



Mt Sill via the Swiss Arete

One of the great climbs of the Sierra is on 14,162 foot Mt. Sill, the most prominent of the Palisade peaks. The arete is a great sweeping curve, steadily steeping as height is gained. The route is never too easy and never too difficult, just good climbing high above surrounding peaks and alpine lakes. Spectacular views extend out over the Owens Valley to Telescope Peak above Death Valley, the White Mountains to the east, and Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks to the south and west.

Meeting place and time: The course meets at the parking area at the end of the Glacier Creek Road at 8.00 a.m. on the first day of the trip. Follow Glacier Lodge Road west out of the town of Big Pine. A road turns left into Glacier Lodge and we may park vehicles in there, but we will meet in the day-use parking area. Most vehicles will take about 20 minutes to get here from Big Pine as it's a gain of 3,500'. We will do a gear check here and distribute group equipment.

Itinerary: This is a three-day trip at a minimum; sometimes we combine the Swiss Arete with ascents of other neighboring peaks, making a full tour of the Palisade Glacier summits. Our scheduled five-day version of this is called the Palisades High Peaks Camp

As a three-day trip it is necessary to get to high camp on the first day. Usually if we're just there to climb Sill we'll camp at the Gayley High Camp, below Mt. Gayley at 12,200'. This requires an altitude gain of over 4,000' the first day so, a night or two of altitude prior to the trip will help you enjoy the climb more. If we're there for other peaks as well as Sill we'll usually camp over at the Glacier High Camp, at 12,320'. This camp is easy to spot on the 7.5' map "North Palisade", it's 800' due west from the lake at the terminus of the Palisade Glacier, above the two tiny tarns shown on the map. If we're there for other peaks too we're probably taking two days to get to high camp, the first night spent above Third Lake.

The Swiss Arete starts by crossing the Palisade Glacier, which, though small by other mountain range standards, can have hidden crevasses so, it's wise to rope up. Once at the top of Glacier Notch (3rd class, often guarded by a hidden bergschrund where the glacier meets rock on the north side) the route ascends part way up the L-shaped Snowfield. One can gain the actual Swiss Arete at many places along the ridge, the further down we move on to the ridge the more rock climbing we'll get. Many third class ramps lead from the L-shaped Snowfield onto the Swiss Arete proper but we like to maximize the climbing by joining the ridge fairly low down and make the climb ten pitches or so. Part way up the climb the route steepens and the crux is reached: either a 5.9 move straight up or the famous "step around" move, a long step and reach to the right brings one to the base of a short, steep, 5.6 hand crack. Easier climbing with many variations leads directly to the summit, 300' above with its fantastic views.

But too soon we have to go down. Descent is via the Starr Route. We descend the ridge some and then turn east onto the shadowed North Face. Some downclimbing and a rappel or lower takes us to the sub peak of Sill, known as Apex Peak. This is the peak that projects from Mt. Sill to Sill's north, just under 14,000' in height. A ledge system quickly brings us to the top of the L-shaped Snowfield. The L-shaped snowfield has melted out over the years and is often more properly names the L-shaped snowfield. We pick up gear and head on down back over Glacier Notch to camp. We sometimes return to a camp near Third Lake after climbing the Swiss Arete, to get a head start on the hike out.

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 a long climb so we keep the ratio of one guide to two participants to ensure speed and efficient climbing.

Prerequisites: You should be able to comfortably follow multi-pitch 5.6 with a daypack and mountaineering experience with ice axe and crampon use. This is a physically demanding trip and you should be in good condition and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderate pack.

Special Notes: The best guidebook is Peter Croft's "The Good, The Great, and the Awesome". Get it from Maximus Press. <http://www.maximuspress.com>

You can also get our unpublished SMC Guide to Mt. Sill on-line.

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 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.

Equipment List for Mt. Sill, Swiss Arete

The following list is a general guide and will assist you in packing for the program. Remember that this is an alpine climb and you want to pare everything down to the minimum since you have to carry it up on technical climbing. 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 * can 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 Tevas 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. Synchilla 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 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 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.