



AAC Publications

Fifi Butress, The Nexus (a.k.a. The Niels Tietze Memorial Route)

California, Yosemite National Park

In early November 2020, Nick Sullens of Yosemite Valley SAR and Eric Lynch, a Yosemite climbing ranger, completed the long-awaited free ascent of a new route on the Fifi Butress in Yosemite Valley—the culmination of vision and determination by several Yosemite community members.

In the spring of 2017, Brandon Adams and Adam Ramsey established an aid route in the middle of the wall called Make It So (5.8 A4). Around the same time, Niels Tietze began envisioning a free line that shared many of the same features, and that autumn, Tietze and Adams ventured onto the route together. The line was “futuristic,” says Lynch, and as with many of the difficult modern routes on the Fifi Butress, Tietze planned to link crack systems with technical climbing on intricate face holds. Tietze pointed these features out to Adams, and the two debated bolt placements needed for a free ascent. With fixed lines on the route, Tietze began the work of equipping, cleaning, and perfecting the line.

Just a few weeks later, on November 13, 2017, Tietze fell from the route in an apparent rappelling accident, and for the next few years the project sat silent with his memory. (The In Memoriam tribute to Tietze from AAAJ 2018 can be found [here](#).)

Tietze had established around two-thirds of the route, and in 2019, Adams returned to see if he could complete the vision.

By the spring of 2020, Adams had installed more a dozen bolts, put a tremendous effort into cleaning the lichen-strewn wall, and attempted the free moves. But, he says, “I didn’t feel any ownership of it,” and by that fall his motivation had shifted away from trying for a free ascent. The first time Lynch tried the route, he was blown away. Nick Sullens had also been climbing on the route, and with Adams’ blessing, Lynch and Sullens teamed up to finish the project, though they had never climbed together before. They finally coordinated schedules on November 5, a day they both remember as perfect for climbing, though Yosemite’s first winter storm, predicted for the next day, added a bit of pressure.

The two flowed up the route, a climb they describe as sustained and with beautiful variety. The route follows face features, mainly knobs and flakes, through disconnected crack systems. The second pitch layback corner stands out to both climbers as one of the best pitches on the route, safe, modern, and approachable. Still, Sullens says, “there aren’t bolts where there don’t need to be bolts. It’s definitely in the Yosemite style.”

Above the first pitch, rated 5.10+, the route has three pitches of 5.11, four pitches of 5.12, and two pitches of 5.13a/b. The free route shares about half of its pitches with Adams’ aid route, Make It So. All the Fifi Butress routes are named with a Star Trek theme, and Lynch and Sullens chose a name that also honored Tietze, whom they felt was a kindred spirit to Captain Kirk (“the lovable, fun, and brave captain of the ship”); in one episode of the Star Trek franchise, Kirk disappears into an energy field called the Nexus during an attempt to save the Enterprise. “Niels is definitely Captain Kirk,” says Sullens.

"[The Nexus] was a huge gift," Sullens says. "I spent a lot of time up there alone, reflecting on my time in Yosemite, on Niels' death." Both Sullens and Lynch also credit Adams' hard work on bolting and cleaning, but for Adams the route's ultimate credit still lies with Niels Tietze. "I never would have done it without his vision," he says.

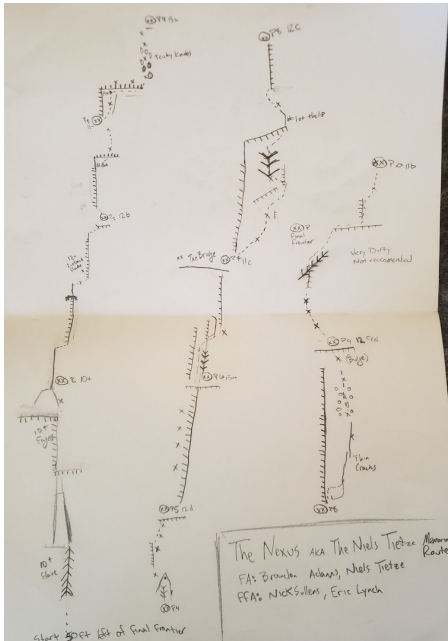
Lynch wrote at Mountain Project: "Niels was a wild man. I did not know him well, but his energy, vibrancy, and grasping toward living life to the fullest inspired everyone who knew him. Niels was a renaissance man with a staggering variety of passions and maintained an open mind to everyone he interacted with. He found value and meaning in places overlooked by most. He is sorely missed in this community and in this world."

— Lauren DeLaunay Miller

Images



The Fifi Buttress in Yosemite National Park showing the line of the Nexus, a.k.a. The Niels Tietze Memorial Route (900', 10 pitches, 5.13-).



Topo for the Nexus, a.k.a. the Niels Tietze Memorial Route (900', 10 pitches, 5.13-) on the Fifi Buttress in Yosemite National Park.

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