

Free-climber scales Yosemite rock wall in record time

By Scott Smith, AP

Gripping tiny slices of sheer rock and hoisting himself up 3,000 feet with only his strength, Adam Ondra quietly inched his way up one of the world's most challenging rock walls and into the record books, a spokesman for the climber said.

Ondra, a 23-year-old from the Czech Republic, took eight days to finish the free-climb up the Dawn Wall of the famed El Capitan in Yosemite National Park.

He completed the second-ever free ascent of the wall Monday, said John Dicuollo, a spokesman for Black Diamond Equipment, which sponsors Ondra.

Nearly two years ago, U.S. climbers Tommy Caldwell and Kevin Jorgeson were first to chart and conquer the route, a feat that took the pair 19 days.

"It's like being a proud parent, in a way," Jorgeson said Tuesday, honored that Ondra was drawn to the challenge. "That's the point: To raise the bar so someone else can do the same thing and stand on our shoulders."

Unlike climbers who need more elaborate equipment, free-climbers use their strength and ability to grasp tiny cracks and lips on the granite rock with their fingertips and toes. They use ropes and harnesses only for safety to catch a fall.

Throughout the climb, Ondra took to social media to post about the cold, soaking rain and the pain from the granite wearing down the skin on his fingers. He also celebrated victories.

"Hard to find the words to describe how I feel," he wrote on Instagram as he neared the top. "We made it up to the Wino

Tower and no more hard pitches guard my way to the top. I could not have asked for a better day.”

Ondra, pictured in jeans and a T-shirt pumping his arms after completing a difficult stretch of the climb, was not available for comment. Dicuollo said Ondra’s cellphone was off as he celebrated by resting.

Ondra completed the climb in his first visit to Yosemite Valley. He arrived in mid-October, spending several days practicing some of the wall’s most harrowing sections, before launching the formal climb on Nov. 14.

To rest, Ondra and his team pitched tents suspended on the wall’s sheer face towering hundreds of feet above Yosemite Valley. The park – famous for its grand views, giant sequoias and pristine meadows – is known for attracting daredevil adventurers from around the globe.

Ondra had already distinguished himself as the first to hold two world championships in climbing, his sponsors said. Earlier this year, he also completed his university degree in business management.

He closely monitored Caldwell and Jorgeson’s accomplishment in early 2015, drawing on inspiration from their climb to attempt his own, his sponsor said.

Yosemite climber and historian Ken Yager said there is no doubt that Ondra is the strongest climber alive today. Yager, however, credits Caldwell for taking years to chart the path up the Dawn Wall, the most difficult of several routes that climbers can take up El Capitan.

“Hopefully, Adam, with his skills, will come back and pioneer his own route,” Yager said. “He can push it to his own level. He’s got the skills to. It’s whether he has the desire, too.”