



Mt. Williamson Winter Expedition

It is not necessary to travel long distances to undertake a major climb and expedition. In our backyard is a climb that rivals any other in North America for its length and in winter is a major trip requiring planning, stamina and expeditionary techniques. Mt. Williamson is the second highest peak in California but rises from the Owen's Valley at 4,000 feet to its 14,375 foot summit, easily eclipsing Mt. Whitney in base to top relief. Our route, the northeast ridge, was first ascended in 1925 by Homer Irwin. The first winter ascent was made in 1954 by John Ohrenschall and Warren Harding. Since then many other climbers have made the winter attempt but few have succeeded. Harding had taken part in an earlier failed attempt on the peak and at that time the trip leader judged Harding to be a weak individual who would probably not amount to much as a climber. Harding went on to make the first ascent of El Capitan in Yosemite by the Nose route, as well as countless other Yosemite climbs, and to be known for his endurance and stamina. Overall this route up Williamson involves over 8,000 feet of elevation gain over a distance of five miles, with exposed camps and several long sections of fourth class terrain.

To travelers along highway 395 Mt. Williamson dominates the view as one passes south of Independence. The northeast ridge is very prominent with two towers high, just below the summit. We will carry everything needed for the ascent and in winter this can be quite a big load.

Itinerary: We leave the dry desert at about 6,000 feet and climb the narrow, sandy ridge, working our way around towers and scrub to what passes for tree line on the route. We hope to put our first camp in around 10,000' but of course this depends on conditions. Beyond this is a technical, but short ridge section that puts us in another large bowl. Here we hope to place our last and be positioned for a summit attempt on the fourth day, conditions willing. Above high camp we traverse another technical ridge section before crossing over the East Horn and then the West Horn before the broad summit plateau and the final ascent to the top of the peak. Descent will be back down the route.

Meeting place and time: We plan on meeting at Winedumah Hotel, in the center of Independence, at 8:00 am, for breakfast. After a thorough equipment check and final packing we'll head to the start of the trip, near (but not at) the Shepherd Pass trailhead parking area. This meeting place may change but we will confirm that before the trip.

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, avalanche beacons, tents, kitchen gear and dinners, lunches and breakfasts (you bring snack items).

Notes and other information: This area lies within the range of the Sierra bighorn sheep and we need to be aware of these animals and the need not to disturb them. There are barely 130 of these magnificent animals left and we will be doing our part to avoid disturbing them during this critical time of the year when they are forced low in search of food but subject to mountain lion predation.

We will be travelling on snowshoes so if you have your own bring them or else we will provide you with ours.

For a map look at the Mt. Williamson 7.5 minute map. Guide books include Secor's "The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails" and "Climbing California's Fourteeners" by Porcella and Burns.

The SMC web site has photos, a map and more information.

Proper acclimatization to the elevation will greatly increase your pleasure and enjoyment of the trip. We highly recommend getting at least one day and night at altitude immediately prior to the trip, for instance, by staying in Mammoth if coming from the north.

Prerequisites: This is a major ascent so come prepared for hard work. Prior climbing experience is essential. You need not have camped before under winter conditions, but you do need appropriate cold weather equipment and a positive mental attitude will help enormously. Have your systems down so that once we get to camp you know what to get organized and into the tent and out of the cold. Packs will be heavy and the snow may be deep. Avalanche hazard assessment will be essential. There are no guarantees of success in winter and a big storm may well put all of our careful planning into disarray. Do not be summit oriented but go out with the goal of gaining skills and enjoying a very different climbing season.

Equipment List for Mt. Williamson in Winter

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.

Essentials

- Boots: A high quality mountaineering boot is essential to keeping your feet warm. We recommend a plastic boot such as an Asolo or Scarpa. Leather boots such as the Sportiva Nepal are also good, but leather is much more difficult to dry out should they get wet.
- Snowshoes. If you are not comfortable on skis take snowshoes. We recommend the MSR type or similar with a climbing claw and metal side rails to prevent slipping when on sidehills. We provide these if required.
- Poles, telescoping probe type are best.
- Ice axe.* A general purpose mountaineering axe of 70cm or so.
- Crampons.* These must be compatible with your boots. A step in type is a lot easier to manipulate in cold conditions.
- Harness.* A step-in type works best such as a Black Diamond Alpine Bod.
- Two locking carabiners and a couple of non-lockers*
- A belay/rappel device of some type*.
- Internal frame backpack of about 4000 cubic inches.
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about -10°F.
- Sleeping pads. A Thermarest and or Ridgerest. A 3/4 Thermarest on a Ridgerest makes a good combination. Bring a repair kit along with a Thermarest in case of holes.

Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic liner socks
- 2 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks
- Gaiters. These should fit snugly over the top of the boots.
- Long underwear top and bottom. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable
- Warm pants. Tights or Expedition weight Capilene
- Warm shirt. Expedition Capilene or light Synchilla
- Another fuzzy sweater top of some sort
- Pile jacket. The Windstopper fabric works well and is not too bulky.
- Light down jacket; synthetic fill is second choice. This is optional & can replace the previous item
- Good quality rain/wind pants and rain jacket. Must be water proof and jacket must have a hood. Do not skimp on your rain gear.
- Warm hat that covers the ears.
- Visor hat (for sun).
- Mid to heavyweight capilene or Windstopper gloves.
- Shell gloves or mittens.

Etc.

- Sunglasses, high quality with keeper leash. The type with side shields are recommended. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair.
- Ear plugs for noisy tents.
- Personal kit; tooth brush, etc.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen. A 1oz. bottle will be sufficient.
- Two 1-quart plastic water bottles with insulating jackets
- A pee bottle is far more pleasant than getting out of the tent in the middle of the night. Mark it well though to avoid confusion!!
- Personal first aid kit, foot care, and any required medications. We will have a large group medical kit; go light on your own kit. Bring plenty of blister treatment items.
- Headlamp with extra batteries and bulb.
- Camera, film and spare batteries.
- Eating utensils. Bowl, cup, fork and spoon.
- A Swiss Army type knife.

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.

Group gear that will be provided and divided amongst the group prior to starting the trip

- One shovel for each person
- Avalanche transceiver for each person
- Food
- Tents
- Cooking equipment

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.