



The Sierra High Hiking Route

Done the John Muir Trail? Looking for a more difficult route that takes you over the high country of the Sierra rather than through the valleys?

If so, the Sierra High Route is for you. This is not a trail hike, but follows high alpine passes and basins avoiding both trails and below treeline travel wherever possible. The route is the brainchild of long time Sierra climber and wanderer, Steve Roper, who pieced together the route in the late 1970s and is more a series of suggested sections than a clearly defined route. Many options exist but the overall goal is to stay high and to minimize trail travel. It would be possible to avoid trails all together, but this would create a very contrived route that also misses out on some fantastically beautiful country. We have added in some of our own variations that enable us to pick up food caches and break the route into manageable sections keeping the pack weight as light as possible.

Itinerary: Not everyone has the ability to get an entire three weeks off work so we have divided the trip into segments. You can sign up for all, or part of the hike, although of course we recommend doing all of it if you can. We are allowing twenty days for the complete trip and differing lengths of time for the segments. We will have several food drops so that the packs are not too heavy for each segment and if doing only part of the trip you will go in, or out, with the food drop. You can expect to cover ten to twelve miles a day. The tentative schedule is as follows, but remember that weather, conditions and perhaps issues such as sore feet or a desire for a rest day may well vary this outline. So be flexible and adapt to the inevitable changes that will occur during a trip of this duration. It's just as possible the trip will finish before the allotted number of days.

Numbered days refer to significant logistical events during the trip. Due to the difficulties of trying to map out every day of a long journey such as this other days have been omitted from this itinerary. Expect changes to this itinerary!

Section One: Taboose Pass to Bishop Pass

The start of any trip can be tough on the body so while this section involves some strenuous hiking we start off with not too much food in the packs to help us break into the trail easily. This is a very spectacular thorough one of the highest sections of the entire route. From our start in the low desert of the Owen's Valley we climb quickly into the high alpine zone of Upper Basin. Briefly following the JMT over Mather Pass we then take a high line below the spectacular west face of the Palisades and drop over Thunderbolt Pass into Dusy Basin where we meet our first food drop.

Day 0: The first night before the actual hiking start of the trip will be spent in Bishop where we will do an equipment check and put together the final items for the trip.

Day 1: We drive to Independence and start hiking. Taboose Pass has a reputation for not being easy!

Day 5: Arrive near Bishop Pass and pick up food.

Section Two: Bishop Pass to Rock Creek Canyon

This section spends some time on the trails and the John Muir Trail specifically, but who would want to miss out on the fantastic Evolution area, a vast glacier valley dotted with high alpine lakes. The canyons are deep and the peaks high as we link passes that the JMT carefully avoids. We take a variation here into Little Lakes Valley which also gives us the opportunity to scramble up Bear Creek Spire along the way.

Day 5: Leave Bishop Pass and drop to a camp in Le Conte canyon.

Day 10: Cross over Spire Col and drop down to pick up a resupply near Mosquito Flats in Rock Creek Canyon.

Section Three: Rock Creek to Devils Postpile

We head along the Mono Pass trail over Mono pass and down Golden Creek to regain Roper's route at Second Recess. This section is more spectacular than difficult as we gain the Silver Divide and head on towards the town and ski area of Mammoth.

Day 10: Leave Rock Creek and camp near Ruby Lake

Day 14: Arrive at Devils Postpile. Here we have the luxury of a hot shower, a restaurant cooked meal and even a beer.

Section Four: Devils Post Pile to Tioga

The highlights of this section are the peaks of Ritter, Banner and the minarets that dominate the area with their jagged skylines and sharp summits. The terrain changes slowly and becomes more open and expansive.

Day 15: Leave Devils Postpile.

Day 17: Arrive at the Tioga road.

Section Five: Tioga Road to Twin Lakes.

The trip is slowly winding down and by now you are in fantastic hiking shape and the miles will just flow by. This section stays close to the crest and crosses back and forth over it before dropping to finish at Mono Village near the small town of Bridgeport.

Day 18: Leave Tuolumne Meadows. We may shuttle along the road here to avoid the camping near road regulations and to get away from the camper vans and multitudes of tourists.

Day 20: Arrive at Twin Lakes. From here we will shuttle back to Bishop and a soft bed in a local motel.

Logistics: This is a long trip and for many people may be the longest backcountry trip they have ever done. Because of the length there is always the potential for things to go wrong and the unexpected to occur. Your guide will be trained in wilderness first aid and will carry a radio or cell phone for emergency communications. (No, not for personal use and calling home!). Remember that in these remote locations we cannot guarantee that cell phones will work reliably and in the event of an emergency it is likely to take a considerable effort to find a location where the phone will work. Family and friends can contact you through our office, but because of the problems of communication in the backcountry the delay can be substantial. It will be possible to receive (small) mail and messages with the resupplies.

Please read the equipment list carefully. The weight that you carry in the pack will be the most single important factor in how much you enjoy the trip. The less the better!

You need to be in good shape for the trip. This does not mean being a super fit marathoner though. The days will be long and steady. The most important thing is endurance and the ability to deal with whatever happens. Please contact us for details if you have specific questions.

Conditions: We do this trip in August to get what we consider to be the best conditions. Most biting insects and bugs should be gone. Days, while getting shorter should be warm with day temperatures in the 60 degree region and nights dipping to about 32 degrees rarely and only at the higher elevation. There may be small snow patches on the highest passes, but not enough to warrant ice axe and crampon use. Stream flows will be well below peak flow and most should be easy to cross. There is the possibility of afternoon thunderstorms that may be heavy for a short time. You will be in the high mountains so there is always the chance of snow, but prolonged storms are not likely at this time of year.

Weight: The big question everyone asks is how much will I have to carry. It all depends upon your equipment selection, planning, and care you take packing. Packs and weight. This is a different experience to hiking in, for example, Europe. You will have to carry a larger pack than what you might be used to, so prepare for that and check the equipment list suggestions.

There will be an opportunity to drop off extra gear at the first food resupply at Red's Meadow. After reconsidering what is essential and what is not, many people elect to use this option.

Personal and group gear (it's up to the group to share the load of community equipment such as tents, stoves, water purification, bear-proof food containers, etc.) should be about 25 to 30 pounds. If you can do less than this all the better. But on top of this comes food. We reckon this at about two pounds a day per person.

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.

Inclusions:

- Trailhead shuttle at both ends of the trip
- Food during the trip. This does not include restaurant meals at the beginning and end of the trip.
- Group equipment such as tents, food canisters, and water purification.
- Porter or mule supported supply drops during the trip.
- Guides, contingency and emergency support, and all necessary permits.

Price does not include transportation from airports to/from Bishop. We can help you make these arrangements but since people's travel plans vary so much we cannot include this transportation in the cost.

Getting to Bishop: Again, if you need assistance making these arrangements please let us know. The closest major airport is Reno, Nevada, approximately four hours to our north. Los Angeles is five hours to our south. A shuttle service exists between Bishop and Reno, transferring in Carson City. We usually help participants arrange this if necessary and is about \$30 per person each way. This price is not included in the basic trip price.

Notes to those from overseas: We have a number of people from overseas doing this trip so a few things for you. Do not panic too much about the bears. They are something to deal with but are not aggressive and are a part of the backcountry experience. We generally have no encounters with them at all and often hikers leave a little let down not to have even seen one beating a hasty retreat. To quote John Muir; in 1898

"In my first interview with a Sierra bear we were frightened and embarrassed, both of us, but the bear's behavior was better than mine"

Equipment List for the Sierra High Trail

The following list is a very specific guide that 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 less weight you carry, the better and this list is our suggestion for doing so. Remember that you'll be receiving your share of the group equipment prior to departure. If you do not have some of these items we can help arrange for rentals here in Bishop.

Big Stuff

- Footwear. A good sturdy pair of hiking boots. These must be broken in to your feet and need to be sealed with a water-proofing treatment. Your selection of boots may mean the difference between pain and comfort on the trip so be very careful with what you wear on your feet.
- Camp Shoes. A lightweight pair of tennies or Tevas to wear in camp. This will reduce vegetation damage at or campsites.
- Pack. A 4000-4500 cubic inch (66-75 liter) pack will hold everything for the trip. Internal frame packs are recommended for their comfort and balance when hiking. The Gregory Makalu or Reality are about the right size.
- Sleeping Bag. Most summer trips are warm and a bag rated to about 25°F (-4°C) will be plenty warm. Pair this with a compression stuff sac to reduce volume. We recommend a down bag rather than a synthetic since it will be less bulky.
- 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.

Clothing

- 3 pair synthetic liner socks.
- 3 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks.
- 1 long underwear top. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable.
- 1 long underwear bottom.
- 1 warm pants, tights or expedition weight Capilene.
- 1 warm shirt. Synchronilla or 200 weight works well.
- 1 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.
- 1 pair of shorts for on the trail.
- 2 Tee shirts for on the trail.
- 1 pair of polypropylene or similar gloves.
- 1 warm hat. Synthetics are less itchy than wool.
- 1 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. Knife, 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.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. A 1 oz.. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- 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.
- Camera. Bring film and a spare battery to record those moments.
- Plastic Trash Sac. Handy for keeping things in outside the tent should it rain.
- Trekking poles. These are not essential, but can be handy on the trail. It is your choice, but they do save wear on the knees.
- Optional reading material, etc.
- Ear plugs. These can be handy to block flapping tents (or noisy tent partners).

Shared Equipment

- Shelter. We will provide lightweight, but 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 will provide MSR Whisperlight stoves
- Cookwear.
- Water purification. A sad but true fact of life is that much Sierra water is contaminated. The group will carry a light weight pump and iodine.
- 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.