

THE MT. WHITNEY TRAIL

INYO National Forest



THE 11 MILE MT. WHITNEY TRAIL leads to the highest peak in the contiguous United States. It is the most frequently climbed peak in the Sierra Nevada, if not in the country.

The Mt. Whitney trail and summit are part of the National Wilderness Preservation System, which is designated by act of Congress. The first 8.5 miles of the trail are in the John Muir Wilderness administered by the Inyo National Forest. The last 2.5 miles of the trail are in the Sequoia National Park Wilderness. The trail, and the encompassing area, is undeveloped federal land managed to preserve the lands primeval character.

CLIMBING Mt. Whitney is popular and attracts thousands of people every year. To maintain Wilderness character and to prevent overcrowding, there are daily quotas for the trail during the peak season of May 15th through November 1st. **Permits are required year-round for all overnight hikes and for day hikes past Lone Pine Lake, located 2.8 miles from the trailhead.**

For the sake of the land and all its inhabitants, please become familiar with the wilderness regulations. Traveling with reverence and respect will keep Mt. Whitney wild for generations to come.

TRAILHEAD LOCATION: Whitney Portal can be reached by driving 13 miles west of Lone Pine on Whitney Portal Road. Whitney Portal Road intersects Highway 395 at the traffic signal in downtown Lone Pine. The road is usually open from May to early November. In the winter, the last 6 miles of the road are not plowed.

TRAIL DIFFICULTY: Moderate to strenuous, depending upon your experience and skill level. The trailhead elevation is 8,365 feet. The elevation at the summit is 14,496 feet. At high elevations, altitude sickness affects many people. You can put yourself in danger by pushing yourself past your physical limits. Headaches, dizziness and nausea are symptoms that should not be ignored. If you begin showing signs of altitude sickness you should descend to a lower elevation immediately.

WILDERNESS RISK: Of the thousands of people that climb Mt. Whitney, many are unaware of the inherent risks associated with being outdoors and on their own. You are far from help should you have a mishap. Remoteness and changing weather may compound

problems that otherwise could be manageable.

EVERYONE HAS A PERSONAL RESPONSIBILITY TO MAINTAIN SELF-SUFFICIENCY IN THE WILDERNESS. For a safe trip, assess the skills and abilities of every member of your party, prepare for a variety of weather, and plan for every contingency. Create your own "good luck" by being well prepared and making prudent decisions.

WEATHER: Summer days may be warm at lower elevations, but at higher elevations it will be cooler. You may need a down jacket in July, when it is 90 degrees at the trailhead! Even in the summer, the following conditions may exist: rain, wind, lightning, snow, ice and below freezing temperatures. Afternoon thunderstorms are common and may show no warning of their arrival. These storms build quickly and can occur daily. If clouds appear before noon, precipitation is likely to happen. Above tree line, it is difficult to find shelter from lightning strikes. At the first signs of lightning, assess your situation and decide if you should turn around. Check the weather forecast before starting your trip.

SEASON: Most people hike the trail from mid-July through early October when the trail is free of most snow. However, ice patches and snowfields may exist on the trail at any time.

EQUIPMENT: Equipment needs will vary according to the time of year, the condition of the trail and your mountaineering skills. Layered clothing, rain gear, good boots, sunglasses, sunscreen and a hat are advisable. At anytime of year one or more of the following may be recommended: crampons, ice ax, snowshoes, skis, ski poles, and walking sticks. You and every member of your party should know how to use this equipment properly *before* hiking up the mountain. Only you will know what your specific equipment needs are for a successful hike. Be aware; you may need an ice ax on a section of trail where your partner can easily walk without one. Knowledge of your safety gear may mean the difference between life and death.

WATER: Water is available near the trail as far as Trail Camp. Carry water to the summit, as there is no dependable source of water after Trail Camp. The presence of Giardiasis in backcountry water poses a serious health problem. Filter, boil or chemically treat all drinking water.