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Warning!

Climbing is an inherently dangerous sport in which severe injuries or death may occur. Relying on the information in this book may increase the danger.

When climbing you can only rely on your skill, training, experience, and conditioning. **If you have any doubts as to your ability to safely climb any route in this guide, do not try it.**

This book is neither a professional climbing instructor nor a substitute for one. **It is not an instructional book. Do not use it as one.** It contains information that is nothing more than a compilation of opinions about climbing in the High Sierra. **These opinions are neither facts nor promises.** Treat the information as opinions and nothing more. Do not substitute these opinions for your own common sense and experience.

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Acknowledgements

Huge thanks to: **Dana Benson** for tolerating my sandbagging on the Northeast Ridge of Bear Creek Spire. We later realized the route is not “4th class” and bulky hiking boots are not ideal for soloing exposed 5.5 on your first Sierra climb. **Peter Croft** for tons of beta and leading me up (sans ropes, of course) my first High Sierra 14er. **Sarah Felchlin** who did an awesome job managing, editing, and laying out this guidebook and forgave me when I got way off route on the Fishhook Arête. **Brad Goya** for joining me on many of the climbs and insisting that I was wasting my time by climbing in any alpine setting other than the High Sierra. **Aaron Martin, Joey Papazian, and Paul Wignall** for a great Incredible Hulk trip. **Steve Levinson** and two-one-eight for reminding me that as cool as the High Sierra is, the Valley is still where it’s at. **Gene Malone** for his thorough editing and feedback. My dad **Steve McNamara** who is not only Senior Editor and Head of Shipping, but has also been a huge inspiration and endless source of good advice. My mom **Kay McNamara** who never wavers in her support. **Morgan McNamara**, bro, who makes sure that the SuperTopo Mill Valley office is always having fun. **Marshall Minobe** for beta and photos on the SuperTopo web site as well as working hard on Eastern Sierra community building and environmental protection (www.easternsierraadvocates.org). **Russell Mitrovich** for beta, posing, and waiting for me on the approaches. **Todd Offenbacher** for way too much fun on many climbing trips to The Hulk, Conness, etc. **SP Parker, Todd Vogel, and Sierra Mountain Center** who provided great photos, topos, and

beta for Temple Crag and Charlotte Dome. **Steve Roper** for history and introduction text. **Karen Roseme** for lots of beta and route suggestions. **Mick Ryan** and Rockfax guidebooks for editing topos and being a great help in general. **David Safanda** for continued, awesome work on the SuperTopo web site. **Andy Selters** for the great histories. **Erik Sloan** for badass advice, research, and general assistance with this book as well as selfless service to the climbing community in general. **Doug Thompson** for great beta on the Mountaineer’s Route and delicious hamburgers at the Whitney Portal Store.

Thank you everyone who sent feedback: Allen L Binette, Tony Brake, Zeanid Breyer, Gary Clark, Cori Constantine, Mary Hollendoner, Joe Lemay, Anthony Longobardo, Kristin Tara McNamara, Bob Odom, Scott Rogers, Thomas Rogers, Florence Scholl, and Cedar Wright.

Lastly, I want to thank two people who are no longer with us. **Galen and Barbara Rowell** were close friends and mentors. Their friendship, encouragement, and unrelenting energy revealed a more passionate and creative world to me. While I miss them, we are all fortunate that they published almost 20 books that captured their love for the mountains. It’s hard to open *Mountain Light* or *High and Wild* and not want to experience wild places. In the end, that’s why I publish books. Hopefully you, the reader, will drop whatever you are doing, load up the car, and break out for the mountains.

– Chris McNamara

ACCESS: It's every climber's concern

The Access Fund, a national, non-profit climbers' organization, works to keep climbing areas open and to conserve the climbing environment. Need help with closures? Land acquisition? Legal or land management issues? Funding for trails and other projects? Starting a local climbers' group? CALL US!

Climbers can help preserve access by being committed to leaving the environment in its natural state. Here are some simple guidelines:

- **ASPIRE TO CLIMB WITHOUT LEAVING A TRACE**, especially in environmentally sensitive areas like caves. Chalk can make a significant impact on dark and porous rock—don't use it around historic rock art. Pick up litter, and leave trees and plants intact.
- **DISPOSE OF HUMAN WASTE PROPERLY**. Use toilets whenever possible. If toilets are not available, dig a "cat hole" at least six inches deep and 200 feet from any water, trails, campsites, or the base of climbs. *Always pack out toilet paper*. On big wall routes, use a "poop tube" and carry waste up and off with you (the old "bag toss" is now illegal in many areas).
- **USE EXISTING TRAILS**. Cutting across switchbacks causes erosion. When walking off-trail, tread lightly, especially in the desert where cryptogamic soils (usually a dark crust) take thousands of years to form and are easily damaged. Be aware that "rim ecologies" (the cliff top) are often highly sensitive to disturbance.
- **BE DISCREET WITH FIXED ANCHORS**. *Bolts are controversial and are not a convenience—don't place them unless they are really necessary*. Camouflage all anchors. Remove unsightly slings from rappel stations (better to use steel chain or welded cold shuts). Bolts sometimes can be used proactively to protect fragile resources—consult with your local land manager.
- **RESPECT THE RULES** and speak up when other climbers don't. Expect restrictions in designated wilderness areas, rock art sites, caves, and in sensitive wildlife areas such as nesting sites for birds of prey. *Power drills are illegal in wilderness areas and all national parks*.
- **PARK AND CAMP IN DESIGNATED AREAS**. Some climbing areas require a permit for overnight camping.
- **MAINTAIN A LOW PROFILE**. Leave the boom box and day-glo clothing at home. The less climbers are seen and heard, the better.
- **RESPECT PRIVATE PROPERTY**. Be courteous to land owners. Don't climb where you're not wanted.
- **JOIN THE ACCESS FUND**. To become a member, make a tax-deductible donation of \$25.

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Introduction

Bordered by a great agricultural area on one side and an inhospitable desert on the other, California's Sierra Nevada is the highest mountain range in the contiguous United States, and some say it is the most beautiful. It has almost everything a climber desires: rugged peaks, glaciers, and splendid, isolated chunks of granite. And these attractions are set in a lovely locale of lake basins, streams, and high meadows. The rock is generally good, the weather during the summer months is excellent, and the access is easy. What more could a climber want? If there is any disadvantage, it lies in the hordes of people who have recently found the range to their liking. The John Muir Trail, which runs the length of the High Sierra, is a crowded corridor in mid-summer, yet the climber who is willing to wander just a few miles from it will find untrammeled lake basins at the base of peaks that see fewer than ten ascents a year.

Long ago the Spaniards saw the range and gave it its present name, which means "snowy range of mountains." In former times the 300-mile-long uplift posed a serious threat to east-west travel, and even now there are no roads across its most rugged portion for 175 miles. The crest of the range, which runs from northwest to southeast, contains scores of peaks above 13,000 feet, and 12 peaks rise above 14,000 feet. Nestled under the western side of the crest are hundreds of lakes, some set in high glacial basins and some surrounded by lush meadows.

The western side of the range slopes gently. It is nearly 50 miles from the Central Valley to the crest, and much of this distance is marked by heavy and varied



Chris McNamara

The view west from the summit of Mt. Russell.

forests. Scattered amid these forests are groves of "big trees," or sequoias. These enormous trees, endemic to the western slope of the Sierra, are one of the great tourist attractions of the West, and a national park has been named for them.

The summits themselves are often easiest to reach from the west, and almost every Sierra peak has at least one side that presents no problem for the climber. The north and east faces, however, tend to be steeper and have often been sculpted by glaciers.

The eastern escarpment of the High Sierra is a magnificent sight. Along its base runs U.S. 395, and from it the traveler can gaze upward nearly 2 vertical miles to see the range's culmination: Mt. Whitney. Roads that lead into the range begin in vast fields of sagebrush, wind through the pinyon-juniper belt, and finally pass through several varieties of pine. Driving up such a road one can experience a temperature drop of 20 degrees.

Much of the rock in the Sierra is granite of excellent quality; some, in fact, is world-renowned by rockclimbers. The rock in

Mark Leffler on the North Ridge of Bear Creek Spire.
(PattucciPhoto)

the high country is heavily fractured, and although the rock itself may be solid, the disjointed structure makes for many loose blocks. The vast amount of rubble on ledges is proof that the mountains are continually falling to pieces. In addition to igneous rock, a few places such as the Ritter Range, Black Divide, and the Kaweahs are principally metamorphic, and some exceptionally loose rock is found in these areas. The climber must take every precaution on this type of rock.

Glaciers were active in the range for many centuries, and although only a few remnants survive, evidence of them abounds. The Kern River Valley, remarkably straight and U-shaped, is one of the finest examples of glacial action in the High Sierra, but almost every other valley shows prominent signs of the ice sheets that once scoured them.

General Climbing History

Indians were the first climbers of the High Sierra, as has been shown by arrowhead fragments found high on many peaks, including Mt. Whitney. But the Indians left no records, and neither did the Spaniards, early military expeditions, prospectors, or sheepherders who followed. However, it is not likely that many major summits were reached during these early days, for as we all know, there are relatively few reasons to stand atop a mountain.

During the Gold Rush, thousands crossed the Sierra Nevada, but they all carefully avoided the highest and most rugged part of the range. By the time of the Civil War, California had become a populated state, yet little was known about its resources or geography. It was to rectify this deplorable situation that the legislature created the California Geological Survey in 1860. For a few years the Whitney Survey, as it soon became called after its leader, Josiah Whitney, did work in other parts of the state, moving into the Sierra foothills only in the summer of 1863. After spending time in the fabulous, recently discovered Yosemite Valley, the Survey climbed up toward Tuolumne Meadows. There,

William Brewer, field leader of the Survey, Charles Hoffmann, and Whitney climbed a prominent peak, which they named Mt. Hoffmann. This is the first known ascent of a major peak in the High Sierra (Mt. Tom, near Bishop, may have been climbed in 1860). A few days later Brewer and Hoffmann climbed a very high summit that they named Mt. Dana, after the pre-eminent American geologist of the era. They thought the peak was higher than Mt. Shasta, which at that time was considered the highest point in the state. The next day Whitney climbed the peak to see the view; it was his last important Sierra climb, and he soon left the range to direct from afar. From then on Brewer and his associates dominated the Survey's mountaineering.

Without question, 1864 is the key year in the history of early Sierra climbing and exploration. That year the Survey was composed of Brewer, Hoffmann, Clarence King, James Gardiner, and the group's packer, Richard Cotter. Leaving Oakland in late May, they rode their mounts eastward. It was the driest summer in many years, and the party suffered in the oppressive heat. Mummified carcasses of cattle lay everywhere and dusty whirlwinds darted across the grasslands. It must have been a welcome relief to reach the mountains, which they did in early July in the vicinity of the Kings River. Although there had been rumors of a great canyon in the area which rivaled Yosemite, no one had yet described it to the outside world. When Brewer's party finally came into the canyon, they were stunned—it was almost as spectacular as Yosemite, though it lacked waterfalls and monolithic cliffs. In the area of Kings Canyon they made several climbs, and members of the Survey immediately named one of these peaks Mt. Brewer. From its summit they saw a very high peak to the southeast. Thinking that it must be the highest point in the range (Mt. Dana had already been discredited), King and Cotter longed for it, and their epic five-day trek, described in a later chapter, was the first time in America's history that such

mountainous and inhospitable terrain had been traversed.

A few weeks later members of the Survey crossed the range at Kearsarge Pass and dropped down into the Owens Valley. Although they visited a few more areas that summer, this is the last we hear of the Whitney Survey, for it soon completed its work and disbanded.

In the next few years many travelers came to the mountains to see the great canyons and big trees that had been gaining notoriety. One of these visitors was John Muir, who arrived in Yosemite Valley in 1868 for a brief stay. The following year he became a supervisor of sheepherders, a job that left him much free time to study the landscape. During the next few years Muir became a self-educated expert on the ecology of the Sierra. While in Tuolumne Meadows in 1869, he made the first ascent of the sharp and beautiful Cathedral Peak—this involved some difficult climbing of a nature not yet seen in this country. Although his mountaineering exploits are not as well known as his later geological theories, descriptive writings, and long struggles to exclude sheep and lumbermen from his beloved mountains, Muir's solo ascents of Mt. Ritter, Mt. Whitney, and many other peaks (mentioned only obliquely in his writings) place him among the first rank of early American mountaineers.

Though much country had been explored by the early 1890s, there were many blanks on the maps, and relatively few peaks had been climbed. Yet, remarkably, someone had already envisioned a trail stretching the length of the range. The idea had come to Theodore Solomons in 1884, when as a youth he had been herding cattle in the Central Valley and had been overwhelmed by a view of the Sierra on a pristine day. During the early 1890s Solomons set out summer after summer, seeking the most feasible path for his "high mountain route." Although he is best remembered for his explorations around the headwaters of the San Joaquin

River and for many of the place names he bestowed in this area, the John Muir Trail, begun in 1915, is perhaps his greatest legacy to the Sierra.

Another important figure of this era was Joseph N. LeConte, the son of a famous geologist who had visited Muir in Yosemite in 1870. Barely five feet in height, "Little Joe" explored watersheds, climbed many peaks, made a splendid set of photographs, and drew the first accurate maps of much of the Sierra. Like Solomons, LeConte was a charter member of the Sierra Club, which had been founded in 1892. His maps, distributed to club members, materially contributed to further exploration of the range. Club outings, which began in 1901 under the leadership of William Colby, brought more and more people into the mountains, in keeping with the club's by-laws "to render accessible the mountain regions."

James Hutchinson was the next prominent figure in the history of Sierra mountaineering. He was already 32 when, in 1899, he made his initial Sierra first ascent. During the next 20 years he compiled the most enviable first-ascent record any Sierra climber will ever have. A partial list of his peaks includes Matterhorn Peak, Mt. Mills, Mt. Abbot, Mt. Humphreys, North Palisade, and Black Kaweah.

Of all the men who have ever climbed in the Sierra, none was so legendary as Norman Clyde. A scholar of the classics, Clyde migrated west in the early part of the century, teaching at rural schools, but never staying in one place for very long. He seems to have been born with wanderlust. Clyde worked on his master's degree at Berkeley for a few years but dropped out over a dispute in curriculum. The following summer he made two first ascents in Yosemite. A curious gap of six years followed, but in 1920 he began to totally dominate the climbing history of the range. He moved to the east side of the Sierra in 1924 to become principal of the high school in Independence. He was 40 years old in the summer of 1925 and later wrote, "I

sometimes think I climbed enough peaks this summer to render me a candidate for a padded cell—at least some people look at the matter in that way.” In 1927, Clyde was involved in a Halloween scandal when he fired shots over the heads of pranksters who were trying to intimidate him. It was not thought proper for a high school principal to behave in such a manner, so Clyde left that job and for the next 40 years worked at odd jobs in the mountains, climbing at every opportunity. It is thought that he made over a thousand ascents in the range; his first ascents and new routes number around 130. If, as someone has said, the mark of a true mountaineer is his willingness to repeat climbs, then Clyde qualifies as few others are ever likely to do. He had many favorite peaks and would climb them year after year—he apparently ascended Mt. Thompson 50 times.

Clyde was famous for his huge packs, and it was a rare day when one would weigh less than 90 pounds. Guns, axes, cast-iron pots, and books in Greek all contributed to his monstrous Trapper Nelson. Although Clyde did his last new route in 1946, he attended Sierra Club Base Camps and High Trips in the capacity of woodcutter and guide until 1970, when he retired at the age of 85. Two years later he died in Big Pine.

In 1931 Robert L.M. Underhill, an East Coast mountaineer well-versed in the school of European rope management, came to California at the invitation of Francis Farquhar, an early climber and later a respected Sierra historian. The two had met the previous summer in Canada, and Farquhar thought it would be a good idea if Californians learned something about proper rope techniques. The pair gathered a small group of interested and talented climbers and went on a grand tour of the Sierra. Several fine first ascents resulted and a new age of California climbing began. Rockclimber-mountaineers such as Raffi Bedayn, Dave Brower, Glen Dawson, Jules Eichorn, Richard Leonard, and Hervey Voge put up scores of difficult routes in Yosemite Valley and the High Sierra during the 1930s. These routes were of a standard little dreamed of by Muir, LeConte, or

Hutchinson, involving high-angle rock and elaborate rope techniques to safeguard the participants. Few of the climbs in the High Sierra required a rope, but the confidence gained from the teachings of Underhill was invaluable. Leonard later wrote that if he were to fall, his first thought would be, “What would Underhill say of my technique?”

During the years after World War II most of the noteworthy climbing in the range was done by members of the Sierra Club outing groups. Since many of the peaks had already been ascended, the emphasis was on new routes on a multitude of virgin ridges and faces.

Rockclimbers “discovered” the big walls of the Sierra in the late 1950s. At first only the most prominent faces were climbed: Mt. Whitney’s true east face in 1959, the southwest face of Mt. Conness in 1959, and the great east wall of Keeler Needle the following year. The leader of the last two climbs was the legendary Yosemite climber, Warren Harding. By the late 1960s hidden walls had been ferreted out, and though these were usually not more than 1,000 feet high, they were steep and difficult.

– Steve Roper

Overview of Climbs by Difficulty

Mt. Russell, East Ridge, (3rd class)

This is probably the best 3rd class ridge in the Sierra. Either climb it as a route or use it as a descent after climbing Fishhook Arête.

Mountaineer’s Route (3rd class)

With just a bit of 4th class at the top, this is a moderate passage to Whitney’s summit that avoids the crowds of the Whitney Trail while delivering that big mountain feeling.

Laurel Mountain, Northeast Gully (5.2)

This scramble is more about the location and views than the climbing quality. In the mile of mostly 3rd and 4th class rock there are a few 5th class moves. This route is usually soloed.

Bear Creek Spire, Northeast Ridge (5.5)

Some feel this climb is as classic as the North Arête. The climbing is mostly 3rd and 4th class, but there are a few 5th class

moves. Most confident Sierra climbers who can handle big exposure solo the route.

Tenaya Peak, Northwest Buttress (5.5, 14 pitches)

This is the Royal Arches of Tuolumne with endless amounts of fun moderate climbing in a spectacular setting.

Cathedral Peak (5.6, 5 pitches)

Incredibly popular for good reason: good rock, moderate climbing, and an incredible summit.

Mt. Conness, North Ridge (5.6)

If Cathedral Peak is the best intro peak climb, this is the best intro mountain climb. Mostly 4th class with occasional 5th class moves in a great position.

Mt. Conness, West Ridge (5.6, 12 pitches)

The best 5.6 mountain climb in the High Sierra. Mostly moderate moves and relatively straightforward. Easy to bypass exposure and harder moves if necessary.

Matthes Crest, Traverse from South to North (5.7)

One of the more unique rock formations anywhere. Mostly 4th class with a few sections of either 5th class moves or big exposure.

Matterhorn Peak (5.7, 6 pitches)

An aesthetic peak with a huge approach and mediocre climbing. The full High Sierra experience at only moderate technical difficulty.

Mt. Whitney, East Face (5.7, 13 pitches)

A wandering journey up mostly 3rd and 4th class terrain with a few memorable pitches of exposure and technical difficulty.

Mt. Whitney, East Buttress (5.7, 11 pitches)

This route is about the same difficulty and quality as the East Face. The climbing is more sustained but still rarely has a crux longer than 20 feet.

Temple Crag, Venusian Blind (5.7, 12 pitches)

This is one of the more moderate and quality arêtes on Temple Crag. The climb is long and exposed with a few technical sections between arête and ridge scrambling.

following pages: The stunning Whitney Crest glows in post-thunderstorm light. (PatitucciPhoto)

Temple Crag, Moon Goddess Arête (5.8, 14 pitches)

Similar to Venusian Blind, this route ascends an exposed arête with a few technical sections separated by fun scrambling.

Charlotte Dome, South Face (5.8, 12 pitches)

This is a favorite Sierra climb for many people. The climbing is sustained and on exceptional rock reminiscent of Tuolumne.

Bear Creek Spire, North Arête (5.8, 10 pitches)

This is one of the more accessible Sierra peaks and fast teams often climb it car-to-car in a day. The first half of the route ascends a striking and steep arête while the second half is a scramble up an enjoyable and exposed ridge.

Eichorn's Pinnacle, West Pillar (5.9, 5 pitches)

This is a more challenging and less crowded way to get to the most striking summit in Tuolumne, if not the entire High Sierra.

Mt. Russell, Fishhook Arête (5.9, 8 pitches)

A combination of size, rock quality, and the striking arête make this a must-do for experienced Sierra climbers. Once you see the route from the summit of Mt. Whitney, you will be compelled to climb it.

Mt. Goode, North Buttress (5.9, 9 pitches)

The relatively straightforward approach, beautiful setting and steep, dramatic buttress add to the appeal of this route.

Temple Crag, Sun Ribbon Arête (5.10a, 18 pitches)

This is one of the longest and most classic arêtes in the High Sierra and offers a rare opportunity for a Tyrolean Traverse. You must move fast on this one.

Third Pillar of Dana, Regular Route (5.10b, 5 pitches)

Four pitches of good climbing lead to what is probably the best finishing pitch of any High Sierra climb.

Incredible Hulk, Red Dihedral, (5.10b, 11 pitches)

The Incredible Hulk has probably the best rock in the High Sierra and the Red Dihedral is its most classic 5.10 route. This climb is long, sustained, and amazing.





Mt. Conness, Southwest Face (5.10c, 9 pitches)

This climb looks like a true alpine big wall both from a distance, from the base, and when you are on it. The climbing is mostly 5.8 and 5.9 with a few distinct 5.10 cruxes.

Keeler Needle, Harding Route**(5.10c, 13 pitches)**

This is the coolest-looking formation in the High Sierra but the rock is not as good as it looks. A huge and adventurous climb.

Incredible Hulk, Positive Vibrations**(5.11a, 13 pitches)**

Probably the best route in the High Sierra. Long and sustained with perfect rock. It doesn't get any better.

Incredible Hulk, Sun Spot Dihedral**(5.11b, 12 pitches)**

More sustained and almost as classic as Positive Vibrations. Long endurance pitches with occasional technical cruxes.

High Sierra Climbing Beta**High Sierra Climbing Skills**

You need a solid base of trad climbing skills to lead a High Sierra route. Most climbs will involve a little bit of every technique from face climbing and stemming to hand cracks and the occasional chimney. Build confidence with these techniques on multi-pitch climbs at a granite area like Tuolumne Meadows, Yosemite Valley, or Lover's Leap.

When choosing a climb, keep in mind that in the High Sierra, most climbers lead at least a number grade lower than their cragging ability. For example, if you lead 5.9 trad at the crags, you will probably only be comfortable leading 5.8 or even 5.7 in the High Sierra. This is because you are generally weaker at high altitude, but also because you must not fall on Sierra climbs. Because of the ledgy terrain, even short falls are serious and rescue is usually at least a day away.

High Sierra Non-Climbing Skills

Technical climbing skills are only a small requirement for High Sierra routes. Routefinding skills, hiking fitness, and general mountain sense are just as important. Approaches typically involve at least a few miles of hiking off a main

trail. Our *High Sierra Climbing* guidebook features the most detailed info ever provided for these approaches. However, you will still need some basic orienteering skills to navigate through cross-country sections. Also, High Sierra climbs ascend complex and confusing terrain that demands careful attention to the topo and some intuition. Important tip: on the approach, keep the topo handy and study the route from a distance. Do not wait until you are at the base to look at the topo. At that point, much of the upper route will probably be hidden and it may be hard to orient yourself. Almost all climbs require a substantial approach at high elevation. If out of shape, you may be too tired to climb by the time you reach the base of the route. All *High Sierra Climbing* routes can be climbed car-to-car in a day by a fast team. Most parties, however, will prefer to camp near the base, therefore you will need all the requisite backcountry camping skills.

Climbing Gear

Climb light. Carrying a heavy pack and rack at altitude will slow you down and, more importantly, remove the fun. Carry only what you need (but don't skimp on food, water, and a rain shell).

The typical rack includes: one 9-10mm rope, 1 set of nuts, 1-2 sets of cams .6-3", 10 slings, 20 lightweight carabiners, belay device, lightweight harness. For the High Sierra, slings are better than quickdraws because they are more versatile. On a wandering pitch you will want a sling on every piece to reduce rope drag and on straight up and down pitches you can convert your slings into make-shift quickdraws. 50m ropes are preferred because they are lighter than 60m ropes and after 50m it is usually impossible to communicate with the belayer. (All the topos in the *High Sierra Climbing* guidebook are set for 50m ropes, but we tell you where you can link pitches with a 60m rope). A retreat rope may be helpful for some climbs. However, sometimes it is better to rappel with just one rope because long rappels in the High Sierra often result in stuck ropes or pulling loose blocks down on yourself.

Non-Climbing Gear

Sun hat, sunscreen, sunglasses, warm hat, water-resistant lightweight jacket (don't bring a heavy Gore-Tex jacket), water filter or iodine tablets, and a pencil (so you can make comments and suggestions on the SuperTopos and send us feedback!). Don't forget the trekking poles! These indispensable companions will save your knees and help you move faster. They also make a great "rudder" when glissading. Get the lightweight kind that collapse really small (we like Leki poles). Also, hike in using lightweight approach shoes. Remember, you climb carrying your approach shoes so don't bring heavy hiking boots. Definitely bring a headlamp (lightweight LED models are best). An ice axe and crampons may be necessary for climbs on Temple Crag.

For a good backcountry camping gear list, visit the Sierra Mountain Center web site: www.sierramountaincenter.com.

Altitude Sickness

It takes a few days for most people to adjust to the rarefied air. Not to mention, climbing at altitude makes everything feel much harder. Drink lots of water and don't run around too fast if you're just coming up from low elevations. It's a good idea to camp at least one night at the trailhead and a better idea to spend a few days cragging at high elevation. Tuolumne Meadows is the best place for high altitude cragging. If you can't make it there check out Rock Creek for awesome granite trad and sport climbs at the Main Attraction Wall and Iris Slabs.

If you do get a bad headache or feel nauseous, the best cure is to head to lower elevation.

Thunderstorms and Lightning Strikes

The High Sierra has some of the best weather of any alpine rock climbing area on earth. That said, note that the High Sierra is still in a massive mountain range and receives severe thunderstorms and lightning throughout the summer. Check the weather before you climb and scope the retreat route beforehand. Most thunderstorms originate from the west, so if you are climbing an east-facing route, you

may not see thunderstorms until they are on top of you. Always carry a rain shell.

Lightning tends to hit high points, trees, and water, but will hit low points next to high rocks, flat areas near tall trees, and dry land in areas with lakes. Know how to perform CPR. Unlike with nearly any other type of injury that stops the heart, electrical shock victims can suddenly respond even after extended CPR, so CPR should be continued indefinitely.

Current Road and Weather

Your best bet is to check the general High Sierra Weather: <http://www.weather.com/weather/local/USCA0661>

Getting There

Air Travel

Reno/Tahoe Airport is the closest airport to most High Sierra climbs. From there, you will need to rent a car and drive 2-3.5 hours to your climbing destination. You can also fly into Los Angeles, Oakland, San Francisco, Sacramento, or Fresno. Each of these places requires a 5-7 hour drive to the East Side.

Bus Travel

The Eastern Sierra has little bus service or public transportation. The only town that can be reached by bus is Mammoth Lakes via the Mammoth Shuttle (760-934-3030).

Car Travel

Almost all climbs are accessed by U.S. 395 and the small Eastern Sierra towns of Lone Pine, Independence, Big Pine, Bishop, Tom's Place, and Bridgeport.

Below are the general driving times (in hours) to the Eastern Sierra (times vary depending on which trailhead you are heading for).

Tuolumne Meadows: 1-3; Yosemite Valley: 2-4; Reno: 2-4; Los Angeles: 4-6; San Francisco: 5-7; Las Vegas: 4-6; Salt Lake City: 9-11; Boulder: 18-20.

Nearby Towns and Trailheads

Lone Pine and Whitney Portal Essentials

Nearby Peaks: Mt. Russell, Mt. Whitney
Groceries: Joseph's Bi-Rite Market

Restaurants: The **Pizza Factory** (301 South Main Street; 760-876-4707) has inexpensive pizza and salad bar. **Mt. Whitney Restaurant** (Corner of U.S. 395 and Whitney Portal Road; 760-876-5751) is open seven days a week and serves buffalo, ostrich, and veggie burgers. **Totem Cafe** (131 South Main Street; 760-876-1120) has American-style cuisine and patio dining. **Seasons Restaurant** (227 South Main Street; 760-876-8927) is pricey, but serves good food and large portions. **PJ's Bake and Broil** (446 South Main Street; 760-876-5796) is the classic diner in town. High Sierra Café at the south end of town is a good breakfast spot.

Services at Whitney Portal: Don't miss the hamburgers and french fries at the **Whitney Portal Store** (760-876-0030). The Whitney Portal Store also sells tourist stuff, maps, books, and they have a great deal on bear canisters, which you can also rent.

Trailhead Camping: It is often a good idea to camp at the Whitney Portal before starting your climb. You will get an early start on the hike and start acclimatizing (Whitney Portal is at 8,300 feet). There are ten walk-in sites near the trailhead (follow signs to "Hiker Overnight Camping") reserved for hikers/climbers that cost \$6 a night and are first come, first served. You can also stay at the Whitney Portal Campground but will have to shell out \$14 a night and reserve your site in advance. For more info: www.r5.fs.fed.us/inyo/vvc/cmpgrnds.htm#LonePine

Independence and Onion Valley Essentials

Nearby Peak: Charlotte Dome

Groceries: There is a small market in town but your best bet is to shop at Joseph's in Lone Pine or one of the three markets in Bishop.

Restaurants: Not much to choose from but the **Rocking Rhino** (123 North Edwards; 760-878-0052) has good pizza, beer, and a nice atmosphere.

Trailhead Camping: Onion Valley Campground is located at 9,200 feet, costs \$11/night (reservations recommended; 877-444-6777) and has picnic tables and piped water.

Big Pine and Big Pine Creek Essentials

Nearby Peak: Temple Crag

Groceries: **Carroll's Market** and the **Mobil Station** are limited and have the only groceries in town. Stock up in Bishop, which is 15 miles north on U.S. 395.

Restaurants: **Uncle Bud's** (120 South Main Street) has pizzas, salads, and sandwiches and the **Country Kitchen** (181 South Main Street; 760-938-9917) serves diner breakfasts.

Services at Big Pine Creek: **Glacier Lodge** (11 miles west of U.S. 395; 760-938-2837) has cabins for \$70/night that sleep two to nine people, a general store, and a restaurant. \$4 showers are available between 10 a.m. and 4 p.m. **Glacier Pack Train** (0.5 mile east of Glacier Lodge; 760-938-2538) provides pack trips into the backcountry.

Trailhead Camping: Big Pine Creek Campground and Upper Sage Flat Campground are located along Glacier Lodge Road at 7,700 feet and have picnic tables, restrooms, and water. Both are \$13/night (reservations recommended; 877-444-6777). If you are up for hiking in a mile to First Falls, there is a free walk-in campground with picnic tables, fire rings, and pit toilets (you must get your own water from the creek).

Bishop and South Lake Essentials

Nearby Peak: Mt. Goode

Groceries: Vons (North Main Street) is the gigantic grocery store located next to K-mart. Joseph's Bi-Rite Market is in the center of town, across from Kava, and Manor Market (3100 West Line Street) has a great beer and wine selection as well as a deli and basic groceries.

Restaurants and Cafes: **Spellbinder's Books** (124 South Main Street; 760- 873-4511) is not only a cool bookstore, but also serves great coffee at the coffee bar in the back of the store. **The Bishop Grill** (across from Wilson's Eastside Sports; 760-873-7248) serves greasy and tasty diner food—breakfast is great. **Jack's Waffle Shop** (437 North Main Street; 760-872-7971) and **Inyo Country Store** (177 Academy Street) also serve breakfast. **Kava** (next to Wilson's; 760-872-1010) is the local climber hang and

serves coffee and tasty scones and muffins. **Schat's Bakery** (763 North Main Street; 760-873-7156) has every type of pastry and excellent sandwiches and bread. **Western Thai Kitchen** (930 North Main Street; 760-872-3246) serves tasty Thai food as well as burgers and fries—a local favorite. For Mexican food there are three options: At **Amigos** (285 North Main Street; 760-872-2189) try the carne asada, **Taqueria Las Palmas** (136 East Line Street; 760-873-4337) has awesome burritos, and **La Casita** (175 South Main Street; 760-873-4828) has okay food and a full bar (that means margaritas!). **Whiskey Creek** (524 North Main Street; 760-873-7174) has a great bar with yummy salads, pub food, and a sit-down dining room with fancier choices such as filet mignon and ahi tuna. **Upper Crust Pizza** (1180 North Main Street; 760-872-8153) has some of the best pizza we've tasted—try the "Illusian."

Other: **The Rubber Room** (175-B North Main Street; 888-395-ROCK) is the best place anywhere for quality resolets. There is a Bank of America, Washington Mutual, and Union Bank of California in town. The **Bishop Twin Theatre** (237 North Main Street; 760-873-3575) has two screens and new movies weekly. **Mountain Light Gallery** (106 South Main Street; 760-873-7700) features the incredible work of Galen and Barbara Rowell and is definitely worth a visit.

Services at South Lake: There is a general store in Habbeggers, which is 3 miles from Highway 168 on the way to South Lake.

Trailhead Camping: Willow Campground is located at 9,000 feet on the road to South Lake. Sites are \$13/night. You'll need to get water from the creek.

Tom's Place and Rock Creek Essentials

Nearby Peak: Bear Creek Spire

Groceries: There is a little grocery store at Tom's Place, but for major groceries head 20 minutes south to Bishop or 15 minutes north to Mammoth Lakes. Bishop has three large stores and Mammoth Lakes has a Vons (off Old Mammoth Road).

Restaurants: **Tom's Place Resort** (right off U.S. 395) has lodging as well as a

restaurant and bar (next to the store). For a more extensive selection, cruise down the grade to Bishop or up to Mammoth Lakes. In Mammoth the places to go are: **Roberto's Mexican Cafe** (271 Old Mammoth Road; 760-934-3667) for great Mexican food and strong margaritas, **Shogun** (452 Old Mammoth Road; 760-934-3970) for fresh sushi, **Good Life Cafe** (126 Old Mammoth Road; 760-934-1734) for healthy food, **Bergers** (6118 Minaret Road; 760-934-6622) for awesome burgers and fries.

Services at Rock Creek: **Rock Creek Lodge** (Rock Creek Road; 877-935-4170 or 760-935-4170) has a small store and a restaurant (known for its pies!)

Trailhead Camping: Mosquito Flat Trailhead Campground is a free walk-in campground only for persons with an overnight backcountry permit for the following day, and the stay limit is only one night. The campground is located across the bridge that leads to Eastern Brook Lakes. There are 12 other campgrounds to choose from between Tom's Place and Mosquito Flat that cost around \$15 a night. Most of these campgrounds do not require reservations.

For more information, visit: www.rockcreeklake.com/camping/

Tuolumne Meadows/Lee Vining Essentials

Nearby Peaks: Mt. Conness, Third Pillar of Dana, Cathedral Peak, Matthes Crest

Groceries: A limited selection of high-priced groceries are available at the Tuolumne Meadows store. In addition, you can purchase groceries in Lee Vining at the Lee Vining Market. Mammoth has a large Vons supermarket.

Restaurants: The **Tuolumne Meadows Grill** serves hamburgers, fries, etc., and has limited hours. The **Tuolumne Lodge** has a restaurant that serves breakfast and dinner in the middle part of summer. Eight miles east of Tuolumne Meadows, the **Tioga Pass Resort** houses a cozy dining room with good food. The **Mobil Gas Station**, located 14 miles from Tuolumne Meadows in Lee Vining, serves some of the best food in the area. This isn't just any gas station—its deli

has a great selection of sandwiches, pizzas, fish tacos, and a variety of other savory treats for breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

Camping: There is one campground in Tuolumne Meadows located next to the Tuolumne Store that has about 300 sites. Half of the sites can be reserved in advance at <http://reservations.nps.gov/> (reserve them at least 2-3 months in advance) and half of the sites are on a first come, first served basis (arrive in the morning to ensure you get a site). Sites cost \$18 per night with a six-person two-car limit. Mosquitoes can be particularly fierce so bring bug spray and bug netting. Bears regularly break into cars with food in them so use bear boxes.

Located 7 to 10 miles east of Tuolumne Meadows are five Forest Service campgrounds, many of which are first come, first served. These campgrounds are often battered by icy winds. Twelve miles east of Tuolumne Meadows, the Lee Vining Creek campground is not only sheltered from the wind, it's set next to a beautiful trout-stocked creek. You will pay \$8 per night on a first come, first served basis. Along Highway 120 toward Yosemite Valley are several additional campgrounds requiring moderate to long drives. The campground reservation office in Tuolumne has information on current campground conditions.

There are two free camping areas near Mono Lake:

1) 2.2 miles below Conway Summit at the north end of the guardrail at the huge turn. Can be tricky to find a perfectly flat spot. Great view of Mono Lake. The Buttermilk-looking boulders nearby actually have terrible rock.

2) Black Point: From Lee Vining, head north on U.S. 395 for about 5 miles to Cemetery Road. Drive 3.3 miles on Cemetery Road (mostly dirt road, low clearance okay) and take a right on the road that leads to Black Point. When there is an option, stay right.

Lodges and Cabins: In addition to campsites, there are more plush accommodations available in Tuolumne and the High Sierra, including the Tuolumne Meadows Lodge, White

Wolf, and the High Sierra Camps (www.yosemitepark.com/html/accommodation.html). Just outside of the park boundary is the Tioga Pass Resort (www.tiogapassresort.com), which offers cabins year-round (in the winter you need to ski or snowmobile up to them). Drive 15 miles east from Tuolumne Meadows and you will reach Lee Vining, a small town with a few motels, restaurants, and other basic services.

Bridgeport and Twin Lakes Essentials

Nearby Peaks: Incredible Hulk, Matterhorn Peak

Groceries: There's a small market.

Restaurants: **Hays Street Café** (21 Hays Street; 760-932-7141) is a great breakfast and lunch spot (it is a little pricey). There are a few decent burger spots, too.

Services at Twin Lakes: The **Twin Lakes Resort** (760-932-7751) has a small store and a restaurant that serves great burgers.

Trailhead Camping:

Mono Village Campground:

(760-932-7071) at 7,100 feet is \$12/night.

Lower Twin Lakes Campground:

(760-932-7070) at 7,000 feet and \$10/night.

Honeymoon Flat Campground:

(760-932-7070) at 7,000 feet and \$10/night.

Hot Springs: 0.25 mile south of town on U.S. 395 turn east onto Jack Sawyer Road.

When the paved road veers right after a few hundred yards, continue straight on a dirt road for less than a mile to its end. The tubs are paved and clean but often crowded.

When to Climb

Almost everyone climbs in the High Sierra between June and October. From November through April, the High Sierra is pounded with snow from big Pacific storms.

Note: Below, the snow conditions are listed for an average snow year. Most snow years are not average and the projections below will be way off if it has been a heavy or light snow year. Your best bet is to search online for your climb on the SuperTopo Route Beta page to check current conditions. If there is nothing there, ask a question in the SuperTopo Forum.

Summer thunderstorm near Bishop. (Jody Langford)



May – Only in low snow years will climbs be easily accessible. In general, most of the approaches will be snow-covered and many of the access roads may not be plowed. May is mostly dry but expect a few storms. There are no crowds in May.

June – Aside from a rare storm, June is usually dry with warm temps and nice long days. Most of the access roads are plowed, but there will still be snow on most approaches. Thunderstorms begin to develop so keep a close eye on the weather. The crowds start showing at the end of June, and it becomes more competitive to get overnight camping permits. Charlotte Dome and Temple Crag are usually the first climbs to access easily.

July and August – Prime Sierra climbing weather. Temperatures are hot at the trailheads, but perfect on the climbs. This is also prime thunderstorm season so watch the weather closely. There are crowds, and it is competitive for overnight camping permits (get reservations at least a month in advance).

September – Still great climbing conditions, but the nights are cool. Some north-facing routes may be uncomfortably cold in the shade. The crowds start to thin.

October – Shorter days and cold nights mean less people. Climbing in the shade is no fun. Weather is mostly dry, but the first winter storm can arrive late in the month. Easy to get overnight camping permits.

November – Frigid nights and short days keep most people out of the High Sierra. Winter storms begin to arrive more frequently. A rare time to get some solitude before the heavy snow sets in.

December-April – Got skis? Frequent winter storms and icy temperatures make the High Sierra only accessible to those that enjoy suffering. In exceptionally dry years, during a warm spell, you may be able to run up one of the peaks in a day in December.

Camping and Permits

Backcountry Camping Permits

When camping in the backcountry, you need a permit, which can be picked up

at one of the ranger stations listed below (sorry, no mail order permits). A quota system is in place in the summer and fall, which means only a limited number of permits are issued each day. Of this number, 25-40 percent are available on a walk-in basis for free at the ranger station and 60-75 percent of the permits can be reserved in advance for a \$3-10 fee. Most of the classic Sierra climbs are accessed off popular trails where permits are in high demand, especially from June to August. During this time, you may need to reserve your permit more than a month in advance. If you show up for a walk-in permit, you may be denied.

Ranger Stations

Inyo National Forest (760-873-2483)

Popular peaks: Mt. Whitney, Mt. Russell, Temple Crag, Palisades, Mt. Goode, Bear Creek Spire, Laurel Mountain, Clyde Minaret.

[Mt. Whitney Ranger Station](#) (640 South Main Street, Lone Pine; 760-876-6200)

[White Mountain Ranger Station](#) (798 North Main Street, Bishop; 760-873-2500)

[Mammoth Ranger Station](#) (2500 Main Street, Mammoth Lakes; 760-924-5500)

[Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center](#) (On U.S. 395, Lee Vining; 760-647-3044)

[Tuolumne Wilderness Center](#) (Highway 120, in parking lot 0.25 mile from ranger station; 209-372-0740, www.nps.gov/yose/wilderness/permits.htm)

Toiyabe National Forest/Hoover Wilderness

Popular Peaks: Matterhorn Peak, Incredible Hulk

[Bridgeport Ranger Station](#)

(On U.S. 395, 0.25 mile south of Bridgeport; 760-932-7070)

Kings Canyon National Park

Popular Peak: Charlotte Dome

[Road's End Wilderness Permit Station](#)

(located at Road's End; 559-565-3708)

Climbing Guides and Climbing Gear

Sierra Mountain Center (174 West Line Street, Bishop; 760-873-8526) is the best guiding service in the Eastern Sierra. They

guide just about every classic climb in the High Sierra and every climb contained in the *High Sierra Climbing* SuperTopo guidebook. Their cool web site: www.sierramountaincenter.com is loaded with photos, route descriptions, slide shows, and extensive gear lists for most classic High Sierra climbs.

There are two great climbing shops on the East Side that have everything you need for any climbing or backpacking adventure: **Wilson's Eastside Sports** (224 North Main Street, Bishop; 760-873-7520) and **Mammoth Mountaineering** (437 Old Mammoth Road, Mammoth Lakes; 760-934-4191).

Bears

Every year the bears seem to get smarter and more aggressive. If you do not take precautions, **YOUR CAR WILL BE BROKEN INTO**. Bears are active both at the trailhead parking areas and popular camping areas in the backcountry.

Bears at the Trailhead Parking Areas

While the Whitney and Onion Valley Trailheads currently have the worst problems, all Sierra trailheads experience bear break-ins. If you have any food or anything smelling like food in your car, it will be broken into. If you are lucky, they break a window. If you are unlucky, they will peel the upper part of the door down causing thousands of dollars in body damage to your car. However, even if your car is free of food, a bear may break into it just because he sees enough clutter (bags, backpacks, clothes, etc). For this reason, it is essential to clear out your car as much as possible before you reach the trailhead and put any loose items in the trunk. Make the car look empty. Food lockers are provided at the trailhead, but they are often full and not always secure so don't plan on using them for more than a night.

Bears in the Backcountry

A bear's natural habitat is the forests and shrublands below 8,000 feet (2,438 meters), but they will frequently roam above these elevations in order to steal food from backpackers. Don't even think about "bear



Sarah Feldlin

bagging" your food (the bears figured this one out) or sleeping with your food (a backpacker has been mauled by a bear). The only way to protect your food is in a bear canister. These large black plastic containers are bulky, heavy, and a pain in the ass to deal with. However, they are also the only way to protect your food from bears and are mandatory in many popular backcountry areas. Bear canisters can be rented for between \$5 and \$10 per week from any ranger station, as well as at the Whitney Portal Store. To own a bear canister, you will need to fork over \$80 at a ranger station or you can get one for the great price of \$57.25 (shipped) from the Whitney Portal Store.

Marmots and Mosquitos

Above 11,000 feet, the marmots are more of a problem than the bears. These furry little critters act cute, but if you drop your guard for a minute they will devour your food with the grace and speed of a garbage disposal. Hang all of your food and anything scented (toothpaste, sunscreen, garbage) from a large boulder or, better yet, bring a bear canister (for rent at the ranger stations).

During a one-month period around June and July, the mosquitos are so dense

that even repellent may not prevent bites. Their arrival varies from year to year, area to area, and depends on the snow year. Come prepared (especially if you are camping) with long pants, long sleeves, and DEET repellent. Ask rangers and the SuperTopo Forum about current mosquito conditions.

East Side Summer Cragging Areas

First-rate cragging abounds on the East Side. It is a good idea to crag at high elevation before climbing a High Sierra route to both acclimatize and get comfortable on Sierra granite. The areas listed below are between 8,000 and 10,000 feet and are climbable from May–October. There are a number of other crags and boulders at lower elevations, such as the Buttermiks, Happy Boulders, and Owens River Gorge. These areas are too hot in the summer.

Whitney Portal: Great climbing...if you climb 5.10 or harder. The rock and lines are as good as Yosemite and present a mixture of splitter cracks and face moves on 80-

degree, white granite walls. The season is spring and fall, but unfortunately there is not a good guidebook to the area.

Cardinal Pinnacle: Another great area... if you climb 5.10 or harder. The fine-grained granite has numerous edges and splitter cracks. The routes are all three to four pitches and end on a cool summit. The guidebook is *Bishop Area Rock Climbs* by Marty Lewis.

Rock Creek/Iris Slab: Rock Creek has excellent (hard) bouldering along the river and super fun sport climbs on perfect granite edges (there are not many routes under 5.10). Iris Slab has more easy and moderate climbs. The guidebook is *Bishop Area Rock Climbs* by Marty Lewis.

Dike Wall and Crystal Crag: Located above beautiful alpine lakes and easily accessed, the Dike Wall has excellent sport climbs that are 5.10 and up. Crystal Crag has more moderate climbs also of excellent quality. The guidebook is *Eastern Sierra Summer* by Mick Ryan available at www.Rockfax.com.

Bear Creek Spire rises above Mack Lake. (Jody Langford)



SuperTopo Mission

- Help climbers ascend and descend routes quickly, efficiently, and safely by creating the most accurate and informative climbing topos ever published.
- Capture the mystery, adventure, and humor of climbing by publishing the histories, anecdotes, and outrageous stories of each route.
- Promote clean climbing by publishing the most up-to-date rack info as well as hammerless ratings for each pitch.
- Stress the importance of low impact climbing and promote stewardship of the environment.

Visit www.SuperTopo.com Before Each Climb

There is much more beta available for free on the SuperTopo web site: www.supertopo.com. This information may be more current than the beta available here.

The web site offers additional free beta for each climb:

- photo galleries
- trip reports
- route condition updates
- closures and rockfall warnings
- route beta email alerts

The web site is packed with general High Sierra info:

- free downloadable color topos
- road and weather conditions
- everything you need to know about staying in the High Sierra
- good routes for first-time High Sierra climbers
- general trip planning info

