



Clarence King and Gardner Basin Tour

For many years now we have been out exploring the ski touring potential of the Sierra Nevada and developing new routes. This journey into the Clarence King and Gardner Basin area is one of the best we have recently found. It is more than just a ski tour and combines some great ski mountaineering up some of the Sierra's finest peaks deep in the heart of the range.

Itinerary: We start from the Onion Valley trailhead and head up and over Kearsarge Pass just as we start our favorite variation on the High Route. But then we turn right and countour around towards Glenn Pass on the John Muir Trail. The pass is steep of the north side but gives a great run down towards Rae Lakes. A small pass takes us into the Sixty Lakes Basin and yet another pass drops us into Gardner Basin where we will set up our camp for a couple of days. From here we can climb and ski from the summit of Mount Cotter. Climb towards Mt Gardner, leave our skis near the summit and continue along the exposed knife edge to the top. The initial descent is steep, but faces south and we hope and expect great Sierra corn snow for the run home.

If we are into peak bagging Mount Clarence King is the high point of the area and the summit block involves some very tricky climbing that is best accomplished by throwing a rope over the top. While doing this we generally wonder how Bolton Brown achieved this, solo no less, in 1896. Guess they were pretty good back then and we have not gotten a lot better!

Once we have ticked off as many ascents as we can we start the journey home.

We retrace our steps part way above Rae Lakes before taking a small un-named col behind the Painted Lady skirting Dragon Lake. Above this is Dragon Pass the most difficult pass on our tour and it that will take us sometime to negotiate it's 4th class loose rock. Fortunately the east side is a great ski run back down to the vehicles at Onion Valley.

Meeting place and time: We rendezvous at 7.00 am trip at the Winnedumah Hotel in beautiful downtown Independence the first morning of the trip. The hotel is in the center of town on the west side of Highway 395 - not hard to find since Independence extends barely a half mile. We leave some vehicles at the Independence airport before doing a through equipment check and shuttling to the roadhead.

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, avalanche beacons, tents, kitchen gear and dinners, lunches and breakfasts (you bring snack items).

Length: 26 miles **Duration** 5 days **Difficulty:** SMC Tour Rating III

Other information: For a good overview see the Inyo National Forest John Muir/Ansel Adams Wilderness map (but please don't bring it on the trip...). The SMC web site has photos, our own topo map, trip profile 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.

Prerequisites: You need advanced ski skills for this tour. You should be able to ski advanced ski area runs confidently and be proficient at kick turns, traversing on 40 degree slopes, side slipping and parallel or telemark turns all while carrying a pack of about 40 pounds. Prior winter camping and mountaineering skills are required. You will be travelling up to eight miles a day and gaining up to 3500 feet a day so an excellent level of aerobic fitness is required.