

# THE TWO OF US

FUELLED BY CUPS  
OF TEA AND A  
SHARED SENSE OF  
THE ABSURD, ANNA-  
VERONIQUE L'HOEST  
& ROSIE HOHNEN  
PROVE THE BEST  
WAY TO CLIMB A BIG  
WALL IS TO DO IT  
WITH YOUR BESTIE

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IMAGES: Anna-Veronique L'hoest collection

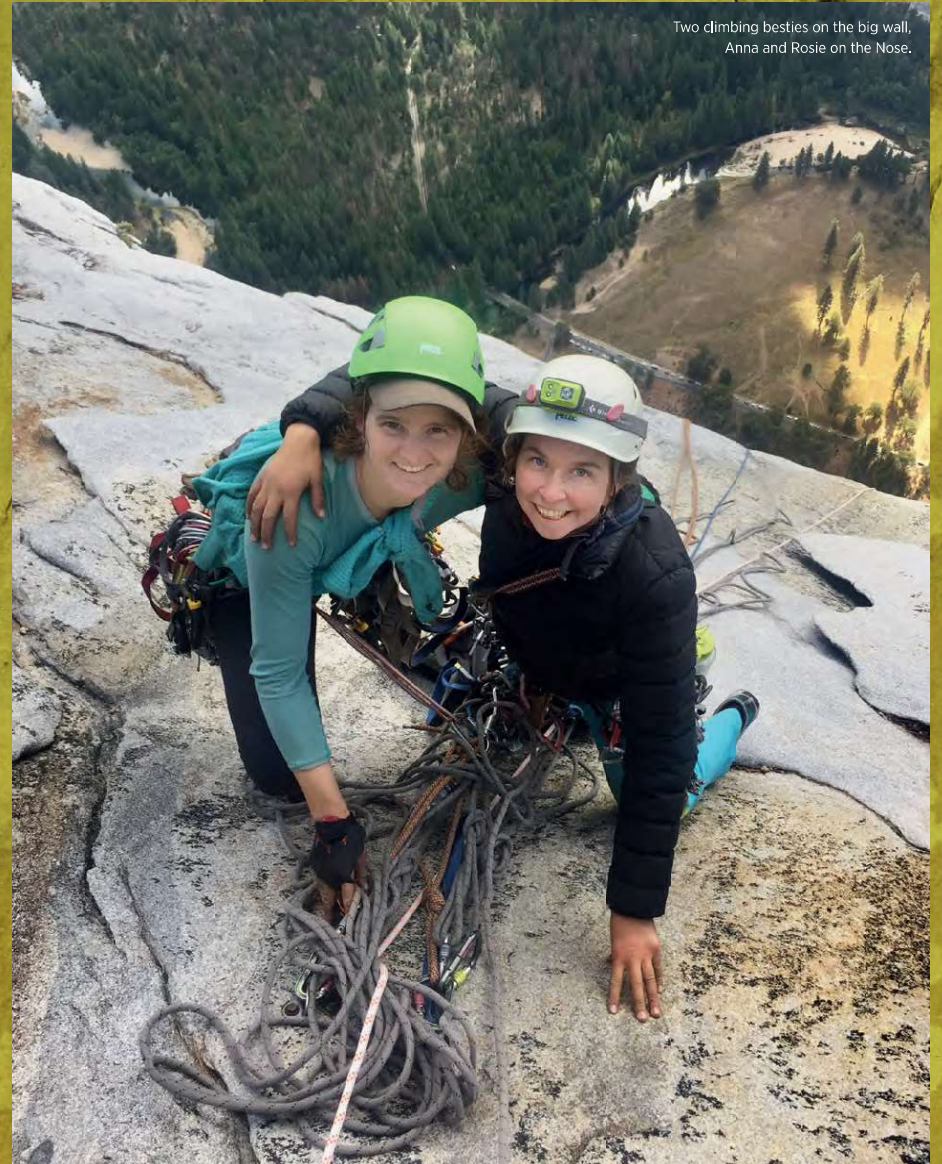
## ANNA & THE NOSE

I can't remember when I first met Anna, but the first time I remember climbing with her she convinced me to follow her up a sandbagged, bottomless V-groove, which she happily shimmy-shimmied up but which took me a good 60 minutes of head jams and vertical beached whaling. Though she has two cochlear hearing aid implants she lip reads a lot so when you talk to her she always looks straight at you, and when I finally arrived at the top, Anna asked me if we should go have a cup of tea. I knew I'd found a friend.

We've climbed a lot together now, most recently on the Nose of El Cap in Yosemite. The 29 pitches of the Nose are the easiest way to get up El Cap and, as a result, it's usually covered in bumblebees. We were no exception. Hauling the bags on the first day I forgot my jumars, how to tie a munter hitch and the first rule of big-wall climbing – take a crap before you leave the ground. Luckily, we slept back on the ground the first night, so we could sort ourselves out. Unfortunately, we somehow still forgot to bring a lighter for the stove, so at each bivvy ledge we had to beg one off another party.

On the morning of the third day, we were camped a pitch below the Great Roof. It's one of the harder pitches, following a right-facing corner into a thin and awkward 15m roof traverse. To stay in front of the party we were sharing the ledge with we got up at 3am, so there was no waking them to get their lighter. Anna, who usually insists on a cup of tea and eats her muesli at a glacial pace, chowed down half a bagel and half a caffeine tablet, then racked up. Anna often jokes her muscles are only visible in photos (like the Loch Ness monster), but don't let that fool you. When the dawn light gently hit the cliff, Anna had finished the corner and was nearing the end of the roof section. As she aided across, she was back-cleaning just to make it easy for me to clean, leaving a giant 20m loop of slack that reached from her all the way back to her last gear in the corner. Later she told me that at any given time she was sitting on four bits of gear, which was a relief but I was terrified and proud to hold the end of the rope for her in that moment.

On the last morning Anna was climbing back up to the bivvy ledge in the dark after taking a crap in a bag during a gale, when she felt something go in her shoulder. She started crying on the belay. As I gave her a hug I wondered if we'd be able to get out of there, we still had six pitches to go. Retreating would mean rappelling 23 pitches with a haul bag through the great conga line of parties below us; an absolute clusterfuck. But Anna, ever pragmatic, took a deep breath, wiped the tears and snot on her sleeve, and started juggling our fixed lines to the next belay. There she reported that luckily juggling didn't hurt too much, it was the motion of pulling upwards that sent a spear of pain into her shoulder. So slowly, with Anna cleaning, we made our way towards the summit. We topped out at noon on the fourth day with a heady feeling of relief and quiet happiness. I'll always be grateful to Anna for her psych, and her spirit. I was bloody glad to be up there with her.



Two climbing besties on the big wall,  
Anna and Rosie on the Nose.



There is nothing like having a climbing partner with whom you can share the load equally.

## ROSIE & THE NOSE

Sometime last year Rosie and I decided to aid the Nose. It was the next logical step after aiding Passport to Insanity in the Grampians and Ozymandias at Mt Buffalo. We didn't let our lack of training deter us, Rosie could not climb for two months before going to Yosemite as she was digging holes on Kangaroo Island for her PhD. I did not have a good excuse for not taking training seriously.

I first met Rosie almost ten years ago at Frog Buttress. She was part of the Tassie crowd, who I'd fallen in with at Mt Arapiles. It was at

Arapiles we started climbing together, getting scared onsighting slabs on the Watchtower Face. I like climbing scary stuff with Rosie. She never discourages me, rather her strongest objection would only ever be a half-hearted, 'Anna, I'm not sure about this...' – easily overcome by me suggesting I'd lead the scary bits. Don't get me wrong, Rosie can hold her own facing run-outs, choss and gnarly-gnar.

Rosie also brings some much-needed focus to our climbing endeavours. Like when we aided Ozymandias and I tried to turn the changeovers into ledge tea parties. Much like the British Empire, our friendship is based on solid foundation of tea and Rosie is known to drink 11 cups before noon, while I need a regular caffeine supply to function. Rosie, however, would have none of it. She made sure we Got Shit Done and topped out before dark – on day two, that is. We're not fast.

Right from the beginning on the Nose, our theme song – We are Bumbles – got a work out, starting off with when Rosie forgot her jumars. But also after particularly silly mishaps, like when we realised we forgot to bring our lighter, AGAIN (we had also forgotten it during the Passport mission). We would sing it after spectacular clusterfucks sharing hanging belays. After maybe eight pitches, Rosie finally managed to set up the perfect belay. No clusterfucks. Minimalist and tidy. Arriving at the belay, I announced my need to pee as I clipped everything off my harness onto everything else and then pulled up the beautiful, long, tidy coils of two different ropes into a sorry mess on the tiny ledge, just so I could lower over the edge and take a pee. It took us half an hour to detangle the ropes and we laughed until we cried.

On the second and third days, I led some scary pitches, including the King Swing and the Great Roof, pitches I had enthusiastically volunteered for before we started ('King Swing! Sounds like fun! And the Great Roof! Exposure! Excitement!'). This was where climbing with Rosie brought out the best in me. I knew that, should I retreat and send her up, she would feel just the same as I did, and the fastest way to get to the top was to keep going and finish my lead.

Those pitches took it out of me, burning all my enthusiasm, psych and mental energy, leaving me frazzled. A lack of tea on day three (we didn't want to wake the other party on the bivvy ledge at 3am to borrow their lighter) didn't help either. So it was up to Rosie to get us to the top, which she did in style as she took over and Got Shit Done. Pitch by pitch flew by as I jumared up in a caffeine-deprived haze.

Watching other teams I got the impression that people who just teamed up because of similar climbing ability but who didn't get along that well, struggled a lot more with the meat grinder that is big-wall climbing. Rosie is my perfect climbing partner, she is strong and capable but doesn't take herself too seriously, which makes everything instantly hilarious, especially when things don't go to plan. Climbing the Nose with Rosie was great. For her birthday a couple weeks later, I drew her leading on the Nose, wearing a cape with a big 'B' on it. When she asked what it stood for, I replied, "Both for 'Badarse' and 'Bumble'".



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