

Mt. Whitney – Mountaineer’s Route

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Mt. Whitney, at 14,505 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 or hikes 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 several 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, 14,505', 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 from Whitney Portal is over 6,100'

Don't Feed the Summiters:

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

“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.

Mt. Whitney Dates

~~March 25-28, 2021 (FULL)~~
~~March 27-30, 2021 (FULL)~~
~~March 29-April 1, 2021 (FULL)~~
April 8-11, 2021 (one spot open)
April 10-13, 2021

Maximum group size: 6 climbers and 2 guides per trip
Landcost: \$1,200 for the 4-day program

The fee includes Sierra Mountaineering 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. **REQUIRED Insurance:** IMG requires that all* trip participants purchase [Travel Insurance](#) that includes coverage for medical evacuation, repatriation and medical expenses for the duration of their IMG program. Trip Cancellation Insurance is strongly recommended. Trekking and mountaineering programs are true "adventure travel."

**The insurance requirement does not apply to IMG customers on programs within the continental USA, but is strongly encouraged.*

Note: We will offer training days on March 24, 2021 and April 7, 2021 for anyone lacking prior crampon and ice axe experience or in need of a refresher. Other training days available upon request, minimum two persons. It will be conducted near Mammoth, just north of Bishop. Additional cost: \$250.



Mt. Whitney Itinerary

Day 1: Meet at the Alabama Hills Cafe in Lone Pine for breakfast at 7:00 a.m. the starting day of your program. 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, the team will leave cars at a parking area near the road closure sign and then shuttle the group in a few vehicles as far as possible up the road. The way from Whitney Portal (8,400') is often bare trail at the start, with some steep snowshoeing terrain through pines and around exposed granite slabs a few miles up the trail. IMG will notify the group in advance if snowshoes are not needed. The day will be a long one, 6 or more hours, with a heavy pack. Evening camp will be in the vicinity of Lower Boy Scout Lake, at about 10,300' in elevation.

Day 2: The team will move up to a high camp somewhere below Iceberg Lake (12,240'), a move to high altitude, but a moderate day of climbing. It may be cold at high camp, in the range of +20F 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 to 40 degrees in angle. Steep! From the notch, a short, steeper gully will be belayed or anchored with several fixed ropes to facilitate the ascent to the summit. The guides will lower the group down to the notch and the team will descend the route to high camp.

Day 4: Pack up and return to the road head. End of trip. Expect to be back at the vehicles by mid-afternoon, 12 to 2 p.m., depending on conditions.

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. One good option is the Whitney Hostel. Rooms sleep up to 4 in two sets of bunks and runs around \$25 a person plus tax. There are showers in each room and the place is nice. The address is 238 S Main in Lone Pine. Phone is (760) 876-0030 for reservations. Tell them you are climbing with SMI/IMG. For pictures of the hostel, go to mountwhitneyportal.com. It really is pleasant! You can spend the extra money on a nice dinner before the trip. We'll do our gear check and briefing after breakfast in the main downstairs room at the hostel.

If the idea of the hostel just doesn't appeal to you, try the Dow Villa Motel just to the south, 310 Main St., phone (800) 824-9317 dowvilla@lonepinetv.com. The Dow is a nice comfortable place.

The group will hope to be down by noon (earliest) on the last day. It is a long drive back to Las Vegas if you are flying out that way. The team usually enjoys getting together for lunch and final good-byes in Lone Pine at the end of the climb. If you are spending the night in Lone Pine, don't forget to make a reservation for the last night of the program as well.

Meeting

Plan to meet for breakfast at the Alabama Hills Cafe, just across the street from the Hostel and the Dow at 111 Post Street. The guides will be there at 7:00 a.m. on the morning of the starting date and will allow for time to eat breakfast at 7:00. You can make final adjustments and we'll issue group gear and rentals after breakfast.



Guides and Permits

This is a program organized by George Dunn of International Mountain Guides under contract with Sierra Mountaineering International (SMI). SMI is an authorized permit holder in 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, ascender, ice axe, helmet, pack, sleeping bag and Thermarest pad are available for rent directly from 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, except in limited supply in the town of Bishop at Wilson's Eastside Sports. SMI does have single insulated boots for rental, the Lowa Mountain Expert. These boots work fine for most, but not those especially prone to cold feet. Best of all, invest in a good fitting pair of plastic double boots. You won't be sorry!

“Mt. Whitney provided a few new tastes of technical climbing, a reasonably tough challenge and one more opportunity to experience a mountain in the stellar company of IMG. Specifically, George Dunn (IMG) and Doug Nidever of SMI. This is my fourth climb with IMG and hopefully not my last. Every company in America, in any industry, should go to school at IMG for their tremendous service, relentless attention to detail and maximum level of great mojo (more companies desperately need IMG mojo)... ”

—Jeff M.

“My Mt. Whitney trip couldn't have been better! I had the best time with the group and guides... As always, everything IMG does is first class in the mountains.”

—Jennifer W.

“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.

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

Mt. Whitney Equipment List

- Long underwear top and bottom (light or medium weight)
- Expedition weight long underwear top
- Soft shell or fleece jacket
- Soft shell pant, Schoeller fabric or similar stretchy, tight weave material
- Waterproof/ breathable shell with hood
- Waterproof/ breathable pants (full or ¾ length side zips preferred)
- Warm, roomy down or synthetic insulated jacket with hood (*available for rent)
- Wool or fleece hat that fits underneath a helmet
- Neck gaiter or balaclava or Buff
- 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 wool/synthetic blend socks (bring one extra change)
- Baseball or sun cap
- Synthetic T-shirt (preferably white for hot days)
- Avalanche transceiver (*available for rent)
- Snowshoes with underfoot traction (*available for rent)
- Full size internal frame pack, 4000- 5000 cubic inches or 60-80 liters (*available for rent)
- Sleeping bag with compression stuff sack, rated to approximately zero degrees F. (*available for rent)
- Sleeping pad (*available for rent)
- Plastic mountaineering boots (recommended for warmth) or leather climbing boots (must be rigid soled and insulated). **For some persons with sensitive toes, single boots will not be warm enough.** *Leather boots (Lowa Mountain Expert) are available for rent from SMI, and a limited supply of plastic double boots are available for rent in Bishop.
- Full length gaiters
- Crampons, fitted to your boots (*available for rent)
- Sunscreen and lip balm, minimum SPF 15
- Ice Axe, 60 or 70 cm. in length (*available for rent) wrist leash optional
- Climbing harness (*available for rent)
- Climbing helmet (*available for rent)
- Two large pear shaped locking carabiners
- Two sewn nylon webbing slings or tied 7mm Perlon accessory cord loops (approx. 24" in diameter)
- One mechanical ascender (*available for rent)
- Ski poles or trekking poles with baskets (*available for rent)
- LED headlamp with spare pair of batteries
- Dark glasses, UV rated, wrap around or with side protection
- Double lens ski goggles or spare glasses
- Two wide-mouth plastic water bottles, 1 liter capacity. Optional, bring insulating covers
- Pocket knife
- Plastic bowl, plastic insulated mug, spoon
- Compact camera with cord to hang around neck and inside insulating layers
- 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 or blister pads, 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. It is more convenient to rent this gear on site from SMI rather than from IMG and incur shipping charges.*

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