

Detailed Day by Day Description for Bishop Pass to Reds Meadow

Below are very tentative day-by-day itineraries. This can change for many reasons such as weather, minor injury, tired mules or unforeseen circumstances so please be flexible and go with any changes the backcountry dictates.

Day 0 Meet the evening before at the SMC office for an equipment check.

Day 1 South Lake over Bishop Pass to Upper Dusy Basin:

6.7 miles, 2460' of gain, 875' of loss

We shuttle from the SMC office to the trailhead at Bishop Pass and have a relatively easy day over Bishop Pass to our camp just over the west side of the pass above the uppermost lake in Dusy Basin.

Day 2 Dusy Basin to Big Pete Meadow

8.75 miles, 650' of gain, 3400' of loss

Day 3 Big Pete Meadow over Muir Pass to Evolution Lake

12 miles, 3,000' gain, 1,400' loss

The trail follows the Kings River past meadows and cascades before leaving the trees after ascending 1,600' in 3.4 miles. The barren, daunting landscape ahead can only be described as majestic, with the Black Divide to the west and the Goddard Divide to the north. We climb another 1,200' in 2.7 miles to Muir Pass, passing several lakes, including large Helen Lake. The top of 11,976' Muir Pass has the only structure on the John Muir Trail between Tuolumne Meadow and Mount Whitney, a small stone hut. The views from the pass are simply tremendous. The trail drops down into Evolution Basin with glacial cut walls and shelves with tarns and lakes. We will camp near the outlet of Evolution Lake, enjoying the view up-canyon as the afternoon light turns the rocky peaks golden.

Day 4 Evolution Lake to Evolution Meadow

6.1 miles, 100' gain, 1,700' loss

This is as close as one can get to easy day hiking in the Sierras. We will leave our perch on the edge of Evolution Basin, to drop 900' in 1.4 miles on a loamy trail to a series of meadows, first Colby, then McClure, and finally, our destination, Evolution Meadow. The meadows and trees seem greener in comparison to the rocky, barren landscape of Muir Pass.

Day 5 Evolution Meadow to Senger Creek

11 miles, 2,150' gain, 1,650' loss

This is a day to enjoy the sight and sound of rushing water as the trail follows Evolution Creek and then the San Joaquin River. The day starts with a wade across Evolution Creek and then following its south bank before veering away to switchback down through forest to a bridge crossing of the South Fork of the San Joaquin River at mile 1.9, crossing on another bridge at mile 2.8. The trail continues to follow the energetic San Joaquin River to a bridged crossing of Piute Creek as the John Muir Trail leaves Kings Canyon National Park and enters the John Muir Wilderness of the Sierra National Forest. Our second day of downhill hiking ends at mile 7.2 as the trail begins the climb to Seldon Pass, first through forest and then through mixed forest and manzanita before reentering the forest. We will ascend 1,900 feet in 3.8 miles to the meadow above the Senger Creek crossing.

Day 5 Senger Creek over Seldon Pass to Bear Creek

7.6 miles, 1,350' gain, 1,450' loss

Our climb to Senger Creek the previous day gave us a head start on the pass. The trail climbs 600' in two miles to the beautiful Sallie Keyes Lakes, around pretty Heart Lake, and finally topping out at 10,910' Seldon Pass in four miles. The view Marie Lake from the pass is breathtaking. This is an easy pass compared to those behind us with an easy walk of only ½ mile and less than 400' to the shores of Marie Lake. Our path today takes us past Rosemarie Meadow to our camp at Upper Bear Creek Meadow.

Day 6 Layover at Bear Creek

There are excellent day hikes out of the Bear Creek camp including: Ruby Lake, Seven Gables Lake, Sandpiper, Medly, and Three Island Lakes via Beverly and Orchid Lakes.

Day 7 Bear Creek to Quail Meadow

9.8 miles, 1,100' gain, 2,900' loss

The trail follows Bear Creek for three miles through forest. After dropping about 600', the trail leaves Bear Creek and starts to climb toward Bear Ridge, climbing 1,000' in 2.5 miles, mostly forested with some lovely views. The trail then drops over 2,100' down the forested north side of Bear Ridge, finally crossing over Mono Creek on a bridge to meet the trail to Edison Lake in four miles. Follow the sign to Edison Lake, walking ¼ mile to our campsite at Quail Meadow.

Day 8 Quail Meadow to Silver Pass Lake

5.7 miles, 2,600' gain, 50' loss

This is a day of rushing water and granite slabs. Walk the ¼ mile back to the John Muir Trail and turn north toward Silver Pass. The trail soon crosses the North Fork of Mono Creek and climbs 400' to the Mono Pass Trail junction. The trail follows the east bank of the creek for 1.4 miles to Pocket Meadow and the junction to Mott Lake. Crossing the creek, the trail steepens on forested switchbacks, passing Silver Pass Meadow before climbing to Silver Pass Lake at mile 5.7.

Day 9 Silver Pass Lake over Silver Pass to Virginia Lake

7.6 miles, 1,850' gain, 1,900' loss

It is only a short walk of 0.7 miles to 10,779' Silver Pass. Plan to spend some time at Silver Pass as the views are absolutely stunning. You can see the Minarets, Ritter, and Banner in the distance; peaks you will pass in a few days. The trail descends through alpine lakes surrounded by granite cirques and meadows peppered across the stone slabs, eventually dropping through thick forest to the Cascade Valley Junction at mile 4.2. The trail follows cascading Fish Creek to Tully Hole before climbing up exposed switchbacks to beautiful Lake Virginia. The wonderful views south provide an excellent excuse to catch your breath.

Day 10 Virginia Lake to Deer Creek

9.3 miles, 1,150' gain, 2,400' loss

The trail climbs briefly over a low ridge before dropping to Purple Lake at mile 1.7. After a brief climb, the trail contours along south facing hillsides, crossing the outlet from Duck Lake, before finally descending on a dusty trail to Deer Creek at mile 9.3.

Day 11 Deer Creek to Reds Meadow

5.75 miles, 550' of gain, 1950' of loss

The trail leaves Deer Creek, contouring along the hillside before descending slowly to the Mammoth Pass junction at mile 2.2. Continuing north, the trail drops another 1,300' in 3.4 miles through forest, portions recovering from a 1992 lightning strike, as it approaches Reds Meadow. We follow the John Muir Trail to the fascinating basalt columns of the Devils Postpile and then to the "civilization" of Reds Meadow and our shuttle pickup.