Mt. Whitney
The Mountaineer's Route

At 14,495 feet Mount Whitney is the high point of the lower forty eight states and the goal of many a mountaineer. The regular Trail Route is the most popular way of ascent and is a long circuitous eleven mile non technical hike up a well graded trail to the summit. Instead of this however, we follow in the footsteps of the redoubtable John Muir who described the trail as being the choice for "soft, succulent people." Muir ascended what is now known as the Mountaineers' Route in 1873, starting on foot from the town of Independence. He failed on his first attempt, climbing Mount Muir instead. After a day of rest he tried again finally gaining the summit in the late October cold.

Itinerary: We start our climb at the 8,640 foot Whitney Portal and stay on the regular Whitney Trail for less than a mile before heading up the steep North Fork of Lone Pine Creek. The trail here is non-maintained and rough with creek crossings and rocks to scramble up and over. We traverse the "Ebersbacher" Ledges above the creek and drop into the serene setting of Lower Boy Scout Lake (10,335') before ascending to our camp beside Upper Boy Scout Lake (11,200'), near Mount Russell. This is an elevation gain of 2,500' from the cars and takes most of the day.

Day two: We ascend past Iceberg Lake (12,400') and onto the Mountaineer's Route proper. Crampons and ice axe may be necessary in early season as this gully holds snow and later in summer is a steep class two talus slope. Above the top of the gully we ascend straight up third class rock using a rope and belays to the summit plateau, a short distance from the very summit. We aim for midday on the summit and the round trip usually taking 8-10 hours camp to camp.

Day three: A return down the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek gets us back down to the trailhead by mid day.

Meeting place and time: We'll meet at Whitney Portal, twenty minutes west of Lone Pine at 8:00 am. Be at the Mt. Whitney trail sign about 100 feet below the store. You should have had a good breakfast and other than final packing be more or less ready to go. After introductions we'll do a quick pack check and distribute group gear.

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.

Prerequisites: Technical climbing skills are not required but prior backpacking experience is recommended as is experience at altitudes above 12,000'. This is a physically demanding trip and you should be in good condition and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderately heavy pack.

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

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

In the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek human impact is a major concern and it is necessary to pack solid human waste out from this area. The Forest Service provides a bag system to make this an easy procedure.

Since this trip requires a first night's camp at 11,200' we highly recommend that you spend at least one night at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000') just prior to the trip. 80% of our unsuccessful attempts on these routes fail due to problems with altitude. (And the balance due to weather). Sites can be reserved at the Whitney Portal Campground (8,400') through the National Forest Reservation System (800) 280 2267. Nearby Cottonwood Lakes offers a walk-in campground (100' from your car) at almost 10,000'. Reservations are not necessary here. Ideally, two days would be spent in the Cottonwood Lakes area immediately prior to starting your climb of the Mountaineers Route. Cottonwood Lakes is a large area with plenty to see and do.

Bears are a major problem at the Portal Trailhead. Do not leave food, scented items (deodorant, soap etc.) in your vehicle. There is limited food locker storage at Whitney Portal so do not bring extra items with you to the trailhead. Clean up all trash prior to your trip. Failure to take precautions can cause the vehicle to be ripped apart by a bear and the added insult of a fine from the Forest Service. If possible, please car pool up to the trailhead, leaving unnecessary vehicles at the Forest Service Station in Lone Pine.

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Equipment List for The Mountaineers Route

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.
Items with an * may be rented from SMC.

Climbing equipment

- ❒ Ice Axe.* A standard 70 cm. general purpose axe will suffice. Required only in early season. We will inform you if this is needed.
- ❒ Crampons.* These should be matched to the boot and are required only in early season. We will inform you if these are needed.
- ❒ Harness*. An adjustable leg loop type such as the Black Diamond Bod or Wild Things Expresso 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).

Other essentials

- ❒ Boots. The approach trail is rough and boots should be sturdy with ample ankle support. Lightweight tennies are inadequate.
- ❒ 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 with plenty of compression is best since this 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.
- ❒ Sleeping Bag. Most summer trips are warm and a bag rated to about 25°F will be warm enough except in the spring and 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. These are 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. The 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. Solid human waste must be packed out on trips to the climber's side of Mt. Whitney. The Forest Service supplies kits to make this easy.
- ❒ 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. A 1oz. bottle will be enough.
- ❒ Bug repellent. Only needed in the early season.
- ❒ Camera, film and a spare battery to record the summit.
- ❒ 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 provide the main meals on scheduled trips. You need to bring drinks (hot and cold) and your favorite snacks. Food is not included on custom trips but can be provided at additional cost. We will discuss this when arranging the trip.

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.
- ❒ Group climbing 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.