



Ritter and Banner

An Introduction to Sierra Peak Climbing

These two peaks dominate the Sierra Skyline near Mammoth and offer a perfect introduction to the pleasures of Sierra Peak climbing. John Muir was the first to ascend Mt. Ritter and we follow his footsteps into mountains little changed since his days here. Pack stock will carry gear to camp near Ediza Lake while we strike a leisurely and comfortable hiking pace. We spend a day getting our skills in order and then tackle our main goals: ascents of both Ritter and Banner. But as well as climbing we include plenty of instruction as well as simply time to relax and enjoy one of the most beautiful areas of the Sierra. This is a perfect trip for someone who has done little peak climbing but wants to discover the joys of being in the Sierra in the summer and ascending classic mountains in a classic fashion.

Anyone driving Highway 395 in the vicinity of Mammoth has probably noticed these impressive peaks dominating the Sierra skyline. Their spectacular appearance makes them a magnet for the climber, but while they appear impressive they are not unduly difficult to ascend. Noted climber and explorer Clarence King attempted Ritter in 1866 but retreated, calling the peak inaccessible. However the redoubtable John Muir proved him wrong and made the first ascent in 1872. In his book "The Mountains of California" he describes the view from the summit:

"Looking southward along the axis of the range, the eye is first caught by a row of exceedingly sharp and slender spires, which rise openly to a height of about a thousand feet, above a series of short, residual glaciers that lean back against their bases, their fantastic sculpture and the unrelieved sharpness with which they spring out of the ice rendering them peculiarly wild and striking. These are the "Minarets". Beyond them you behold a sublime wilderness of mountains, their snowy summits towering together in crowded abundance, peak beyond peak, swelling higher, higher as they sweep on southward, until the culminating point of the range is reached on Mount Whitney..."

What was for Muir one of his most difficult ascents is now for us a delightful and not too hard excursion.

Meeting place and time: We will meet in Mammoth at the Breakfast Club for breakfast, introductions, and trip outline at 7:00 a.m. the first morning of the trip. The packers like to get going early so we need to be at Red's Meadow by 8.30 am. The Breakfast Club is located on Highway 203 (the access road to Mammoth from Highway 395) at the first traffic light you encounter, adjacent to the Shell Station. This is the intersection of Highway 203 and Old Mammoth Road and the restaurant is on the south side of 203. If needed the phone there is 934-6944. After breakfast we will do an equipment check before driving to the trailhead. We'll then caravan to the Agnew Meadow Pack Station. There is a \$5.00 per vehicle entry fee or Golden Eagle and Parks passes for entry to the Reds and Agnew Meadows area.

Itinerary: Day One: Hiking the six miles without heavy packs allows us to take an easy leisurely hike up the San Joaquin River from Agnew Meadows, past beautiful Shadow Lake and up to camp in the vicinity of tranquil Lake Ediza.

Day Two: We will take an acclimatization scramble up nearby Volcanic Ridge which has a great view of the Minarets and the entire Ritter range north into the Yosemite High Country. This also preps us for our ascents of Ritter or Banner or both over days three and four.

Day Three and Four: For Mount Banner we will ascend to the Ritter-Banner Saddle via some 3rd class climbing and then make our way up easy talus slopes to the summit. On Mount Ritter we have two choices: The North Face above the Ritter-Banner Saddle: this is the route that John Muir first climbed. Or we can climb the South-east Glacier route which involves more snow climbing. Which one we take will depend upon route conditions and the objectives of group members.

Day Five: We pack up and return to the vehicles 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. We have scheduled dates for climbing these peaks but also undertake it as a custom ascent. Pack stock support both ways is very expensive and we need to have a full trip to cover this. With fewer participants we may need to add an extra charge to cover this.

Ratios: These climbs are straightforward ascents so we undertake them at a maximum ratio of 1:4.

Notes and other information: Notes

Guidebooks include Secor's "The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails". 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 would do the trick. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info.

Prerequisites: No prior mountaineering experience is required but you should have some backpacking and hiking experience. You should be in good physical condition.

Equipment List for Ritter and Banner

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. Please try to pack lightly and compactly. Items on the list with an * may be rented from SMC.

Climbing equipment

- Ice Axe*. A standard 70 cm. general purpose axe will suffice. These may or not be needed. We will let you know.
- 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. These may or not be needed. We will let you know.
- Harness*. An adjustable leg loop type such as the Black Diamond Bod or Wild Things Espresso will accommodate layer changes.
- 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.
- Carabiners*. Two locking carabiners (Screwgates are more secure than twist lock style and easier to manipulate) and two regular carabiners are required.

Other essentials

- Footwear. For these climbs 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.
- Large Pack*. A 4000 cubic inch will hold everything for the five days in the backcountry. Internal frame packs are recommended for their comfort and balance when climbing. The Gregory Makalu or Reality are about the right size. You will be able to put your big pack on the mules and hike in with a small climbing pack.
- Day Pack. The big pack will go on the mules into camp and you will need a small pack for both hiking in and for the climbs.
- Sleeping Bag. Most summer trips are warm and a bag rated to about 25°F will be sufficient except in the spring and fall.
- Sleeping pad. A 3/4 length Ultralight thermarest paired with a Ridgerest foam pad is the best combination. If you bring a Thermarest also bring a repair kit to fix pesky leaks
- Bivvy Sac. Only if using a Megamid.
- Camp Shoes. A lightweight pair of tennies or Texas to wear in camp. This will reduce vegetation damage at our campsites.

Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic liner socks.
- 2 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks.
- Gaiters.
- Long underwear top. Capilene or some other synthetic is best.
- 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 clothing is unnecessary. Side zips on the pants should be long enough to slide on over boots. Jackets 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 shelled 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. 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 predominately consist of foot repair items, 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. Bring film and a spare battery to record those special moments.
- 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.
- Bear Canisters. Sierra bears have fallen into bad habits and learned that backpacker's food is tasty and easy to obtain. We provide these bulky items since the area warrants their use.

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.