

# Honnold makes historic solo climb of Yosemite's El Capitan

By Tom McCarthy, The Guardian, adapted by Newsela staff on 06.07.17

Word Count **743**

Level **960L**



Alex Honnold, 31, is the first to free-solo El Capitan in Yosemite Valley, California. He took a 2,900-foot-tall route that is ranked near the highest difficulty. Photo: Jimmy Chin/National Geographic

Alex Honnold has made a free-solo climb of El Capitan, completing the ropeless ascent of the legendary California cliff in just under four hours Saturday morning. He made the summit in time for breakfast.

Free-soloing is climbing without a harness or rope, leaving no room for error.

## **Climb Was A Life's Dream For Honnold**

The 31-year-old rock climber is the first to achieve the feat and was considered the only climber capable of attempting it. El Capitan is in Yosemite National Park.

After completing the climb, Honnold posted on Twitter, a social media site. He wrote, “So stoked to realize a life dream today.” The post included a photo of him ascending along a wide crack near the top of the route.

“This is the ‘moon landing’ of free-soloing,” fellow climber Tommy Caldwell told National Geographic. The media company filmed the ascent for a documentary and first carried the news on its website.

Caldwell won fame outside the climbing world for a 2015 ascent. He and Kevin Jorgeson climbed El Capitan’s Dawn Wall route. They set a new standard of difficulty on the Yosemite Valley cliff.

The route Honnold climbed Saturday is known as Freerider. It is 2,900 feet tall and near the top of the ratings system for difficulty.

At several points on the route, Honnold had to make off-balance moves on widely spaced holds the width of raisins. He had hundreds, and then thousands, of feet of air beneath him.

### **Honnold Spent A Year Preparing For The Climb**

Honnold’s preparation for the climb was the subject of rumor even as it was written off as impossibly daunting and risky. The Sacramento, Calif., native has repeatedly shocked the climbing world with ropeless ascents of forbidding routes. He had been quietly training for the route for more than a year.

Honnold backed off of an earlier attempt at a free-solo last November. Conditions were less than ideal, he thought. He most recently climbed the route with a rope, and Caldwell as a partner, late last month.

“Alex was on fire,” Caldwell told National Geographic of the ascent. “I’ve never seen him climbing so well.”

Honnold described his preparations. The climber expanded his “comfort zone” until he was ready to commit to the route, he said.

He told National Geographic he had "mentally mapped out what it would mean to free-solo Freerider" years ago. Honnold said there were several places and moves that he considered "scary."

“There were so many little sections where I thought ‘Ugh, cringe.’ But in the years since, I’ve pushed my comfort zone and made it bigger and bigger until these objectives that seemed totally crazy eventually fell within the realm of the possible.”

### **Climb Took Less Than Four Hours**

Honnold’s historic ascent began with the first hint of dawn at 5:32 a.m. Saturday. He reached the top three hours and 56 minutes later, at 9:28 a.m. Most roped ascents of El Capitan take hours, or days or longer.

The route was first scaled by a climber pulling only on stone, as opposed to pulling on gear put into the stone, in 1995. German climber Alex Huber completed the route. He wore a harness and was attached to ropes that would have caught him had he fallen. For much of its length, Freerider follows the Salathe Wall route. It was established in 1961 by the wall-climbing pioneer Royal Robbins, who died in March.

Honnold grew up in Sacramento. At age 11, he began climbing in the local training gym. He dropped out of the University of California at Berkeley at age 19, where he had been studying

engineering, to commit to his climbing career.

His previous adventures have been widely documented. One of his corporate sponsors, North Face, produced a 2014 film of his free-solo of the 2,500-foot El Sendero Luminoso in Mexico. A National Geographic film crew captured Honnold's revolutionary 2011 free-solo of the northwest face of Half Dome, in Yosemite. That climb had a hair-raising moment of truth near the top in which Honnold struggled to keep his cool. He is known for usually staying calm.

As his stature in the climbing world and beyond has grown over the last decade, Honnold has maintained a wandering lifestyle. He lives in a converted van and travels the world. His training for Freerider took him to Europe, Morocco and China, according to National Geographic. The climbers who trained with him were sworn to keep the project secret.

## Quiz

1 Read the sentence from the section "Climb Was A Life's Dream For Honnold."

*"This is the 'moon landing' of free-soloing," fellow climber Tommy Caldwell told National Geographic.*

WHY does Caldwell compare Honnold's climb to the moon landing?

- (A) to send a message to encourage other free-soloers
- (B) to make a joke about Honnold not using equipment
- (C) to compare the distance of the climb and the moon
- (D) to emphasize that it is a historic moment for climbers

2 Read the sentence from the section "Honnold Spent A Year Preparing For The Climb."

*Honnold's preparation for the climb was the subject of rumor even as it was written off as impossibly daunting and risky.*

The words "daunting" and "risky" in this sentence tell you that:

- (A) people were encouraging Honnold to attempt the climb
- (B) many people considered the climb too dangerous to try
- (C) other climbers had already been injured trying the climb
- (D) enough preparation would keep Honnold safe on the climb

3 Read the following statement.

*It took Honnold years of practice and study before he felt ready to attempt the free-solo of Freerider.*

Which paragraph in the section "Honnold Spent A Year Preparing For The Climb" BEST supports this statement?

4 Read the paragraph from the section "Climb Took Less Than Four Hours."

*Honnold's historic ascent began with the first hint of dawn at 5:32 a.m. Saturday. He reached the top three hours and 56 minutes later, at 9:28 a.m. Most roped ascents of El Capitan take hours, or days or longer.*

What conclusion is BEST supported by this paragraph?

- (A) Free-soloing allows climbers to move faster than climbing with ropes.
- (B) Honnold is also the fastest climber to make a roped ascent of El Capitan.
- (C) The route that Honnold found to climb up the cliff was a shortcut.
- (D) Beginning a climb earlier in the day makes it much easier to climb quickly.