



## **Palisades High Peaks Camp**

The Palisades region of the Sierra is home to some of the most highly coveted summits in the range and is known for its fine mountaineering and as a great training ground for alpine ranges of the world. With five peaks over 14,000' accessible from one high camp (Sill, Polemonium, North Palisade, Starlight, and Thunderbolt) the cirque at the head of the North Fork of Big Pine Creek has much to offer the mountaineer. None of these mountains offers an easy route from their east side and only Sill has a third class route from any approach, making these among the most difficult of Sierra peaks.

For this program we dwell less upon formal instruction in skills and aim to climb peaks with instruction along the way. So we assume a reasonable level of exposure to climbing skills in the past.

Since the approach to the Palisades is long we have taken to using pack stock for the approach. Yes. It is cheating (kind of) but we have found that groups that hike all the way to the Glacier in one day are generally too tired to be able to do anything the next day other than sleep. With the pack stock we can walk with a light daypack and water and snacks to the turnoff to Sam Mack Meadows, a distance of about 6 miles and elevation gain of nearly 3,000 feet. We hope to get here by midday and that leave us about 2.5 miles and 2000 feet to go to camp.

We hope to climb North Palisade via the U-notch and Sill via the Swiss Arete. Other options are Starlight or Thunderbolt peaks. What we wind up doing depends upon climbing conditions and the objectives of participants. Whatever routes we choose you can be certain that this trip combines the best in the snow, ice, and rock routes of the High Sierra.

**Meeting place and time:** The course meets at the Glacier Pack Train parking lot at 6:30 am on the first day of the trip. Follow Glacier Lodge Road west out of the town of Big Pine. A half mile or so before the road ends the pack station comes up on the right. It is signed. We'll meet in the big parking area opposite the pack station, on the south side of the road. Most vehicles will take about 20 minutes to get here from Big Pine as it's a gain of 3,500'. Vehicles can be parked at the pack station's parking area. Since we're getting packed to our first camp you need to have your gear prepared to be loaded on the animals. Plan on loading your heavy items into your main pack for the horses and gear for the day in your daypack. The packers like to leave the packstation early as possible be ready to get organized quickly.

**Itinerary:** The longer a trip is in the mountains, the more vague the itinerary need be. It is quite ambitious to plan on climbing three 14ers in three days. But, in a perfect world, the trip will go like this:

**Day One:** We will meet, pack, do an equipment check, get the loads onto the pack stock and hike to the Sam Mack Meadow turnoff. Here we will pick up the heavy loads and head to high camp near the Palisade Glacier (elevation 12,300'). This is a long day but once into camp we have done the hard work and can get down to enjoying the climbing

**Day Two:** A moderate day, tuning up skills climbing Mt. Gayley or Mt. Winchel

**Day Three:** An early start (4:00 am) for either the Swiss Arete or Starr Route on Sill, 10 to 12 hour round trip.

**Day Four:** North Palisade via the U-notch.

**Day Five:** Head out, arriving at the trailhead by late afternoon.

**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 technical climbs of significant length. So to ensure we return to camp before it turns dark and leaves us stumbling around in the talus we have a maximum ratio of 1:2.

**Notes and other information:** Guidebooks include Secor's "The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails", "Sierra Classics" by Moynier and Fiddler. Peter Croft's "The Good, The Great, and the Awesome". Get the latter from Maximus Press. <http://www.maximuspress.com> The best of course is "Eastern Sierra Ice" by SP Parker. Get it from Maximus Press.

You can also get our unpublished SMC Guide to the Palisades on-line.

While we will climb up gradually with several nights at about 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 one of the campgrounds in Big Pine Creek for a night just before the trip. Glacier Lodge is also a good lodging option. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info.

**Prerequisites:** Prior rock climbing experience at up to an easy fifth class level. We will practice snow and ice skills, but prior experience is helpful. The approach to camp is seven miles long and we will be carrying full packs from below Sam Mack meadow to camp so be in good physical shape and be prepared to work hard on the first day.

Some relevant elevations for an idea of the gain. Trailhead; 7,873', pack pickup; 10,600'; Glacier camp 12,280'.

# Equipment List for the Palisades High Peaks

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

## **Climbing equipment**

- Ice Axe\*. A standard 70 cm. general purpose axe will suffice for most routes.
- 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.\* An adjustable type such as a Black Diamond Alpine Bod works best.
- 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. For most Sierra climbs a medium-weight pair of leather mountaineering boots will be sufficient. In general you should wear the lightest boot you can get away with. The Sportiva Makalu or Glacier is a good example of an appropriate mountain boot. Plastic boots are a bit too heavy for these routes and are hot on the approach trail.
- Camp Shoes. A lightweight pair of tennies or Texas to wear in camp. This will reduce vegetation damage at our campsites.
- Pack\*. A 4000 cubic inch will hold everything for the backcountry. Internal frame packs are recommended for their comfort and balance when climbing. A pack that allows plenty of compression 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. You will need a smaller day pack if your big pack won't compress adequately.
- Climbing pack. A separate pack is recommended for these climbs if your main one is big and does not compress down.
- Sleeping Bag. Most summer trips are warm and a bag rated to about 25° will be plenty warm enough except in the spring and late fall.
- 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.
- 1 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks.
- Gaiters-usually required only on spring trips.
- Long underwear top and bottom. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable.
- Warm pants. Tights or Expedition weight Capilene.
- Warm shirt. Synchronia 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 clothing is unnecessary. Side zips on the pants should be long enough to slide on over boots. 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 and shells.
- Warm hat.

- 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.
- Iodine for water purification.
- 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 the used in.
- Personal Medical Kit. The guide will carry a large kit so yours will consist of foot repair items, mild pain killer such as Advil and bandaids.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. A 1 oz. 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 gear in outside the tent should it rain.
- Optional reading material etc.
- 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.

## **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.

## **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.