

revenge of deadman canyon

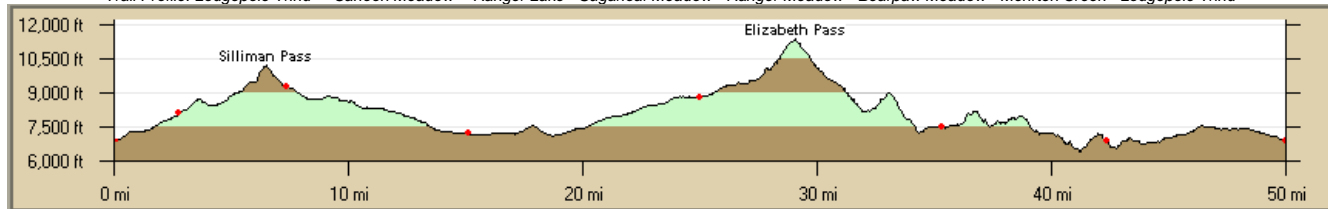
...going back for the first time!

In 2006 and 2007, small groups of hardy Southern Arizona Hiking Club backpackers went on week-long trips to California's Sierra Nevada.

Here's your chance to view this spectacular mountain range for yourself. This loop backpack trip from the Lodgepole Visitor Center delves through the backcountry of Kings Canyon and Sequoia National Parks, building by slow degrees to a grand climax of a High Sierra crossing at Elizabeth Pass, and winding down again with another gradual passage down the north wall of the Kaweah River. Glacier-carved cliffs and mountains, deep canyons, wildlife, and giant sequoias - this hike has it all! Join me for this amazing trip to one of the crown jewels of the American wilderness system.

- Trip Duration:** 7 days and 6 nights. There will be at least two nights in hotels.
- General Description:** An aggressive long-distance, multi-day wilderness backpack
- Distance:** ~50.0 miles
- Difficulty:** Formidable, with more than 14,000 feet of elevation gained and lost overall
- Traffic:** Moderate to Silliman Pass, light beyond
- Elevation Gain:** 14,000+ feet overall
- Trailhead / Elevation:** Twin Lakes Trailhead / 6,750 feet
- Maximum Elevation:** Elizabeth Pass / 11,400 feet
- Topo Maps:** Muir Grove, Mount Silliman, Sphinx Lakes, Giant Forest, Lodgepole, Triple Divide Peak

Trail Profile: Lodgepole Trlhd - Cahoon Meadow - Ranger Lake - Sugarloaf Meadow - Ranger Meadow - Bearpaw Meadow - Mehrten Creek - Lodgepole Trlhd



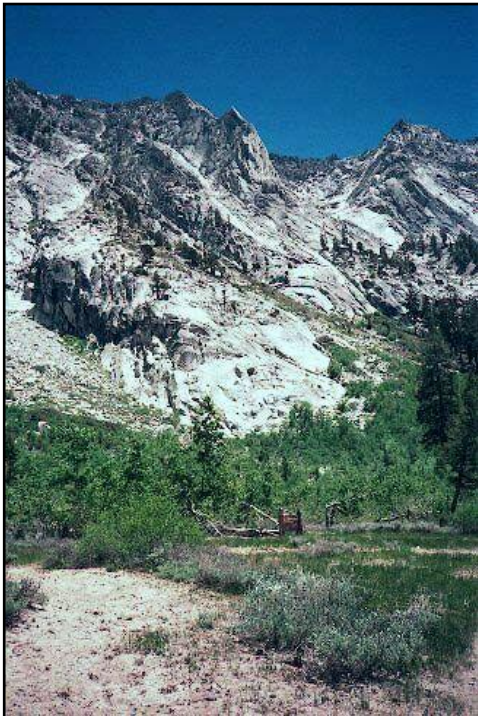
Miles	Day	Trail Jct or Landmark	Miles	Day	Trail Jct or Landmark
0.0	Sa	Twin Lakes Trailhead at Lodgepole	24.6	T	Shepherd's grave
1.2	Sa	Trail Jct to Wuksachi Village; bear right (N)	25.2	T	Second Deadman Canyon creek ford
3.0	Sa	Cahoon Meadow 🏕️📦	26.9	T	Lower Ranger Meadow in Deadman Canyon 🏕️📦
5.0	Su	Jct with JO Pass Tral; bear right (NE)	30.5	W	Ford of creek above waterfall, upper Deadman Cyn
6.8	Su	Twin Lakes	31.7	W	Elizabeth Pass
7.9	Su	Silliman Pass	34.5	W	Jct with Tamarack Lake Trail; go right (S)
9.7	Su	Beville Lake jct; bear left (N)	34.6	W	Over-the-Hill Trail jct; bear right (SW)
9.8	Su	Ranger Lake jct; bear right (E) 🏕️📦	36.6	W	Redwood Mdw Trail jct; keep right (W) 🏕️📦
13.0	M	Seville Lake jct; bear right (NE)	37.8	Th	Buck Creek
14.7	M	Comanche Meadow jct; bear right (E)	39.1	Th	Nine Mile Creek
17.9	M	Ford of Sugarloaf Creek 🏕️📦	42.0	Th	Mehrten Creek 🏕️📦
19.3	T	Ford of Ferguson Creek	45.6	F	Wolverton Cut-Off Trail jct; turn right (W)
22.1	T	Roaring River Ranger Station	48.0	F	Wolverton Corrals; road; turn right (E)
23.7	T	First Deadman Canyon creek ford	49.9	F	Twin Lakes Trailhead

🏕️ = campsite / 📦 = bear canister / 📦 = bearbox

The Sierra Nevada Range

The Sierra Nevada is a superlative range. Almost 400 miles long from Tehachapi Pass to where it fades into the Cascade Range just north of the Feather River, and from 50 to 80 miles wide, it is the longest single mountain range (as opposed to a mountain system) in the continental United States. Within that purview you will find the largest trees, the most temperate summer climate, the greatest snow depths, the mightiest escarpment, (arguably) the deepest canyon, and the highest waterfalls in the United States. Its rivers water the richest agricultural region, and its placers and quartz veins produced and still hoard the richest gold deposits. The highest U.S. mountain outside of Alaska is Mount Whitney, a Sierra summit. The oldest large-scale public park to be established by the federal government - the nation's first national park, if you will - were the combined parcels of Yosemite Valley and the Wawona Grove of giant sequoias, signed over to the state of California by Abraham Lincoln in 1864, eight years before Congress created Yellowstone National Park.

What sets the Sierra Nevada apart from other landscapes, however, owes more to the testimony of the senses than to factual assessments. For anyone even moderately receptive to the beauty of mountain landscapes, the Sierra Nevada offers



a lifetime of enthralling study, pleasure, and recreation. No matter where you go, there is always something extraordinary. The scent of pungent mountain misery is every bit as heady as the aroma of deep pine forests or sagebrush basins. The dazzling wildflower pastures of Butte County in spring, or of Carson Pass in summer, give way to the dazzling autumnal leaf displays of the eastern canyons of Mono, Alpine, and Inyo Counties. The widest, most sublime of Sierra vistas evokes a sense of wonder no less engaging than the most exquisite details that lie immediately under our noses: a trailside rock garden, that delicious scent of sun-warmed Jeffrey pine, bumblebees sheltering from rain under the umbels of a blooming flower stalk, the fat marmot who lives atop Mount Whitney.

The Sierra Nevada is much, much more than a sum of its peaks. When you stand before the majesty of a soaring alpine summit, spare some thought for the broad belts of desert, forest, and foothill that cushion your solitude; the lower canyons that carry the streams and their sediments away from the highlands; the boreal larders of food and shelter for wildlife. The western foothills and forests are a prelude to the High Sierra, the east-side deserts its grand finale. By extension, the degradation of the foothills also degrades the High Sierra, for the failing health of one zone infringes upon the next and weakens the whole.

John Muir extolled this extraordinary richness of the Sierra Nevada in his writings. He recognized the rare magic of these mountains at his first glimpse, as he crossed the Coast Ranges en route from San Francisco to Yosemite, and the Sierra never disappointed him:

At my feet lay the Great Central Valley of California, level and flowery, like a lake of pure sunshine, forty or fifty miles wide, five hundred miles long, one rich furred garden of yellow Compositae. And from the eastern boundary of this vast golden flower-bed rose the mighty Sierra, miles in height, and so gloriously colored and so radiant it seemed not clothed with light, but wholly composed of it, like the wall of some celestial city. Along the top and extending a good way down, was a rich pearl-gray belt of snow; below it a belt of blue and dark purple, marking the extension of the forests; and stretching along the base of the range a broad belt of rose purple; all these colors, from the blue sky to the yellow valley smoothly blending as they do in a rainbow, making a wall of light ineffably fine. Then it seemed to me that the Sierra should be called, not the Nevada or Snowy Range, but the Range of Light. And after ten years of wandering and wondering in the heart of it, rejoicing in its glorious floods of light, the white beams of the morning streaming through the passes, the noonday radiance on the crystal rocks, the flush of the alpenglow, and the irised spray of countless waterfalls, it still seems above all others the Range of Light.

The mountains have a way of kneading and slapping life back into an existence wearied and dulled by too much city living. Who needs a personal trainer when you can hike a Sierra peak? Who needs a stiff belt down at Joe's when the stinging shock of a cold wind off a high snowbank, or even a damp grass stain on the seat of your britches, bellows out that you are a vibrant part of the planet? Hiking the Sierra Nevada is not always a romp through posy fields. The mountains can parch you, exhaust you, freeze you, drench you, wear holes in the knees of your trousers, or break your bones with complete indifference, though never with malice. A week on its trails has a wondrous way of shifting priorities back into their proper places, of reminding us of the preeminent excellence of simple things - dry clothes, rest, food, water, camaraderie, a campfire. Our ancient ancestors ranked such basic commodities highest among life's happiest and most precious attainments. Bring along a good book or a guitar, and we can add to that state of bliss a touch of high culture, too.

The Hike

From the Twin Lakes trailhead at Lodgepole (6,750'), our trail hooks around the campground perimeter and strikes a westbound course ascending the north wall of the Kaweah River's Marble Fork canyon. We can gauge our progress by checking up on Lodgepole through sporadic breaks in the wall of conifers and shrubs.

After a mile of steady climbing, we turn right (N) onto a flat stretch thickly clotted with lodgepole pine and red fir. A mile of easy rambling on forest duff brings us to a ford of Silliman Creek, where a sign admonishes us to stay out of the water, because it is part of the park's water supply. Continuing uphill, we pass the flowery glade of Cahoon Meadow along its eastern edge, climbing a ravine to Cahoon Gap, a wooded saddle at 8,650 feet. Rather than camping at Lodgepole for our first night, we will hike to Cahoon Meadow to get three miles under our belts before the next day's hike.

Our trail now descends about 250 feet of elevation in 0.8 mile to the banks of Clover Creek. We turn right at the junction with the JO Pass Trail, ford the stream, and commence a series of uphill switchbacks about 2 miles to the 9,500-foot shelf where Twin Lakes recline in the woods below Silliman Pass. There are popular campsites at both lakes.

The final climb starts without preamble on the eastern end of the lakes, zigzagging up through thick forest. Trees are even growing on the 10,200-foot brow of the Kings-Kaweah Divide at Silliman Pass, where the trail momentarily fades in gravel. If you walk a short distance up the knoll to the right (S), however, you can enjoy unhampered views east and north over the Kings River drainage. Below us we can pick out the namesake dome of Sugarloaf Valley, backed to the north by Sentinel Ridge, and beyond that a network of tributary canyons, including the great white cliff of Muro Blanco. Most spectacular of all is the Great Western Divide, to the east, surmounted by Mount Brewer (13,570'), named for the leader of the first survey party to map the area. William Brewer climbed it in June 1864 only to discover that the real Sierra Crest lay even further to the east. "Such a landscape!" he wrote. "A hundred peaks in sight over thirteen thousand feet - many very sharp - deep canyons, cliffs in every direction almost rival Yosemite, sharp ridges inaccessible to man, on which human foot has never trod - all combined to produce a view of sublimity of which is rarely equaled, of which few are privileged to behold."

Crossing into Kings Canyon National Park at Silliman Pass, our trail winds down in full view of Mount Silliman (11,188') to the south, as well as some dainty examples of natural flower gardens and miniature waterfalls. Reaching a wooded shelf, we pass the short entry paths to Beville Lake - popular with mosquitos - and then larger Ranger Lake. The latter is the better camping place, with bear boxes and extensive granite terraces to raise your tent above most of the mosquitos.

Leaving the lakes, our trail descends gradually northward, passing under Ball Dome and leveling out at the ford of Seville Lake's outlet stream in Belle Canyon. Turning right (NE) at the junction, we follow the creek down to another junction at Comanche Meadow, where we turn right (E) again. Forging the creek that drains Williams Meadow, we hike down into Sugarloaf Valley. As the forest pulls back from dry meadows, the famous Sugarloaf soon pulls into view, a granite dome rising tusklike 1,000 feet above the valley floor. On the southwest corner of the Sugarloaf, in woods on the edge of Sugarloaf Meadow, a small spur path on the left side of our trail leads to a comfortable packer camp, with creek, fire ring, bear box, and log seats.

The heavily forested 3-mile passage across Sugarloaf Valley would be easy hiking, were it not for the fords of Sugarloaf and Ferguson creeks, which are treacherous in early season. Apart from that, the trail is fairly level and soft on the feet. After Ferguson Creek, we climb out of the valley over a dry moraine pushed up by ice age glaciers moving down Deadman and Cloud canyons, whose combined drainages today form the Roaring River on the eastern side of the moraine. This is a swift, dangerous river at any time of the year, but fortunately we do not have to ford it. Our path traces its rushing waters upstream to Scaffold Meadow, a strategic crossroads of Sierra byways. At this junction stands the Roaring River Ranger Station, staffed from June through September, unless the ranger is on patrol. A fine campsite here offers not only bear boxes, but even the luxury of an outhouse, minus the house, with a toilet carved from an old stump, very sociably situated in a pasture beside the trail. A footbridge across Roaring River carries other trails toward the Kern River via Colby Pass and to Cedar Grove via Avalanche Pass - but our trail does not cross this bridge. Staying on the west bank of the Roaring River, we go upriver into Deadman Canyon.

As we begin the first temperate mile of Deadman Canyon, we begin to see signs that the hitherto prevalent forest cover is beginning to quaver. Independent Jeffrey pines and clumps of sagebrush - the harbingers of drier, rockier terrain - are growing more numerous. The canyon is narrowing, hemmed in on the left (E) by Glacier Ridge and on the right (W) by ridge spurs from the Tablelands.

After fording Deadman Canyon's creek (known as Copper Creek, for the mine at the head of Deadman Canyon), we hike through meadows on the eastern bank before arriving at the canyon's namesake, the grave of an Iberian sheepherder, Alfred Moniere. After taking sick here in 1887, probably of appendicitis, he died alone, while his partner sought help from distant Fresno. His timber monument is surrounded by avalanche-flattened trees. Closer to the creek, you can search the white-barked quaking aspen for old carvings made by bored sheepherders.

After leaving the grave to its lonely vigil, we again cross Copper Creek and pass a drift fence, an indication that this trail is popular among packers. As we climb higher, the canyon appears to deepen, especially as we enter Lower Ranger Meadow, about a mile above the ford. where the ridges have risen into respectable mountains. Hikers often meet herds of grazing horses. The boulders and woods along the east side of Lower and Middle Ranger Meadows shelter some old packer camps.

Passing through another stock gate, we make another ford of Copper Creek and climb a granite shelf to Upper Ranger Meadow, with an excellent packer camp in the trees overlooking Middle Ranger Meadow. From our final stretch of flat ground before the pass, we eye the canyon's looming headwalls, a glacial cirque that seems to offer no easy escape. It's hard to believe we are looking at Elizabeth Pass, the usually snowy low point on the right (sw) ridge, 2,000 feet higher than where we now stand.

Now begins the hardest climb of this trip. To recall the phraseology of a ranger once met at Lodgepole, Elizabeth Pass is "a real grunt"; that is, a climb of heroic proportions. Our trail takes off through fields of talus above the rushing creek, climbing to the top of a granite bluff and crossing the cascades to the opposite bank, a tricky ford when the water is high. The trail from here to the little meadow below the granite cirque is beautifully engineered with rock steps. As we turn uphill onto steep granite slabs above the meadow, however, the trail is sometimes hard to follow. The problem is snow, which sticks in patches to this northeast-facing slope often throughout the year. Keep in mind that you are aiming for the pass on the southwest ridge and climb for that. Chances are good that you will at some point regain the trail, which climbs in broad switchbacks to the 11,400-foot pass, a narrow saddle in the Kings-Kaweah Divide.

There is a register box atop Elizabeth Pass. Behind us (NW), we look down to Ranger Meadow, where Deadman Canyon makes a turn to disappear behind Glacier Ridge. Ahead (W), the rocky slopes of the Kaweah River drainage slip steeply away. It's a fine view, but the proximity of so many high ridges and peaks blocks our view of the Great Western Divide.

The 3,350-foot descent from Elizabeth Pass to Lone Pine Creek is tough on knees. We start down through the talus on a set of tight, ambitiously engineered switchbacks, feeding thence into long, sloping granite slabs interspersed with meadow and boulders. Cairns mark our route, which is not always easy to follow, but even when we lose it we can often pick it up in the wide-open country by searching down the slope. Our trail descends to a lateral valley, crossing the outlet creek from Lonely Lake, whereupon we begin a series of merciless switchbacks through dry scrub down to the rocky floor of Lone Pine Creek's canyon, at about 8,050 feet. There we meet the trail to Tamarack Lake, which leads to some close campsites sheltered in the trees.

Just ahead on our trail lies another junction, with the Over-the-Hill Trail to Bearpaw Meadow. We start by climbing through a subalpine world scoured by avalanches. Enjoy the fantastic views eastward to the Angel Wings and other polished granite domes and spires, because once we hit the crest the forest closes in, and we make a steep descent, blinkered in forests of red fir. Arriving at Bearpaw High Sierra Camp, we find a ranger station and a canvas tent lodge that provides beds, showers and meals to paying guests (who reserve the privilege months in advance). The Bearpaw Meadow Campground for backpackers has piped water, an outhouse, and bear boxes.

At Bearpaw Meadow, we pick up the famous High Sierra Trail back toward Giant Forest, a stretch of trail that is engineered to keep the rise and fall to a minimum, while enjoying scenic views of Sugarbowl Dome, Little Blue Dome, Castle Rocks, and the Kaweah River gorge. There are campsites with bear boxes at Buck Creek, Nine Mile Creek, and Mehrten Creek.

Three-and-a-half miles west of our Mehrten Creek campsite, the trail makes a large sweeping turn to the southwest. As it does, the Wolverton Cutoff Trail branches off to the right (W) and climbs steeply up the ridge in front of us before running off to the south again to sweep around the end of the ridge. The trail remains fairly level as we hike back into a valley to the north then out and around another broad ridge, on the western side of which stands the Congress Grove of big trees. These enormous trees - some of the largest living things on the planet - can grow nearly 300 feet tall and have an average diameter of more than 20 feet! It is worth our time to drop our packs at this point for some photos and communal time with these giants. After hiking more than 45 miles, these trees - these beings - are here to greet us as we near the end point of our fabulous trek.

After an appropriate time during which we pay homage to the trees that guard this forest, continue north on the Wolverton Cutoff Trail. The trail winds its way past the Wolverton Corrals, crosses a gravel road and turns east as it drops down toward Lodgepole Campground and Visitor Center, the end of our adventure.

Please visit <http://DeadmanCanyon.sierra-hikes.com> for more complete information.