



Mt Humphreys via the East Arete

Trip Notes

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While all routes to the summit of 13,986 foot Mt. Humphreys are difficult, the most challenging ascent is surely the wonderful East Ridge. The first ascent by this route in 1935 was by the legendary Norman Clyde, who considered the route a classic mountaineering challenge. There are a number of route options: our favorite is to basecamp at a small tarn and then to gain the East Ridge. Blocks, towers, and exposed traverses characterize this route, which has been referred to as the “Exum Ridge” of the Sierra. This is a great one for a winter ascent (four days, two on the route).

Itinerary

Day One: From Bishop we travel west to Buttermilk Country, first on paved road and then onto a good dirt road. Once past the Peabody Boulders things change and we shift into four wheel drive (yes, it is obligatory for this approach) and 45 minutes of rough bouncy driving takes us to the end of the road.

Over the years we have taken a number of different approaches and descents. We have found the best to be from the trailhead to a small un-named lake on the south side of the lower East Ridge. This is a short 2-3 hour hike over trail-less terrain to a great sandy camp amidst the last whitebark pines.

Day Two: As always, we have the obligatory alpine start early the next morning. The climbing starts off easy but before long we have some tricky sandy ledges to deal with before gaining the ridge proper.

Now it gets good! The ridge crest is narrow and exposed. The bold can walk the very crest. The rest of us can scramble across traversing below the crest. We descend some around a tricky tower and then back up and into the final notch. The ridge steepens here and we avoid one steep section by a traverse onto the south face. Above here the rock quality becomes a little grainier but eases off in angle as we near the place known as Married Men’s Point. On the first ascent of Mt Humphreys in 1904 some of the party members decided to remain behind here while others went on, citing the fact that the difficulties ahead appeared to be too difficult for those with married responsibilities. Although the final 200 feet to the summit indeed does look daunting, we are up for it and as we get closer it appears a lot more reasonable. 150 feet of roped climbing and we are scrambling the last few feet to the very small summit.

We descend via our ascent route with a short rappel until we get into the last notch. From here we head south and down the McGee Creek drainage back to camp. After a quick rest and packing up our gear, we hike back to the car. This can be a long but rewarding day.

Elevations and Distances:

Trailhead to camp	1.30 miles	1700’ of gain	70’ of descent.
Camp to summit to trailhead	4.2 miles	3150’ of gain	4820’ of descent

Meeting place and time

We meet the first day at 10:00a.m. at the world headquarters of Sierra Mountain Center, 200 South Main Street, in Bishop. We are on the east side of Highway 395 in the second block south of the south most traffic light (intersection of Line Street and Main Street/Highway 395. Or if you prefer just across the Mountain Rambler Brewery. We will do a gear check and distribution of group gear. Before driving to the trailhead, we will have the opportunity for you to grab a sandwich or other lunch to go from a local store.

Dates and Prices

Check the latest brochure, call us or go to our web site for dates and rates. Should minimum participant numbers not be reached you will be given the option of paying our private rate, rescheduling, or canceling. Price includes guiding, permits, all necessary group climbing gear, tents, kitchen gear and breakfast, lunch and dinner daily (you bring hot/cold drinks and snack items). Scheduled dates include USFS trail fees. Private programs do not.

Prerequisites

You should be in good physical condition, have some backpacking experience and have the ability to traverse broken uneven slopes with a moderate pack. Prior experience at altitudes above 10,000’ is recommended. You need to be able to follow at the 5.4 level and have experience on multi pitch routes.

Ratios

This is a technical climb and we limit the ratio to two climbers to one guide. This enhances safety and ensures a timely arrival at the summit before potential weather changes.

Notes and other information

The best guidebook is Peter Croft's "The Good, The Great, and the Awesome". Get this from Maximus Press: <http://www.maximuspress.com>.

Preparing for Success

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

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

Acclimatization

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

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Porters

Want to do the trip but concerned about carrying the overnight pack through the rough terrain or want to save the knees from the steep descent back down? We can provide the services of a porter to carry the heavier and bulky items, leaving you with a lighter day pack for the trip. Porters can be used for just the up or the down as well. Contact the office for more information.

Equipment List for Mt Humphreys via the East Arete

The following list is a general guide and will assist you in packing for the program. Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have specific questions regarding equipment or if you need assistance prior to making a purchase. The following list will vary according to the time of year, and your individual requirements. When packing **THINK LIGHTWEIGHT!** Items with a * can be rented from SMC.

Climbing equipment

- Boots*. Lightweight mountaineering or heavy duty hiking boots are required, but also a pair that is compact enough to fit in the climbing pack for the descent. Trail runners or tennies are not acceptable since there may be hard snow to cross. If you have any concerns as to the adequacy of your footwear contact us. We rent mountaineering boots.
- Ice axe.* A general purpose axe appropriate to your height. Required only in early season. We will inform you if this is needed.
- Crampons.* These must be compatible with your boots. Required only in early season. We will inform you if these are needed.
- Harness.* We recommend a comfortable rock climbing style harness.
- Helmet. Should be comfortable and lightweight. We provide these for the program if you do not have your own.
- Two locking carabiners and a couple of non-lockers.*
- A lightweight belay/rappel device, ATC style.*
- A 120cm nylon sling.
- Rock shoes*. Regardless of what anyone tells you they need to be comfortable! You'll be wearing them most of the day.

Other essentials

- Internal frame backpack of 50-60 L. This must fit all of your personal gear and group equipment. If your pack compresses down you do not need the following item.
- Small day pack for climbing. 20-25L with attachment points for ice axe and crampons.
- Sleeping bag. This should be rated to about 32°F.
- Sleeping pads. A Thermarest and foam pad. A 3/4 Thermarest on a foam pad makes a good combination. Bring a repair kit along with a Thermarest in case of holes.

Clothing

- 2 pair synthetic or wool socks.
- Long underwear top and bottom.
- Warm pants, to layer between base and waterproof layer, such as softshell fabric.
- Another fuzzy sweater top, such as fleece or Polartec.
- Pile/fleece/softshell fabric jacket.
- Light down jacket; synthetic fill is second choice. This is optional & can replace the previous item. For in camp or in cold weather.
- Good quality rain/wind pants and rain jacket. Must be water proof and jacket must have a hood. Don't skimp on your rain gear.
- Shorts for on the trail.
- Climbing pants. We like the softshell type fabrics.
- 1 long-sleeve sun shirt. We recommend a "hoody" style though anything that covers your arms and is synthetic is great.
- 1 short-sleeve T-shirt. Synthetic, not cotton, so it can dry quickly and wick sweat from your body on sweaty, but windy, days.
- 1 lightweight pair of polypropylene or similar gloves.
- 1 pair of heavier gloves.
- 1 warm hat/beanie. Synthetics are less itchy than wool.
- Sunhat. Better to cover up than just rely upon sunscreen.

Etc.

- Sun glasses. Good quality. If you wear corrective glasses you might want a second pair in case of breakage.
- Water carrying system with a capacity of 2-3 liters. We recommend a 2 liter bladder for daily trail use and an additional Klean Kanteen insulated bottle for drink flavoring, coffee, etc. This can be your thermos and additional water bottle.
- Headlamp. With a spare set of batteries.
- Eating and drinking equipment. An insulated mug with a lid. This can double for a bowl. Fork and spoon.
- Pocket knife. Small Swiss army style, not a large Leatherman.
- Personal toiletries. Toothbrush and toothpaste. TP & a ziplock bag to carry out the used.
- Sunscreen and lip screen. 30+ SPF. A 1oz. bottle will be enough. Make sure the lip stuff actually contains a sunscreen.
- Personal Medical Kit. The guide will carry a large kit so yours will predominately consist of foot repair items, mild pain killer such as Advil, and bandaids.
- Camera/phone camera. Small enough to fit in a pocket; please no giant cameras with multiple lenses.
- Plastic Trash Sac. Handy for keeping gear in outside the tent should it rain.
- Trekking poles*. These are not essential, but can be handy on the trail. It is your choice, but they do save the knees on long descents.
- Optional reading material, journal, Kindle, etc.

Food

- We include meals from dinner on Day 1 through lunch on Day 2. Bring your own snack items like cliff bars, power bars, or gorp concoctions for all days. Also bring your favorite hot drinks (tea, hot chocolate, cider etc.). A days worth for most people would be 2 bars, 3 ounces of gorp, and perhaps a candy bar. Don't over do it.

Shared Equipment Provided by SMC

- First aid kit
- Food
- Shelter. We will provide lightweight, storm worthy tents. If you have your favorite, by all means bring it, but we do want to pair people up where possible to reduce weight.
- Stove. We provide MSR Whisperlite stoves.
- Group climbing equipment.
- Water purification. A sad but true fact of life is that much Sierra water is contaminated. Iodine may be used individually or the group can carry a gravity style purifier.

You specifically don't need

- ⊗ Big first aid kits (we have a comprehensive one).
- ⊗ Deodorant or any toiletries beyond those listed above.
- ⊗ Items that are not on this list.

Additional Thoughts

- Some people, particularly women, tend to run colder than others. If this is the case add another layer or two, a warmer sleeping bag, warmer boots and extra handwarmers
- Women – see our "Women on the Trail" information sheet at the Women's Trips pages on the website.