

From the Expert Authors of **WILDERNESS PRESS**



3RD EDITION

BACKPACKING CALIFORNIA

*Mountain, Foothill, Coastal
& Desert Adventures in the Golden State*



WILDERNESS PRESS



CONTENTS

Locator Maps	iv–v
Foreword by Mike White	xii
Backpacking in California	1
Map Legend	7

WESTERN CALIFORNIA

THE PENINSULAR RANGES 9

Cuyamaca Mountains

- 1** East and West Mesas *by Scott Turner* 13

Pine Creek Wilderness

- 2** Horsethief Canyon *by Scott Turner* 18

San Mateo Canyon Wilderness

- 3** San Mateo Canyon *by David Harris* 22

The San Jacinto Mountains

- 4** San Jacinto Loop *by David Harris* 26

The Santa Rosa Mountains

- 5** Art Smith Trail *by David Harris* 30

SANTA CATALINA ISLAND (CHANNEL ISLANDS) 34

- 6** Trans-Catalina Trail *by David Harris* **35**

THE TRANSVERSE RANGES 43**The San Bernardino Mountains**

- 7** San Gorgonio Mountain *by Jerry Schad and by David Harris* **46**
8 San Bernardino Mountain Traverse *by Jerry Schad and by David Harris* **50**
9 Holcomb Crossing Trail Camp Loop *by David Harris* **55**

The San Gabriel Mountains

- 10** Big Santa Anita Loop *by Jerry Schad and David Harris* **58**
11 East Fork San Gabriel River *by Jerry Schad and David Harris* **62**
12 Silver Moccasin Trail *by David Harris* **67**
13 High Desert Loop *by David Harris* **73**

The Santa Monica Mountains

- 14** Point Mugu State Park Loop *by David Harris and Doug Christiansen*
80

THE COAST RANGES 85**Big Sur**

- 15** Big Sur's South Coast: Salmon Beach to Buckeye Meadow
by Analise Elliot Heid **91**
16 Pine Valley *by Analise Elliot Heid* **96**
17 Coast to Cone Peak: CA 1 to Vicente Flat and Cone Peak Loop
by Analise Elliot Heid **102**

Diablo Range

- 18** Poverty Flat and Los Cruzeros Loop
by Kathleen Dodge Doherty **110**
19 Redfern Pond Loop *by Kathleen Dodge Doherty* **117**
20 The Ohlone Wilderness Trail *by Kathleen Dodge Doherty* **123**

Santa Cruz Mountains

- 21** Pescadero Creek Loop *by Michel Digonnet* **130**
22 Skyline to Big Basin *by Michel Digonnet* **136**

Point Reyes National Seashore

- 23** Coast Trail *by Matt Heid and Jessica Lage* **143**
24 Bear Valley Loop *by Matt Heid and Jessica Lage* **149**

Lost Coast

- 25** Lost Coast Trail North: Mattole River to Black Sands Beach
by Mike White 155
- 26** Lost Coast Trail South: Hidden Valley to Usal Beach
by Mike White 163

KLAMATH MOUNTAINS 171

Trinity Alps

- 27** Canyon Creek Lakes and L Lake *by Mike White* 173
- 28** North Fork Trinity River to Grizzly Lake *by Mike White* 181
- 29** Caribou Basin and Sawtooth Ridge *by Mike White* 189
- 30** Deadfall Lakes, Mount Eddy, and the Sacramento Headwaters
by Andy Selters 197

Marble Mountains

- 31** Sky High Lakes Basin and Red Rock Valley Loop *by Mike White* 202
- 32** Shackleford to Campbell, Cliff, Summit, Little Elk, Deep, and
Wrights Lakes Loop *by Mike White* 207

EASTERN CALIFORNIA

DESERT 216

Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

- 33** Butler and Coyote Canyon Loop *by Lowell and Diana Lindsay* 220
- 34** Rockhouse Valley Loop *by Lowell and Diana Lindsay* 225
- 35** Mountain Palm Springs Extended Loops (includes Indian Valley,
Mountain Palm Springs, Bow Willow, and Rockhouse Canyon)
by Lowell and Diana Lindsay 230

Death Valley National Park

- 36** Marble Canyon to Cottonwood Canyon Loop
by Michel Digonnet 236
- 37** Surprise Canyon *by Michel Digonnet* 241
- 38** Ubehebe Country *by Michel Digonnet* 248
- 39** Devil's Playground *by Michel Digonnet* 254

White Mountains

- 40** Cottonwood Basin Loop *by Andy Selters* 260

SOUTHERN SIERRA NEVADA 265

Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and John Muir and Golden Trout Wildernesses

- 41** Mineral King and Little Five Lakes Loop *by Mike White* **269**
- 42** Crescent Meadow to Whitney Portal via the High Sierra Trail
by Mike White **276**
- 43** Lodgepole to Deadman Canyon to Crescent Meadow
by Mike White **285**
- 44** Rae Lakes Loop *by Mike White* **294**
- 45** Cottonwood Lakes to Upper Rock Creek Loop *by Mike White* **301**
- 46** Horseshoe Meadow to Whitney Portal *by Mike White* **307**
- 47** South Lake to North Lake *by Mike White* **313**
- 48** North Lake to Humphreys Basin Loop *by Mike White* **323**
- 49** North Fork Big Pine Creek *by Andy Selters* **329**
- 50** Kings-Kern Divide Loop *by Andy Selters* **335**
- 51** Middle Fork Bishop Creek *by Andy Selters* **342**

Ansel Adams Wilderness

- 52** Agnew Meadows to Devils Postpile *by Mike White* **347**
- 53** Lillian Lake Loop *by Elizabeth Wenk* **354**

NORTHERN SIERRA NEVADA 359

Yosemite National Park

- 54** Happy Isles to Half Dome *by Elizabeth Wenk* **363**
- 55** Happy Isles to Merced Lake *by Elizabeth Wenk* **368**
- 56** Glen Aulin and Waterwheel Falls *by Elizabeth Wenk* **374**
- 57** High Sierra Camps Loop, Northwest Part *by Elizabeth Wenk* **379**
- 58** High Sierra Camps Loop, Southeast Part *by Elizabeth Wenk* **385**
- 59** Tuolumne Meadows to Vogelsang High Sierra Camp and Emeric Lake *by Elizabeth Wenk* **391**

Hoover Wilderness

- 60** Virginia Lakes Basin to Green Creek *by Elizabeth Wenk* **396**
- 61** Benson Lake and Matterhorn Canyon Loop via Barney and Peeler Lakes *by Elizabeth Wenk* **401**

Carson-Iceberg Wilderness

- 62** Fourth of July, Round Top, and Winnemucca Lakes Loop
by Mike White **408**
- 63** Pacific Grade Summit to Bull Run Lake *by Mike White* **413**

Desolation Wilderness

- 64** Glen Alpine to Half Moon Lake *by Mike White* **418**
- 65** Velma, Fontanillis, and Dicks Lakes *by Mike White* **422**
- 66** Meeks Bay to Emerald Bay *by Mike White* **426**

Tahoe Rim Trail

- 67** Tahoe Rim Trail: Showers Lake *by Tim Hauserman* **431**
- 68** Tahoe Rim Trail: Star Lake and Freel Peak *by Tim Hauserman* **436**

Plumas-Eureka State Park

- 69** Little Jamison Canyon to Grass, Rock, Jamison, and Wades Lakes *by Mike White* **440**

Bucks Lake Wilderness

- 70** Bucks Lake Wilderness Loop *by Mike White* **445**

CASCADE RANGE 451

Lassen Volcanic National Park

- 71** Summit Lake to Cluster, Twin, Rainbow, Snag, Horseshoe, and Swan Lakes Loop *by Mike White* **453**

Caribou Wilderness

- 72** Central Caribou Lakes Loop *by Mike White* **460**

Mount Shasta

- 73** Treeline Circumnavigation of Mount Shasta *by Michael Zanger and Andy Selters* **455**

WARNER MOUNTAINS 471

- 74** The Summit Trail: Pepperdine Trailhead to Patterson Lake *by Mike White* **472**

Appendix: Trips at a Glance 478

Index 484

About the Contributors 495

FOREWORD *by Mike White*

Oddly, I trace my own wanderlust to my mother, who never learned to drive a car but had a voracious appetite to simply go places, whether on foot around the neighborhoods of Portland, Oregon, or as a passenger in someone else's vehicle. The destination didn't seem to matter all that much; she just liked to go. Growing up on a small farm near an equally small town in northeastern Kansas, she bolted for points west after graduating high school, a fairly uncommon move for an unmarried woman in the 1940s. Spending some time in Denver, she eventually landed in Portland. Although she never traveled abroad, or even through the majority of the United States, she loved trips to the Oregon Coast, Mount Hood, the Columbia River Gorge, and Central Oregon. Whether passed through genetics or simply by example, the joy of wandering inhabited her only child as well, and once I owned my first vehicle, a green VW Bug named Obie, the way was set for my own explorations into the nearby mountains.

When I left Portland to attend college in Seattle, my forays into the wilderness expanded, although they were still strictly limited to the Cascades of the Pacific Northwest. My first trip to the Golden State occurred one spring break when a buddy and I drove to the Bay Area, picked up some friends, and then continued south for the warmth and sun of Palm Springs. Prior to that week, my perception of California had been formed almost exclusively through the music of the day, first by the surf culture promoted by groups like the Beach Boys and later by the psychedelic scene of Haight-Ashbury in San Francisco. Upon my return home from my brief visit, the state maintained the feel of an exotic, faraway land, and its mountains were completely unknown to me. Little did I know at that time that in a few short years the eastern Sierra would become my new home.

Two years after marrying Robin, we carefully drove the green VW into the back of a U-Haul truck; just as carefully packed our minimal worldly possessions into it; and headed off toward Reno, Nevada, where she would be attending medical school and I would look for work. This move occurred in mid-August during the second year of a

BACKPACKING IN CALIFORNIA

Authors of hiking guidebooks face a paradox: Without dedicated supporters, the wilderness would never be protected in the first place. The best and most enthusiastic advocates are those who have actually visited the land, often with the assistance of a guidebook. Unfortunately, too many boots on the ground can also be destructive. The responsibility of every visitor is to tread lightly on the land and speak out strongly for its preservation. Though California has nearly 15 million acres of officially designated wilderness, the job of protecting those precious wildlands is far from complete. Outdoors enthusiasts are strongly encouraged to join in efforts to set aside even more of the state's millions of acres of unprotected roadless terrain. Even land already officially protected as wilderness needs continued citizen involvement. Issues such as use restrictions, grazing rights, mining claims, all-terrain-vehicle damage, and entry fees all present ongoing challenges. Remember, you own this land, so treat these areas with respect, and get involved in its management. Almost every agency official will stress the need for hikers to leave no trace of their visit. However, the time has come to go beyond the well-known Leave No Trace principles that foster a landscape without evidence of human presence; we must also leave the backcountry in better shape than before our visits.

GENERAL BACKPACKING GUIDELINES

This book is not a how-to guide for backpackers. Anyone contemplating an extended backpacking vacation should already know about equipment, the Leave No Trace ethic, conditioning, how to select a campsite, food, first aid, and all the other aspects of this sport. For those without such skills, many excellent books cover these subjects. However,

*Opposite: The Minarets towering over Minaret Lake (see Trip 52, page 347)
photographed by Mike White*

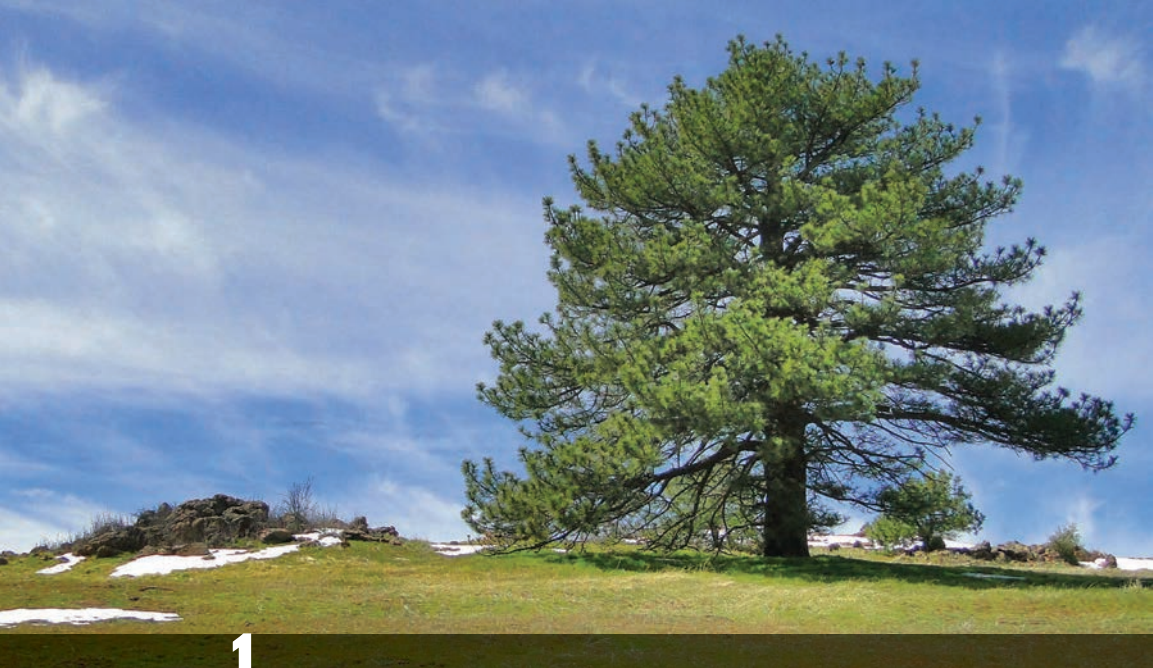
WESTERN CALIFORNIA



THE PENINSULAR RANGES

The Peninsular Ranges in the southernmost part of California belong to a series of mountains stretching some 1,000 miles south—all the way down the Baja California Peninsula. These ranges are generally parallel to one another, and they trend northwest–southeast, which is typical of the “grain” of almost all the major mountain ranges in California. As in the Sierra Nevada range (the backbone of the northern two-thirds of California), the Peninsular Ranges tend to have dramatically steep eastern slopes and more gradually inclined western slopes. The northernmost and highest peak in the Peninsular Ranges is San Jacinto Peak (10,804') in Riverside County. South from there, the range slopes down to somewhat lesser elevations in the Palomar, Cuyamaca, and Laguna Mountains of San Diego County. A bit lower still are the Santa Ana Mountains, which form the eastern border of Orange County. Because the Peninsular Ranges stretch from near the coast to the desert and rise (sometimes abruptly) from elevations of near sea level, there is a startling diversity of climate and vegetation. Nearly every major climate zone and major type of plant community found in the state of California can be found here. For example, desert scrub vegetation endures summertime temperatures as high as 120°F at the foot of San Jacinto Peak, while the top of the peak, only a few miles away, pokes into the arctic-alpine climate zone, where even the hardest evergreen trees cannot survive. In between are belts of chaparral and various zones of oak and coniferous forest. Because no part of Peninsular Ranges territory lies very far away from paved highways and dirt roads, day hiking is more popular than overnight backpacking. Most wilderness-oriented backpacking trips are of the weekend variety. Multiday trips along the Pacific Crest Trail are possible, but these excursions tend to cross roads fairly frequently.

Opposite: Tahquitz Peak and Strawberry Valley (see Trip 4, page 26)
photographed by David Harris



1

EAST AND WEST MESAS

Scott Turner

DISTANCE: 16.3 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 3

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 2,600'/2,600'

TYPE OF TRIP: Loop

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: N/A

DIFFICULTY: Moderately strenuous

SOLITUDE: Moderate solitude

SCENERY: 7

MAP: USGS *Cuyamaca Peak*; Tom Harrison *Cuyamaca Rancho State Park*

BEST SEASON: Fall and spring

LOCATION: Cuyamaca Rancho State Park

CONTACT: 760-765-0755, parks.ca.gov/667

PERMITS

Permits for both campgrounds are available first come, first served at the entrance to Green Valley Campground and the entrance to Paso Picacho Campground. Complete the permit reservation for both campsites prior to your hike, and keep the envelope stub as your permit. Green Valley Campground closes from December to April. Because this

Above: Jeffrey pine and patches of snow following a March storm

East and West Mesas



is your starting point, speak with the staff at the Paso Picacho Campground entrance to receive direction on where to leave your car.

CHALLENGES

At several spots on the route, especially on the descent into Harper Canyon, ceanothus on north-facing slopes tends to grow at a rate that sometimes outpaces trail maintenance efforts. If the trail is overgrown, expect to push through bushy sections on the descent from Granite Springs Campground to Harper Creek.

During the spring and early summer, ticks may lie in wait at the ends of branches. When they latch onto a host—say, an unsuspecting backpacker—they can bury their heads into the skin and suck blood until engorged. Perform periodic tick checks to prevent ticks from latching on and so you can remove them as soon as possible if they do.

HOW TO GET THERE

TRAILHEAD N32° 54.138' W116° 34.794'

From I-8 in Los Terrinitos, follow CA 79 north 12 miles to Paso Picacho Campground. At the entrance, you can obtain permits for both campgrounds and check in with the rangers. Next, backtrack south on CA 79 for 5 miles and turn right into Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. Immediately turn right on Arroyo Seco Fire Road. In 0.3 mile, turn left to stay on Arroyo Seco Fire Road, arriving shortly thereafter at Green Valley Campground, on the right. Enter the campground, and follow instructions from park staff regarding how to reach the designated parking area for overnight hikers.

TRIP DESCRIPTION

After sorting out the permits and leaving your car at the prescribed parking area, cross CA 79 and join the East Side Trail. Turn left to follow the East Side Trail north 0.7 mile to a junction with the Harvey Moore Trail. Turn right onto the Harvey Moore Trail, and begin an extended, moderate ascent through a ravine blanketed in chaparral and oak-and-pine woodland recovering from the 2003 Cedar Fire. Continue straight at 1.2 miles at a junction with a connector trail leading north to Juaquapin Creek. Continue straight at a second junction leading north to Dyar Spring at 2.2 miles. The first of several possible water sources lies about 0.8 mile north of this junction, where Dyar Spring collects in a horse trough. As with all of the water sources on the route, be prepared to filter and treat the water to avoid exposure to harmful microorganisms. Beyond the Dyar Spring Trail, the Harvey Moore Trail enters a beautiful, spacious meadow atop East Mesa. This rolling, grassy landscape peppered with Jeffrey pines and black oaks hosts a parade of wildlife, including mule deer, coyotes, bobcats, wild turkeys, songbirds, and even the occasional mountain lion. The spacious blue California sky arcs overhead to meet the rolling highlands of Cuyamaca Peak to the west and the Laguna Mountains to the east. The trail winds through this gorgeous habitat on a gentle incline until a Y-junction at 3.6 miles. Turn left here to continue toward Granite Springs Trail Camp, which nestles into a grove of Jeffrey pines and oaks at 4.2 miles. Granite Springs features several designated standard campsites and one group campsite, a water pump, equestrian stables, and pit toilets. Check with rangers before your hike to ascertain whether water is available from the pump. During wet periods, an intermittent creek that lies about

TAKE THIS TRIP

San Diego County's patchwork quilt of public and private land generally precludes multi-day backpacking trips. Furthermore, the county's semiarid climate creates scarce opportunities for running water on potential multiday routes in places like Cleveland National Forest and Anza-Borrego Desert State Park. One notable and wonderfully scenic exception is this wide, looping route that visits the East and West Mesas on the southern half of Cuyamaca Rancho State Park. Reliable water sources, sweeping vistas, frequent wildlife sightings, and a pair of comfortable backcountry campgrounds make this one of the best multiday routes in southwestern California.

50 yards north of the campground may provide an alternate source of water, but it's unwise to count on this water source unless there has been recent precipitation.

Day two begins with an extended descent into Harper Canyon as the Harvey Moore Trail continues its looping way back to Green Valley and the Sweetwater River. After passing through more groves of Jeffrey pines, the trail reaches the cusp of Harper Canyon and commences a long, switchbacking descent amid occasionally overgrown ceanothus. The trail reaches its first crossing of Harper Creek at 6.6 miles, which runs during winter and spring but may dry up by early summer. Continue along the northern bank of the creek to a second crossing of Harper Creek at 7.4 miles. If there's time for a short diversion, find and follow an informal path upstream along Harper Creek to a series of small waterfalls and picturesque pools gouged into colorful metamorphic rock.

After the Harper Creek Crossing, the Harvey Moore Trail ends at a split junction with the East Side Trail. Turn left here and parallel the southern bank of the Sweetwater River—another reliable water source—for 1.1 miles to a connector trail that crosses the river and leads north to the Cuyamaca Outdoor School and the ruins of the Dyar House. At 8.9 miles, cross the access road for the camp and continue along the Cold Stream Trail. The namesake watercourse for this trail is another potential water source, as is Cold Spring, which lies another 1.1 miles ahead. Just north of Cold Spring, turn left onto a connector trail that leads west to CA 79. Cross CA 79 to find the gated entrance for West Mesa Fire Road.

All Hail the Almighty Couscous

Let's face it: most backpacking food sucks, and there isn't much you can do to improve it. Couscous is a great option for a quick, satisfying meal. It cooks quickly, often comes packaged with delicious flavors, and pairs well with dehydrated veggies, pine nuts, or almonds, as well as shelf-stable sausages or salamis. Add an individual packet of olive oil for extra calories and flavor, and you will eat like a king.

Cuyamaca Peak's forested heights loom high above the grasslands of East Mesa.



CHANNEL ISLANDS

The eight Channel Islands form a 160-mile archipelago off Southern California's coast. Geologically speaking, the northern islands in Channel Island National Park are an extension of the Transverse Ranges. Santa Catalina Island's geology is particularly complicated, beginning with underwater volcanos that metamorphosed the surrounding rocks about 100 million years ago. Plate movement and uplift thrust the island from the sea, while erosion carved its rugged form.

Catalina Island is the most developed, with about 4,000 people living in the communities of Avalon and Two Harbors, but most of this island remains wild as well. It has been inhabited for at least 8,000 years. The native Pimugan people first met Europeans in 1542 when Spanish explorer Juan Rodríguez Cabrillo arrived, and the Spanish soon named the island for Saint Catherine. William Wrigley, of chewing gum and Chicago Cubs fame, purchased nearly the entire island in 1919. In 1975, the Wrigley family donated nearly 90% of the land to the Catalina Island Conservancy, which continues to administer most of the land outside the towns.

Catalina is home to about 400 native plant species. Six of those are endemic, found only on the island: Catalina manzanita, mahogany, dudleya, bedstraw, ironwood, and St. Catherine's lace. They are most easily viewed at the Wrigley Memorial and Botanical Garden. Chaparral, coastal sage scrub, woodland, and grassland are most common, with the grassland heavily impacted by the cattle, sheep, and feral goats and pigs that once roamed the ranchland. Hollywood brought 14 bison to the island in 1924 while filming *The Vanishing American*, and about 150 of their progeny still roam the grasslands.

Boaters have long enjoyed Catalina. The island is becoming increasingly popular with backpackers who admire the unique scenery and outstanding camping along the Trans-Catalina Trail.



6

TRANS-CATALINA TRAIL

David Harris

DISTANCE: 38.5 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 4–5

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 8,000'

TYPE OF TRIP: Point-to-point

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: Ferry required

DIFFICULTY: Moderately strenuous

SOLITUDE: Moderately populated

SCENERY: 8

MAP: Catalina Island Conservancy, tinyurl.com/transcatalinatrailmap

BEST SEASON: October–May, but the trail is closed during and after rainstorms

LOCATION: Santa Catalina Island

CONTACT: Catalina Island Conservancy, 310-510-2595, catalinaconservancy.org

PERMITS

A free hiking permit is required and can be obtained online at the Catalina Island Conservancy website or at the visitor centers. Expensive camping permits are required in advance

(continued on page 38)

Above: Little Harbor Campground on Catalina is a gem and an oasis.

(continued from page 35)

for each campsite and are obtained by calling Two Harbors Visitor Services at 310-510-4205. Some campgrounds have two-night minimums, but these are waived for Trans-Catalina hikers. Campsites fill up, so make your reservation well in advance. Parsons Landing lacks tap water, but you can request a water jug and/or firewood for a fee as part of your camping reservation. Pick up your camping permit when you arrive at Hermit's Gulch Campground in Avalon, or at the visitor services office near the dock in Two Harbors.

Camping fuel is prohibited on the ferry, but you can purchase all kinds of fuel at Chet's Hardware in Avalon or the General Store in Two Harbors.

CHALLENGES •••••

While the beaches are appealing in the summer, the interior is too hot for enjoyable hiking. Carry at least 3 quarts of water between campgrounds, or more on a hot day. Some portions of the trail are steep; trekking poles may be useful. Hiking at night is prohibited.

HOW TO GET THERE •••••

TRAILHEAD VISITOR CENTER N33° 20.565' W118° 19.408'

HERMIT GULCH TRAILHEAD N33° 19.710' W118° 20.406'

This trip requires a 75-minute ferry ride from San Pedro to Avalon, and a return ferry from Two Harbors. The Catalina Express ferry schedule changes seasonally and on weekends. In the winter, there may be only one ferry a day from Two Harbors, and none at all on Tuesdays and Thursdays. The fare is currently \$36.75 each way. Find schedules at catalinaexpress.com. Catalina Express parking is located at Berth 95 in San Pedro. From I-110, take Exit 1A for CA 47. Take an immediate exit onto Harbor Boulevard, and then continue straight on Swinford Street to the ferry terminal.

TRIP DESCRIPTION •••••

Start at the Catalina Conservancy's Trailhead Visitor Center near the ferry terminal at 708 Crescent Ave. in Avalon, where you can pick up your permit, buy a map, or inquire about current conditions. Your first leg is to walk through town to the Hermit's Gulch Campground (1.5 miles). Follow the frontage road along the harbor to the big tourist pier, then turn left onto Catalina Avenue through the heart of town. At the south end of Catalina Avenue, jog right three short blocks, then turn left onto Avalon Canyon Road and follow it to Hermit's Gulch. If you are patient, you might save the walk by catching the Avalon Transit Garibaldi bus from one of its stops along Catalina Avenue or Avalon Canyon Road. If you arrive on the afternoon ferry, you might want to spend the first night at Hermit's Gulch and make a side trip to the Wrigley Memorial and Botanic Garden.

From the campground, follow the Hermit Gulch Trail as it switchbacks up through chaparral and wildflowers. At 3.2 miles, reach Divide Road, where you turn right (north). Enjoy excellent views of Avalon Bay from the ridge. At 5.0 miles, veer left onto the trail that leads

to the small Haypress Reservoir. Circle around the north side of the lake to Haypress Recreation Area at 5.6 miles; there you'll find tap water, restrooms, and picnic tables beside a playground. Be sure you have plenty of water because the stretch ahead can be hot.

The trail briefly follows the reservoir before turning north and rejoining Airport Road at 6 miles. At 6.5 miles, near a viewpoint, turn left onto singletrack. The next stretch of undulating but scenic trail crosses three lightly used roads and the Skull Ridge Trail before reaching Black Jack Campground at 10.5 miles. Here you'll find tap water, restrooms, and a cold shower at the large campsite nestled in a pleasant grove of oaks and conifers.

Follow trail signs carefully as you climb through a maze of roads between Black Jack Mountain (2,010') and Mount Orizaba (2,102'). Orizaba, the highest point on the island, is easily recognized from afar by its flat summit, bulldozed to hold a white bowling pin-shaped aircraft radio beacon. At 11.5 miles, beyond the saddle, the route leaves Upper Cottonwood Road and becomes a steep but scenic singletrack dropping north into Cottonwood Canyon and climbing back toward a mesa where Airport in the Sky is situated. Turn left near the old soapstone quarry and meet Airport Road just outside the airport (12.8 miles). Consider stopping at the DC3 Grill at the airport to have their famous buffalo burger or just refill your water bottle.

Pass under a decorative Western arch and join the trail that circles the west end of the airport. At 13.7 miles, join Empire Landing Road near Buffalo Springs Reservoir. Turn left and head west on this dull and dusty road. At 15.0 miles, be sure to pick up the singletrack on the left descending Big Springs Ridge. Your long descent is rewarded by reaching Little Harbor, one of the most scenic parts of the island. At the bottom of the trail, jog right on Isthmus Road, then left on trail to reach the corner of the Little Harbor Campground (19.0 miles). This jewel of a campground fronting a sandy beach is shaded by palms and has water, restrooms, and cold showers. Beware that stingrays frequent the harbor; if you go in the water, shuffle your feet to warn them you are coming and to avoid stepping on one. With (expensive) reservations through Wet Spot Rentals, you can rent kayaks here and explore the windward side of the island on a layover day.

The signed Trans-Catalina Trail switchbacks up to the northeast above the campground. The first several hundred yards have some of the best photo ops on the whole trail. Send your photographer

TAKE THIS TRIP

The Trans-Catalina Trail is an increasingly popular backpacking trip across the length of California's most popular island. It traverses diverse scenery, from view-rich ridges to secluded coves to intimate woodlands. You'll likely encounter bison along the trail (give them plenty of space), and you might see the Catalina Island fox and other endemic species. The campgrounds along the trail are some of the most memorable (and expensive) in California. This trip is far more than the sum of its parts. While portions involve walking dusty fire roads or traversing weedy hillsides impacted by decades of ranching, the experience of hiking the entire island and seeing it from so many perspectives is unforgettable.

POSSIBLE ITINERARIES

	CAMP	MILES	ELEVATION GAIN
Day 1	Blackjack	10.7	3,000'
Day 2	Little Harbor	8.2	1,000'
Day 3	Parsons Landing	11.9	3,600'
Day 4	Two Harbors	7.7	400'

	CAMP	MILES	ELEVATION GAIN
Day 1	Blackjack	10.7	3,000'
Day 2	Little Harbor	8.2	1,000'
Day 3	Two Harbors	5.3	1,600'
Day 4	Parsons Landing	6.6	2,000'
Day 5	Two Harbors	7.7	400'

With more time, add a day at Two Harbors between Little Harbor and Parsons Landing, or a layover at Little Harbor or Parsons Landing.



The Trans-Catalina Trail passes Catalina's famous Airport in the Sky, where you might stop for a fresh buffalo burger.

THE COAST RANGES

California's Coast Ranges stretch from San Diego to the Oregon border, a nearly continuous line of rugged subranges that runs parallel to the coastline and extends inland for roughly 100 miles. The overall topography consists of closely packed ridgelines and peaks separated by narrow, often deep valleys. Unlike the hard granite bedrock of the Sierra Nevada, the underlying geology consists primarily of the Franciscan Formation, a collection of mudstones, sandstones, and other loosely consolidated sedimentary rock. Annual precipitation increases as you travel from the chaparral slopes of Southern California to the redwood forest of the central and northern coastlines. Rainfall is highest along the coastline but diminishes rapidly as you move inland.

In Southern California, the San Bernardino and San Gabriel Mountains arc east-west around the Los Angeles metropolitan area, transitioning into the San Rafael and Sierra Madre Mountains to the north. These mountains then merge into the Santa Lucia Range, which rises abruptly from the ocean to form the precipitous interior terrain of the Big Sur region. A break in the Coast Ranges occurs inland from Monterey Bay before the land rises upward again to form the many subranges of the San Francisco Bay Area, including the redwood-cloaked Santa Cruz Mountains, the oak-studded Diablo Range of the East Bay, and the peaks of Marin County and Point Reyes National Seashore. From here north, the mountains widen into the broad expanse of Mendocino National Forest and eventually transition into the peaks of northwest California's Klamath Mountains. The topography remains sheer and severe along the coastline, however, reaching a rugged crescendo along the Lost Coast—the wildest stretch of coastline in the Lower 48 states.

BIG SUR

The name *Big Sur* evokes images of a wild coast nestled along the base of the rugged Santa Lucia Range. California's Big Sur country stretches from Carmel southward to San Simeon, and from the Pacific Ocean eastward into the Santa Lucias. This dramatic landscape was home to the Esselen, Ohlone, and Salinian tribes until the mid-1800s, when a



15

BIG SUR'S SOUTH COAST:

Salmon Creek to Buckeye Meadow

Analise Elliot Heid

DISTANCE: 7.0 miles out-and-back (Buckeye Camp); 7.9 miles point-to-point (Cruikshank Trailhead); 8.4 miles point-to-point (Alder Creek Camp)

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 1–3

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 2,058'/304' (one-way to Buckeye Camp)

TYPE OF TRIP: Out-and-back

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: If you choose to hike this route point-to-point from the Buckeye Trailhead to the Cruikshank Trailhead, it's 4.1 miles between trailheads along CA 1.

DIFFICULTY: Moderately strenuous

SOLITUDE: Moderately populated

SCENERY: 8

MAPS: Wilderness Press *Big Sur Recreation Map*; Jack Glendening *Big Sur Trailmap* (bigsurtrailmap.net)

BEST SEASON: October–May, when fog banks roll well offshore, migrating gray whales spout within sight of land, and the meadows bloom anew. In summer, fog often obscures coastal views. However, the wet months (November–April) also bring an onslaught of ticks.

LOCATION: Silver Peak Wilderness

CONTACT: Los Padres National Forest: 831-385-5434 (Monterey District Headquarters); 805-927-4211 (Pacific Valley Station); fs.usda.gov/lpnf

Above: View from the Buckeye Trail

Big Sur's South Coast: Salmon Beach to Buckeye Meadow



PERMITS

Fire permits are required for all stoves (preventwildfire.ca.org/Campfire-Permit). Off-leash dogs are permitted, except in designated campgrounds, where a 6-foot or shorter leash is required. Horses and livestock are allowed on the trail, but bikes are prohibited.

CHALLENGES

Most of the trail beats through fast-growing coastal brush that overruns the trail. Poison oak is common along the coastal slopes. Warmer temperatures (usually above 70°F) bring an onslaught of nagging flies that persist through late fall. Wetter months will turn this trail into a tick haven.

HOW TO GET THERE

BUCKEYE TRAILHEAD N35° 48.875' W121° 21.633'

From San Simeon, head north on CA 1 for 19 miles. Park at the abandoned Salmon Creek Station, 100 yards north of a tight bend in CA 1, 8 miles south of Gorda and 1.5 miles north of the posted San Luis Obispo County line. The trailhead is immediately west of the parking area. There are no facilities or water at the trailhead.

TRIP DESCRIPTION

The signed Buckeye Trailhead (357') lies just west of the dilapidated, abandoned ranger station. You'll cross a cattle guard and climb behind the station to a gated fence. After a steep, short climb past interwoven branches of poison oak and morning glories, the trail climbs along a minor ridge to open slopes of fragrant coastal scrub, including sagebrush, yarrow, hedge nettle, and ceanothus. The ridge leads to a minor saddle (0.5 mile, 760') directly above CA 1 for spectacular, unobstructed views of the coast.

From the saddle, the Buckeye Trail crosses arid slopes flanked with open grasslands and scattered yuccas, climbing northwest past a fence to the Soda Springs Trail junction (1 mile, 860'). While the Soda Springs Trail leads 0.5 mile to CA 1, offering a shorter route to Buckeye Camp, that trail is steeper and is often overgrown.

Past the junction, the trail crosses a bay-lined minor gully, which in the wetter months supports a small waterfall 30 feet northeast of the trail. You'll quickly cross three more gullies fringed with oaks, maples, bays, toyons, and buckeyes, offering shady respite from the exposed coastal slopes.

Tick Tips

In tick country, wear light-colored clothing to help spot them. Though not breathable, rain pants or nylon pants may thwart these pesky hitchhikers altogether. Check for ticks regularly on the trail. If you do find one burrowed into your skin, take a pair of tweezers, grip the tick as close to the skin as possible, and pull it straight out. Avoid squeezing the tick, as it may emit bacteria into the skin. While tick-borne Lyme disease remains rare in the northern Santa Lucia Range, that could change in the future. A tick must be attached for at least 24 hours to transmit the disease. If you develop a bull's-eye rash, pain, fever, headache, or muscle aches after a tick bite, see your doctor immediately.

TAKE THIS TRIP

The Buckeye Trail offers grand vistas of Big Sur's stunning and less visited southern coast. If you can arrange a shuttle vehicle, point-to-point trips include 1.5 miles to Soda Springs Trailhead via the Buckeye and Soda Springs Trails; 7.9 miles to the Cruikshank Trailhead via the Buckeye and Cruikshank Trails; and 8.4 miles to Alder Creek Camp via the Buckeye Trail. Regardless of your itinerary, Buckeye Camp is a highlight. Perched amid an open meadow, the camp is roomy enough for a group outing.

Just past a cascading creek, you will reach an oak-clad minor ridge with impressive views. Cross another shady gully to a stand of ponderosa pines for views south toward Piedras Blancas, near Hearst Castle. Views open up to the north as you climb open oak and pine woodlands past a dry gully (3.3 miles, 2,060'). From here, the trail crosses a typically dry creek past a fence to the signed Buckeye Camp entrance at spacious Buckeye Meadow.

Skirting the oak-rimmed meadow, the trail then reaches the main site (3.4 miles, 2,060') in the shade of a large bay. This is an ideal spot for a group outing, with plenty of room for several tents. A reliable spring-fed creek passes just south of camp, though in summer the shallow, murky water may lose its appeal. To reach the smaller second site, continue northwest, threading a pair of valley oaks at the meadow's edge. The site lies just downslope, offering a fire ring and room for up to two tents.

You can either return the way you came or loop north on the Buckeye Trail to the Cruikshank Trailhead along CA 1 (a 7.9-mile point-to-point trek from the abandoned Salmon Creek Station to the lower Cruikshank Trailhead). Be aware that this route is more difficult due to overgrown brush and the tread being obscured in places.

BUILD-UP AND WIND-DOWN TIPS

Drive the coast for an iconic coastal California experience. While the dedication of CA 1 in 1938 opened the Big Sur wilderness for all to enjoy, the construction project was also the source of devastating environmental damage. Residents have long lobbied on behalf of the region, motivated by environmental concerns and fears that tourism might lead to rampant development and commercialism. Soon after the highway opened, residents lobbied the local board of supervisors and county planning commission to ban billboards and similar visual noise. As a result, visitors today can still enjoy stunning, uninterrupted vistas from the many turnouts along CA 1. If you can carve out the time, don't miss a classic iconic California experience to drive the 90-mile stretch of highway that defines Big Sur country.

Visit an off-the-grid ecoresort. Decades ago, founders John and Corinne Handy wanted to design a place that preserved the beauty and health of the land while allowing guests to immerse themselves in Big Sur's natural beauty. Today, the yurts and campsites of Treebones (877-424-4787, treebonesresort.com) "perch lightly" with a smaller



A mound of serpentine, California's state rock, creates a barren landscape where only endemic species survive.

carbon footprint than other resorts along the coast. Innovative ideas put into practice here include recycling heat created by clean-burning microturbines. The heat is used for radiant-heated floors and to provide hot water for the resort and its pool and spa. Treebones also boasts two great restaurants of garden-to-table food. All kitchen scraps are fed to chickens or composted at the organic garden. Most of their vegetables are grown on site and supplement additional produce bought from neighbors and other local, high-quality purveyors. If glamping is your thing, Treebones is a premier spot to visit.

POSSIBLE ITINERARY

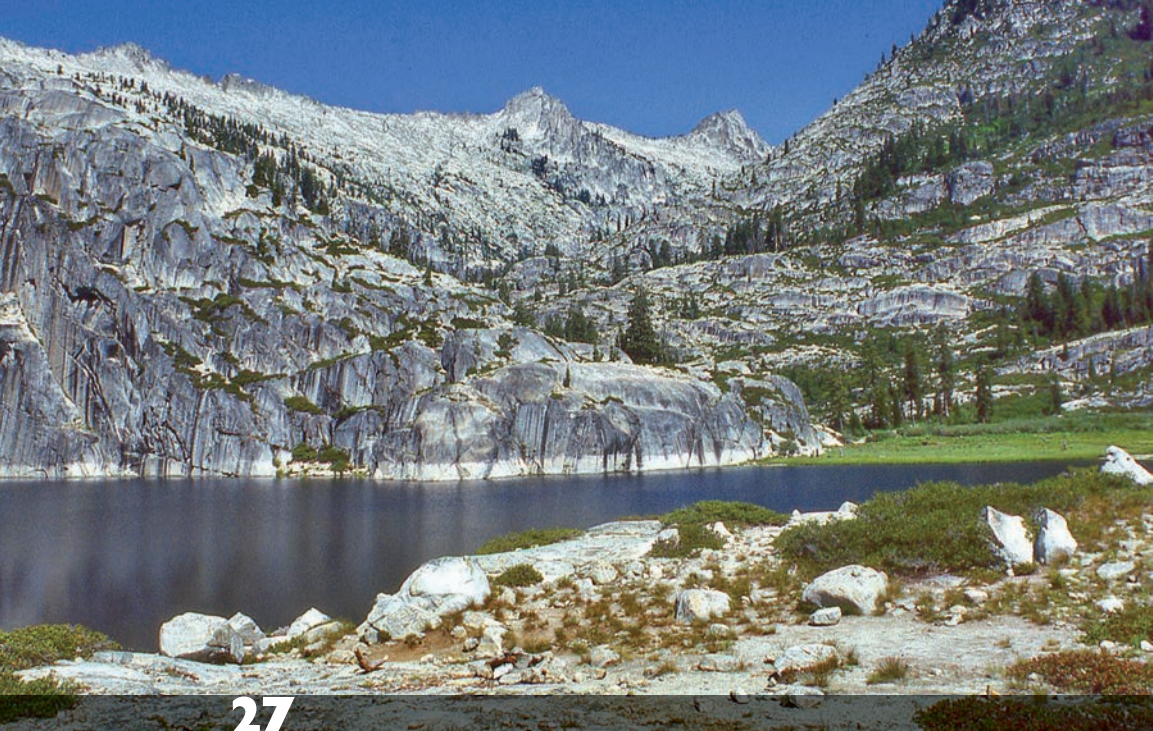
	CAMP	MILES	ELEVATION GAIN
Day 1	Buckeye Camp Side trip to Salmon Creek Falls from trailhead	3.5 0.1	2,058' 20'
Day 2	Out	3.5	304'

KLAMATH MOUNTAINS

The remote Klamath Mountains cover a large portion of northwestern California and southwestern Oregon, a region rich in diversity spanning the spectrum from coastal forests to alpine heights. Two of California's most pristine wilderness areas are found within the Klamath Mountains. The Trinity Alps Wilderness, northwest of Redding, contains 515,000 acres of rugged backcountry with more than 500 miles of trails. The Marble Mountain Wilderness, southwest of Yreka, contains 227,000 acres, about half the size of the Trinity Alps but with nearly the same trail mileage. Because these wilderness areas are well away from major population centers, they are not heavily visited. Some trails in the Klamath Mountains are more popular than others, but the opportunity for solitude is much higher here than in the Sierra Nevada. While you may not encounter many other people on the trail, you might see some cattle, as grazing is allowed during certain periods (check with the U.S. Forest Service for exact dates if you wish to avoid these bovine invasions). With a thousand miles of trail, the Klamath Mountains present a plethora of backpacking opportunities beyond the handful of trails in this guide. Not many other areas in California present such geographic diversity within such proximity, spanning the range from coastal forests to alpine heights. The region is more than worthy of consideration for backpacking adventures beyond the routes described here.

THE TRINITY ALPS

The Trinity Alps are characterized by rushing streams, high waterfalls, mountain lakes, granite peaks, and cool, deep forests. Set aside as a primitive area in the 1930s, the Alps were officially added to the wilderness system in 1984. Three national forests (Shasta-Trinity, Klamath, and Six Rivers) oversee the administration of the Trinity Alps. Three trips are described in this guide within the Trinity Alps. The trail to Canyon Creek Lakes is perhaps the most heavily used path in the otherwise lightly used wilderness, providing a suitable weekend (or longer) trip to a trio of scenic high lakes tucked into a granite cirque in the central Alps. A much longer journey follows the tumbling course of the North Fork Trinity



27

CANYON CREEK LAKES AND L LAKE

Mike White

DISTANCE: 16.5 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 2–3

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 3,500'/100' to L Lake; 2,500'/100' to Lower Canyon Creek Lake

TYPE OF TRIP: Out-and-back

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: N/A

DIFFICULTY: Moderately strenuous

SOLITUDE: Moderately populated

SCENERY: 8

MAP: USGS *Mount Hilton*; USFS *A Guide to the Trinity Alps Wilderness*

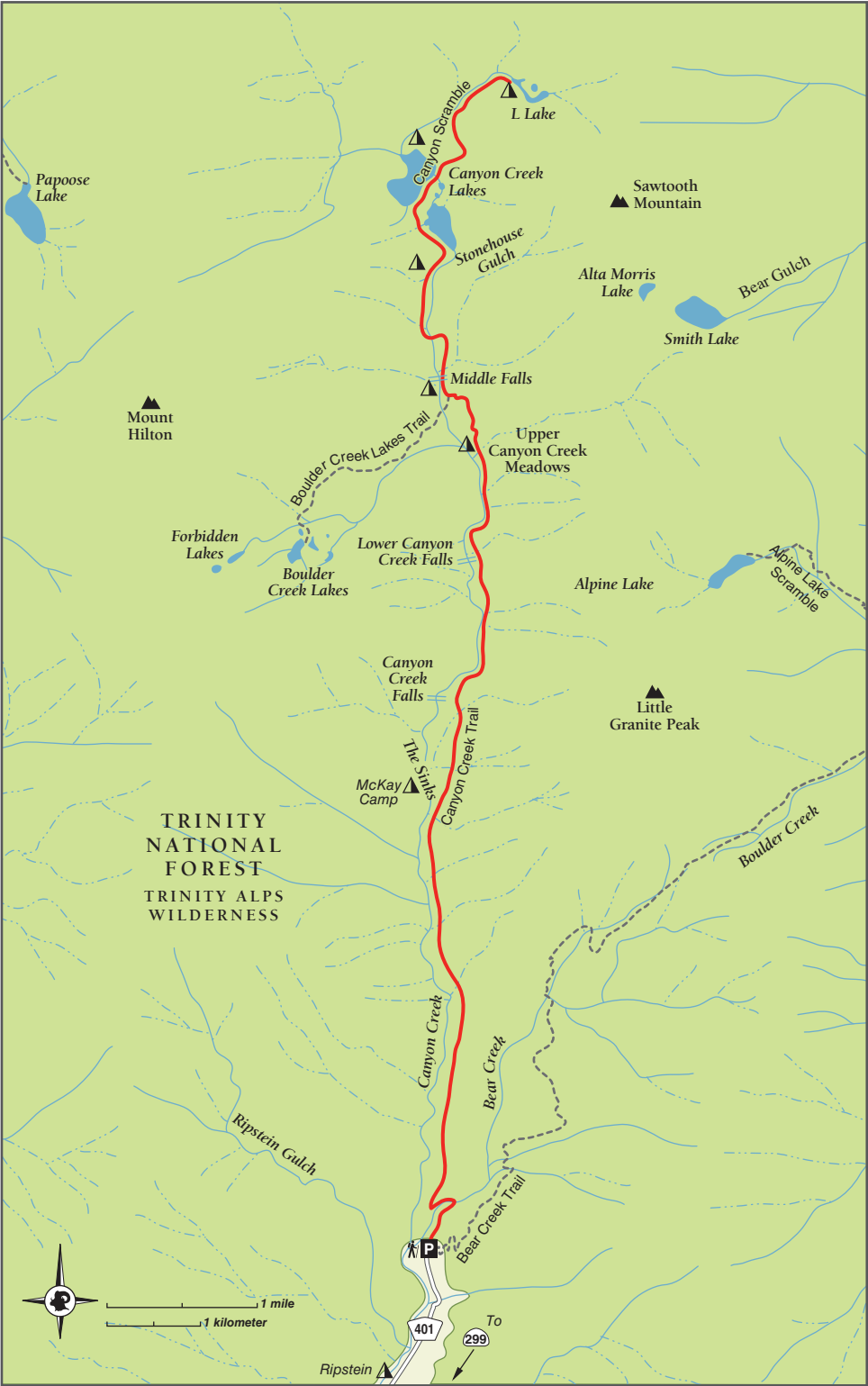
BEST SEASON: Summer–early fall

LOCATION: Trinity Alps Wilderness

CONTACT: Shasta-Trinity National Forest, 530-623-2121, fs.usda.gov/main/stnf/home

Above: The Canyon Creek Lakes are some of the most scenic in the Trinity Alps.

Canyon Creek Lakes and L Lake



PERMITS

A wilderness permit is required for all overnight trips in the Trinity Alps Wilderness, and a campfire permit is also required if you plan to have one. Both permits can be obtained by self-registration at the ranger station in Weaverville.

CHALLENGES

Because this is perhaps the most popular trail in the Alps, get an early start on the weekend to secure the best campsites. Better yet, take this trip during the week to minimize the crowds. Campfires are prohibited in the upper Canyon Creek watershed, beginning 500 feet beyond the Boulder Lakes Trail junction.

HOW TO GET THERE

CANYON CREEK TRAILHEAD N40° 53.250' W123° 01.460'

From Weaverville, which is about 45 miles west of Redding, continue westbound on CA 299 for 8 miles to the tiny town of Junction City, and turn right (north) onto Canyon Creek Road. Drive 13.2 miles on Canyon Creek Road to the large parking area at the road's end. The trailhead is equipped with a pit toilet and picnic table.

TRIP DESCRIPTION

From the well-signed trailhead, the Canyon Creek Trail branches left from the Bear Creek Trail, as you head north on slightly rising tread. Soon leveling off, the trail then makes a moderate descent among big-leaf maple and dogwood to a boulder hop of Bear Creek. From the creek, the trail climbs around the shoulder into the main canyon, well above Canyon Creek. A long, steady ascent ensues, where you pass through the dry vegetation of an open, mixed forest of canyon and black oaks, incense cedars, Douglas-firs, and ponderosa pines. The climb continues uninterrupted until you reach an informal junction with a use trail heading down 200 yards to a large flat and the relocated McKay Camp just below the Sinks, a large rockslide where the creek adopts a subterranean course. For interested backpackers, McKay Camp offers fine campsites and good fishing nearby.

From the junction, a moderate climb leads to the first source of water since Bear Creek, where a pleasant little stream glides across the trail through a narrow swath of vegetation. As refreshing as this water may appear, you might want to hold off on acquiring any for a little while, as the trail soon crosses this stream two more times via a pair of switchbacks. Leaving the thrice-visited stream behind, continue the ascent up the east side of the canyon. The old trail followed the creek bottom past spectacular Canyon Creek Falls, but nowadays hikers must settle for the distant roar of the falls and perhaps an incomplete and unsatisfying cross-canyon glimpse through dense brush and moderate forest. Farther up the trail, you draw near to the creek and pass by Lower Canyon Creek Falls, a less prestigious fall but one with a wonderful swimming hole at the base, offering a great way to beat the heat on a hot afternoon.

EASTERN CALIFORNIA



A pleasant mix of meadows, forests, and crags spreads around Cottonwood Basin, beneath the eastern flanks of the White Mountains (see Trip 40, page 260).
photographed by Andy Selters

DESERT

ANZA-BORREGO DESERT STATE PARK

Spanning the eastern half of San Diego County and portions of Riverside and Imperial Counties, Anza-Borrego Desert State Park offers a vast landscape of over 1,000 square miles that rivals many national parks in its diversity and natural resources. The geology of this region, which lies adjacent to the San Andreas Fault Zone on the eastern edge of the Pacific Plate, is highly influenced by tectonic activity that has raised mountains 2 miles high and dropped nearby basins below sea level to create this rugged yet sublime landscape. In the northern portion of Anza-Borrego, the very active San Jacinto Fault Zone has created vast wilderness panoramas ranging from gaping basins and soaring escarpments to sunbaked dry lakes and occasionally muddy playas to snow-covered winter peaks.

One of the least known and most remote portions of this park is in this northern section, bordering the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument along the San Diego and Riverside County line. This area lies within both state and federal wilderness areas. The Santa Rosa Mountains Wilderness, at more than 100,000 acres, was part of the original selection creating the California Wilderness Preservation System in 1974. Its boundaries are within the state park. Just north of this area is the Santa Rosa Wilderness, created in 1984. At more than 70,000 acres, it is an isolated area within the Santa Rosa and San Jacinto Mountains National Monument administered jointly by the Bureau of Land Management and the US Forest Service. A dramatic entry into the heart of these wilderness areas is through Clark Valley in northeastern Anza-Borrego. It is a challenging but profound desert experience that offers cross-country backpackers solitude, rock-lined canyons, sweeping views, Indian ruins, shade-covered campsites, and sparse but generally dependable water supplies.

The best backpacking opportunities in the Anza-Borrego region are found in this same general location due to probable water supplies, interesting and variable terrain, and the general isolation found in wilderness areas. All of the westside canyons along Coyote Creek



33

BUTLER AND COYOTE CANYON LOOP

Lowell and Diana Lindsay

DISTANCE: 18.0 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 2

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 2,328'/2,328'

TYPE OF TRIP: Loop

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: N/A

DIFFICULTY: Moderately strenuous

SOLITUDE: Moderate solitude

SCENERY: 8

MAP: USGS *Clark Lake, Clark Lake NE, Collins Valley, and Borrego Palm Canyon*

BEST SEASON: Winter–spring

LOCATION: Anza-Borrego Desert State Park

CONTACT: 619-767-4037 (administrative office), 619-767-5311 (ranger/sector office); parks.ca.gov/?page_id=638

PERMITS

None. But it's wise to check in and out at the Anza-Borrego Desert State Park (ABDSP) visitor center in Borrego Springs (760-767-4205). They will notify a ranger if you don't check back in after a reasonable amount of time has passed.

Above: Riparian corridor thicket photographed by Don Fosket

Butler and Coyote Canyon Loop



CHALLENGES

Finding your way up the mouth of the rocky gorge of Butler Canyon and identifying the route up to the playa on the ridge is the greatest challenge.

HOW TO GET THERE

TRAILHEAD N33° 23.228' W116° 21.949'

From CA 86 (Salton City), drive west 21.3 miles on County Highway S-22 (Borrego Salton Seaway) to the paved turnoff just east of mile marker 26. From Borrego Springs, travel east from Christmas Circle 7.2 miles on S-22 to the Rockhouse Canyon Road turnoff on the north (left) side. Turn right and proceed northeasterly on this road toward Clark Dry Lake. A high-clearance vehicle is recommended for the road to Rockhouse Canyon. Drive northeast (leaving pavement after 0.7 mile) to the signed Rockhouse Canyon turnoff 1.6 miles from County Highway S-22. Turn northwest (left) at this junction and

Don't Depend on Your Phone

Telephone reception is sketchy at best in remote desert areas. Don't depend on it for emergencies. Let a trusted person know where you are going and when you will return, and check back in. Don't depend on your phone for GPS navigation either. Use a real GPS device that uses satellites for global positioning, or use a map and compass.

shed and now want to descend southerly and then southwesterly, staying generally on the ridgeline into the Box Canyon drainage. Avoid dropping from the ridgeline into small but deep canyons on either side until you near the bottom of Box Canyon. As the ridgeline turns clearly west at 2,000 feet in elevation, arc a bit to the northwest (right) and descend into a shallow tributary canyon to exit west (left) onto the floor of Box Canyon at 8.4 miles and an elevation of 1,610 feet. Turn south (left) and descend Box Canyon to enter Coyote Canyon at 9.7 miles and an elevation of 1,190 feet between Lower Willows and Third Crossing. Exit Middle Willows and join the Coyote Canyon Road at 9.9 miles along the Third Crossing (1,160') of Coyote Creek.

Camp nearby or hike west (right) into Collins Valley to find a more isolated campsite along gurgling Coyote Creek. From Third Crossing it is a leisurely 2.8-mile hike downstream following the jeep route to the Alcoholic Pass turnoff 0.5 mile southeast of (beyond) Desert Gardens. The gardens are marked by a table and bench and commemorate the work of the Anza-Borrego Committee (now Foundation) to acquire private landholdings within the park for public benefit. (Alternately, you could hike a couple more flat miles on the Ocotillo Flat horse trail, which loops northeast from Second Crossing along the colorful Coyote Badlands and then southeast to First Crossing to rejoin the road.)

The Alcoholic Pass Trail, at 12.7 miles and 920 feet, is an Indian route between Coyote Canyon and Rockhouse Canyon. Follow the trail up the rocky ridge, and discover a trail register en route to the saddle, which is at 13.9 miles and 1,568 feet elevation. Three miles farther, down a prominent wash, is the Rockhouse Canyon Road. Turn northwest (left) and continue about a mile to the Rockhouse/Butler Canyon junction to complete the loop.

TAKE THIS TRIP

This desert backpack has it all: a narrow, snaking gorge with steep walls; American Indian sites; running water; spectacular views of both high mountain escarpments and desert lowlands; a register to record your crossing over Alcoholic Pass; and segments of total solitude and silence—a high-quality escape that's close to civilization. After a day's workout winding down shaded desert canyons, Coyote Creek will be a refreshing place to cool off. Enjoy the chorus of frogs at the water's edge.

BUILD-UP AND WIND-DOWN TIPS

If you are looking for a late meal after your trip, go to Carlee's (660 Palm Canyon Drive, 760-767-3262 carleesplace.com) in Borrego Springs, just west of Christmas Circle. Borrego Springs shuts down early, but Carlee's stays open until midnight. For an early breakfast, try a stack of blueberry pancakes at Kendall's (587 Palm Canyon Drive, 760-767-3491, kendalls.cafe) in The Mall. For supplies you have forgotten, try Borrego Outfitters (579-E Palm Canyon Drive, 760-767-3502, borregooutfitters.com) in The Mall or True Value Hardware (785 Palm Canyon Drive, 760-767-5001, truevalue.com) just east of

SOUTHERN SIERRA NEVADA

The Sierra Nevada reaches a climax toward the southern end of its 400-mile range, in an area referred to as the High Sierra. A sizable portion of the High Sierra lies within the boundaries of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, John Muir Wilderness, Golden Trout Wilderness, and Ansel Adams Wilderness. Within these jurisdictions are some of the range's most significant geographical features—14,494-foot Mount Whitney, the highest peak in the Lower 48, and the largest groves of *Sequoiadendron giganteum*, more commonly known as giant sequoias, the world's largest trees by volume. This region also provides passage to a trio of famous routes: a section of the 2,600-mile Mexico-to-Canada Pacific Crest Trail, part of the 218-mile Mount Whitney-to-Yosemite Valley John Muir Trail, and the entirety of the trans-Sierra, 69-mile High Sierra Trail. Along with these legendary features, the High Sierra is blessed with acres and acres of terrain for which the area is famous, including glistening granite peaks, crystal-line lakes, dashing streams, wildflower-carpeted meadows, and glaciated valleys.

Thankfully, this region is mostly devoid of major roads. From Tioga Pass Road through Yosemite National Park and CA 178 well to the south—a distance of roughly 170 air miles—no highways cross the Sierra, leaving a huge, roadless tract of land for the enjoyment of backcountry visitors. The Southern Sierra features vast wilderness lands, including Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, of which more than 800,00 acres are managed as wilderness; the 650,000-acre John Muir Wilderness (California's largest wilderness area), which wraps around the northern and eastern boundaries of the parks; and the 304,000-acre Golden Trout Wilderness, located along the southern boundary of Sequoia. Smaller pockets of wilderness adjoin the parks on the west side, including Monarch, Kaiser, Dinkey, and Jennie Lakes Wildernesses. Farther north, between the John Muir Wilderness and Yosemite National Park, the Ansel Adams Wilderness protects another 232,000 acres of rugged backcountry, including the renowned Minarets.



41

MINERAL KING AND LITTLE FIVE LAKES LOOP

Mike White

DISTANCE: 39.2 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 5–7

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 10,710'/10,710'

TYPE OF TRIP: Loop

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: N/A

DIFFICULTY: Strenuous

SOLITUDE: Moderately populated

SCENERY: 9

MAP: USGS *Mineral King, Chagoopa Falls, and Triple Divide Peak*

BEST SEASON: Midsummer–early fall

LOCATION: Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks

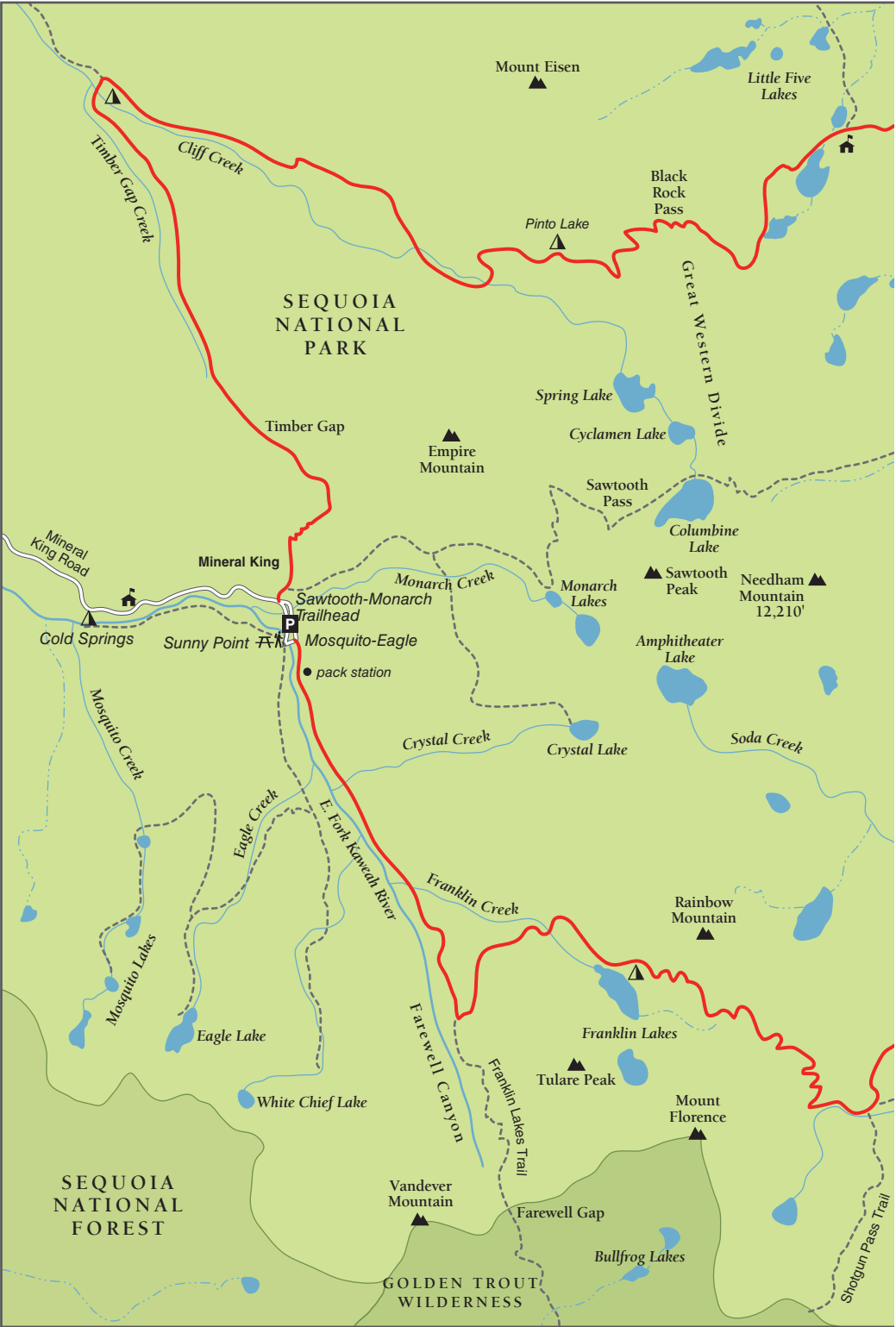
CONTACT: 559-565-3341, nps.gov/seki

PERMITS

A wilderness permit is required for entry into the backcountry of Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks. Trailhead quotas are in effect from about the end of May to the end of September, and approximately 66% of the daily trailhead quota is available by advance reservation March 1–September 15. At least two weeks before the day of

Above: Mineral King and the Great Western Divide from Franklin Pass

Mineral King and Little Five Lakes Loop





departure, you can obtain a permit application from the park website (nps.gov/seki) and submit the completed form by mail (Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Parks, Wilderness Permit Reservations, 47050 Generals Highway, #60, Three Rivers, CA 93271) or via email to sekiwildernessreservations@nps.gov. A nonrefundable fee of \$10 per reservation plus \$5 per person is assessed and can be paid by credit card through pay.gov.

Applicants will receive a reservation confirmation by mail, which must then be turned in to the issue station nearest your departure trailhead in order to obtain the actual permit. You must confirm or pick up your permit after 1 p.m. on the day before departure or before 9 a.m. on the departure day; otherwise the permit is canceled and becomes available to other parties on a walk-in basis. Free walk-in permits may be obtained after 1 p.m. on the day before departure, and unclaimed reserved permits become available after 9 a.m. on the day of departure. More information about wilderness permits is available online at nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/wilderness.htm.

Fees are charged for entrance into the park as well (\$35 for a seven-day pass, \$60 for an Annual Park Pass to Sequoia & Kings Canyon, and \$80 for an America the Beautiful Pass that provides year-round access to all national parks and recreation areas).

CHALLENGES

Gas is not available beyond Three Rivers, so make sure you have enough fuel to get to Mineral King and back. The marmots of Mineral King are notorious for chewing on engine hoses and stowing away in engine compartments, so make sure you check your vehicle for leaks and stowaways before departure. Better yet, use a large tarp to wrap the undercarriage of your car. Campfires are banned in several places along this route, so plan on using a stove. Bears are active throughout Sequoia National Park, and while bear canisters are not required, they are highly recommended. In lieu of canisters, use the bear boxes at the locations noted in the description. Bear-bagging food has proven to be largely ineffectual, compounding the bear problem.

HOW TO GET THERE

MOSQUITO-EAGLE TRAILHEAD N36° 26.905' W118° 35.716'

Near the east end of Three Rivers, leave CA 198 to follow the Mineral King Road east 24.7 miles to the Mosquito-Eagle Trailhead parking area. The narrow and winding road has unpaved sections and will require about 1.5 hours to negotiate—more if you encounter much traffic. Along the way, you pass the Lookout Point entrance station (fee), Atwell Mill Campground, Silver City Resort, Cold Springs Campground, and Mineral King ranger station. Any extra food or scented items should be placed in the storage shed (24-hour access) opposite the ranger station, as both bears and marmots have been known to damage vehicles parked in Mineral King.

TRIP DESCRIPTION

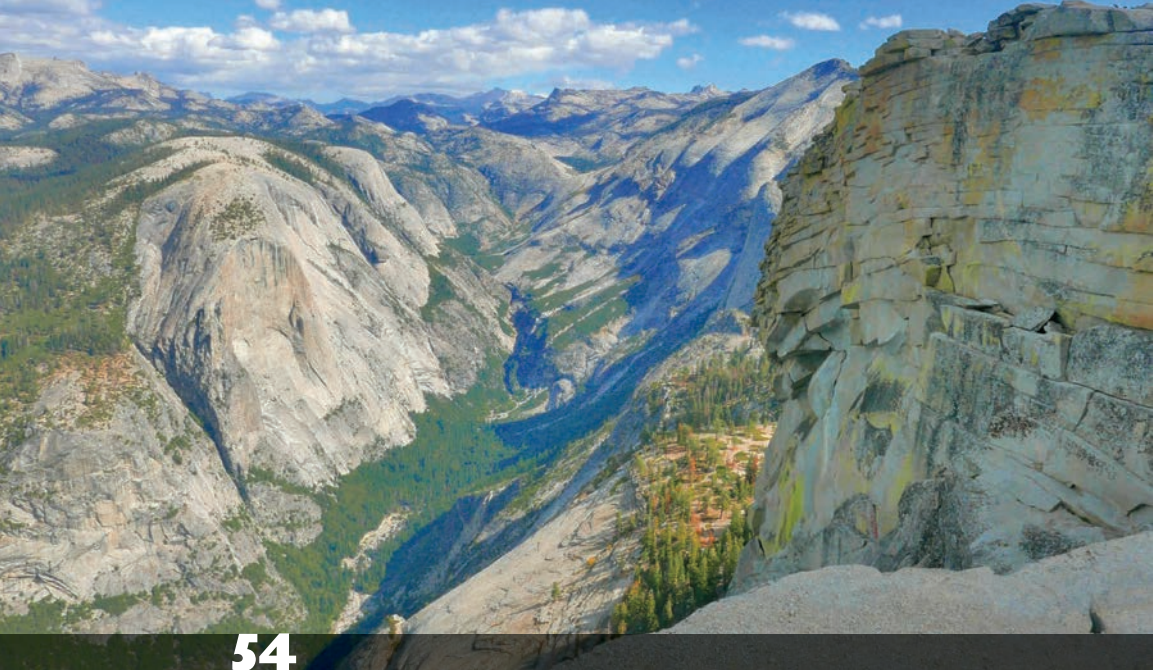
Backtrack down the road, cross the bridge over East Fork Kaweah River, and then follow the pack station access road up the canyon (southeast) past the horse corral. After a mile, ford Crystal Creek and proceed on single-track trail (the road continues along the river through

NORTHERN SIERRA NEVADA

At 400 miles long, the Sierra Nevada is the longest and highest single-block mountain range in the United States. Geographically, the Sierra Nevada is generally divided into three sections: southern, central, and northern. For the purposes of this guide, the northern section is the northern half of the range, extending from the North Fork Feather River Canyon southward to Yosemite National Park's south and southeastern boundaries. The northern Sierra Nevada makes up about half the length of the entire range, an area roughly 200 miles long. Although much of the overlying rock in the northern Sierra is volcanic in nature, the underlying rock is part of the huge Sierra Nevada batholith, a composition of many granitic plutons, which are made up of intrusive igneous rock that crystallized beneath the earth's surface. This geologic distinction identifies the northern lands in this region as part of the greater Sierra Nevada, as opposed to part of the southern Cascades, which are primarily volcanic in origin.

Yosemite is included for practical reasons, even though its topography is significantly different from lands to the north and is considered part of the High Sierra. Yosemite's mountains are indeed taller, with some surpassing 13,000 feet, but it is really the shift to a granitic landscape that defines the High Sierra. From Yosemite south, the granite comprising the Sierra Nevada batholith is on display at the surface—almost everywhere—while it is more buried farther north. This classic granite landscape is evident in both Yosemite Valley and throughout the 1,200 square miles of backcountry.

Around the North Fork Feather River Canyon, the Sierra Nevada's crest lands are relatively low—the highest peaks are rarely over 7,000 feet—but the elevations increase southward. Around Donner Pass (I-80), crest lands are mostly around 8,000 feet, with the highest peaks exceeding 9,000 feet. Around Lake Tahoe, crest lands are similarly high, but the highest peaks approach 11,000 feet. Finally, along Yosemite's crest lands, valleys are mostly over 9,000 feet, and the peaks above them are mostly 11,000–12,000 feet, with two exceeding 13,000 feet.



54

HAPPY ISLES TO HALF DOME

Elizabeth Wenk

DISTANCE: 15.7 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 2–3

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 5,410'/5,410'

TYPE OF TRIP: Out-and-back

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: N/A

DIFFICULTY: Strenuous

SOLITUDE: Crowded

SCENERY: 10

MAP: USGS Yosemite Valley; Tom Harrison Yosemite Valley

BEST SEASON: Summer–early fall

LOCATION: Yosemite National Park

CONTACT: Yosemite National Park Wilderness Center, 209-372-0826,
nps.gov/yose

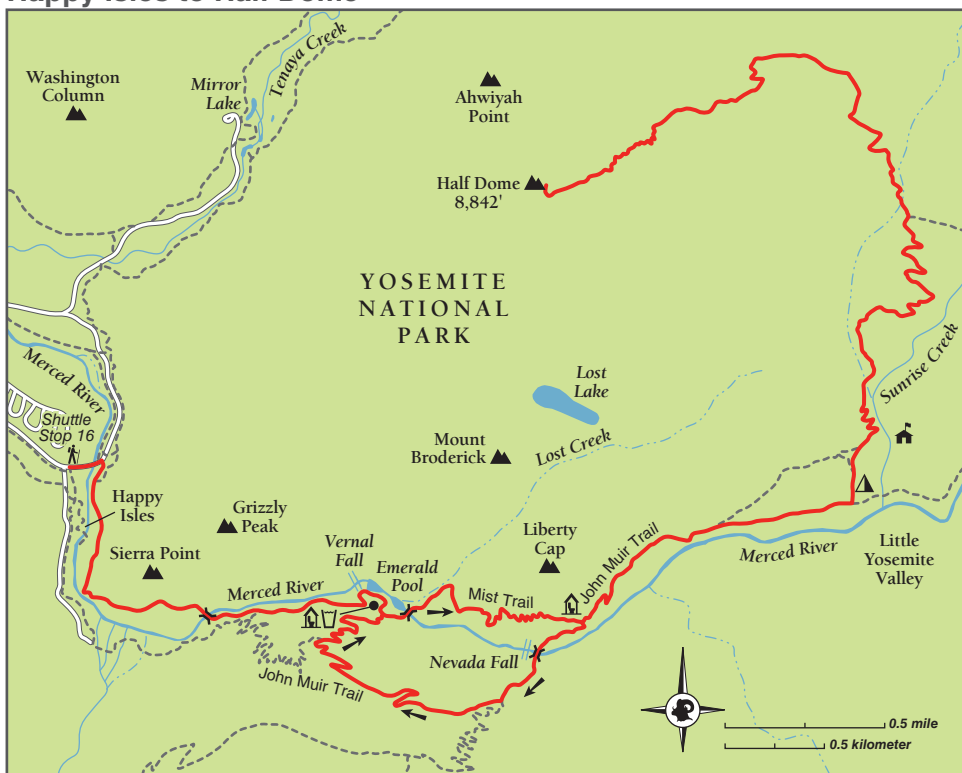
PERMITS

You need a wilderness permit for the Happy Isles to Little Yosemite Valley Trailhead, issued by Yosemite National Park, as well as a special permit to climb Half Dome.

You can apply for a wilderness permit from 24 weeks to two days in advance of your trip day, although given this is the most popular permit request in Yosemite, even

Above: View up Tenaya Canyon from the summit of Half Dome

Happy Isles to Half Dome



applying on the first possible day you have a less than 10% chance of receiving a permit on the day of your choice. Though you can make a permit reservation by calling 209-372-0740, permits emailed to the center over the previous 24 hours have priority over those made by phone. The reservation form to fill in is available at nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wpres.htm and can be emailed up to 24 hours in advance of the first date to make reservations; so that means you submit your reservation request 24 weeks and one day before your hike starts. The cost of confirmed permits is \$5 per permit plus \$5 per person in the group.

Leave Some Time to Find the Perfect Campsite

The campsites visible from the trail may be occupied when you arrive. So you want some spare time to explore the surroundings to find a perfect location. In most of the Sierra, you can camp anywhere—as long as you're 100 feet from trail and water—and some of the best sites aren't visible from the trail.

You request a Half Dome permit together with your wilderness permit by filling in the applicable sections on the wilderness permit application. See nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/hdwildpermits.htm for additional information. The cost for the Half Dome permit is an additional \$10 per person. If you are successful in requesting a permit, you will receive payment instructions by email.

Pick up your permit at the Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center, located in Yosemite Village next to the Ansel Adams Gallery.

CHALLENGES

The Half Dome cables are safe for competent hikers, but they are an exhausting ascent not to be attempted in rain or when storms threaten. A small number of hikers have fallen and died on this route, mostly climbing in wet conditions. Also, acrophobics are advised to avoid this trip—the route is exposed and steep. But really, the biggest challenge is getting the permit!

HOW TO GET THERE

TRAILHEAD (HAPPY ISLES SHUTTLE STOP 16) N37° 43.945' W119° 33.579'

Enter Yosemite Valley via CA 140, CA 41, or Big Oak Flat Road (via CA 120). From the intersection where CA 41/Wawona Road merges from the right, continue 5.2 miles on Southside Drive to a four-way intersection with Northside Drive. Continue straight and either turn right into the Curry Village lot in 0.15 mile or drive another 0.4 mile to reach the backpacker trailhead parking. If you park in the Curry Village lot, take the shuttle to the trailhead. If you park in the backpacker parking area, it is a 0.4-mile walk to the Happy Isles shuttle stop 16, where the trailhead is located. (You pick up your wilderness permit at the Yosemite Valley Wilderness Center, located in Yosemite Village.)

TRIP DESCRIPTION

From the shuttle-bus stop (4,030') you walk briefly east along the road, across a bridge, and then south, soon reaching a large trail sign. Beyond, the paved trail steepens, passes a viewpoint, and then turns east, continuing diligently uphill until a quick drop leads to the Vernal Fall Bridge (1.0 mile). Here you see Vernal Fall, backdropped by Mount Broderick (left) and Liberty Cap (right). Passing a water faucet and toilets, you quickly reach a junction (1.2 miles), where you stay left, on the Mist Trail; to the right, the John Muir Trail is the longer, less steep, less scenic alternative, which you will take on the way back. Dressed for the upcoming, often soaking mist, start up the Mist Trail. The spray increases as you advance upward, sandwiched among throngs of hikers as you carefully ascend steep steps. After a brief pause, boasting wonderful views of the fall, the steep stairs resume, leading up a drier, forested gully to an alcove beneath an ominous overhang. A last set of stairs, protected by a railing, guides hikers to the brink of Vernal Fall.

Just upstream is Emerald Pool, and near the pool's east end, the trail begins ascending again (near some

TAKE THIS TRIP

Half Dome is justifiably one of the Sierra's most popular backcountry summits, a challenging, attractive route rewarded with a stunning view of Yosemite Valley and the park's high country to the east. Additionally, the hike treats you to a close-up of two spectacular waterfalls, Vernal and Nevada. By camping in Little Yosemite Valley, you have a head start on the numerous day hikers and will enjoy a less crowded ascent of the cables and a quieter summit stay.

CASCADE RANGE

Geographic tradition defines the Cascade Range as extending from southernmost British Columbia to the volcanic terrain south of the Mount Lassen area, which places about 130 miles of Cascadia within California. Outdoors enthusiasts can find lots of good fishing, hunting, and water sports in the state's share of this great range, but most of the terrain is hill country, with more timber harvesting than hiking opportunities. While the Pacific Crest Trail is about as well located as a trail can be to take advantage of the scenic terrain in this stretch, the average backpacker in California's Cascades will find two very notable areas of attraction: Mount Lassen and Mount Shasta.

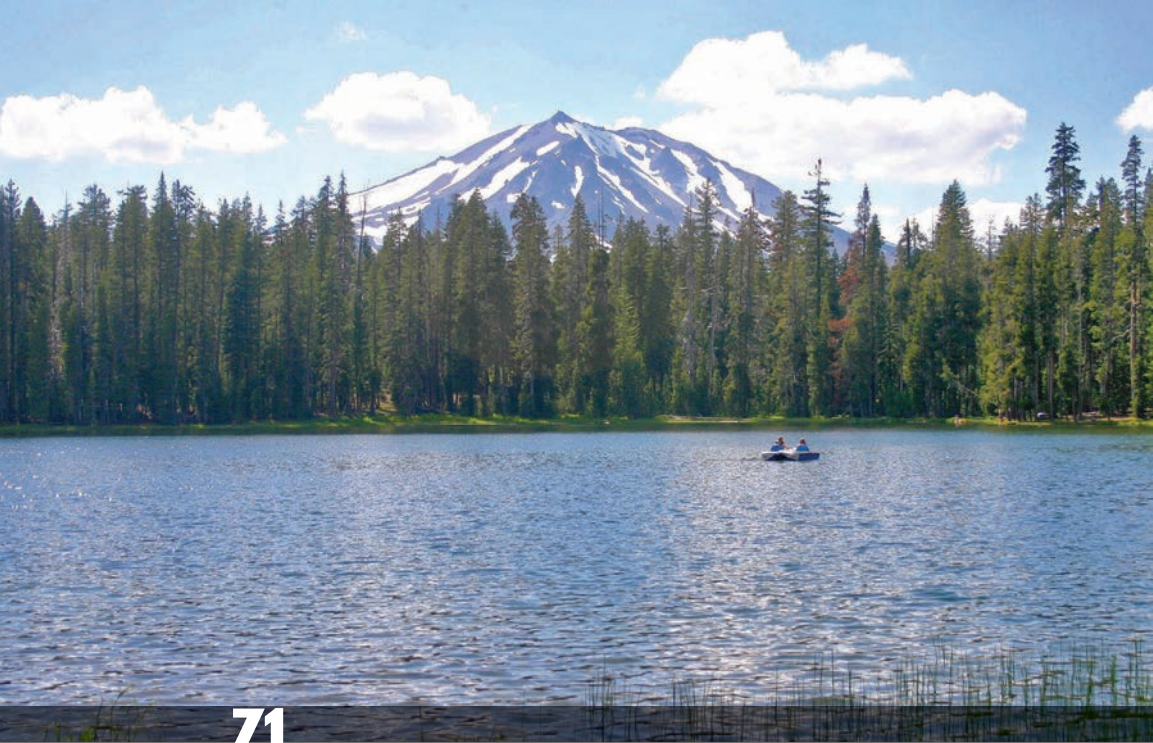
LASSEN VOLCANIC NATIONAL PARK

Situated about 75 miles southeast of Mount Shasta, the centerpiece of Lassen Volcanic National Park is the 10,457-foot Cascade Range volcano Lassen Peak. Prior to the 1980 eruption of Washington's Mount St. Helens, Lassen Peak was the most recent volcano to blow in the continental US, erupting numerous times from 1914 to 1917. These eruptions, along with several active hydrothermal areas and plenty of evidence of previous volcanic activity, compelled the federal government to give the area national park status in 1916.

However, Lassen is more than just a place for a geology lesson. The scenery—crystal lakes, rushing streams, flower-covered meadows, serene forests, and the rich red summit of Lassen Peak itself—is absolutely stunning. The 150 miles of maintained trails in the 106,000-acre park tempt day hikers to enjoy such wonders, and a fine network of connecting trails provides many loop options for backpackers. Best of all, the park is well away from California's major urban areas, so backpackers won't have to contend with crowds on most trails. The one loop trip offered in this guide travels to a series of lovely forested lakes in the heart of the park.

CARIBOU WILDERNESS

On the eastern border of Lassen Volcanic National Park is the seldom visited 20,625-acre Caribou Wilderness, a land of rolling, forested terrain and numerous lakes. While



71

SUMMIT LAKE TO CLUSTER, TWIN, RAINBOW, SNAG, HORSESHOE, AND SWAN LAKES LOOP

Mike White

DISTANCE: 22.0 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 2–4

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 2,500'/2,500'

TYPE OF TRIP: Loop

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: N/A

DIFFICULTY: Easy

SOLITUDE: Moderate solitude

SCENERY: 8

MAP: USGS *Reading Peak, West Prospect Peak, Prospect Peak, and Mount Harkness*

BEST SEASON: Summer–early fall

LOCATION: Lassen Volcanic National Park

CONTACT: 530-595-4480, nps.gov/lavo

Above: Lassen Peak above Summit Lake

Summit Lake to Cluster, Twin, Rainbow, Snag, Horseshoe, and Swan Lakes Loop



PERMITS

A free wilderness permit, required for overnight stays in Lassen Volcanic National Park, can be obtained in person from any ranger or information station during regular business hours. Applications may be downloaded from the park’s website ([nps.gov/lavo/planyourvisit/wilderness-permit-information.htm](https://www.nps.gov/lavo/planyourvisit/wilderness-permit-information.htm)) and returned to the park via email or fax (530-595-3262). Allow two weeks for processing. After business hours, backpackers may self-register at the Kohm Yah-mah-nee Visitor Center near the southwest entrance.

CHALLENGES

Campfires and pets are not permitted within Lassen Volcanic National Park. Mosquitoes can be problematic through midsummer—bring a tent and repellent.

HOW TO GET THERE

TRAILHEAD N40° 29.883' W121° 25.606'

From either the Manzanita Lake or the southwest entrances, follow Lassen Park Road (CA 89) to the access road to the Summit Lake Ranger Station, 0.3 mile north of the turn-off for the North Summit Lake Campground. Head east, past the ranger station, and park in the overnight parking area.

TRIP DESCRIPTION

From the parking area, follow a boardwalk east across a spongy clearing (a finger of Dersch Meadows) into a mixed forest of red firs and western white and lodgepole pines. Cross a lush swale, briefly ascend a low hill, and reach the northeast shore of Summit Lake, near a junction with a lateral from the Summit Lake North Campground. A short distance farther, near the northeast finger of the lake, is a well-signed Y-junction with a trail to Corral Meadows on the right and your trail to Echo Lake on the left.

A moderate climb travels up a gully and then up a ridge to a switchback, with the first good view of Lassen Peak due west and Crescent Crater on the peak's north flank. Continue climbing through open forest across a slope covered with pinemat manzanita and lesser amounts of greenleaf manzanita to a plateau and a junction with a trail to Echo Lake and Twin Lakes on the right, 1 mile from the trailhead. This trail will be your return route.

Turn left (north) at the junction to head toward Little Bear Lake, and make a gradual climb that soon becomes moderate. After a half mile, reach the high point atop a rumpled plateau of old lava flows. A cross-country route heads northwest from here on a nearly level half mile to the base of Hat Mountain and then more steeply to the summit. Hat Mountain's cone, with its composition of andesite lava flows, differs from the park's more famous Cinder Cone, which is composed of basalt cinders.

From the high point, descend northward to a shallow, unnamed lake that offers pleasant swimming. A half mile of gently graded tread leads across the plateau and past a tiny pond before a moderate to steep descent heads down a ridge separating a pair of small, glaciated canyons. Soon you begin to see the forest devastation caused by the 2012 Reading Fire. Although sections of ground cover have recovered,

TAKE THIS TRIP

Numerous lakes, gentle terrain, and a lack of crowds make this trip a backpacker's paradise. This loop leads to several of the best lakes in the park, and because these lakes are never too far apart from each other, you have plenty of opportunities for camping and swimming. (However, fishing is limited.) The gentle terrain makes getting around fairly easy, a particular bonus for families with young children. And with a remote location in Northern California, far from any major population centers, there are no quotas and you have a reasonable expectation for solitude. Other options are also possible with this trip: it's easily reversible, and thanks to a number of connecting trails, you could extend your trip or use layover days to day hike to a variety of destinations.

WARNER MOUNTAINS

The remote Warner Mountains are California's northeasternmost range, separating the Modoc Plateau to the west from the Great Basin to the east. Bearing affinities to both geologic provinces, the range is composed of multiple thick lava flows similar to the Modoc Plateau and is a dipping fault-block range similar to those of the Great Basin. The Surprise Valley fault system trailing the Warners' eastern escarpment is the principal site of the area's ongoing faulting, stretching the land and causing Surprise Valley to sink over time. Today the valley is filled with deep sediments capped by three large, muddy, and extremely shallow alkaline lakes. Thinning of the crust has allowed magma to work toward the surface, heating the groundwater and giving rise to a string of hot springs.

The tiny hamlet of Alturas is the nearest jumping-off point for trips into the Warner Mountains, located at the junctions of US 395 and CA 299. Alturas is the county seat of Modoc County, a vast volcanic region where cattle far outnumber people. CA 299 bisects the Warner Mountains, the lower northern half traversed by four-wheel-drive roads and the higher southern half traversed by trails. This roadless area is home to the 70,385-acre South Warner Wilderness, a west-dipping range reminiscent of a miniature Sierra Nevada. The principal trail in the wilderness is the Summit Trail, a 22.5-mile route that traverses the north-south trending crest of the range. The lone entry from the South Warner Wilderness in this book follows the northern section of this scenic trail to lovely Patterson Lake, nestled below the rugged cliffs of 9,710-foot Warren Peak.



74

THE SUMMIT TRAIL:

Pepperdine Trailhead to Patterson Lake

Mike White

DISTANCE: 12.0 miles

RECOMMENDED NUMBER OF DAYS: 2

ELEVATION GAIN/LOSS: 2,600'/2,600'

TYPE OF TRIP: Out-and-back

SHUTTLE MILEAGE: N/A

DIFFICULTY: Moderate

SOLITUDE: Moderate solitude

SCENERY: 7

MAP: USGS *Warren Peak*; USFS *South Warner Wilderness*

BEST SEASON: Summer–early fall

LOCATION: South Warner Wilderness, Modoc National Forest

CONTACT: 530-233-5811, fs.usda.gov/main/modoc

PERMITS

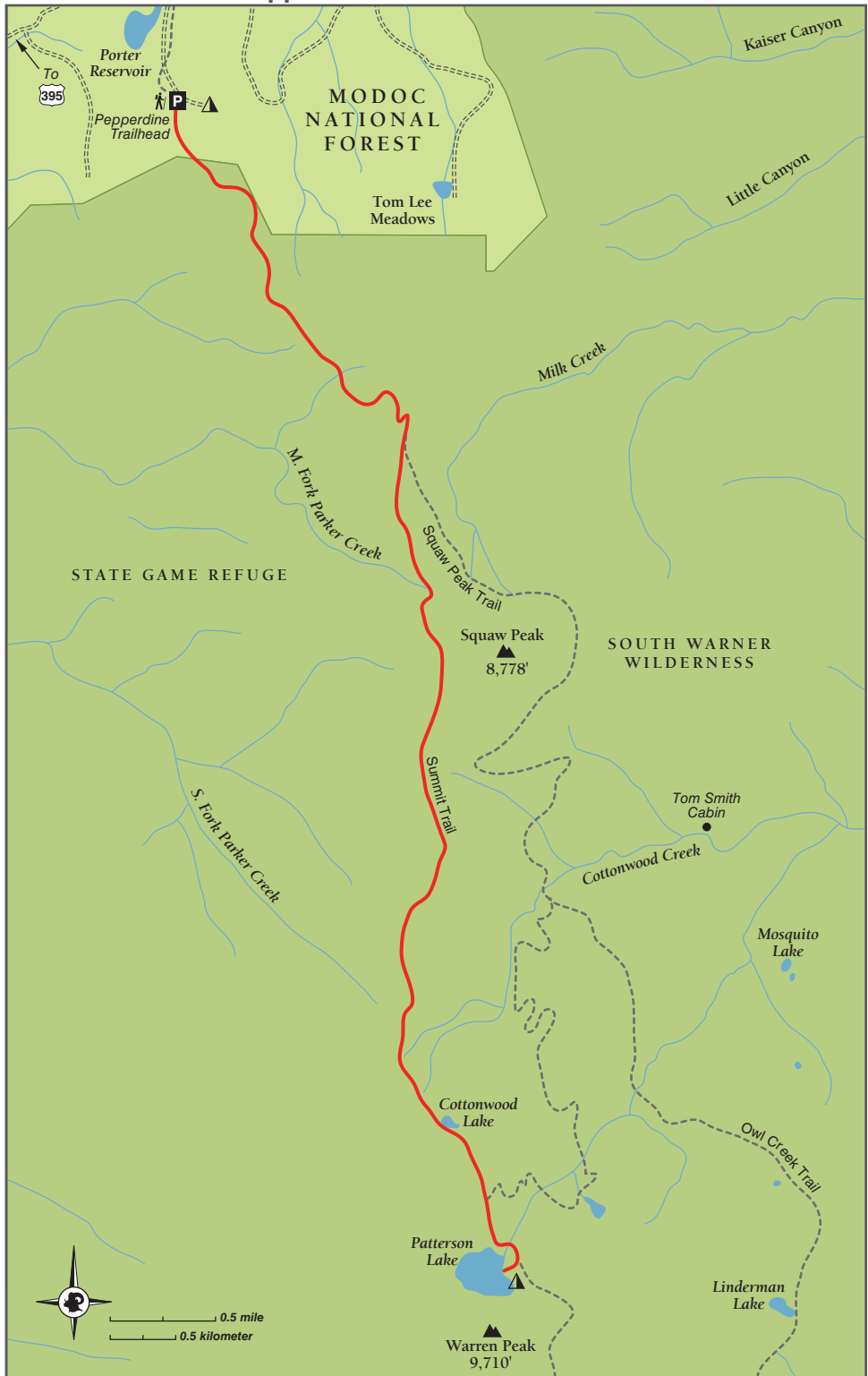
Permits are not required in the South Warner Wilderness.

CHALLENGES

Cattle are allowed to graze within the South Warner Wilderness and may be encountered anytime from July to September. The remote location in extreme northeastern California

Above: Scenic Patterson Lake sits below Warren Peak's rugged cliffs.

The Summit Trail: Pepperdine Trailhead to Patterson Lake



TAKE THIS TRIP

A narrow, linear range trending north–south, the South Warner Mountains are more similar in nature to mountain ranges in the Great Basin to the east than to those typically found in the Golden State. Another dissimilarity to many other California mountain ranges is a lack of people: thanks to the range’s remote setting in the extreme northeastern part of the state, you may not see another soul during this trip. On clear days, 100-mile vistas from this crest-hugging trail are quite common, stretching from the high desert of southern Oregon and northwestern Nevada to the Cascade summits of Mount Shasta, Lassen Peak, and beyond. Patterson Lake is a cirque-bound, scenic body of water providing a destination worthy of the most discriminating backpacker.

Westward views include Alturas and the upper Pit River valley, along with snowcapped Mount Shasta and, farther up the trail, Lassen Peak. Eastward is the classic basin and range topography of the Great Basin, vividly displayed by Surprise Valley and some alkali lakes backdropped by the peaks of the Hays Canyon Range. Gently rising tread, bordered by yellow-flowered mule-ears in early season, takes you across mostly open terrain with a smattering of white fir and mountain mahogany before a stiffer climb leads to

makes for a long drive to the trailhead from any major urban area. Although there are a few stores in Alturas, backpacking gear is hard to come by.

HOW TO GET THERE •••••

TRAILHEAD N41° 27.039' W120° 14.614'

From the southern part of Alturas, about 1 mile south of the CA 299 junction, leave US 395 and head east on County Road 56, passing Dorris Reservoir and remaining on CR 56 at a junction with CR 58 on the left. Proceed 12.6 miles from US 395 to the Modoc Forest boundary, near where the surface turns to gravel and the road becomes Forest Road 5. Continue another 1.1 miles from the boundary to a junction, where FR 5 curves southeast but you take the left branch onto FR 31. You will notice extensive damage from a recent wildfire on the drive to the trailhead. Drive 6.6 miles on FR 31 to a well-signed junction with the short road to the Pepperdine Trailhead on the right. Follow this road past the equestrian trailhead to the hiker trailhead near the entrance to Pepperdine Campground.

TRIP DESCRIPTION •••••

Amid shady white firs, the trail immediately passes the path from the equestrian trailhead on the right and climbs moderately to moderately steeply up the forested slope. A minor amount of charred forest is visible along the initial stretch of trail, but fortunately all evidence of the fire quickly disappears farther up the trail. Break out of the trees near the signed wilderness boundary and climb more mildly across open volcanic slopes dotted with wildflowers in early summer, experiencing the first of many impressive vistas to come.

“Backpacking California offers an embarrassment of riches for those souls interested in backpacking the Golden State.” —Mike White



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