

Hike: Mt. Whitney – Mountaineer’s Route

Trailhead: Whitney Portal – marked

Distance: 12 miles - up and back

Elevation gain: 6,136 feet

Elevation of peak: 14,494 feet

Time: 10 - 14 hours – up and back

Difficulty: 5

Danger level: 5

Class: 3

How easy to follow: 3

Children: No

Waypoints: See Page

Fees/Permits: By lottery \$15 per person <http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/recreation/wild/whitneylottery.shtml>

Best season: Late summer, early autumn

Driving directions: From Lone Pine, CA, turn west onto Whitney Portal Road. Drive 13 miles to the trailhead.

It can be crowded on the weekends.

Comments: Mt. Whitney, the highest peak in the contiguous United States, is one of the most climbed peaks in the country. The Mountaineer’s Route is harder and far less crowded than the Mt. Whitney Trail; however, from Lower Boy Scout Lake it’s a non-maintained path. The route can be done in one day; though, many people camp and then complete the route the next day. The only equipment you need is a good pair of hiking boots and a **water filter** (I drank almost two gallons of water). If you hike the route when it has snow and ice, crampons and ice ax are mandatory.

Lodging: I have stayed at the Dow Motel in Lone Pine, CA, located in the middle of the town, numerous times.

All rooms have mini-fridges, microwaves, and DVD players.

310 S. Main Street, (760)-876-5521

Camping: Whitney Portal Campground \$19 per night

<http://www.reserveamerica.com/campgroundDetails.do?subTabIndex=0&&contractCode=nrso&parkCode=whitneyportal>

The hike: Hike the Mt. Whitney Trail almost a mile to just before the second creek crossing where you turn right onto the Mountaineer’s Route at the sign, which reads: North Fork of Lone Pine Creek. ([Waypoint 1.](#)).

Follow the steep trail up the slope and across the creek. The trail continues to climb and Ebersbacher Ledges



Photo 1

east along the ledges to a class 3 climb up a boulder. Once up, make a “U” turn and head west. Rocks outline the turn. The trail resumes at the end of the ledges. Follow the trail to the saddle where you’re rewarded with a

are visible just before you cross the creek again. (See Photo 1.) The trail crosses the creek again at a waterfall.

Once across the creek, head west (left) about 40 yards paralleling the base of Ebersbacher Ledges to a class 3 chute that leads past the lone foxtail pine in Photo 1 – [Waypoint 2](#).

Traverse about 50 yards east along the ledges to a class 3 climb up a boulder. Once up, make a “U” turn and head west. Rocks outline the turn. The trail resumes at the end of the ledges. Follow the trail to the saddle where you’re rewarded with a good view of Mt. Whitney.



Photo 2

Follow the trail about a hundred yards and cross Lower Boy Scout Lake at the east (near) end of the lake. Hike SW around the side of the lake. This is one of the most scenic parts of the route. It’s a great place to camp with tall trees and plenty of primitive campsites, but it’s still a long way to the



Photo 3

peak. (Photo 2 is an overview of the route from Lower Boy Scout Lake to Upper Boy Scout Lake.)

Your next destination is Upper Boy Scout Lake. From here the hike becomes a route and is harder to follow. Follow the **lower** path that stays near the bushes to a small boulder field. The path resumes on the far side of the boulder field



Photo 4

where the grade becomes moderate. The path weaves between the boulders as seen in Photo 2 ([Waypoint 3](#)). Once past the boulders, cross the creek to the north (right) side. Cairns mark the crossing.

Hike up the granite slabs. Water runs down the slabs to the north (right) of you. Continue up the slabs about 200 yards until you see a cairn on a boulder. A path starts at the boulder and crosses the water that you have been paralleling on your right side. It then cuts through the vegetation and crosses to the south side of the creek.

After crossing the creek, head SW on the path and slabs. In a few minutes Upper Boy Scott Lake appears. Unless you need a break or water,



Photo 5

there's no reason to hike to Upper Boy Scott Lake. Follow any of the numerous paths ([Waypoint 4](#)) SW up the slope outlined in Photo 3. Mt. Whitney comes back into view during your trek up to the ridge. Keep following the path and cairns toward Iceberg Lake. You're treated to incredible views of Whitney and Keeler and Day Needle. In about a mile you'll parallel a wall. Iceberg Lake is just above the wall and the base of Mt. Whitney stands in front of you. When the path divides, follow the **upper** path. It weaves up the slope to the wall. Continue on the path **pass** where water flows down the wall. The path then weaves up the slope and continues to Iceberg Lake. This avoids climbing the wall. If you're low on water, fill up at Iceberg Lake ([Waypoint 5](#)). There are no more water sources. The most strenuous part of the hike is yet to

come.

From Iceberg Lake, you'll ascend a chute to the left of the gully. It provides better footing than the main gully; however, you'll eventually hike up the gully. (See Photo 4) Photo 5 is a close up of the chute and outlines the preferred route. Be careful not to climb too high in the chute or you'll cliff out. Climb to the "X" in the photo and then head north (right) into the gully ([Waypoint 6](#)). Stay near the south (left) wall of the gully and scramble to the notch. Be careful of loose rock in the gully.

From the notch ([Waypoint 7](#)), the path heads west toward the sloping west end of the summit; however, it eventually is obscured by snow and ice most of the year. The best plan of attack is to climb (class 3) the broken north face to the summit. Start the climb at the rib shown in Photo 6. It's about 50 yards from the top of the notch. Be careful of ice even in late August. Once on the summit, head south to the summit hut and sign the register.



Photo 6

To Descend: From the summit hut head to the north rim of the summit. Parallel the cliffs until you find a spot you feel comfortable down-climbing. Once down head NE to the notch. ([Waypoint 7](#))

Descend the gully to Iceberg Lake. From here you will be retracing your steps. Follow the path south down through the cliffs and past the waterfall. Continue on the path (it seems like a long distance) to just above Upper Boy Scout Lake, but don't hike to the lake. Instead head NE down the slabs toward the trees that lie by the creek. Cross the creek and follow the path through the vegetation and back onto the slabs. Keep a sharp eye out for the path, which continues to the right (south) of the slabs. Follow the path and watch for the large boulder field across the creek to the south. When you're about even with the boulder field,

cross the creek and head to the boulder field. (Cairns mark the crossing.) Scramble over the boulders eventually picking up the path that leads to Lower Boy Scout Lake. Cross the lake at the far (east) end. Follow the path to Ebersbacher Ledges. Scramble down the ledges and parallel the wall about 40 yards before crossing the creek at a 20-foot waterfall. Don't be lured into crossing the creek too soon. Continue on the path to the Mt. Whitney Trail and follow it back to the trailhead.

Waypoints: (NAD 27 – Not WGS84)

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|--------------|------------|-------------------------------|
| 1. 36.58693N | 118.24428W | North Fork of Lone Pine Creek |
| 2. 36.58585N | 118.25209W | Foxtail Pine |
| 3. 36.58145N | 118.26293W | |
| 4. 36.58022N | 118.27111W | |
| 5. 36.58069N | 118.28477W | Iceberg Lake |
| 6. 36.57984N | 118.28960W | |
| 7. 36.57946N | 118.29386W | Notch |