



# Hiking the Mt. Whitney Trail

Inyo National Forest

2008

## Take responsibility for your own safety

There are no safety features and many potential hazards on Mt. Whitney: slick snow or ice; severe weather; lightning; steep terrain; pre-existing medical conditions; exhaustion; and altitude sickness. Every year, hikers who make poor decisions when confronted by these hazards become ill or get injured. There have also been fatalities here. You must recognize hazards, evaluate your group's abilities, and make good decisions about your safety.

## Help protect this wilderness area

Everyone who hikes Mt. Whitney needs to make a strong commitment to Leave No Trace. Without this commitment, hikers will damage this very fragile place. Pack out your human waste. Use a bear canister to store your food and trash. Carefully protect the purity of the water. Use only stoves for cooking. Please commit to these Leave No Trace practices before your trip. If you cannot, please choose another place to hike.



## PLAN AND PREPARE AT HOME...NOT AT THE TRAILHEAD

- Visit the Inyo National Forest website: [www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/](http://www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo/)
- Click on *Mt. Whitney* for trip planning information and the current weather forecast
- Click on *Current Conditions* for trail conditions
- Visit the Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park website if you plan to travel through the Park: [www.nps.gov/seki/](http://www.nps.gov/seki/)
- Click on *Plan Your Visit*
- Get in shape before the trip
- Practice using your equipment
- Study a topographic map and plan your itinerary
- Plan the meals then repackage food to minimize bulk
- Pack your bear canister before you get to the trailhead

### Essential day hike equipment

- Water
- Warm clothing & rain gear
- Sunscreen & hat
- Sunglasses
- Map & compass
- Headlamp & extra batteries
- First aid kit
- Extra food
- Emergency blanket
- Pack-out kit

### Essential overnight hike equipment

- Day hike equipment
- Tent or other shelter
- Stove
- Sleeping bag & pad
- Bear canister

### When snow and ice are on the trail

Specialized equipment may be necessary. Improper use of this equipment may result in injury or death.

- Ice axe, crampons, helmet
- Skis or snowshoes
- Avalanche beacon, probe and snow shovel.

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## Come prepared for severe weather

It may be warm and sunny at the trailhead, but weather conditions can change quickly. Be prepared for high winds, subfreezing temperatures, rain or snow any month of the year.

**May–June:** The winter snow pack slowly recedes. Expect the switchbacks above Trail Camp to be covered by snow and ice through June. Day-time temperatures are often warm, with nights usually below freezing. Winter-like storms are not uncommon.

**July–Early September:** The trail is relatively snow free and the weather usually fair and pleasant. The upper elevations can still be cold and windy. Thunderstorms and lightning are a significant hazard. At the first sign of lightning, leave the summit area or exposed ridge tops.

**Late September–October:** Short days and cold temperatures make day hikes to the summit difficult. Storms may be severe. Snow that falls on upper elevation slopes, especially above Trail Camp, may not melt off.

*Snow and ice conditions change daily. Travel may be hazardous without the proper skills and equipment.*

**November–April:** Winter prevails, with deep snow and very cold temperatures. The road to Whitney Portal is usually closed November through April. Winter storms may drop several feet of snow and have winds over 100 mph.

## Acclimate yourself to the high altitude

Arrive a few days early: Stay at a campground located at a moderate (8,000-10,000 feet) elevation: Whitney Portal, Onion Valley or Horseshoe Meadows.

**Day hike to higher elevations:** You will acclimate better by day hiking at higher elevations and sleeping at moderate elevations. We recommend you take acclimation hikes at Onion Valley or Horseshoe Meadows to lessen the number of people of the Mt. Whitney Trail.

**Take baby steps to the top:** Travel at a slow, steady and comfortable pace. If you are day hiking to the summit, start up the trail well before dawn.

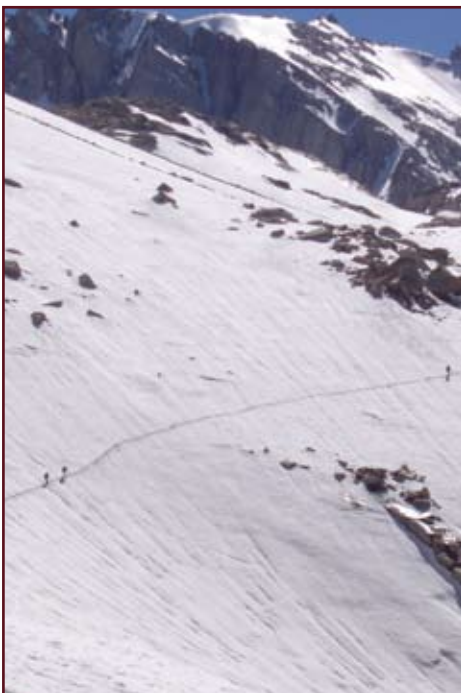
**Stay hydrated and well nourished:** Be sure to replenish electrolytes. Don't forget any prescribed medications.

**Learn to recognize Acute Mountain Sickness (AMS):** Also called altitude sickness, AMS symptoms include persistent headache along with difficulty sleeping, dizziness, fatigue, loss of appetite, nausea or vomiting.

AMS can affect anyone. Your age, gender, physical condition or previous high altitude experience has no bearing on whether you will be affected by AMS.

AMS may impair your judgment. For your group's safety, you need to make good decisions on the mountain.

*If you experience more than mild discomfort from AMS, you should descend immediately.*



Above Outpost Camp, mid-May 2006



Along the switchbacks, June 2007



Trail Crest, mid-August 2006



## Pack out your human waste

Why can't I just bury my poop, like in other wilderness areas? First, consider there are 20,000 people on the mountain each year. Then consider that much of the area is solid bedrock. There is simply not enough soil to bury the human waste from this many hikers. And there is the potential to harm water quality. Remember, you need to drink the water.

*Pack-out kits are the only acceptable method for the disposal of human waste.*



COURTESY: NEW YORK TIMES

**Where to get pack-out kits:** Eastern Sierra InterAgency Visitor Center in Lone Pine.

### How to use a pack-out kit:

- Find a secluded location.
- Spread the large inner bag on the ground. Don't spill the powder!
- Crouch over the bag and relieve yourself. Dispose of toilet paper in the bag.
- Tie a knot in the inner bag. Then zip lock it inside the outer bag.

**Fight odors:** Add a cup of water or urinate in the inner bag. The powder inside absorbs liquid to create an odor-fighting gel.

**Urine:** Urinate anywhere, but stay at least 100 feet from water or campsites. It is okay to urinate inside the pack-out kits.

**Animals:** Store only human waste and tissue in your pack-out kit. Trash or food scraps will attract animals.

**Storage:** Store used kits outside your tent or in your pack. Do not store kits in bear canisters.

**Disposal:** Please dispose of used kits in the receptacle at the trailhead, next to the trailhead toilet.

## Store food safely

**At the trailhead:** Use the food storage lockers at the trailhead. Space is limited, so minimize the amount of food you store. Leave ice chests at home. To bears, "food" includes water bottles, coffee mugs, soda cans, trash, wrappers, cosmetics, grocery bags, boxes, and ice chests. Do not leave these "food" items in your car or tent. Keep a clean camp and never leave trash or food unattended. Be bear aware: black bears are common in the Mt. Whitney area.

**On the trail:** Bear canisters are the only effective means to store your food. All food, trash, toiletries and anything with a scent must be stored inside the canister. Rangers will issue citations to hikers that counterbalance food or hang trash from trees when canisters are required.

We strongly recommend you use a bear canister the remainder of the year. Bears may be active during spring and fall months, and marmots will boldly try to get improperly stored food.

*Approved bear canisters are required on the Mt. Whitney Trail from the Friday of Memorial Day weekend to November 1.*

**Keep bears wild:** When a bear gets human food it becomes less fearful of, or "habituated" to people. A habituated bear can destroy property or injure people as it attempts to get improperly stored food. Once a bear has damaged property or injured someone, authorities will attempt to find and shoot the bear. Protect your food, and keep bears alive and wild!

**Bear canister rental locations:** Eastern Sierra InterAgency Visitor Center in Lone Pine; Whitney Portal Store; and sporting goods stores in Lone Pine.

**Approved bear canisters:** For the list of approved bear canisters, visit: [www.sierrawildbear.gov](http://www.sierrawildbear.gov)



Place bear canisters at least 50 feet from camp during the night or when you hike to the summit.

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## PLAN AND PREPARE...

### Give trip plans to someone at home

- Names of people in the party and proposed itinerary
- Wilderness permit reservation number
- Make of car and license number
- Entry trail and date, exit trail and date
- To report someone overdue by more than 24 hours: Inyo County Sheriff's Office 760-878-0383

### Water

- Water is readily available up to Trail Camp in lakes and streams. Water is scarce above Trail Camp after the snow melts off.
- Surface waters can contain pathogenic bacteria. Filter, boil or chemically treat water to ensure it is safe to drink.

### Campgrounds, lodging, services

- Reservations for Whitney Portal, Lone Pine, or Onion Valley campgrounds:  
**www.recreation.gov** **1-877-444-6677**
- Lodging and services in the Lone Pine area:  
**www.lonepinechamber.org** **1-877-253-8981**
- Whitney Portal Store has showers, meals, and bear canisters. Open May-October:  
**www.whitneyportalstore.com**
- Whitney Trailhead and Horseshoe Meadows have walk-in campgrounds that are first-come, first-served.

### Inyo National Forest phone numbers

Mount Whitney Ranger Station 760-876-6200  
Ranger Station TDD Line 760-876-6228  
Wilderness Information 760-873-2485  
Wilderness Permit Reservations 760-873-2483  
InterAgency Visitor Center 760-876-6222  
Located at the junction of US 395 and SR 136, 1.5 miles south of Lone Pine. Order books and maps via the phone.

Most of the reservation fees for your Mt. Whitney permit stays on the Inyo National Forest. The Mt. Whitney wilderness rangers, the visitor center's summer staff, pack-out kits, trail maintenance work and wilderness restoration projects are funded entirely by reservation fees.

## Decide where to camp

Most hikers choose to camp at Outpost Camp or Trail Camp. Other campsite choices include Lone Pine Lake or Consultation Lake. Always choose a well-established site. Comply with signs that indicate areas closed to camping.

**Outpost Camp:** Located in Bighorn Park 3.8 miles from the trailhead at elevation 10,300 feet. Relatively sheltered campsites are located near creeks amidst trees and willows.

**Trail Camp:** Located 6 miles from the trailhead at elevation 12,000 feet. Trail Camp is above tree line and exposed to wind. Campsites are scattered off both sides of the trail. Look in the area south of the trail for more secluded campsites.

**Hygiene:** Wash your hands before eating or preparing food. Wash your hands after using pack-out kits.

## Regulations to protect wilderness and water quality

- No campfires.
- No camping at Mirror Lake and Trailside Meadow.
- Camp more than 100 feet from lakes, streams or the trail.
- Use your pack-out kit for human waste. Do not urinate within 100 feet of lakes, streams or campsites.
- Do not wash or discharge soap within 100 feet of water.
- Do not leave trash in the wilderness.



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