

Detailed Day by Day Description for Onion Valley to Bishop Pass

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 1 Onion Valley to Charlotte Lake

7.5 miles, 2870' of gain, 1650' of loss

We enter the John Muir Wilderness at above Onion Valley and cross 11,850' Kearsarge Pass before dropping to Charlotte Lake, surely one of the most beautiful in the Sierra.

Day 2 Charlotte Lake to Baxter Meadow

9.0 miles, 1825' of gain, 2650' of loss

We will backtrack 1.3 miles to the John Muir Trail junction before turning north toward the narrow ridge of 11,978' Glen Pass. The day will start in the trees, but soon climbs out of the shade to rocky slopes as it approaches the pass. You will pause at the top to celebrate the climb, but then linger to enjoy the spectacular views. Eventually we drop down from the pass for lunch at the stunning Rae Lakes and on past Arrowhead Lake to our camp by Baxter Meadow.

Day 3 Layover at Baxter Meadow.

Yes, it is early in the trip to be too tired and in need of a day of rest but this a beautiful place to stop and simply enjoy the Sierra Nevada or if the energy is high to walk to Baxter Pass or scramble one of the nearby peaks.

Day 4 Baxter Meadow to Twin Lakes

9.1 miles, 2,100' gain, 1,850' loss

We will spend the first half of the day walking 4.6 miles down a pleasant trail through forest and occasional meadows to Woods Creek. We can keep an eye out for one of Shorty's cabins off to the right just before we reach the creek. Crossing a suspension bridge at 8,492', we turn right and start back up through mostly forested slopes to 10,600' in almost four miles. This is a quiet day after the excitement of Mount Whitney, Forester Pass, and Glen Pass, but the views and sounds of cascading creeks surrounded by rocky canyon walls make this a great day of hiking.

Day 5 Twin Lakes over Pinchot Pass to Upper Basin

7.5 miles, 1,550' gain, 2,150' loss

The hike starts near tree line, so most of this day will be hiking in open alpine meadows and rocky slopes surrounded by multicolored rock walls along the way to 12,130' Pinchot Pass. The easy descent down the north side has a series of lakes before entering the forested area above the South Fork Kings River. The Lake Marjorie shoreline, at about mile 4.6, and the stream crossing in another ¼ mile are two great lunch spots. A side trip just before the drop to the Kings River to beautiful Bench Lake is worth the 250' drop and gain over 3.4 miles. As the trail approaches camp, it first crosses a fast creek coming from Taboose Pass and then comes to the Kings River ¼ mile later. The camp is between the two streams and to the left, at the 10,000' level.

Day 6 Layover Day at Upper Basin.

Upper Basin is a great place to enjoy a day at treeline on the edge of this expansive basin. We can walk to nearby lakes or head to Taboose Pass or scramble a peak.

Day 7 Upper Basin over Mather Pass to Lower Palisade Lake

9.3 miles, 2,200' gain, 1,550' loss

The trail soon leaves the forest to a series of lovely alpine meadows and finally into a barren rocky landscape with some scattered ponds at the base of the massive wall that hides Mather Pass. A series of switchbacks take us up the last of the climb to the 12,100' pass at mile 5.5 to enjoy expansive views of the trail behind and the basin ahead. The trail drops steeply with large steps and loose rubble forcing us to tear our eyes away from the classic glacial walls of the Palisade drainage. The trail turns to dirt below the switchback around mile seven as it aims steadily toward the Palisade Lakes below you. Be sure to stop at the creek running into the east side of the upper lake to enjoy a small waterfall, wildflowers, and a great foot soak. Camp is at the far end of the lower lake.

Day 8 Lower Palisades down the Golden Staircase to Grouse Meadow

8.5 miles, 450' of gain, 2900' of loss

The day starts down the much-talked-about Golden Staircase, a steep set of well-designed, tight switchbacks dropping over 1,500' in about two miles. Southbound JMT hikers usually climb this and then Mather Pass on the same day, often in

the warm sun. We go down in the morning shade. The trail remains in the forest much of the day as it follows first Palisade Creek and then turns up the Middle Fork of the Kings River. Grouse Meadow is the perfect place for a quick dip and a wonderful view of spectacular Le Conte Canyon. This is a long day, but the path from the bottom of the staircase drops only 1,100' in 4.5 miles, before climbing 1300' in five miles.

Day 9 Grouse Meadow to Upper Dusy Basin

7.5 miles, 3130 'of gain, 1100 'of loss

We drop down Le Conte Canyon as it deepens and the walls climb high above us before turning off the JMT to the east. The climb out of Le Conte Canyon is steep and steady as we gain 2000' to the lower lip of beautiful Dusy Basin. Here the trees grow smaller and more sparse until we get to a hidden camp above the uppermost of the Dusy Lakes.

Day 10 Upper Dusy Basin over Bishop Pass to South Lake

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

An early start from camp takes us the final few hundred feet to the broad expanse of Bishop Pass. From here is a steady downhill pass several lakes to the parking area at South Lake where our van pickup awaits.