



North Peak Ice Climb

California is well known for a sunny climate and fantastic rock climbing but less well known is its alpine ice climbing. Come late summer and fall the snows of the past winter have melted off and repeated freeze and thaw cycles have transformed the snow to firm neve and water ice, often offering straightforward ways to the summits of many a Sierra peak.

North Peak is another one of the great introductory ice routes in the High Sierra. It has the added benefit of a short approach and return, making for a reasonable car-to-car day. The climb comprises six pitches of snow and/or ice up to about 50°, followed by a short rock scramble to the summit and an easy descent.

Meeting place and time: We will meet at 6.00 a.m. at the trailhead parking area for Saddlebag Lake. The turn off to Saddlebag Lake is off Highway 120 just before the Tioga Pass Resort. Take this a couple of miles to the parking area on the right-hand side near the end of the to Saddlebag Lake Road opposite the dam. If you get to the Marina you have gone too far. You should be fed, packed, and more or less ready to go.

Itinerary: This is a long one-day climb. We meet early and plan on a 10 to 12 hour round trip, generally retracing our steps for the return.

We approach via the Saddlebag Lake Trail as it traverses around the lake for a mile before flattening out at the head of the lake near Greenstone Lake. We continue past small lakes and tarns, steadily climbing towards North Peak. We surmount a steep rocky ridge, climb over a loose moraine and we are at the small glacier below the peak.

We gear up with crampons and pull out axes at this point. Before long we enter the couloir. The bergschrund generally does not present any problems and we belay on ice screws or with rock anchors on the wall of the couloir. There are about six pitches of climbing and ice the gully is hard ice the calves will be crying out y the time we reach the top. On the other hand soft neve will be a lot easier on the legs.

A rest here will revive us and get us ready for the final 300 feet to the top. There is a little low fifth class rock and we emerge pretty close to the summit.

The descent is easy with long sandy slopes back down to Conness Lakes and a glorious descent over rock slabs and through verdant meadows. Then comes the final section back to the parking area.

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: This is technical ascent and we undertake it at a maximum ratio of 1:3 for this route.

Notes and other information: Guidebooks include Secor's "The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails", and "Sierra Classics" by Moynier and Fiddler The best of course is "Eastern Sierra Ice" by SP Parker.

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 would do the trick or better yet, camped at an even higher trailhead, such as the Sawmill Creek Campground on the Saddlebag Lake Road or in Tuolumne, for a night just before the trip. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info.

Prerequisites: You do not need to have climbed steep ice before but basic snow travel skills are preferred. In the fall the snow is often hard and icy so we will not be able to work on self arrest and similar skills so come equipped with these.

Equipment List for North Peak

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 this route. A shorter tool is optional.
- Second Tool*. This should be an ice hammer and we recommend a straight shaft rather than a bent.
- 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.
- Harness.* A step-in 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.

Other essentials

- Footwear. A medium-weight pair of leather mountaineering boots or heavyweight hiking boots will be sufficient. The Sportiva Glacier is a good example of an appropriate mountain boot. Plastic boots are fine but will tend to be somewhat hot and uncomfortable on the approach so, if space in the pack permits, these can be carried and a lightweight pair of hiking boots used on the walk in.
- Pack. Big enough to carry everything for the route.

Clothing

- 1 pair synthetic liner socks.
- 1 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks.
- Gaiters.
- 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.
- Polypropylene or similar gloves.
- Heavyweight gloves.
- Warm hat. Synthetics are less itchy than wool.
- Sunhat.

Etc.

- Sun glasses. Good quality with side shields.
- 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.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. A 1 oz. bottle will be sufficient. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- Camera/film/spare battery.
- 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.
- Food for the day. Quick snacks and a light lunch. We hope to be down to get food for dinner in Lee Vining.

You specifically don't need

- ⊗ Cell phones. They rarely work anyway.
- ⊗ Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one).
- ⊗ Items that are not on this list.