

Mt. Whitney – Mountaineer's Route

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Mt. Whitney, at 14,495 feet is the highest peak in the lower 48 states. It is also the most sought after peak in North America. During the summer months it is normal to find several hundred hikers ascending the peak on any given day via the Mt. Whitney Trail.

In the spring, Mt. Whitney is a different mountain. It becomes a climber's challenge. Our route of ascent is the Mountaineer's Route on the east side of the mountain. What is a third class loose rock gully in the summer becomes a snow climb on terrain up to 45 degrees. Techniques that will be used and introduced include running belays and fixed line work making this an excellent primer for a Mt. McKinley expedition, climbing elsewhere in Alaska, the Alps, and other big snow climbs. We will use expedition camping skills and bring the same equipment that we would use on a summer climb of Mt. Rainier. In addition, we will use snowshoes on the approach hike up to high camp.

Skill Level

Mt. Whitney in the spring is every bit as strenuous as Mt. Rainier. All participants must be in very good physical condition. The need to train for this climb cannot be overstressed! For several months prior to the start of the climb, training should include lots of long, slow distance runs over hilly terrain, an hour or more in duration. Add additional weekend outings carrying a heavy pack (50-60 lbs.) up steep hills or stairs. These sessions should gain 2-3,000 feet over 3 or more miles.

It would also be helpful to get out during the winter and practice snowshoeing with a pack on steeper slopes. This is not required, but prior experience with snowshoes will make the approach hike the first two days easier.

Previous ice axe arrest practice, use of crampons, and rope travel experience **is required**.

A one-day training course will be offered prior to one or more of the programs as demand requires. This will cover ice axe arrest, cramponing, rope travel and ascending fixed ropes.

Mt. Whitney: Just The Facts

No Higher:

Mt. Whitney, 14,495', is the highest peak in the US outside of Alaska

Set Your GPS:

36° 35' N, 118° 17' W

No Highs Without Lows:

Whitney is 85 miles from the lowest point in the US, Badwater Basin, -279', in Death Valley

By Any Other Name:

Originally named Fisherman's Peak in 1873 by the first summiters: A. Johnson, C. Begole, John Lucas. A subsequent team thought they were first and named it Mt. Whitney which stuck due to maps and publications printed by them.

Not Whitney Houston:

The mountain was named after Josiah Whitney who mapped much of the American West

To the Summit:

Elevation gain is 6,136' over 12 miles

Don't Feed the Summiters:

Marmots are small animals resembling fat squirrels and can be seen all over Whitney, including the summit.

"Every time I go on one of George Dunn's expeditions, I come back saying, 'that was the best adventure I've ever been on'!! From climbing Denali's West Buttress route, to his ice climbing seminar in Ouray, Colorado, to the Everest trek and Island Peak climb. I had the time of my life on each trip..."

—Bruce G.

Mt. Whitney Itinerary

Day 1: Meet at the High Sierra Cafe in Lone Pine for breakfast at 7:00 a.m. the starting day of your program. We will drive to the end of the Whitney Portal road around 9:00 a.m. as a team after issue of group gear and individual gear checks. The road is not plowed to Whitney Portal in the spring and there is usually a mile or more to hike to the road's end. In normal conditions, we will leave cars at a parking area near the road closure sign and then shuttle the group in a 4-wheel drive vehicle as far as we can get. We will likely use snowshoes from the start. The way from Whitney Portal (8,400') will be all snow, with some steep snowshoeing terrain through pines and around exposed granite slabs. The day will be a long one, 6 or more hours, with a heavy pack. Our evening camp will be in the vicinity of Lower Boy Scout Lake, at about 10,300' in elevation.

Day 2: We will move up to a high camp somewhere below Iceberg Lake (12,240'), another very full day. It may be cold at high camp, in the range of +20 to as low as 0 degrees F. overnight.

Day 3: Summit day. The Mountaineer's route ascends a large, snow filled gully up to a notch just north of the summit. The gully may be firm snow or knee deep step kicking, depending on conditions. It is 30 - 40 degrees in angle. Anchors and running belays may be used to protect our party. From the notch, a short, steeper gully will be belayed or anchored with several fixed ropes to facilitate our ascent to the summit. We will descend the route to our high camp.

Day 4: Pack up and return to the road head. End of trip. We will hope to be back at our vehicles by mid-afternoon, 2-4 p.m. depending on conditions.

“The ascent of the Mountaineer's Route on Mt. Whitney in the spring gave me the opportunity to develop the winter climbing skills I had learned on previous climbs on Mt. Rainier and other peaks. The route was challenging, and the guides did an awesome job organizing every aspect of the trip. My experiences on this climb further motivated me to pursue my passion for mountaineering and served as great preparation for more challenging climbs I have done since...”

—Perry J.

For more comments from IMG climbers, please see our website: www.mountainguides.com/comments.shtml

Getting there

Mt. Whitney is located in a fairly isolated part of the Sierras. There is no direct crossing of the Sierras from the west side to Whitney in the winter/spring months. Your best bet is to fly into whatever major airport is most convenient for you: Las Vegas (4 hrs.), Reno (4 1/2 hrs.), LA (3 1/2 hrs.), or Bakersfield, among others, and then plan to rent a vehicle for the half day drive to Mt. Whitney. My choice is Las Vegas because of the cheap airfares and quieter airport. Also, there is no major pass to drive over in case of snow. Drive to highway 395 on the east side of the Sierras and the small town of Lone Pine, about 59 miles south of Bishop. In the town of Lone Pine, drive west on the Whitney Portal Road to the marked end of the road. If the road is free of snow (unlikely) it is 13 miles to Whitney Portal from Lone Pine. If you would like to carpool to Lone Pine, I will send out a team roster with names and addresses approximately 30 days prior to the start of the program. Feel free to contact other members of the team regarding sharing rides. The simplest strategy is to book your flight through IMG's travel agent, CTT Destinations (800/909-6647 or img@cttdestinations.com). They are happy to coordinate flight times for you. In general, if you book your flight in to Las Vegas arriving by mid-afternoon the day prior to the start of the climb, you will have the best chance of teaming up with others. Your return time would be best planned for mid-afternoon of the day after the end of the climb.

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Lodging

You are on your own for lodging the night prior to the start of the trip. There are several small motels in the town of Lone Pine, and many more an hour north in Bishop. Team members normally stay at the Dow Villa Hotel in Lone Pine (800) 824-9317, dowvilla@lonepinetv.com. Meet for breakfast at the High Sierra Cafe right next door to the Dow at 7:00 a.m. on the morning of the trip. You might also want to arrange for a stay in Lone Pine on the evening of the last night of the trip unless you plan to fly out late that same night. Again, we can team up and share rooms if anyone wishes.

For you diehards, there is a year round campground on the Whitney Portal Road, the Lone Pine Campground. For information on camping, contact the Mt. Whitney Ranger Station at (619) 876-6200.

Guides and Permits

This is a program organized by George Dunn of International Mountain Guides under contract with long time friend Kurt Wedberg of Sierra Mountaineering International. Kurt is an authorized permit holder for guiding in the Inyo National Forest.

Equipment

Enclosed is a complete equipment list of required clothing and gear. Some items, including snowshoes, avalanche transceiver, crampons, boots, climbing harness, ice axe, helmet, pack, sleeping bag and Thermarest pad are available for rent directly from Kurt Wedberg of Sierra Mountaineering International. Contact IMG for a copy of the rental form. Please fill out the form and return it with payment directly to Sierra Mountaineering. Your guide will bring your gear to the meeting place and issue it to you on the first day of the trip.

Please note that plastic double boots are not available for rent, nor are they available anywhere in the vicinity of Mt. Whitney or Lone Pine. SMI does have good insulated boots for rental, the Montrail "Verglas", but supplies are limited. You will probably want to pick up your boots the day prior to your trip at the SMI office in Bishop to insure a proper fit. Good quality leather boots suitable for this program are also available for rent in the town of Bishop at Wilson's Eastside Sports. They carry a full line of Solomon Super Latoks. Call Wilson's directly, (760) 873-7520 to affirm your size is in stock and to reserve them well in advance. Again, it would be desirable to try them out at least the day prior to the trip. Better yet, invest in a good pair of plastic boots. You won't be sorry!

Dates

March 27 – 30, 2009

March 29 – April 1, 2009

April 3-6, 2009

April 5-8, 2009

(Maximum group size: 6 climbers and 2 guides per trip)

Note: We will offer training days on March 26 and April 2 for anyone lacking prior crampon and ice axe experience or in need of a refresher. It will be conducted near Mammoth, just north of Bishop. Additional cost: \$200.

Cost

\$1000 for the 4-day program. The fee includes guides, dinners and breakfasts during the climb, group equipment including tents, stoves, climbing ropes and hardware, and permits. Not included is transportation to the trailhead, lodging the evening prior to the start of the climb or the last night of the trip, or meals other than breakfasts and dinners on the trip.

Mt. Whitney Equipment List

Clothing

- Long underwear top and bottom (light or medium weight)
- Expedition weight long underwear top
- Soft shell or fleece jacket
- Schoeller type climbing pant or light weight fleece (full side zips preferred)
- Waterproof/ breathable shell with hood
- Waterproof/ breathable pants (full side zips preferred)
- Warm, roomy down or synthetic jacket with hood (*available for rent)
- Wool or fleece hat
- Neck gaiter or balaclava
- Heavy insulated gloves (those who get cold hands easily may want to add mitts with shell)
- Fleece or light weight climbing gloves
- Heavy wool or synthetic socks with liners (one extra change)
- Baseball or sun cap
- Synthetic T-shirt (preferably white for hot days)
- Light hiking pants or zip off pants

Gear

- Avalanche transceiver (*available for rent)
- Snowshoes with underfoot traction (*available for rent)
- Full size internal frame pack, 5000 to 6000 cubic inches (*available for rent)
- Sleeping bag with stuff sack, rated to approximately zero degrees F. (*available for rent)
- Sleeping pad (*available for rent)
- Plastic mountaineering boots (highly recommended) or leather climbing boots- **must be rigid soled and insulated** (*leather boots are available for rent)
- Full length gaiters
- Crampons, fitted to your boots (*available for rent)
- Sunscreen and lip balm
- Ice Axe, 60 or 70 cm. in length, with wrist leash (*available for rent)
- Climbing harness (*available for rent)
- Climbing helmet (*available for rent)
- Two large pear shaped locking carabiners
- One sewn webbing sling or tied 7mm prussik loop (approx. 24" diameter)
- One mechanical ascender (*available for rent)
- Ski poles (*available for rent)
- Headlamp with spare pair of batteries (LED works great)
- Dark glasses, UV rated with side protection
- Double lens ski goggles or spare glasses
- Two wide-mouth plastic water bottles, 1 liter capacity, with insulating covers
- Pocket knife
- Plastic bowl, plastic insulated mug, spoon
- Compact camera
- Personal lunch food for four days
- Light toiletries: toothbrush and paste, small roll of t.p., ear plugs for sleeping
- Personal FA kit to include moleskin, a few Band-Aids, tape, aspirin, Advil, prescription medications, etc.

**select items are available for rent directly from Sierra Mountaineering International. Please contact the IMG office for a copy of the rental form.*

Included in your fee are dinners and breakfasts for the 4-day climb and all group equipment including shared tents, stoves, climbing ropes and hardware. Not included is transportation to the trailhead, lodging the evening prior to the start of the climb or the last night of the trip, or meals other than breakfasts and dinners on the program.

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