



# Mt. Whitney via Cottonwood

At 14,495 feet Mount Whitney is the high point of the lower forty-eight states and the goal of many. The Trail Route is the standard trip but obtaining a permit can be problematic and you need to get an application in by March. The Mountaineers Route requires the ability to travel off trail as well as rope work and belayed climbing on the upper section.

The route from Cottonwood crosses over the Sierra Crest at the Cottonwood Pass and then drops to the west to the Kern River and then loops to Guitar Lake below the western slopes of the peak. We like this route for a number of reasons:

- It is beautiful with high alpine lakes and expansive views.
- Far fewer people than on the regular Whitney Trail where there can be literally hundreds of people.
- Rather than a rush to the summit this route offers a fine hike in it's own right and the summit as a bonus
- To make it a truly relaxing trip we utilize the services of Cottonwood Pack Station to carry equipment while we hike with a day pack. This also enables us to take along a few extra luxuries and make a complete vacation.

We have changed our itinerary recently to break up the first day and to give more acclimatization time. Yes, this does take longer and cost more - but it makes the trip a lot easier and with a far great chance of getting to the top. Isn't that worth it?

## **Itinerary**

### *Day 1*

From the Cottonwood Packstation we hike up and over Cottonwood Pass and descend a little over about a half mile to Chicken Sprigs Lake, our first night's camp. This day is about 4 miles long with about 1300 feet of elevation gain and makes for a great break-in day.

### *Day 2*

We leave camp and then make a long contour entering Sequoia Kings National Park, and continuing to the headwaters of Rock Creek. This is about a 9 mile day.

### *Day 3*

We drop down Rock Creek before climbing up onto the wide open spaces of Guyot Flat. Staying above treeline we climb and contour around into Crabtree Meadows. We now turn towards Mt. Whitney and climbing steadily we get to camp at Guitar Lake (11,460'). This is a 9-10 mile trip. The pack stock leave us here and return back down to Crabtree Meadows to overnight the mules and wait for us to climb.

### *Day 4*

We are not too far from the summit but we allow all day for the ascent to the summit and the return. There are numerous switch-backs up to Trailcrest (13,550') where we meet others coming up from the other side. The summit seems within grasp but the thin air limits our ability to move speedily, though with slow but steadily progress before long we will be on top and enjoying the highest point outside of Alaska. After summit photos and relaxing on top we retrace our steps to camp and a celebratory dinner.

### *Day 5*

The packstock return and pick up our gear and we retrace our steps back to Rock Creek.

### *Day 6*

We retrace our steps back to the road head. This is a long day so be prepared for an early start and a late afternoon return to the roadhead.

## **Meeting place and time**

We meet at the Cottonwood Packstation at 11.00am. We'll do a pack check, a group orientation and make lunch before hitting the trail. The Packstation is some 45 minutes from Lone Pine so you need to have checked and double-checked your gear since there will be no opportunity for "last minute" shopping for forgotten items. See our driving directions below.

## **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, packstock and wranglers, 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**

We keep the ratio of one guide to five participants to ensure speed and efficiency while climbing. We need to be off the peak early enough to avoid encounters with afternoon thunderstorms.

## Prerequisites

Good hiking shape is the main prerequisite. Climbing skills are not needed, but you should be able to hike, with a day pack, up to thirteen miles a day.

While we use packstock to carry the loads the distances to be covered each day are not insignificant and do not think of this as a much easier option to the regular Whitney Trail route. You still have long days hiking to put in so be prepared.

## Special Notes

For maps look at the Mt. Whitney, Mt. Langley and Cirque Peak 7.5 minute maps. Guide books include Secor's "The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails".

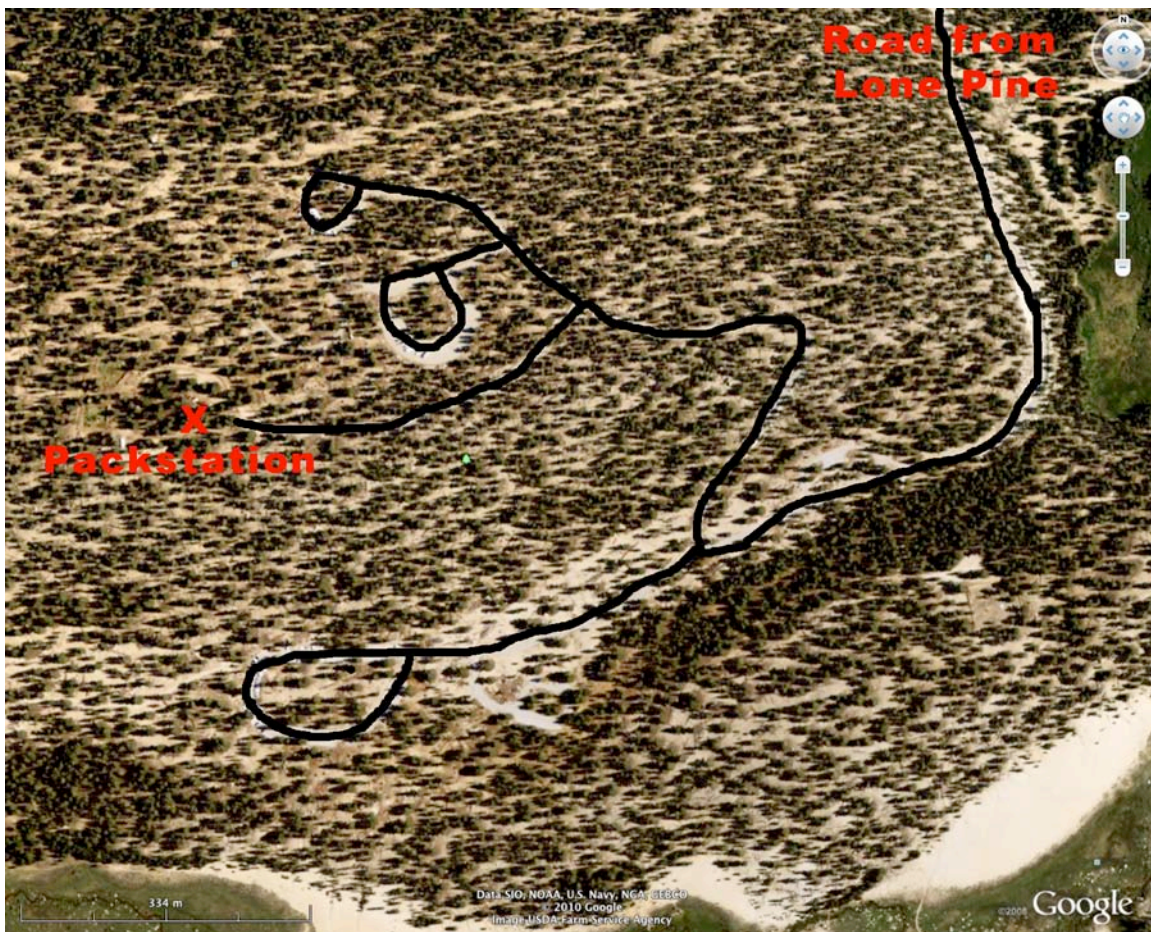
If you have time we suggest allowing more time for acclimatization. Ninety percent of our unsuccessful attempts fail due to problems with altitude. (And the balance due to weather). There is a campground at the trailhead and if you arrive the night before this is perfect. Sites are non-reservable and first come first served.

Bears are a problem at the Cottonwood Trailhead. Do not leave food, scented items (deodorant, soap etc.) in your vehicle. There is limited food locker storage 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.

## Packstation Directions

There are a number of roads and two trailheads here making it a little confusing. So here is where to go.

In Lone Pine, at intersection of US Rt. 395 and Whitney Portal Rd, take Whitney Portal Rd west and go 3.2 miles to Tuttle Creek campground sign. Turn left at sign onto Horseshoe Meadow Road and go 20 miles up the steep road with many hairpin bends to the New Army Pass sign. Turn right after sign and go 0.5 miles to the packstation on the right. There are two campgrounds here as well.



## Distances and elevations:

- Day 1 1312 feet of ascent; 177 feet of descent; 4.16 miles.
- Day 2 843 feet of ascent; 2436 of descent; 8.9 miles.
- Day 3 2843 feet of ascent; 978 of descent; 9.4 miles.
- Day 4 3360 feet of ascent; 3360 feet of descent ; 8.6 miles.
- Day 5 978 feet of ascent; 2843 of descent; 9.4 miles.
- Day 6 2613 feet of ascent, 2154 of descent; 13.2 miles.

# Equipment List for Ascending Mt. Whitney via Cottonwood

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. This list will vary according to prevailing weather conditions and individual requirements.

Because we are using pack stock to carry the equipment this does not mean that you can take anything or everything. There will be a complete pack check before leaving and items deemed unnecessary will have to be left behind.

## **Essentials**

- Footwear. For this trips a medium-weight pair of hiking boots. We do not recommend lightweight hikers or tennies since they give little ankle support and the soles are often thin.
- Camp Shoes. A lightweight pair of tennies or Texas to wear in camp. This will reduce vegetation damage at our campsites.
- A day pack. large enough to take water, extra clothing, rain-wear, camera etc during the days.
- Sleeping Bag. Most summer trips are warm and a bag rated to about 25°F will be plenty warm enough. We much prefer down bags, and good quality ones at that. Your bag should weigh in around 3 pounds.
- 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 holes.
- Bivy Sac. Only if you plan on sleeping out under the stars - which we do recommend if you are up for it.
- Ear plugs are great to have in a noisy tent.
- 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 1 oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- Bug repellent. Only needed in the early season.
- Camera. A spare battery is a good back up.
- Ski/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.
- Plastic trash bag. Handy for keeping gear in outside the tent should it rain.
- Optional reading material etc.
- Iodine tablets.
- Food. We provide the main meals on scheduled trips. You need to bring drinks (hot and cold) and your favorite snacks.

## **Clothing**

- 2 pair synthetic liner socks.
- 2 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks.
- Long underwear top. Capilene or some other synthetic is most desirable.
- 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 over boots. Jacket must have a hood. Do not skimp on your rain gear. Nylon ponchos are not acceptable.
- Shorts for on the trail
- Tee shirt for on the trail
- Polypropylene or similar 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). Don't bring bike bottles or any bottle that doesn't have a wide opening.
- 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. In the Whitney Zone we use the "Carry out" bags. This is on Days 3/4 & 5.

## **Shared Equipment Provided by SMC**

- Duffle bag. Instead of a large pack substitute this for packing gear onto the mules. We prefer to use our own since they fit the saddlebags well.
- 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 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 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.