Mount Whitney
Ascent in Winter
Trip Notes
**Mt. Whitney Ascent in Winter**

At 14,505 feet Mt. Whitney is the high point of the lower forty eight states and the goal of virtually every mountaineer. The eleven mile long Trail Route offers the easiest route to the summit and is ascended by hundreds of climbers each year. In summer the summit is often crowded with excited climbers calling home on their cell phones and marmots cadging scraps from those lolling in the warm sun.

Winter however is a totally different story!

In the “off season” Mt. Whitney becomes a remote and difficult ascent. Few people are willing to take the chance of putting in a lot of work trying to climb, only to be turned back by weather, avalanche conditions and deep snow. But for those who want to test themselves and see how they do in this difficult environment Mt. Whitney offers a great climb and an adventure that is unique in California.

**Itinerary:** We climb the Mountaineers Route on the east side of the peak. Exactly where we start depends upon the road closure which may be well below the summer parking at Whitney Portal. In fact it might just take a day to get to the parking area! We also have to consider retrieving the vehicles should the weather change for the worse. Above the Portal we travel up the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek to Lower Boy Scout Lake and then on to Upper Boy Scout Lake. We may camp here or place high camp at Iceberg Lake at 12,400 feet. Above Iceberg Lake rises the Mountaineers Route proper. In winter this will be a snow filled gully of about 35 degrees and at the top, three hundred feet of snow covered rock lead to the summit plateau and the culmination of the climb. Each day weather conditions, avalanche danger and group ability will be assessed to make informed decisions. A full itinerary cannot be guaranteed in advance; you need to be flexible as we play it day by day.

**Meeting place and time:** We’ll meet at the Whitney Portal Hostel in the center of Lone Pine at 7:30 am. The hostel is on the east side of Highway 395 just south of the only traffic light in town. You should have had a good breakfast and other than final packing be more or less ready to go. After introductions we’ll do a pack check and distribute group gear before carpooling to the road closure, some 20 minutes out of town.

**Prerequisites:** This is a major ascent so come prepared for hard work. Prior climbing and overnight backpacking experience is essential. You need not have camped before in winter conditions, but you do need appropriate cold weather equipment. A positive mental attitude helps enormously and will be your most important asset. Have your systems down so that once we get to camp you know what to get organized and into the tent and out of the cold. Packs will be heavy and the snow may be deep. Avalanche hazard assessment will be essential and success will depend upon safe conditions.

There are no guarantees of success in winter and a big storm may well put all of our careful planning into disarray. Do not be summit oriented but go out with the goal of gaining skills and enjoying a very different climbing season.

**Ratios:** This is not a technical climb but winter, weather and avalanche considerations make it far more of a challenge than it would be in summer. So we limit the ratio to three climbers to one guide. This enhances timely and efficient travel.

**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 breakfasts, lunches and dinners (you bring hot/cold drinks and snack items). Scheduled dates include USFS trail fees. Private programs do not.

**Notes and other information:** For maps look at the Mt. Whitney and Lone Pine 7.5 minute maps. Guide books include Secors “The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails” and “Climbing California’s Fourteeners” by Porcella and Burns. The SMC web site has photos, a map and more information.
**Skis or Snowshoes?** For over the snow travel we recommend snowshoes for most people since skiing with a heavy pack in variable snow requires very advanced ski techniques. We also do not like to have split groups with some people on skis and some on snowshoes because of the different rates of travel.

**Acclimatization:** 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.

**Bears:** Bears are a major problem at the Portal Trailhead even in winter. Do not leave food, scented items (deodorant, soap etc.) in your vehicle. There is limited food locker storage at Whitney Portal 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. If possible, please car pool up to the trailhead, leaving unnecessary vehicles at the Portal Store parking.

**Lone Pine Accommodation and Showers:** The Whitney Portal Hostel and Hotel is a great place to stay in Lone Pine. Prices are reasonable and we will be meeting there in the morning. They also offer showers so if you want to clean up before heading home stop by and grab one for a few dollars.

Contact them at 760 876-0030 and look on line at www.whitneyportalstore
Equipment List for Mount Whitney Ascent in Winter

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 your individual requirements. Items marked with an * are items that we rent or we can coordinate rentals with a local shop. When packing THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!

**Climbing equipment**
- Boots*: A high quality mountaineering boot is essential for warm feet. We recommend a plastic boot such as an Asolo or Scarpa or a leather boot such as a Sportiva. We have rentals.
- Snowshoes*: We rent snowshoes or you can obtain them from southern or northern California REI stores.
- Poles.* Telescoping probe type are best.
- Ice axe.* A general purpose axe appropriate to your height.
- Cramppons.* These must be compatible with your boots.
- Harness.* We recommend an alpine style harness that is easy to put on with large boots and cramppons.
- 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.*

**Other essentials**
- Internal frame backpack of 60-70 L. This must fit all of your personal gear and group equipment.
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about -10°F.

**Clothing**
- 3 pair synthetic or wool socks. Ski socks are great since they go above the boot cuff.
- Gaiters. Necessary only if pants don’t cover boot top. If there is a gap, snow will get in and your feet will be wet and cold.
- 2 long underwear tops and 1 bottom.
- Warm pants, to layer between base and waterproof layer, such as softshell fabric. Get a lined style if you tend to run colder.
- 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.
- 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.
- Warm hat that covers the ears.
- Visor hat (for sun).
- Neck gaiter.
- Lightweight windstopper-type gloves.
- Shell gloves or mittens.

**Etc.**
- Sun glasses. Good quality. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair in case of breakage.
- Water Bottles. Two quart (1 liter) wide mouth bottles. Hydration systems and hoses typically freeze, even with an insulation sleeve.
- A pee bottle is far more pleasant than getting out of the tent in the middle of the night. Mark it well though to avoid confusion!!
- 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 1 oz. 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 band-aids.
- 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.
- Optional reading material, journal, Kindle, etc.
- Hand warmers if you tend to run cold.
- Goggles and a face mask are great if it becomes stormy.

**Food**
- We include meals from lunch on Day 1 through lunch on Day 5. Bring your own snack items like cliff bars, power bars, or gorp concoctions for all days. Also bring your favorite hot drink (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**
- Shovels
- Avalanche transceivers
- Probes
- First aid kit
- Snowshoe repair kit
- Tents
- Cooking equipment
- Group climbing equipment

**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.