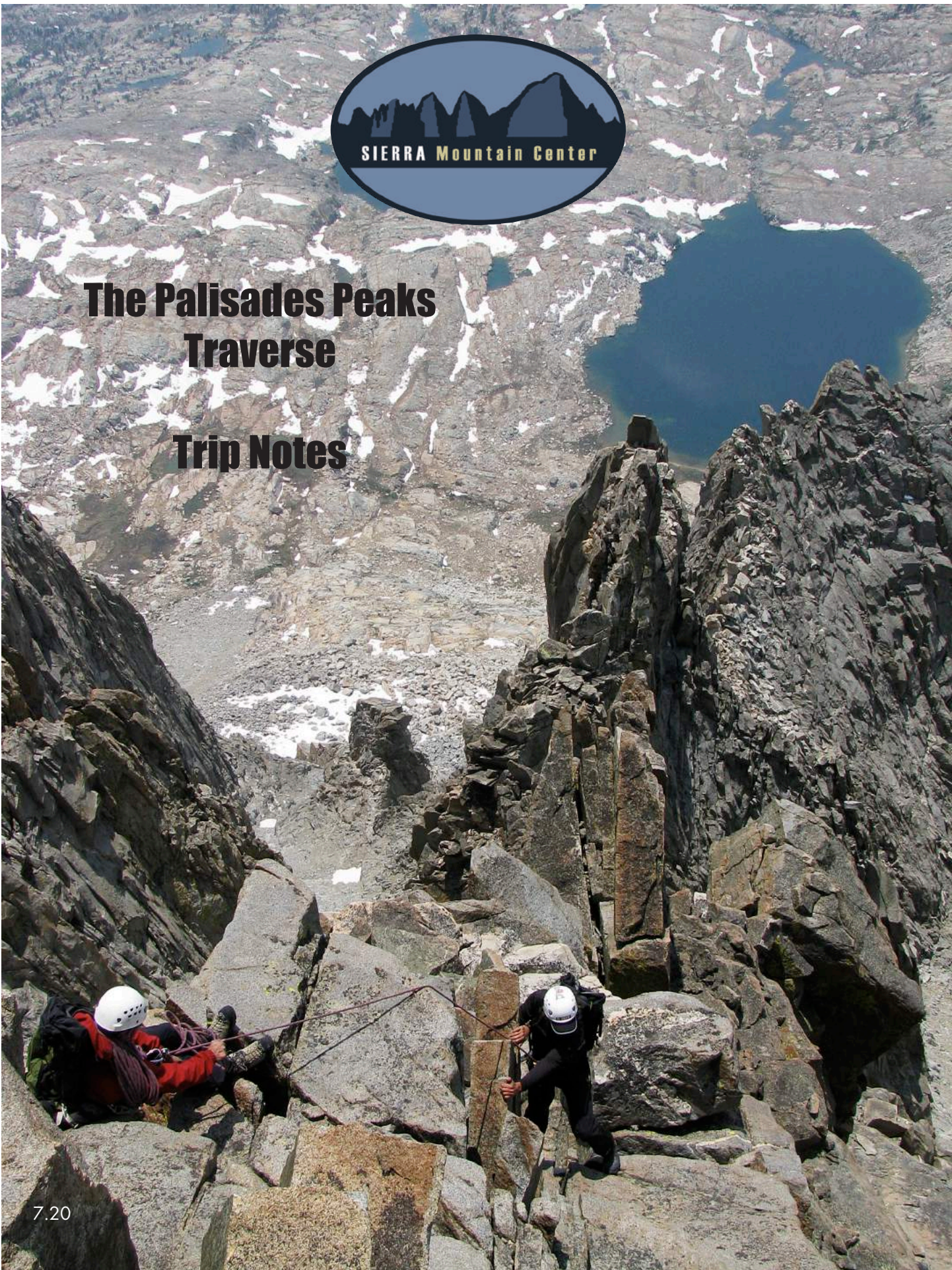




The Palisades Peaks Traverse Trip Notes



The Palisades Peaks Traverse

Feeling strong and ready for the most committing and difficult section of the Sierra Nevada? Had some good solid alpine experience and wanting to do one of the great Sierra traverses? Want to spend a couple of days above 13,000 feet and climb technical terrain with a multi-day pack?

If you can say yes to all of these questions then this traverse will be a great one for you. Along the way you will have the opportunity to tag the summits of five of California's fourteen thousand foot peaks without having to descend down off the main Sierra Crest.

Itinerary

The longer a trip is in the mountains, the more vague the itinerary need be. We have built some slack into the program to accommodate changes in weather, etc. It is possible to complete the climb in a shorter time but in the mountains it is always better to have more time than less.

Day One: We will meet at the SMC office in Bishop, pack, do an equipment check and head to the trailhead. We start at the Bishop Pass trailhead and climb past alpine lakes to the pass. From here we head off the trail. Our goal will be to camp high below the Thunderbolt Couloir on the west side or if there is snow for meltwater, higher up on the crest of the Sierra.

Day Two: We start climbing from the north end of the traverse, ascending Thunderbolt. The summit block on T'bolt (14,003') is the hardest rock climbing on the whole traverse but we do not need to carry packs up and over this so it will not be too bad. Then it is down the ridge to the top of the Underhill Couloirs. If the weather turns this also gives us a good point to get off the ridge. (No, we do not want to be here if there is any chance of an electrical storm). The ridge continues up to Starlight Peak with a few sections of 5th class climbing, but primarily 4th class. The summit "milkbottle" of Starlight (14,200') is also a little tricky to gain, but we know the tricks here. The summit of North Palisade looks not far off and it is not. But unfortunately we have to drop several hundred feet over technical terrain and then reascend to get there. What, on flat ground, would be a short stroll will take us a couple of hours. North Palisade's summit (14,242') is no problem at all and then we traverse, downclimb and spend the night in the west bowl of the peak where there often is water.

Day Three: We climb back up to the col at the head of U-notch. We will be here early so the plan is to drop packs and head off over Polemonium to Sill with just day packs. There is some 5.6 climbing right out of the notch and then we can drop packs and scramble to the exposed summit of Polemonium (14,100'). Once again easy ground is "just over there" but we have to put in a lot of work to get "over there" by retracing our steps rappelling into a gully and re-ascending. The remaining terrain is easy. We traverse above the top of V-notch and over to the top of Mt. Sill's North Couloir. We can drop packs again (since we will be back soon) and head up to the top of Mt. Sill (14,153'). This peak has perhaps the best view of anywhere in the Sierra and we can see north to the Mammoth area and south to Whitney. But too soon it is time to go down so we pick up packs and head back to our overnight gear at the top of U-Notch. Then it is down a gully and either camp wherever we like, or return to our first camp near Thunderbolt Col.

Day Four: Head out back over Thunderbolt Col, arriving at the trailhead around midday.

Elevations and Distances

Trailhead to low camp	7.1 miles	3300' of gain	800' of descent
Low camp to bivvy along crest	0.9 miles	2250' of gain	500' of descent
Bivvy to low camp	2.2 miles	1050' of gain	2750' of descent
Low camp to trailhead	7.1 miles	800' of gain	3300' of descent

Meeting place and time

We will meet the first day at 8:00 am at the world headquarters of Sierra Mountain Center, 200 South Main Street, in Bishop. We are on the east side of Highway 395 in the second block south of the south most traffic light (intersection of Line Street and Main Street/Highway 395. Or is you prefer just across the Mountain Rambler Brewery. We will have introductions then do a thorough equipment check to ensure we bring nothing extra on the traverse. Once ready, we'll carpool to the trailhead.

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 breakfast, lunch and dinner daily (you bring hot/cold drinks and snack items). Scheduled dates include USFS trail fees. Private programs do not.

Prerequisites

You should be in good physical condition, have prior backpacking experience and the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with an overnight pack. Prior experience at altitudes above 12,000' is recommended. You need to be able to follow at the 5.6 level and have experience on multi pitch routes. Previous experience with travel on snow and talus is highly recommended, including the use of crampons and ice axe. Do not think of this trip as being an easy way to climb all of the fourteens in the area in one outing. It is a long traverse at high elevation with an overnight pack, on tricky rock with extensive up and down climbing. This is probably the most involved and complex climb we guide.

Ratios

This is a very complex climb and we limit the ratio to one climber to one guide. This enhances safety and ensures a timely arrival at the summit before potential weather changes.

Notes and other information

The best guidebooks are Supertopo's "High Sierra Climbing" by Chris McNamara and Peter Croff's "The Good, The Great, and the Awesome". Get them from Maximus Press. You can also get our unpublished SMC Guide to The Palisades on-line.

Preparing for Success

If it has been a while since you have climbed outdoors or you are unsure of your current skill level relevant to the climb you wish to undertake, we strongly suggest a "warm-up" day of multi-pitch climbing, such as Crystal Crag. This allows you and your guide to work on systems and communication, increasing your efficiency on the overnight climb. You will do better on the main climb with this day.

Mountain climbing requires endurance. Your objective may be remote (miles in with substantial elevation gain) and you need the stamina to approach, climb, and descend all day (12hrs+). The day prior to the climb consists of an approach with overnight packs. The climbs are often long and sustained with a gully descent. This means long days requiring all day endurance so incorporating endurance training into your fitness regimen is essential.

Acclimatization

The higher in elevation you go, the less oxygen there is in the air. This, combined with very dry air, means you will work harder to do the same activities, get dehydrated faster and recover more slowly. It takes days for your body to adjust to these changes. We highly recommend that you spend at least one night at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000') just prior to the trip. Spending a night in Mammoth would do the trick or better yet, camped at an even higher trailhead, such as the Mosquito Flats trailhead. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info.

Bears

Bears can be a problem at the trailhead. Do not leave food or other scented items (deodorant, soap etc.) in your vehicle. There is limited food locker storage at the trailhead 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.

Porters

Want to do the trip but concerned about carrying the overnight pack through the rough terrain or want to save the knees from the steep descent back down? We can provide the services of a porter to carry the heavier and bulky items, leaving you with a lighter day pack for the trip. Porters can be used for just the up or the down as well. Contact the office for more information.

Equipment List for The Palisades Peaks Traverse

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. This is a technical climbing trip so you need appropriate gear to avoid taking too heavy a pack along the traverse. Everything works together. There is no point in putting a heavy bulky sleeping bag in a lightweight pack or a light bag in a heavy pack. When packing **THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!** Items with a * can be rented from SMC

Climbing equipment

- Boots*. Lightweight mountaineering or heavy duty hiking boots are required, but also a pair that is compact enough to fit in the climbing pack for the descent. Trail runners or tennies are not acceptable since there may be hard snow to cross. If you have any concerns as to the adequacy of your footwear contact us. We rent mountaineering boots.
- Ice axe.* A general purpose axe appropriate to your height. Required only in early season. We will inform you if this is needed.
- Crampons.* These must be compatible with your boots. Required only in early season. We will inform you if these are needed.
- Harness.* We recommend a comfortable rock climbing style harness.
- Helmet. Should be comfortable and lightweight. We provide these for the program if you do not have your own.
- Two locking carabiners and a couple of non-lockers.*
- A lightweight belay/rappel device, ATC style.*
- A 120cm nylon sling.
- Rock shoes*. Regardless of what anyone tells you they need to be comfortable! You'll be wearing them most of the day.

Other essentials

- Internal frame climbing backpack of 35-40 L. This must fit all of your personal gear and group equipment. Must be a climbing style pack, not a backing backpack.
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about 32°F.
- Sleeping pads. A Thermarest and foam pad. A 3/4 Thermarest on a foam pad makes a good combination. Bring a repair kit along with a Thermarest in case of holes.

Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic or wool socks.
- Long underwear top and bottom.
- Warm pants, to layer between base and waterproof layer, such as softshell fabric.
- Another fuzzy sweater top, such as fleece or Polartec.
- Pile/fleece/softshell fabric jacket.
- Light down jacket; synthetic fill is second choice. This is optional & can replace the previous item. For in camp or in cold weather.
- Good quality rain/wind pants and rain jacket. Must be water proof and jacket must have a hood. Don't skimp on your rain gear.
- Shorts for on the trail.
- Climbing pants. We like the softshell type fabrics.
- 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. 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 pair of heavier 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 you wear corrective glasses you might

want a second pair in case of breakage.

- Water carrying system with a capacity of 2-3 liters. 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.
- Eating and drinking equipment. An insulated mug with a lid. This can double for a bowl. Fork and spoon.
- Pocket knife. Small Swiss army style, not a large Leatherman.
- Personal toiletries. Toothbrush and toothpaste. TP & a ziplock bag to carry out the used.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. 30+ SPF. A 1oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- 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/phone camera. Small enough to fit in a pocket; please no giant cameras with multiple lenses.
- Plastic Trash Sac. Handy for keeping gear 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 the knees on long descents.
- Optional reading material, journal, Kindle, etc.

Food

- We include meals from lunch on Day 1 through breakfast on Day 4. Bring your own snack items like cliff bars, power bars, or gorp concoctions for all days. Also bring your favorite hot drinks (tea, hot chocolate, cider etc.). A days worth for most people would be 2 bars, 3 ounces of gorp, and perhaps a candy bar. Don't over do it.

Shared Equipment Provided by SMC

- First aid kit
- Food
- 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.
- Group climbing equipment.
- 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 gravity style purifier.

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.

Additional Thoughts

- Some people, particularly women, tend to run colder than others. If this is the case add another layer or two, a warmer sleeping bag, warmer boots and extra handwarmers
- Women – see our "Women on the Trail" information sheet at the Women's Trips pages on the website.

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