# Ridge Traverses and Summits of the High Sierra: The Sequel

A proposal to the Ritt Kellogg Fund By Mona Johnston, Meaghan Daly and Chris Benoit



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## Introduction

"The High Sierra of California, backbone of our world, fountain of cities and farms, lifting and toppling, pouring back the Pacific's salty waters in sweet streams filtered through snow and ice, rock and rubble, ferns, flowers, forests, and mountainsides of little apples. Lifting us as we climb and lifting still"

- Tom Killion "the High Sierra of California"

The three of us, Chris, Meaghan and I, found ourselves at the base of the Sierras for the first time three years ago. It was spring break and the peaks were still covered with snow. We drove along its eastern flanks to Bishop and bouldered for a few days before heading south to Joshua Tree. At the time, the massive eastern front seemed like an impenetrable wall, we were all mesmerized. Although all of us have climbed in many mountain ranges since, none have held us in such thrall. Meaghan left school for a year to live in Bishop and climb, and Chris and Mona received a grant from the Ritt Kellogg fund to explore and climb in the northern part of the range. And though our ventures were extensive, they only served to fuel our curiosity for those areas that remained unseen. We are therefore proposing a 28 day trip through a part of the range that is new to us all, through Kings Canyon and Sequoia national parks. We want to climb as much as possible in these 28 days within our ability and safety. We believe that it's more fun to many moderate climbs rather than a few hard ones and this philosophy has fueled our choices for this trip. The number of peaks that exist between our entry and our exit are too numerous to mention here, let alone climb in 28 days, so we will choose only those that seem most inspiring and promising. We plan to backpack between base camps and stay at each base camp to climb for several days before moving on. The purpose of this trip is to explore mountains that are familiar yet unfamiliar and to stretch ourselves physically and mentally within the limits of safety. Of course there are many other purposes that are less easy to quantify. As Tom Killion said, "When we set off into the Sierra, we are usually in search of something. Something that will take us out of our everyday experience; something that will connect us with another part of ourselves; something linked to an older way of living that is more dependent on our physical interaction with the natural world"

## Goals

- To experience the mountains in the way that it seems they should be experiences: on foot and by climbing (in this landscape of towering peaks, it seems a natural response to want to go up)
- To plan and safely carry out a long backcountry trip
- To travel fast and light (Chris and Mona had the opportunity to test lightweight techniques on the last Sierra trip and are eager to perfect those techniques.)
- To live simply for 28 days, observe at a pace set by our walking and respect the landscape through which we travel. "The only way to know a landscape is by walking across it, day after day." -Gary Snyder



Meaghan bouldering with the Sierras in the background

- Capital Peak by the Northeast ridge (Class 4), Led kids up fourteeners and other week-long excursions with Sanborn Western Camps for the summers of 2000 and 2001, Solo hiking trip into the Taryall Mountains after camp was over in 2000.
- I have also done a number of good mountain runs, because I truly enjoyane endurance and mental struggle of these. This includes: an 18-mile race in the Catskills, a half-marathon in Buena Vista, CO, and a 2 hours and 15 min. ascent of Pikes Peak through the Crags.
- Ritt Kellogg Climbing Trip Summer 2002- Bidge Traverses in the Sierras
- O Attempted climb of the Sawtooth ridge in Northern Yosemite
- Mt. Conness
- O Various climbs in and around Toulanne
- O Summited ??? Minarets in the Inter-Banner Range near Mammoth, California
- Summer of 2003 spent in the North Cascades... involved numerous alpine climbs up to 5.9 in the Liberty Fell region and Mt. Stuart/Enchantments Region. Also climbed in the glaciated region of Cascade Pass.

I will also have attended the Wilderness First Responder course, set up by the Ritt Kellogg fund, in the half-block of 2002. I recertified that training in January of 2003. Currently I have First Aid set up by the American Red Cross expiring December, 2001. I also lave CPR set up by the American Heart Association expiring June, 2004.

## " Itinerary

Because we will be traveling through remote areas during our trip and will not be passing through any populated areas, special consideration was needed when deciding how to plan our re-supplies. Because detours to pick up food would take a day or more and food-storage space was limited because of the size of bear canisters, we decided that the best option would be to cache food in two places along the route before we begin. We picked these particular spots was because they were much closer to our route and were spaced ideally for the amount of food that we will able to carry in bear canisters, and had a large number of bear boxes available for storage. All three of us have had experience packing food in bear canisters and think that nine days worth of food, which will be the maximum amount we will need to carry, can fit in the canisters. Rest days have been deliberately placed before longer or more difficult climbs to ensure that we will be in our best condition. Almost all of our cross-country travel will be along the John Muir Trail. or other well established trails, and the daily hiking distances have been determined with this in mind. The elevations listed apply to the highest point that will be reached during that day. The escape routes listed in bold parentheses apply for the days immediately following. These routes will provide the closest and least strenuous route of exit in the case that an emergency arises. In addition, the nearest ranger station contact information will be provided in order to seek assistance if necessary.

#### **Parking**

Meaghan will be driving her own car to the Bishop area on July 27th to meet up with Mona and Chris, who will already be in the area to caching food, on July 30th. We have confirmed that the areas that we are caching food at have six or more bear boxes at each and will provide a safe place to store our food. We will be leaving one car at the North Lake Campground and the other car at the Whitney Portal Campground so that transportation will be provided before and after the trip. We have contacted North Lake and Whitney Portal Campgrounds to make sure that we will be able to park our cars in their parking lots. We will call both just before the trip to confirm that they are willing to let us use their property to park our cars. We will begin the trip on August 1<sup>st</sup> and finish on August 28<sup>th</sup>.

#### (Pre-trip)

Big Pine Food Cache: Drive to the Glacier Lodge, just west of Big Pine to drop of first food cache. (1/2 day) Contact number (to confirm):760-930-2837

Charlotte Lake Food Cache: Drive to Onion Valley Campground and hike to Charlotte Lake Ranger Station via Kearsarge Pass to drop off second food cache. We will be storing the food in a secured bear box located at the ranger station. (11 miles roundtrip, 1 day) Contact number: 559-565-3768

The Sequel Begins...

(August 1<sup>st</sup>)

## (Exiting at North Lake Trailhead via Lamarck Col)

<u>Day 1:</u> Hike from North Lake camp ground to the head of Darwin Canyon via the Lamarck Col (4 miles)

<u>Day 2</u>: Climb Mt. Darwin via the West Ridge Variation to avoid glacier (Class 3) with descent of the same *Elevation:13,830* 

<u>Day 3</u>: Climb Mt. Wallace/ Haeckel Traverse via the East Ridge of Mt. Haeckel continuing along the Northwest Ridge (Class 3)to descent via Southwest chute of Mt. Wallace (Class 2) and return to camp *Elevation: 13,435* 

# (Contact South Lake Ranger Station for emergency assistance 760-873-8877, exiting at South Lake)

Day 4: Hike to Muir Pass via the Muir Trail (8 miles)

<u>Day 5</u>: Hike to Dusy Basin via Muir and Dusy Branch Trails (9 miles)

# (Contact South Lake Ranger Station for emergency assistance, exiting via the South Fork trail to Glacier Lodge)

Day 6: Hike to the base of the Middle Palisade Glacier (5 miles)

Day 7: Rest Day

<u>Dav 8</u>: Traverse of the Palisade Crest (III, 5.5) Elevation: 13,520 ft

<u>Day 9</u>: Climb East Face of the Middle Palisade (5.4) with traverse to Disappointment Peak (Class 4) with descent of East ridge (Class 4) Elevation: 14,040

<u>Day 10</u>: Food Resupply at trailhead from Glacier Lodge and move camp to base of Palisade Glacier (8 miles)

Day 11: Rest Day

<u>Day 12</u>: Climb Moon Goddess Arête at Temple Crag (IV, 5.7 with several opportunities for walk-off retreats) and return to camp *Elevation*: 12,999

# (Contact South Lake Ranger Station for emergency assistance, exiting at South Lake)

<u>Day 13</u>: Hike to Deer Meadow at Glacier and Palisade Creek Confluence via Muir Trail (10 miles)

#### (Exiting at Taboose Creek Rd. via Taboose Pass)

<u>Day 14</u>: Hike to Pinchot Pass via Muir Trail (12 miles)

# (Contact Charlotte Lake or Rae Lake Ranger Station for emergency assistance, Exiting at Onion Creek)

Day 15: Hike to Rae Lakes via Muir Trail (10 miles)

<u>Day 16</u>: Climb South Face of Mt. Clarence King (II, 5.4) with rappels to descend and return to camp at Rae Lakes *Elevation:12,905 ft* 

<u>Day 17</u>: Climb East Ridge of Mt. Gardiner (Class 4) descend the same and return to camp at Rae Lakes *Elevation*: 12,902 ft

Day 18: Rest Day

<u>Day 19</u>: Climb the Southeast Face of Charlotte Dome ( $\Pi$ , 5.7) with descent along north ridge into the North Fork of Charlotte Creek and return to camp *Elevation*: 10,690 ft

# (Contact Tyndall Creek Ranger Station for emergency assistance, Exiting at Symmes Creek via Shepard Pass)

<u>Day 20</u>: Hike to Tyndall Creek Outpost via Forester Pass and Diamond Mesa on Muir Trail with a stop at Charlotte Lake Ranger Station for food resupply (12 miles)

Day 21: Hike to Iceberg Lake (11 miles)

#### (Contact Whitney Portal Ranger Station 760-876-6200, Exiting at Whitney Portal)

<u>Day 22</u>: Climb the South Ridge to the East Peak of Mt. Russell (II, 5.7) *Elevation: 14,086 ft* 

Day 23: Rest Day

<u>Day 24</u>: Whitney Basin traverse (V, 5.7 with rappels) Will be equipped with provisions for emergency bivouac. *Elevation: 14,494 ft* 

<u>Day 25</u>: Climb the East Face of Mt. Whitney (III, 5.6) descending the northern edge of the summit plateau to the Mountaineer's Route to Ice berg Lake and return to camp. *Elevation:* 14,494 ft

<u>Day 26</u>: Hike to Meysan Lake traverse along the base of Mt. Whitney to Consultation Lake, skirting around Mt. Irvine to reach Meysan (6 miles) we will determine the viability of this once we can scout the terrain, Alternate route: Whitney Trail to Whitney Portal to pick up Meysan Lakes trail (9 miles) We would like to avoid going to Whitney

Portal if possible because it will be a crowded area during the summer, but will take this route if the other does not seem possible.

<u>Day 27</u>: Climb the Northeast Ridge of Lone Pine Peak (III, 5.5) and descend via the Meysan Lake Trail (Class 2) *Elevation*:12,994 ft

Day 28: Hike to Whitney Portal and pick up car (4 miles)

(August 28th)

#### Additional Emergency Contacts:

Joi Gallant: 608-345-3788 (Bishop, CA)

Christopher Hackbarth: 760-608-0430 (Bishop, CA)

Neal Dawson: 209-379-2433 (Tuolumne, CA)



Mona and Chris after a trail run in the Cascades

#### Threesomes are FUN!! and safe too.

Meaghan Daly, Chris Benoit, and Mona Johnston are best friends. There is no avoiding that fact. They have been, at times, the only trustworthy people in each of their lives at one point or another. So it only makes sense that this trip comes to fruition after so many years of catching each other's falls on the rock and in life.

Yet, beyond the flawless social context for their journey, there exists some solid efficiency advantages to traveling in three. First, as our trip is based around multi-pitch longer rock climbs, there is always an advantage to having three people... COMPANY FOR THE BELAYER!!! We have traveled as three through a number of climbs in this way with double ropes, and are all adept at belaying two followers at once. None of the climbs should push our envelope to the point where this practice is dangerous, and we will have a "Reverso" to aid the process. In this manner, we can climb as fast as or faster than a two-person team with the advantage of companionship. Second, three person on foot will reduce weight. That is a fantastic bonus, as Chris and Mona have hauled group weight between the two on their previous Ritt Kellogg trip and suffered accordingly.

## Safety Considerations

Safety is by far the most important consideration in planning a backcountry trip of this length. The Sierras are big mountains, and due to the nature of our travels, detailed emergency planning and preparation are necessary.

We have compiled a list of emergency contact numbers including the number of every ranger station we will pass near as well as numbers of friends who will be in the area during our trip. These friends and the ranger stations at our entrance and exit points will have copies of our itinerary. In order to utilize these contacts in the case of emergency, we will be carrying a cell phone and/or a radio with us. We have spoken with several rangers in the area and are in the process of confirming cell coverage in the areas where we will be traveling. If cell coverage does not exist, we will rent a radio from the ranger station nearest to our entrance point and carry it with us. We will also all carry whistles in case we are separated. We have examined our intended route in detail and identified all possible evacuation routes along the way. These routes are outlined in the itinerary section of our proposal. For the majority of our trip we will be traveling on or near the John Muir trail. Because this trail is fairly popular during the summer months, we are confident that we will be able to elicit help from backpackers in the area if the need arises.

During the last Sierra trip, Chris and Mona witnessed a near-miss when a party climbing behind them on Mt. Conness was forced to bivy when the sun went down. This situation could have been avoided by scouting the route more carefully beforehand and moving more quickly. We feel that in an alpine setting such as this, speed and safety (besides fun) are the most important elements. Although we are a party of three, and parties of three tend to be slower than parties of two, we have climbed together extensively and have streamlined our party of three technique. We have also chosen routes that will be easy to do with three people.

Every technical route that we will attempt during this trip has an easier (3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> class) alternative route. Many of our intended routes also have multiple places to bail in the case of an emergency. All three of us have joined the American Alpine club as junior members and therefore receive "rescue insurance" from them. This means that if a rescue became necessary, all expenses would be paid by the club.

Lastly, we will all be WFR certified at the time of the trip. We will also review our first-aid and rock rescue skills thoroughly before the trip. Should an emergency present itself, we will call on these skills as necessary and use our cell phone or radio to contact the closest ranger station. We will also enlist help from nearby parties. We are confident that with our skills, contacts and knowledge of nearby parties we will be able to handle emergency situations effectively.

In addition to a solid emergency plan, several environmental considerations are warranted. As R.J. Secor notes, "There are no man-eating animals, killer storms are so rare that when they do occur they get newspaper coverage, the rock is relatively solid, and the glaciers are well behaved. The High Sierra is a gentle wilderness" However, dangers always exist in the backcountry and it is important to keep this in mind.

Stream crossings, although a serious issue in the spring and at other times during the year, should not be a problem in August. Lightning is a possible danger, but one that we are prepared to handle seeing as we come from Colorado. By staying off high points, employing lightning position, and being aware of weather conditions while climbing, we will avoid this danger as well as we can. Weather in August in the Sierras is generally very predictable and sunny.

Black bears are common in the area and for this reason we will be carrying bear canisters to ensure the safety of our food and ourselves. Canisters can be rented at any ranger station in the area before the trip. All of us have been in confrontational situations with black bears and understand the safety procedures needed to avoid attack.

A minimal amount of glacier travel will be necessary on a few of the mountains we plan to climb. All three members of our party have experience traveling across glaciers and all three are ice climbers as well. Although the glaciers in the Sierras are generally small and docile, necessary precautions will be taken to ensure safety across any larger glaciers. We will all be carrying tools for self-arrest and we will rope up if necessary.

Rock-fall is always an issue in the mountains. To avoid major rock fall, we will avoid snow gullies later in the day and try to be as cautious as possible when climbing.

Anther important issue worth noting is water safety. We have found that in general, it is easier to treat all drinking water with iodine or chlorine tablets rather than filtering. For this reason, we will bring an adequate supply of iodine tablets.

Other health issues such as hypothermia and high-altitude sickness are always potential problems on a backcountry trip such as this. To deal with these problems we will use the common backcountry sense that all of us have acquired over the years and our wilderness medical training.

#### Environmental Concerns

We will be adhering to the Leave No Trace ethics that have been established by the National Outdoor Leadership School. This includes staying on established trails, leaving no trash behind, burying human waste 200 ft from water sources, respecting cultural and historical relics, and responsible interaction with wildlife. The Eastern Sierras are a diverse region, ranging from high deserts, to dense redwood groves, to pristine alpine meadows. The unique nature and the variety of terrain found in the Sierras makes it necessary to adapt low-impact measures to address the specific issues that are relevant to the areas we will be traveling through. It is of utmost importance to us to ensure that we will be leaving the land the way we found it so that others may enjoy the same wilderness experience that we had. We will consider the following to minimize the impact that we may incur during our trip:

#### Traveling Light

Because of the nature of our trip, it will be necessary to only bring the necessities. Even so, we will be mindful when setting up camp, recognizing that a more compact, less elaborate camping area will greatly reduce the impact on the land. In addition, traveling light will allow us to comfortably travel overland without the need to cut switchbacks or take shortcuts.

#### Choosing a Responsible Camp-site

The first criteria will be that the site must be at least 100 feet from the trail in order to prevent overuse of areas directly surrounding the trails. In addition, we will seek out "hard" campsites (preferably rock) that are less sensitive to the impacts of camping. Areas that are of particular concern in the Sierras are meadows and alpine lakeshores. In general we will avoid areas that have moist or soft soil. A good rule of thumb will be to make sure that there is at least 100 feet between our site and the nearest water source.

#### Fires

Wood resources in the Sierras are often limited and much of it has been pillaged for use in camp fires. In addition, a large portion of the Sierras receive very little rainfall. Therefore, it is essential to minimize use of wood resources and the risk of forest fire by using white gas stoves for cooking and do without camp fires.

#### Wildlife

The most problematic of the wildlife in the Eastern Sierras will be black bears. While they are usually not aggressive towards humans, they are determined food snatchers. In order to avoid having food taken, we will be bringing bear-proof canisters to store our food in. We will be storing the canisters at least 100 feet away from our tent for safety. We will be sure that there is nothing scented in our immediate proximity that might attract bears to us while we are sleeping. All of us have had first hand encounters with bears and know the appropriate action to take in the case that we do run into one. In addition, mountain lions inhabit the area we will be traveling through. While they are not as prominent as the bears, we are familiar with the appropriate action to take if we encounter a mountain lion. Bighorn sheep are an endangered species that live in the Sierras and certain areas are restricted for parts of the year to ensure their survival. We

will respect these regulations. The rest of the animals are more benign but will be just as interested in the food that we are carrying. Making sure that we keep our food inaccessible will keep the animals from becoming habituated to eating human food.

#### Historical Artifacts

While the Sierras are still a remote area of the country, people have been passing through the region for thousands of years. We may encounter some of the evidence that these people have been there, but we will be sure to leave these pieces of history untouched. The National Park Service defines any human made object that is over fifty years old to be an artifact. If we find any such objects, we will report their location to the National Park Service.

#### Climbing Ethics

We will not be drilling any bolts or placing pitons. We will avoid leaving any excess webbing or gear behind and will remove any worn out or damaged anchors. In the case that it will be necessary to leave some webbing, as we may need to do in order to rappel, we will purchase gray webbing, which will not be highly visible from far away, blending into the natural environment. In addition, we will minimize our use of climbing chalk as it leaves noticeable residue on the rock.

#### Wilderness Permits

Permits are used in the Sierras to limit the amount of people that will be traveling in wilderness areas. We will be visiting during a quota period, so it will be necessary to obtain permits for the area from the National Parks Service and the United States Forestry Service. It will be necessary to carry these permits with us at all times in the back country. Reservations can be made starting March 1 for \$10. A special permit is required to climb Mt. Whitney by reservation only and applications for permits must be submitted during the month of February.

Invo National Forest: 760-873-2500 Bishop

760-876-6200 Lone Pine (Whitney Ranger Station)

Sequoia & Kings Canyon National Park Reservations: 559-565-4239 (fax requests only)

Sequoia National Forest: 559-784-1500 Sierra National Forest: 559-297-0706

### Gear

Camping

3/4 Ridge Rests

3 light sleeping bags

Backpackers Tarp

Camping stove

Fuel canisters Cooking kit

2 pots

Utensils

#### Clothing

Polypro tops/bottoms

Light weight hiking shoes

2 pair socks per person

(replacements in caches)

Hiking shorts

Light weight wind shell

Rain shell

Warm hat

Warm gloves

Synthetic T-shirt

Fleece tops/bottoms

#### Accessories

2 compasses

Sun glasses

Sun screen

Headlamps w/ extra

batteries

Leatherman tool

Bear canisters

Three whistles

Watch with alarm

Plastic garbage bags

Duct tape

Sewing kit

P-cord (+50 ft.)

Safety Pins

6 liter dromedary bag

3 1 liter water bottles

Iodine tablets- 1-2 bottles

per cache + starting ration

#### First Aid Kit

Butterfly closures

Triangle bandages

Band aids

Gauze pads

Non-adherent dressing

Gauze and athletic tape

Moleskin

Iodine swabs

Ibuprofen

Latex gloves

Tweezers

Zip locks

Pepto bismol

SOAP forms

ACE bandage

Antihistamine

Aloe

Space blanket

Antibiotic ointment

#### Climbing

Harnesses

Helmets

Ice Axes

Prusiks

Climbing rack

2 60 m. ropes

rock climbing shoes

#### RACK:

Double set cam sizes .5-3

Single set 4

1 set stoppers

Single length draws (5)

Double length draws (7)

Shoulder-length slings (7)

Web-bolet (2)

Cordolet (3)

Locking biners (9)

Free biners (12)

Prusik cord

Extra grey webbing

#### Food

Food is, of course, an integral part of our trip. A man once said, "To eat good food is to be close to God." The beauty of backcountry cooking is that it takes relatively simple meals to feel the truth in this statement. Our trip involves a lot of physical activity on many days, and we will be certain to have ravenous appetites. We plan on dehydrating many foods ourselves in preparation for this trip. We will also buy bulk as much as possible. These techniques will hopefully cut down the overall cost of food items. Below is an estimated list of meals and food quantities. At this point, these are only estimates and may be adjusted.

Breakfast
Granola
Oatmeal
Whole grains
Dried fruit and nuts
Breakfast burritos

Lunches
Bagels/tortillas
Cheese
Tuna packages
Crackers
Peanut butter
Dried fruit and nuts
Jerkey
Cliff bars

#### Dinners

- 1. Pasta w/sauce and tuna
- 2. TVP chili
- 3. Burritos
- 4. Couscous w/ extras
- 5. Backpacker meal for day before cache (we got this idea from Andy Shepard and Ryan Mckeon)

Quantities Granola (3 lbs) Oatmeal (3 lbs) Whole Grains (3 lbs) Dried Fruit (6 lbs) Nuts (2 lbs) Powdered Eggs (2 dozen) Dried Blk. Beans (30 c.) Tortillas (5 dozen) Pasta (10 lbs) Couscous (7 lbs) TVP (2 lbs) Chili Mix (7 lbs) Backpacker meals (9 pkg) Instant Mashed Potatoes (1.5lbs)Cheese (15 lbs) Peanut butter (3 lg.jars) Tuna (20 envelopes) Bagels (5 dozen) Crackers (9 boxes) Cliff Bars (3 boxes) Tomato Sauce (6 cups) Pesto (6 cups) Jerky (90 oz) Pudding (3 lbs) Hot Chocolate (1.5 lbs) Olive Oil (1qt) Brown sugar (2 lbs) Raisins (2 lbs)

Honey (2 lbs)

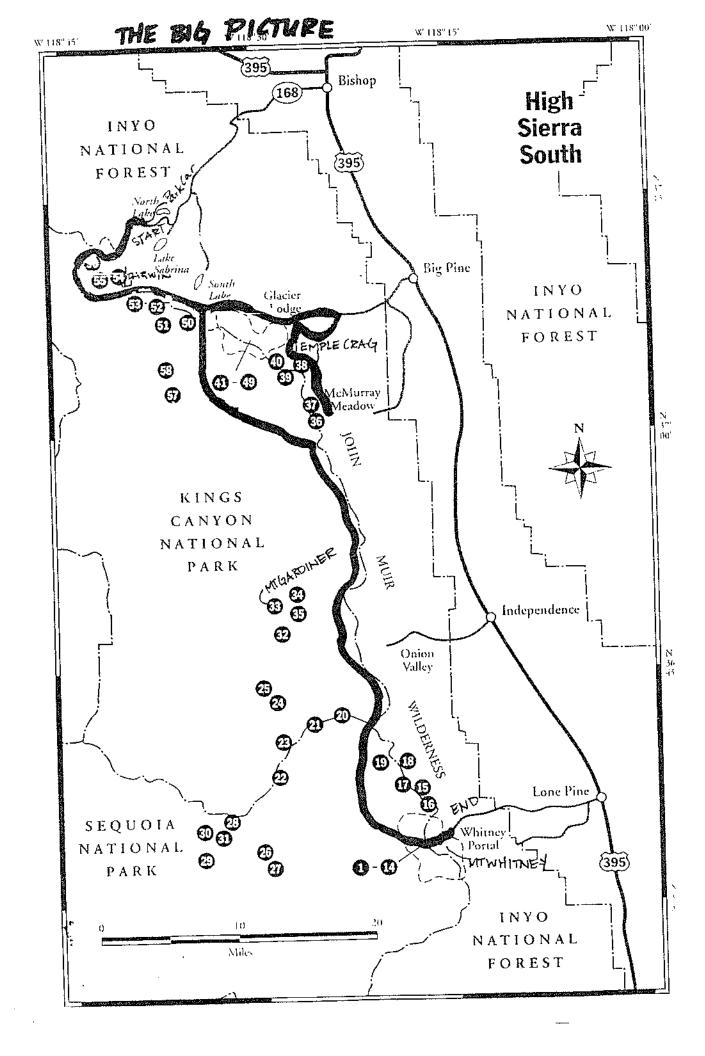
# Budget

Below is a list of all the planned expenses for this trip. In all cases we have strived to reduce costs. Meaghan and Mona's cars are both fuel efficient, reducing the cost of transportation. Food will be bought in bulk and we will be dehydrating on our own in order to avoid paying a lot for food. These factors have been taken into consideration when calculating the budget.

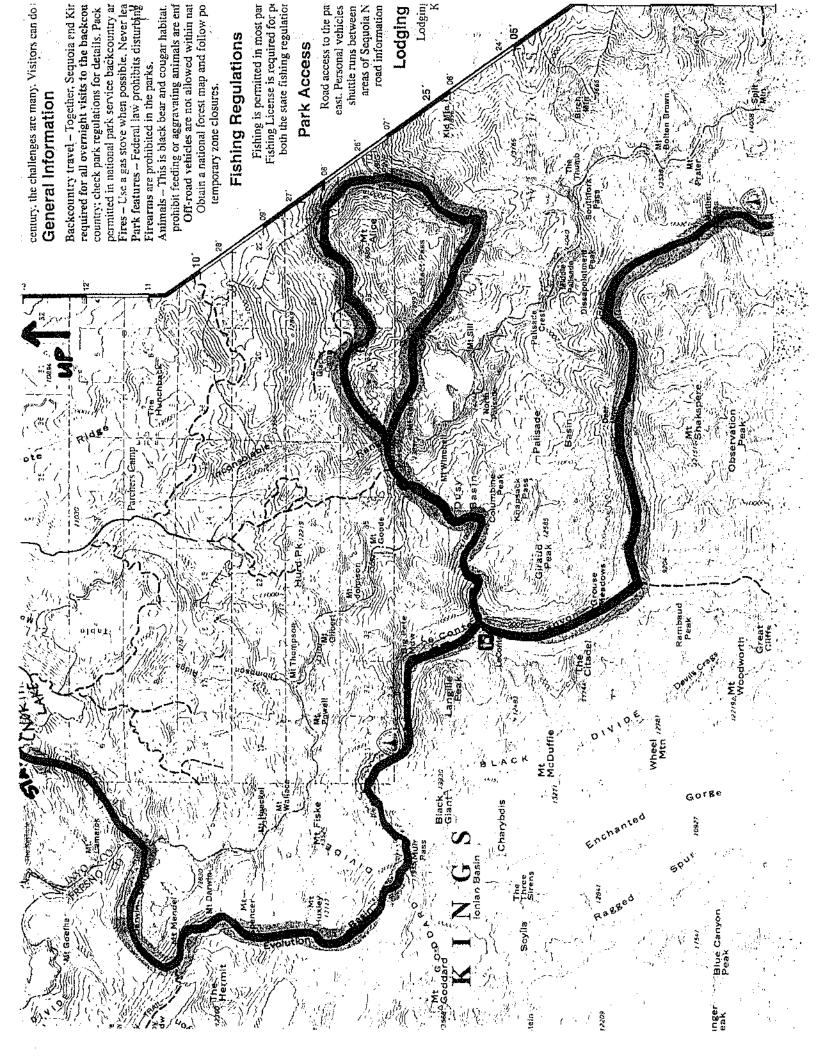
Food	\$600
Bear Canister Rental	\$130
Transportation gas (2 cars, there and back)	\$250
Books and Maps	\$45
Stove fuel (10 gas canisters)	\$45
Permits	\$100
Iodine (12 bottles)	\$60
Cache boxes, cache fees (20\$ per cache)	\$50
Miscellaneous (duct tape, p-cord, sunscreen, batteries etc.)	\$50
Film, processing	\$100
Emergency money (carried with us)	\$50
Total	\$1,480

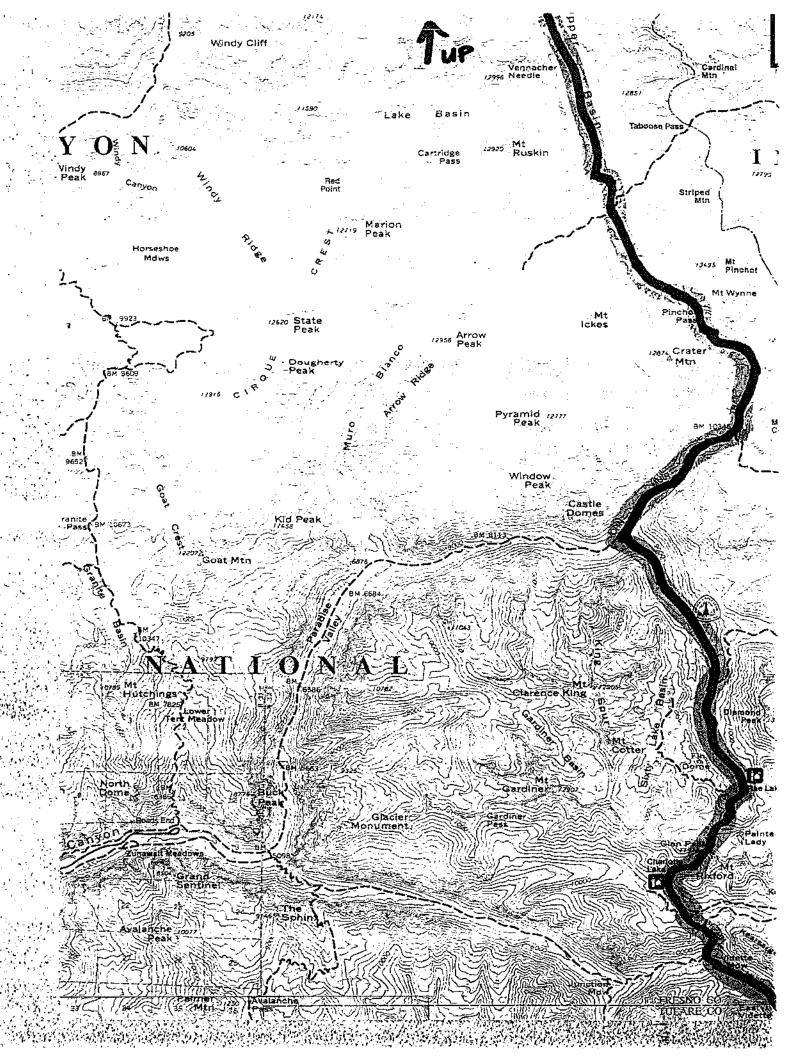
Thank you so much for your time and consideration of our proposal. We just can't get enough of the Sierras. And of course, "All great paths lead through mountains" – Gary Snyder



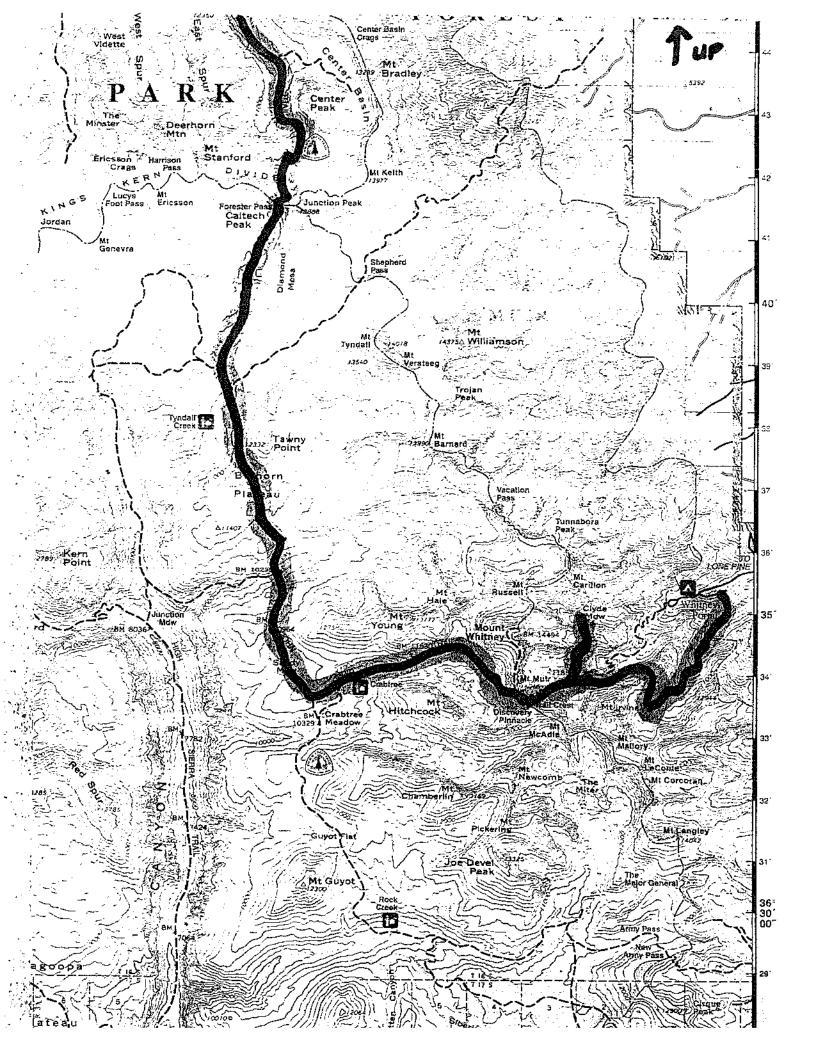


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