Mount Whitney via The East Buttress Trip Notes
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The East Buttress of Mt. Whitney is certainly the best known climbing route in the Whitney area, and for good reason. With ten high-quality rock pitches at moderate difficulty it would be classic even if Whitney weren't the highest point in the lower 48 states. But with that distinction The East Buttress becomes a “must-do” for the alpine rock climber, a little harder and steeper then the more popular East Face. The route was first climbed by the redoubtable Glen Dawson along with Bob Brinton, Richard Jones, Howard Kostner and Muir Dawson in 1937. Originally called the Sunshine-Pee Wee route after the large block part way up the route became one of Dawson’s favorite Sierra routes.

**Itinerary**

**Day One: The Approach.** Starting at the 8,640 foot Whitney Portal we hike Whitney Trail for less than a mile before heading 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 climb to the serene setting of Lower Boy Scout Lake (10,335’). Ascending still higher we pass Upper Boy Scout Lake to our camp near Iceberg Lake (12,400’). Hold on to your hats: this is a gain of over 4000’ from the cars and takes most of the day.

**Day Two: The Climb.** We leave Iceberg Lake initially following the Mountaineers Route and traverse to the start of the East Buttress. In early season crampons and ice axe may be necessary but in late season the approach is a steep class two talus slope. From the rope-up point to the top is usually twelve pitches or so, with some 5.7. We aim for midday on the summit and the round trip usually taking 8-10 hours camp to camp. Descent is via the Mountaineer’s Route, a snow gully early season, with some fourth class at its top.

**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:**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Distance Description</th>
<th>Miles</th>
<th>Feet of Gain</th>
<th>Feet of Descent</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Trailhead to Lower Boy Scout Lake</td>
<td>1.9</td>
<td>2060’</td>
<td>60’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lower Boy Scout Lake to Upper Boy Scout Lake</td>
<td>0.8</td>
<td>1040’</td>
<td>30’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Upper Boy Scout Lake to Iceberg Lake</td>
<td>1.2</td>
<td>1310’</td>
<td>30’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Iceberg Lake to the Summit</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>1870’</td>
<td>30’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Summit to camp</td>
<td>0.75</td>
<td>30’</td>
<td>1870’</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Camp to Trailhead</td>
<td>2.7</td>
<td>120’</td>
<td>4410’</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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. You 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 cancelling. 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.

**Ratios**

This is a 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.

**Prerequisites:**

You need to be able to follow at the 5.8 level and have experience on multi-pitch routes (This level is harder than the rating of the route, but you will be at elevation, climbing with a pack and moving steadily for a good part for the day). 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 and uneven slopes with a moderately heavy pack.
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 12,400’ 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.

Whitney - Russell Grand 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 East Buttress on Mount Whitney as well as Fishhook Arete. The approach, camping and hike out will be the same. We will plan to climb the East Buttress one day and Fishhook Arete 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.
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. Items marked with a * are items that we rent. When packing THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!

**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.*
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- A lightweight belay/rappel device, ATC style.*
- A 120cm nylon sling.
- Rock shoes*. Regardless of what anyone tells you they need to be comfortable! You’ll be wearing them most of the day.

**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.

**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.
- 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 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.
- 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 hand warmers.
- Women – see our “Women on the Trail” information sheet at the Women’s Trips pages on the website.