



AAC Publications

Big Five Lakes, Peak 11,880', Cinco Grande

California, Sequoia National Park

In 1985, I was managing the Bearpaw Meadows High Sierra Camp in Sequoia National Park when Claude and Nancy Fiddler passed through during a multi-week backpacking and climbing blitz. I was able to help them out of a pinch with some food when their gear drop didn't materialize, and in exchange they shared some accounts of the first ascents they had made in the area. One of the most intriguing was a 5.11 line on a wall above Big Five Lakes, which in R.J. Secor's guidebook gets merely a two-line teaser that states, "Follow a crack system up the center of the face for 17 pitches. A long and committing route on steep rock."

Although I've climbed extensively throughout the Great Western Divide area, it wasn't until almost 35 years after I first heard about the wall, in October 2019, that I finally headed into Big Five Lakes with Clayton Helzer to check it out. We made the hike with full packs from Mineral King over Sawtooth Pass and looped around Lost Canyon and the Little Five Lakes Trail—a 15-mile grind through a spectacular and inspiring stretch of the southern Sierra.

In addition to being an impressive formation of granite, with numerous features and possible lines on its 1,000' wall, Peak 11,880' rises above a beautiful forested cirque of five lakes, which is a worthy reason alone to make the long hike in.

After an easy approach and recon along the base of the wall, Clayton and I settled on a steep line that starts at the toe of the main buttress, in the center of the face. The meat of the route is in the first few pitches, where the wall is steepest. It then tapers off to a moderate and engaging midsection that leads to an airy arête and an easy, wandering finish: Cinco Grande (10 pitches, IV 5.11-).

Based on a conversation with Claude in October, it appears their original 1985 route took a line just right of ours, with a short difficult passage in the center of the wall. He recalled being put to the test on their first ascent, as they only carried a 120' rope and a single rack of Friends.

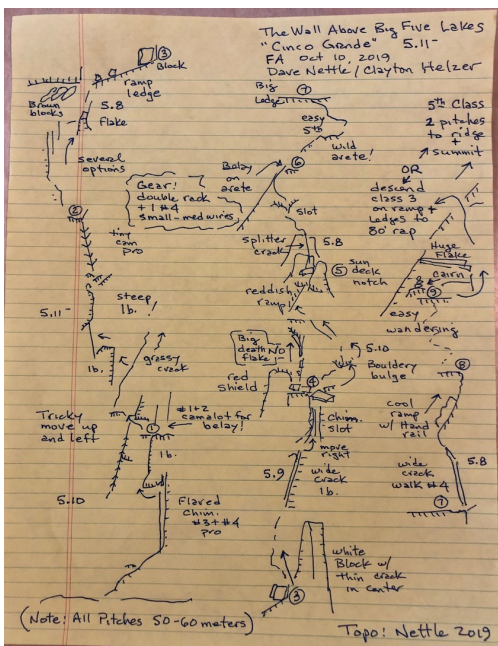
The descent drops east into an idyllic hidden basin with a small alpine lake, where a short scramble north down a gully takes you back to the main lake in the Big Five Lakes basin.

– Dave Nettle

Images



The northwest face of Peak 11,880', a.k.a. The Wall Above Big Five, showing the approximate line of the original route (5.11, Fiddler-Fiddler, 1985) in red and the 2019 line Cinco Grande (5.11-, Helzer-Nettle) in blue.



Topo for Cinco Grande (IV 5.11-), the second route up the northwest face of Peak 11,880' in Sequoia National Park. Dave Nettle and Clayton Helzer climbed this new route in October 2019.



Clayton Helzer contemplates a clean lieback finish to the first pitch of Cinco Grande (IV 5.11-), on the northwest face of Peak 11,880' in Sequoia National Park.



Clayton Helzer enjoying scenic views and big exposure about two-thirds of the way up the first ascent of Cinco Grande (IV 5.11-), on the northwest face of Peak 11,880' in Sequoia National Park.

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