

# returntodeadmancanyon

August 25 - September 3, 2017

Over the past decade or so, I've led small groups of Southern Arizona Hiking Club members on week-long trips to California's Sierra Nevada. Back in 2010, I did this exact same trip and said I'd be back. This seems like the year for it.

This aggressive loop backpack trip from the Lodgepole Visitor Center delves through the backcountry of Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks, building by slow degrees to a grand climax of a High Sierra crossing at Elizabeth Pass, and winding down again with another gradual passage down the north wall of the Kaweah River canyon. Glacier-carved cliffs and mountains, deep canyons, wildlife, and giant sequoias - this hike has it all! I think this trip is going to be the best yet! Join me for this amazing trip to one of the crown jewels of the American wilderness system.

## The Drive

We'll leave Tucson early on Friday, August 25th and make the eight-hour, 520-mile drive to Sylmar, CA, where we'll spend the night in the Motel 6. See the links to the right, and make your reservations early.

On Saturday, August 26th, we'll get up early and continue our drive, having breakfast along the way. We have a 200-mile drive up through Three Rivers, then up the winding, switchbacked road into Sequoia National Park until we arrive at the Lodgepole Visitor Center. There, we'll pick up our permit, park the Jeep, and hit the trail.

## The Plan

From the Twin Lakes trailhead at Lodgepole, the trail hooks around the campground perimeter and heads west, ascending the north wall of the Kaweah River's Marble Fork canyon. After a mile of steady climbing, we turn right for a mile of flat, easy rambling to the ford of Silliman Creek. Continuing uphill, we enter the flowery glade of Cahoon Meadow along its eastern edge. We'll stop here for the evening, having put just three miles behind us on this easy first day.



On Sunday, we'll climb a ravine to Cahoon Gap, a lovely wooded saddle at 8,650 feet. From here the trail drops just a bit then climbs again to pass Twin Lakes at 9,500 feet. The final climb starts at the eastern end of the lakes, zigzagging through thick forest until we reach the Kings-Kaweah Divide at Silliman pass, elevation 10,200 feet. Crossing into Kings Canyon National Park, our trail winds down in full view of Mount Silliman to the south. We'll head for Ranger Lake and campsites on the rocks above that lake.

Monday means we're leaving Ranger Lake for our longest day on the trail. Our trail descends to the north, passing under Ball Dome and leveling out in Belle Canyon. We follow a creek through Comanche Meadow and Williams Meadow and hike down into Sugarloaf Valley. Sugarloaf itself is a granite dome rising 1,000 feet above the valley floor. We will push on through Sugarloaf Valley to Ferguson Creek. There are very nice campsites creekside, and we may be able to take a dip in the creek before dinner.

## SAHC Hike Info

- **Guide:** Steve Singkofer
- **Days/Nites:** 7/6
- **Rating:** A
- **Tot Distance:** 53.7 mi
- **Tot Elev Gain:** 9,500 ft
- **Meet:** Other
- **Time:** 9:00 AM
- **Type:** Trail
- **Drive:** 1450 mi
- **Maps:** Lodgepole, Mount Silliman, Sphinx Lakes, Triple Divide Peak
- **Area:** Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks

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We climb out of the valley on Tuesday, hike up and over a dry moraine then follow the path along the Roaring River to Scaffold Meadow and the Roaring River Ranger Station. Staying on the west bank of the Roaring River, we head upriver into Deadman Canyon. After fording Deadman Canyon's creek (known as Copper Creek, for the mine at the head of the canyon), we hike through meadows on the eastern bank before arriving at the canyon's namesake, the grave of an Iberian shepherd named Alfred Moniere. Poor Alfred died alone here of appendicitis while his partner sought medical help in far-off Fresno. His timber monument is surrounded by avalanche-flattened trees.

Leaving the grave to its lonely vigil, we again cross Copper Creek and continue to climb, make another ford of the creek and climb a granite shelf to Upper Ranger Meadow, where we'll camp for the evening.

The young vagabond Everett Ruess went through Deadman Canyon back in August, 1933. Here's what he had to say in a letter to his mother:

Everything has been proceeding beautifully, and at present I am in the most interesting little canyon I have found in the Sierras. Parallel to it is Cloud Canyon. They converge below to form Roaring River, which flows into King's River. The elevation here is 10,000 feet, and above is Elizabeth Pass and the Copper Mine, at nearly 13,000 feet. Golden trout and rainbow are in the stream, which flows under snowbanks at its head.

- Everett Ruess

Wednesday morning finds us facing our most difficult climb of the trip. From this final stretch of flat ground before the pass, we can see the canyon's looming headwalls, a glacial cirque that seems to offer no easy escape. It's hard to believe we are looking at Elizabeth Pass, the usually-snowy low point on the right ridge, 2,000 feet higher than our campsite.

Our trail takes off through fields of talus above the rushing creek, climbing to the top of a granite bluff and crossing the cascades to the opposite bank, a tricky ford when the water is high. The trail from here to the little meadow below the granite cirque is beautifully engineered with rock steps. As we turn uphill onto steep granite slabs above the meadow, however, the trail is sometimes hard to follow. The problem is snow, which sticks in large patches to this northeast-facing slope, often throughout the year. Keep in mind that you are aiming for the pass on the southwest ridge and climb for that. Chances are good that you will at some point regain the trail, which climbs in broad switchbacks to the 11,400-foot pass, a narrow saddle in the Kings-Kaweah Divide.

Behind us, we can look down to Ranger Meadow, where Deadman Canyon makes a turn to disappear behind Glacier Ridge. Ahead, the rocky slopes of the Kaweah River drainage slip steeply away. It's a fine view, but the proximity of so many high ridges and peaks blocks our view of the Great Western Divide.

The 3,350-foot descent from Elizabeth Pass to Lone Pine Creek is tough. We start down through the talus on a set of tight, ambitiously engineered switchbacks which feed into long, sloping granite slabs interspersed with meadow and boulders. Watch for cairns that sometimes mark the trail. Eventually, the trail descends to a lateral valley and crosses the outlet creek from Lonely Lake, whereupon we begin a series of merciless switchbacks through dry scrub down to the rocky floor of Lone Pine Creek's canyon, at about 8,050 feet. We're not done yet, however, as we reach the junction with Over-the-Hill Trail and take that up through a subalpine world scoured by avalanches. Enjoy the views eastward to the Angel Wings and other polished granite domes and spires. Once we hit the crest, the forest closes in again and we make a steep descent to Bearpaw High Sierra Camp. Just past the camp, we'll find Bearpaw Meadow Campground with piped water, an outhouse, and bear boxes. We're home for the evening.

On Thursday, we can get up late. We have just a short day ahead of us on the famous High Sierra Trail, heading back toward Giant Forest. This stretch of trail is engineered to keep the rise and fall to a minimum, while enjoying scenic views of Sugarbowl Dome, Little Blue Dome, Castle Rocks, and the Kaweah River gorge. There are campsites with bear boxes at Buck Creek, Nine Mile Creek, and Mehrten Creek.

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Three-and-a-half miles west of our Mehrten Creek campsite, the trail makes a large sweeping turn to the southwest. As it does, the Wolverton Cutoff Trail branches off to the right and steeply climbs about 350' up the ridge in front of us before running off to the south again, still climbing, to sweep around the end of the ridge. The trail remains fairly level, following the 7400' contour line, as we hike back into a valley to the north then out and around another broad ridge, on the western side of which stands the Congress Group of big trees. These enormous trees - some of the largest living things on the planet - can grow more than 250 feet tall and have an average diameter of more than 20 feet! It is worth our time to drop our packs at this point for some photos and communal time with these giants. After hiking nearly 50 miles, these trees - these beings - are here to greet us as we near the end point of our fabulous trek.

Do behold the King Sequoia! Behold! Behold! seems all I can say. Some time ago I left all for Sequoia and have been and am at his feet, fasting and praying for light, for is he not the greatest light in the woods, in the world? Where are such columns of sunshine, tangible, accessible, terrestrialized?  
- John Muir

After an appropriate time during which we pay homage to the trees that guard this forest, continue north on the Wolverton Cutoff Trail. The trail winds its way past the Wolverton Corrals, crosses a gravel road and turns east as it drops down toward Lodgepole Campground and Visitor Center, the end of our adventure.

After our week on the trail, we'll travel a short distance back down the road to the lovely little town of Three Rivers and will stay at the Choice Hotel for the evening of Friday, September 1st. This hotel is a bit more expensive than the Motel 6, but I think the cost is worth it after such an arduous trek.

The drive back to Tucson is nearly 750 miles, so we might stop in Blythe on the way back and stay at the Motel 6 in that ugly little town on Saturday evening, September 2nd. We've stayed there before on previous trips to the Sierra Nevada. We'll make a consensus-based decision before we go and will let everyone know well in advance if reservations are required here. Without a stop, we'll be back in Tucson sometime in the late evening.

## The Prep

This trip is planned for up to eight people. The cost for the backpack permit will be six whole dollars per person, plus cost-sharing for fuel and incidental travel expenses. Of course, there will also be two nights in motels and meals along the way. Plan accordingly.

You'll need food for six breakfasts, five lunches, and six dinners, plus snacks. Everything must fit into a bear canister, with the exception of the first night's dinner. That meal can go straight into your pack, since you'll be eating it before it needs to be stored.

## The Elements

There should be water all over the place. I don't foresee any problems.

The weather in the Sierra Nevada can be very nice at higher elevations, but will be warm in the lower portions of our trek. Daytime highs will be in the 70s or even the low 80s with nighttime lows in the mid 40s and low 50s. There might be one or two nights of temps in the high 30s. Be prepared! Click the links for the different campsites below to get spot weather forecasts for that particular area. Remember that those forecasts will as much as ten days into the future from when you're able to look at them. Even so, you will probably only need a cool weather sleeping bag for this trip. I'm hoping to be able to take my warmer weather 40° bag.

## The Hike

day	miles	elev gain	elev	destination
Fri	480 miles	driving	-	Motel 6, Sylmar, CA
Sat	260 miles	driving	-	Lodgepole Visitor Center
Sat	0.0 / 0.0	000 / 000	6750'	Twin Lakes Trailhead at Lodgepole

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Sat	1.2 / 1.2	+650 / 650	7400'	Trail Jct to Wuksachi Village; bear right (N)
Sat	3.0 / 3.0	+500 / 1150	7900'	Cahoon Meadow; <a href="#">campsite</a>
Sun	2.0 / 5.0	+500 / 1650	8400'	Jct with JO Pass Trail; bear right (NE)
Sun	1.8 / 6.8	+900 / 2550	9500'	Twin Lakes
Sun	1.1 / 7.9	+700 / 3250	10200'	Silliman Pass
Sun	1.8 / 9.7	-1000 / 3250	9200'	Beville Lake jct; bear left (N)
Sun	0.1 / 9.8	+150 / 3400	9250'	Ranger Lake jct; bear right (E); <a href="#">campsite</a>
Mon	3.2 / 13.0	-1350 / 3400	7800'	Seville Lake jct; bear right (NE)
Mon	1.7 / 14.7	-400 / 3400	7400'	Comanche Meadow jct; bear right (E)
Mon	3.5 / 18.2	-400 / 3400	7000'	Ford of Sugarloaf Creek
Mon	2.8 / 21.0	+150 / 3550	7000'	Ford of Ferguson Creek; <a href="#">campsite</a>
Tue	2.8 / 23.8	+350 / 3900	7350'	Roaring River Ranger Station
Tue	1.6 / 25.4	+500 / 4400	7850'	First Deadman Canyon creek ford
Tue	1.4 / 26.8	+550 / 4950	8400'	Shepherd's grave
Tue	1.2 / 28.0	+100 / 5050	8500'	Second Deadman Canyon creek ford
Tue	3.0 / 31.0	+1300 / 6350	9800'	Upper Ranger Meadow, Deadman Canyon; <a href="#">campsite</a>
Wed	2.6 / 33.6	+400 / 6750	10200'	Ford creek above waterfall, upper Deadman Cyn
Wed	1.4 / 35.0	+1400 / 8150	11400'	Elizabeth Pass
Wed	2.8 / 37.8	-3200 / 8150	8200'	Jct with Tamarack Lake Trail; go right (S)
Wed	0.3 / 38.1	-200 / 8150	8000'	Over-the-Hill Trail jct; bear right (SW)
Wed	2.1 / 40.2	+350 / 8500	7600'	Bearpaw Mdw jct; keep right (W); <a href="#">campsite</a>
Thu	1.2 / 41.4	-400 / 8600	7200'	Buck Creek
Thu	1.3 / 42.7	+200 / 8800	7400'	Nine Mile Creek
Thu	2.9 / 45.6	+200 / 9000	7600'	Mehrten Creek; <a href="#">campsite</a>
Fri	3.6 / 49.2	-800 / 9000	6800'	Wolverton Cut-Off Trail jct; turn right (W)
Fri	2.5 / 51.8	+500 / 9500	7200'	Wolverton Corrals; road; cross & turn right (E)
Fri	1.9 / 53.7	-450 / 9500	6750'	Twin Lakes Trailhead
Fri	30 miles	driving	-	<a href="#">Comfort Inn</a> , Three Rivers
Sat	700 miles	driving	-	Tucson

## The End

After our week on the trail, we'll travel about 30 miles back down the road to the lovely little town of Three Rivers and will stay at the Comfort Inn for the evening of Friday, September 1st. This hotel is a bit more expensive than the Motel 6, but I think the cost is worth it after such an arduous trek.

The drive back to Tucson is just about 700 miles, so we might stop in Blythe on the way back and stay at the Motel 6 in that ugly little town on Saturday evening, September 2nd. I've stayed there before on previous trips to the Sierra Nevada. We'll make a consensus-based decision before we go and will let everyone know well in advance if reservations are required here.

## Reference

Most of the information for this trip, as well as the information in the paragraphs above, was extracted from *Hiking the Sierra Nevada* (3rd ed.) by Barry Parr (see Trip #71). Purchase the latest edition of the book to see this and many other backpacking trips.