



## AAC Publications

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### Middle Cathedral Rock, North Face, Gaia

California, Sierra Nevada, Yosemite National Park

Brandon Adams leading the 11th pitch of Gaia, which would become the aid crux of the route at A3+. Photo by Lance Colley.

**In the spring of 2023, while walking along the base of Middle Cathedral Rock's north face, Brandon Adams and I stumbled upon an inspiring wavelike corner**, just west of the infamous North Buttress (V 5.10a, Harding-Holden-Tarver-Whitmer, 1954). We excitedly climbed the corner and looked up: More corners and features looked to end at a large ledge 1,000' higher. It seemed like a worthy adventure.

Later that summer, we climbed above the wave, linking dirty corners with bold face climbing. From the corners, we could see that the adjacent face and dull arêtes to our right promised fantastic climbing. We did six additional pitches—including an immaculate 5.9 hand crack—up to the big ledge, the site of an amazing bivy we named the Panda Palace.

After fixing ropes down from our high point, we began exploring the wall between the dirty corners—which we believe are part of the North Face Route (V 5.9 A4, Kamps-Pratt-Roper, 1959)—and Morning Lumber (III 5.11c, Wah-Way, 1990s). The line that would become Gaia starts on the wave, then climbs an exquisite white granite face, and finishes on a glorious red dihedral we named the Red Fox Corner in honor of the elusive, beautiful, and endangered Sierra Nevada critter of that name. Pitch four was the hardest, featuring desperate 5.12c slab. We replaced the bolts of Morning Lumber—which protect a steep 5.11+ section—that lead into the Red Fox Corner.

By the end of the summer, in a cumulative two weeks of effort, we'd established the first seven pitches of Gaia. [This block has become a route unto itself, redpointed by Adams and the author, Lance Colley, in the fall of 2023 at 5.12c.] We would have to return the next year to take it to the summit of Middle Cathedral.

In late May 2024, we again fixed ropes up to the Panda Palace to establish a comfy base camp. From there, we traversed right and up a pinnacle to the base of a headwall. I led an A2 pitch, at the end of which I found an old anchor and evidence of a climb going left to obvious roofs and corners. We could find no information on this unreported route. In search of an adventure, we looked to the right at much smaller, more elusive features.

We transitioned into the mindset of hard aid to tackle steep, blank granite for three pitches. The A3+ aid crux was protected by thin beaks and ended with a very cool hooking traverse on a golden-orange dike.

The next morning, our friends Miles Fullman and Sam Stuckey climbed our fixed lines to the Panda Palace to join us. Above our high point, two new pitches of 5.10 free climbing brought us to the Kat Walk traverse ledge, where we bivvied.

In the morning, Miles took the sharp end and free climbed an overhanging arch that he protected with hammered beaks. Sam led the penultimate pitch with a mixture of free and aid. The honor of the last pitch fell to me: A mix of easy free climbing and aid, followed by a long traverse on hooks, took me to a classic, slightly chossy Yosemite top-out. On the summit, we sat in the sun with big, cheesy smiles.

Gaia (2,200', 18 pitches, VI 5.12c A3+) is not to be missed.

— **Lance Colley**

## Images



The north face of Middle Cathedral Rock with the line of Gaia (2,200', 18 pitches, VI 5.12c A3+) and the newly established rappel route.



jpg Lance Colley excitedly pointing up at Gaia and the summit of Middle Cathedral.



Brandon Adams leading the 11th pitch of Gaia, which would become the aid crux of the route at A3+.

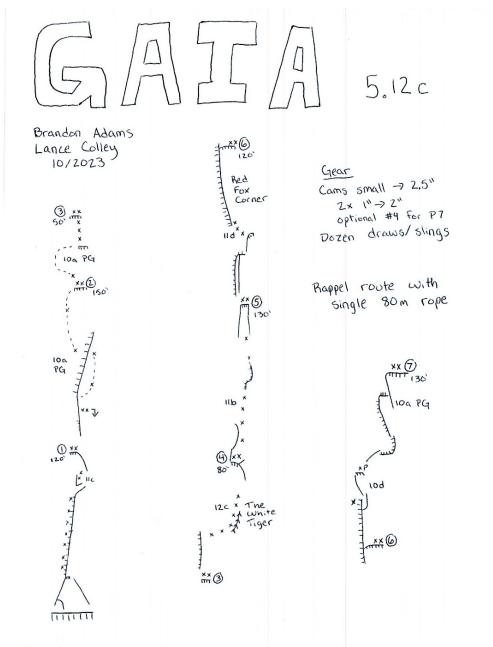


Miles Fullman leading off Kit Kat Ledge while Brandon Adams belays during the first ascent of Gaia on Middle Cathedral.

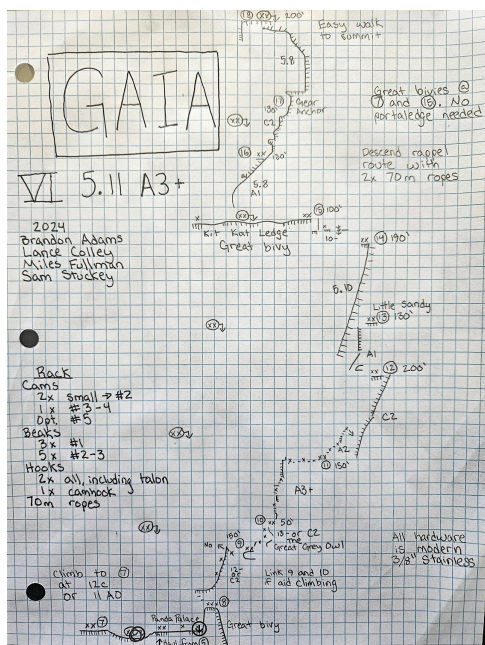




(Left to right) Miles Fullman, Brandon Adams, Lance Colley, and Sam Stuckey at the 13th belay on Gaia, which they named Little Sandy because of its similar feeling to the Big Sandy Ledge on Half Dome.



Topo for the free climbing portion of Gaia on the north face of Middle Cathedral. The free section encompasses the first seven pitches of the full wall route.



Topo for the aid climbing finish of Gaia on the north face of Middle Cathedral. The first seven pitches of the route were established as a free climb at 5.12c.

Article Details

Author	Lance Colley
Publication	AAJ
Volume	66
Issue	99
Page	137
Copyright Date	2025
Article Type	Climbs and expeditions