



Ski Descents

Any skier who has driven Highway 395 has probably looked up at the hundred miles of peaks stretching from Lone Pine to Tioga Pass and marvelled at the abundance of opportunities to get out and ski long runs from the mountain tops to the valley floor. Spring is the high point of our ski season and one of our favorite times of the year. These descents range from mere thigh burners to all day undertakings with predawn starts and late afternoon finishes. You choose the length: a good day gets us 4,000' of vertical and longer runs are possible.

We keep the itinerary open until we see how conditions are and which aspects are in the best shape, then make our selection based on this information, and the group's experience and objectives. There is certainly no shortage of lines to choose from. One of our favorites is the legendary Elderberry Canyon. The driven among you can go all the way to the summit for a very long day with 7,000' of descent. Most mortals however are content with four or five thousand feet of what at a ski area would be an intermediate "blue square" run. Or how about Basin Mountain: starting from just below the summit and down 6,000' into the sage desert. More technical are the Wahoo Gullies on Mt. Locked or Morphine Canyon above Tom's Place. Or how about Jawbone Canyon, Esha Canyon on Morgan, White Mountain or Ellery Bowl or... The list just goes on. No matter what we choose you will be assured of skiing the best runs we can find often with a summit to aim for. Generally we start early in the morning before daylight and head out while the snow is firm with easier travelling conditions. We time our turn around to catch the best conditions on the way down and want to be finished before the snow gets too soft and mushy, usually getting back to base in time for a snack and to relax and gloat over our tracks high above. For either of these programs you can use telemark or alpine touring equipment, your choice. Snowboarders are welcome on these trips too. Whatever you choose be comfortable on the gear going uphill as well as on the descents.

Camp I: Based in the Bishop area.

Bishop meeting place and time: We will meet at the SMC office at 6.00 p.m. the night before the scheduled start of the trip. This allows us to complete a gear and equipment check and to outline the following days activities since an early start will probably be in order. The world headquarters of Sierra Mountain Center are at 174 W. Line Street, in Bishop. Line Street is an east/west street marked by the southern-most traffic light on Main Street/Highway 395, in town. We're west of the light, on the south side of the street next to the health food store. A large parking lot is located on the south side of the building. We will have camping arranged at Millpond Campground just north of Bishop where there are ample car camping sites and hot showers. If you prefer to stay in Bishop in the comfort of a motel let us know and we can arrange that for you. (Motel expense is not included in the program price but camping is). You can cook in the campground or go into Bishop for meals except breakfast which is probably best had in the campground since it will be early.

Camp II: The Tioga Pass area. We time this camp to take advantage of the opening of the Tioga road which allows us to drive right to snowline and put skis on at the car.

Tioga meeting place and time: We will meet at 6.00pm at the Nicely's Restaurant in the center of Lee Vining the night before the scheduled start of the program. From here we will proceed to our campsite in Lee Vining Canyon and prepare for the following days activities. If you prefer you can stay at a motel in Lee Vining and we can assist in coordinating this for you. We'll return to camp each afternoon in time for a solar shower, snacks and to get ready for another early start and great skiing the next day. Meals are not included in this camp.

Dates and Prices: Check the latest brochure, call us or go to our web site for dates and rates. Should minimum participant numbers not be reached you will be given the option of paying our private rate, rescheduling, or cancelling. Price includes guiding, permits, all necessary group gear, camping fees, avalanche beacons, shovels and probes.

Notes: The SMC web site has photos a map and more information.

Proper acclimatization to the elevation will greatly increase your pleasure and enjoyment of the trip. We highly recommend getting at least one day and night at altitude immediately prior to the trip, for instance, by staying in Mammoth, or better yet, camped at an even higher trailhead, such as the South Lake/Bishop Pass trailhead for a day or two just before the trip.

Gear and equipment: SMC does not rent ski equipment, but we work with Mammoth Mountaineering (760 934 4191) to get you set up on the correct equipment. MMS has a very wide range of rental equipment that is probably the best you will find anywhere in California. All gear is state of the art, well tuned and rental fees are deductible if you buy a set up from them. (We highly recommend renting before you buy so as to find what suits you best, since a full setup is pretty pricy). We can coordinate the rental but suggest that you arrive Mammoth the night before since boot fitting can take some time.

Prerequisites: We will be able to divide the groups according to skill level and there is ample terrain for everyone to find their ideal runs. You do not need to have prior backcountry ski experience, but you should be comfortable skiing intermediate and above runs at a ski area.

Ski Descents Camp Equipment List

The following list is a general guide and will assist you in packing for the program. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have specific questions regarding equipment and if you need assistance prior to making a purchase. The following list will vary according to the time of year, and your individual requirements.

Items on the list with an * may be rented from SMC.

Essentials

- Skis*. Metal edge telemark mountaineering skis or alpine touring skis are essential. Better too short than too long. Get them tuned and check the bindings for tightness and boot fit prior to the trip. We can coordinate ski rentals from Mammoth Mountaineering (760) 934-4191.
- Boots*. Stiff, high top boots in good condition and water-proof. Asolo Extreme and Snopine, Merrell Ultra, and Black Diamond T-2 and 3 are some examples of acceptable telemark boots. For Alpine touring we recommend the Scarpa Lasers, Lowa or Dynafit boots. Make sure your boots are a comfortable fit for walking and skiing. We can coordinate boot rental from Mammoth Mountaineering (760) 934-4191.
- Climbing skins*. These should be close to the width of the ski's waist. Make sure the glue is in good shape.
- Poles*. Telescoping probe type are best.
- Day pack of about 1500 cubic inches.

Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic liner socks
- 2 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks. Some people like to use using vapor barrier or neoprene socks.
- Gaiters. These are usually not necessary in spring, depending on your boot system. If in doubt, please ask.
- Long underwear top and bottom. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable
- Warm pants. Tights or Expedition weight Capilene
- Warm shirt. Expedition Capilene or light Synchilla
- Another fuzzy sweater top of some sort
- Rain/wind pants & rain jacket. Preferably Goretex or similar and of good quality with a hood. Do not skimp on your rain gear.
- Warm hat that covers the ears.
- Visor hat (for sun).
- Bandanna, surgical mask; for facial and neck sun protection.
- Liner gloves. Midweight capilene, windstopper or similar is best.
- Shell gloves or mittens.
- Long sleeve lightweight white shirt for sun protection. Hawaiian patterns suggested.

Etc...

- Sunglasses, high quality with keeper leash. Side shields are recommended. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair. .
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen. A 1oz. bottle will be sufficient.
- Two 1-quart plastic water bottles with insulating jackets
- Personal first aid kit, foot care, and any required medications. We will have a large group medical kit; go light on your own kit. Bring plenty of blister treatment items.
- Camera, film and spare batteries.

Food

- Bring snack food for during the days. Dinners can be cooked in the campground or we can go into Bishop or Lee Vining for a restaurant meal. Breakfasts will be quick and you should have some easy to prepare items for this.

Group gear that will be provided and divided amongst the group prior to starting the trip

- One shovel for each person
- Avalanche transceiver for each person
- One probe per two people
- First aid kit
- Ski repair kit

Car Camping Equipment

- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about 20°F.
- Sleeping pads. A Thermarest and or Ridgerest.
- Eating utensils. Bowl, cup, fork and spoon.
- Food for breakfast, lunch, and dinner, (unless you plan on eating in town).