

# EXPOSED

LEO HOULDING

PHOTOGRAPHS OF AN EXTREME LIFE

ALASTAIR LEE



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"Only those who will risk going too far can possibly find out how far one can go."

– T.S. Eliot



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from sustainable sources.

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◀◀ Front cover: A1/E9 Beauty, The Prophet, E9 7a (5.14a,  
R). It took ten years, but my quest to find a new free line  
on El Cap was eventually rewarded. The crux A1/E9 Beauty  
pitch is the hardest, most perfect and exposed pitch I have  
ever climbed. October 2010.

Back cover: Leo and Sean enjoying the midnight sun  
from Ulvetanna's advance basecamp, Queen Maud Land,  
Antarctica. January 2013.

Pages 2–3: The otherworldly peaks of the Fenriskjeften  
– the Jaws of the Fenris Wolf – Kintanna, Hel, Stetind  
and Ulvetanna – The Wolf's Fang in Queen Maud Land,  
Antarctica. January 2013.

Pages 4–5: Gazing across the endless white desert from  
our wall camp on the 'Ledge of Great Expectations' during  
the first ascent of the mile-high North-East Ridge of  
Ulvetanna, Queen Maud Land, Antarctica. January 2013.

Pages 6–7: Mount Asgard bathed in rare midnight light  
above the Turner Glacier. The home of the Norse gods and  
an epic adventure playground. The striking North Face of  
the North Tower awaits a free ascent. Baffin Island, Arctic  
Canada. August 2009.

▶ Contents: Unclimbed walls in Queen Maud Land,  
Antarctica. January 2013.

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01/08/2009 - 06/09/2009

# M o u n t A s g a r d

66° 40' 19.62" N, 65° 16' 22.55" W

"All true wisdom is only to be found far from the dwellings of men, in the great solitudes; and it can only be obtained through suffering. Suffering and privation are the only things that can open the mind of man to that which is hidden from his fellows."

— Doug Scott





▲ Riglos BASE

The vultures circled overhead and clouds engulfed the summit of the second tower, El Pizon, shrouding us in white mist. Poised on exit, hearts pounding, we leapt blind into the void as the foreboding church bells began to ring. The rhythm and tone for the Asgard Project had been ominously set.

► Monte Brento

Over 1,000m of elevation, a road within 20 minutes of the exit, and a welcoming bar at the landing zone; Monte Brento, Trentino, Italy, is as friendly as wingsuit BASE gets. Robbie Pecnik, Croatian grandfather of the sport, designer and manufacturer of the finest Phoenix-fly wingsuits and still at the forefront of the game after 30 years, was the perfect mentor to coach our 007-themed Asgard Project opening and end sequences.



**"AS IF YOU CAN HAVE THIS MUCH FUN  
WITHOUT BREAKING ANY LAWS!"**



▲ Twelve freezing nights sleeping outside on a shaded, sloping, utterly exposed ledge tested my resolve to its limit. We were not anticipating what would be described in the UK as full winter conditions. But inside the Arctic Circle at 67 degrees North, even in August, Asgard's North Wall proved as brutal and cold as we could tolerate.

Yet in spite of, or perhaps because of, the intense hardship there was great camaraderie. We celebrated Sean's 34th birthday with an improvised cake and single malt from coke bottles in our hanging wall camp.

► We aid climbed serious big wall terrain then tried to free what we could, until conditions put survival ahead of style. Sean aiding pitch 9 that he later freed on top rope.





1998 - 2010

# Y o s e m i t e

37° 43' 19.59" N, 119° 37' 58.66" W

"The thing about Leo is he can get you really psyched for stuff you wouldn't normally do."

— Sean 'Stanley' Leary



## Y o s e m i t e



Jose Pereyra held court in the meadow beneath the tree in the south-east corner, the unofficial HQ of the Stone Monkey troop.

A professor of mathematics from Venezuela complete with thick Hispanic accent, a decade older than most of us, a virtuoso crack climber and committed proponent of new-wave speed climbing, he enchanted with tales of tepuis, quartzite walls of Yosemite scale hidden deep in the Amazon rainforest, and somehow spun quantum mechanics, shamanic ceremonies and exploratory rock climbing epics into a single, riveting narrative.

The first dry yellow leaves fell from the shade of the Black Oak and spiralled downwards to signal the turn of the season and the kinder, cooler temperatures that awaited.

Dean Potter relaxed his giant frame beside him. Shirtless, wild haired and even wilder eyed, he nursed huge gobbies (scabs) that covered hands, elbows, ankles and knees from the literal miles of coarse cracks he had climbed that week having just made the first one-day ascent of the Valley's three proudest features; El Cap, Half Dome and Mount Watkins, with Timmy O'Neill.

Cedar Wright, sporting his thick-rimmed glasses, strummed his guitar and crooned a hippy folk tune. Timmy accompanied, drumming a water bottle like a pro, and dropped in the odd rap. Stanley quietly contented himself with his newfound love, Roberta, the fairylike Brazilian big wall babe.

Alex and Thomas Huber, sporting their celebratory Bavarian lederhosen and with rippling muscles and flowing hair, strolled over victorious after miraculously making the first free ascent of yet another seemingly impossible El Cap aid line.

Chongo Chuck packed another bowl and philosophised quantum big walls with Jose. Anywhere else he would've been considered homeless, but here in the valley he was a king.

The first hues of alpenglow began to burn the Shield headwall a heart-warming rouge as El Cap's massive shadow stretched along the length of the valley towards Half Dome framed gracefully above.

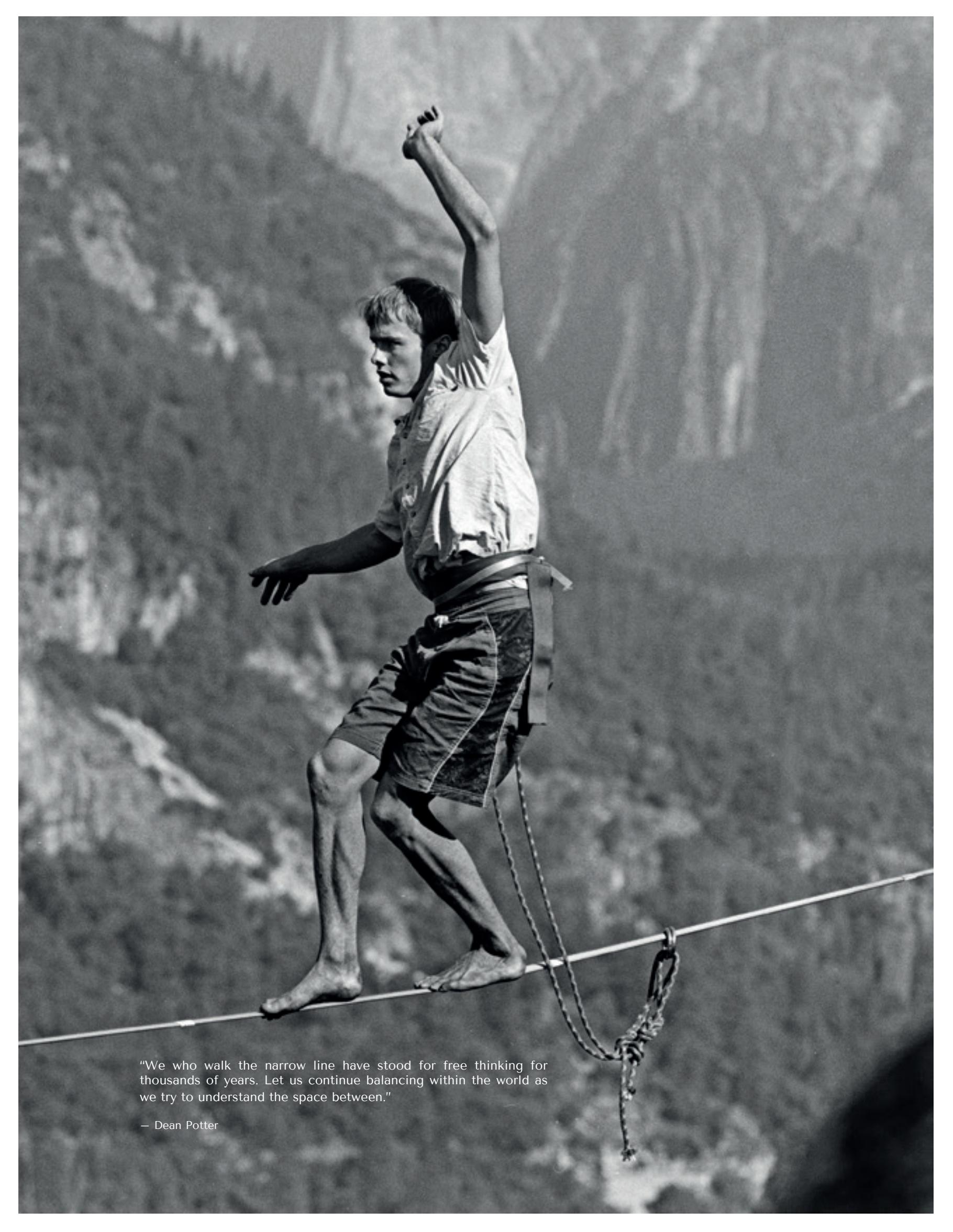
Fellow Northerner Jason Pickles and I sipped cheap malt liquor, gazed spellbound at the flawless beauty that surrounded us and soaked up the vibe. I never grew tired of staring at the myriad possibilities hidden in the seams and shadows, faces and facets of that complex muse El Capitan through my climber's eyes. It felt like those days were timeless and would last forever.

Many places are compared to Yosemite, but throughout my travels, I've seen none that even come close. Perfection is rarely equalled, never bettered.

Yosemite Valley was formed by tectonic forces of fire and ice, carved from hard stone, softened by ancient trees. But its climbing culture was created by flesh and blood.

◀ The dreamy Neverland vibes of Yosemite Valley.

◀◀ Previous pages: West Face Leaning Tower, E7 6c, 5.13a. Jason Pickles and I made the first free ascent from the top of the first pitch, a 60m bolt ladder. It became an instant classic free climb. Spring 2001. Photo Corey Rich.



"We who walk the narrow line have stood for free thinking for thousands of years. Let us continue balancing within the world as we try to understand the space between."

— Dean Potter

