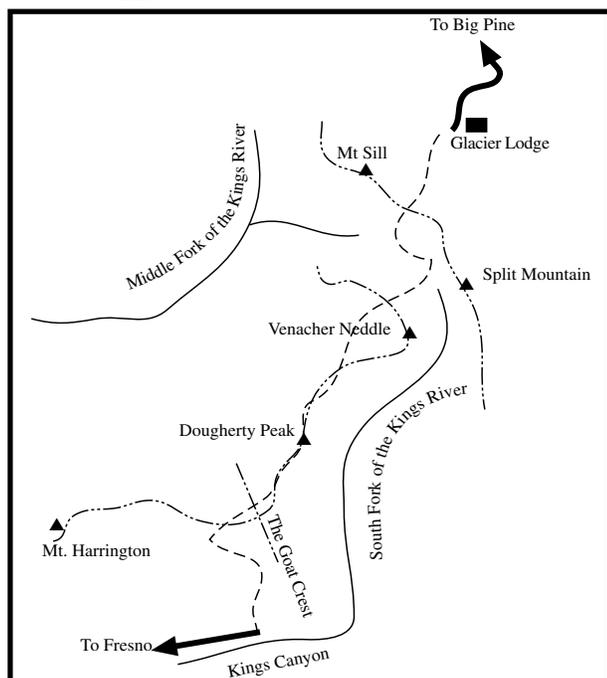




The Monarch and Cirque Divides



While the Sierra High Route has become the most popular of all trans-Sierra tours there are numerous other tours that are just as good but are unknown, except to locals and Sierra experts. The Monarch Divide is one of these. This has easily become our favorite Sierra ski tour so if you have already skied the High Route or want a challenging remote tour where few others venture this is a your perfect option. The route stays high, rarely dropping below 11,000 feet as it follows the entire crest of the Cirque Divide and even passes directly over the summit of 12,241 foot Dougherty Peak. Along the way dropping packs and skiing Marion Peak's perfect south facing corn slopes is one highlight not to be missed.

Itinerary: We ski this route from east to west starting from Glacier Lodge in Big Pine Creek canyon, ascending the south fork of Big Pine Creek and crossing Southfork Pass at 12,600 before descending to Palisades Lakes. Briefly following the route of the John Muir Trail, we cross Mather Pass leaving the Muir Trail in Upper Basin as we pass Vennacher Needle and head onto the Cirque Divide. Here we descend to camp alongside lovely Marion Lake (named after Marion Le Conte, wife of redoubtable Sierra climber and explorer, Joseph Le Conte). We

continue south, crossing back and forth from the north and south sides of the Divide as it links together small passes and high traverses. Below to the south, as we traverse high isolated alpine cirques and hanging valleys, are expansive views over the south fork of the Kings River and the well named "Muro Blanco". If time and energy allows we can make a side trip to ski from the summit of 12,719 foot Marion Peak. Superb 35 degree snow right from the summit before moving on and traverse Dougherty Peak with yet another run directly from the summit.

At the end of the Cirque Divide we cross the Goat Crest and drop down into Granite Basin via wonderful easy runs before descending Copper Creek to the road's end at Zumwalt Meadows in the Kings Canyon. Here we are picked up by our shuttle and taken to the airport for a return flight into Bishop.

Meeting place and time: We will meet the first day at 7.00 a.m. at the world headquarters of Sierra Mountain Center, 174 W. Line Street, in Bishop. Line Street is an east/west street marked by the southern-most traffic light on Main Street/Highway 395, in town. We're west of the light, on the south side of the street next to the health food store. A large parking lot is located on the south side of the building. We will meet for breakfast and will have a thorough pack check so don't plan on finalizing your packing until then.

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. Price includes guiding, permits, all necessary group gear, avalanche beacons, tents, kitchen gear and dinners, lunches and breakfasts (you bring snack items).

Length: 34 miles **Duration:** 7 days **Difficulty:** SMC tour rating III

Other information: For a good overview see the Inyo National Forest John Muir/Ansel Adams Wilderness map (but please don't bring it on the trip...). The SMC web site has photos, our own topo map, trip profile and more information. Proper acclimatization to the elevation with greatly increase your pleasure and enjoyment of the trip. We highly recommend getting at least one day and night at altitude immediately prior to the trip, for instance, by staying in Mammoth, or better yet, camped at an even higher trailhead, such as the South Lake/Bishop Pass trailhead for a day or two just before the trip.

Prerequisites: You need advanced ski skills for this tour. You should be able to ski advanced ski area runs confidently and be proficient at kick turns, traversing on 40 degree slopes, side slipping and parallel or telemark turns all while carrying a pack of about 40 pounds. Prior winter camping and mountaineering skills are required. You will be travelling up to eight miles a day and gaining up to 3500 feet a day so an excellent level of aerobic fitness is required.