



# **The White Mountains Traverse**

## **Trip Notes**



# **The White Mountains Crest Hike**

**This is one of the most amazing hikes of its length in the country. This is also a rugged cross country trip, trailless except for a couple of miles on a closed road and it takes place at elevations above 11,000' for more than 95% of the distance. The White Mountains are the first of the Great Basin desert ranges and rise to over fourteen thousand feet on the east side of the Owens Valley. The Whites are home to some of the oldest known living things, the bristlecone pine, which can live for over four thousand years. For a while White Mountain was rumored to be higher than Mt. Whitney -it is not, but is a mere 250 feet lower and is perhaps the "easiest" fourteenner in California. The Whites are remote, little traveled and true wilderness and the 2009 designation of them as a Wilderness area recognized these values. We hope that you will join us to explore this area with its fantastic views of the whole Sierra Nevada range from Olancha to the Tahoe area. Golden eagles, mountain lions, and groups of desert bighorn sheep are amongst the wildlife here and we hope to be lucky enough to see them.**

## **Itinerary**

Camp elevations are high (higher generally than those in the Sierra Nevada) on this trip so it is essential that you get at least one night and preferably three nights sleeping at 9,000' or higher prior to this trip.

*Day 1:* We will meet at the Sierra Mountain Center office for the pre trip meeting. We will have a pack check prior to getting shuttled up to the trailhead near Crooked Creek in the Whites. The shuttle takes nearly three hours with a stop for a short hike at the Schulman Bristlecone Grove. From there an easy hours walk will bring us to our first camp at 10,600' in Cottonwood Meadow.

*Day 2:* This day we walk on informal use trails and ancient Paiute routes as we make our way to an unnamed pass near Mt. Barcroft. Camp this night is at 11,600 with snowmelt for our water source. This is a relatively short day but is important for acclimatization to the high elevation. It does allow time for a walk unencumbered by our large packs to get the outstanding views back to Cottonwood Basin and to the east out to Fishlake Valley.

*Day 3:* This is a very long day and requires a pre dawn start as we head into the heart of the range. Ascending animal and Native American trails towards Mt. Barcroft we may come across a group of desert bighorn sheep as we're now entering their habitat high above tree line on open rocky slopes. We briefly intersect the now closed White Mountain road and breathing hard, we ascend to the summit of White Mountain Peak to the last vestiges of civilization at the old research cabin on the summit. We leave the developed world for the remaining days and head north off the peak to a short 3rd class ridge. This is the most difficult section of the hike but before long we are on the stunning wide open slopes and plateaus of the range. We travel along the ridge crest to a camp (elevation 11,200') at the headwaters of Cabin and Birch Creeks with their year round springs.

*Day 4:* The hike today begins with a long but gentle uphill through improbable grasslands and wide open meadows, with lots of running water. The five mile walk along remarkably flat terrain of 12,000 foot Pellissier Flats with its alpine tundra and miniature wildflowers is a highlight of the trip. Our final camp is just past Mt. Dubois at over 13,000'. The campsite location will depend upon the condition of the springs or the ability to locate snow patches for our nights water supply.

*Day 5:* This is a big day with a several route options, all involving a lot of elevation loss. We may go over Montgomery and Boundary Peaks and drop east into Trail Canyon. Or we may choose to avoid the peaks and head due east off the "Jump Off". Much of this is second class so be prepared for scrambling.

## **Meeting place and time**

We meet at the SMC office at 200 South Main Street in Bishop at 8.00 a.m. the morning of Day 1. We are in the second block south of the south most traffic light on Main Street/Highway 395 and on the east side of the highway. We will do a final gear check and distribute group equipment.

## **Dates and Prices**

Check the latest brochure, call us or go to our web site and locate on the first page the pull down menu for downloadable schedules and rates. Should minimum participant numbers not be reached you will be given the option of paying our private rate, rescheduling, or cancelling. Price includes guiding, permits, all necessary group climbing gear, tents, kitchen gear and breakfasts, lunches and dinners (you bring hot/cold drinks and snack items).

## **Ratios**

Five participants to one guide.

## **Notes and other information**

For maps look at the Mount Barcroft, White Mountain Peak and Boundary Peak 7.5 minute map for most of the route. Chalfant Valley, Benton, Juniper Mountain and Blanco Mountain are needed for complete coverage of the range.

This range is also subject to thunderstorms if we have a moist weather pattern set up with tropical moisture moving up from the south. We would be very exposed to the storms and this is not the place to be in an electrical storm. An adverse weather pattern may result in cancellation of the trip. Please keep in touch with us as the trip approaches for weather updates.

This is a pristine and little travelled area. We must do our utmost to minimize our impact on the land and leave no evidence of our presence. This means a higher than normal awareness of our potential impacts and doing what we can to leave no trace of our passage. Your guide will inform you thoroughly on our "Leave no Trace" practices.

This is a trip to extreme high elevations and lack of acclimatization to the elevation is the primary reason that hikers do not do well on this trip. Our itinerary takes this into account but the terrain often limits where we can camp. We've done our best to place camps in the lowest spots available but most are above 11,000 feet. It is essential that you have at least one night, and preferably three nights, immediately prior to the trip at high elevation. Look at this as an investment in your trip and in your health. One option is to camp a day or two at the Cottonwood trailhead area, near Mt. Whitney. There is a walk in campground at 10,200'. Another option is Sabrina campground near Sabrina Lake or Willows campground near South Lake; both are reached by traveling west on the 168 from Bishop. Ask us for details.

## **Prerequisites**

This will be a primarily off trail hike sometimes in rugged terrain. You need to feel comfortable carrying a five day pack across this rugged terrain, but prior cross country experience is not necessary. Daily travel will be about 7-8 miles; this may not sound a lot, but it is at 12,000' or higher. Since this is a very high elevation trip, prior altitude experience is advised.

# Equipment List for the White Mountains Crest Hike

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. When backpacking paying attention to the details and creating a personal system will lead to success. Experiment with your gear and your packing style before arriving in the Sierra. Consider the month, weather patterns, and snow conditions. **Think lightweight.** Items with a \* can be rented from SMC.

## Essentials

- ☐ Footwear. You will be hiking roughly 7-8 miles per day off trail. Please bring sturdy hiking boots that you have broken in and that are suitable for off trail travel. Your feet are your transportation and can make the difference between surviving this trip and thriving.
- ☐ Camp Shoes for around camp. Sanuk sandals, Crocs, or light tennis shoes are all appropriate. The camp shoes will make hanging out in camp more comfortable, and lessen the impact we leave on the sites. Open toed flip flops are not acceptable.
- ☐ Pack. 60-65 liter. The pack you choose to bring will also greatly impact your trip. Bring the smallest lightest pack you can get everything into.
- ☐ Sleeping Bag. A 32°F bag should be sufficient but if you are cold at night a sleeping bag liner can add significant warmth with minimal additional weight. We recommend a down-bag as opposed to a synthetic one due to weight differences, but a down-bag must be waterproofed inside your bag with a trash bag lining the stuff sack. Pair this with a compression stuff sac to reduce volume.
- ☐ Sleeping pad. A 3/4 length Ultralight inflatable pad paired with a foam pad is our favorite combination. If bringing an inflatable pad also bring a repair kit to fix leaks.

## Clothing

- ☐ 3 pairs of socks. 2 pairs to alternate while hiking, and a third pair for at camp. Nothing beats a fresh pair of socks in the backcountry. Blister prevention is crucial so the clean third pair for camp is excellent preventative care. Having 2 pairs to alternate hiking in also gives the opportunity to rinse and dry socks. A mid-weight, non-cotton sock is ideal, such as a Smartwool or Darn Tough hiking specific sock. Please do not bring low-cut ankle socks as they can lead to rubbing on the heel.
- ☐ 1 mid-weight long-sleeve top. Capilene, Merino or other synthetic.
- ☐ 1 pair of long-johns or tights. Capilene, Merino or other synthetic.
- ☐ 1 warm pair of pants, tights or expedition weight Capilene.
- ☐ 1 warm shirt. Synchilla or 200 weight works well.
- ☐ 1 warm jacket. A down jacket is preferred with around 800 fill.
- ☐ Waterproof Jacket and Pants - Lightweight and non-bulky. Side zips on the pants should be long enough to slide on over boots. Jacket must have a hood.
- ☐ 1 pair of hiking pants.
- ☐ 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 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 using prescription lenses consider a backup pair.
- ☐ Water carrying system with a capacity of 2-3 liters. A combination of a bottle and hydration system works well. 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. For drinking we like a thermos (refer to "water carrying system" above for more clarity). Plastic sporks will break - titanium does not. Collapsible style bowls save space.
- ☐ Swiss army style knife. No giant "multi-tools".
- ☐ Personal toiletries including toothbrush, toothpaste (travel sized), baby wipes and floss. Keep it minimal.
- ☐ Hand sanitizer - a personal travel size bottle.
- ☐ Toilet paper. The used toilet paper will go in a paper bag, which then goes in a ziplock, which you carry in your pack.
- ☐ Sunscreen and lip screen. SPF 30+. A 1 oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip screen actually contains a sunscreen.
- ☐ Basic first aid supplies such as ibuprofen, moleskin, and tape. Your guides will have extensive first aid kits so please don't go overboard with your personal kits. If you tend to take NSAID's regularly please bring your own, or if your feet require constant blister attention please bring tape and moleskin.
- ☐ Camera, a spare memory card and battery. No big cameras please; compacts only. You can substitute a camera phone.
- ☐ Plastic Trash Bag for keeping things 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.
- ☐ Reading material, journal or Kindle. Do not bring "War & Peace"
- ☐ Ear plugs. Handy to block flapping tent noise (or noisy partners).

## Shared Equipment

- ☐ Shelter. We will provide tents for you, and you will be asked to share a tent with someone as campsites are only so large, and to help distribute weight. If you have a tent of your own you want to use please call the office prior to the trip.
- ☐ Stoves, kitchen and cookware.
- ☐ Water purification. The group will have access to a variety of different ways to treat water. Chemical treatment, such as Aquamira or Iodine, will be carried by the guide. Gravity filtration bags will be distributed amongst the group for use in camp.

## 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.