

Cottonwood to Shepherd Pass
Hike
Program Notes



Cottonwood to Shepherd Pass Hike

Want to hike a part of the JMT, climb Whitney along the way and not have to retrace your steps back the way you started.

If so then this is the hike for you.

For many years we have climbed Mount Whitney via Cottonwood but we added this program to give the option of a trip the same length, a point to point rather than a loop and self supported, not using pack stock.

We do up the pace of the trip later in the trip but by then the packs are light and most of the distance is downhill.

Day 1

We meet early in the morning at the Cottonwood Pass Trailhead, do introductions, divide up group gear and food, do a full pack check and then hike from the roadhead up and over Cottonwood Pass and descend a little over about a half mile to Chicken Springs Lake, our first night's camp. This day is about 4 miles long with about 1400 feet of elevation gain and makes for a great break-in day further improving your acclimatization to the elevation. There will be plenty of time in camp to relax and enjoy the surroundings.

Day 2

We leave camp and, after a short initial climb, much of the day is relatively flat or downhill. We contour above Big Whitney Meadow with views towards the Kaweah's. After entering Sequoia Kings National Park, we continue to the lower crossing of Rock Creek. This is about a 10 mile day.

Day 3

Our day starts with a climb over Guyot Pass and into the wide open spaces of Guyot Flat. Staying near treeline, we climb and contour around into Crabtree Meadows. We now turn towards Mt. Whitney and steadily climb to camp overlooking Guitar Lake (11,460').

Day 4

We allow all day for the ascent to the summit and the return to camp. Today we ditch the big packs and travel with a light day pack leaving camp set up for our return. There are numerous switchbacks up to Trail Crest (13,550'), where we meet others coming up the east side trail. The summit comes into view but the thin air limits our ability to move speedily. With slow but steadily progress, before long we will be on top and enjoying the views in all directions. After summit photos and maybe even relaxing on top, we retrace our steps down the mountain to Guitar Lake.

Day 5

Heading north we follow the JMT over several small passes past Wallace and Wright Lakes, curve around Tawney Point and camp in Tyndall Creek for the night.

Day 6

This is a big day so be prepared for an early start. We follow up Tyndall Creek into its headwaters high above treeline and then gain Shepherd Pass at 12,000 feet. The views to the Owens Valley far below are stunning as we start our long descent of 6200 feet to the trailhead. Here we have a shuttle arranged to take you back to the vehicles at Cottonwood. From there head to Lone Pine for a well deserved dinner and shower.

Meeting place and time

We meet at the Cottonwood Pass Trailhead at 8.00 a.m. on Day 1 of the trip. We'll do introductions, a pack check and a group orientation. The Trailhead is some 45 minutes from Lone Pine so you need to have checked and double-checked your gear since there will be no opportunity for "last minute" shopping for forgotten items. See our driving directions below.

Lone Pine Accommodation and Showers

The Whitney Portal Hostel and Hotel. This is a great place to stay in Lone Pine and prices are reasonable. 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.mountwhitneyportal.com

Dates and Prices

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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 gear, tents, packstock and packers, 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.

Ratios

We keep the ratio of one guide to five participants.

Prerequisites

Good hiking shape is the main prerequisite. Climbing skills are not needed, but you should be able to hike, with a day pack, up to thirteen miles a day with 3000 feet or more in elevation gain. You still have long hiking days, so come prepared and in good condition.

Trailhead Directions

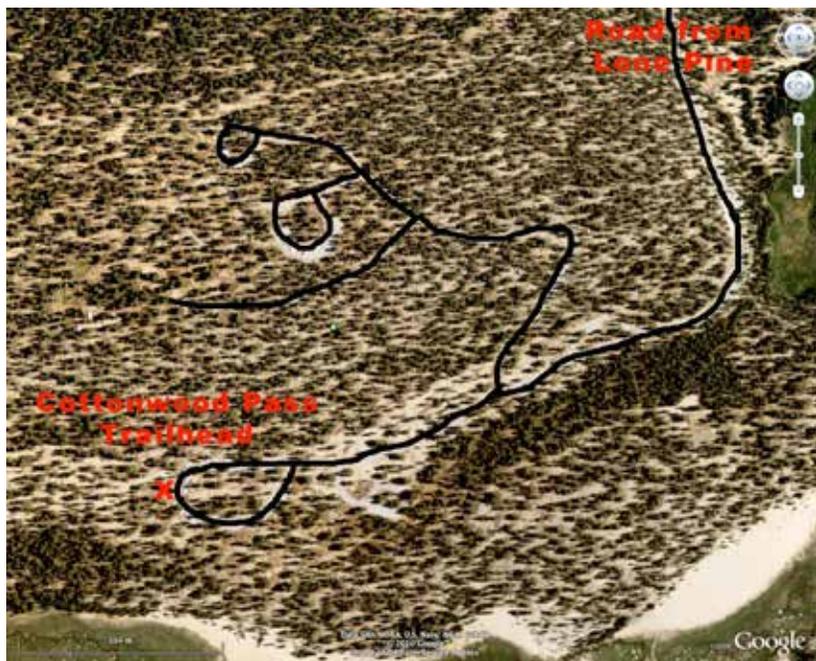
There are a number of roads and two trailheads here, making our meeting place a little confusing. So here is where to go. In Lone Pine, at the intersection of US Highway 395 and Whitney Portal Road, take Whitney Portal Road west and go 3.2 miles to the Tuttle Creek campground sign. Turn left at the sign onto Horseshoe Meadow Road and go 20 miles up the steep road with many hairpin bends. Keep going straight to the end of the road. Do not turn right to the Cottonwood Lakes Trailhead

Special Notes

The above itinerary is our ideal one. However since we are working with packstock things can change. The packers are limited by the park service for grazing and this changes over the season so our campsites might well have to adapt to stock forage. Weather can also change things. Be understanding and be prepared to change if plans need to adapt.

For maps use the Mt. Whitney, Mt. Langley and Cirque Peak 7.5 minute maps. The Tom Harrison Mt. Whitney High Country Map covers most of the route and the Whitney Zone one gives detail of the peak area. Ninety percent of our unsuccessful attempts fail due to problems with altitude (And the balance due to weather). This trip is paced to allow plenty of acclimatization time but if you know your body and require more time then take it. You could stay in Mammoth or camp out at the roadhead an additional night if required.

Bears are a problem at the Cottonwood Trailhead. Do not leave food or scented items (deodorant, soap etc.) in your vehicle. There is limited storage 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.



Distances and Elevations

Day 1 to Chicken Spring Lake 5.3 miles Elevation Gain 1405 feet. Estimated hiking time; 3 hours 35 minutes

Day 2 to Rock Creek Crossing 10.5 miles Elevation Gain 620 feet. Estimated hiking time; 6 hours 43 minutes

Day 3 to Guitar Lake 10.3 miles Elevation Gain 2985 feet. Estimated hiking time; 7 hours 10 minutes

Day 4 Mount Whitney then back to Guitar Lake Meadows 8.8 miles Elevation Gain 3278 feet. Estimated hiking time; 8 hours

Day 5 Guitar lake to Tyndall Creek 10.08 miles Elevation Gain 1906 feet Estimated hiking time; 7 hours

Day 6 Tyndal Creek to Trailhead 12.25 miles Elevation Gain 2035. Estimated hiking time; 8 hours

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Equipment List for Cottonwood to Shepherd Hike

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. When backpacking paying attention to the details and creating a personal system will lead to success. Experiment with your gear and your packing style before arriving in the Sierra. Consider the month, weather patterns, and snow conditions. **Think lightweight.**

Essentials

- ❑ Footwear. You will be hiking roughly 10 miles per day for 22 days. Please bring sturdy hiking boots that you have broken in, or trail shoes that you have worn heavy packs with. The main difference between trail runners and boots is foot support vs. blisters. If your feet blister notoriously please consider wearing a trail runner. If you have weak ankles or need additional foot support please wear boots. Again, your feet are your transportation and can make the difference between surviving this trip and thriving. Snow conditions can change which footwear is appropriate so please consider the month—snow can last into July and come as early as August.
- ❑ Camp Shoes for around camp. Sanuk sandals, Crocs, or light tennis shoes are all appropriate. The camp shoes will make hanging out in camp more comfortable, and lessen the impact we leave on the sites. Open toed flip flops are not acceptable.
- ❑ Pack. 60-65 liter. The pack you choose to bring will also greatly impact your trip. Bring the smallest lightest pack you can get everything into (including group gear).
- ❑ Sleeping Bag. Please consider the month you are going to be hiking in. Fall trips have much colder nights than mid-July trips. A 25°F bag should be sufficient but if you are cold at night a sleeping bag liner can add significant warmth with minimal additional weight. We recommend a down-bag as opposed to a synthetic one due to weight differences, but a down-bag must be waterproofed inside your bag with a trash bag lining the stuff sack. Pair this with a compression stuff sac to reduce volume.
- ❑ Sleeping pad. A 3/4 length Ultralight inflatable pad paired with a foam pad is our favorite combination. If bringing an inflatable pad also bring a repair kit to fix leaks.

Clothing

We seek a balance between comfort and weight on these longer trips. Layering your clothes will lead to having enough warmth and having options on what to wear. The list below is what the guides recommend, though you also need to consider the month and temperatures expected during your specific month.

- ❑ 3 pairs of socks. 2 pairs to alternate while hiking, and a third pair for at camp. Nothing beats a fresh pair of socks in the backcountry and we have 3 resupplies which can come with fresh socks (for more clarity refer to the “resupply instruction” document). Blister prevention is crucial so the clean third pair for camp is excellent preventative care. Having 2 pairs to alternate hiking in also gives the opportunity to rinse and dry socks. A mid-weight, non-cotton sock is ideal, such as a Smartwool or Darn Tough hiking specific sock. Please do not bring low-cut ankle socks as they can lead to rubbing on the heel.
- ❑ 1 mid-weight long-sleeve top. Capilene, Merino or other synthetic.
- ❑ 1 pair of long-johns or tights. Capilene, Merino or other synthetic.
- ❑ 1 pair of warm pants.
- ❑ 1 warm shirt. Synchilla or 200 weight works well.
- ❑ 1 warm jacket. A down jacket is preferred with around 800 fill.
- ❑ Waterproof Jacket and Pants - Lightweight and non-bulky. Side zips on the pants should be long enough to slide on over boots. Jacket must have a hood.
- ❑ 1 pair of hiking pants. Convertible pants that can convert to shorts can also be nice to have on the trail.
- ❑ 1 pair of shorts. Nice for swimming.
- ❑ 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 per section. 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 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 using prescription lenses consider a backup pair.
- ❑ Water carrying system with a capacity of 2-3 liters. A combination of a bottle and hydration system works well. 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 for mid trip resupply.
- ❑ Eating and drinking equipment. We recommend a container with a lid for leftovers and a thermos (refer to “water capacity for more clarity). Plastic sporks will break - titanium does not.
- ❑ Swiss army style knife. No giant “multi-tools”.
- ❑ Personal toiletries including toothbrush, toothpaste (travel sized), baby wipes and floss. Keep it minimal.
- ❑ Hand sanitizer - a personal travel size bottle.
- ❑ Toilet paper - you can put more TP in each resupply so 1 roll will be more than enough! ***You will be required to carry your used toilet paper u.*** The used toilet paper will go in a paper bag, which then goes in a ziplock, which you carry in your pack. Bathrooms will alternate between pit toilets, established pit toilets, or carry out bags in the Whitney Zone. Guides will inform you about the different practices.
- ❑ Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. A 1 oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip screen actually contains a sunscreen.
- ❑ Basic first aid supplies such as ibuprofen, moleskin, and tape. Your guides will have extensive first aid kits so please don't go overboard with your personal kits. If you tend to take NSAID's regularly please bring your own, or if your feet require constant blister attention please bring tape and moleskin.
- ❑ Camera, a spare memory card and battery. No big cameras please; compacts only.
- ❑ Plastic Trash Bag for keeping things 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 wear on the knees.
- ❑ Reading material, journal or Kindle. Do not bring “War & Peace”.
- ❑ Ear plugs. Handy to block flapping tents (or noisy partners).
- ❑ 1 watch with an alarm.

Early Season or After a Big Winter Extras

- ❑ Ice axe.
- ❑ Lightweight instep crampons, boot spikes or cleats.
- ❑ Heavier weight boots to deal with more snowy conditions.

Shared Equipment

- ❑ Shelter. We will provide tents for you, and you will be asked to share a tent with someone as campsites are only so large, and to help distribute weight. If you have a tent of your own you want to use please call the office prior to the trip.
- ❑ Stoves, kitchen and cookware.
- ❑ Water purification. The group will have access to a variety of different ways to treat water. Chemical treatment, such as Aquamira or Iodine, will be carried by the guide. Gravity filtration bags will be distributed amongst the group for use in camp.
- ❑ Bear Canisters. Each hiker gets a large plastic cylinder for overnight food protection from animals. When you pack each day you will be issued one canister to carry for that day.

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.