



The John Muir Trail

Trip Notes

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The John Muir Trail is one of the finest wilderness hikes to be found anywhere in the world and the trip of a lifetime. Our route starts near, and then climbs, Mount Whitney - the high point of the lower forty-eight states - and continues north some two hundred miles ending in Yosemite National Park. Along the way it climbs over 13,000' passes, wanders beneath high alpine peaks, and traverses beautiful meadows and forested river valleys. The spectacular scenery is combined with the generally clement weather of California and warm summer temperatures. We have lived in the area for over 35 years and in this time we have seen enormous changes, with the last few years in particular showing a tremendous explosion in use. Hiker numbers have skyrocketed and this has made it ever more difficult to obtain permits. Our trips now start in the south at the Cottonwood trailhead. This adds a day but aids in acclimatization to the elevation. We are now allowing twenty three days for the complete trip.

We will have four or five food drops so that packs are not too heavy, with you carrying a maximum of 8 days food at any one time. You can expect to cover ten to twelve miles a day. The tentative schedule is as follows, but remember that weather, conditions and perhaps issues such as sore feet or a desire for a rest day may well vary this outline. Be flexible and adapt to the inevitable changes that will occur during a trip of this duration. Numbered days refer to significant logistical events during the trip. Due to the difficulties in trying to map out every day of a long journey such as this, other days have been omitted from this itinerary. Expect changes to this itinerary!

THE ENTIRE JMT

The entire JMT is a 23 day trip and we do not have people join or leave this trip. If you are interested in a shorter segment of the JMT then see the sectional itineraries below.

We meet in Bishop at SMC Headquarters for a gear check, shuttle to the Horseshoe Meadows Campground, have dinner and an early bed, starting the process of getting the body adapted to the thin air at 10,000 feet.

To further aid in our acclimatization, Day 1 is a short day; after this we steadily pick up the pace to Crabtree Meadows and from here climb to the 14,505 foot summit of Mount Whitney. After climbing Mt. Whitney we travel north and pick up a resupply coming in over Kearsarge Pass. The passes here are high and steep, as we travel through the wide open alpine valley of Upper Basin and below the jagged Palisade Range. But the effort is more than compensated for by the incredible scenery and after numerous high passes we drop into the deeply incised cleft of Le Conte Canyon where we get a resupply brought in by pack stock.

Next we travel into the heart of the Sierra. From Le Conte Canyon we cross Muir Pass and enter the stunning beautiful high alpine area of Evolution Valley. We drop into the San Joaquin River drainage and, staying well to the west of the main Sierra Crest, pass Lake Thomas Edison before climbing up onto the Silver Divide. We briefly touch an outpost of "civilization" at Reds Meadow where our next resupply arrives along with lunch.

For many people the last segment is the most beautiful section of the trip and now, being trail hardened and carrying lighter packs, we finish the final section quickly and efficiently. After leaving Reds Meadow we camp at Johnston Meadow. We skirt the beautiful Garnet Lake and well named Thousand Island Lake before dropping into Rush Creek and then cross Donahue Pass, our last pass. Lyell Canyon is long but nearly flat, ending at Tuolumne Meadows and a well deserved rest.

Day One: Meet in Bishop, do a gear check and shuttle to Horseshoe Meadows.

Day Eight: Arrive at Bullfrog Lake with a resupply coming in over Kearsarge Pass.

Day Thirteen: Arrive in Le Conte Canyon and receive a resupply. Hike north to Big Pete Meadow.

Day Sixteen: A short side trip to Muir Ranch to pick up a resupply.

Day Twenty: Arrive at Reds Meadow north of Mammoth. Here we pick up our re-supply and head north to Johnston Meadow.

Day Twenty Three: Arrive in Tuolumne Meadows.

THE JMT IN SECTIONS

Not everyone has the ability to get an entire 23 days off work so we offer the option of shorter sections. These sections follow our entire JMT schedule but have additional days added for access in and out at different trailheads. These segments are their own separate trip and, while following the same overall itinerary as the entire trip, are on different dates. We have to access or leave the JMT and this adds ad-

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ditional days when doing the JMT in sections. We also need to add in time for acclimatization so we want to start each segment slowly where we can, so the timing of each segment differs from that of the complete JMT where people gain strength and fitness as the trip progresses.

Section One

Cottonwood to Bishop Pass Fourteen Days 105 Miles

Day One: Meet at SMC headquarters in Bishop. Do a gear check and shuttle to Horseshoe Meadows.

Day Two: Start on the trail and camp at Chicken Spring Lake.

Day Eight: Arrive at Bullfrog Lake with a resupply coming in over Kearsarge Pass.

Day Thirteen: Get to Le Conte Canyon and start hiking out towards Bishop Pass.

Day Fourteen: Hike out over Bishop Pass and arrive in Bishop.

Section Two

Bishop Pass to Reds Meadow Nine Days 77 Miles

Day One: Meet at SMC headquarters in Bishop. Do a gear check and shuttle to South Lake trailhead.

Day Two: Descend to Le Conte Canyon and join the JMT. Camp at Little Pete Meadow.

Day Five: A short side trip to Muir Ranch to pick up a resupply.

Day Nine: Arrive at Reds Meadow and meet our resupply.

Section Three

Reds Meadow to Tuolumne Four Days 34 miles

Day One: Meet in Mammoth, do a gear check and shuttle to Reds Meadow and hike to Johnston Meadow.

Day Four: Arrive in Tuolumne Meadows and shuttle back to Mammoth or Bishop.

INFORMATION COMMON TO ALL TRIPS

Logistics: This is a long wilderness trip and for many people it may be the longest backcountry trip they have ever done. You will get tired, dirty and there will be no showers along the way. Because of the length there is always the potential for things to go wrong and the unexpected to occur. Your guide will be trained in wilderness first aid and will carry a radio or cell phone for emergency communications. (No, not for personal use or calling home!). In these remote locations cell phones rarely work. Family and friends can contact you through our office, but because of the problems of communication in the backcountry the delay can be substantial. It will be possible to receive (small) mail and messages with the resupplies.

Conditions: We do this trip from July to early September to get what we consider to be the best conditions. There might be biting insects and bugs in July but by August they should be gone. In August and September the days, while getting shorter should be warm with day temperatures in the 60 degree region and nights dipping to about 32 degrees rarely and only at the higher elevations. There may be small snow patches on the highest passes, but not normally enough to warrant ice axe and crampon use. This might well change should we have a big snow winter and we will let you know should this be the case. Stream flows will be well below peak flow and most should be easy to cross. There is the possibility of afternoon thunderstorms that may be heavy for a short time. You will be in the high mountains so there is always the chance of snow, but prolonged storms are not likely at this time of year.

Weight: The big question everyone asks is, "how much will I have to carry"? It all depends upon your equipment selection, planning, and the care you take in packing. This is a different experience to hiking in, for example, Europe. You will have to carry a larger pack than what you might be used to, so prepare for that and check the equipment list suggestions. Personal weight without group gear should be about 20 pounds (it's up to the group to share the load of community equipment such as tents, stoves, water purification, bear-proof food containers, etc.). If you can do less than this all the better. But on top of this comes food. We reckon this at about 1 to 1.25 pounds per person per day.

Starting out on the trip, twenty three days is going to feel like a long time. There will be lots of things you think you are going to need but in reality you can get by without a lot and the time will go quickly.

Look at what you really "need" versus what you would like to have. Part of being in the mountains is leaving some of the trappings of the modern world behind and stepping back into a simpler time. Think lightweight not excessive comfort.

Consider this:

In 1896 Bolton Coit Brown and Lucy Brown set off for five days in the Sierra. His pack weighed 12 pounds and her's 5 pounds.

Could you do that? Their weight included food of 1lb/day between them.

Seven days is about the maximum we have between resupplies but for the sake of argument let's double the food weight.

We do not need to be that minimal but 100 years later we have all the modern lightweight equipment - right?

The more load on your back, the less quickly you move, the more pain on the shoulders and the greater the strain on the knees.

So how to get there?

Everything has to work together. I.e. a lightweight sleeping bag needs to be in a lightweight pack.

Start with the pack. A lot of the big packs weight 7 pounds before you put anything in it. Go with a lighter pack

Sleeping bag. Down, not synthetic. Synthetic bags are warm, but they are very bulky. Put the bag in a compression stuff sac.

Sleeping pad. A short 3/4 inflatable pad paired with a foam pad is best. You can sit on the foam pad outside without any fear of puncturing.

Clothing. No need to change everyday. Rinse the socks out every so often. We can send in an extra tee shirt or socks part way through.

Rainwear. Lightweight and compact. You will most likely not be wearing this on a regular basis. At this time of year we are concerned with short thunderstorms. A lightweight compact shell is adequate.

First aid. Just personal things for fixing feet and any necessary personal medications.

Toiletries. Toothbrush, toothpaste, floss and maybe Wet Wipes. That is it! No deodorants, etc. - everyone smells the same at the end of a hard hiking day.

Tents. Nope, not everyone gets their own tent. Just adds too much weight and too many tents. If you want to be alone try sleeping out under the stars and only use the tent if the weather is bad.

Cameras. Yes, we want everyone to record the trip of a lifetime but there is no point in cutting your pack weight only to top it off with a heavy bulky camera with multiple lenses. The best camera is one that is handy, that you can pull out and take the shot, then put away quickly. Stopping, unpacking the pack and pulling out the camera every time you see something wonderful will add hours to the day. Either that or you will give up and take far fewer photos than you had thought you would.

We do need you to be serious about weight, because we will be when we do the pack review before the trip. You really will have more fun with a light pack. One person who insists that they "need this" and "need that" will end up slowing the entire group down. We want you to have a fantastic, enjoyable adventure, and cutting down the weight will go a long way in achieving this.

Tent Accommodations: We ask that people share tents. We know that everyone would like to have their own private accommodation, but we have a number of reasons why we double up on tents.

- It reduces pack weight. There are a lot of things we would "like" but we want to pare down to "what we need" taking the essentials to make the hiking easier.

- The JMT is more popular and campsites are getting more and more crowded. As part of following LNT principles we want to use established sites and not create new ones so have to fit where we can. If everyone has their own tent we end up with 10-12 tents and that takes up a lot of space, making it difficult for both the guided groups and the non-guided to find ideal campsites. We do not want to get into a situation where getting a campsite becomes the priority and focus of the day with pressure to get somewhere as soon as possible.

- Get to know your companions better. Tent time is a time for sharing and intimate conversations. Yes, not everyone gets along with everyone and your guides do the best to rearrange if needed. But we do find that people often bond and makes friends for a lifetime, not just for on the trail.

We do hear from people that they snore. If that is the case, we will do what we can to work out the accommodation but ask that you get a doctor's note so as to be fair to everyone.

If you want your alone space and time, we suggest you just sleep out under the stars. Your guides often do it and carry a tarp type shelter for use only when needed. We can set that up for you. Why bother with a meager five-star hotel when our accommodations have 10,000 real ones.

Prior Training and Fitness: This is a long and hard trip. You do need to be in appropriate shape for it and you do need to train. Please look at our suggestions for training and do follow through on them. Do not think that you will get in shape on the first few days of the trip. Come prepared both physically and mentally and you will have a good time. The first few days of the trip are a shakedown and the guides will be evaluating hikers and ensuring that they have the stamina to complete the entire journey. If the guide's assessment is that a participant does not have the necessary physical conditioning to complete the trip we will have to discuss if it is prudent for that person to continue. Make sure you come well prepared and fully trained.

Food: We do our best to cater to different dietary needs. However if you have a significant food allergy or medical condition that requires strict adherence to a dietary regime we may not be able to fully accommodate you. The guide is unable to prepare a number of different meals each night for a number of different needs. Bishop is very limited in shopping options and much lightweight food may contain a variety of allergens. We will have to ask you to bring some of your own favorite items for resupplies and to provide for specific dietary needs.

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.

Inclusions: Trailhead shuttle at both ends of the trip.
Food during the trip. This does not include restaurant meals at the beginning and end of the trip.
Group equipment such as tents, food canisters, and water purification.
Porter or mule supported supply drops during the trip.
Guides, contingency and emergency support, and all necessary permits.

Price does not include transportation from airports to/from Bishop. We can help you make these arrangements but since people's travel plans vary so much we cannot include this transportation in the cost.

Getting to Bishop: Again, if you need assistance making these arrangements please let us know. Commuter flights are available into Mammoth Lakes but these are limited. The closest major airport is Reno, Nevada, approximately four hours to our north. Los Angeles is five hours to our south. A shuttle service exists between Bishop and Reno, transferring in Carson City. We usually help participants arrange this if necessary and it costs about \$40 per person each way. This price is not included in the basic trip price.

Bears: We have a number of people unfamiliar with being in bear country.

Do not panic too much about the bears. They live here too, are something to deal with but are not aggressive and are a part of the backcountry experience. We generally have no encounters with them at all and often hikers leave a little let down not to have even seen one beating a hasty retreat.

To quote John Muir in 1898;

"In my first interview with a Sierra bear we were frightened and embarrassed, both of us, but the bear's behavior was better than mine"

Federal regulations require the use of bear canisters to store food in when in camp. This prevents the animals from getting habituated to human food and becoming a problem to humans.

If your vehicle is left parked anywhere ensure that it is emptied of anything that is, or smells like, food and put in a bear locker.

Resupplies: SMC is providing 4 resupplies on the entire JMT trip. These resupplies will be brought in by either porters, mules, or vehicles, depending on the location. Below you will find the number of days in each section between resupplies, the location, and instructions on how to label your items.

Your resupply will consist of your personal snacks, powdered drinks, clean socks, medications, batteries, and a clean T-shirt; all of which you provide. Each resupply should not weigh more than 2lbs. Guides will review your personal resupplies at the office the first day we meet to finalize each drop. Once on the trail you will be able to "return" dirty clothes to the office to be available at pickup the final day.

On the first day of the journey, SMC will pick you up at your accommodation in either Bishop or Mammoth and shuttle you to the SMC office for a gear check. We will meet around 11:00 am and be busy all morning at the office clarifying resupply needs, finalizing personal gear, and distributing group gear. You will have 7 days of personal snacks and powdered drinks in your pack when we meet, which you provide. You will purchase your own lunch in Bishop and after lunch we will drive 2 hours to the Cottonwood Campground. SMC will provide dinner and all meals from now until you return to Bishop or Mammoth in 22 days, though you are to use these resupplies to supplement each drop.

Resupply days and locations: Place resupplies in a gallon zip lock bag. Put your name and resupply dates/location on each resupply bag with a permanent marker. We will collect your resupplies at the beginning of your trip. You should arrive with 4 resupply bags. The Muir Trail Ranch resupply must be sent a month in advance per the Ranch's policy, so SMC will have already sent in a resupply for Muir Trail Ranch. We will send an email regarding your requests for the Muir Trail Ranch resupply before the trip. For the resupplies you should have enough snack food to sustain you between breakfast and lunch, and lunch and dinner. Don't go overboard on your selection. A couple of Clif Bars, beef jerky, candy bars or a bit of trail mix each day will suffice. We will be weighing resupply quantities and generally find that people suffer from "snack anxiety" and way overdo the quantities.

Day 1 - Starting the trip

You need 7 days of snacks and drinks packed into your pack to start off with.

Day 8 - Resupply 1 : Kearsarge.

You need 5 days of snacks and drinks packed into bags, labeled and left behind in the SMC office.

Day 13 - Resupply 2 : Little Pete Meadow.

You need 5 days of snacks and drinks packed into bags, labeled and left behind in the SMC office. Also include enough (if any) personal medications in this resupply to get you all the way through to resupply 4.

Day 16 - Resupply 3 : Muir Trail Ranch.

You need 3 days of snacks and drinks.

This resupply is packed and sent in advance by SMC based upon your requests.

We can provide the following items for your individual Muir Trail Ranch resupply so let us know a month before the start of the trip your needs for this resupply. Please specify how many of each item you would like for the 3 days of this section.

At this resupply we cannot take out socks, T-shirts, underwear etc or bring in new items unless they arrive at the office a month in advance. Please let us know asap, your selection for Muir Ranch Resupply.

Coffee/Tea/Hot Chocolate

Clif Bars

Jerky-beef or turkey

Trail Mix

Candy Bars? What kind do you like?

If you have allergies please note them again, and ensure that any medications or special items you would need for this section go into **resupply 2**.

Day 20 - Resupply 4 : Red's Meadow

You need 3 days of snacks and drinks packed into bags, labeled and left behind in the SMC office.

Equipment List for the John Muir Trail

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. When backpacking paying attention to the details and creating a personal system will lead to success. Experiment with your gear and your packing style before arriving in the Sierra. Consider the month, weather patterns, and snow conditions. **Think lightweight.**

Essentials

- Footwear. You will be hiking roughly 10 miles per day for 22 days. Please bring sturdy hiking boots that you have broken in, or trail shoes that you have worn heavy packs with. The main difference between trail runners and boots is foot support vs. blisters. If your feet blister notoriously please consider wearing a trail runner. If you have weak ankles or need additional foot support please wear boots. Again, your feet are your transportation and can make the difference between surviving this trip and thriving. Snow conditions can change which footwear is appropriate so please consider the month—snow can last into July and come as early as August.
- Camp Shoes for around camp. Sanuk sandals, Crocs, or light tennis shoes are all appropriate. The camp shoes will make hanging out in camp more comfortable, and lessen the impact we leave on the sites. Open toed flip flops are not acceptable.
- Pack. 60-65 liter. The pack you choose to bring will also greatly impact your trip. Bring the smallest lightest pack you can get everything into (including group gear).
- Sleeping Bag. Please consider the month you are going to be hiking in. Fall trips have much colder nights than mid-July trips. A 25°F bag should be sufficient but if you are cold at night a sleeping bag liner can add significant warmth with minimal additional weight. We recommend a down-bag as opposed to a synthetic one due to weight differences, but a down-bag must be waterproofed inside your bag with a trash bag lining the stuff sack. Pair this with a compression stuff sac to reduce volume.
- Sleeping pad. A 3/4 length Ultralight inflatable pad paired with a foam pad is our favorite combination. If bringing an inflatable pad also bring a repair kit to fix leaks.

Clothing

A balance between comfort and weight is necessary on expeditions such as the JMT. Layering your clothes will lead to having enough warmth and having options on what to wear. The list below is what the guides recommend, though you also need to consider the month and temperatures expected during your specific month.

- 3 pairs of socks for each section. 2 pairs to alternate while hiking, and a third pair for at camp. Nothing beats a fresh pair of socks in the backcountry and we have 3 resupplies which can come with fresh socks (for more clarity refer to the "resupply instruction" document). Blister prevention is crucial so the clean third pair for camp is excellent preventative care. Having 2 pairs to alternate hiking in also gives the opportunity to rinse and dry socks. A mid-weight, non-cotton sock is ideal, such as a Smartwool or Darn Tough hiking specific sock. Please do not bring low-cut ankle socks as they can lead to rubbing on the heel.
- 1 mid-weight long-sleeve top. Capilene, Merino or other synthetic.
- 1 pair of long-johns or tights. Capilene, Merino or other synthetic.
- 1 pair of warm pants.
- 1 warm shirt. Synchilla or 200 weight works well.
- 1 warm jacket. A down jacket is preferred with around 800 fill.
- Waterproof Jacket and Pants - Lightweight and non-bulky. Side zips on the pants should be long enough to slide on over boots. Jacket must have a hood.
- 1 pair of hiking pants. Convertible pants that can convert to shorts can also be nice to have on the trail.
- 1 pair of shorts. Nice for swimming.
- 1 long-sleeve sun shirt. We recommend a "hoody" style though anything that covers your arms and is synthetic is great.
- 1 short-sleeve T-shirt per section. Synthetic, not cotton, so it can dry quickly and wick sweat from your body on sweaty, but windy, days.
- 1 lightweight pair of polypropylene or similar gloves.
- 1 warm hat/beanie. Synthetics are less itchy than wool.
- Sunhat. Better to cover up than just rely upon sunscreen.

Etc.

- Sun glasses. Good quality. If using prescription lenses consider a backup pair.
- Water carrying system with a capacity of 2-3 liters. A combination of a bottle and hydration system works well. We recommend a 2 liter bladder for daily trail use and an additional Klean Kanteen insulated bottle for drink flavoring, coffee, etc. This can be your thermos and additional water bottle.
- Headlamp. With a spare set of batteries for mid trip resupply.
- Eating and drinking equipment. We recommend a container with a lid for leftovers and a thermos (refer to "water capacity for more clarity). Plastic sporks will break - titanium does not.
- Swiss army style knife. No giant "multi-tools".
- Personal toiletries including toothbrush, toothpaste (travel sized), baby wipes and floss. Keep it minimal.
- Hand sanitizer - a personal travel size bottle.
- Toilet paper - you can put more TP in each resupply so 1 roll will be more than enough! **You will be required to carry your used toilet paper until the upcoming resupply.** The used toilet paper will go in a paper bag, which then goes in a ziplock, which you carry in your pack.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. A 1oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip screen actually contains a sunscreen.
- Basic first aid supplies such as ibuprofen, moleskin, and tape. Your guides will have extensive first aid kits so please don't go overboard with your personal kits. If you tend to take NSAID's regularly please bring your own, or if your feet require constant blister attention please bring tape and moleskin.
- Camera, a spare memory card and battery. No big cameras please; compacts only.
- Plastic Trash Bag for keeping things in outside the tent should it rain.
- 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.
- Reading material, journal or Kindle. Do not bring "War & Peace".
- Ear plugs. Handy to block flapping tents (or noisy partners).
- 1 watch with an alarm.

Early Season or After a Big Winter Extras

- Ice axe.
- Lightweight instep crampons, boot spikes or cleats.
- Heavier weight boots to deal with more snowy conditions.

Shared Equipment

- Shelter. We will provide tents for you, and you will be asked to share a tent with someone as campsites are only so large, and to help distribute weight. If you have a tent of your own you want to use please call the office prior to the trip.
- Stoves, kitchen and cookware.
- Water purification. The group will have access to a variety of different ways to treat water. Chemical treatment, such as Aquamira or Iodine, will be carried by the guide. Gravity filtration bags will be distributed amongst the group for use in camp.
- Bear Canisters. Each hiker gets a large plastic cylinder for overnight food protection from animals. When you pack each day you will be issued one canister to carry for that day.

You specifically don't need

- Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one).
- Deodorant or any toiletries beyond those listed above.
- Items that are not on this list.