



**Mount Whitney  
via  
The Mountaineers Route  
Trip Notes**

# Mount Whitney via the Mountaineers Route

At 14,495 feet Mount Whitney is the high point of the lower forty eight states and the goal of many a mountaineer. The Mount Whitney Trail is the most popular way to ascend and is a long circuitous eleven mile non technical hike up a well graded trail to the summit. Instead of this however, we follow in the footsteps of the redoubtable John Muir, who described the trail as being the choice for “soft, succulent people.” Muir ascended what is now known as the Mountaineers Route in 1873, starting on foot from the town of Independence. He failed on his first attempt, climbing Mount Muir instead. After a day of rest he tried again, finally gaining the summit in the late October cold.

## **Itinerary:**

Day One: The Approach. After meeting in Lone Pine, we start our climb from the 8,640 foot Whitney Portal. Staying on the main Whitney Trail for less than a mile, we turn up the steep North Fork of Lone Pine Creek. The trail here is non-maintained and rough with creek crossings and rocks to scramble up and over. We traverse the “Ebersbacher” Ledges above the creek and traverse into the serene setting of Lower Boy Scout Lake (10,335’). From here we climb steadily to our camp beside Upper Boy Scout Lake (11,200’) below Mount Russell. This is an elevation gain of 2,500’ from the cars and takes most of the day.

Day Two: The Climb. We ascend past Iceberg Lake (12,400’) and onto the Mountaineer’s Route proper. Crampons and ice axes may be necessary in early season when the gully holds snow, while late summer presents a steep class two talus slope. Above the top of the gully we have two choices depending upon the season. In late season when the snow has melted off we can take an easy rising traverse across the north side of the peak to the summit plateau. When snow makes the traverse not a viable option we climb straight up via third class rock using a rope and belays to the summit plateau, a short distance from the very summit. We aim for midday on the summit and the round trip taking 8-12 hours camp to camp.

Day Three: The Hike Out. We return down the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek and plan to get back down to the trailhead in time for a lunch of the famed burgers and fries at the Whitney Portal Store, before heading home tired but satisfied.

## **Elevations and Distances:**

Trailhead to Lower Boy Scout Lake	1.9 miles	2060’ of gain	60’ of descent.
Lower Boy Scout Lake to Upper Boy Scout Lake	0.8 miles	1040’ of gain	30’ of descent
Upper Boy Scout Lake to Iceberg Lake	1.2 miles	1310’ of gain	30’ of descent
Iceberg Lake to the Summit	0.75 miles	1870’ of gain	30’ of descent
Summit to camp	1.95 miles	60’ of gain	3180’ of descent
Camp to Trailhead	2.7 miles	90’ of gain	3100’ of descent

Do not be fooled by the short mileages. Focus on the total amount of ascent and descent!

## **Meeting place and time:**

We will meet in Lone Pine at 7:30am at Spainhower Park (formerly known as Lone Pine Park). The Park is on the north end of Lone Pine; we will be at the south entrance next to Carl’s Jr. Restaurant. Plan to be breakfasted up and ready to go. Your guide will do a gear check, distribute group equipment then everyone will 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 breakfasts, lunches and dinners (you bring hot/cold drinks and snack items). Scheduled dates include USFS trail fees. Private programs do not.

## **Prerequisites:**

Technical climbing skills are not required but prior backpacking experience is recommended as is experience at altitudes above 12,000’. This is a physically demanding trip and you should be in good condition and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderately heavy pack.

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## **Maps and Books**

For a map look at the Mt. Whitney 7.5 minute map. The Tom Harrison *Whitney Zone* map also covers the route. Guide books include Secor's *The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails*, *Climbing California's Fourteeners* by Porcella and Burns, *Sierra Classics* by Moynier and Fiddler and the Supertopo *High Sierra Climbing* guidebook.

We also have our unpublished guide to Whitney and its routes available on our website.

The SMC web site has photos, a map and more information.

## **Human Waste**

In the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek human impact is a major concern and it is necessary to pack solid human waste out from this area. The Forest Service provides a bag system to make this an easy procedure. We will provide these bags for you and instruct you on how to use them.

## **Acclimatization**

Since the first night's camp is at 11,200' we highly recommend that you spend at least one night at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000') just prior to the trip. 80% of our unsuccessful attempts on these routes fail due to problems with altitude (and the balance due to weather). Sites can be reserved at the Whitney Portal Campground (8,400') through the National Forest Reservation System (800) 280 2267.

Nearby Cottonwood Lakes offers a walk-in campground (100' from your car) at almost 10,000'. Reservations are not necessary here; a small fee is required. Ideally, two days would be spent in the Cottonwood Lakes area immediately prior to starting your climb of the Mountaineers Route. Cottonwood Lakes is a large area with plenty to see and do. Putting in time acclimatizing initially will help greatly on the trip so plan to include time for this.

## **Bears**

Bears are a major problem at the Portal Trailhead. Do not leave food or other 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.

## **Porters**

Want to do the climb 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.

## **Lone Pine Accommodation and Showers**

The Dougs from the Portal Store operate the Whitney Portal Hostel and Hotel. This is a great place to stay in Lone Pine after the trip. 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.whitneyportalstore.com](http://www.whitneyportalstore.com).

## **Whitney - Russell Tour**

Looking to increase your hiking to climbing time ratio and do two classic Sierra climbs in four days? Add a day on to your trip and you can climb the Mountaineers route on Mount Whitney as well as East Ridge on Russell. The approach, camping and hike out will be the same. We will plan to climb the Mountaineers one day and the East Ridge the next day. This allows you to spend more time in this beautiful alpine area and climb two classics in one trip! Call our office to talk about changing your trip to a four day adventure in the Whitney Area.

# Equipment List for Mount Whitney via the Mountaineers Route

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. When packing **THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!** Items with a \* can be rented from SMC.

## Climbing equipment

- Boots\*. Lightweight mountaineering or heavy duty hiking boots are a must for this route. Trail runners or tennies are not acceptable. If there is snow you will need a heavier duty more waterproof boot. Foot care is very important and bad boots can make or break a trip. 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 an alpine style harness that is easy to put on with large boots and crampons.
- 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 50-60 L. This must fit all of your personal gear and group equipment.
- 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.
- Gaiters. Shorties are handy to avoid rocks in the boots up high.
- 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. In early season with freezing temperatures, bottles are recommended instead of the hydration system.
- 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 3. 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.