



This page: Melissa Lacasse climbing a route called "Fluorescent Falcon" in the central Sierra.

Opposite: Greg Haverstock on the Matthes Crest, an unbelievable knife-edge mountain ridge in the Yosemite backcountry out of Tuolumne Meadows.



By Linda L. May *higher*
ever
climbing
Shawn Reeder

Professional outdoor photographer Shawn Reeder of Bishop, CA, is always up for adventure in the mountains—the higher the better! For the past 12 summers, he has climbed and photographed the mountains of the High Sierra while living

in Yosemite National Park, and waiting tables for additional income. Shawn has hung off the face of El Capitan to photograph climbers who were raising money for peace. He has documented ascents of knife-edge backcountry ridges in Yosemite

and King Canyon National Parks and has also photographed several international star athletes, including Sean Jones, Chris Sharma and other famous mountaineers and rock climbers that push the boundaries of their pursuits in the backcountry.

Above: Sean Jones climbing his route "Mama" in Yosemite near Bridal Veil Falls.

Below: Chris Hackbarth looking out above a sea of clouds and watching the sunrise in the central Sierra.

Shawn's awe-inspiring nature images have been published in numerous outdoor magazines, including *Climbing* and *Rock and Ice*. Several outdoor commercial and catalog clients have also hired him to shoot advertising images in the mountains. In 2007, Shawn began shooting weddings in the great outdoors to expand his client base and offer a more personalized service.

Shawn serendipitously happened upon the bold lifestyle of rock climbing, mountaineering and photography when he won a contest at age 18. While working as a waiter in Ellicott City, MD, he entered a contest with 17 other waiters. They had to run through several restaurants and alleys holding glasses of beer on their trays. For every ounce of beer they spilled, five seconds was added to their time. In the end, Shawn won the waiter competition and was rewarded with a trip for two to Yosemite National Park. He invited his best friend, Brad Woods, who brought along a camera but was not using it. When Shawn asked if he could borrow it and take pictures, Brad complied. It was at this moment that Shawn not only fell in love with the area, but also with photographing it. "I enjoyed shooting those first Yosemite pictures, and it stuck with me," he says. Upon returning to Maryland, everyone who saw his images raved about how beautiful they were and suggested he get involved with photography, given his obvious natural talent for it.

"I started coming back to the park and waiting tables in the summers," says Shawn. "I met a lot of really amazing people who were also working in the park. They were living a really cool lifestyle where they worked only those three months and then spent the rest of the year traveling around the nation and the world, climbing and exploring." Inspired by the lifestyles of the people he met in Yosemite, Shawn says, "I paid off my debts, I traveled more and enjoyed life in the wilderness and took many pictures. After three years, I moved from Maryland to Bishop, CA, which is only an hour and a half away from Yosemite, so I go there often and shoot.

"Climbing is not a sport, it's a lifestyle! My whole life changed when I started climbing seriously. Before winning that trip to Yosemite, I had only climbed a few times. After that trip, I started rock climbing with a passion!"

Many of the friends Shawn met in Yosemite are world famous climbers, so he began taking pictures of their different climbs. They liked them so much that they encouraged him to sell





Top: Kelley Doyle and Abbie Moore practicing partner yoga at sunrise near Bishop, CA.

Bottom: Moonrise from Cathedral Peak, Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite National Park.

his images. He says, "I got published in outdoor magazines and catalogs, and my business built very quickly. Many of my friends had sponsors for their climbing, so I also did work for some of them."

According to Shawn, rock climbing can involve anything from climbing a small boulder that is 20 feet high, which is called "bouldering," to climbing cliffs that can be anywhere between 100 to 3000 feet or more. "Mountaineering" is a very specific area of climbing involving mountain peaks.

"Rock climbing and mountaineering are absolutely high-risk activities. One must be

extremely careful," cautions Shawn. "However, I think there are other risks that people take every day that are just as dangerous, like driving on any major freeway in rush hour traffic in any major city in this country."

"For three years, I lived out of the back of my truck in remote places, climbed and enjoyed nature," he shares. "I traveled around Colorado, Arizona, Utah, New Mexico, California, Oregon and Wyoming, climbing, shooting images and exploring the beautiful land. Rock climbing is an activity that people get so wrapped up in they will drop everything just to pursue their passion."

Shawn's climbing passion is apparent in his work and has undoubtedly helped to

firmly establish him in the outdoor/adventure industry. He gets a lot of assignments from repeat clients because they are aware of his high quality work. On client shoots, Shawn says, "I bring along a camera bag and change lenses on the side of a cliff or wherever I might be."

Shooting for his own pleasure, Shawn packs his gear differently. "When I'm in the front country, I love to have my full assortment of gear. [In the backcountry] I travel lighter, and I usually only bring one lens. I found a small camera bag at a yard sale for a dollar that has a chest harness attached, so I wear that when I'm shooting for myself in remote locations. Hanging on the side of a cliff can be precarious, so I attach myself with a series of ropes and harnesses.

"It's pretty wild up there, and the wind also plays a role in the process," Shawn shares. Photographing on the sides of cliffs and mountains certainly does come with certain pitfalls. "I have dropped lens caps and rolls of film off the side of a cliff and watched them fall thousands of feet below. Thankfully, I haven't dropped a lens or camera yet. Now I carry a Canon 5D camera, so I don't have to worry about dropping canisters of film."

Shawn advises new climbers who are interested in doing this type of photography to acquire basic climbing skills before attempting to bring along a camera, which can be a major and potentially life-threatening distraction. "It's hard enough to be on a mountain in the first place, let alone shoot pictures. There are times when I'm on the edge of a cliff, and it may be a 2000-foot drop." Shawn continues, "When you're on a mountain, you must be acutely aware of what you're standing on to make sure you don't fall. One wrong step and you could tumble into the abyss, or you could drop the camera, so one needs vigilance [in] every moment."

When photographing on the ground, Shawn prefers to capture candid. "I love photographing people, but only when they are unaware of the camera. When people know they are getting their picture taken, they are usually not really being themselves, but posing for the camera. I like catching people being candid and real.

"When I'm shooting rock climbers, they are so focused on the moment and what they're doing that I usually get very real expressions," he says. "That transfers easily over to weddings. Everyone is feeling a



Above: Chris Sharma in the central Sierra climbing the first ascent of the "Trail of Tears" route established by Sean Jones.

Right: Sean Jones climbing his new route, "Growing Up," on Half Dome in Yosemite.



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wide range of emotions at weddings and not paying attention to the photographer?"

This parallel is one reason Shawn was successfully able to add weddings to his product mix. Because the outdoor industry is so small and fiercely competitive, and making a living working solely in outdoor photography was not feasible for him, shooting weddings is an important part of his photography business.

Shawn markets his wedding work through his user-friendly website, which brings in many new clients. He also gets referrals from local vendors, other photographers in the area who are booked and from former satisfied clients.

In addition to his passion for rock climbing, yoga is also a big part of Shawn's

lifestyle. He practices daily to keep himself centered and balanced. "Yoga helps keep my body, mind and spirit in alignment, healthy and flexible," explains Shawn. "Intensive climbing and mountaineering is hard on the body, so yoga is a way to balance out the intensity of climbing, and it's good for the soul. It brings an inner calm."

Shawn has his whole life ahead of him, and he intends to make the most of it by continuing to rock climb and photograph those who do it. He is also a musician and has recently built a website to sell his music and his friends' music royalty-free in order to help other photographers market their businesses through websites, slide shows and presentations. He is currently shooting an article on Half Dome—one of the most famous mountains in Yosemite—along with good friend Sean Jones, a world-renowned climber and the subject in the photographs illustrating the article.

In Shawn's travels he has also become friends with Doug Robinson, a seasoned climber who did some of the first ascents in Yosemite back in the 1970s. Doug has collaborated on three different outdoor articles with Shawn and Sean Jones. In the long term, the trio is working on a book combining Shawn's images with Sean Jones' climbing legacy in the Sierra Mountains. Shawn is also working on a personal book to showcase his beautiful landscape work.

Someday, he hopes to meet a life partner with similar interests, get married and settle down. But for now, he's enjoying his freedom to travel and climb where and when he likes, with camera always in hand.

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