

Southern Sierra High Route

ROUTE DESCRIPTION

By Alan Dixon and Don Wilson

SECTION 1: SOUTH LAKE TO UPPER BASIN

The Southern Sierra High Route (SoSHR) starts at the South Lake trailhead, west of Bishop, CA. This popular trailhead allows fast access to the beautiful high country terrain that we seek. In this section we cross the Sierra crest for the first time, and then descend to join Roper's Sierra High Route (SHR) near Dusy Basin. We will follow the Sierra High Route to Upper Basin, just south of Mather Pass, where our route will head south to higher country as Roper's route heads west, toward King's Canyon and lower terrain.

The route stays on trail for its initial miles and climbs over popular Bishop Pass. From Bishop Pass you will see rugged Mount Agassiz (13,899 feet), with its summit less than a mile to the east. Mount Agassiz is the northernmost peak in the Palisades - a fitting place to enter the high country. The Palisades are generally considered the most rugged sub-range in the Sierra, and we will get a close up view of numerous peaks as we traverse just west of the crest all the way to Upper Basin.

Leaving Bishop Pass, head south on the trail for about a mile and a half. The trail descends gradually towards lush Dusy Basin. Just below 11,000 feet the trail makes an abrupt right turn to the west. Leave the trail here and descend cross country to the south, and slightly east. It is only about 5 miles of cross country terrain from this point until you reach the John Muir Trail (JMT) at Lower Palisade Lake. While not technically difficult, much of the terrain in this section is complex and the travel is slow. Expect to spend 5 to 8 hours working your way from Dusy Basin to Lower Palisade Lake.

Your first goal is to traverse toward the head of Dusy Basin at the bottom of Knapsack Pass. Travel is mostly easy through this section and you may pick up an occasional use trail. Upon reaching the head of the canyon, look for a weakness and small gully system below the pass. Ascend this gully system past

occasional cairns up to the pass. From the top of the pass you will not drop directly down, but instead head left (east) toward Bartlett Lakes. You can drop diagonally down and left, or you can stay high (nearly the height of the pass) along a use trail for some distance before dropping. Either way, your objective is to reach the outlet of the westernmost of the Bartlett Lakes (Lake 11428 on your map). Traverse along the south side of this lake and then along a use trail on the north side of the larger Bartlett Lake. Your next objective is to climb up to a non-obvious saddle located just northeast of point 12,085. After reaching this saddle, an obvious and easy half mile traverse will take you to Potluck Pass.

From the top of Potluck Pass you need to connect to ramps off to the right (south). Head directly right, looking for ramps that go further right, then slightly down, then right again. Follow these to where the ramps end and you join a steep scree slope. Descend this slope via obvious use trails. Continue southeast to reach the outlet of the large lake between Potluck Pass and Cirque Pass.

At this point you have the option (highly recommended) to summit Mount Sill. Mount Sill (14,162 feet) is a classic climb and one of the most beautiful peaks in the Sierra. According to R.J. Secor in his highly recommended book *The High Sierra*, "Mount Sill has the best summit view of any peak in the Sierra." Head to the north end of the lake between Potluck Pass and Cirque Pass. Then continue north up slabs and talus into the cirque between Polemonium Peak and Mount Sill. Stay north of the snowfields in this cirque if possible and head to the obvious west ridge of Mount Sill. Once on the ridge, the rock improves dramatically. Ascend steep but good rock to the summit. We encountered several class 3+ boulders on the west ridge below the summit. With careful route finding you may be able to keep the difficulty at the class 2-3 grade reported by Secor. For more route information, see the description of the *Southwest Slope route* (*The High Sierra*, page 245, 3rd edition). You can expect to spend about 5-6 hours to ascend and descend this climb. By taking the option to climb Mount Sill, you will have climbed a superb 3rd class 14K peak at the beginning of the trip to match another great 3rd class 14K summit at the southern end of the trip; Mt. Whitney via the Mountaineer's Route.

From the outlet of the large lake between Potluck Pass and Cirque Pass, head southeast up slabs, then turn left when you hit obvious ramps that head up toward the pass. Follow the ramps up to an obvious narrow slot about 6 feet wide. Hike up through this slot and then head left up more ramps and ledges to the summit.

Once on Cirque Pass you have only one more descent remaining before you reach the comfort of the JMT for a number of miles. Expect the terrain to slow you down, as many ledges and slab systems complicate the initial part of the descent. Stay right as you start to hike down, connecting ramp systems and grassy small meadows. The terrain eases up after several hundred feet of descent. As Lower Palisade Lake comes into view, do not head directly toward its outlet. Instead, stay more right heading almost directly south and carefully looking for ledge systems that will connect you to the Palisade Lakes basin below. The further left you go in this final section of the descent, the steeper the terrain will be. You should reach the John Muir Trail in nearly flat terrain west of Lower Palisade Lake. There are popular campsites at the lake's outlet, but even better sites near the trail about a mile farther along toward Mather Pass. The route ascends the John Muir Trail over 12,100 foot Mather Pass, and then drops into pristine Upper Basin. As the trail levels off and reaches the uppermost lakes in Upper Basin, we reach the end of our first section. Here Roper's SHR heads to the southwest and Frozen Lake Pass. Our route continues south along the JMT, heading for Pinchot Pass and the highest peaks in the Sierra.

SECTION 2: UPPER BASIN TO VIDETTE MEADOW

From Upper Basin the route follows the John Muir Trail for about 12.5 miles to the junction with the Sawmill Pass trail. The first few miles through Upper Basin are some of the most beautiful miles of the JMT, filled with alpine grasses, many small creeks and surrounded by the 14,000 foot crest containing Split Mountain and Cardinal mountain to the east, and the clean granite spires of Vennacher Needle and Mount Ruskin to the west. Descend gradually through Upper Basin, crossing many small creeklets and an infinite selection of beautiful campsites. After about 5 miles the trail reaches the valley bottom, where four creeks come together to form the South Fork of the Kings River. The crossing here can be exciting in early season, but there are frequently good log crossings. Look both upstream and downstream if the water is high. From the crossing, stay on the John Muir Trail, climbing rapidly out of the forest and into the basin below Pinchot Pass. Follow the trail up to 12,100 foot Pinchot Pass, passing several large lakes in cirques below the pass. From the top of the pass there is a beautiful view to the south. Here one can spot Grasshopper Pass in an obvious notch a little less than 6 miles distant as the crow flies. Grasshopper Pass lies at a bearing of 155 degrees (true) from Pinchot Pass.

Descend from Pinchot Pass along the JMT. The trail descends steadily and after 3.7 miles at approximately 10,500 feet, you will reach a signed junction for Sawmill Pass. Here you have the option to divert into this valley and ascend the west ridge of Acrodectes Peak, connecting to Baxter Lakes and rejoining the JMT near Dollar Lake. This option skips the descent to the suspension bridge crossing of lower Woods Creek (Alan calls it 'Woods Hole'). This will also keep your trip continually over 10,000 feet. The Woods Lake Basin (Sawmill Pass Trail area) was closed to travel for many years and once you get off the faint trail there is scant evidence of other hikers. Also due to the long closure and now low use as an "unmaintained" trail, we found an abundance of wildlife in this basin. Thus, Woods Lake Basin is highly recommended as an overnight (side trip) off of the JMT even if you don't decide to go over the west ridge of Acrodectes Peak. Well worth the 3-4 miles round trip.

If you take the option to cross the ridge of Acrodectes Peak, you will travel southwest from the junction with the JMT, taking the trail toward Sawmill Pass and immediately crossing Woods Creek. The sometimes faint trail then climbs slowly and turns east, traversing along the northern boundary of several lakes. To

the south, you will get occasional views of enormous Woods Lake. Your objective is to leave the trail about two miles after the Sawmill Pass junction and head to an L shaped lake at 10,930 feet. This lake is labelled as Lake 3331 on the USGS Quad. In our hike of the route we scouted this section but did not climb over the ridge (or Grasshopper Pass). From Lake 3331, the route heads directly south up obvious ramps, near the drainage coming down from Stocking Lake. Although we originally considered a route over Grasshopper Pass as the best option to connect to Baxter Lakes from this valley, further research leads us to believe that the north side of Grasshopper Pass is frequently choked with steep snow, and the route up to the pass is full of loose rock and tricky routefinding--in our opinion not a safe or suitable option. We now believe the best option to cross to Baxter Lakes is to head directly west from the south end of Stocking Lake, and ascend a relatively low angle weak point in the ridge that heads west and north from the summit of Acrodectes Peak. Once on the ridge, the route descends to the unnamed lake that lies directly west of Acrodectes Peak. From that lake, continue descending south to Baxter Lakes and the trail to Dollar Lake. This route over the ridge is reportedly class 3, but holds less snow and has more stable terrain than the north side of Grasshopper Pass.

If you skip the climb over the ridge of Acrodectes Peak, stay on the JMT at the Sawmill Pass junction, dropping gradually and following Woods Creek on its west side. After descending all the way to 8,500 feet, you reach a junction where the JMT turns southeast and crosses Woods Creek on an impressive suspension bridge. A heavily used campsite with bear boxes lies on the far side of the bridge. From this low point on the trail the route climbs steadily to the beautiful Rae Lakes (many campsites, some with bear boxes). Leaving Rae Lakes, the trail climbs steeply to 11,930 foot Glen Pass. Follow the trail down from the pass for several miles, where you will encounter several junctions with trails heading down from Kearsarge Pass. Look at your map carefully. After crossing a sandy flat basin below the trail junctions, you will drop more steeply toward Vidette Meadow. Finally reaching the valley floor near Bubbs Creek, you come upon a junction where you will turn east and traverse along the nearly level Lower Vidette Meadow. There is little that resembles a meadow here. The terrain is heavily forested, with a few small glimpses of grass. There is reason to celebrate your arrival here. You've completed a long section on the JMT, and the route ahead gets much more challenging. It contains some of the best and highest cross country travel in the Sierra.

SECTION 3: VIDETTE MEADOW TO UPPER BOY SCOUT LAKE

Leaving the junction at 9500 feet, you travel east on the JMT through thick pines and past numerous campsites. The trail stays fairly level for a little over a mile, then begins a gradual climb. Just before reaching 10,000 feet the trail enters a sandy flat section with open forest. For the next mile and a half the trail stays close along the east side of Bubbs Creek. Good campsites abound again from about 9900 feet to 10,200 feet.

Finally departing slightly from Bubbs Creek, the trail climbs more steeply. When you reach 10,650 feet, a faint trail cuts off to your left, heading east where the JMT turns south. This junction is difficult to find. There is no sign and not much evidence of travel (there has obviously been a dedicated effort to conceal the turn-off to this “decommissioned” trail). After the hard to find junction, the trail will level off and drop slightly to a small creek at 10,600 feet. If you missed the trail junction (we missed it), leave the JMT at this creek and begin a gradual climb to the east through the forest. When you encounter steeper rocky terrain ahead, bear diagonally left and you will eventually cross the faint trail heading up to Golden Bear Lake. Stay on the trail, winding around some meadows and boggy terrain, reaching sublime Golden Bear Lake at 11,175 feet. Continue on this faint trail, which is the former route of the JMT, heading upward toward Junction Pass. You will pass above two lakes and climb onto a ridge at 12,600 feet. From this ridge a great view of Forester Pass and the JMT opens up before you as the JMT climbs toward the dramatic notch of Forester Pass. You can be a voyeur here and watch tiny backpacker ants slowly toil up to the pass. Continue up to the Sierra crest at 13,320 foot Junction Pass and admire the view of Junction Peak, just to your south. Get a good rest here, as the route ahead will require your full attention.

When you drop off Junction Pass you will likely find footprints and a faint sign of a trail that heads southeast from the pass. The terrain here is not too steep and the sandy footing makes for easy walking and obvious footprints. At about 12,900 feet, the route turns back to the southwest and begins a drop into the drainage that lies south of Junction Pass. Your objective is to reach the head of this canyon at about 12,400 feet. On the drop into this canyon, the trail will disappear and you will descend on loose, nasty talus and all manner of crud all the way down. Proceed slowly and with caution. The footing is loose and perilous. We both had a couple of slips on this section and we were being careful. Many

routes down the slope are possible. When in doubt, stay right and head towards the upper end of the canyon bottom. About 150 vertical feet above the canyon floor, you may see some evidence of the old JMT. Only a few small sections remain. Nearly all the old trail has been obliterated by the loose crumbing terrain above--possibly a reason the trail was abandoned.

As you get near the bottom, turn again to the southeast and begin a mile long traverse across a seemingly infinite slope of scree and talus. At some point you will drop to the bottom of the canyon and continue on the almost flat canyon bottom on more scree and huge talus. After a long mile, you will reach terrain which becomes more easily walkable, and a few sections of grass appear. A small stream emerges from the talus here too. At this point, stay south of the stream and look for evidence of a faint trail turning south and down across a hillside. Follow this past several switchbacks as it drops toward The Pothole, which can be seen below. The much more heavily used trail up to Shepherd Pass can be seen to the south and east, coming up from the canyon below. At approximately 11,200 feet, the trail levels out and continues across a flatish basin. The trail is difficult to follow in this basin. We decided to leave the trail here and traverse directly south at approximately 11,100 feet, heading toward the visible Shepherd Pass trail a half mile away. This traverse is fairly easy, and avoids a further drop of 300 vertical feet into The Pothole. Once on the Shepherd Pass trail, take a break and rest up for the steep climb above.

The climb up to Shepherd Pass is steep, but the trail is fairly good and the climb goes easily. Once on Shepherd Pass (just over 12,000 feet), you enter a long section of excellent travel across high basins and passes. Follow the trail down from Shepherd Pass for about 1.5 miles on mostly low angle terrain. At about 11,500 feet, turn directly south, heading for an obvious notch, which we call Wright Lakes Pass. Easy class 2 hiking leads up to the 12,040 foot pass. Descend south toward Wright Lakes on easy terrain and begin a beautiful 2.5 mile long walk past Wright Lakes across a high basin dotted with ancient dead pines. South of Wright Lakes, you will begin to pass through some trees and meadows, heading toward Wallace Creek.

As you near Wallace Creek you will encounter increasingly rocky terrain. Depending on your location, you will likely need to climb slightly up, and then drop several hundred feet before encountering the faint trail that lies north of the creek. You should aim to hit the trail following Wallace Creek at about 10,800 feet, crossing the ridge north of Wallace Creek at around 11,000 feet or a bit lower. (Note: don't succumb to the urge to cross too soon and too directly into

Wallace Creek. The ridge north of the creek is rocky, and there are a steep sets of cliff bands descending into Wallace creek that are hard to navigate).

Once on Wallace Creek, turn east when you hit the trail and begin the climb up toward Wallace Lake. The faint trail up to the lake is unmaintained and fades out in places. You can expect to lose it now and again. Beyond the lake, all signs of a trail quickly disappear. At 11,480 feet, Wallace Lake is a huge azure gem, with spectacular walls to its north and inviting flat terrain along its south side. Continue past the lake to a steep looking headwall southeast of the lake. The best way up this headwall is to directly attack its center, where the drainage from the basin above empties down the slope heading for Wallace Lake. This 500 foot climb involves a lot of large talus and some class 2 scrambling.

Above the headwall, a welcome and inviting walk of just over a mile leads toward Tulainyo Lake. This lake is the highest lake of its size in the lower 48 states. It has no inlet or outlet, instead it is tucked away in a bowl just below 13,000 feet, where few people get the pleasure of seeing it. Take another rest at the lake and get your bearings. Your next objective is the Russell-Carillon Col. This pass will be located far off to your right as you initially encounter the lake, and is not fully visible when you first see the lake. Drop down to the lakeshore, probably crossing large snowfields that are nearly permanent, and traverse along the southwest shore. The Russell-Carillon Col will now become obvious and somewhat intimidating. It is easier than it appears. As you near the southern tip of the lake, begin the climb up on the talus, heading for a point directly below the low point of the pass. At the top of the talus you will encounter a point where the rock suddenly gets steeper and scrambling is required. This climb of about 250 feet is moderate class 3, and is broken up by numerous large ledges. Some hikers may want a hand in a few places, or may want to pass up their packs for a move or two. The ledges make this climb quite safe, with the most significant danger being loose rock dislodged by your own party. We suggest you alternate climbing and use the large ledges to keep your party clear of the fall line from your highest members at all times. In a few fun minutes you will emerge again onto the Sierra crest at 13,300 feet on the Russell-Carillon Col.

From the col, the famous east ridge of Mount Russell lies to the west. This steep and airy climb is known as one of the best class 3 climbs in North America (and would make a spectacular side-trip/peak bag). Because of the popularity of this climb, there is a use trail that heads up to the col from Upper Boy Scout Lake. You will follow this use trail down to the lake. The terrain down to the lake is mostly loose sand and scree. While this makes for some fun walking, you can

expect to fill up your shoes with plenty of souvenirs. As you begin the descent, follow obvious paths to the southeast, eventually turning more east and traveling through a vague notch. Continue east, following a mesh of paths and occasional cairns. As you approach steeper terrain, several large cairns may appear, marking potential points to drop onto steeper terrain. There are numerous options that will become clear when you can see onto the steeper terrain below. Work your way down these quite slippery and steep slopes, heading towards the North Fork of Lone Pine Creek. When several hundred feet above the creek, at about 11500 feet, a use trail will fork off to the right and head directly toward Upper Boy Scout Lake (which is not visible from above). If you miss this fork, you can descend to the creek and then climb back toward Upper Boy Scout Lake. The lake lies at nearly 11,400 feet and will be a welcome site to your dusty feet and rock filled shoes. This is a good place to bivy prior to ascending Mount Whitney via the Mountaineer's Route. (Or if you have time, you could hump up to Iceberg Lake and save yourself a bit of distance and elevation when climbing Whitney the next day.)

SECTION 4: UPPER BOY SCOUT LAKE TO HORSESHOE MEADOWS

It just keeps getting better. This section is the highest bit of off trail hiking that either of us has done in the US. It contains a full traverse of Mount Whitney, a walk along the highest mountain ridge in the lower 48, an enormous and fun scree slope, challenging and intricate navigation, and several large and lonely alpine lakes. It's worth a reminder that you will be in the Mount Whitney Zone, with its regulations regarding human waste, from the time you cross the Russell-Carillon Col until you summit Mount Whitney.

Leaving Upper Boy Scout Lake, head south across its outlet and scramble up slabs until you join the informal climber's trail that heads east up and over a headwall. If you hike this section in the early morning you will be granted spectacular views of the east face of Mount Whitney as the sun lights up the peaks. Continue east up fairly easy to follow trails until you begin to traverse along a south facing slope which is south of Iceberg Lake. There are many possible routes to reach Iceberg Lake, all of them requiring an eventual turn to the north up steep slopes. There are numerous seeps in this area which can make the slabs slippery, especially if temperatures are near or below freezing. At 12,700 feet you will climb over a final rise and come to the south shore of Iceberg Lake. Isolated and cold, the lake is nestled snugly in a steep cirque between Mount Whitney and Mount Russell. There are numerous bivy sites along the south shore, most with level camping and stone walls to provide some protection on windy nights. This is a good place to rest, get a drink and refill your water supplies. There is no water, other than possible snowmelt, for the next 5 hours or so of hiking (until you reach the uppermost Crabtree Lake, below Crabtree Pass).

Your next objective is an ascent of Mount Whitney via the Mountaineer's Route. This route is not at all difficult in good conditions, but if the route holds significant snow or ice it can quickly become more serious, requiring a rope and crampons for most people. It's a popular route, so a little searching on the internet can usually provide good info on current route conditions before you leave home. In most years the route is in good shape by early July and remains so until mid September.

From Iceberg Lake, head almost directly east up slabs and boulders, aiming for the north side of the east buttress. The notch that is your eventual objective is

obvious on the skyline at 14,000 feet, some 1,300 feet above Iceberg Lake. By staying left of the scree you can hike and scramble to the base of the east buttress on mostly good rock. As you reach the base of the east buttress you will be forced to the right into the main gully of the Mountaineer's Route. Continue up the gully, staying on the most stable rock you can find (usually on the left). Eventually you will be forced to head directly up a long section of loose scree. This can be a lot of work, as you climb up and slide down with each step. But it is not difficult, and your position alongside the east buttress is simply spectacular. Clean, golden granite surrounds you, and the vistas to the north and east more than make up for the loose conditions of the climb. After a long grunt, you arrive at the notch, just above 14,000 feet. From here you will climb the most technical section of the route in the final push to the summit.

Drop down onto the west side of the notch, losing only 20 or 30 vertical feet. After this very short drop, to your left (north) an obvious gully will head directly north towards the summit. This first gully on the west side of the ridge is your route. The gully lies well above 14,000 feet and is nearly always in the shade. It may be cold, and will hold snow or ice when other parts of the route are balmy. The very first move up this gully is generally considered the most difficult obstacle between you and the summit. Scramble up and left from the base, then wander up the gully past rolling ledges and slabs over class 3 terrain. On our ascent a recent storm had left considerable ice in the gully, and it limited our options on the way up. But we were still able for the most part to stay on good, ice-free rock all the way up. As you near the top of the gully you may be able to head right (into the warm sun!) to easier terrain. After about 400 feet of climbing, you emerge rather suddenly onto the summit plateau of Mount Whitney. Wander over to the summit and enjoy the perfect flat slabs that are abundant on the highest point in the continental US.

From the summit you will join the Mount Whitney trail that heads initially west and then south from the summit. For the next 2.5 miles you will stay on this trail, walking just west of the spectacular ridge that heads south of Whitney, past Keeler Needle and Mount Muir, both 14,000+ summits. Although this trail is crowded with Mount Whitney hikers, the position is spectacular and the walking and views are thoroughly enjoyable. After about two miles you will reach a trail junction where the JMT comes up from the west. Stay left here, and climb up to the crest. Cross the crest (this location is known as Trail Crest) on the trail and staying on the trail, begin a traverse to the east, the start of the drop toward Whitney Portal. About a quarter mile past Trail Crest, you reach the first

switchback, where the trail turns left and continues a long series of switchbacks down a steep slope.

Look back uphill at this switchback and you will see a very faint use trail that heads directly up on talus and scree, back towards the crest. Leave the trail here knowing you are heading into a challenging section of hiking. Head south, climbing directly uphill until you reach the crest and a low angle plateau at 13,600 feet. Once on the crest, begin dropping to the south, slowly at first, and then with an ever increasing angle on sandy scree. Your objective is to reach the upper end of the lake that lies just west of Crabtree Pass. As you drop, look for ledge systems that allow you to traverse east toward relatively flat terrain above the upper end of the lake. Then turn south to reach a small grassy haven on the east shore. This is the first reliable water since you left Iceberg Lake.

From the lake, head directly up class 2 scrambling to the lowest point on Crabtree Pass. Here you enter a section of complicated terrain and navigation that will occupy you until you arrive at Sky Blue Lake. Along this entire section the terrain will force you to make many small detours. Sky Blue Lake will not be visible until you are nearly upon it and past all the difficulties.

Drop down from the pass, heading slightly right (south) of the direct fall line, aiming for the northwest corner of Lake 3697. Upon nearly reaching the shore of this lake, turn more west and go over a rise and through a faint notch, heading toward the smaller lake west of Lake 3697. You may be able to follow occasional cairns along this section (although not all are to be trusted). Continue traversing to the southeast shore of this lake, then turning south down slabs. About a half mile directly south of this lake the terrain flattens out. Head toward these flat sections and turn east, joining inlet streams that head down to Sky Blue Lake (still not visible). Hike east along these streams through narrow valleys, finally emerging onto slopes that provide a grand view of awesome Sky Blue Lake. Hike directly toward the north shore of the lake, where you can pick up use trails that circle the lake on its north and east sides. Cross the lakes' outlet stream and scramble down slopes on the west side of the stream toward an obvious flatter valley below. Once on the valley floor, head south along Rock Creek, staying on the west side of the creek most of the way down. Intermittent use trails may appear, but much of the upper valley is devoid of trails. High, steep granite walls rise on both sides of the upper canyon. Use trails become more obvious as you get near 11,000 feet in elevation, and eventually the route becomes a good trail which you can follow all the way to a junction at 10,460 feet. Here you come upon a large meadow with a good trail that runs nearly perpendicular to your line

of travel. There is good camping here. You have completed all the off trail travel and only pleasant trails separate you from the trailhead near Horseshoe Meadows.

Turn east (left) when you hit the trail and climb several hundred feet to another junction at 10,800 feet. Here you can take a short walk to Soldier Lake (not named on the map). Your route turns south (right) at this junction and begins a gradual climb toward New Army Pass. At 10,950 feet pass another junction where you turn east (left) toward New Army Pass. Hike up your final climb through alpine terrain. The climb up to New Army Pass does not cross the crest at its low point (huge cliffs on the far side), and instead the pass lies south of the low point, much higher up the crest at 12,300 feet. From the top of the pass you leave the Sierra crest for the last time and head down a series of impressive switchbacks past High Lake and Long Lake, and on popular trails along Cottonwood Creek. About 7 miles beyond New Army Pass you arrive at the Cottonwood Lakes trailhead, where a thrilling car ride down the steep and exposed road leads to the town of Lone Pine. This is a very popular trailhead - hitching a ride down to Lone Pine should be a simple affair.