

Sierra High Route
 RKMF 2025/26 - Sofia Howell, Lusa Hirsch Arnett

BREAKFAST	Amount	Calories	Review
Oatmeal	16x	2400	We honestly did not think this sat very well and we ended up eating PopTarts for breakfast
PopTarts	32x	6400	We ate these for breakfast and got a variety of flavors
LUNCH			
Salame	6x	13,500	We ended up only getting salame and it was great for lunch
Big Block of Cheese	2x	2640	The cheese sometimes got sweaty and we brought too much but tasted good in a tortilla
Tortillias	36x	5040	Some of the tortillas got a little flakey near the end but were a great lunch
DINNER			
Freeze-dried meals	22x	11,000	So awesome and lightweight, we were always excited to eat them at night. Brought a variety of flavors.
EXTRAS/ SNACKS			
Chocolate	6x	3000	
Energy Bars	60x	12,000	Z bars! So easy to get down during the day and delicious.
Hot Chocolate	15x	2550	
Candy	3x bags	2310	Great quick carbs when crashing during the day or needed a sweet treat at night.
Gorp	½ gallon	4500	High in calories and good for a salty snack during the day.
Tea	20x	48	Honestly didn't drink any of these.

Equipment

Personal Gear

Clothing:

2x sports bras - Sofia actually forgot one but otherwise was great to have two to switch off

1x hiking pants- we wore shorts for hiking everyday but it was nice to have a pair of pants for cooler nights.

2x athletic shorts- 2 pairs were great for trading off days and we wore these everyday

1x athletic long sleeve- we actually used this as a warmer (somewhat clean) layer for sleeping and whenever we were at camp.

1x sunshirt - we used our sunshirts almost everyday as a long sleeve layer and to keep us from getting too sunburnt.

6x underwear - always nice to have extra

2x hiking socks - we brought two pairs of hiking socks and would switch off every day and wash in the lakes.

1x warm wool socks for sleeping - one of our favorite luxuries bigger wool socks for sleeping were such a treat especially on cold nights .

1x fleece/ insulated layer - this looked a little different for each of us but we used this layer a lot especially on our higher alpine days.

1x light puffy jacket - we didn't use these too much but definitely were grateful to have it.

1x rainjacket/shell jacket - although we never hiked in the rain, a shell was great for really windy days and when it rained at camp

1x Trail Runners - Sofia did not break in her shoes sufficiently before this trip so her shoes gave her blisters but otherwise trail runners with good tread for scrambling worked better for us than hiking boots.

1x camp shoes: flip flops - we loved having flip flops for camp since we spent so much time in the water and it wasn't too cold.

1x sun hat - we wore our hats every single day.

1x sun glasses- we also used these everyday, they were a necessity

1x lightweight gloves

Other Gear:

1x headlamp - we each brought a headlamp and used it every night to navigate camp and read in our tent

1x hiking backpack - we used Hyperlite and Zpacks and liked both!

1x nalgene water bottle - the nalgene was great for hot water at night as well as during the day

1x Smart Waterbottle - we each used a smartwater for the day as well as they are incredibly light and durable

2x book - we each brought two book which might sound excessive but we really enjoyed reading them.

Sleeping:

1x Sleeping bag - we each brought a mid weight sleeping bag which worked great

1x Nemo sleeping pad - we each also had an inflatable sleeping pad which made sleeping very comfortable

1x inflatable pillow - we both also brought an inflatable pillow which was gamechanger for good sleep every night

Group Gear:

Cooking:

1x jetboil - the jetboil was awesome! It boiled water very quickly and we even used it to cook ramen in!

2x all purpose mug - we each bought an ultralight mug and they were terrible, they got way too hot but the drink got cold immediately. Our least favorite piece of gear. Would not recommend.

2x spork - we used these every night for dinner

1x multitool - we only ended up having to use this to cut our cheese and salame

3x lighter - we thought it was great to have extra lighters in case we lost one or beuieried it deep in our packs

1x Bear Bag- we just brought a bear canister (very minimal trees)

1x Bear canister - Even though we weren't stoked to bring a large plastic container, we used it every night

6x gallon ziplock bags - we used these for our daily snacks and to pack out tp.

2x Aquamira- only ended up using one but we LOVED Aquamira, so light and didn't taste funky

3.5 x butane canister - we only used 1.5 of these, so we definitely brought too much fuel.

1x nemo sitting pad - this was awesome for cooking or even just laying our things out on

Toiletries:

1x mini deodorant - we shared a mini deodorant which worked very well

1x toothpaste - we shared a small tube of toothpaste which lasted us just fine

2x toothbrush - 2 toothbrushes to go with the toothpaste of course

1x sunscreen - we brought face sunscreen which we were very grateful for

1x small trowel - our trowel was plastic and worked great

1x small roll of toilet paper - very necessary and we packed everything out

1x mini hand sanitizer - we used this frequently and kept it on hand

Gear:

1x 2 person tent - we bought a Big Agnes 2 person tent for this trip and we loved it. Very compact, lightweight and easy set up.

1x paper map - although we didn't need the paper map much in field it was fun to have and we enjoyed annotating it every night with what had happened that day

1x Sierra High Route book by Steve Roper - This book was extremely helpful in the difficult routefinding sections on the SHR and we would read it aloud every night to prepare for the next day (and learn some history)

1x first aid kit - We packed out a first aid kit and thought it worked well, we used a lot of blister pads though and wished there were more.

1x ski strap- I learned from my last trip that ski straps are an incredibly useful item and we put it to use when a backpack strap failed

Misc/ Electronics

5x extra triple A batteries (for headlamps) - we never needed these but it's always good to have them!

4x portable chargers - we brought 4 portable chargers since we knew we would be using our online Onx Backcountry maps for routefinding pretty consistently and they all worked great.

1x ZOLEO InReach - we used our ZOLEO every night to check in with our families and to get a weather report. It functioned great and the battery lasted the whole trip.

1x Bear Spray - we brought bearspray but never ended up needing it

1x Bug Spray - we bought one overpriced can of bug spray last minute but didn't end up using it at all

What worked, what didn't, and why

A lot worked during this trip, leading to an overall awesome time. Some specifics were our campsites by beautiful lakes every night. We were so excited to get to our campsites, swim, and hangout by the water. Since there were so many lakes on our route, we were never worried about getting water and we never had to carry more than 2 liters. Along the lines of water, we used Aquamira to filter. We were stoked on this choice. Aquamira is so light and doesn't taste weird (which we anticipated) unless it gets hot. We got so lucky with our weather during the trip with lots of sunshine but the temperature stayed relatively cool. There were only two days of potential rain and one afternoon hunkered down in our tent. This brings me to our tent! We bought the Big Agnes 2 which was so lightweight and compactable. It dealt with the conditions (wind, rain, and sun) well and kept us warm at night. Also, going into the trip Sofia and I knew we worked well together but this trip solidified this. We were able to move together and make decisions with the support of each other. We took breaks, chatted, sang, but also allowed for lots and lots of needed silence and reflection. Overall the route was absolutely fantastic and we loved how remote it was and how little people we saw on the actual Sierra High Route. Finally, Sofia and I brought 2 books each which was heavy but totally worth it. We were so excited to get to camp and read and chat about our books with each other.

Now, for the things that didn't go as smoothly. Sofia didn't break in her shoes as much as she should have and got huge blisters pretty early into the trip. She had to bandage these every morning and they were pretty painful throughout the day. Along the injury topic, I rolled my ankle in the middle of day 2. It was on flat ground (of course) but I fell down and knew something wasn't great right away. We continued hiking and iced it at Lake Catherine where it had swelled up pretty badly. We continued until day 10 but decided to leave the field at Tuolumne Meadows to avoid further damage to my ankles. The routefinding was definitely a challenge and took us longer than anticipated some days. From Lake Catherine to Blue Lakes we did 7 miles in 7 hours because the whole day was off-route with lots of up and down, trying to find the best way to the next landmark. We expected the routefinding to take us a long time but definitely not this long. We also brought lots of oatmeal and didn't end up eating any of it after the first morning. We collectively decided we don't like the taste of oatmeal and how it sits in our stomachs. So, we switched to PopTarts which were awesome. But overall, we did bring a bit too much food.

Travel logistics

On August 5th, Sofia flew from Portland JetPort, ME to Denver, CO. She then bussed up to Boulder, CO to get her car and take a 30 minute nap at a friend's house before driving 6 hours to Santa Fe, NM. That one was a big day for Sofia, so we slept in on the 6th and had a day getting everything ready before we

left early in the morning on August 7th. We left around 7am and drove 13 hours to Bishop, CA. This was definitely a big day but we switched off who was driving every couple hours and ended up getting to Bishop around 8pm.

We stayed in Hostel California which was just off the main strip. It was clean, we slept in a dorm, and we felt it worked well. We spent the night of the 7th and the night of the 8th here.

On the morning of the 9th, we woke up at 5:30, drove our car up to the intended terminus of our hike, Mono Village at Twin Lakes where we met our shuttle. Reuben was the lovely man who drove us an hour and a half back towards Bishop, CA to the McGee Pass Trailhead where we started our adventure around 11am.

We left the field on the 18th, two days earlier than expected, at Tuolumne Meadows in Yosemite. From here, we caught a ride back to our car at Mono Village at Twin Lakes where we were reunited with Sofia's car (Bloop). We drove back to Bishop, CA where we stayed another night at Hostel California but this time in a private room where we could have some space to ourselves to decompress after our adventure. The next morning, August 19th, we woke up early around 6am and started the drive back to Santa Fe, NM. 14 hours later we arrived at Lusa's house for an awesome night's sleep in real beds.

Permitting/government relations

Getting permits for the Sierra can be notoriously difficult and was one of our biggest concerns going into the trip. Permits open 6 months ahead of time to the day at 7 AM PST, or 6 AM MST. They release a portion of permits at this time and hold the remainder for walks up the day before. In order to make sure we had the best opportunity to get one we got up at 5:45 and both logged onto our account on [Rec.gov](https://www.recreation.gov/). Although we were passing through several different national forests you only needed a permit for your entry point so we were going for McGee Pass. At 6 AM we refreshed and saw no permits available, so we understandably had a small moment of panic before waiting for the next 10 minutes anxiously. At around 6:15, the permits appeared and we were able to get one, filling out all of our proposed camp spots as best as we could, given that there are no designated campsites. We made sure to print our permit once it was emailed to us 7 days before the trip started and carried it with us throughout.

Leadership and group dynamics

Sofia and I do almost everything together in the outdoors so we felt very comfortable going into the trip. We liked to move at the same pace during the day and would comfortably communicate when we needed breaks. We had a very 50/50 split of leadership where every decision was made between the both of us and all concerns were voiced. We did a lot of talking but also since we were together for 10 days straight (more with the days before we stepped in the field), we also had so much silence time. This time was so important for us. It was on trail during hard ascents or at camp at the end of a long day basking in the sun. We both wanted and needed this time to be within ourselves and nature and to reflect on everything, just being able to silently appreciate the beauty around us. We understand each other so much that we could tell what the other person needed without them having to vocalize their needs. Overall, we work so well together and this trip was an awesome split between hard days, peaceful afternoons on the water, and great company.

Safety and risk management concerns

Routefinding: Routefinding was definitely one of our major concerns going into this trip due to the fact that we had some big days fully off trail. Overall, we handled this really well. We used our topographic Onyx map on Sofia's phone along with the Steve Roper book. However, since we created the map without having been to this area, we did a lot of our routefinding with our eyes (we found this was most efficient and helpful). We would know what specific landmarks we would have to get to from the book and map, but we talked through every directional decision and used our best judgement when we were actually in the field and could see exactly what the landscape looked like.

Weather: We were so lucky with the weather we were handed for this trip, the majority of it was blue sunny skies. We used our ZOLEO to contact Sofia's dad who would give us weather updates when possible. We never got caught walking in the rain or a storm but we did spend an afternoon at Ediza lake hunkered down in our tent during a storm.

Wildlife: We brought bear spray, a bear canister, and abided by all safety precautions on this trip but never saw a black bear or any large wildlife which we were thankful for.

Dehydration/Food Consumption: Sofia and I were burning at least 2,500 calories a day during this trip so nutrition was very important to us. We ate PopTarts for breakfast, had anywhere from 2-4 snacks (usually Z or Cliff Bars), salami and cheese tortilla roll-ups for lunch, and then each of us had a full dehydrated meal for dinner. There were also endless amounts of places to fill water bottles (we passed around 2 alpine lakes a day, not including the ones we were camping at). This was so important because we never had to carry more than 2L of water and never found ourselves trying to conserve water or dehydrated.

Strenuous Activity/Terrain: The whole Sierra High Route is quite strenuous, with steep accents, descents and tricky terrain. But, we took challenging sections slowly and checked our maps a lot to make sure we were going in the right direction. We also fueled a lot during the day to make sure we had enough energy to tackle our big climbs and objectives.

Rockfall: We had some loose talus sections specifically on the off-trail sections but we would walk next to each other so if we loosened rocks they wouldn't fall on the person below. But, this wasn't really an issue.

Driving: Since the drive was long, Sofia and I switched off who was driving every two hours.

Altitude sickness: Lusa came from Santa Fe, NM which is at 7,000 ft and Sofia had some days to adjust in Santa Fe before we left for our trip. So, even though we got as high as 11,000 ft some days on trail, we never felt sick or were worried about altitude sickness.

Water/river crossings: We crossed some rivers but nothing big. Lusa had to carry Sofia over one because of her blisters but other than that we could use logs or stones (with our packs unclipped) in the river to get across.

Specific route descriptions & concerns

As far as our route, it was very similar to our proposed plan which was to hike sections 3, 4 and 5 of the sierra high route. The SHR travels South to North along the most remote parts of the sierras with significant trailless sections that forces the hiker to use their surroundings to locate themselves and find their way to the next landmark. It was created by a man named Steve Roper whose book we used in order to plan this trip as well as during our travels for guidance. Although the SHR runs nearly 250 miles, we planned to do a 105 mile segment of it, intersecting it from Mcgee Pass on the easter side of the sierra and ending at Mono Village Twin Lakes Resort, the Northern Terminus of the Route.

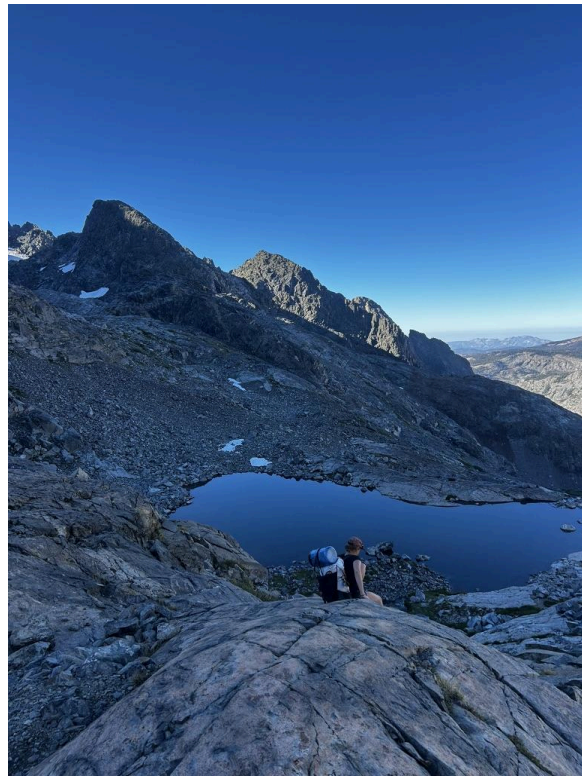
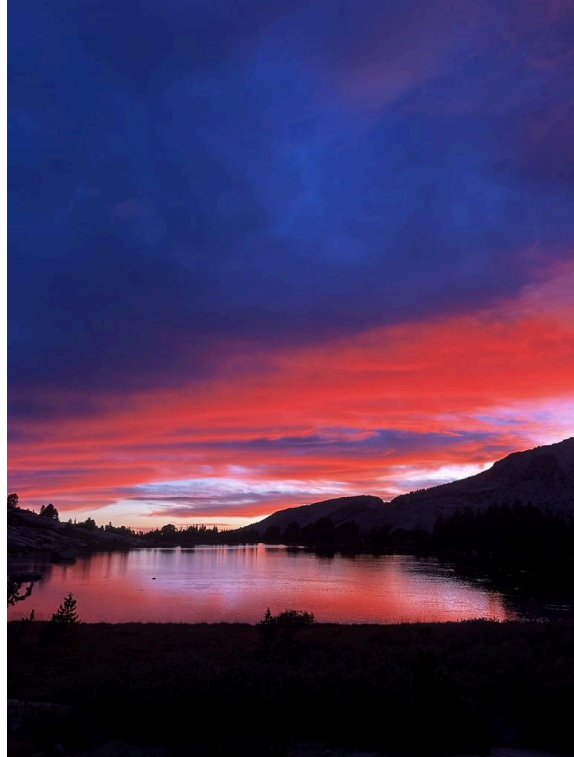
Although most of our route went to plan, we did have a few small deviations. To begin, our 4th proposed campsite, bordering Johnston Lake ended up being more of a marsh so we ended up at Minaret Lake a day ahead of time and added Ediza Lake as one of our camp sites. Due to injuries sustained during the trip we also decided to leave the field two days early on day 10, at Tuolumne meadows, in order to ensure a safe exit from the backcountry. This meant we did not complete the section of the High Route that runs from Tuolumne Meadows to Twin Lakes. We felt this was the best decision for our team and feel grateful to have been able to spend this time in the backcountry together.

Team Photos:



Rankings			8/15
LU		Sof	
① Alfredo	(MT)	① Pad Thai	
② chicken + dump	③ chicken + dump		
③ fried rice	④ beef burrito (tortilla)		
④ rice + beans	⑤ fried rice		
⑤ chile stew	⑥ alfredo		
⑥ Cheesy Broccoli	⑦ lasagna		
⑦ Risotto	⑧ Broccoli rice		
⑧ Pad Thai	⑨ Risotto		
LU		Lakes	
① Blue Lake		① Katherine	
② Minaret		② Minaret	
③ Katherine		③ Blue Lakes	
④ Mcgee		④ Virginia	
⑤ Virginia	⑥ Bernice	⑤ Big Mcgee	
⑥ Ediza		⑥ Crystal	
⑦ Crystal		⑦ Ediza	
⑧ Fletcher		⑧ Fletcher	





A detailed daily course log

Day 1: Trailhead to McGee lake

On day one we woke up early and checked out of our hostel grabbing a bite to eat on the way before driving 2 hours north to Mono Village Resort at Twin Lakes, where we would leave our car for shuttling. Here, we paid for our long term backpacker parking and got picked up by the Sierra shuttle service, who shuttled us back down the highway to McGee Pass Trailhead where we would start our trip.

With heavy packs we began hiking around 11 am, and quickly realized as we gained elevation that it would be preferable to start our days early to avoid the heat of the day. The trail started on sandy gravel before turning into dirt as we gained mileage. Around 4 miles in we stopped at a stream for a quick swim and to eat some lunch of a salame and cheese tortilla. We hiked uphill for around 7 miles before the trail leveled out and we veered off towards McGee Lake where we would make camp for the night. McGee Lake was even more beautiful then the photos we had seen of it with bright blue crystal clear water. We chose a flat rocky spot away from the lake to camp and spent the rest of the afternoon sunbathing, swimming and reading Steve Roper's on the SHR book aloud. We cooked dinner while the sun was still up, having some freeze dried mountain house, before setting up our tent and going to sleep.

Mileage total: 3k vert 7 miles

Day 2: McGee Lake to Lake Virginia

As discussed, day two we woke up around 6 AM and began, making a breakfast of instant oatmeal in the shade. We packed up camp and headed up towards McGee Pass, the rock turned red as we reached treeline and we passed little mcgee lake on our way up the pass. We had done nearly 1500 vertical feet before 9 am and ate some food at the top of McGee Pass as we looked over the picturesque valley we called "Narnia". We descended down into Narnia on a gentle slope for several miles until we finally reached the intersection of the John Muir Trail at a small creek. Here, we had a break for lunch, cooled our blistering feet and encountered our first, and only ranger of the trip who asked for our permits and went along his way. After lunch we began our final ascent of the day gaining the last 1000 ft up to lake virginia where we circumnavigated until finding the perfect place to camp with easy access to the rocky lake shore, which ended up being a little closer than we had originally planned. Sofia's feet were blistering pretty bad so we used our first aid kit and spent the rest of the day sunbathing and swimming, you'll find this to be a trend throughout this daily log. We ate dinner by the lake side, another freeze dried meal and went to bed early for another big day.

Mileage Total: 10 miles 2600 vert

Day 3: Virginia Lake to Crystal Lake

Day three we woke up at 6 AM again and ate a nutritious breakfast of pop-tarts that we decided sat better in our stomachs than the instant oatmeal. We packed up our camp and continued on the John Muir trail encountering our first obstacle only 10 minutes in. The northernmost point of Virginia Lake requires you to wade through a 25 foot section of knee deep water. Here we encountered two kind through hikers who shuttled out packs across while Lusa carried Sofia over in order to avoid getting her freshly taped blisters wet. The carry went surprisingly well and after drying off we started towards Purple Lake, the first landmark of the day. After 2 miles or so we reached the banks of purple lake and began our ascent around peak 11690 heading north to Duck Lake. We took a short snack break on the shores of duck lake before ascending duck pass and climbing a particularly steep section to where we had a good vantage point of deer lake. We descended steep talus down to the shore of deer lakes in the heat of the day and sought shade before our last big ascent up to the mammoth crest at around 7 miles. The route up to the crest was very steep with little to no shade and was a bit of a slog. By the time we reached the top it felt like a great time to break for lunch before traversing the top of the crest heading towards mammoth mountain. With only 3 miles left we saw some clouds beginning to roll in and picked up the pace veering off of the trail and descending another down to the surprisingly populated Crystal Lake. At crystal lake we spent several hours stretching our aching bodies, reading and swimming in the sun while we waited for the day trippers to clear out before setting up our tent and making a well deserved dinner.

Day Mileage: 13 miles 2800 vert

Day 4: Crystal Lake to Minaret Lake

Day four we woke up at 6 AM again and had another pop-tart before packing up camp and getting on our way, reascending back up the switchbacks around 800 vertical feet back to the monarch crest. Our plan today was to resupply at Red's Meadows and then head towards Johnston Lake where we would spend the night. The day began to plan as we descended the crest in the shade running down skree fields until we were back below treeline. At the intersection on Mammoth Pass we took a wrong turn which took us on a 2 mile detour down towards red's meadow. By the time we finally arrived we were very hungry and surprisingly tired as we had descended 3300 vertical feet. At Red's Meadow we quickly found the store where we picked up our resupply and packed it outside among a small, but not insignificant, swarm of bees. We spent around 45 minutes here as we heard from other hikers that the weather was supposed to turn a little later in the day and we headed back onto trail with significantly heavier packs under the impression that we only had a few miles to go. The climb out of red meadows was a trudge and after climbing 700 feet of climbing, 10 miles into the day we stumbled on what we thought would be Johnston Lake, but ended up being a very large marsh. We quickly realized we couldn't camp here and after refueling on energy bars and lots of ibuprofen we started a grueling 6 miles and 2000 vert to our next day's objective, Minaret Lake. We spent the next couple hours hiking in silence as we gained elevation. Finally, after 16 miles we crested a final vertical push and looked out across the most beautiful lake we had ever seen. Massive pillars of stone surrounding its curved edges with endless rocky campsites and private inlets. The wind had started to pick up so we set up camp quickly and used the last bit of sun for a swim before climbing into our sleeping bags for dinner.

Total Mileage: 16 miles, 3400 vert

Day 5: Minaret Lake to Ediza Lake

Since we had done two days worth of mileage the day before and our bodies were feeling the repercussions, we decided to take day 5 easy and slept in until 8 AM, enjoying some hot chocolate while we read our books in the morning. Coincidentally there were also some scattered showerings moving through around the same time so it ended up working perfectly and the sky cleared around 10:30 AM. After our lovely morning we packed up camp and traversed the eastern shore of Minaret Lake. The trail ran right alongside the water until it veered off abruptly uphill towards the “dam” of Cecil lake. The trail was difficult to follow here but we made it to Cecile and traversed its rocky shoreline until we could look down on Iceberg lake, which as its name implies, rarely sees the sun. The descent to Iceberg lake was slow and cautious as the slope was very steep and loose. The trail disappeared here and we scrambled down class 2-3 until we were around 100 feet from the shoreline and then headed due north. We traversed the entire east side of the lake until we reached its head and took a small break for lunch. From here we descended the obvious trail down to Ediza, our stopping point for the night. Although we hadn’t anticipated staying at Ediza, with the last bit of weather moving in we didn’t want to be caught on an open pass so we circumnavigated the lake until we found a good spot and pitched camp early in the day. The rain and wind followed shortly after and lasted until around dinner time where we ate our freeze-dried meal and called it a night.

Total Milage: 4 miles 700 vert

Day 6: Ediza Lake to Cathrine Lake

Day 6 we woke up at 6 AM again since we had our first true off route day. The sky had completely cleared and we heard from our ZOLEO contacts that the weather was supposed to be perfect for the rest of the trip. We packed up camp and headed straight up Mt. Ritter ascent trail, staying to the right of a babbling brooke. There were remnants of a trail to show us the way through the trees but once we reached the tree line and stopped for a snack it had completely disappeared. Using our maps and Steve Roper’s book as a guide we headed towards the Nydiver Lakes, stopping once we could see them below us and traversing the rocky mountain side until we crested whitebark pass. The ridge was incredibly windy and we didn’t spend much time on top of it before descending the Boulderfield field on the other side. This descent took a significant portion of time as we walked above Garnet Lake and towards the gentle ridge separating Garnet from Thousand Islands Lake. We saw a couple deer in the grassland and hopped across rocks until we reached the top of the ridge. Here, we met two men hiking the High Sierra Route from North to South, the opposite of us, who we stopped to have a chat with. After asking them a few questions we continued on our descent down to Thousand Island Lakes and began walking across the land bridge at its west end. The terrain was flat but rocky and during our crossing Lusa fell and twisted her ankle. We immediately knew it was not in the best condition and sat for a while assessing the situation. With minimal pain eventually decided her ankle was okay to walk on and made the collective decision to get to our campsite for the night and assess more that night before deciding whether we needed to evacuate.

After a short lunch we began our final 1500 ft climb up a drainage to Cathrine Lake, located at 11200 ft nestled at the base of Mt. Ritter. The climb felt surprisingly easy as we gained quick elevation scrambling class 2-3 up the boulderfield and eventually crested the rocky ridge down to our favorite lake of the trip. Crystal blue and ice cold Cathrine is surrounded by rocky boulders on all sides with a perfect space on a rock ledge for a tent which we quickly claimed. Sofia spent the rest of the afternoon scrambling around the lake while Lusa iced her ankle and we took plenty of time to enjoy the sun by swimming in the freezing water. We had dinner in the tent watching the sunset and hit the hay after the sun went down. Easily our favorite night of the trip.

Total Milage: 5.5mi 2700 vert

Day 7: Cathrine Lake to Blue Lakes

Yet again we rose at 6 AM for another big day of routefinding. Packing up to leave Catherine was a little bittersweet as it was such an incredible place but after eating a poptart for breakfast we were moving before the sun hit us. We started heading Southwest skirting a smaller lake at the head of Catherine before descending a series of long rock ledges alongside an incredible 80 foot waterfall. We descended, scrambling down these ledges until we reached a “conspicuous tairn” as Steve Roper puts it, a small grassy oasis in the middle of a sea of rocks. We walked it until we found a drainage to descend into the valley. With no trail we followed Steve's instructions carefully crossreferencing with our map and eventually were able to traverse above the valley floor until we reached the small river separating Twin Island Lakes. Here, we were anticipating a 20 foot river crossing, but instead were met with a measly stream with no current that was 2 feet deep and 7 feet across. We made our crossing quickly and hilariously, Lusa still managed to fall in getting her sneakers wet before we continued due south, past the second twin island lake and rounding the nearby ridge. The routefinding was tricky here and we ended up ascending a very steep grassy slope to a small unnamed lake. We ate lunch here, and both fell asleep for a quick nap among the rocks before rallying for the rest of the day's hiking. Hiking without a trail took us almost double the time so it was already nearly 2 pm once we began a scramble to the top of the ridgeline where we had spotted a break in the cliffband. Once we reached the top it was time for a steep descent into Bench Canyon. By the time we reached the canyon floor we were tired and hot as there wasn't a cloud in the sky but continued hiking up the canyon at a gentle slope. The end of the day held a 500 vertical foot climb up to Blue Lakes which felt like it went on forever and we were incredibly grateful to sit down after a long day at the top. All in all it had taken us 7 hours to walk 7 miles. Luckily Blue Lake also had its own beach, which was the first of its kind that we had seen and felt great on our feet. We yet again spent the rest of the day swimming and reading our books before dinner and bedtime.

7 miles 3200 vert (all off trail)

Day 8: Blue Lakes to Bernice Lake

While not particularly difficult routefinding, this was a very long day. Another 6 AM morning had us hiking by 7:15, heading straight up from blue lakes in a rocky class 2/3 scramble to the top of Blue Lakes Pass, a very cold and windy place. The descent of the pass was not much better and took a significant amount of time until we reached the lake on its leeward side. We then descended a very low angle slope

across scattered trees northwest until we hit a large patch of pines. We followed the pines down the drainage until we hit the very faint Merced river shelf trail at around 9,600 ft. This made the walking go a lot quicker as we followed the winding trail all the way down to the Lyell Fork Merced River, 600 feet lower. Here we took a small break at the river crossing and then began the ascent up a path that bordered the cliffline, giving spectacular views into the valley. We reascended around 1000 feet, which felt like it took forever until we reached a high point and took a break for lunch. Salame and cheese tortilla per usual. Once we had regained a little motivation we began our descent down to Lewis creek at 8,600 ft. At this point we were 9.5 miles into our day and we were exhausted, with the lowest moral of the trip so far. At Lewis Creek we refilled our water and began the 2000 ft climb up the last 4 miles of the day. We were very grateful to see Bernice Lake appear in front of our eyes 4 miles later and jumped in the water as soon as we could, easing our aching feet into our sleeping bags for a quick dinner before bed. At this point we also had a team discussion about our respective injuries, Lusa's now very swollen ankle and Sofia's terrible blisters and decided that the smartest call would be to end the trip at Tuolumne Meadows, 25 miles short of our goal.

Total Milage: 14 mi 4200 vert

Day 9: Bernice Lake to Fletcher Lake

Day 9 began at 7 AM for a change given the shorter day, and we ate our usual poptart for breakfast before packing up our camp. The day started uphill, and we crested Voegelsang pass quickly. The top of the pass was quite windy so we headed down the other side and began to see more people than we had the majority of the trip. We descended Vogelsang pass down into the old Vogelsang Camp which was located in the valley and looked quite deserted. We poked around for a good place to camp and eventually settled on the far side of Fletcher lake where we pitched camp very early and spent the entirety of the afternoon doing our usual activities and exploring the surrounding area. We ate dinner on the rocks and soaked in the last of the backcountry while we watched one of the most incredible, pink sunsets we had ever seen over the lake, and went to bed sad to leave the next day.

Total Milage: 3.5 mi 900 vert

Day 10: Fletcher Lake to Tuolumne Meadows

On our last day we woke up and packed up camp for the last time. We ate a pop tart and began our uneventful seven miles down to Tuolumne meadows. The trail was easy going and clear, and the later the day went on the more travelers we saw along the way. Spirits were high and we descended into the parking lot of all the Yosemite seasonal workers who kindly offered us a ride to the Tuolumne Meadows Post Office two miles down the road. Finally, we picked up our final resupply package here and caught a ride to Twin Lakes where our car was parked, rounding out an incredible trip over burgers.

Total Milage: 7 mi