

The 1956 High Trip

(The 51st High Trip)

High Trips 2 & 3 – Along the Sierra’s Mir crest – Rock creek, Timberline Lake & Mount Whitney, Wright lakes & Wallace Creek, Milestone Bench, Center Basin – July 15 – 28, July 29 – August 11

This was the year the High Trip would normally have started south from Yosemite, to center around the Ritter Range. We’ll do that again soon, but this isn’t the year; there were six weeks of Base Camps near one end of the range last summer, and there will be six more weeks near the other end this summer. Superimposing a High Trip in the same region doesn’t seem wise.

So we travel again around the top of the Sierra – the Whitney region – as we did in 1953. We won’t repeat that circuit until about 1961 or later, so this is the chance to see the country for (a) those who didn’t have their fill three years ago, and (b) those who haven’t see it yet, but may have learned about it, in detail, in Dave Brower’s High Trip article which appeared in the June 1954 *National Geographic*. There is other country in the Sierra as good, but none better.

Both periods will cover the Sierra crest south of Kearsarge Pass. The choice will lie between whether you want the sun and snowscape at your back or in your eye as you travel from camp to camp. The first period starts at Carroll Creek and ends at Kearsarge; the second at Onion Valley, ending at Whitney Portal. Both are limited to 135 persons.

The Campsites this year will be the following all-time favorites:

Rock Creek. The beauties of this glacial basin country, close under Mount Langley and the crags of LeConte, Mallory, and Irvine, fascinated High Trippers in 1946 and 1953. There is much for mountaineers and meadowers to do within easy range of camp, and a good chance to learn about rock technique (helpful to cross-country travelers) without leaving the campfire circle, a gem in itself. (First two weeks only.)

Timberline Lake. Jumping-off place for ascents of the highest point in the nation, from the summit of which we expect many of the hardy type to watch sunrise and sunset. Or stay in commissary and watch the reflection of sunset setting fire to the Whitney crest and all its spires; or from your own site up on the campfire balcony let your eye sweep the silhouetted Kaweahs. Or recline in a grassy seat and watch the struggles of the Polemonium Club at work on clean, steep granite.

Wright lakes. We camp on the creek, but the lakes are an easy walk. Campfire is on a knoll with a superb 360-degree panorama that will give you all sorts of ideas about where to spend your time while camped here. Off toward Tyndall, Barnard, and Williamson? Up Wallace Creek to Tulainyo Lake (the highest), Wales Lake (beautifully scarped), or the north face of Russell (this year a snow job for sure)? Or knapsack to Kaweah Basin – the “Last Citadel” of perfect, ungrazed meadows? These are some of the choices. (First two weeks only.)

Wallace Creek. This is the second two-weeks’ substitute for Wright Lakes, and provides most of the same choices. This camp breaks up the otherwise too-long move to Timberline Lake from

Milestone Bench. This won't appear by name on any map, but High Trippers who stayed here in 1948 and 1953 are still talking about it. Dave Brower alternately calls Milestone Bench and Darwin Bench the most beautiful campsite in all the Sierra. Here the campfire is foreground for sunset on Williamson, Tyndall, Barnard, Russell, Whitney, Muir, and Langley – seven of the highest. And right at hand a beautiful meadow, timberline bedsites, rock-coved lakes, and Table Mountain and Milestone to attract the sunrise and the climbers. (Second two weeks only.)

Center Basin. This is part of the great country of the High Sierra. Beautiful peaks encircle an alpine land of forest, meadow, and stream. Handsome Center Peak all but crowds us out of camp, yet doesn't intrude at all while doing it. The explorer's route up to the real Center Basin, well off the Muir trail, is so easy that few can resist it, or should. Scholars can ascent Mount Stanford (a nasty climb), or University Peak, named after the University of California (most enjoyable), Ph.D. Peak is a little to the east, named by the club's Mountaineering Chairman just after he got his.

Little Cottonwood. (for northbound passengers only). A first night's stop to make Rock Creek a reasonable two-day trip – the management's concession to the slow disintegration of footburners that the automobile has caused. Early-day High Trippers (there were giants in those days) would have coasted the whole distance in one day. Little Cottonwood is enjoyable in itself.

These are the moves:

From Carroll Creek to Rock Creek. Ike Livermore has always pointed out that this move provides a wonderful appreciation of the eastern escarpment of the Sierra. He's right. A pleasantly early start will be arranged to preclude your appreciating it too much. And if you'll really look up that *Geographic* piece (we won't mention it many more times), you'll find that a seven-year old made the grade without pain (there are giants in these days, too).

Rock Creek to Timberline Lake. There's so much to describe and so little space ... do you think you could borrow a copy of the N.G.? There are a lot of fine color pictures in it too. If there were nothing to see but the fire-line forest of foxtail pines, you'd still like this day, and be glad to have it part of the fabric of your memory.

Timberline to Wright Lakes (or from Wallace Creek). An easy day either way, with a fair chance of getting your feet wet crossing Wallace Creek (this can be avoided by taking the mountaineer's route – over the top of Russell, with rope).

Timberline to Whitney Portal (last move, second period). This is the highest stock pass in the Sierra, less than 1,000 feet below Whitney's summit. The climb isn't bad at all, and a side trip to Whitney is indicated for those who are in condition for a lot of downhill to road's end. Here, too, is a wonderful chance to learn about the sierra's eastern escarpment, and to be happy that you have to descend only half of the full 11,000 feet vertical difference between Whitney and Lone Pine.

Upper Kern country. Depending upon which period you choose, you'll cover two or three legs of the Triangle between Foresters Pass, Milestone Bench, and Wright Lakes. And you don't find more beautiful days on the Sierra trail. We can just sit here and flash color slide after color slide (all in 3-D) across our mind's screen, and we're just going to sit here and do it and not say another word. We wish you could look.

The move from Center Basin to Milestone Bench is the longest of the trip (second two weeks only), with a steep final pull to the bench to end the day. But it's worth getting into condition for.

Onion Valley to Foresters (but with a stop-over, of course, at Center Basin). High point is 13,200-foot Foresters Pass, as amazing a piece of trail engineering as you'll find in the Sierra – with a chance to observe the striking difference in timberline character between the Kern and the Kings watersheds. Knapsackers looking for a change may choose the route via Lake South America, Harrison Pass, and Vidette Creek.

From Center Basin north, there are a few miles on the John Muir Trail, then the ever-favored eastern approach over Kearsarge Pass. Here again there's a short cut for those who'd prefer a little vertical distance to a lot of horizontal, beautiful trail. There's even a short cut on the short cut.

The Kearsarge approach, as we said in 1953, is one of the easiest – and we hope that our fond plan for the same number of people, roughly, on each of the two Sierra periods is not blasted by a clamoring for the easier way in. We would not want to attach a stigma to one group as opposed to another, but there are those who would suggest that to come in over Kearsarge is a sign of weakness, while to come in from Carroll Creek combines the virtues of determination, resourcefulness, and free enterprise.

The cost. The total cost will be \$85 per period, \$75 for children under 14, and \$45 for children under 12 if two of them share a 30-lb. Dunnage limit. (But check to see how far under is likely to work out.) Remember the counsel of the Subcommittee on Rationalization: Deduct from the \$85 what it would cost you to stay home two weeks, and divide the difference by 366, since a High Trip pays dividends all year.

Excerpt taken from the *Sierra Club Bulletin*, March 1956