

March 8, 1973

Dear Batty and Beasto,

I have no objections to you using my "marvelous account" of the buffoonery, providing, of course, that you present the entire picture as I paint it. I certainly don't want to raise the ire of my good friend R.R. I think he feels badly enough about his (our) erasures. (See Mountain #28.) He almost feels as badly about our seconding the route as he does about you and what's-his-name doing the first ascent. It all started at Badger Pass in January of 1971 when Herb Swedlund's smiling moustache and glinting eyes fronted on me over a beer in the snow-bright sunshine outside the ski lodge. He asked me if Royal had been in touch with me regarding a second ascent of the Dawn Wall. I said that he hadn't. He implied that possibly I should contact Royal. I said I would because I was definitely interested. A day later in Los Angeles Royal phoned and put the question to me. I was flattered and highly affirmative. He asked quite intently if I objected to chopping bolts. Hell no!

I drove to Yosemite, met Royal, sorted hardware, and Royal showed me the two cold chisels he had purchased specifically for the bolt chopping. How extravagant, I thought. I still hadn't caught on. We began early the next day. I led the first pitch using all the bolts for aid. Royal followed and began chopping the first bolt. "Wow!" I thought to myself, "I used that bolt. How come he's chopping it? Oh, I guess he figures he could have made that move free." He then began chopping the second bolt. "Hey, Royal, I used those bolts for aid," I yelled. "Sure you did, but chopping bolts is the name of the game—all the bolts." Now I got it. But should I do it? Hell yes, why not? I didn't like the way Harding and Caldwell did the route. I didn't like the publicity. And besides, I hadn't ever done anything controversial in my life (up to that time). I had always wanted to do a wall with Royal. I guess to some degree I was doing it for the same reasons I attributed to Harding and Caldwell—self-aggrandizement. I had no set principles or ethics of my own, so I could be swayed easily. When Royal reached my belay stance he immediately questioned me. Did I understand that we were erasing the route? Yes, now I did. And on we went. Besides, Royal had assured me that if we descended without accomplishing complete erasure, TM Herbert would personally castrate both of us.

On our first bivouac Royal really began questioning his reasons for erasing the route. He was having difficulty rationalizing his behavior. He had actually published an earlier opinion that completely contradicted his current feelings. I forget which day he decided that we should stop chopping. He decided that the quality of the aid climbing was much higher than he had ever expected of Harding or Caldwell and, of course, it was also taking us an awful long time to chop all those goddam bolts. I was just along for the climb. I (voluntarily) took no part in the decisions, that is, I allowed Royal to make our decisions. I really didn't care what we did just as long as it was a second ascent of the Dawn Wall. Royal asked my opinion in considering every decision, but I essentially told him whatever he figured out was okay by me. I felt I was in good hands. Chouinard once told me after he got off the NA Wall that climbing with Robbins wasn't any fun. Robbins was like a crutch. You always knew you were going to make it. . . .

Love,
Don and Susie