

CALIFORNIA GIRL SCOUT BACKPACKERS

Mt. Whitney

Horseshoe Meadows to Onion Valley

Itinerary provided by Girl Scouts San Diego

Created: February 2019

Distance: 70 miles

Starting Trailhead: Cottonwood Lakes/Horseshoe Meadows out of Lone Pine

Finishing Trailhead: Onion Valley out of Independence

Best Months: mid-July through mid-September

Permit Limit: 15 people

Preview: At 14,505 feet, Mt. Whitney is the highest peak in the Lower 48. The real enticement of this itinerary however, is the long-trail aspect of a 70-mile trip. The high-elevation approach allows for the necessary acclimation before summiting. This route takes the backpacker over 4 beautiful alpine passes and a multitude of lovely lake basins that make for great camping layovers. If you're intent upon climbing Mt. Whitney, this is a strategic - and scenic - way to do it!

Girl Scout Progression Points: This strenuous trip teaches long-trail skills: re-supplies, car shuttles, long itinerary planning, nutrition for the long haul, and how to blend comfortably with the wilderness (and fellow hikers) for long periods of time.

Key Risks:

- Bears
- High altitude
- Exposure to extreme weather
- Long mileage (requiring both excellent conditioning and interpersonal skills/maturity)
- WAG bags: visitors in the Whitney Zone must pack out their solid human waste

Sample Itinerary (By Day):

1. Drive Day; Pick up permit in Lone Pine @ Eastern Sierra Interagency Visitor Center. Continue the drive up to Horseshoe Meadows (45 minutes) and use the Backpacker's Camp (small fee) at the trailhead the first night to acclimate to 10,000 feet.
2. 6.2 miles to Long Lake.
3. 4.6 miles to Soldier Lake – over New Army Pass (12,300').
4. 6 miles to Guyot Creek Crossing.

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5. 9 miles to Guitar Lake (recommend campsites above Guitar Lakes at small tarns).
6. Summit bid day hike (10 – 12 miles depending on campsite location).
7. Re-supply at Crabtree Meadows; continue 5.3 miles to Wright Creek Crossing.
8. 7.6 miles to lake basin south of Forester Pass.
9. 8.8 miles over Forester Pass (13,100') to Vidette Meadow along Bubbs Creek.
10. 7.9 miles to ending trailhead at Onion Valley, over Kearsarge Pass (11,800'); drive home.

Itinerary Options:

- Exit Whitney Portal (50-mile trip) – need to score a Whitney 'exit permit' which is limited in numbers. The exit permit is secured at the same time you make your entry permit reservation.

Permits Needed:

- Wilderness Permit: <https://www.recreation.gov/permits/233262>
 - Once on rec.gov, enter your dates, number in your party, and scroll down to Trailhead J39 – Cottonwood Lakes.
 - Cottonwood Pass is an option (GT60), but that route isn't represented in this itinerary.
 - Permit should be reserved exactly 6 months in advance of your trip for best availability.

Resources & Safety Management:

- Inyo National Forest: www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild
- Inyo N.F. Trail Names and quotas: https://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/stelprdb5143453.pdf
- InterAgency Visitor Center: 760-876-6200
- Rock Creek Pack Station (re-supply) at Horseshoe Meadows: 760-872-8331, expensive, but ask for a waiver since GS is educational.
- Whitney Hostel: Best place for a shower in Lone Pine
- Alabama Hills Café: Best breakfast & lunch in Lone Pine
- Maps: Tom Harrison's Whitney High Country Trail map is just adequate, custom 7.5 minute topos of your route can be made at www.mytopo.com
- Crabtree Ranger Station: Long-time resident ranger Rob Pilewski is happy to chat with your girls
- S. Inyo Hospital (Lone Pine): 760-876-5501
- Lone Pine Sheriff: 760-876-5606

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View of Mt. Whitney from Crabtree Meadows

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