

Mount Whitney

by Paul Richins Jr (2008)

30,000 hikers get a permit to climb Mt. Whitney, but only 1 in 3 makes it to the 14,491' summit. Mt. Shasta was identified in 1788; Rainer & Hood in 1792; but Whitney was not until 1864 (since it did not stand alone). Until then Shasta was thought to be the tallest. 1872 three fishermen were the first to climb from west & 1873 Muir was the 1st from the east. 1904 a horse trail was built to the summit & later a stone shelter for scientist & astronomers.

After WWII the trail was repaired (with the current 97 switchbacks). 1957 had 2658 hikers sign the summit register & 13,200 signed in 2004. Mt. Whitney is the 2nd most climbed peak in CA (Half Dome is #1). Mt. Whitney GPS coordinates = 384490mE-404871mN. The main trail (from the east) is well marked, but if you get off of the main trail GPS is vital on some less traveled trails (especially in bad visibility).

Do some high-altitude training: **hike above 10,000' & camp above 8,000' two nights before.** Use wool socks & trail shoes (or boots). **DO NOT WEAR COTTON!** Layer your clothes: start with synthetic (wicking) under shirt, outer shirt, fleece vest, wind breaker (or rain jacket). Pants that convert to shorts are nice over tights. Backpacks should weigh less than 4-lb, tents 5-lb, sleeping bags 2-lb, 2-lb of food per day per person. Bear bags are lighter than bear canisters. June-Oct is best time to go, but weather can change quickly. Get off the summit in a thunderstorm.

Use waterless soap on hands & clean pots in boiling water. Pack out human waste (they no longer allow hikers to bury it 200' from water). Pack out regular garbage as well. Wood fires above the timberline are banned. Pets & firearms are not allowed in National Parks. Hike in groups, not alone. Drink plenty of water. Wear sun block & sun glasses. Trail camp (stream feeding lake) is the last place to get water to the summit (purify it).

Mt. Muir (14,015') is within 300' of the trail.

One day accents should leave before dawn (headlamp needed) & be off the summit by noon (to avoid afternoon storms). **Diamox (needs prescription) helps with high altitude sickness.** Take 200 mg of ibuprofen with lunch & later in afternoon to help with aches & pain.

Quotes: "It is the chase rather than the conquest that is so appealing." (Steve Roper)
"Strong muscles run out of gas when limited by a sub-par cardiovascular system." (Mark Twight)