



AAC Publications

The Citadel, Wild Kingdom

California, Kings Canyon National Park

On August 25, Katie Lambert and I topped out a new 16-pitch route on the north face of the Citadel (11,744') in Kings Canyon National Park.

Our original ambition was to free the original north face route (IV 5.7 A2, Herbert-Hennek-Lauria; see AAJ 1969), as it's shown in the Secor guidebook. We roughly followed the route outlined in the book—the first major dihedral system to the right of Edge of Time Arête (IV 5.10+, Howell-Nettle, 1991)—but we found no trace of prior passage. Secor also shows Nothing but Time (IV 5.10+, Haden-Pennings, AAJ 2002) as being too far to the left, which leads us to believe the original route must be further right, in one of the other large dihedral systems. Subsequent research revealed that other parties had hiked in intending to climb the 1968 route but also wound up putting up new routes.

With supplies for two weeks, we left the South Lake Trailhead and hiked around 18 miles over Bishop Pass to our first camp alongside the Kings River. We had hired packers to take our gear, but due to a high snow year, they were unable to cross Bishop Pass, so four of our friends helped us porter the loads.

After finding a section of the Kings River that we could wade across, we carried loads up into Ladder Creek and established a camp there. The next day we spent climbing and fixing a few ropes. We expected to be climbing the dihedrals but instead found very clean rock on the face to the left for five pitches.

As we climbed higher, our anticipation of the guidebook's description of "hard aid climbing out a roof" dissipated and we were comfortable in the realization that we were climbing a new route. We found no trace of passage, pins, or tat anywhere on the wall. Finally we took a rest day. The following day we climbed to the top of the wall in a push.

From our high point, we quested into some steep and heady choss, which dramatically slowed our progress. Around pitch 10, the angle of the wall and the difficulty eased, lowering our anxiety somewhat. Upon topping out the east summit, we descended to the saddle and simul-climbed to the true (west) summit. From there we raced the remaining daylight down the west ridge to Ladder Lake and our camp below.

We called our route Wild Kingdom (1,700', IV 5.11) in honor of the wonderful nature we experienced while in the Ladder Creek basin. Having two weeks available meant we could take it slow and enjoy the time away from the hustle and bustle of everyday life.

– Ben Ditto

Images



The north face of the Citadel (11,744') showing the line of Wild Kingdom (IV 5.11), climbed by Ben Ditto and Katie Lambert in August 2019. Ditto and Lambert had intended to free the original 1968 line on the face, but after completing the climb and doing further research, they believe their line—which roughly follows the topo for the 1968 route in the Secor guide—is a new route and the actual 1968 route is further to the right.



Ben Ditto on the third pitch of Wild Kingdom (IV 5.11), a new route on the north face of the Citadel (11,744') in Kings Canyon National Park.

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