Half Dome Ascent
Trip Notes
Half Dome Ascent

Is there a more iconic summit in the USA than that of Half Dome? How many miles of film, and now terrabytes of storage, has been expended upon this monolith? Probably more than any other feature in any national park.

From all sides the peak looks impossible and in the 1800s was declared to be such. The first ascent was by Scotsman George Anderson who drilled holes, placed spikes and lassoed his way up to the previously untouched summit in 1875. In 1919 the current route of cables and posts was established and provides a safe, if steep and a little scary, route to the top of this icon.

Now, you could do it like a lot of people do and start predawn from the valley, rush up the 14 or 16 miles (depending upon the route), gain 4800 feet of elevation and stagger back down having “conquered” the summit and go directly to sleep. Or you can take your time and enjoy the journey as well as the summit and experience the beauty and wonders of the high summit and climb another peak along the way with us.

We start from the beautiful Tuolumne Meadows area and spend the first night near beautiful Sunrise Lakes. The next day we cross over Tenaya Peak and camp directly below Half Dome which we climb the next day early in the morning hoping to be in front of those coming up from the Valley giving us some quite time on the summit to soak up the view and scenery. We end the trip in the Valley.

Itinerary.

Day 1 We meet at Curry Village at 10.00am. You will leave a vehicle here and we will shuttle up to the Sunrise Trailhead near Tenaya Lake, one of the jewels of the High Sierra. From here it is a leisurely walk to the first night’s camp at Sunrise Lakes. We want to take this day slowly so that you can gain some acclimatization to the elevation and give the body time to adapt. This is an elevation gain of about 1250 feet over 3.5 miles and our camp is at about 9170 feet.

Day 2 We get back onto the trail early morning and head up to Clouds Rest. The ascent is gradual and before long we are crossing the narrow spine of this huge expanse of slabs and sweeps of gray granite. The top is an ideal place for a first class lunch on the finest granite tabletop anywhere. From here it is downhill and a little cross country to our camp below the shoulder of Half Dome. From our sandy campsite here we can look down into Yosemite Valley far below and across to the little know dome of Mt Watkins, Half Dome’s smaller sister.

Today we have an elevation gain of about 1400 feet and 3100 feet of descending over 7.5 miles and our camp is at about 7450 feet.

Day 3 We rise early grab a quick breakfast and head out with light packs to Half Dome. The trail over the shoulder is steep and steady but not too bad. Topping out on the shoulder as light creeps across the sky the final section up the cables looks very intimidating. But the front of view of any peak is always exaggerated and as we get closer it starts to look a lot more reasonable. The cables are supported with iron stanchions and wooden slats at irregular interval on which to take a break. The cable section is not actually that long and after a while the angle slowly decreases and the walking becomes easier until we are on top.

We will take a break, identify the landmarks close and far before heading back to camp for a late breakfast/early lunch. We get back on the main Half Dome trail and head down the remaining 6 miles of trail through Little Yosemite Valley and then down the wonderful and well named Mist Trail. Here we pass Nevada falls and then hope to be soaked and refreshed by the spray of Vernal falls.

We reach the bottom of Yosemite Valley at Happy Isles and catch the shuttle bus back to Curry Village, the vehicles and journey’s end.

To the summit and back to camp is about 1500 feet of gain and 1500 feet of descending over about 2.6 miles.
Meeting place and time:
We'll meet at Curry Village at 10.00am. The exact place will be in front of the the campground reservation office in the Northeast corner of the dirt parking lot at Curry Village. You can park overnight in this parking lot.

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 canceling. 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 permit reservation fees. Private programs do not.

Prerequisites:
No technical climbing skills are not required but the cables require a good head for heights. They are not difficult, but they are steep and airy. Prior backpacking experience is recommended. This is a moderately physically demanding trip and you should be in good condition.

Special Notes:
The SMC website has photos, a map and more information.
Obtaining a permit for Half Dome is a major undertaking in it's self. We have to start faxing applications in six months in advance and we run getting a permit about 25% of the time.
So the dates we publish might change and if you want to do a private trip try to have us set it up just as soon as you can in the year.

Bears
Bears are a major problem in Yosemite. Do not leave food, scented items (deodorant, soap etc.) in your vehicle. There is limited food locker storage at Curry Village so do not bring extra items with you to the parking area. 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 Park Service.
Equipment List for Half Dome

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 marked with a * are items that we rent or we can coordinate rentals with a local shop.

Essentials
- Footwear. There is some easy off trail 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 3000-3500 cubic inch will hold everything for the backcountry.
- 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.
- 1 pair gardening or similar gloves. These are for on the cables and provide grip while reduce wear on the palms. There is a pile of them at the start of the cables, but they come and go so best to bring your own.

Clothing
- 2 pair synthetic liner socks.
- 1 pair heavier synthetic or wool blend socks.
- 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 work 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 bad weather gear.
- Shorts for on the trail.
- Tee shirt for on the trail
- Lightweight capilene or similar gloves.
- Warm hat.
- Sunhat.

Etc.
- Sun glasses. Good quality. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair in case of breakage.
- Water Bottles. Water is sparse on this trips so two to three quart (1 liter) wide mouth bottles and or a hydration system holding up to 60oz. (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. 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. TP and two ziplock bags, one for new TP and one for used. We do not burn TP in the backcountry.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. 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.
- 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. A spare battery and an extra card are good back ups.
- 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.

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.