



Bear Creek Spire via North Arete or Northeast Ridge

Trip Notes

Bear Creek Spire via North Arete or Northeast Ridge

Bear Creek Spire is a true mountaineer's peak - not easily accessible and providing one of the finest views in the central Sierra. The beginning of the hike travels through the beautiful Little Lakes Valley from one of the highest trailheads in the Eastern Sierra. The Northeast Ridge offers mainly fourth-class climbing, but with a spectacular ridge traverse to the summit. The shady North Buttress is best climbed in the summer and offers up 5.8 climbing before joining the Northeast Ridge.

Itinerary

We choose to take three days to climb these routes, allowing us slow down and enjoy the beauty of the area. The additional time to acclimatize also helps a lot for the climb.

Day 1: The approach is via Little Lakes Valley in Rock Creek Canyon. The trailhead elevation is just over 10,000 feet, offering a bit of a head start on the approach as compared with the other climbs in the Eastern Sierra that can start from the low desert. Our approach is a very good trail for the first two miles to Long Lake. Here we take a minor trail up Treasure Lakes Gully to stunningly beautiful Treasure Lakes. We then climb over a small dome and drop down to our camp at Dade Lake at 11,500' and a little over four miles from the trailhead.

Day 2: In the morning we climb a little less than a mile and just over 1000 feet, with the final short section over a small snowfield to reach the point where our routes diverge. Just before the snowfield there is a small moraine where we can leave extra equipment. The climbing options are as follows:

North Arete: 5.8, Intermediate

Most of the climbing on the initial part of the arete is 5.7. About half way up a short steep area is reached and is passed via a 5.8 chimney/crack pitch. An interesting pitch with a tunnel move follows and leads to easier terrain that is mostly fourth class. We move off the summit ridge onto the west side briefly before the final 40 feet to the top. The actual summit is typical of many a Sierra peak. A monolithic block with no cracks and plenty of exposure. Luckily the summit register is below this final obstacle and unless you're really adventurous you might need to satisfy yourself with touching the true high point with a hand, rather than standing on the top. Descent begins with one long rappel and then a simple scramble back to the base. Usually there is quite a bit of easy snow on the return - plan on bringing gaiters and having damp boots by the time we reach the talus below.

Northeast Ridge: 5.4, Beginner

The climbing on this ridge is a lot easier than the North Arete, which it joins a few hundred feet below the summit. From the moraine we turn left and head over to Peppermint Col at just below 13,000', overlooking beautiful Spire Lake in the Pine Creek drainage. We rope up here and move through increasingly difficult third and fourth class terrain as the ridge gradually steepens and becomes more and more narrow. Occasional belays and easy stretches make up most of the climb. The upper ridge is certainly exposed, but the views over the valleys and desert should be more than enough to distract you. We do the same maneuvers to gain the summit and descend the same way as the North Arete.

Once back at our gear after either climb, we descend the rest of the way to camp to enjoy our last evening in the mountains.

Day 3: After a leisurely breakfast, we pack up and hike back to our cars. We plan to be at the trailhead around lunchtime.

Elevations and Distances

Trailhead to camp	4.1 miles	1750' of gain	420' of descent
Camp to summit to camp	2.4 miles	2100' of gain	2100' of descent
Camp to trailhead	4.1 miles	420' of gain	1750' of descent

Meeting place and time

We will meet at Toms Place, 18 miles north of Bishop, at 8:00 a.m. Toms Place is at the top of the long steady climb (Sherwin Grade) north of Bishop. Go a hundred feet west from Highway 395 on the road that heads west to Rock Creek Lake and turn north (right) on the frontage road to Toms. You can get breakfast at Toms and we recommend that. Please have gear organized, but not packed in the big pack. We will distribute group gear 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

You should be in good physical condition, have some backpacking experience and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderate pack. Prior experience at altitudes above 10,000' is recommended. More specifically:

North Arête: You need to be able to follow at the 5.8 level and have experience on multi pitch routes.

Northeast Ridge: Prior experience with roped climbing and ice axe and crampon use is helpful but not necessary.

Ratios

On these climbs 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

The best guidebooks are Supertopo's "High Sierra Climbing" by Chris McNamara and Peter Croff's "The Good, The Great, and the Awesome". Get them from Maximus Press.

Preparing for Success

If it has been a while since you have climbed outdoors or you are unsure of your current skill level relevant to the climb you wish to undertake, we strongly suggest a "warm-up" day of multi-pitch climbing, such as Crystal Crag. This allows you and your guide to work on systems and communication, increasing your efficiency on the overnight climb. You will do better on the main climb with this day.

Mountain climbing requires endurance. Your objective may be remote (miles in with substantial elevation gain) and you need the stamina to approach, climb, and descend all day (12hrs+). The day prior to the climb consists of an approach with overnight packs. The climbs are often long and sustained with a gully descent. This means long days requiring all day endurance so incorporating endurance training into your fitness regimen is essential.

Acclimatization

The higher in elevation you go, the less oxygen there is in the air. This, combined with very dry air, means you will work harder to do the same activities, get dehydrated faster and recover more slowly. It takes days for your body to adjust to these changes. We highly recommend that you spend at least one night at moderate altitude (higher than 8,000') just prior to the trip. Spending a night in Mammoth would do the trick or better yet, camped at an even higher trailhead, such as the Mosquito Flats trailhead. 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 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.

Equipment List for Bear Creek Spire

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 required, but also a pair that is compact enough to fit in the climbing pack for the descent. Trail runners or tennies are not acceptable since there may be hard snow to cross. 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*. Regardless of what anyone tells you they need to be comfortable! You'll be wearing them most of the day. Only needed for the North Arete, not the Northeast Ridge.

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 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.

200 South Main Street, P.O. Box 95, Bishop, CA 93515

office@sierramountaincenter.com

760.873.8526

www.sierramountaincenter.com