



AAC Publications

Lake Basin, Hershey's Kiss, Three New Routes

California, Sierra Nevada, Kings Canyon National Park

Jake Whisenant onsighting the 5.11c Glass Elevator roof, the third pitch of Wonka's Way (7 pitches, 5.11c) on Hershey's Kiss. Photo by Leo Franch

Over the long Fourth of July weekend, Matt Allen and I made the soul-crushing trek over Taboose and Cartridge passes into the seldom-visited Lake Basin in Kings Canyon National Park, drawn by the tremendous formations scattered across the area. Our attention locked on the striking, northeast-facing wall of the Cirque Crest ridge, known as Hershey's Kiss. The only known route on Hershey's Kiss was Sugaree (1,200', IV 5.11c), established by Chaz Langelier, Vitaliy Musiyenko, and Brian Prince in 2019. Musiyenko's and Roger Putnam's guidebook *High Sierra Climbing: Volume 2* had inspired our trip to Lake Basin.

We set up camp and made the short approach to the northeast face, then started up a finger crack that led to a corner system 200 feet right of Sugaree. A sudden rainstorm forced us down, and we spent the rest of the day confined to the tent. The next morning, under clear skies, we regained our high point and pushed up through a thin corner that exited onto the face to the left. From here, moderate cracks and small roofs led us for two long pitches to the ridge. Low-fifth-class climbing for a few rope lengths brought us to the top. Well protected and mostly clean, Tin Fish (1,000', 6 pitches, IV 5.10c) had enjoyable movement and even a patriotic Fourth of July flyover by a bald eagle.

Back at the base, with daylight remaining, we turned our attention to another system of corners and flakes 200 feet farther right on the wall. We climbed a left-facing corner through a thin roof before traversing right to a large flake and a comfy belay ledge beneath a series of left-traversing roofs, then enjoyed a spectacular sunset as we rappelled off.

The next morning, we reclinbed the opening and resumed the new line by climbing through the roofs and into an exciting dagger-shaped feature, which led to an exposed but comfortable stance. We dubbed this standout pitch *Roofs and Daggers*. Above, three pitches of excellent cracks (up to low 5.11) gave way to two long, left-traversing pitches of mostly low fifth class (with an occasional 5.7 sequence) and, finally, the summit. This second line proved the better of the two. *Vibe Vendetta* (1,100', 7 pitches, IV 5.11-) is sustained, clean, and full of variety.

In early September, Leo Franchi and Jake Whisenant put up another route on Hershey's Kiss, called *Wonka's Way* (7 pitches, 5.11c), to the left of Sugaree. They climbed it in one day, ground-up. *Wonka's Way* tackles some large roofs and crack systems on a steep headwall before climbing a well-protected 5.8/5.9 ridge feature. After topping out, they scrambled the ridge southeast to Cartridge Pass, then came back to the base to add a two-pitch opening variation to their route.

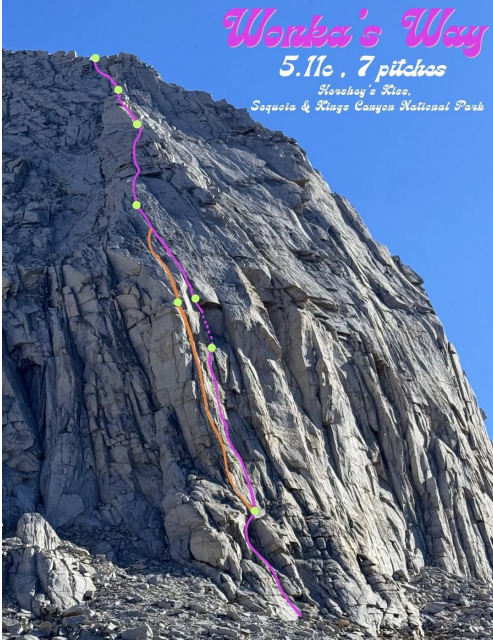
Although the rock in Lake Basin can be gritty, it is generally solid and offers room for more development. Perhaps this area will one day attract more climbers willing to endure its backbreaking approaches. For now, it remains a quiet, adventurous corner of the Sierra—waiting for the willing.

— Thomas Sicilian

Images



The northeast-facing wall of Hershey's Kiss with the lines (left to right) of Wonka's Way (7 pitches, 5.11c), established by Leo Franch and Jake Whisenant in 2025; Sugaree (1,200', IV 5.11c), established by Chaz Langlier, Vitaliy Musiyenko, and Brian Prince in 2019; and Tin Fish (1,000', 6 pitches, IV 5.10c) and Vibe Vendetta (1,100', 7 pitches, IV 5.11-), both established by Matt Allen and Thomas Sicilian in 2025.



Wonka's Way (7 pitches, 5.11c) on Hershey's Kiss. The orange line is a 5.10c variation.



Matt Allen in the roofs of pitch two on Vibe Vendetta on Hershey's Kiss.



Thomas Sicilian on pitch two, below a prominent dagger-shaped feature, on Vibe Vendetta on Hershey's Kiss.



Jake Whisenant onsighting the 5.11c Glass Elevator roof, the third pitch of Wonka's Way (7 pitches, 5.11c) on Hershey's Kiss.



Leo Franch following the 5.11 second pitch of Wonka's Way, which he and Jake Whisenant dubbed the Golden Ticket pitch.

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