

# Mt. Whitney Pack Trains/Rock Creek Pack Station

## John Muir Trail – Onion Valley to Bishop Pass

- Overview** This is the Sierra high country. You will travel over five passes and down the legendary golden staircase. Travelling above tree line much of time affords expansive views of the glacier-sculpted granite peaks and canyons of Kings Canyon National Park. The varied landscape rewards you with trout-filled lakes and streams, cascades and waterfalls, dense forests, and serene meadows.
- Both trailheads are over 9,000', giving you a head start on the 12,000' passes. You will enter the wilderness over Kearsarge Pass from Onion Valley and follow the some of the most picturesque sections of the John Muir Trail before exiting over Bishop Pass to South Lake.
- Rock Creek Pack Station enriches your backcountry experience, freeing you from a heavy backpack by carrying all your gear, preparing gourmet food, and setting up a comfortable camp each night. The camp will include chairs, a sit-down privy, tables, and campfires as elevation allows.
- Distance** 66.6 miles, 15,200' total gain and 14,600' loss on moving days
- Preparation** Hikers should be able to walk 12 miles, 2,700' elevation gain/loss.
- Meet Up** 6:30 AM at 245 Rocking K Road, Bishop. Leave personal vehicles there.
- Trailhead** In – Onion Valley; Out – South Lake. The pack station will provide transportation from Bishop to Onion Valley, collecting you from South Lake and returning you to Bishop.
- Wilderness Permit** The pack station takes care of all permits required for the trip.
- Maps** Paper maps:
- Tom Harrison
    - Sequoia Kings Canyon National Parks or Kings Canyon High Country or JMT Series (last two provide more detail, but are missing the 3 miles of the trip)
    - The above maps and/or John Muir Trail Series can also be downloaded onto a tablet or smart phone using the Avenza app.
  - National Geographic 205::Sequoia Kings Canyon National Parks or John Muir Trail Topographic Map Guide Apps for Smartphone/Tablet. Be sure to download the offline maps before the trip:
- Phone apps:
- FarOut Trail Guides (Formerly Guthook's Hiking Guides) for maps and in-depth trail information. This is the guide used by most through hikers. One-time charge to download John Muir Trail which includes the entry from Onion Valley and exit to South Lake.
  - Gaia GPS: Download your preferred maps for the area the trip will cover. Membership fee to download maps.
  - AllTrails: Membership fee to be able to download maps.

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### Hiking with Pack Stock: Best Practices

Hiking with pack stock allows you to experience the wilderness while only carrying a daypack. The crew will carry your gear from camp to camp and prepare delicious meals. While you are hiking, the crew will clean up camp, load the stock, travel to the next camp, and set up the new camp. They travel faster than hikers and will usually pass you shortly after lunchtime. You must watch for the crew and stock as you approach the expected campsite area. The following trip descriptions include information on where to expect the camps and what to do if you can't find them.

The packer must consider multiple criteria when selecting a campsite.

- Ranger directive
- Established camp
- Availability
- Water
- Grazing
- Scenery
- Comfort
- Access to the trail

The camps shown in this trip description are the locations usually used by the packers. If there are multiple campsites shown on the maps, the packer will tell you which one is the planned site.

Problems can arise if the camp is taken by another group or the ranger directs the packer to a different campsite. Your best bet is to allow the packer to pass you at some point during the day so you can follow the packer to the camp, either visually or by tracking the stock hoofprints. If camp is difficult to see from the trail, the packer will usually leave a pack tarp or rake where you should leave the trail.

If the packer has not passed you as you approach the expected camp area, we ask that you wait at the "Area Entry" location until the packer has arrived. Then, you can follow the stock into camp.

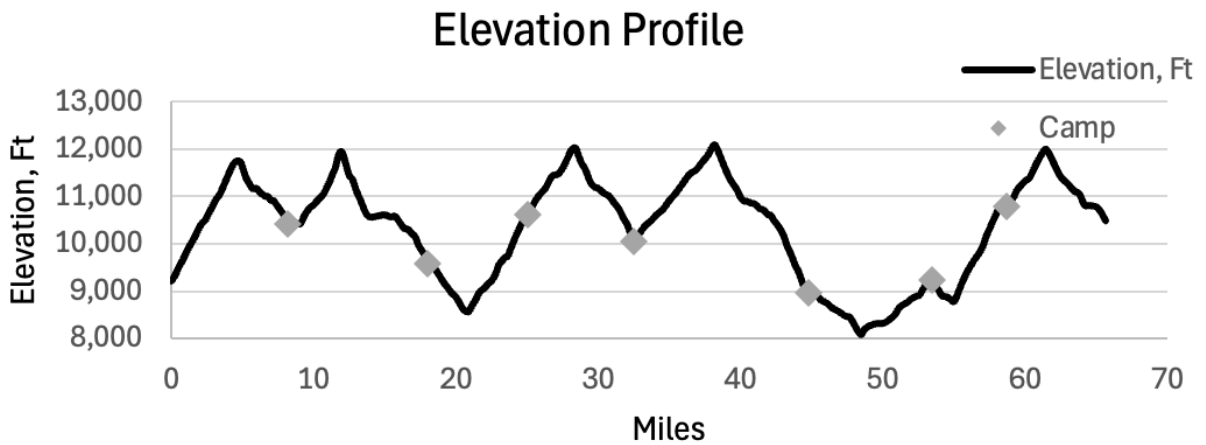
If you are unable to make it to camp, do not leave the trail. If you do not arrive in camp by late afternoon, the packer will look for you. It is essential that you stay close enough to the trail that the packer can easily see you. The packer will start from camp or a waypoint we have identified past camp you could easily identify, such as a trail junction. The packer will follow the expected route taken during the day until the section of the trail where the crew passed you earlier in the day. Staying near the trail throughout the day lets the packer see the guests as the string passes, assess their progress, and determine if anyone needs assistance.

This document also describes some of the side trails you might accidentally take and how to determine you have taken a wrong turn. In this case, we ask that you turn back and return to the John Muir Trail. If you are too tired to continue, wait by the side of the JMT.

Finally, please bring a GPS device, such as a cell phone or Garmin InReach. Setting the phone on airplane mode will save the battery, but you should bring a portable "power bank" to recharge it during the trip. Downloading maps onto a cell phone using apps such as the FarOut/John Muir Trail, GaiaGPS, AllTrails, Natural Atlas, or Avenza/Tom Harrison maps that show your location at any time is invaluable to your safety in the backcountry.

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<i>Day</i>	<i>Camp</i>	<i>Distance</i>	<i>Gain, ft</i>	<i>Loss, ft</i>
1	Charlotte Lake	8.3	2,700	1,500
2	Baxter Meadow	9.8	1,800	2,800
3	Twin Lakes	6.8	2,100	1,000
4	South Fork Kings River	7.6	1,500	2,200
5	Deer Meadow	11.9	2,200	3,200
6&7	Big Pete Meadow	9.0	1,400	1,100
8	Dusy Basin	5.3	2,100	500
9	South Lake	7.9	1,400	2,300
Total		66.6	15,200	14,600



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### Day 1

#### Onion Valley to Charlotte Lake

8.3 miles, 2,700' gain, 1,500' loss

*Water: No reliable water between Flower & Charlotte Lakes*

The trail rises steadily to Gilbert Lake, first through sage and then open forest to gain 1,230' in 2.1 miles to Gilbert Lake. The path follows the shoreline and then passes above Flower Lake before leaving the water to switchback out of the trees to the barren, talus slopes of Kearsarge Pass, gaining a over 2,600' over 4.5 miles from the trailhead. The route then drops steeply from the pass for 0.5 miles to the Bullfrog Lake junction. Keep to the right to stay on the upper trail toward Charlotte Lake and Glen Pass. The trail contours along the hillside above Kearsarge Lakes and then Bullfrog Lake, passing through trees and small meadows, losing 650' 1084 over 2.1 miles to the Glen Pass/Charlotte Lake junction. Follow the trail left toward Charlotte Lake for 0.2 miles 1146 to the John Muir Trail junction. Continue straight toward Charlotte Lake. The trail drops 350' over 0.6 miles down a series of switchbacks to Charlotte Lake with the stock camp at the far end of the lake, one mile from the John Muir Trail Junction.

There is little reliable water past Gilbert Lake and the side trail to Flower Lake until Charlotte Lake.

### Day 2

#### Charlotte Lake over Glen Pass to Baxter Meadow

9.8 miles, 1,800' gain, 2,800' loss

*Water: There is plentiful lake and stream water Rae Lakes on*

Backtrack along Charlotte Lake to climb back up to the JMT/PCT junction before turning north toward the narrow ridge of 11,978' Glen Pass. Continue past another trail junction to the right toward Kearsarge Pass (36.77330, -118.41788) in 0.2 miles. The day will start in forest, but the route soon leaves the shade to rocky slopes as the trail ascends 1,250' over two miles to the pass. Pause at the top to celebrate the climb, but stay to enjoy the impressive view. The path drops down 1,400' from the pass to approach Upper Rae Lake and the Sixty Lakes Basin Trail junction (36.80328, -118.40280). Continue right where you will soon cross the outlet of Upper Rae Lake. The peninsula between the upper and lower lakes is a great place to enjoy a view-filled lunch. The route levels out for two miles as the trail continues along the Rae Lakes before starting to begin a descent to Arrowhead Lake. The trail crosses the outlet creek below Arrowhead Lake, at yet another great view spot and soon passes Dollar Lake and the Baxter Pass Trail junction (36.83494, -118.40778) as it begins to drop 1,000' in two miles to our camp at Baxter Meadow.

### Day 3

#### Baxter Meadow to Twin Lakes

6.8 miles, 2,100' gain, 1,000' loss

*Water: Reliable water at several creeks along Woods Creek.*

This is a quiet day after the triumphs over Mount Whitney, Forester Pass, and Glen Pass, but the views and sounds of cascading creeks surrounded by rocky canyon walls make this a great day of hiking. The trail continues to drop 950' in 2.5 miles through forest and occasional meadows to Woods Creek. Keep an eye out for one of Shorty's cabins off to the right shortly before reaching the Woods Creek bridge. The JMT/PCT turns right at the Woods Creek Trail junction after crossing the suspension bridge and

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follows the creek up the through mostly forested slopes to gain 1,900' in 3.5 miles. Watch for cascades and small waterfalls as you work your way up the canyon. The trail reaches the junction with the Sawmill Pass Trail on the right at mile six. Follow the JMT/PCT to left for another ½ mile to our camp between the two Twin Lakes.

### Day 4

#### Twin Lakes to the South Fork of the Kings River

7.6 miles, 1,500' gain, 2,200' loss

*Water: There is reliable water from Lake Marjorie on*

The hike starts near tree line, so most of this day will be hiking in open alpine meadows and on rocky slopes surrounded by multicolored rock walls along the way to 12,130' Pinchot Pass. The route trends north for 1.6 miles, climbing 700' before leveling out for ½ mile as the trail swings west to avoid a marshy area at the base of Pinchot pass. The final 600' ascent of the pass is on switchbacks over one mile. The straightforward descent along the northern flank of Pinchot Pass traverses a succession of lakes. The trail easily descends the north side of Pinchot Pass, passing several lakes before entering the forested area above the South Fork Kings River. The Lake Marjorie shoreline, at about mile 4.8, and the stream crossing in another ½ mile are two great lunch spots. A side trip just before the drop to the Kings River to beautiful Bench Lake is worth the 250' drop and return ascent over 3.4 miles. Then again, you might want to save your energy for the long hike on over Mather Pass to Deer Meadow.

The JMT/PCT passes the Bench Lake Trail junction (36.96105, -118.43919) to cross the outlet creek from all the lakes you have just passed. The JMT/PCT turns left at a junction (36.96209, -118.43876) 100 yards from the creek crossing to switchback down to the Kings River. The trail crosses a fast creek (36.96913, -118.44186) coming from the meadows below Taboose Pass and WL 11388 in one mile before the slope eases and the route approaches our camp on the Kings River ¼ mile later.

### Day 5

#### South Fork of the Kings River Over Mather Pass to Deer Meadow

11.9 miles, 2,200' gain, 3,200' loss *Water: There are several creek crossings on each side of the pass*

Return to the JMT/PCT and cross the Kings River. The trail soon leaves the forest to a series of lovely alpine meadows and finally into a barren rocky landscape with some scattered ponds having ascended 1,500' in 4.2 miles to the base of the massive wall that hides Mather Pass. The route traverses the lower part of the wall then turns into tight switchbacks to climb to the 12,100' pass at mile 5.5. This is a perfect place for a quick snack while you enjoy views of the trail to the south and the classic glacial walls of the Palisades drainage to the north. Take care leaving the pass as the path drops steeply on large steps and lose rubble before turning to dirt more than a mile below the pass. Be sure to stop at the creek running into the east side of the upper lake to enjoy a small waterfall, wildflowers, and a great foot soak. The route descends above the lakes along the base of the Palisades to finally reach the west end of the Lower Palisades Lake, 2,100' below the pass at mile nine. This is another great place to soak your feet before starting down the Golden Staircase. Leaving the lake, drop 1,200' in two miles, first gently and then more steeply down tight switchbacks to the Deer Meadow Camp.

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### Days 6&7

#### Deer Meadow to Big Pete Meadow

*9.0 miles, 1,400' gain, 1,100' loss*

*Water: There is ample stream water throughout the day*

This is a serene day after the demanding trek over Mather Pass. The route remains in the forest much of the day as it follows Palisade Creek to drop 1,200' in 4.5 miles to a pleasant spot for a snack at the confluence with the Middle Fork of the Kings River and the Middle Fork Trail junction. The JMT/PCT now turns north to follow the Middle Fork up into Le Conte Canyon and soon passes Grouse Meadow. If it is a warm day, there are some deep areas in this slow-moving section of the Middle Fork that are the perfect place for a dip. Continuing up the trail, climb another 1,200' to the Bishop Pass Trail junction and a nearby ranger station at mile eight. Continue north on the JMT/PCT for another 1.5 miles, passing through a drift fence shortly before our camp at the south end of Big Pete Meadow. The Big Pete Meadow camp is a perfect layover day camp with some great bathing pools and a mix of sun and shade to dry washed clothes and relax with a good book.

### Day 8

#### Big Pete Meadow to Dusy Basin

*5.3 miles, 2,100' gain, 500' loss* *Water: There is water at multiple stream crossings and the upper lakes*

Retrace your steps 1.6 miles to the Bishop Pass Trail junction. Turn left to leave the John Muir Trail and switchback up first through forest and then rocky meadows with wonderful views across Le Conte Canyon. The trail climbs steadily to gain 2,000' in three miles before arriving at the beautiful meadows surrounding the lakes of lower Dusy Basin. Camp is usually to the right of the trail and east of the string of small, unnamed lakes anchored by Lake 10742.

### Day 9

#### Dusy Basin to South Lake

*7.9 miles, 1,400' gain, 2,300' loss*

*Water is readily available throughout the day*

This is the way to finish a stay in the Sierras. You may be tempted to rush out to the trailhead, but take time to enjoy the incredible beauty of Dusy Basin and the lakes below Bishop Pass.

Return to the trail and begin the 1,200' ascent over 2.6 miles to Bishop Pass past lakes, rocky slopes, and alpine meadows surrounded by the magnificent peaks of Dusy Basin. Leaving Kings Canyon National Park, the path descends easily for 1/4 mile before tight switchbacks navigate the steep face of Bishop Pass. Bishop Lake, 1.2 miles and over 700' below the pass is a great stop for a quick snack before continuing through a series of meadows, open forest, rocky slopes and along a chain of picturesque lakes to reach the trailhead near the north end of South Lake, 5.3 miles and 2,300' below the pass.

Drivers will arrive at the Bishop Pass Trailhead parking lot at the north end of South Lake at the agreed upon time to shuttle you back to Bishop.