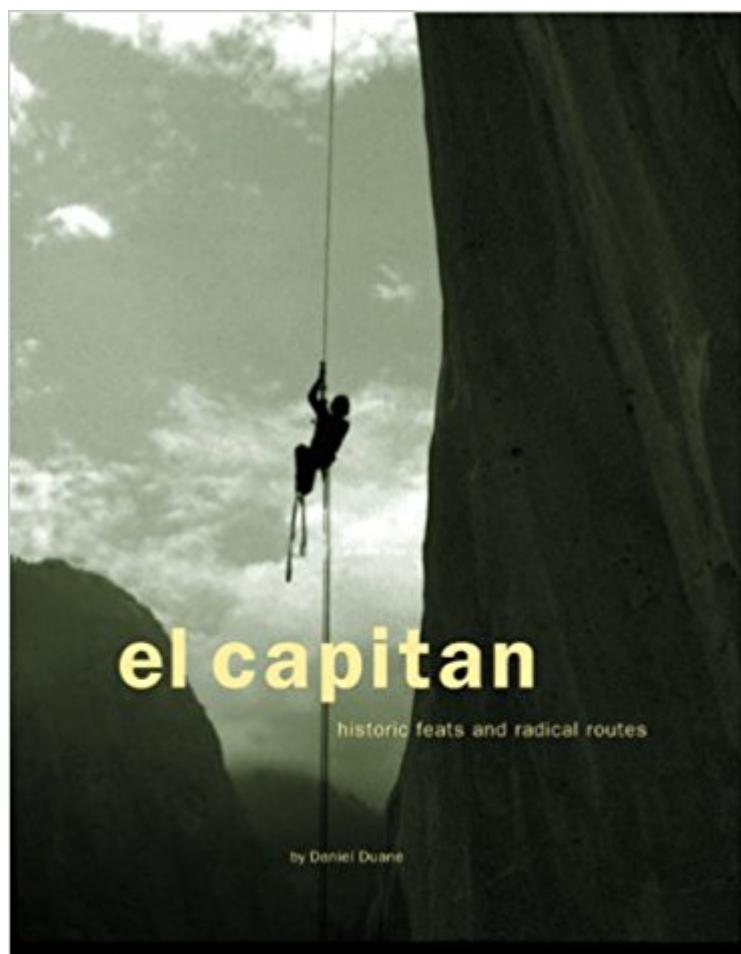


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# El Capitan: Historic Feats And Radical Routes



## Synopsis

An unforgettable face all 3,000 granite feet of it. El Capitan towers above California's Yosemite Valley, a sheer rock wall, seemingly insurmountable, and by far the most coveted rock climb on earth. El Capitan traces the mountain's unique history and recounts the vertical adventures had therefrom Warren Harding's 45-day siege in 1958 up through the recent speed climbs of under 5 hours. Critically acclaimed author Daniel Duane articulates how this massive wall can totally consume a person. Duane profiles the legends who have devoted themselves to El Capitan, including Royal Robbins, Warren Harding, and John Middendorf. Accompanied by 36 moody duotones, El Capitan captures the essence of big wall climbing.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Like a younger, funnier Peter Matthiessen, Duane brought an easily worn literary and environmental seriousness to his beautiful 1996 book on surfing, *Caught Inside: A Surfer's Year on the California Coast* and followed with a surprisingly entertaining novel about rock climbers, *Looking for Mo*. In his new book, Duane is again a knowledgeable but scrupulously unheroic participant narrator, conveying the wonder and self-torture of his subject without lapsing into glorifying cliché. *El Capitan* basically draws on the research that went into Duane's climbing novel, re-creating the stirring ascents of the great 3000' granite chunk in Yosemite Valley known as El Cap, which is pictured throughout in dizzying photos. No one conquered the Cap until the late 1950s, but Duane shows the evolution since of the rock's fabled routes "the Salathe, Pacific Ocean Wall, the Nose" and the change in emphasis from who will be first to whose ascent will be fastest or purest. Duane skillfully

contrasts the spiritual fathers of modern rock climbing, from Warren Harding (whose 1958 effort wasn't the prettiest or shortest on record but was first) to the more aesthetic-minded climbers Royal Robbins and Yvon Chouinard, up until the recent free climb attempts of Scott Burk. Recommended for sports and outdoor collections."Nathan Ward, Library Journal Copyright 2000 Reed Business Information, Inc.

From a San Francisco climber and journalist comes this interesting history of one of the world's most challenging rocks: El Capitan, nestled in California's Yosemite Valley, a sheer granite wall 3,000 feet high that has captured the imaginations of mountaineers since its discovery in 1851. One man climbed El Cap 52 times in 12 years. In 1958, Warren Harding spent 45 days on the rock; nowadays really hardy mountaineers can get from bottom to top in about five hours. Duane, who has spent some time on El Cap himself (in 1991, he made three unsuccessful attempts to get to the top), tells the rock's story by introducing us to the men who dedicated their lives to conquering it. This is a dramatic book, full of derring-do, near misses, and thrills and chills, ideal for readers of real-life adventures (like The Perfect Storm or Into Thin Air) and armchair mountaineers. David PittCopyright © American Library Association. All rights reserved

Great book on a golden era in Valley climbing.

great book

El Capitan is the Holy Grail of Big Wall Climbing and Duane does a very good job providing background history of the Walls and the Legends who made their mark on them. Yes, I've read the other reviews concerned with minor inaccuracies and lack of mention of significant climbers. But, hey, I'm a novice and have never been to Yosemite although I hope to go in the next year. Duane is best in interviewing the legends and telling their background stories and trying to translate the reasons they climb. It's a fascinating story. My favorite being the men stuck on the wall when a storm comes and their bivouac tents are virtually destroyed. Also, it's nice to read about the free spirits whose goal in life have nothing to do with money and all to do with the Wall. Overall, I found this book informative, very concise, and filled with great pictures. It may not however, satisfy the experienced climbers who follow climbing history or have significant experience in Yosemite. But for people fascinated with climbing and the personalities involved, it was a great quick, informative read.

I was excited to see a new history book on El Capitan, but the final product was short of my expectations. Duane draws a few good observations and insight at times, but the guts of the book strike me as a rehash of articles from all kinds of other publications. I have an unusually large collection of climbing literature, which may skew my observations because I've seen so much of the raw historical material he draws from for the book in so many other places. I don't mind that so much, but I was hoping to hear some of the not-so-well known stories of adventures on El Cap and a little more new insight into the historical figures of the big stone. It just wasn't there for me. People who are not so read up on climbing history will probably find the book more enjoyable. The book is an incredibly quick read (not that much text, but lots of pictures) for a subject that could easily justify a much larger book.

I put this on my Christmas wishlist this year after reading Duane's year in the life of a surfer 'Caught Inside', which I loved and I was rapt to get a copy as a present. I'd finished it by Boxing day and it was a bit like that slightly unsatisfying feeling you get after a meal at a Chinese restaurant! I just wanted a bit more. It's a lovely looking book with some evocative black and white shots of the Yosemite pioneers and it's obviously something Duane is passionate about but it rushes by all too fast and there's not much sense of anything holding it together. I wanted more about some of the individual journeys up the wall; it either should have been more technical, or less. It's part picture/coffee table book, part narrative. Duane skips through them in a kind of unconnected way that didn't leave me with anything to hang on to!

This book deserves 4 stars rather than 5 not for what's in it, but for what isn't. This is really a musing, a meditation on El Cap, not the definitive history which it purports to be. Duane examines the Big Stone through the experiences of some of its ascentionists: Harding, Robbins, Corbett, Middendorf, Burke, and so on. But others are strangely absent. Where is Piana and Skinner's controversial Salathe Wall first free ascent? What about the Wings of Steel incident? Where, for heaven's sake, is Lynn Hill? Duane is perhaps at his best when he interviews climbers, drawing intense, personal statements from them. Perhaps his tone is a little depressing, a little inclined to see climbing as pointless, but this is still a worthwhile, intelligently written book. For me, though, Duane's reductionist approach is, ultimately, not enough.

This is truly a splendid book, capturing personalities of Valley climbers better than anything I've

read. Beautifully written, thoughtful, insightful. Great pics also. But Duane is sometimes a sloppy researcher. Misspelled names galore (Scott Burk throughout, e.g.) Wrong dates. Wrong first-ascent names. Screwed-up captions. Bad geography (Palms Springs lies under the Tehachipi Mountains?). These are minor flaws but irritating to see in such a brilliant writer.

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