



# **The California Fourteeners**

## **Trip Notes**



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There are fifteen peaks in California that exceed fourteen thousand feet in height. We won't try to climb them all in the course of these four days, but we will certainly ascend a couple of the most technically difficult of them, namely those along the Palisade Crest.

We start from the South Fork of Bishop Creek, cross Bishop Pass, and set up camp high above beautiful Palisade and Dusy Basins at Thunderbolt Col. From here we will choose between Thunderbolt, Sill, Starlight, North Palisade, or Polemonium peaks and ascend two or three of these over the next two days. This is a fairly busy schedule and while not technically difficult it does require stamina and fitness.

The technical crux of several of these mountains is the tiny summit block, but with a pair of rock shoes you will be standing on the very top of the Sierra's most spectacular peaks. For North Palisade we generally choose the Le Conte route, first ascended by Joseph Le Conte in 1903. This involves a spectacular and exciting traverse across a steep slab. From North Palisade we can traverse to Polemonium, which from the top of the U-Notch offers low fifth class climbing for two hundred feet to the summit and a rappel descent.

The climb of Thunderbolt starts directly from camp at Thunderbolt Col and ascends a steep snow gully to the crest before tackling the summit block via a well-protected fifth class face. Starlight is perhaps the most involved with a devious climb of the west chute to the "Milkbottle" summit and the various rope shenanigans necessary to reach this. From camp Mount Sill is perhaps the easiest peak to climb in the technical sense, but involves a long approach around the head of Palisade Basin to the low angle class two slopes of the west side, making for a very long day.

## **Itinerary**

**Day 1:** We will meet in Bishop, then carpool to the South Lake trailhead and head for Bishop Pass. Once we reach the pass, we leave the trail and contour around to reach Thunderbolt Col. This will take most of the day and travel here can be difficult with some large talus to cross. We can camp at the Col or we can drop down to a small tarn a few hundred feet below. (This is the place to be if the weather is unfavorable since the Col, while beautiful, is very exposed to bad weather and wind).  
Distance: 7.2 miles, 3300 feet of gain, 750 feet of loss

**Days 2 and 3:** These days are similar in that they share an early start for any of the attractive objectives in the area, described above. Each day we plan to return to the same basecamp at/near Thunderbolt Col.

**Day 4:** We pack up and head out, aiming for a mid afternoon arrival back at the vehicles.

## **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 do a gear check and distribute group equipment, then 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**

Prior backpacking and hiking experience on and off trail required. This is a physically demanding trip and you should have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a multi-day pack. Other than the summit blocks, none of these peaks are extremely difficult but they all require roped travel and possibly the use of crampons and ice axes. Prior experience at altitudes at or above 12,000 feet is recommended.

## **Ratios**

These are long semi-technical climb and we limit the ratio to two climbers to one guide. This enhances safety and ensures a timely arrival at the summit before potential weather changes.

## **Notes and other information**

Guidebooks include Secor's "The High Sierra; Peaks, Passes and Trails" and "Climbing California's Fourteeners" by Porcella and Burns.

## **Acclimatization**

We highly recommend that you spend at least a night, or ideally more, at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000') just prior to the trip. There are lodging options in Bishop Creek such as Parchers Resort, Cardinal Village or Bishop Creek Lodge and all are at a higher elevation. There are also several campgrounds in Bishop Creek. Please refer to our Planning for Success info sheet for more info. 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 California Fourteeners

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 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\*. Not totally necessary but can give you the confidence to surmount the hardest climbing to the top of the summit of blocks Thunderbolt and Starlight.

## Other essentials

- Internal frame backpack of 50-60 L. This must fit all of your personal gear and group equipment. If your pack compresses down you do not need the following item.
- Small day pack for climbing. 20-25L with attachment points for ice axe and crampons.
- 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 lunch 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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