

Mount Whitney from Timberline Lake

MOUNT WHITNEY

LEWIS W. CLARK

WESTERN APPROACHES

The Sequoia-Kings Canyon country is a land of giant trees, towering mountains, deep canyons, and shining sky-blue lakes. Here the forces of nature wrought a land unparalleled in beauty that culminates in the Muir Crest and Mt. Whitney.

Visitors to Moro Rock near Giant Forest are given a glimpse of the gateway to this wilderness in the rugged skyline of the Great Western Divide far to the east. However, these are but the western barrier to that vast wilderness that includes the headwaters of the Kern and Kings rivers and stretches north along the Sierra crest for more than 200 miles.

Principal points of entry from the west are found at Giant Forest, Mineral King, Horse Corral, and Cedar Grove. Those going from Giant Forest follow the spectacular High Sierra Trail that starts at Crescent Meadow and follows along the contour high on the shoulder of the Kaweah River basin. After leaving beautiful Hamilton Lake the route crosses the Great Western Divide at Kaweah Gap (10,810') then follows the glacial scarred country of the Big Arroyo down to the Kern River at Upper Funston Meadow.

From there it follows along the Kern River Canyon, famous for its Rainbow trout and Yosemite-like scenery. The climb out of the canyon from Junction Meadow to the junction with the John Muir Trail at Wallace Creek is made by way of a well developed trail of easy grade.

Some of the most famous fishing lakes and streams of the Golden Trout Country lie within a few hours of Crabtree Meadow. Those with stock and many back-packers make this their base camp for the final ascent of Whitney. Side trips should include the Wright Lakes, Wallace and Wales lakes, Crabtree and Hitchcock lakes and many streams well stocked with brilliant Golden.

From Mineral King the three principal routes in are: over Franklin Pass and down Rattlesnake Creek to the Kern just below Upper Funston Meadow; over Franklin Pass and down Soda Creek to the Big Arroyo and on to the Kern by way of Sky Parlor Meadow; and, by way of Columbine Lake, Lost Canyon, Big Arroyo, Sky Parlor Meadow, and the Kern.

The Horse Corral entry provides easy riding or hiking conditions the first couple of days and includes the beautiful Cloud Canyon and Colby Pass country.

Cedar Grove on the Kings River would provide an excellent point of departure for an extended trip of several weeks that includes Bubbs Creek, Forester Pass, dozens of lakes at the headwaters of the Kern River basin, and the Mt. Whitney region. Return can be made by way of either Colby Pass and Cloud Canyon or via the High Sierra Trail to Giant Forest.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE AND TRAIL MILEAGES (Approximate)

GIANT FOREST

Kaweah Gap	20
Upper Funston Meadow	15
Junction Meadow	10
Wallace Creek	5
Crabtree Meadow	5
Mt. Whitney	10
	<hr/> 65

MINERAL KING

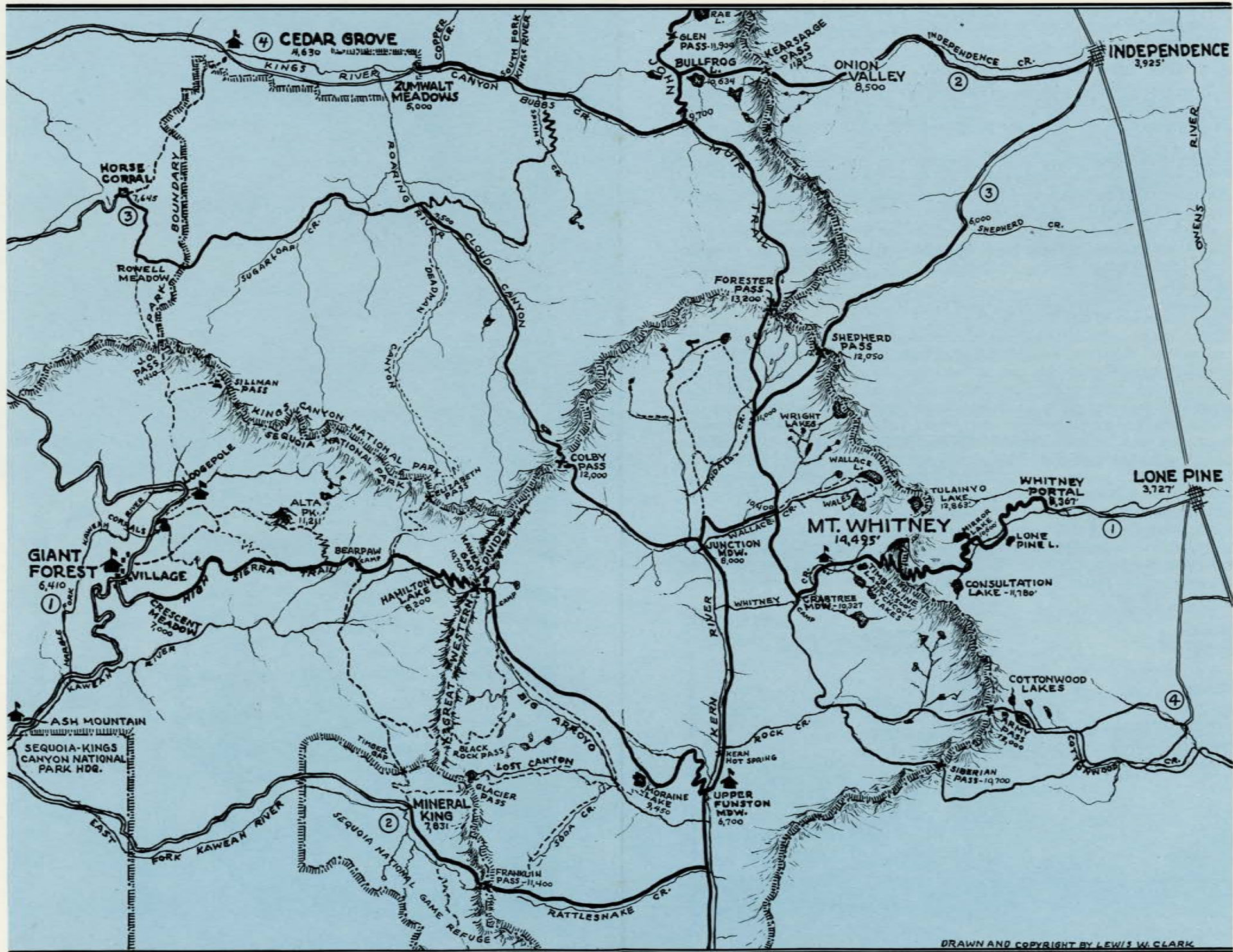
(Approx. distance via Black Rock Pass, Lost Canyon, Soda Creek, or Rattlesnake Creek)	
Upper Funston Meadow	20
Mt. Whitney	30
	<hr/> 50

CEDAR GROVE

John Muir Trail Jctn.	20
Forester Pass	10
Wallace Creek	12
Mt. Whitney	15
	<hr/> 57

HORSE CORRAL

Cloud Canyon	18
Colby Pass	13
Junction Meadow	9
Mt. Whitney	20
	<hr/> 60



EASTERN APPROACHES

Mt. Whitney is only the climax of a vast region of mountain crests, skyline lakes, and streams where the scenery is matched by the quality of its hunting and fishing. It is not surprising, therefore, that many visitors who enter the Sierra from the Owens Valley side make extended trips through the high country and consider the actual ascent of Whitney as only a part of their experience.

The most popular approach is made from Lone Pine. There is a good oiled road up to Whitney Portal that makes a worthwhile trip for those wishing to go only as far as their car will take them. A striking view of the sheer, east face of Whitney and the surrounding peaks and the good camping facilities maintained by the Forest Service makes this a most unusual place.

There are a pack station and store here. ALL hikers must register at the Ranger Station before starting their climb. From here saddle parties can make the round trip to Whitney's summit in one easy day. Hikers usually leave their cars at Whitney Portal and continue on up the trail 4 miles to Mirror Lake. By getting an early start the next morning they make it to the summit around noon, return to their cars by evening, and are on their way home that night.

The Mt. Whitney Trail, built and maintained by the U. S. Forest Service, is much traveled and very spectacular. Its upper portion is through open, barren country with little vegetation and no water the last several miles late in the season. At Trail Crest Pass (13,600') the route turns north and follows along the crest to the summit. DANGER! Attempt no shortcuts. To do so is to invite disaster to yourself, those along the trail below you, and those who may have to help you if you get into trouble!

From Independence an excellent loop trip can be made by way of Onion Valley, Kearsarge Pass, Bullfrog Lake, and then south along the John Muir Trail to the summit of Whitney. Return trip to the Owens Valley can be made by way of Whitney Portal and Lone Pine. A shorter trip can be made by going in over Shepherd's Pass and joining the John Muir Trail at Tyndall Creek.

Other approaches from the Owens Valley side of the Sierra are made out of Lone Pine and Olancha via Army Pass; the Cottonwood Lakes country, Cottonwood Pass, and Whitney Meadows; and Siberian Pass to Crabtree Meadows where they join the John Muir Trail. These routes traverse the Golden Trout Country of the Cottonwood Lakes, Golden Trout Creek, and Whitney Creek.

POINTS OF DEPARTURE AND TRAIL MILEAGES (Approximate)

LONE PINE

Route 1: (To Whitney Portal, 13 mi.)

Whitney Portal	0.0
Outpost Camp	3.5
Mirror Lake	5
Consultation Lake	7
Trail Crest Pass	6.3
Mt. Whitney	2.0
	<hr/> 13.0

Route 4:

Cottonwood Creek area	0.0
Mt. Whitney	30.0
(This route is via Army and Siberian passes, Crabtree Meadow)	

INDEPENDENCE

Route 2: (To Onion Valley, 15 mi.)

Onion Valley	0.0
Kearsarge Pass	4.0
Bullfrog Lake	2.0
Forester Pass	8.0
Wallace Creek	12.0
Mt. Whitney	15.0
	<hr/> 41.0

Route 3:

Shepherd Creek	0.0
Shepherd Pass	10.0
Wallace Creek	9.0
Mt. Whitney	15.0
	<hr/> 34.0

Published by Lewis W. Clark, P. O. Box 303, San Bruno, California. All manuscript and art work by the author.

WHERE CAN WE SEE MT. WHITNEY?

The most spectacular views are from the Owens Valley side of the Sierra around Lone Pine. Visitors to Giant Forest and similar west slope areas of the Sierra are unable to see it at all. From the Kaweah River valley or Moro Rock many people think they see it on the skyline to the east. Actually, that crest is the Great Western Divide and the peak commonly mistaken for Whitney is Sawtooth Peak. Between there and Whitney lies the broad basin headwaters of the Kern River.

The only place in the Giant Forest region where the famous mountain can be seen is from the summit of Alta Peak. Even there on a clear day it is difficult to pick it out from so many peaks that surround it and are within a few hundred to a thousand feet of being as high. Those who do actually see it will see only about 6 feet of the summit's crest!

WHEN TO MAKE THE ASCENT OF MT. WHITNEY

This varies with the nature of each season. In some years the snow may be off the trails between June and October. The safest time is usually between July 1 and September 15. Hikers can usually make the trip a week or so earlier than saddle parties by crossing over snow fields.

DO MANY PEOPLE ACTUALLY CLIMB IT?

Yes, indeed! The idea of climbing the highest peak in the United States has challenged many thousands. Each season some 2,000 actually reach the summit. As many as 300 to 400 make the ascent on July 4th or Labor Day weekends.

MUST I BE A "MOUNTAINEER" TO CLIMB IT?

No. Youngsters and the young in heart of all ages sign the summit register every season. Both Forest Service and Park Service engineers and rangers have constructed and patrol the well graded trails that make the trip enjoyed by all who traverse them with reasonable care. Saddle parties go up almost daily during the late summer from Whitney Portal. An experience never to be forgotten is to take sleeping bags and food enough for an overnight stay. Sunset over the ramparts of the ranges to the west and sunrise across the great desert to the east will be matched by the nearness of a starlight night in the Sierra.

To those who just insist on climbing mountains the hard way the east face presents a challenge to the best of them. It is to be strictly avoided by the inexperienced in rock climbing!

WHAT IS IT LIKE ON TOP?

It's simply tremendous! The feeling of being alone on top of the world is almost overwhelming. Francis Matties, famous geologist of the U. S. Geological Survey, once remarked, "Upon it I have never set foot without a certain sense of reverence."

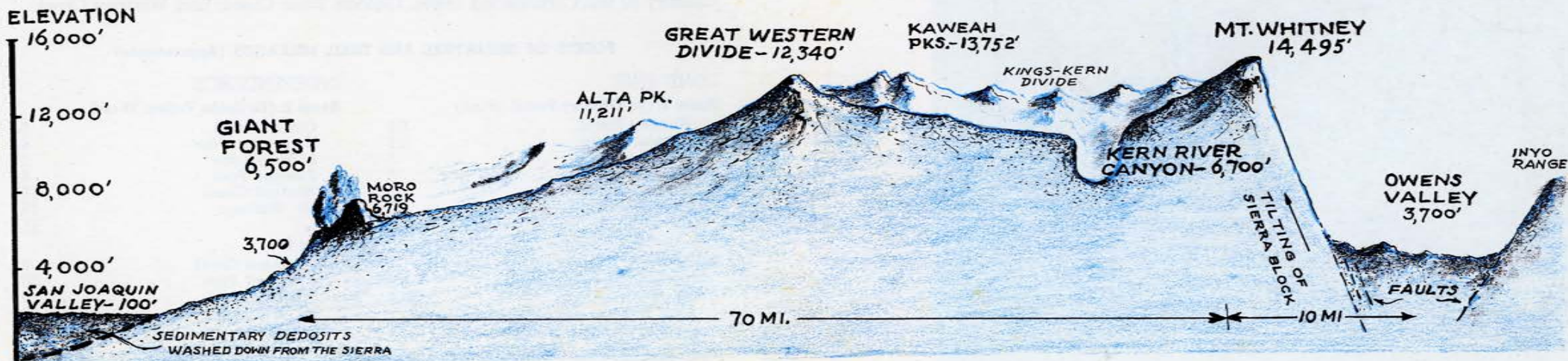
Particularly to the north and west the view is a continuous landscape of barren rock pushed up from deep in the earth in the ancient past and now shaped into deep river valleys, glacial cirques, and ragged ranges which extend off into the blue mists of the distant horizon.

To the east is the sweep of the Owens Valley basin lying more than 10,000 feet below. At night can be seen the lights of the town of Lone Pine. Beyond there lies the desert basins of the Mojave and Death Valley country, much of which lies far below sea level.

Nearby, along the Muir Crest, can be seen 7 of the 11 peaks of the Sierra whose summits exceed 14,000' elevation!

The summit itself is about 1½ acres in area and is quite flat. It is abruptly precipitous several thousand feet on the east face but to the west it slopes off into a steeply rounded shoulder that is furrowed by deep gullies formed by avalanches of snow and rocks. The almost table-like summit is littered with huge granite boulders and slabs which have a distinct type of weathering called nivation—the result of prolonged action by frost. Little, if any, effect of erosion by water can be seen because nearly all precipitation at this elevation falls in the form of snow rather than rain. The heavier winter snows have little effect on the rock as the surface is exposed to stiff prevailing winds which keep it swept clear of deep drifts. What snow remains disappears mostly through evaporation rather than by melting and stream-type runoff.

Near the eastern lip of the summit is a small, two-room stone building. It was built by the Smithsonian Institute in 1908 as a shelter for scientists who stayed up there making scientific observations. Plans are being made to develop it into a museum-type unit to display interpretations of the mountains to the visitor.



EAST FACE OF MOUNT WHITNEY SHOWING ROUTE TO SUMMIT
KERN RIVER CANYON IN UPPER BACKGROUND



L.W.C.