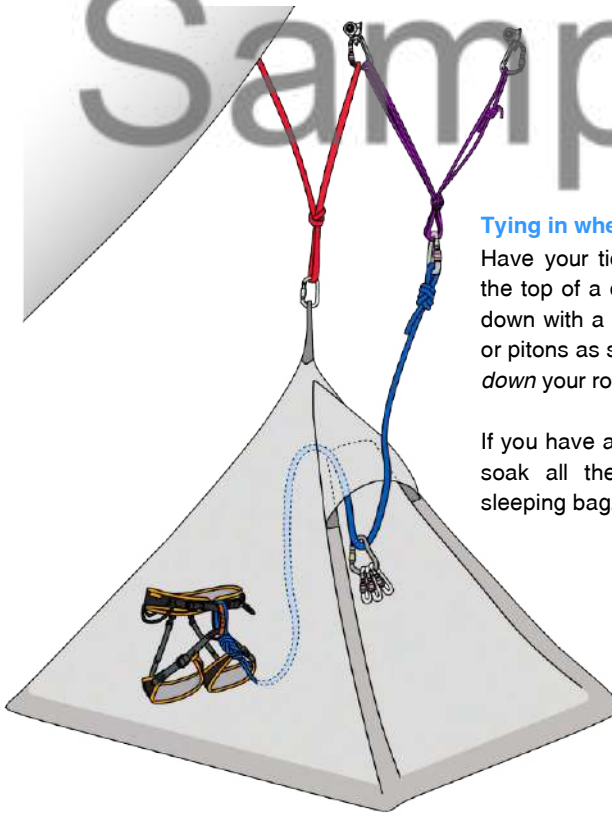
The setup described on the previous pages keeps the belay neatly organized but uses a lot of screwgates.

You could set up a simpler belay with less carabiners if you are confident that you won't encounter any problems doing so.

Tying In

You should keep your harness on and remain tied in with the rope throughout the night. Tie into the main point, making your rope long enough so you can move around the bivi and get in your sleeping bag. An excessively long tie-in is obviously dangerous. Never untie any knot from the anchor unless you are certain what it is — the random knot you unfasten might be your partner's tie-in!





Tying in when the portaledge fly is on

Have your tie-in rope entering through the top of a door. The rope is weighted down with a few bunches of carabiners or pitons as shown. Rain water will soak *down* your rope, but not *up* it.

If you have a taught tie-in rope, rain will soak all the way down it into your sleeping bag.

Piton Craft

The dart art of smashing pitons into rock with a hammer has been frowned upon by climbers since the 1970's when less destructive protection (cams and nuts) was developed. Advancements in modern aid climbing gear have completely removed the need for hammering on most easier routes.

Many old aid lines can now be aided (or free climbed) with clean gear by using the piton scars created from hundreds of early ascents. Even moderate aid routes (A2-A3) are often climbed clean or with only a few hammered placements.

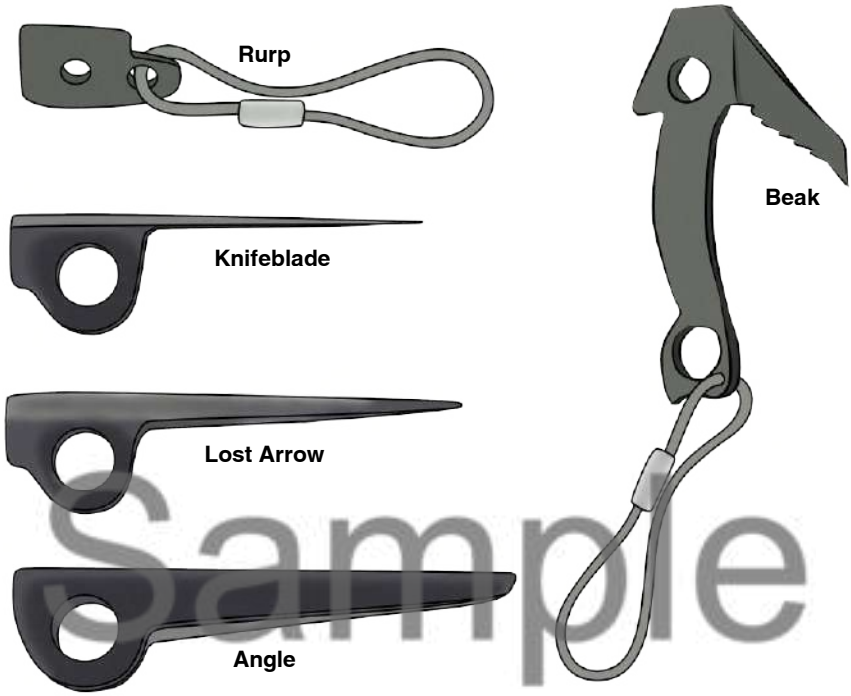
However, if your chosen route relies on fixed pitons or copperheads to go 'clean', you should be prepared to replace them if they are missing or useless. If you plan to climb harder aid or modern routes with few ascents, you'll need to know all the tricks of the trade.

Remember — there is a big difference between gently tapping a piton into a crack, and smashing it in so hard that the whole feature turns to dust or the piton is stuck there forever. Practise placing and removing them on a worthless non-climbable boulder before you weld them into an established aid route.

Types of Piton

Pitons are available in many shapes and sizes. Common types are:

You may find many other obscure shapes and sizes of piton. They all work in the same basic way.



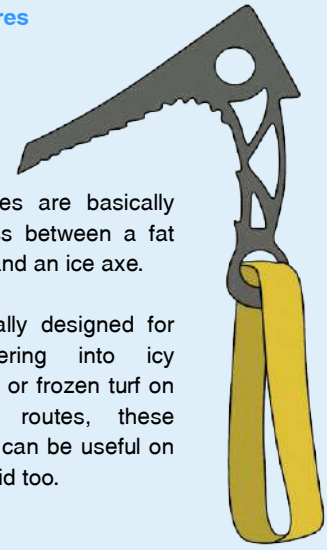
Material

Pitons are typically made of hardened steel, meaning they can stand up to the abuse of repeated placements.

Pitons are also available in softer steel and other malleable metals. These are designed to deform into cracks for a more secure placement, however they are harder to clean and don't last for as many placements as the harder steel versions.

File down any burrs on your pitons as these can damage your rope or slings.

Spectres



Spectres are basically a cross between a fat beak and an ice axe.

Originally designed for hammering into icy cracks or frozen turf on winter routes, these pitons can be useful on hard aid too.

Hammers

You will need a hammer to place and remove pitons. A good wall hammer has a: