



Bear Creek Spire

Bear Creek Spire is a true mountaineer's peak - not easily accessible and providing one of the finest views in the central Sierra. Access is easy and straightforward traveling through the beautiful Little Lakes Valley from one of the highest trailheads in the Eastern Sierra. The Northeast Ridge offers mainly fourth-class climbing, but with a spectacular ridge traverse to the summit. The shady North Buttress is best climbed in the summer and gives up to 5.8 climbing before joining the Northeast Ridge.

Meeting place and time: We will meet at the Toms Place Restaurant, located to the west of Highway 395, 18 miles north of Bishop, at 7:30 a.m. for breakfast. This is at the top of the long steady hill climb (Sherwin Grade) north of Bishop. Go a hundred feet from Highway 395 on the road that heads west to Rock Creek Lake and turn north on the frontage road to the restaurant. Have gear organized, but not packed in the big pack.

Itinerary: These routes can be done in a day, but we prefer to take a little more time, slow down and enjoy the beauty of the area. The additional time to acclimatize to the elevation also helps a lot for the actual ascent. The approach is via Little Lakes Valley, Rock Creek Canyon. Trailhead elevation is just over 10,000 feet here, offering a bit of a head start on the approach as compared with the other climbs in the Eastern Sierra that can start from the low desert. Our approach is a very good trail for the first two miles to Long Lake. Here we take a minor trail up Treasure Lakes Gully to stunningly beautiful Treasure Lakes. We take a break here and then climb over a small dome and drop down to our camp at Dade Lake at 11,500 and a little over four miles from the roadhead. In the morning we have a little less than a mile and a bit over 1000 feet, the final short section over a small snowfield take us to the start of the climbing. Just before the snowfield there is a small moraine where we can leave extra equipment.

North Arete: Two days, 5.8, Intermediate

Most of the climbing on the initial part of the arete is 5.7. About half way up a short steep area is reached and is passed via a 5.8 chimney/crack pitch. An interesting pitch with a tunnel move follows and leads to easier terrain that is mostly fourth class. We move off the summit ridge onto the west side briefly before the final 40 feet to the top. The actual summit is typical of many a Sierra peak. A monolithic block with no cracks and exposed. Luckily the summit register is below this final obstacle and unless you're really adventurous you might need to satisfy yourself with touching the true high point with a hand, rather than standing on the top. Descent begins with one long rappel and then a simple scramble back to the base. Usually there is quite a bit of easy snow on the return - plan on bringing gaiters and having damp boots by the time we reach the talus below.

North-east Ridge: The North East Ridge: Two days, 5.4, Beginner

The climbing is a lot easier than the North Arete, which it joins a few hundred feet below the summit. From the moraine we turn left and head over to Peppermint Col at just below 13,000' and overlooking beautiful Spire Lake in the Pine Creek drainage. We rope up here and move through increasingly difficult third and fourth class terrain as the ridge gradually steepens and becomes more and more narrow. Occasional belays and easy stretches make up the rhythm of the climb for most its length. The upper ridge is certainly exposed, but the views over the valleys and desert should be more than enough to distract you. We do the same maneuvers to gain the tiptop and descend the same way as the North Arete.

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 climbing gear, tents, kitchen gear and breakfasts, lunches and dinners (you bring hot/cold drinks and snack items). Scheduled dates include USFS trail fees. Private programs do not.

Ratios: These are long ascents and we undertake them at a maximum ratio of 1:2.

Notes and other information: The best guidebooks are Supertop's "High Sierra Climbing" by Chris McNamara and Peter Croff's "The Good, The Great, and the Awesome". Get them from Maximus Press. We highly recommend that you spend at least one night at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000') just prior to the trip. Spending a night in Mammoth or camped at the trailhead campground in Rock Creek Canyon would do the trick. You could also stay at Rock Creek Lodge. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info.

Prerequisites: North Arete: Technical climbing skills are required: you should be able to comfortably follow 5.8. You should be in good condition and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderate pack.

Northeast Ridge: The climb is mostly scrambling so prior experience with roped climbing is helpful but not necessary and the same is true of ice axe/crampons. You should be in good condition and have some backpacking experience at altitude and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderate pack.

Equipment List for Bear Creek Spire

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 or 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 with an * may be rented from SMC.

Climbing equipment

- Ice Axe*. A standard 70 cm. General purpose axe will suffice for most routes. Required only for early season ascents.
- Crampons*. These should be matched to the boot. We suggest for very flexible boots the Charlet Moser G10 or Black Diamond Contact Clip; for stiffer boots the Black Diamond Sabretooth, the Moser G12 or Rambo. Required only for early season ascents.
- Harness.* An adjustable type works best such as a Black Diamond Alpine Bod.
- Helmet. New models such as the Petzl "Helios" or the Black Diamond Half Dome are comfortable and light weight. We provide these for the program.
- Two locking carabiners and a couple of non-lockers.*
- Belay/rappel device*. An ATC style is preferred.
- Rock shoes are required for the North Arete but the North-east arete can be climbed in either sturdy hiking boots or light-weight mountaineering boots.

Other essentials

- Footwear: bring the lightest boot you can get away with. If snow travel is expected you should bring a heavier boot and gaiters
- Camp Shoes. A lightweight pair of tennies or Tevas to wear in camp. This will reduce vegetation damage at our campsites.
- Large Pack. A 3000 to 4000 cubic inch will hold everything for the two days in the backcountry. Internal frame packs are recommended for their comfort and balance when climbing. A pack that allows plenty of compression is best since this allows it to be carried on climbs without the need for a smaller day pack. The Gregory Makalu or Reality are about the right size.
- A day pack is recommended.
- Sleeping Bag. Most fall trips are warm and a bag rated to about 20°F will be plenty warm enough.
- Sleeping pad. A 3/4 or full length closed cell foam or Thermarest. If you bring a Thermarest also bring a repair kit to fix pesky leaks.

Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic liner socks.
- 2 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks.
- Gaiters.
- Long underwear top. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable.
- Long underwear bottom.
- Warm pants. Tights or Expedition weight Capilene
- Warm shirt. Synchronilla or 200 weight works well.
- Another fuzzy sweater top or pile jacket of some sort.
- GoreTex Jacket and Pants. A lightweight set is sufficient and heavy bulky rainwear is unnecessary. Side zips on the pants should be long enough to slide on over boots. The jacket must have a hood. Do not skimp on your rain gear.
- Shorts for on the trail.
- Tee shirt for on the trail.
- Polypropylene or similar gloves.
- Heavyweight gloves.
- Warm hat. Synthetics are less itchy than wool.
- Sunhat.

Etc.

- Sun glasses. Good quality with side shields.
- Ski poles. These are not essential, but can be handy on the trail. It is your choice, but they do save wear on the knees.
- Water Bottles. Two quart (1 liter) wide mouth bottles and or a hydration system holding up to 50oz. (2 liters).
- Headlamp. With a spare set of batteries.
- Eating and drinking equipment. Forget the traditional Sierra cup, instead use an insulated backpacking mug, with a lid. This can double for a bowl. Fork and spoon.
- Pocket knife. Swiss army style.
- Personal toiletries. It is not necessary to smell like a rose each day so do not over do it. Remember toilet paper and a small zip-lock bag to carry out in.
- Personal Medical Kit. The guide will carry a large kit so yours will predominately consist of foot repair items and mild pain killer such as Advil and bandaids.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. A 1oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- Bug repellent. Only needed in the early season.
- Camera/film/spare battery.
- Plastic Trash Sac. Handy for keeping in outside the tent should it rain.
- Optional reading material etc.

Food

- We will provide breakfast, dinner and lunch but bring some snack items like cliff bars, power bars, gorp concoctions. A days worth for most people would be 2 bars, 3 ounces of gorp, and perhaps a candy bar. Don't over do it.

Shared Equipment Provided by SMC

- Shelter. We will provide lightweight, storm worthy tents. If you have your favorite, by all means bring it, but we do want to pair people up where possible to reduce weight.
- Stove. We provide MSR Whisperlite stoves.
- Cookwear.
- Water purification. A sad but true fact of life is that much Sierra water is contaminated. Iodine may be used individually or the group can carry a pump style purifier.
- Bear Canisters. Sierra bears have fallen into bad habits and learned that backpacker's food is tasty and easy to obtain. We will provide these bulky, but necessary items.

You specifically don't need

- ⊗ Cell phones. They rarely work anyway.
- ⊗ Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one).
- ⊗ Deodorant or any toiletries beyond those listed above.
- ⊗ Items that are not on this list.