

## Backpack Catalina

**Distance:** About 7 miles  
**Trailhead:** Avalon  
**Permit Limit:** unlimited  
**Difficulty:** Easy (rated 2)

### Features:

Backpacking on Catalina Island is a classic Scout adventure. It requires a lot more planning than your typical Sierra backpack trip because it involves coordinating with more agencies and resources (camping, ferry, island transportation). Still, a great beginner trip can be planned, along with pleasant day hikes or beach time, and Avalon is a fun town for apres-hike souvenirs and dinner.

### FYI:

The new Trans-Catalina Trail that runs the length of the island is *really* steep and rugged, so keep that in mind if you plan to utilize that trail.

### Additionally:

Fuel can't be transported on the ferry. Reserve your camp stoves and propane fuel from the Catalina Island Company. The ranger will deliver stoves, fuel, firewood and any other gear you need (and they provide) right to your campsite.

### Good Beginning Itinerary:

Catalina Express ferry service Dana Point to Avalon; Airport Shuttle to B. J. TH  
Backpack 1.5 m to Black Jack Campground  
Day hike the Trans Catalina Trail; another night at Black Jack  
Backpack to Little Harbor via the Cottonwood Trail (5+ miles) or the TCT  
(7+ miles)  
Safari Bus to Avalon. Ferry from Avalon to Dana Point; drive home

### Important Phone Numbers

Catalina Island Medical Center Hospital: 310-510-0700  
100 Falls Canyon Road in Avalon  
In an emergency: Sheriff 310-510-0174  
911 - call may go to Catalina Island or L.A.; indicate you're on Catalina Island;  
GPS coordinates will be recorded  
Cell phone service @ Blackjack is great; okay at Little Harbor, but excellent from surrounding ridges

Resources:

**Catalina Island Camping:** 310-510-8368, M - F, 8 a.m. - 5 p.m.

[www.visitcatalinaisland.com](http://www.visitcatalinaisland.com)

Camping Reservations, Gear Rental

Permit: issued at Pavilion Lodge in Avalon

**Catalina Express:** Ferry from Dana Point to Avalon (800) 481-3470

Reservations: Make well in advance; credit card isn't charged until the day of travel

Refund/Cancelation policy: full refund if cancelled by 6 p.m. the previous evening

Group rate: 20 or more      Adult rate: Ages 12+

**Airport Shuttle:** 310-510-0143 (to Black Jack TH)

Picks up in Town Plaza; departs at 10:30, 12:00, 2:00 and 4:00 by reservation only

**Safari Bus:** 310-510-2800

(from Two Harbors/Little Harbor to Avalon) M - F, 8 - 5

**Catalina Island Conservancy** (310) 510-2595, 8:30 - 4:30 daily

[www.catalinaconservancy.org](http://www.catalinaconservancy.org)

125 Clarissa (trail maps, nature guides, conservation info, gift shop)

Reservations:

For best selection, make reservations 1 year in advance

Notes: Black Jack Campground – sites 5, 8, 9 and 10 are excellent

Little Harbor – sites 5, 8, 9 are excellent, 1 is okay.

Cancellations/Refund policy: 3 days in advance for full refund

Timeline:

1 year in advance

Make camping reservations

January/February

Camping payment due (after new fees posted)

Reserve camp stoves/fuel/firewood

Make Catalina Express ferry reservations (after new fees posted)

May:

Reserve Safari Bus Little Harbor to Avalon when new fees are posted

2 weeks in advance:

Reserve Airport Shuttle to Black Jack TH

1 week in advance:            Less than 15 on permit? Get full refund  
Request firewood delivery (remember to take *good*  
firestarter; matches!)

24 hours in advance:        Cancel any ferry reservations?

Gear Notes:

Water filter: not necessary, potable water at both sites  
Stove & fuel: no! (fuel not allowed on ferry)  
Matches — DON'T FORGET!!!!  
Rope - yes, for hanging food from ground dwellers  
Trowel? - portapotties on site  
Showers - on site, both campgrounds (outdoor spray showers, cold water)  
Topo maps — Use Conservancy Map; check out Franko's Map  
Camp shoes — good idea, must be closed toe

Avalon Duffel should include:

Clean clothes for return trip (include warm sweatshirt or jacket) on ferry.  
Clean-up kit, towel

Other things you'll pay for:

Ferry parking: on-site, \$9/car/night, cash only  
Luggage storage in Avalon at ferry landing: \$4/bag  
Showers located by the marina, north end of Avalon: \$5 for 5-minute shower;  
includes towel.

Key Risks & Concerns to address:

Water activities (swimming, kayaking) require a lifeguard (Girl Scouts Safety  
Wise)  
Flora: grasslands, island scrub oak. *Cactus!*  
Cool Fauna (no predators): *bison*, snakes (*rattlesnakes*), Catalina Island Fox, bald  
eagles  
Sea sickness on ferry?

## **Cottonwood Lakes High Sierra Backpack Trip**

- Distance:** 11 miles  
One Way: 5.1 miles to Cottonwood Lakes Basin/Muir Lake  
Day hike options include South Fork Lakes (+.5 mile), New Army Pass (2.5 miles) and Cirque Peak (4.5 miles)
- Permit Limit:** 15 people
- Trailhead:** Horseshoe Meadows (east of Lone Pine, CA)
- Difficulty:** Easy - Moderate backpacking at elevations between 10,000 and 11,000 feet. Rated 2.6

### **Preview:**

This 5-day trip into the Golden Trout Wilderness is an excellent bridge to more advanced backpacking. The terrain is gentle and ideal for backpackers of all levels. Five lakes dot the Cottonwood Basin, with numerous lakes located within a couple easy miles. The basin is at the foot of Mt. Langley — neighbor to nearby Mt. Whitney — and Cirque Peak, both excellent dayhike destinations if conditions permit (no lingering snow.)

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

- Day 1: Drive to Lone Pine, pick up permit, buy lunch and take-out dinner. Drive up to Horseshoe Meadows backpackers' campground, relax, and acclimate overnight at 10,000 feet.
- Day 2: Backpack into Cottonwood Lakes Basin. Set up base camp. Muir Lake makes an excellent base camp just east of the other lakes. Excellent camping.
- Day 3 & 4: Day hike and explore the basin and surrounding area. Excellent day trips include touring the Cottonwood Lake Basin towards Old Army Pass, and hiking to the top of New Army Pass (elevation 12,300'). Cross-country travel is straight forward between lakes.
- Day 5: Hike out, showers (Whitney Portal Store Hostel) & lunch in Lone Pine, drive home.

### **Important Phone Numbers:**

Inter Agency Visitor Center (pick up permit here, 1 mile south of Lone Pine)  
760-876-6200  
S. Inyo Hospital (Lone Pine): 760-876-5501  
Lone Pine Sheriff (number to call for emergencies/in-town contact)  
760-876-5606

### **For More Information:**

[www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild)  
[www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)  
Online wilderness permit reservations or call: 877-444-6777  
[www.whitneyportalstore.com](http://www.whitneyportalstore.com)  
Great link to message board: hostel (showers), weather, snow pack, etc.  
*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White

**Topo Map:**

7.5 minutes – Cirque Peak

**Estimated Costs:**

Permit: \$15/permit

Lodging: \$6/site in Horseshoe Meadows – walk-in backpackers' campground right by parking lot (bathrooms, bear lockers)

Map: approx. \$9

Insurance

Showers: \$5/person, includes towel & soap, at the Whitney Portal Hostel in Lone Pine

Travel Incidentals (meals on the road, souvenirs, gas money)

Gear: Bear canister required

Food

**Identifying key risks:**

Black bear country (food storage)

Altitude & elevation gain

Weather

Fitness

Personal responsibility

Lingering snow (Old Army Pass is often snow-covered into July, and New Army Pass will often have a cornice of snow lingering through June).

## **Dinkey Lakes (9 miles Round Trip)**

**Trip length:** 9 miles out & back

**Permit Limit:** 15 people

**Trailhead:** Shaver Lake, Sierra National Forest

For the best directions, contact the Pineridge Ranger. Generally you'll be driving from Fresno east toward Shaver Lake, then diverting off to progressively smaller and rougher forest roads to reach the trailhead about 45 minutes from Shaver Lake. Camping is available at the trailhead, but it's primitive: no bathrooms, campsites or piped-in water. **Your water source will be Dinkey Creek.**

**Difficulty:** Easy (rated 2.2)

### **Features:**

This Western Sierra semi-loop trip west of Fresno is well worth driving the long dirt road to the trailhead. The gentle, forested terrain is perfect for beginning backpackers and younger children, the wildflowers are a treat, and six lovely lakes are easily reached on one long day hike or an easy 3-day backpack trip.

### **Basic Trip Information:**

A series of beautiful lakes along easy creekside trails makes this trip a winner. First Dinkey Lake is reached after 3 miles, and Second Dinkey is just beyond. Second Dinkey makes an excellent base camp for excursions to Island Lake, Rock Lake and Dogtooth Peak. Return the same way, or make it a semi-loop by hiking about 4 miles past South, Swede and Mystery Lakes on your way back to the car.

### **Side Trips and Options:**

Island Lake is rocky and wild. Snow often lingers on the flanks of Three Sisters peak: great for pictures and Tang snowcones!

Dogtooth Peak makes an excellent excursion. The base of the peak is bursting with quartz, and for peak-baggers, Dogtooth affords fabulous views.

Dinkey Lakes has a Wilderness designation. Dogs and horses are welcome.

**Information, Permits and Resources:**

Pineridge Ranger District: PO Box 559, Prather, Ca 93651  
(559-855-5360)

Sierra National Forest: 1600 Tollhouse Rd., Clovis, CA 93611  
(559-297-0706)      [www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra/)

*100 Hikes in California's Central Sierra & Coast Range* by Vicky Spring:  
will give you excellent driving and hiking directions for the Dinkey Lakes  
loop.

*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White: will provide excellent  
supplemental information.

**Topo Maps**

7.5 minute topos Courtright Reservoir and Dogtooth Peak

**Identifying Key Risks:**

Water: Dry years and late season (mid-August or later), check with ranger  
station to see if Dinkey Creek still has water flowing. Ask for a recent  
“backcountry report,” so you are assured of the most current information.

## **Evolution Valley, Kings Canyon National Park**

**Trip length:** 36 miles out & back, not including day hikes

**Permit Limit:** 15 people

**Trailhead:** Florence Lake, Sierra National Forest (Elevation 7,300')

**Difficulty:** Moderate (rated 3.3)

Backpacking from 7,300 feet at Florence Lake to 10,000 feet in Evolution Valley, and day hiking into the basin up to 12,000 feet at Muir Pass. X-Country day hike option around the Hermit would require bouldering and excellent map skills: moderately strenuous (rated 4).

### **Preview:**

Both Evolution Valley and Evolution Basin are world class highlights along the iconic John Muir Trail. Approaching from the west allows for an easy, forested ascent over three days, giving ample opportunity to gently acclimate. Backpacking from Goddard Canyon Junction into Evolution Valley is probably one of the most stunning trail sections you will ever travel along.

Make a base camp in Colby Meadow (at the south end of Evolution Valley), and enjoy sunset views of the basin right above you. You'll be sipping your evening cocoa watching the alpine glow on Mt. Mendel, truly a sight to behold. Leave a couple days for a good day hike up into the basin. You can choose to hike up through the beautiful lakes in Evolution Basin to 12,000 foot Muir Pass (and see the famous stone hut) or do a x-country loop around The Hermit into McGee Lakes Basin and back to camp. Both are amazing options.

Return to Florence Lake along the same route, with a possible side trip to Blayney Hot Springs.

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

- Day 1: Drive to Florence Lake Trailhead; camp at Jackass Meadow Campground
- Day 2: 8 miles to Piute Creek Crossing
- Day 3: 4 miles to Evolution/Goddard junction
- Day 4: 6 miles to Colby Meadow; great camp sites at Darwin Creek crossing
- Day 5: day hike to Evolution Basin
- Day 6: x-country dayhike around The Hermit into McGee Lakes
- Day 7: Return along the JMT to Piute Creek Crossing
- Day 8: Hike out to Florence Lake

### **Important Phone Numbers:**

High Sierra Ranger District (in Prather): 559-855-5355

- o Permitting office: 29688 Auberry Rd. Prather, CA 93651

24-Hour dispatch (emergency): 559-565-3195

SEKI Wilderness Office: 559-565-3766



**For More Information:**

Florence Lake ([www.florence-lake.com](http://www.florence-lake.com))

This is the trailhead, and they provide the ferry service across the lake, as well, eliminating 4 miles of trudging around the lake. Camping is available at Jackass Meadow near Florence Lake. There is also a store on the lake, where you buy ferry tickets.

Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park: [www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit](http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit)

You will cross into Kings Canyon NP at the Piute Creek Crossing.

Information specific to the remainder of your route to Evolution Basin can be found at this website.

*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White

**Topo Maps:**

7.5 minutes – Ward Mtn., Mt. Henry, Mt. Darwin (optional: Florence Lake, Mt. Goddard)

**Estimated Costs:**

Permit: \$5/person

Insurance:

Camping: \$40/night at Florence Lake

Lodging: Possible lodging on the way home at Mono Hot Springs or a Comfort Inn Suites en route. Shared rooms and expenses.

Ferry: \$20 Round Trip

Maps: Topos are about \$9 apiece, and 4 quads are necessary to cover our trip.

Travel Incidentals:

Food: Approx. 5 - 6 meals on the road

Souvenirs: t-shirts, patches, etc. available at Florence Lake Store or Ranger Station in Prather

Gas Money: reasonable donation to the drivers

Gear:

Personal: Backpack, sleeping bag, bear canister (full-size), etc.

Group: Stove, fuel, tent, water filter, cookpot

Food: Varies per person

**Identifying key risks:**

Black bear habitat (food storage – no bear lockers on this route)

Stream crossing safety (Evolution Creek – water crossing shoes are a plus)

Altitude and elevation gain

Weather

Fitness

Personal responsibility

## **Graveyard Lakes – Silver Divide Loop**

**Distance:** 26 miles  
**Permit:** 12  
**Trailhead:** Edison Lake, 3 hours east of Fresno  
**Difficulty:** Rated 3.5, moderate

### **Features:**

The Silver Divide is a magnificent backdrop for a High Sierra backpack trip. This loop begins at Edison Lake, the highest in a chain of reservoirs east of Fresno, and takes you over two passes with outstanding views – Goodale Pass (10,960') and Silver Pass (10,900). Follow a portion of the John Muir Trail and enjoy beautiful creeks and lakes. Take time to day hike through the Graveyard Lakes Basin (excellent opportunity to polish your cross-country/use-trail navigation skills), and another day hike to Mott Lake later in the trip is worthwhile.

### **Trailhead:**

Edison Lake is about 3 hours east of Fresno. Take Hwy 168 east to Huntington Lake, then turn onto Kaiser Pass Road for a 1 – 2 hour pokey drive on a gravel, one-lane road. Travel with your headlights on and one hand on the horn; inevitably, you will meet a Suburban towing a bass boat coming the other way, and unfortunately, not everyone is skilled at sharing the road or understands rights of way.

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

Day 1: Drive to Edison Lake. Along the way, stop in Prather to pick up your permit at the Pineridge Ranger Station. The local Vons makes outstanding sandwiches if you want to 'take away' your dinner. Spend the night camping at Vermillion 'Resort' at Edison, or utilize the trailhead camping.

Day 2: 7.8 to Graveyard Lakes

Day 3: Day hike the Graveyard Lakes Basin. If you have a strong group with good x-country navigating skills, consider hiking up to Silver Fox Pass, the divide between Graveyard Lakes basin and Peter Pande Lakes.

- Day 4: 4.5 miles to Lake of the Lone Indian – good campsites on west of lake, north at the outlet, and one lovely, above-the-lake-with-amazing-view site on the bluff just west of the lake along the trail.
- Day 5: 2.5 to Wilbur May Lake
- Day 6: 7.3 to top notch Silver Creek campsites above Pocket Meadow (1 mile north of the creek crossing, before the switchbacks that descend to Pocket.)
- Day 7: Day hike to Mott Lake (8 miles round trip)
- Day 8: 5 miles to Edison Lake ferry landing (taking the morning/afternoon ferry across the lake eliminates another 5 – 6 miles of hiking along the north side of the lake to your car at the trailhead.

**For More Information:**

High Sierra Ranger District in Prather: 559-855-5360/5355  
29688 Auberry Rd., Prather, CA 93651

[http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/sierra/passes-permits/?cid=fsbdev7\\_018115](http://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/sierra/passes-permits/?cid=fsbdev7_018115)

Use this site to obtain a wilderness permit.

Vermillion Valley Resort <http://www.edisonlake.com/>

Vermillion Resort is right on Edison Lake, and is an outstanding resource for all backpackers, including JMT and PCT thru-hikers. In addition to lodging, there's a restaurant, store, showers and ferry service. Vermillion Valley Resort caters to backpackers, hikers and anglers, so you can count on their little store to be quite well-supplied and their restaurant packed.

Ferry Service – Vermillion Valley Resort

The ferry runs from June to October and runs twice a day. It leaves Vermillion Valley Resort at 9 a.m. and 4 p.m.; it leaves the Mono Creek landing at 9:45 a.m. and 4:45 a.m. The fare is \$10/one way. They will make custom runs for \$75 minimum.

Mono Hot Springs [www.monohotsprings.com](http://www.monohotsprings.com)

The hot springs are an excellent resource for lodging or baths/showers after your trip. They are located about ½ an hour from Edison (toward Fresno). There's also a store and restaurant, plus all the spa amenities.

High Sierra Pack Station [www.highsierrapackstations.com](http://www.highsierrapackstations.com)

Another option to consider is using a pack station to take your gear into Graveyard Lakes and having your group meet them there.

**Topo Maps:**

7.5 minute Graveyard Peak

**Identifying Key Risks:**

Kaiser Pass Road – this one-lane road is slow going. Be safe!

Black bear country (food storage)

Altitude & elevation gain

Weather

Lingering snow on passes

Stream crossings – Silver Pass Creek can be treacherous in early season

## **Little Lakes Valley (6.6 miles round trip)**

**Distance:** 6.6 miles  
**Permit Limit:** 15  
**Trailhead:** Mosquito Flat (out of Bishop, CA)  
**Difficulty:** Easy, rated 2

### **Features:**

This is an extremely easy 2-3 day trip. The scenery is nothing short of stunning. Magnificent lakes, majestic spires — you'll be singing like Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* within minutes of leaving the trailhead. This trip is on the east side of the Sierras, outside of Bishop, CA.

### **Trailhead:**

Mosquito Flat Trailhead is near Bishop (where you'll pick up your permit.) From Hwy. 395 at Tom's Place, (just north of Bishop) go south up Rock Creek Rd. and drive 13 miles to the end. Bear lockers and backpacker campsites are available at the trailhead (you can only camp one night at the trailhead, and it is free.) Water is available from Rock Creek. Tip: post-trip showers and burgers are available at Tom's Place.

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

This is an out & back trip. It's 3.3 easy miles all the way to Gem Lakes, and there are a series of lakes strung through the valley where you can stop to swim, eat lunch, fish or camp. The area is understandably popular with dayhikers, fishing enthusiasts, rock climbers *en route* to the many peaks in the area, and other backpackers, so don't expect a lot of privacy. But you'll be rewarded by the simplicity of an easy trip, and the absolute beauty of a High Sierra glacial valley.

### **Side Trips and Options:**

Little Lakes Valley makes an excellent high altitude acclimation dayhike for other trips. Setting up a series of one-day hikes between here and Mammoth Lakes is practical & rewarding.

Ruby Lake is a beautiful, but more strenuous, hike from the same trailhead. You could extend your trip with a dayhike up to beautiful Ruby Lake. Heading south along the Little Lakes trail, turn right (west) at .5 miles and start climbing toward Mono Pass. 1.5 miles and 1000 feet of elevation gain will take you a trail junction for Ruby Lake. Follow this lateral trail a quarter mile to your destination.

### **Information, Permits and Resources:**

Inyo National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/)): 351 Pacu Ln. #200, Bishop, CA 93514

Wilderness information ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index))  
*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White: will provide you with excellent trail details.

[www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) – online permit system

**Topo Maps:** Mt. Abbot and Mt. Morgan 7.5 minute maps

**Key risks and concerns:**

Bears are active here (canisters are required.)

High altitude trailhead (10,300 feet): you'll want to spend the night at the backpackers' campground right at the trailhead to acclimate.

Early season: be aware of lingering snow (this is the highest trailhead in the Sierras)

Swift water during snow melt season. Check with the ranger station for more information on current conditions.

## Minaret Lake

**Distance:** 16 miles

**Permit Limit:** 8 people

**Trailhead:** Devil's Postpile National Monument, Mammoth, CA

**Difficulty:** Moderate (3.2 rating)

### **Preview:**

The granite pinnacles of the Minarets, outside of Mammoth, CA, are a majestic backdrop for some of the most spectacular hiking in the southern Sierras. Situated in the Ritter Range, which separates the Ansel Adams Wilderness from Yosemite, the granite spires of the Minarets and the distinctive peaks of Mt. Ritter and Mt. Banner will take your breath away.

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

Minaret Lake makes an excellent destination for a 4-day trip, or extend the days to take in more of the surrounding area. You'll begin your trip in Devil's Postpile (a worthwhile diversion before you set off in earnest.) You'll start out following a segment of the famous John Muir Trail, then diverging off to the Minaret Trail after crossing Minaret Creek. There are excellent campsites a mile or two upstream, which is a great way to break up the mileage (and elevation gain) on your first day out. You can comfortably drive, take the shuttle to the trailhead and hike up to the creek the same day.

### **Side Trips and Options:**

For those ready to try some cross-country (no trails) hiking, take a side trip from Minaret Lake up to Cecile Lake. Route finding and bouldering skills are necessary, but the route is fairly straightforward. Unmaintained use trails and ducked routes can be found to help guide you, but there's no substitute for your own navigational skill and judgment.

Extend your trip by hiking north on the John Muir Trail visit any number of magnificent lakes in the Minaret/Banner-Ritter Range: Shadow Lake, 1000 Island Lake, Garnet Lake, Ediza Lake. It's only 35 miles to Yosemite's Tuolumne Meadows!

### **Trailhead Information:**

The trailhead is in Devils' Postpile National Monument, at the Devil's Postpile Ranger Station. Drive to the Mammoth Mountain Ski Resort. Here you'll need to either buy a ticket and take the tram (mandatory from 7 a.m. - 7 p.m.) down to the Devil's Postpile, or arrive outside the tram hours and drive the 1-lane road down to the overnight parking lot near the D.P. Ranger Station. After your trip, the Old Mammoth Inn (at the ski resort) offers a shower room, towels and soap.

**Information, Permits and Resources:**

Inyo National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/)): 351 Pacu Ln. #200, Bishop, CA 93514

Wilderness information ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index))

Mammoth Lakes Visitor Center: 2500 N. Main St., Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546 (760) 924-5531

[www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov) – wilderness permits online

*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White: will provide you with excellent trail details.

**Topo Maps:**

7.5 minute Mammoth Mtn. and Mt. Ritter topos

Tom Harrison's Mammoth High Country Trail Map

**Identifying Key Risks:**

Bears are active here (canisters are required.)

Early season: be aware of lingering snow and swift water during snow melt season. Check with the ranger station (below) for more information on current conditions.

Lightning: July is monsoon season, but afternoon thunder showers can occur all summer. Minaret Lake is right at treeline: 9822 feet in elevation — so be aware of your exposure and take cover accordingly.



## **Mt. Whitney – Horseshoe Meadows to Kearsarge**

<b>Distance:</b>	60 miles (+12 mile day hike up Mt. Whitney mid-trip)
<b>Trailhead:</b>	Horseshoe Meadows, out of Lone Pine
<b>Finish:</b>	Onion Valley, out of Independence
<b>Permit limit:</b>	15 people
<b>Difficulty:</b>	Strenuous, rated 4.5

### **Preview:**

Hiking up Mt. Whitney – the highest peak in the contiguous United States – is one of those iconic dreams that really isn't out of reach for the well-conditioned backpacker. Approaching from Horseshoe Meadows (New Army Pass) offers a number of bonuses not available to those heading up Mt. Whitney from the Portal. This trip allows you to adequately acclimate before climbing to 14,494 feet to reach the top of Whitney, the scenery is top-notch every step of the way, and it's easy to avoid the crowds that plague the Whitney Trail hiker heading in from Whitney Portal.

Finishing your trip right there at Whitney Portal is difficult for large groups because of the exit quota Inyo National Forest has exerted over Whitney Crest. Only 35 backpackers a day are allowed to exit east from Mt. Whitney, which means large groups will most likely have to make this an out-and-back or shuttle trip.

The recommended itinerary – from Horseshoe Meadows to Kearsarge – is a classic trip in and of itself, following the John Muir Trail/Pacific Crest Trail most of the way north, and crossing over Forester Pass – at 13,153 feet one of the highest in the Sierras. This is a rugged trip, requiring excellent stream crossing skills and good endurance. Scheduling 10 days, and a mule re-supply mid-trip, allows the backpacker to really enjoy the magnificent scenery and still have time in camp to relax, do laundry and occasionally take a bath or wash hair.

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

- Day 1: Travel day. Drive to Lone Pine; pick up permit at InterAgency 1 mile south of town. Buy lunch & take-away dinner. Drop spare car keys off with shuttle driver for valet parking service. Drive to Horseshoe Meadows and camp at trailhead walk-in campsites. Deliver re-supply packages to Cottonwood Pack Station at Horseshoe Meadows.
- Day 2: 6.2 miles to Long Lake. Excellent camping on the northwest side of lake.
- Day 3: 4.6 miles to Soldier Lake. Consider camping downstream along creek if lake camping is too busy.
- Day 4: 6 miles to Guyot Creek Crossing. Lots of campsites.
- Day 5: 9 miles to Guitar Lake (11,500')
- Day 6: Day hike up Mt. Whitney (12-miles round trip). Return to Guitar Lake for the night.

- Day 7: Early start – return 2.5 miles to Crabtree Meadows and meet pack station re-supply. Continue 5.3 miles to Wright Creek Crossing. Excellent camping both sides of creek.
- Day 8: 7.6 miles to barren lakes south of Forester Pass.
- Day 9: 8.8 miles over Forester Pass (13,153') to Vidette Meadow along Bubbs Creek.
- Day 10: 7.9 miles over Kearsarge Pass (11,800') to Onion Valley Trailhead.

**Support Information:**

Mt. Whitney Shuttle Service: Robert Ennis (insured)  
(760-876-1915) Permit #: 22306 - P

Will transport your group to trailheads, or provide a less-expensive valet service: moving your cars mid-week after you've passed the half-way point on your trip.

Cottonwood Pack Station (located at trailhead, Horseshoe Meadows) (760) 878-2015

**Important Phone #s:**

InterAgency Visitor Center: (760-876-6200)	Pick up permit here in Lone Pine
Mt. Whitney Ranger Stn: (760-876-6200)	
S. Inyo Hospital (Lone Pine): (760) 876-5501	
Lone Pine Sheriff: (760) 876-5606	Number to leave w/ in-town contact

**For More Information:**

Inyo National Forest: [www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild)

[www.recreation.gov](http://www.recreation.gov)

Online wilderness permit reservations, or call 877-444-6777

[www.whitneyportalstore.com](http://www.whitneyportalstore.com)

Great link to message board: hostel (showers), weather, snow pack, etc.

*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White

**Topo Maps:**

Tom Harrison's Mt. Whitney High Country trail map will cover *almost* all of the trip, missing your trailhead and the last day's hike over Kearsarge pass.

Trimble Outdoors: make your own custom maps for this route at Backpacker

Magazine's Destination page: <http://bp2.trimbleoutdoors.com/ViewTrip/1085042>

### **Estimated Costs:**

Permit: \$15/person  
Lodging: \$6 for one campsite at Cottonwood Lakes trailhead in Horseshoe Meadows  
Shuttle: \$220+ (divided among number of participants)  
Re-Supply: \$1000+ (divided among number of participants)  
Trail maps: \$9 for Tom Harrison Whitney Map  
\$14.95/custom map

### Travel Incidentals:

Food: Approx. 6 meals on the road  
Souvenirs: t-shirt, patches, etc.  
Gas Money: reasonable donation to the driver

### Gear:

Personal: Backpack, Sleeping Bag, Bear canister  
Group: Stove, fuel, tent, water filter, cookpot

Food: Varies per person

### **Identifying Key Risks**

Black bears, food storage  
High altitude & big elevation gains/losses  
Exposure to extreme weather  
Long mileage  
Stream crossings  
Lingering snow on high passes

### **Note about WAG bags:**

Mt. Whitney visitors (from Guitar Lake to Whitney Portal) must pack out their solid human waste. Wag bags can be picked up at the Crabtree Meadows trail junction *en route*.

## Noble Canyon

Distance: 10.5 miles (shuttle trip)  
Permit: unlimited; 8 recommended  
Trailhead: Penny Pines on Sunrise Hwy., mile 27  
Difficulty: Easy, rated 1.6

### **Features:**

This fairly easy, mostly downhill hike makes a great overnight, or an equally pleasant day hike. A shuttle is required to enjoy the one-way aspect of this trip. November to June are the best months to go, with May & June providing excellent wildflower displays.

### **Trailheads:**

Pine Valley (lower) TH: Exit Interstate 8 and turn left. Turn left on Old Hwy 80. Travel 1.2 miles to Pine Creek Rd. (just after old bridge.) Turn sharp right and travel 1.6 to Noble Cyn. trailhead parking on the right. Bathrooms and running water are available.

Penny Pines (upper) TH: Return to Old Hwy 80 and turn left. Drive east all the way to Sunrise Hwy and turn left — north. Drive to about the mile 27 marker. The Trailhead is right after the cattle guard. It's big, with parking on both sides of the highway, and info signs about the Penny Pines project. Park here, and put up your Adventure Pass. Water *might* be available.

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

Day 1: Leave one car at Pine Valley Trailhead. Shuttle to Penny Pine. Hike 5 miles to creek crossing campsite and spend the night.  
Day 2: Hike 5.5 to your car in Pine Valley. Stop for a celebratory hot fudge sundae at the Tasty Burger in Pine Valley.

### **Information, Permits and Resources:**

Descanso Ranger District: (619) 445-6235  
Call ranger station for permit information and backcountry camping regulations.  
Adventure Pass: required for parking at trailheads in the Cleveland NF. Can be purchased (\$5/day, \$35/year) at local outdoor stores – Big 5, A-16, REI – the Descanso Ranger Stn (if they're open), the Mt. Laguna store, and sometimes, Alpine gas stations.

**Topo Maps:**

[www.mountainbikebill.com/noblecanyon](http://www.mountainbikebill.com/noblecanyon)

**Key risks and concerns:**

Heat exposure is a concern in the summer months.

Keep an eye out for rattlesnakes and, if you're amazing lucky, mountain lions. Gnats can be pesty near the creek in early summer.

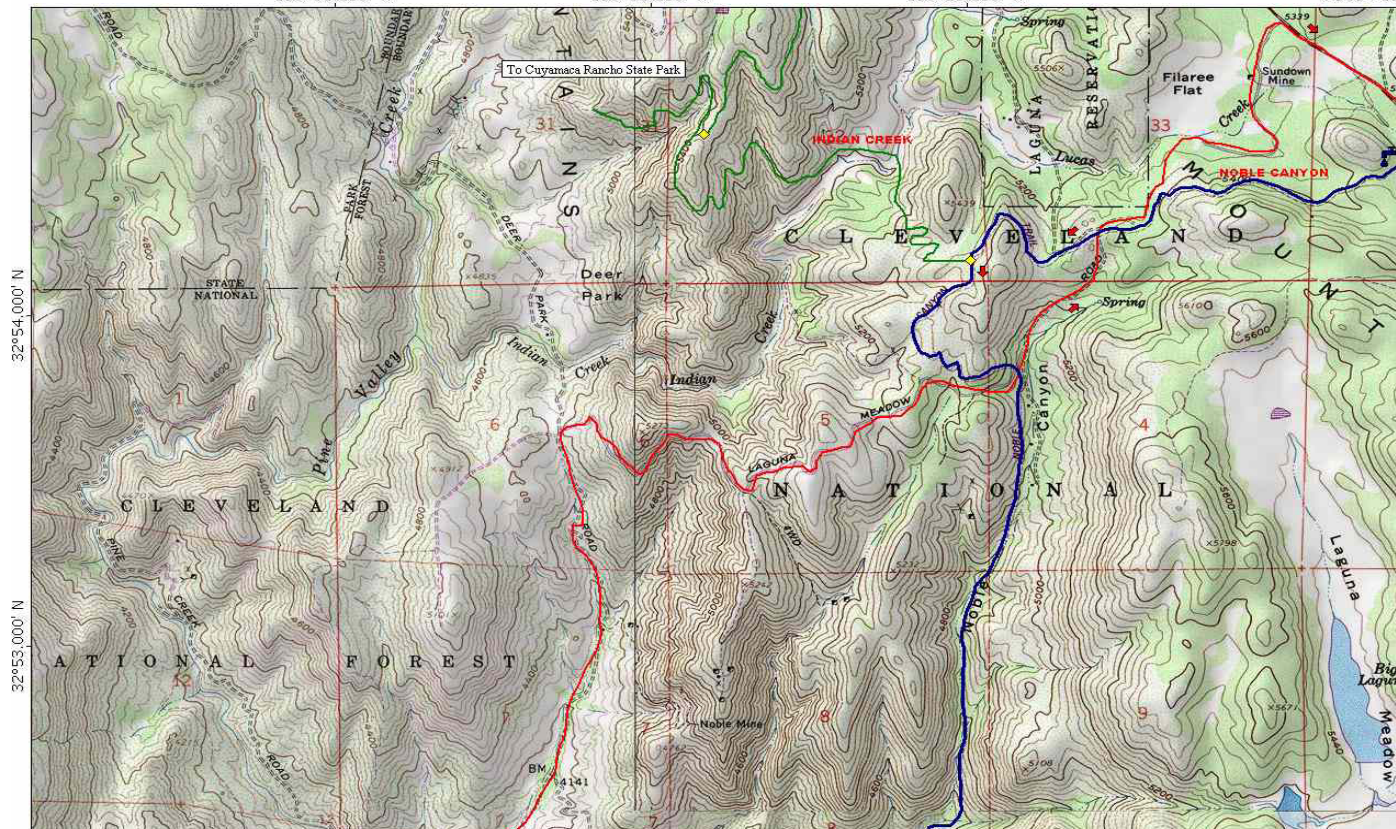
Poison oak flourishes along the creek.

The creek flowing from Laguna meadow runs year round, and the water must be filtered (about mile 5).

Camping is limited in the canyon. A few established sites are clustered at the creek crossing, and a site or two can be legitimately nudged between the creek and the canyon walls about  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles downstream from the crossing. Another large camping area can be found 2 – 3 miles from the end of the hike, though water in the creek will be uncertain.

Lake Hodges and Bernardo Mountain (32°51.963' N, 116°29.633' W WGS84) www.mountainbikebill.com  
116°31.000' W 116°30.000' W 116°29.000' W

WGS84 11



## **Rae Lakes, Kings Canyon National Park**

**Distance:** 46 miles  
**Trailhead:** Cedar Grove Road's End (Elevation 5039')  
**Permit Limit:** 15 people  
**Difficulty:** Moderate (rated 3.8)

### **Preview:**

The Rae Lakes loop in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park is a world-class backpacking trip that attracts hundreds of backpackers every year. Fortunately, an excellent quota system and layover camping limits help preserve the solitude in this amazingly beautiful area. This is a moderate trip appropriate for those ready to hike 6 - 8 miles a day.

This 6-night trip loops clockwise through aptly named Paradise Valley, up along Woods Creek to join the John Muir and Pacific Crest Trails. Cross Woods Creek on a very cool suspension bridge, then climb south to Rae Lakes where you can lay over for 2 nights. Use the layover day to day hike a couple miles west to Sixty Lakes Basin — a stunning and relatively secluded valley of turquoise lakes and tarns. Leaving the Rae Lakes basin, hike south over Glen Pass (11,978 feet) and down to Charlotte Lake, then to Junction Meadow. Leave the JMT/PCT at Bubbs Creek and descend back to Cedar Grove for showers and pizza!

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

Day 1: Drive to Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon (Roads End), pick up permit and camp in the valley.  
Day 2: Middle Paradise Valley (7.2 miles); bear lockers available  
Day 3: Woods Creek Crossing x JMT (7.2 miles); bear lockers available  
Day 4: Middle Rae Lake (6.5 miles); bear lockers available; backcountry ranger station  
Day 5: Day hike to Sixty Lakes Basin (camping restricted to groups of 8 or less)  
Day 6: Over Glen Pass to Charlotte Lake (4 miles), Bubbs Creek (5.5 mi.) or Junction Meadow (7.8 mi.) Bear lockers available at all sites.  
Day 7: Either hike out, or camp at Sphinx Creek Crossing (8.6 from Bubb's Creek)

### **Important Phone Numbers:**

SEKI Wilderness Office: 559-565-3766  
24-Hour dispatch (emergency): 559-565-3195  
Closest hospital/medical care: Visalia or Fresno hospitals

### **For More Information:**

[www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/rae-lakes-loop](http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/rae-lakes-loop)  
[www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/trailcond.htm](http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/trailcond.htm)  
[www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/wilderness.htm](http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/wilderness.htm) (permit information)  
*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White

**Topo Maps:**

7.5 minute The Sphinx, Mt. Clarence King  
Tom Harrison's Trail Map: Kings Canyon High Country

**Estimated Costs:**

Permit: \$15/permit  
Lodging: \$35/ group campsite at Cedar Grove trailhead  
Trail maps: \$9 for Tom Harrison Sequoia & Kings Canyon  
Travel Incidentals:  
Food: Approx. 5 meals on the road  
Souvenirs: t-shirt, patches, etc.  
Gas Money: reasonable donation to the drivers  
Gear:  
Personal: Backpack, Sleeping Bag, Bear canister, etc.  
Group: Stove, fuel, tent, water filter, cookpot  
Food: Varies per person  
Insurance

**Key Risks:**

Black bears (food storage)  
Stream crossing (all major fords are bridged: S. Fork Kings & Woods Creek)  
Altitude and elevation gain  
Weather  
Conditioning  
Personal responsibility



## **San Gorgonio – South Fork Trail**

**Distance:** 25 miles (13 backpacking, 12 day hike to peak)  
**Elevation Gain:** 4,700 feet  
**Permit:** 12  
**Trailhead:** South Fork Trail  
**Difficulty:** Moderate – Strenuous (rated 4)

### **Features:**

This is a moderate to strenuous, high-altitude trip that takes you to the highest peak in Southern California – San Gorgonio Peak, 11,400 feet – for great views and a tremendous sense of accomplishment. Several trails will take you to designated camping spots and ultimately up to the peak, but the South Fork Trail provides easy grades, ample water, and a beautifully scenic and manageable approach to the peak.

### **Recommended Itinerary:**

Day 1: Drive to South Fork Trailhead on Jenks Lake Rd, stopping by Mill Creek Ranger Station in Mentone to check in and ask questions. Backpack 6.5 miles to Dry Lake (aka Lodgepole Spring) and make base camp.  
Day 2: 9 mile day hike to Dollar Lake  
Day 3: 12 mile roundtrip day hike to top of San Gorgonio Peak  
Day 4: Retrace your steps Lodgepole Spring Camp to the trailhead (6.5 miles)

### **Important Phone #s:**

Backcountry EM: 911  
Mill Creek Ranger Stn: (909) 382-2881  
Loma Linda Medical Center (909) 558-8000 11234 Anderson St, Loma Linda CA  
# Emergency for in-town contact 911 or M.C Ranger Stn./ Sheriff

### **For More Information:**

San Gorgonio Wilderness Association: [www.sgwa.org](http://www.sgwa.org)  
Use this SGWA website for all your planning needs: permit application, Trailhead directions, overnight camps, distances, elevations, trail conditions, water availability, etc.

San Bernardino National Forest [www.fs.fed.us/r5/sanbernardino](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sanbernardino)  
“San Bernardino Mountain Trails” by John W. Robinson (100 Hikes series)  
Note: Adventure Pass needed to park at trailhead

**Topo Maps:**

Tom Harrison Map: San Gorgonio Wilderness Trail Map  
7.5 minute topos: Moonridge and San Gorgonio

**Identifying Key Risks:**

High altitude

The need for excellent pre-conditioning

Bear canisters are recommended, but not required, on the South Fork Trail.

## **San Jacinto Wilderness State Park** (via Palm Springs Aerial Tramway)

**Distance:** 5 miles - Easy  
**Permit:** 15/permit  
**Trailhead:** Palm Springs Aerial Tram  
**Difficulty:** Easy, Rated 2

### **Features:**

San Jacinto Wilderness State Park provides one of the prettiest, most accessible high-altitude backpack trips in Southern California. Access from the Palm Springs tramway means that this is also an easy trip — just 2.5 miles to Round Valley Campground (9000'), where a base camp gives you easy access to San Jacinto Peak (10,800') for a dayhike.

### **Basic Trip Information:**

San Jacinto can be backpacked easily in a weekend, though three days feels more like a vacation. The hike to Round Valley Camp is 2.5 miles; Tamarack Camp is another half-mile north on a spur trail, and worth the extra 15 minutes of hiking for the solitude, wildlife and views it offers. Check water availability with the ranger prior to your arrival. The spring in Round Valley often runs year round, and the creek in Tamarack is seasonal. Water from either source must be filtered.

San Jacinto Peak is 3.5 miles from Round Valley (one way,) with an elevation gain of 1,720 feet. No water is available *en route*. The trip to the peak makes an excellent day hike, whether you just return to camp, or continue on out to the tram afterwards.

### **Side Trips and Options:**

For spectacular views, hike back to the tram via the Hidden Lake/Willow Creek trail.

Jean Peak is directly south of San Jacinto Peak, and if you've hiked San Jac too many times and are experienced enough for a cross-country adventure, this is an excellent destination.

### **Trailhead Directions:**

The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway is located off Hwy. 111 in Palm Springs, about 2 1/2 hours from San Diego. Be sure to park in one of the overnight parking lots located *after* you pass by the tram building and start downhill. First tram up is 8 a.m. on weekends and holidays, 10 a.m. otherwise, and group rates and AAA discounts are available. Your trailhead is in Long Valley at the top of the tram.

**Information, Permits and Resources:**

Long Valley Ranger Stn. (760) 327-0222 (no human, just a recording of current trail & weather conditions.)

Idyllwild Ranger Stn.: (951) 659-2607

Palm Springs Tram ([www.pstramway.com](http://www.pstramway.com)) In addition to tram information, use this site to download a **wilderness permit** (\$5/person), which can be reserved up to 8 weeks in advance of a trip (highly advised for holiday and summer weekends.)

**Topo Maps:**

San Jacinto Wilderness Trail Map by Tom Harrison

**Key risks and concerns:**

The elevation at the top of the tram is 8,516 feet, so altitude and acclimation are the primary concerns. Exposure to weather, especially above treeline, is notable on trips up to the peak. Exposure to falls on the peak is very minimal, though significantly more dangerous if there's snow and ice, which can linger into late May.

## Skyline to the Sea Trail

### Big Basin Redwoods State Park

**Distance:** 32 miles  
**Permit:** 6 people/permit  
**Trailhead:** Castle Rock State Park & Waddell Beach  
**Difficulty:** Moderate, rated 3

#### **Features**

This Central California coastal backpack trip begins at Castle Rock State Park and travels about 32 miles to Waddell Beach in Big Basin Redwoods State Park. The trail has six trail camps located at uneven intervals along the route. Two other trail camps are located on scenic side trails. You'll hike among enormous coastal redwoods, fern and beautiful Pacific madrones, pass beautiful waterfalls, carefully step over banana slugs, occasionally emerge from the woods to encounter magnificent vistas, and – on your last day – hike out to the rugged Pacific Ocean.

#### **Trailheads**

**Castle Rock State Park:** Drive to Saratoga Gap at the intersection of Hwy. 9 and Skyline Drive (Hwy. 35). Go south on Skyline Drive for 2.6 miles, then turn left into trailhead parking.

**Waddell Beach/ Rancho del Oso Ranger Station:** Hwy 1 north of Santa Cruz to Waddell Beach. Ranger Station is on right, 0.2 miles from Hwy. 1.

#### **Recommended Itinerary**

Day 1: Drive day; leave shuttle cars at Waddell Beach. Backpack Castle Rock Trailhead to Castle Rock camp, 2.8 miles (potable water)  
Day 2: Hike to Waterman Gap Camp, 6.7 (potable water)  
Day 3: Hike to Jay Camp in Big Basin Headquarters, 9.8 (potable water, showers, store)  
Day 4: Hike to Sunset Camp, 5.3 (no potable water. Creek available 1/4 mile away, must filter. Check availability w/ ranger.)  
Day 5: Hike to Waddell Beach, 7.8, go have lunch in downtown Santa Cruz  
Day 6: Drive home

## **Information, Permits and Resources**

Big Basin Redwood State Park, backpacking info:

[www.bigbasin.org/backpacking](http://www.bigbasin.org/backpacking)

Reservations: (831) 338-8861

Office open daily from 9 a.m. – 5 p.m., but you can only make reservations M – F. Reservations can be made for each trail camp exactly 2 months in advance of trip. Reservation fee: \$8

Note: Reservation fee (\$8/permit) is mailed within 7 days to Big Basin State Park, 21600 Big Basin Way, Boulder Creek, CA 95006 Attn: Trail Camp. On check, write “backpacking” in memo. Include Trip Itinerary with check. Check payable to: California State Park. Camping fee (trail campsites, including Castle Rock) is deposited in iron ranger at Castle Rock trailhead.

Camp permit:

Permit limit: 6 people (2 permits can be issued to one person)

Fee: \$15/night

Castle Rock Campground: This is a first-come, first serve walk-in camp 2 miles from the parking lot. Pay on site in the iron ranger at the trailhead.

Parking: Castle Rock and Rancho del Oso Ranger Station (in Waddell Beach) are \$10/ day; 1 car per permit is free.

Group Reservations:

Craig Holden, Event coordinator (for groups like GS)

831-335-3455

Group Backpacking Fees are \$60/night, and \$50 reservation fee. There is a \$100 refundable security deposit.

This is a handy contact to make reservations for a large group. Trips must be Monday - Thursday only, and reservations can be made 1 year in advance. The fee reserves the entire camp (6 sites for 6 people each) for your group. Great opportunity for large scouting trips, being mindful that hiking groups should still be small and also well-supervised with 2 adults.

**Maps:**

Contact the Mountain Parks Foundation for their Sempervirens Fund Trail Maps  
(2 map set): 831-335-3174

**Key Risks and Concerns**

Flora & fauna: poison oak and raccoons (hang your food!)

Shuttle trip: this is a one-way hike that requires a car at each trailhead. Plan extra time on your first day to leave one vehicle at Waddell Beach before you return to the trailhead at Castle Rock (1hour drive).

## Upper Twin Lakes

**Distance:** Upper Twin Lakes (6.6 Round Trip) / George Lake (9.6 Round Trip)  
**Permit:** 15  
**Trailhead:** Huntington Lake (Fresno, CA)  
**Difficulty:** Easy (rated 2.4)

### **Features:**

Another easy Western Sierra trip out of Fresno, this out-and-back trip in the Kaiser Wilderness is perfect for beginners and young children. The views from Potter Pass are excellent, and take in the far-off Minarets near Mammoth. Upper Twin Lakes has excellent camping, and George Lake — a little more private and remote — also has excellent campsites.

### **Trailhead:**

From the Clovis/Fresno area, take highway 168 east to Huntington Lake, about an hour's drive. Just before you reach the little town of Lakeshore (restaurant, groceries, ice cream, gas) turn right on Kaiser Pass Road. Drive 2.7 miles to a junction with a dirt road on the left; turn left and drive .2 miles to the Potter Pass Trailhead. Alternatively, there is another Potter Pass Trailhead a little farther up Kaiser Pass Road. The first trailhead provides a slightly more scenic option with an easy creek crossing (water source). Primitive camping is available at the trailhead.

### **Basic Trip Information:**

This beautifully forested 3 - 4 day trip affords easy hiking with great views from the pass. Don't bother to stop at Lower Twin Lake (pond?), but keep on going to the beautiful Upper Twin Lake for great fishing and swimming. This lake is a great destination, or you can continue to George Lake, which presents more solitude.

### **Side Trips and Options:**

A day hike up to the top of Kaiser Peak is well worth the climb. The route is cross-country (no trails) but straightforward. Following the inlet creek to George Lake will take you to College Lake and Jewel Lake, a good place to practice some easy off-trail navigation.

### **Information, Permits and Resources:**

Pineridge Ranger District: PO Box 559, Prather, Ca 93651  
(559-855-5360)

Sierra National Forest: 1600 Tollhouse Rd., Clovis, CA 93611  
(559-297-0706)      [www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra/)

*100 Hikes in California's Central Sierra & Coast Range* by Vicky Spring  
*Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White



**Topo Map:**

7.5 minute Kaiser Peak topo

**Identifying Key Risks:**

Bears are possibly present, but currently bear canisters are not required. Cows are infinitely more active, as you are in a National Forest (Land of Many Uses) and grazing is permissible. At least cows don't want your food, but they can be noisy!

## Sierras Backpacking Trip Tips

**Little Lakes Valley (6.6 miles round trip) -- Very Easy (Sierras, East Side)**

### Features

This is an extremely easy 2-3 day trip. The scenery is nothing short of stunning. Magnificent lakes, majestic spires — you'll be singing like Julie Andrews in *The Sound of Music* within minutes of leaving the trailhead. This trip is on the east side of the Sierras, outside of Bishop, CA.

### Key risks and concerns

- Bears are active here. Canisters are required.
- High altitude trailhead (10,300 feet) – You'll want to spend the night at the backpackers' campground right at the trailhead to acclimate.
- During early season – Be aware of lingering snow (this is the highest trailhead in the Sierras) and swift water during snow melt season. Check with the ranger station (below) for more information on current conditions.

### Information, Permits and Resources

- Inyo National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/)), 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 200, Bishop, CA 93514; (760) 873-2400
- Wilderness area information ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index))
- Sierra South, by Kathy Morey and Mike White – Excellent trail details
- Maps – Mt. Abbot and Mt. Morgan topos

### Trailhead

Mosquito Flat Trailhead is near Bishop (where you'll pick up your permit). From Hwy. 395 at Tom's Place (just north of Bishop), go south on Rock Creek Rd. and drive 13 miles to the end. Bear lockers and backpacker campsites are available at the trailhead. You may camp at the trailhead for one night only; it is free. Water is available from Rock Creek. Tip: post-trip showers and burgers are available at Tom's Place.

### Basic Trip Information

This is an out and back trip. It's 3.3 easy miles all the way to Gem Lakes, and there are a series of lakes strung through the valley where you can stop to swim, eat lunch, fish or camp. The area is understandably popular with day hikers, fishing enthusiasts, rock climbers en route to the many peaks in the area and other backpackers, so don't expect a lot of privacy. You'll be rewarded by the simplicity of an easy trip, and the absolute beauty of a High Sierra glacial valley.

### Side Trips and Options

Little Lakes Valley is an excellent high altitude acclimation day hike to take when preparing for higher altitude trips. Setting up a series of one-day hikes between here and Mammoth Lakes is practical and rewarding.

Ruby Lake is a beautiful, but more strenuous, hike from the same trailhead. You could extend your trip with a day hike to Ruby Lake. Heading south along the Little Lakes trail, turn right (west) at .5 miles and start climbing toward Mono Pass. 1.5 miles and 1000 feet of elevation gain will take you to a trail junction for Ruby Lake. Follow this lateral trail a quarter mile to your destination.

## **Cottonwood Lakes (11 miles round trip) -- Moderate (Sierras, East Side)**

### **Features**

This is an excellent beginning backpack trip into the Golden Trout Wilderness just south of Mt. Whitney in the Eastern Sierra. The Cottonwood Lakes Basin features six lakes famous for their fishing (golden trout), and nearby Muir Lake is an absolute gem.

### **Key Risks and Concerns**

Bears are active. Canisters required.

High altitude trailhead (10,000 feet). You may want to spend one night at the trailhead to acclimate.

### **Information, Permits and Resources**

- Inyo National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/)), 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 200, Bishop, CA 93514; (760) 873-2400
- Wilderness area information ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index) )
- *Sierra South*, by Kathy Morey and Mike White – Excellent trail details
- Maps: Cirque Peak and Mt. Langley topos
- Showers: \$5/person at the new hostel in Lone Pine, corner of Hwy. 395 & Whitney Portal

### **Trailhead**

The closest town (and ranger station for picking up your permit) is Lone Pine, CA, on Hwy. 395. From the only traffic light in Lone Pine, turn west and drive 3.5 miles along Whitney Portal Rd. to the intersection with Horseshoe Meadows Rd. Turn left, and continue 20 more miles. Turn right at the signed turnoff for Cottonwood Lakes, and drive .5 miles to trailhead parking. One-overnight campground, toilets and water are available.

### **Basic Trip Information**

This out-and-back route makes a great 3- or 4-day trip with amazing high country vistas of Mt. Langley and Cirque Peak. The Cottonwood Lakes Basin is comprised of six numbered lakes. Muir, Long and South Fork Lakes are nearby. All are worthwhile destinations for fishing, views, swimming, camping and relaxing.

### **Side Trips and Options**

Make a base camp at Muir Lake or one of the Cottonwood Lakes and spend several days exploring the basin, South Fork Lakes, New Army Pass, Old Army Pass and Cirque Peak. Special fishing restrictions and permits apply in this area.

Cottonwood Pack Station (760-878-2015) is located at the trailhead for those interested in a re-supply or complete pack in.

## **Minaret Lake (16 miles round trip) -- Moderate (Sierras, East Side)**

### **Features**

The granite pinnacles of the Minarets, outside of Mammoth, CA, are a majestic backdrop for some of the most spectacular hiking in the southern Sierras. Situated in the Ritter Range, which separates the Ansel Adams Wilderness from Yosemite, the granite spires of the Minarets and the distinctive peaks of Mt. Ritter and Mt. Banner will take your breath away.

### **Key Risks and Concerns**

- Bears are active here. Canisters are required.
- Early season: Be aware of lingering snow and swift water during snow melt season. Check with the ranger station (below) for more information on current conditions.
- Lightning: Although July is monsoon season, afternoon thunder showers can occur all summer. Minaret Lake is right at tree line (9822 feet in elevation) — so be aware of your exposure and take cover accordingly.

### **Information, Permits and Resources**

- Inyo National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/)): 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 200, Bishop, CA 93514; (760) 873-2400
- Wilderness area information ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/index) )
- Mammoth Lakes Visitor Center: 2500 N. Main St., Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546; (760) 924-5531
- *Sierra South*, by Kathy Morey and Mike White – Excellent trail details
- Maps: Mammoth Mtn. and Mt. Ritter topos; Tom Harrison's Mammoth High Country Trail Map

### **Trailhead**

The trailhead is in Devils' Postpile National Monument, at the Devil's Postpile Ranger Station. Drive to the Mammoth Mountain Ski Resort, where you may buy a ticket for the mandatory tram down to Devil's Postpile. If you arrive outside the tram hours (7 a.m.-7 p.m.), you may drive down the one-lane road to the overnight parking lot near the D.P. Ranger Station. The Old Mammoth Inn at the ski resort offers a shower room, towels and soap for \$10.

### **Basic Trip Information**

Minaret Lake makes an excellent destination for a 4-day trip. You'll begin your trip in Devil's Postpile, a worthwhile diversion before you set off in earnest. You'll first follow a segment of the famous John Muir Trail, and then diverge off to the Minaret Trail after crossing Minaret Creek. There are excellent campsites a mile or two upstream, which is a great way to break up the mileage and elevation gain on your first day out. You can comfortably drive, take the tram to the trailhead and hike up to the creek on the same day.

**Side Trips and Options:**

For those ready to try some cross-country (no trails) day hiking, take a side trip from Minaret Lake to Cecile Lake. The route is fairly straightforward. Route finding and bouldering skills are necessary. While unmaintained use trails and ducked routes may help guide you, there's no substitute for your own navigational skill and judgment. Extend your trip by hiking north on the John Muir Trail. Visit any number of magnificent lakes in the Minaret/Banner-Ritter Range: Shadow Lake, 1000 Island Lake, Garnet Lake, Ediza Lake. It's only 35 miles to Yosemite's Tuolumne Meadows!

## **Dinkey Lakes (9 miles round trip) -- Easy (Sierras, West Side)**

### **Features**

This Western Sierra semi-loop trip west of Fresno is well worth driving the long dirt road to the trailhead. The gentle, forested terrain is perfect for beginning backpackers and younger children. The wildflowers are a treat, and six lovely lakes are easily reached on one long day hike or an easy 3-day backpack trip.

### **Key Risks and Concerns**

Water during dry years and late season (mid-August or later): Check with ranger station to see if Dinkey Creek still has water flowing. Ask for a recent "backcountry report" for the most current information.

### **Information, Permits and Resources**

- Pineridge Ranger District: PO Box 559, Prather, Ca 93651 (559-855-5360)
- Sierra National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra/)): 1600 Tollhouse Rd., Clovis, CA 93611; (559) 297-0706
- *100 Hikes in California's Central Sierra & Coast Range* by Vicky Spring: Excellent driving and hiking directions for the Dinkey Lakes loop.
- *Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White: Excellent supplemental information
- Maps: Courtright Reservoir, Dogtooth Peak topos

### **Trailhead**

From Fresno you'll be driving east toward Shaver Lake, then diverting to progressively smaller and rougher forested roads to reach the trailhead about 45 minutes from Shaver Lake. Contact the Pineridge Ranger Station or consult the 100 Hikes book for specific directions. Primitive camping (no bathrooms, campsites or piped-in water) is available at the trailhead. Your water source will be Dinkey Creek.

### **Basic Trip Information**

A series of beautiful lakes along easy creekside trails makes this trip a winner. You reach First Dinkey Lake after 3 miles. Second Dinkey Lake is just beyond, and makes an excellent base camp for excursions to Island Lake, Rock Lake and Dogtooth Peak. Return the same way, or make it a semi-loop by hiking about 4 miles past South, Swede and Mystery Lakes.

### **Side Trips and Options**

- Island Lake is rocky and wild. Snow often lingers on the flanks of Three Sisters peak (great for pictures and Tang snow cones!).
- Make an excursion to Dogtooth Peak for fabulous views. The base of the peak is bursting with quartz.
- Dinkey Lakes has a Wilderness designation. Dogs and horses are welcome.

## **Upper Twin Lakes (6.6 miles round trip) / George Lake (9.6 miles round trip)** Easy (Sierras, West Side)

### **Features**

Another easy Western Sierra trip out of Fresno, this out-and-back trip in the Kaiser Wilderness is perfect for beginners and young children. The views from Potter Pass are excellent, and take in the far-off Minarets near Mammoth. Upper Twin Lakes and the more private and remote George Lake have excellent campsites.

### **Key Risks and Concerns**

While bears may be present, bear canisters are not required. Cows are much more common, as you are in a National Forest (Land of Many Uses) and grazing is permissible. Cows can be noisy, but at least they don't want your food!

### **Information, Permits and Resources**

- Pineridge Ranger District: PO Box 559, Prather, Ca 93651 (559-855-5360)
- Sierra National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sierra)): 1600 Tollhouse Rd., Clovis, CA 93611; (559) 297-0706
- *100 Hikes in California's Central Sierra & Coast Range* by Vicky Spring
- *Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White
- Maps: Kaiser Peak topo

### **Trailhead**

From the Clovis/Fresno area, take highway 168 east to Huntington Lake (about an hour's drive). Just before you reach the little town of Lakeshore (restaurant, groceries, ice cream, gas available) turn right on Kaiser Pass Road. Drive 2.7 miles to a junction with a dirt road on the left; turn left and drive .2 miles to the Potter Pass Trailhead. Although there is another trailhead a little farther up Kaiser Pass Road, the first trailhead provides a slightly more scenic option with an easy creek crossing (water source). Primitive camping is available.

### **Basic Trip Information**

This beautifully forested 3-4 day trip features easy hiking with great views from the pass. Don't bother to stop at Lower Twin Lake; continue instead to the beautiful Upper Twin Lake for great fishing and swimming. You may also continue to the more solitary George Lake.

### **Side Trips and Options**

- A day hike to the top of Kaiser Peak is well worth the cross-country climb. While there are no trails, it is a straightforward route.
- Follow the inlet creek to George Lake to get to College Lake and Jewel Lake, a good place to practice some easy off-trail navigation.



**Rae Lakes, Kings Canyon National Park** (46 miles) – moderate to strenuous (Sierras, west side)

### Features

The Rae Lakes loop in Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park is a world-class backpacking trip into one of the most beautiful regions of the High Sierra. A clockwise loop allows for easier acclimation between the trailhead (5,000 feet) and the top of Glen Pass (11,978 feet) over several days. See deer, bears, marmots and maybe pikas amid the jaw-dropping scenery and absolute majesty of this amazing Sierra wonderland.

### Key Risks and Concerns

- Bears are very active throughout this route. Bear canisters are required. Bear lockers are available at many popular camping sites throughout this loop.
- High altitude, lightning and lingering snow (particularly on the north side of Glen Pass) require attention and good judgment. All major water crossings are conveniently bridged.
- This is a busy section of the John Muir Trail. There's a two-night camping limit at Rae Lakes. Look for more solitude at Lower Rae Lakes and Arrowhead Lake.

### Information, Permits and Resources

- Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Park (<http://www.nps.gov/seki/index.htm> )
- Plan Your Visit (<http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/index.htm> )
- Trail Conditions ([www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/trailcond.htm](http://www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/trailcond.htm) )
- *Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White
- SEKI Wilderness Office: (559) 565-3766
- Topo maps: Mt. Clarence King & The Sphynx

### Trailhead

Located at Cedar Grove, Roads End, Kings Cyn NP (at the end of Hwy. 198). Several canyon campgrounds offer small 6-person sites as well as sites for groups of up to 35. Campsites are available on first-come, first-serve basis.

### Recommended Itinerary

- Day 1: Cedar Grove Roads End to Middle Paradise Valley (7.25 miles)
- Day 2: Paradise Valley to Woods Creek Crossing (7 miles)
- Day 3: Woods Creek to Rae Lakes (6.5 miles)
- Day 4: Layover – Day hike to Sixty Lakes Basin (2 miles each way)
- Day 5: Rae Lakes to Bubb's Creek (5.5 miles) or Junction Meadow (8 miles)
- Day 6: Camp at Sphynx Creek Crossing, or hike 4 more miles to the car and celebrate an early finish with pizza, showers & ice cream at the Cedar Grove General Store.

### Side trips

Sixty Lakes Basin, 2 miles west of Rae Lakes, is an easy day hike from Rae Lakes. At least 60 lakes are strung along this beautiful valley.

Charlotte Lake, just south of Glen Pass, is a worthy stopover for lunch or the night.

## **Mt. Whitney via Horseshoe Mdws. (50 miles) – Strenuous, Sierras (east side)**

### **Features**

At 14, 494 feet, Mt. Whitney is the highest peak in the Lower 48. The real attraction of this trip, however, is backpacking the preceding 40 miles from Horseshoe Meadows. The long, slow approach allows for the necessary high altitude acclimation, while taking backpackers over two beautiful alpine passes and through several lovely lake basins that make for great camping layovers. If you're intent on climbing Mt. Whitney, this is the most relaxing way to do it!

### **Key Risks and Concerns**

- Bears, high altitude, exposure to extreme weather, long mileage. This trip involves everything the wilderness can deliver. Give special attention to proper food storage, slow and careful acclimating, excellent pre-conditioning, good judgment and a watchful weather eye.
- Permits (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/passes/>): Fax to the Wilderness Office at 12:01 a.m. exactly 6 months before your trip's start date. The real difficulty is securing an exit permit for Trail Crest, the pass just east of Mt. Whitney. Only 35 people a day are allowed to exit. Since permits for longer trips will have been faxed in on an earlier date, people with longer trips may have an easier time securing their permit than those with shorter trips. Consider an 8- or 9-day trip with a pack horse resupply at Crabtree Meadows.
- Wag Bags: Mt. Whitney visitors (from Guitar Lake to Whitney Portal) must pack out their solid human waste. Wag bags can be picked up at the Crabtree Meadows trail junction.

### **Information, Permits and Resources**

- Inyo National Forest (<http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/>): Use this website for permit application and planning.
- *Sierra South* by Kathy Morey and Mike White
- InterAgency Visitor Center, Lone Pine (pick up permit here): (760) 876-6200
- S. Inyo Hospital, Lone Pine: (760) 876-5501
- Cottonwood Pack Station (at trailhead, for resupply): (760) 878-2015
- Mt. Whitney Shuttle Service: Robert Ennis, (760) 876-1915
- Showers: \$5/person at the Lone Pine hostel, corner of Hwy. 395 & Whitney Portal

### **Trailhead: Horseshoe Meadows**

One-night backpacker campground with water and bathrooms.

**Recommended Itinerary:**

- Day 1: Drive to Lone Pine, pick up permit at InterAgency, arrange shuttle if necessary at Whitney Portal; continue to trailhead at Horseshow Meadows (acclimate at 10,000 feet)
- Day 2: Backpack 6.1 miles to Long Lake (elev. 11,135 feet)
- Day 3: Backpack 5.5 miles over New Army Pass (12,340 feet) to lower Soldier Lake (10,790 feet). Great layover opportunity with cross-country travel to Sky Blue Lake.
- Day 4: Backpack 8.5 miles to Guyot Creek
- Day 5: Backpack 5.5 miles to Crabtree Meadows. Possible layover, resupply from pack station.
- Day 6: Backpack 3 miles to Guitar Lake; acclimate
- Day 7: Backpack up Mt. Whitney (leave backpacks at trail junction, use daypacks to the peak); return to junction and hike over Trail Crest to trailside camping
- Day 8: Pack out and celebrate!

# Southern California Backpacking Trips

## Day Hikes

**San Gorgonio– South Fork Trail** (25 miles roundtrip, moderate-strenuous)

### Features

This high-altitude trip takes you to San Gorgonio Peak, the highest peak in Southern California at 11,400 feet, for great views and a tremendous sense of accomplishment. The South Fork Trail provides easy grades, ample water, and a scenic and manageable approach to the peak.

- Hike Length: 25 miles roundtrip, 4,700 feet elevation gain, 3 days
- Difficulty: Moderate - Strenuous
- Permit Limit: 12 people
- Recommended Prerequisites: San Jacinto or other overnight backpack trip to elevations above 10,000 feet. Personal commitment to physical conditioning prior to trip.
- Required: First aid and CPR certification, Wilderness First Aid recommended

### Recommended Itinerary

- Day 1: Drive to South Fork Trailhead on Jenks Lake Rd., stopping by Mill Creek Ranger Station in Mentone to check in and ask questions. Backpack 6.5 miles to Dry Lake (a.k.a. Lodgepole Spring) and make base camp.
- Day 2: Day hike to top of San Gorgonio Peak (12 miles roundtrip)
- Day 3: Retrace your steps from Dry Lake to the trailhead (6.5 miles)

### Key risks and concerns

Chief concerns are high altitude and the need for excellent pre-conditioning. Bear canisters are recommended but not required.

### Information, Permits and Resources

- San Gorgonio Wilderness Association ([www.sgwa.org](http://www.sgwa.org)) Planning, permit application, trailhead directions, overnight camps, distances, elevations, trail conditions, water availability, etc.
- San Bernardino National Forest ([www.fs.fed.us/r5/sanbernardino](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/sanbernardino))
- *San Bernardino Mountain Trails* by John W. Robinson (100 Hikes series)



## **San Jacinto Wilderness State Park** (via Palm Springs Aerial Tramway)

5 miles roundtrip, easy

### **Features**

San Jacinto Wilderness State Park provides one of the prettiest, most accessible high-altitude backpack trips in Southern California. The convenient Palm Springs aerial tramway takes you 2.5 miles to Round Valley Campground (9000 feet), where a base camp gives you easy access to San Jacinto Peak (10,800 feet) for a day hike.

### **Key risks and concerns**

- High altitude and acclimation (the elevation at the top of the tram is 8,516 feet)
- Exposure to weather, especially above tree line
- Exposure to falls: Minimal, though exposure increases if there's snow and ice on the peak, which can linger into late May.
- Water availability: Check availability with the ranger before arriving. The spring in Round Valley often runs year round; the creek in Tamarack is seasonal. Water from either source must be filtered.

### **Information, Permits and Resources**

- Long Valley Ranger Station's current trail and weather conditions recording: (760) 327-0222
- Idyllwild Ranger Station: (951) 659-2607
- Palm Springs Tram ([www.pstramway.com](http://www.pstramway.com))
- Permits: information ([http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page\\_id=636](http://www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=636)), download wilderness permit (<http://www.parks.ca.gov/pages/636/files/dpr409.pdf>) (can be reserved up to 8 weeks in advance of a trip; highly recommended for holiday and summer weekends)
- Maps: *San Jacinto Wilderness Trail Map* by Tom Harrison

### **Trailhead**

The Palm Springs Aerial Tramway is located off Hwy. 111 in Palm Springs, about 2 1/2 hours from San Diego. Park in one of the overnight lots after passing the tram building and starting downhill. First tram up departs 8 a.m. on weekends and holidays, 10 a.m. on weekdays. Group rates and AAA discounts are available. Trailhead is in Long Valley at the top of the tram.

### **Basic Trip Information**

San Jacinto can be easily backpacked in a weekend. The hike to Round Valley Camp is 2.5 miles. Tamarack Camp is another half-mile north on a spur trail, and worth the extra 15 minutes of hiking for its solitude, wildlife and views. San Jacinto Peak is 3.5 miles from Round Valley, with an elevation gain of 1,720 feet. No water is available en route. After an excellent day hike to the peak, you may return to camp or continue on to the tram.

### **Side Trips and Options**

For spectacular views, hike back to the tram via the Hidden Lake/Willow Creek trail. If you are ready to try some cross country navigation, see if you can locate Hidden Lake. Jean Peak is directly south of San Jacinto Peak. If you've hiked San Jacinto too many times and are experienced enough for a cross-country adventure, this is an excellent destination.

## **Noble Canyon (10.5 miles one way) – Easy to Moderate, Mt. Laguna**

### **Features**

This fairly easy, mostly downhill hike makes a great overnight, or an equally pleasant day hike. A shuttle is required to enjoy the one-way aspect of this trip. November to June are the best months to go, with excellent wildflower displays in May and June. This is the perfect trip for identifying flowers, birds, and trees.

### **Key risks and concerns**

- Heat exposure in the summer months
- Wildlife
- Look for rattlesnakes and, if you're amazingly lucky, mountain lions. Gnats can be pesky near the creek in early summer, and poison oak flourishes there as well.
- Water
- The Laguna Meadow creek (about mile 5) flows year round. The water must be filtered.
- Camping: Campsites are limited in the canyon. A few established sites are clustered at the creek crossing, and a site or two can be squeezed between the creek and the canyon walls about  $\frac{3}{4}$  miles downstream from the crossing. Another large camping area can be found 2-3 miles from the end of the hike, although water availability is uncertain.

### **Information, Permits and Resources**

- Descanso Ranger District: (619) 445-6235
- Call ranger station for permit information and backcountry camping regulations.
- Adventure Pass: required for parking at trailheads in the Cleveland NF. Can be purchased for \$5/day, \$35/year at local outdoor stores (Big 5, A-16, REI), the Descanso Ranger Station, the Mt. Laguna store and sometimes Alpine gas stations.
- Map (see next page)

### **Trailheads**

Pine Valley (lower) Trailhead: Exit I-8 and turn left. Turn left on Old Hwy 80. Travel 1.2 miles to Pine Creek Rd. (just after old bridge). Make sharp right and travel 1.6 miles to Noble Canyon trailhead parking on the right. Bathrooms and running water are available.

Penny Pines (upper) Trailhead: Return to Old Hwy 80 and turn left. Drive east all the way to Sunrise Hwy and turn left (north). Drive to about the mile 27 marker. Look for the large trailhead/parking area after the cattle guard. Park on either side of the highway and put up your Adventure Pass. Water might be available.

### **Recommended Itinerary**

- Day 1: Leave one car at Pine Valley Trailhead. Shuttle to Penny Pine. Hike 5 miles to creek crossing campsite and spend the night.
- Day 2: Hike 5.5 miles back to your car in Pine Valley. Stop for a celebratory hot fudge sundae at the Tasty Burger in Pine Valley.

#### **Option**

For a longer trip, shuttle to Cuyamaca Rancho State Park instead of Penny Pine.

