



The Sierra Echo

Volume 67 ▲ Number 4 ▲ October-December 2023

The Obelisk

Story on page 25 ("Alpenglow on The Obelisk," photo by Todd Lyster).

Also in this issue:

Kearsarge Pass in the snow, Northern Sierra Peaks, Mystery Peak, Passages

Echoes from the Chair

“In general, I don’t like lists—the SPS List is the exception”—that was uttered by my guide on the Palisade Traverse. He said that over the years he has come to know of a lot of acquaintances “chasing the list,” and he was impressed with the commitment of the climbers and the sheer geographic scale of the list. This year especially I have been grateful for that scale. Being home-based in Southern California, my pursuit of peaks has been largely southerly centered, having, before this year, only dipped my toes into peaks north of Yosemite. This year, of course, has been a wild on. Out of the four planned trips I had planned months ago (including three permit reservations), only one has gone as planned. And that’s why I am grateful for that geographic scale, because when things go sideways in the center or the South, GO



NORTH. First, a southerly road closure forced us up to Carson Pass, where we had a great snow hike of Round Top. Then, a fear of venturing solo up Taboose Pass (after reports that week of wet avalanches taking the lives of a skier on Hurd Peak and a hiker on Split), I road tripped to the Tahoe area for some peak bagging in areas previously unknown to me. I had gone ahead and taken out another permit for Taboose Pass, only to have Hurricane Hilary force me north once again, where I was able to explore peaks around Sonora Pass. Despite the additional fossil fuel burden, it’s nice to see some green dots north of Yosemite on my Peakbagger SPS page.

Jason Pair

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Call for Nominations!

It’s that time of year when we’re looking for members to run for the SPS management committee. Are you interested? Know someone who might be willing to serve? Please contact Mary McMannes, chair of the nominating committee, to make suggestions. Her email is marymuir@earthlink.net

Save the Date!

The 2024 SPS banquet will be on Sunday, January 28th! Venue and speaker to be determined.

Call for Award Nominations!

It's that time of year for members to nominate SPS leaders for the SPS Leadership Award. Established and first given in 1997, the award has been described thus: "Created by the SPS Membership to give recognition to those individuals who have shown outstanding leadership and service to the SPS over the years and who have fostered new leaders."

Please send your nomination and list of qualifications to the chair, Jason Pair, at jasonpair69@gmail.com. For more information, here's what the Policies and Procedures say about the award:

From time to time the Management Committee may choose to honor a leader for extraordinary service to the SPS. The award shall be given at the annual banquet with an article in the banquet issue of *The Sierra Echo* to honor the leader. The award may be given posthumously. By submitting a letter to the Management Committee indicating why the leader should be so honored, members may nominate possible recipients. Management Committee members may also nominate recipients and should draw up a list of qualifications to be mentioned in an *Echo* article published each year in a mid-year issue along with a solicitation for nominees. Factors that may contribute to the selection of recipients should include leadership on numerous trips over a period of at least ten years, fostering new members and leaders, achievement of at least an "M" leadership rating, and setting the example of well-planned and safe trips. The Management Committee shall vote whether each nominee is to receive the award. More than one person may receive the award each year, but it need not be given every year.



2023 Sierra Peaks Section Management Committee

Elected

Jason Pair	Chair jasonpair@gmail.com
Paul Garry	Vice-chair/banquet vicechair@sierrapeaks.org
Laura Newman	Treasurer sierrapeakstreasurer@gmail.com
Phil S. Bates	Secretary philsbates54@gmail.com
Phil A. Bates	Fifth officer/outings philipabates@gmail.com

Appointed

Archives	Dan Richter dan@danrichter.com
Conservation Chair	Sharon Moore justslm@earthlink.net
<i>Echo</i> editors	Tina Bowman tina@bowmanchange.com , Beth Epstein
<i>Echo</i> mailer	Tina Bowman
Emblem Committee	Phil S. Bates, Kathy Rich, Daryn Dodge, Ron Bartell, Bob Pickering
IT Support	Greg Mason admin@sierrapeaks.org , Harry Lagenbacher admin2@sierrapeaks.org
Keeper of the List	Tina Bowman
Merchandise	Patty Kline patriciakline@aol.com
Mountain Records	Harry Langenbacher register@langenbacher.org
Outings	Phil A. Bates philipabates@gmail.com
Safety Chair	Doug Mantle sierradoug@icloud.com
Webmaster	Joe Wankum jbwankum@aol.com
Asst. Webmasters	Harry Lagenbacher register@summitregister.org , Tina Bowman tina@bowmanchange.com

Regional Representatives

San Diego	Joe White
Central California	Daryn Dodge
Northern California	Lisa Barboza

Past recipients are

Dave Dykeman and Bill T. Russell (posthumously), 1997
Doug Mantle and Duane McRuer, 1998
Dan Richter, 1999
Larry Tidball, 2000
Barbee Tidball, 2002
Tina Bowman (Stough), 2015
Neal Robbins, 2016
Kathy Rich, 2017

The SPS now has a Lifetime Achievement Award, first given in 2016 to Barbara Lilley and Gordon MacLeod, then to Jerry Keating in 2017, Doug Mantle in 2018, and Tina Bowman in 2022. Please contact the chair if you would like to nominate someone. Here's the description of the award from the Policies and Procedures:

From time to time the Management Committee may choose to honor a member for outstanding service to the SPS over many years. Such service may include leading copious outings, serving in various elected or appointed positions on the Management Committee, contributing to the *Echo*, and inspiring others by their mountaineering accomplishments. Members may nominate a possible recipient by writing to the Management Committee and indicating why the person should be so honored. The Management Committee shall vote whether each nominee is to receive the award. More than one person may receive the award each year, but the award need not be given every year.

SPS Management Committee Meeting Minutes Monday, July 10, 2023

1. Call to Order at 7pm. Present: Jason Pair, Chair; Paul Garry, Vice Chair; Phil S. Bates, Secretary; Dan Richter, Archivist; Joe Wankum, Webmaster; Patty Kline, Merchandise; and Tina Bowman, *Echo* Co-Editor.
2. Standard business and reports
 - c. Approval of minutes (May 15, 2023): Previously approved via email roll call for inclusion in latest issue of *The Sierra Echo*.
 - d. Chair (Jason Pair): Jason was able to gain access to the SPS YouTube Channel and post the 2022 Banquet Video.
 - e. Vice Chair (Paul Garry): Phil S.'s attempts to entice Kim Stanley Robinson to speak at this year's banquet were unsuccessful. Other proposed candidates for banquet speaker included Michael Chamoun, who recently attempted Everest but became ill, and Vitaliy Musiyenko, who just climbed a new route up Charlotte Dome. Paul volunteered to try to contact Mr. Musiyenko.
 - f. Secretary and Chair of the Emblem Committee (Phil S. Bates): There was no request for emblem awards over the previous two months.
 - g. Outings (Phil A. Bates): Not present.
 - h. Treasurer (Laura Newman): Not present, but Laura submitted a report via email on June 10. The committee had no questions or comments on the latest report.
 - i. Emblem Committee Report (Chair, Phil S. Bates): No requests or awards.
 - j. Outreach: No report.
 - k. Archives (Dan Richter): Plans for the transfer of post-1940 SPS archives to UCLA have been delayed due to a change in our contacts at UCLA. A decision is expected by September. Other options for the archives are the Sierra Club's Colby Library in Oakland or the Bancroft Library at Berkeley. Robin Ingram has offered his summit register records for various non-SPS Sierra summits, provided the SPS agrees to return the records to the relevant summits. The Committee agreed that we could pledge to seek volunteers to return the registers but could not commit to returning each register to the relevant peak.
 - l. *Echo* (Tina Bowman): Deadline for next issue of *The Sierra Echo* is August 25, including "Echoes from the Chair," treasurer's report, MC minutes, and any member achievement awards.
 - m. Mountain Records (Harry Langenbacher): With Harry continuing to look for a successor, Paul volunteered to assist with SPS mountain registers, and Jason posted a request for help with SPS summit registers on the SPS Facebook page.
 - n. IT (Greg Mason): Not present.
 - o. Keeper of the List (Tina Bowman): Tina and Joe Wankum made a few corrections of typos to the SPS Peaks List on the SPS website. No approval was required.
 - p. Website (Joe Wankum): No new developments reported.
 - q. Conservation (Sharon Moore): Not present.
 - r. Safety Chair (Doug Mantle): Not present.

3. Old Business: None

4. New Business

- a. Next Management Committee was set for September 18 at 7pm PST via Zoom.

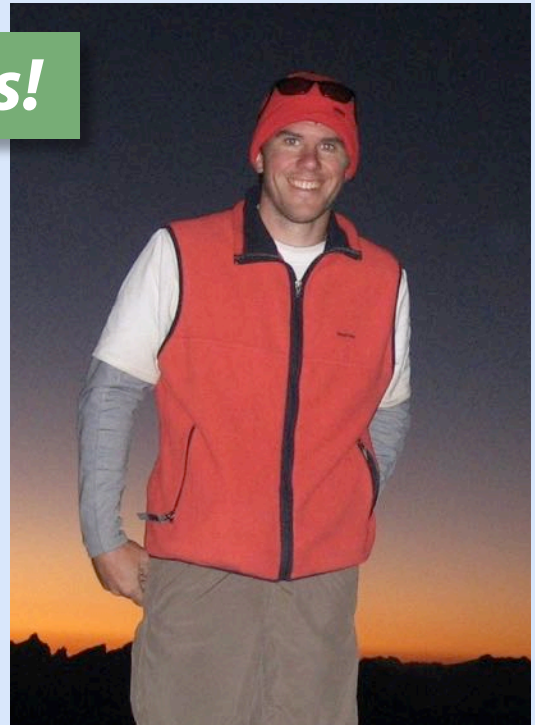
Treasurer's Statement Year to Date (1/1/2023–09/01/2023)

Money In		\$5726.68
Donations		705.00
Interest		1.68
Membership		1425
Banquet Income		3595
Money Out		-\$6153.95
Banquet		-5494.63
Echo Expense		-491.80
Postage		-217.61
Printing		-269.19
Other		-5.00
Office Expenses		-99.00
PayPal Fees		-68.52
	Money In	\$5726.68
	Money Out	-\$6153.95
	Net Total:	-\$427.27
ASSETS		
Paypal		\$2638.59
Checking		\$5708.22
Savings		\$3481.64
NET WORTH		\$8695.45

Welcome New Members!

Neal Banta

Neal grew up in eastern North Carolina and cut his teeth hiking in swamps—this is why he hasn't had a foot blister since 1996. He moved to Fresno in 2006 to work on a hotshot crew in Kings Canyon National Park. It was on the fire crew and after a couple of tax-funded helicopter rides to Tehipite Dome that he realized there was much to see, learn, and do in the Sierra. He's been going on strolls in the Range ever since and whenever possible.



Dennis Roberts

Dennis is a California native with his first experience in the Sierra being a Boy Scout Trip to Desolation Wilderness. In 2019, he attempted the Pacific Crest Trail making it from the border with Mexico to Sierra City. Since then, he has continued backpacking throughout the Sierra. He has completed six of the Emblem Peaks and is slowly working towards the Geographic Emblem as well. When the weather turns, Dennis enjoys rock climbing in Joshua Tree and snowboarding in Big Bear.

Congratulations!



Jon Hershman earned Emblem #599 on Mt. Goddard on July 15, 2023. Congrats, Jon!



around-the-web/

By Dave Sholle

Editors' note: Dave Sholle is our correspondent for this column, sharing web links that SPS members may find interesting. If you see something you think would interest other members, please send it to Dave at dsholle@verizon.net.

Some of these links may be behind paywalls.

Sierra and California

Sierra Club climber Steve Curry dies in Death Valley:
<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-07-21/death-valley-heat-71-year-old-hiker-dies>.

From Greg Mason, more on Steve Curry:
<https://ktla.com/news/local-news/los-angeles-man-who-died-at-death-valley-national-park-identified/>
<https://geniuscelebs.com/los-angeles-steve-curry-death-cause-and-obituary/>.

New ski record on a classic Sierra route:
<https://www.sanluisobispo.com/news/california/article276080826.html>.

From Pat Holleman via Dave Vandervoet, an avalanche on Split Mountain:
<https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/08/us/california-avalanche-hiker-dies-split-mountain/index.html>.

Climbing Mount Whitney in June:
<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-06-09/mt-whitney-perilous-trek-top-california-record-snowpack>.

From Beth Epstein, more climbing news of Vitaliy Musiyenko's new route on Charlotte Dome:
https://americanalpineclub.org/news/2023/6/26/the-line-june-2023?mc_cid=c32f1510a1&mc_eid=188bad90dd.

From Bill Oliver, American Alpine Club Search and Rescue awards with three videos, including a rescue by Inyo County SAR on Mt. Emerson:

https://americanalpineclub.org/sar-awards-2023?mc_cid=5155a0085d&mc_eid=188bad90dd.

New California wildfire alert system:
<https://petapixel.com/2023/05/17/new-california-wildfire-alert-system-is-a-network-of-1000-cameras/>.

L.A. group helps people with disabilities climb mountains:
<https://www.latimes.com/travel/newsletter/2023-07-13/paracliffhangers-adaptive-climbing-disabled-climbers-meetup-the-wild>.

Actor Julian Sands' death on Mount Baldy:
<https://www.latimes.com/entertainment-arts/story/2023-07-24/julian-sands-cause-of-death-missing-mt-baldy>;
<https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/24/entertainment/julian-sands-cause-of-death/index.html>; and
<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-08-10/julian-sands-mt-baldy-hikers-who-found-his-remains-body>.

Ninety-three year old climbs Half Dome:
<https://www.boredpanda.com/oldest-man-yosemite/>.

Article by Patt Morrison about California lakes:
https://edition.pagesuite.com/popovers/dynamic_article_popover.aspx?guid=92cbcaf0-48a1-47a6-9a31-11f408e5a18f&v=sdk.

Hiking the PCT in this high snow year:
<https://www.sfchronicle.com/outdoors/article/hike-high-sierra-pacific-crest-trail-18258558.php>.

Black bears are scaling Half Dome:
<https://www.latimes.com/about/story/2023-08-18/black-bears-climbing-yosemite-half-dome>.

A push to save lives on Mt. Baldy:
<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-08-10/sheriff-asks-lawmakers-and-us-forest-service-for-help-to-curb-injuries-and-deaths-on-mt-baldy> and <https://www.latimes.com/opinion/letters-to-the-editor/story/2023-08-15/hikers-dying-on-mt-baldy-its-time-for-a-winter-permit-system>.

around-the-web/ continued:

High Asian Peaks

Why Everest Base Camp won't be moving anytime soon:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-65723447>.

Everest record breaker sees no future in Nepal:
<https://www.cnn.com/2023/05/30/sport/mount-everest-record-breaker-mountain-climber-spt-intl/index.html>.

Norwegian woman and Nepali guide break record for climbing all fourteen 8,000 meter peaks:
<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/norwegian-woman-nepal-record-mountain-intl/index.html>.

Sherpa rescues climber from Everest "Death Zone":
<https://www.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/06/04/exp-everest-rescue-todd-pkg-burke-intv-09346355-cnn-world.cnn> and <https://www.npr.org/2023/06/03/1179923987/opinion-a-lifesaving-moment-at-mount-everest>. This rescue was followed by some very ungrateful behavior:
<https://www.newsweek.com/everest-climber-sherpa-instagram-video-block-1804524>.

Over two hundred climbers aim for K2 summit:
<https://gripped.com/news/over-200-climbers-aim-for-k2-summit/>.

The story of why a poorly/paid/equipped/trained porter died on K2:
<https://www.insider.com/death-k2-real-story-climbers-stepped-dying-man-kristin-harila-2023-8>.

Why did so many climbers die on Mount Everest this season?:
<https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/everest/climbers-death-mount-everest/>.

Pakistani women climbing their high peaks:
<http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web23s/wfeature-a81-tcl-power-on-the-peaks>.

One of the worst mountaineering accidents in history:
<https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/exploration-survival/avalanche-mountainering-accident-drapadi-ka-danda-2/>.

Major threat on Mount Everest:
<https://www.yahoo.com/lifestyle/mount-everest-facing-major-threat-190000869.html>.

The Alps

Five days on the North Face of the Grandes Jorasses:
<https://www.petzl.com/CA/en/Sport/News/2023-4-18/Five-Days-on-the-North-Face-of-the-Grandes-Jorasses-with-Symon-Welfringer>.

Reinhold Messner on Christian crosses on European peaks:
<https://apple.news/AeA5bJJHOQxORReMZ2o9gyw>.

A legal fight and future tensions in the warming Alps:
<https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/climbing/a-legendary-alpinist-a-french-mayor-and-the-melting-glaciers-on-mont-blanc/>.

Melting glacier uncovers missing climber in Swiss Alps:
<https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-66334788>.

Hillary Gerardi's FKT on Mont Blanc:
<https://www.outsideonline.com/health/running/culture-running/people/hillary-gerardi-mont-blanc-fkt/>.

Other

NPR book review of *Trail of the Lost* about missing hikers on the PCT:
<https://www.npr.org/2023/08/24/1195262616/book-review-andrea-lankfords-trail-of-the-lost>.

"Must Have" starter kits for climbers (humor):
<https://www.climbing.com/people/six-must-have-starter-kits-for-climbers/>.

Contemplating the next impossible:
<http://www.alpinist.com/doc/web23s/wfeature-a82-sharp-end-contemplating-the-next-impossible>.

Everesting world record on bike:
<https://velo.outsideonline.com/culture/jack-thompson-ultracyclist-the-everesting-world-record/>.

Visits to the Colorado Fourteeners decline:
<https://www.outsideonline.com/outdoor-adventure/hiking-and-backpacking/fourteener-decline-2022/>.

around-the-web/ continued:

Are digital climbing guides the future?:

<https://gripped.com/profiles/has-the-future-of-climbing-guidebooks-arrived-in-squamish/>.

Super light and small packraft (perhaps not too useful in the Sierra except for lounging on lakes, but could be useful for big, not too wild river crossings in the Arctic):

<https://www.outsideonline.com/health/running/gear/packraft-for-minimalists/>.

Southern California woman dies in fall on Teewinot in the Tetons:

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/08/12/us/hiker-dies-grand-teton-national-park/index.html>.

Deadly extreme heat in the national parks:

<https://www.cnn.com/2023/07/23/us/national-park-heat-deaths-climate/index.html>.

Spectacular photos from the Peruvian Andes:

<https://www.boredpanda.com/photography-andes-mountains-peru-karol-nienartowicz/>.

Woman rescued from mountain after trying to find scared pet parrot:

<https://www.cnn.com/travel/article/wales-mountain-rescue-parrot-scli-intl/index.html>.

Oldest woman to summit Mount Rainier:

<https://www.kentucky.com/news/nation-world/national/article277610568.html>.

Dust on snow events affect snow pack:

<https://backcountrymagazine.com/stories/dust-on-snow-events-threaten-winter-and-spring-snowpacks/>.

A lengthy John Long story:

<https://www.climbing.com/people/john-longs-first-big-time-tv-break-turns-to-tragedy/>.

Family of seven is about to finish the Triple Crown of hiking:

<https://www.cnn.com/travel/family-seven-hiking-americas-longest-trails/index.html>.

From Mark Adrian, via several Sierra Club members, a story on Gerry Roach:

<https://www.cbsnews.com/colorado/news/gerry-roach-injured-climber-author-mountaineering-guide-colorado-14ers/>.

From Beth Epstein, more depressing climate change news:

https://www.nytimes.com/2023/06/19/climate/himalayas-melting-water-source.html?unlocked_article_code=8X4PDkpljtTV98W1P5r27oYFV1YUCP1kT6gw80_LZX9eu255xKomRX6Tx0rirajKlBOpBKpwjJS8w2DV-nm9xhLbcXZ5ZimDwekysafmwp4rr_MvcdmUO6Ymo96aWeRGiOonHUBuicK1vORCwJ36rUieqyNaTdNvGAQ7cd7XEq0y2AAkd-XCMOoZjoCEqngOmHWtzSAU7zq85SltuJbPcve31rb0Y4LE-2WDtRCrwBb1XpJAP_8mC3zOQc0i3Ce68EnMeuioo68YC5sq0D7E1hLX9ZeSQSV9IgOhNadFt2G1qNepuEygR8HV0kYyYSAvhGMVn5dpuEpe2QARaNWiy6weRDgve&smid=url-share.

For seven decades, Tom and Joanne Heindel have stalked some of California's rarest birds. Now they're set to publish a 500-page book on their discoveries:

<https://www.latimes.com/california/story/2023-06-29/these-retired-teachers-started-with-a-little-bird-guide-and-ended-with-a-magnum-opus>.

Hulu

The Hulu streaming service (you can get it for a month, then cancel) has several good mountaineering items on it now (<https://www.hulu.com/welcome>).

Finding Michael is about a man who goes to Everest to try to find his brother who disappeared many years ago.

This Mountain Life is about a woman and her sixty-year old-mother going on a six month ski trek in the Coast Mountains of British Columbia; the film won an award at the Banff festival.

Torn is Max Lowe's film about his father Alex Lowe.

Summit Fever is a fictional story about motivated climbers who die, and how it affects their partners, families, and friends. It can be cheesy here and there but is much better than the usual fictional mountain movie, and has fantastic shots of skiing and climbing, mainly around Chamonix, but also on the Matterhorn and the Eiger.



New Gray Wolf Pack in California

See this article from the California Department of Fish and Wildlife's *CDFW News* about a new pack of gray wolves—at least five individuals—in Sequoia National Forest:

<https://wildlife.ca.gov/News/Archive/new-gray-wolf-pack-confirmed-in-tulare-county#gsc.tab=0>.



(Photos courtesy of California Department of Fish and Wildlife and Michelle Harris, Samantha Winiecki-Love, Ryan Slezak, and Colibri Ecological Consulting, which is one group among numerous groups that reported sightings on the wolf pack.)

FREE First Year's Membership or Echo Subscription

New subscribers and members can receive their first year's subscription for free! Download the Membership Application Form at <http://sierraclub.org/angeles/sierra-peaks/new-members#mr>. Please contact the chair if you have any questions.

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A Snowy Summer Pass Over Kearsarge

By Phil S. Bates



Sometimes a Sierra outing can go sideways and still be rewarding! Early in the past winter I planned a week-long, late June, mountain-bagging backpack via Kearsarge Pass with my brother Steve and several climbing friends; then the Sierra's record high snowfall unfolded, inducing my brother to reschedule his annual Sierra backpack and my friends to bail. Nonetheless, I didn't cancel my permit reservation, and when Onion Valley Road opened ten days before my permit departure date, my hiking buddy Andy and his brother Morgan decided to join me on an exploration of this year's enduring snowscape in the High Sierra.

I embarked with the fanciful notion of climbing East Vidette Peak, which under normal summer conditions is considered easily manageable on a short backpack or even a long day hike. With Morgan's work constraints limiting our backpack to three nights, the current year's extensive snow and deep, swift waterways made my climbing goal a tad challenging. However, I must confess

that my East Vidette plan never engendered any enthusiasm from my more sensible backpacking mates.

Recent internet postings and comments from a few backpackers we met at the trailhead suggested that micro spikes, ice axe, and trekking poles were the preferred gear for assuring good traction and safety. In addition, forecasts for cool temperatures and unstable weather, along with the possibility of needing to camp on snow, made it prudent to carry more gear and provisions than required for a typical summer backpack. Still, we thought we could reach Vidette Meadows in a day, affording the opportunity for a climb.

When Andy and I arrived at the Onion Valley Trailhead (9190'), we were surprised to see fewer than a dozen vehicles in a parking lot normally jammed with five or six dozen vehicles on a typical summer day. A significant stream was flowing across the road that separated trailhead parking from the campground, which remained closed. While the trailhead was snow free, the surrounding mountainsides were heavily buried under deep snow. Morgan had yet to arrive due to his long, early morning drive from San Diego. With our day's hiking objective only nine miles away and mostly sunny

Endless sun cups looking towards Kearsarge Pinnacles from camp (Photo by Phil Bates).

skies, we were feeling no time pressures. Nonetheless, given my concerns about keeping up with two youngsters with thirty-year age advantages, Andy and I agreed that I would get a head start, hike at a slow pace, and take lots of breaks. Our tentative plan was to meet up at Gilbert or Flower Lakes, about two miles up the trail. Andy hoped that he and his brother would be on the trail within an hour. If the delay were longer, we would meet at the pass or the Kearsarge Lakes below the west side of the pass.

The first mile of trail was easy hiking with only occasional small snow drifts. After reaching Little Pothole Lake, I hit continuous, deep, firm snow and put on my microspikes. Though the trail was now invisible aside from irregular boot prints, I encountered few navigation problems thanks to a dozen previous hikes up the route. However, endless, troublesome sun cups soon began to slow my ascent. Often the sun cups had deep troughs and narrow rims, resulting in a tiring mix of exaggerated high stepping and unstable balancing. At times my progress was diverted by the sound of significant water flowing below the snowpack or occasional glimpses of impromptu streams that revealed potentially unstable snow bridges. Accordingly, my second mile was dramatically slower than my first, and I was happy to pause for views when I reached the high snowbanks surrounding icy Gilbert Lake. A cumbersome hike around the side of Gilbert and up the inlet stream brought me to a partially snow- and ice-covered Flower Lake, where I took a short break in the hope that Andy and Morgan would soon catch up. After fifteen minutes and no sign of the brothers, I pushed on to Heart Lake, which was almost totally covered in snow and ice. The lovely views of the

Kearsarge Lakes and Pinnacles from the pass (Photo by Phil Bates).

surrounding ridges and University Peak induced me to eat an early lunch.

With a leisurely lunch break yielding no sighting of the brothers, I pushed on to the pass. After an initial steep climb on soft snow, my route emerged onto the wide, gently sloping mountainside above Big Pothole Lake, providing a first view of the pass. A narrow but clear set of bootprints rose upward in one long diagonal to the pass, the abundant snow totally obscuring the usual long switchback of the summer trail. The uphill slog was slow and tedious, but before long I approached the remains of a large cornice just below the pass. Fortunately, the snow conditions were good and a shallow trench of footsteps provided firm footing above a long, unappealing runout below the pass. My mid-day arrival at Kearsarge Pass (11,835') yielded great views in all directions, but also showed endless snowfields, with the exception of the mostly snow-free, south-facing ridge rising to Mount Gould. Below me the Kearsarge Lakes and surrounding landscape were totally covered in deep snow. Finding a snow free patch of earth to camp on looked pretty much impossible. I hoped we'd have better luck down at lower elevations near Vidette Meadows.



I waited for an hour without spotting the brothers or receiving any news from the three hikers that reached the pass. Getting antsy, I headed down to the Kearsarge Lakes to look for a camp site in the event we had to abandon our plan of reaching Vidette Meadows that day. About halfway down the 800-foot descent to the lakes, I glimpsed what looked like a little patch of bare ground on a small hilltop just north of the most eastern lake. I thought my eyes were playing tricks on me, but I altered my course towards the apparent island of dirt in a sea of snow. Increasingly bad sun cups and wet, loose snow conditions slowed my descent, but soon I realized the bare earth mirage was real, and moreover it would be just big enough for us to pitch our three tents! The camp spot at 11,000 feet elevation had a couple of trees for shade from the blinding glare of the bright sun reflecting off the surrounding snowfields. Adding to our good luck, I soon discovered easily accessible, free flowing water only fifty yards away. However, the miraculous camp site would be rather exposed in the event of a storm or high wind, so I spent the next hour and lots of energy trudging about the lakes in search of a more protected alternative. Alas, there was nothing remotely appealing.

With no sign of Andy and Morgan by late afternoon, I decided to pitch my tent and give up on reaching Vidette Meadow. Finally, after 6:00 pm two figures appeared at the pass. I waved my bright orange shell jacket and blew my whistle to ensure they spotted me. A bit after 7:00 the two brothers arrived in camp, rather weary from their snow travel



ordeal and the effects of elevation. As it turned out, Morgan's late arrival and his need to pack at the trailhead delayed their start until after 11:00 am, and the difficult snow conditions required numerous

breaks. Andy and Morgan were relieved to see the snow-free camp site. We relished our good luck and the lovely evening light on the breathtaking mountain landscape as we cooked our dinners. Adding to our good fortune, the cool temperatures kept away the mosquitos.

The next morning heavy cloud cover threatened precipitation. The snow was rock hard, and the sun cups were



Above: Morgan and Andy descending the east side of Kearsarge Pass. Left: Our "patch of dirt" campsite above Kearsarge Lakes (Photos by Phil Bates).

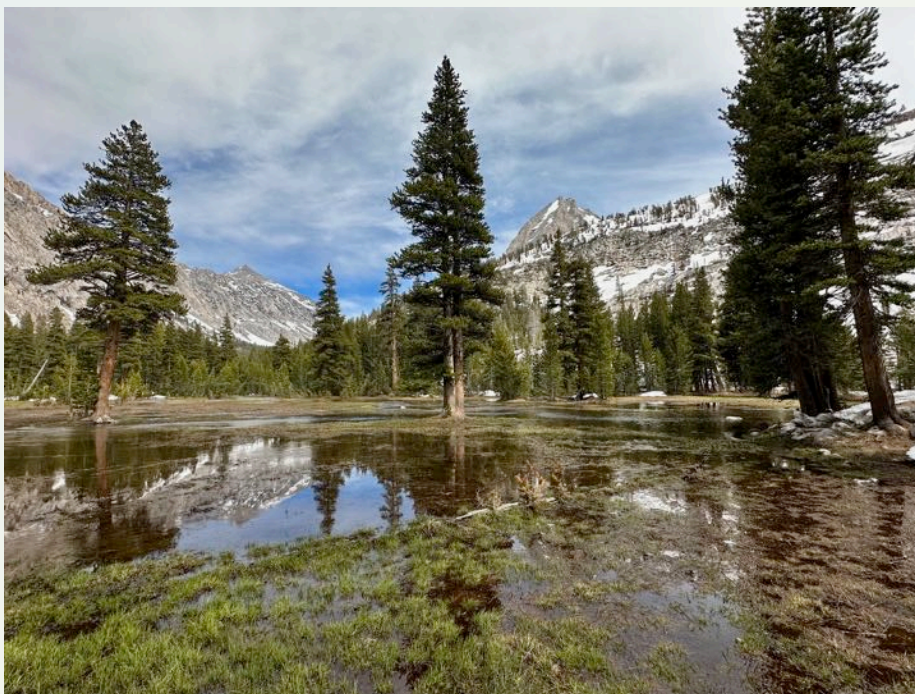
again endless as we descended to Bullfrog Lake and circled around the north shore on our way to the junction with the JMT. The wintery view was spectacular across mostly snow-covered Bullfrog Lake towards beautiful East Vidette Peak and the surrounding mountains. After passing another frozen lake we spotted the top half of the JMT sign peeking through the deep snow. From the trail junction we began a rough approximation of the JMT's descent route



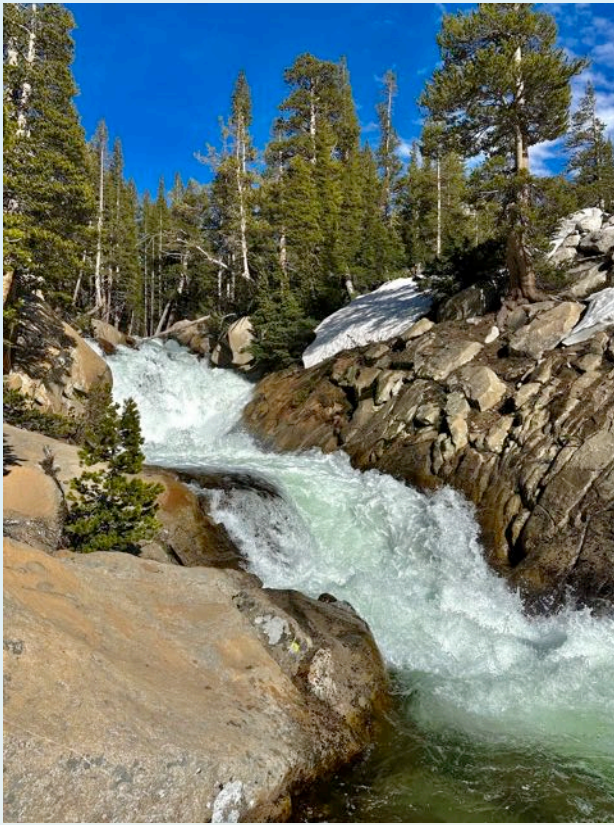
towards Vidette Meadows. Under dense forest the trail followed and twice crossed a stream that was now roaring below a deep snowpack. Looking to our right we saw a south-facing, rocky slope with less tree cover and, in turn, little snow. We chose this relatively unobstructed slope for a scrambling descent until we intersected the now visible JMT on a long, downward slanting traverse just before its junction with the Bubbs Creek Trail.

We reached Vidette Meadows (9500') by mid-day and now needed to find a suitable camp spot before exploring the feasibility of approaching East Vidette Peak. First, we headed south and uphill on the JMT looking for a snow free

spot to pitch our tents. Every snow-free place with adequate space, however, was totally water logged, reflecting Vidette Meadows' transformation into a vast wetlands area. Streams descending from the Kearsarge Pinnacles were not difficult to cross, but to our right we observed a raging river that in normal times was the relatively



Above: Morgan and Andy during our descent to Vidette Meadows. Left: The Vidette "Wetlands" (Photos by Phil Bates).



modest Bubbs Creek. Visions of East Vidette Peak began to fade. After passing numerous unusable camping spots, we stopped to eat our lunch. A look at our maps showed a bear box back near the junction with the Bubbs Creek Trail. After lunch we reversed course, and less than half mile down the Bubbs Creek Trail we found a spacious, snow-free meadow only fifty yards above the creek. With the continued threat of rain, we each quickly found comfortable and scenic spots to pitch our tents. Again, there were no mosquitos!

While Andy and Morgan relaxed about camp, I headed back up stream to re-examine the Vidette wetlands and possible crossings of Bubbs Creek. During my hike the clouds began to disappear, and gorgeous views emerged of the surrounding peaks and ridges. While the views were spectacular, I also gained a discouraging view of our intended route up East Vidette's east ridge, which appeared covered by heavy snow that could pose hazards. Becoming thoroughly discouraged about the feasibility of crossing the creek and negotiating potentially unstable snow slopes, I returned to camp. Later I joined Andy on a delightful hike down Bubbs Creek past a series of breathtaking cascades. With Road's End in King's Canyon closed for the season, the trail showed no sign of human activity. Numerous fallen trees, dislodged rocks and snowbanks obscured large sections of the trail. After returning to camp, we settled in

for a delightful evening of food and drink, with occasional jaunts up to a nearby rock outcrop for panoramic views of the evening light on the surrounding mountain scenery.

With East Vidette Peak off the itinerary and Morgan facing time pressures for his return to work in San Diego, we

agreed to enjoy a leisurely morning among the nearby meadows and cascades and then hike back up to our hilltop perch above Kearsarge Lakes. Bright, sunny skies made the hike back to Kearsarge Lakes a totally different experience from the previous day's hike under dark clouds. We



Top: Bubbs Creek Cascades near campsite. Left: East Vidette Peak during scrambling ascent from Vidette Meadows (Photos by Phil Bates).



reversed our descent route by scrambling up the snow-free talus slopes to the west of the JMT and enjoyed fabulous views of the mountains from our lunch spot on the north side of Bullfrog Lake. A mid-afternoon return to our first night's camp site provided plenty of time for exploring Kearsarge Lakes, though the strenuous nature of the travel over the endless sun cups ended up limiting the extent of our local excursions. As our anticipation of a fabulous sunset began to build, we noticed the sudden appearance of heavy ground fog, which quickly spread across the basin, obscuring all the surrounding mountains and sending a chill through our camp site. Plans for evening libations were quickly forgotten, and we all retired to the warmth of our sleeping bags.

The following morning our hike out proved fairly fast and efficient, with the exception of a long pause at the pass when we observed a helicopter circling the summit of University Peak. The helicopter made numerous passes in front of the peak's upper north side before hovering above the slope for a considerable time. After watching the apparent search or rescue operation for fifteen-to-twenty minutes, we began our descent. Our pace was quickened by an appreciable melting of snow during the previous two days, especially on the upper east side of the pass. Some steep sections were suitable for short standing, kneeling, and sitting glissades. We saved a fair bit of time by taking an alternate path that by-passed both Flower and Gilbert Lakes. We were back at the Onion Valley trailhead around mid-day and immediately observed two vehicles and a half a dozen members of Inyo County Search and Rescue. We left the team to their urgent business, which we later learned was the recovery of a climber who suffered a fatal fall on University Peak. While the climbing accident was a sobering reminder of the dangers of mountain outings, we quickly refocused on our fun adventure as we enjoyed a tasty lunch at the nearby Alabama Hills Cafe. Though we climbed no peaks and hiked only twenty-five miles in three-plus days, we were all glad to have the opportunity to see a beautiful

portion of the High Sierra under this year's record snowfall. As I happily munched my delicious breakfast burrito, I began to envision a return to Kearsarge Pass and a climb of East Vidette in late August.



Top: Phil hiking up west side of Kearsarge Pass. Left: Our group at Kearsarge Pass, left to right: Morgan Staley, Phil Bates, and Andy Staley (Photos by Andy Staley).

High (Up) Country—a Northern Sierra Adventure

By Dylan Kilby



Introduction: Being Other People

I thought I hated hiking. Growing up in northeast Florida, hiking meant long walks under a hot sun in humid sea air while shuffling through sand and emptying shoes every half-mile. Torrid—but not in the same way as the telenovelas endlessly played in air-conditioned offices. Climbing was not a thought, let alone a question; the only gym I knew of was contained in an administrative office at a local YMCA tens of miles away.

I voraciously read about Colorado, Wyoming, California, and the host of western and mountain states, but because I had a single mother and little disposable income, the states stayed as images on pages. Instead, my activity in Boy Scouts focused on the ample number of water sports available rather than yet another centipede to pull out of my shoe. Put simply, I decided early on that mountains were for other people, not me.

It is twenty years later, and eight since I moved out of Florida following a spur-of-the-moment application to a sled dog tourism job in Alaska. (I distinctly recall stepping off the plane, being cold for the first time in my life, and thinking, “Ah yes, this is what I’ve been missing from my life.”) Between now and then, I’ve been fortunate to live in Chile, northern Virginia, Michigan, and

now Colorado (indeed!). Mountains are now my life, in some ways more literal than figurative. How did this happen? Surely not in any way that eleven-year-old Dylan would imagine. And let me emphasize: he had quite an imagination, per the referral notes sent to the principal’s office.

It is March 2020. COVID-19 sweeps through the country. As a graduate student completing his Master of Public Health in epidemiology with a certificate in risk science, it was a professionally exciting time if not personally horrifying. I need not discuss the exhaustion of that year, nor those that came later. At the end of that fateful month, I applied for and was quickly mobilized to support COVID-19 response in California. I had never been to the state; per my life in Alaska and Chile, randomly moving to somewhere entirely new was twice a coincidence, three times a pattern.

Through the long months, my time outside of work was chiefly divided into three activities: watching movies via FaceTime with my girlfriend, playing the *Dark Souls* series of video games, and tentatively exploring

On the Crystal Range traverse (Photo by Dylan Kilby).

California. Early on, I realized a fun fact: Lake Tahoe was only an hour and a half away.

Suddenly, I was one of those “other people.”

Nearly every weekend, I climbed and hiked around Lake Tahoe, its namesake National Forest, and Carson Pass. The relatively lower interest in the northern Sierra compared to Yosemite, the Evolution Area, the Ritter Range, Whitney Portal, and other famous areas has resulted in specious beta and spartan trip reports. When the vagrant mountaineer steps out of the popular peaks, they quickly recognize that the route is “whichever way you can get up” if there’s any route at all.

The northern Sierra’s mountaineering history is, unsurprisingly, tied to the Sierra Club. The Peak and Gorge Section (formerly based out of Sacramento) chiefly operated throughout Lake Tahoe and surrounding lands, including the Sweetwater Mountains and Plumas National Forest. In the early 1980s, members identified sixty-three peaks considered to be topologically or culturally appropriate for a mountaineers’ list that were accessible within a day’s travel from Sacramento. Of these, sixteen overlap with the Sierra Peaks Section list (areas #23 and #24). Though the Peak and Gorge Section disbanded in the early 90s due to lack of activity, their list is now maintained by the Western States Climbers under the name “Tahoe Oguls.” In the late 2010s, twenty-two more peaks were added to the list as the “Oguls Plus.”

Since late May 2023, I have been on a mountaineering trip throughout the Sierra Nevada simply to be outside and explore. I primarily focus on the Sierra Peaks Section while completing the Tahoe Ogul list and dipping my toes into the Great Basin and Desert Peaks lists. The first two months were centered in and around the northern Sierra—both with the goal of completing the Tahoe Oguls and simply exploring as much of the range as I could.

In conversations with other mountaineers and hikers, everyone has their “home range.” It’s the range that speaks to them, clicks with them, and excites them no matter how many visits or climbs may occur. Though neither as tall nor as technically challenging as the High Sierra, the northern Sierra has become a home range for me. Let this article be a humble yet hopeful introduction, and may it inspire interest if not passion.

Geography of the Northern Sierra

I will define “northern Sierra” as “Ebbetts Pass to Adams Peak.” This roughly corresponds to the area encompassed by the Tahoe Oguls while including the broader areas in the Mokelumne Wilderness and Tahoe

National Forest. Some say that the northern Sierra only truly starts north of Tahoe; in my experience, the peaks encircled by my definition hold more geographical and botanical similarities than differences.

The northern Sierra is primarily defined by a volcanic geography distinct from the granitic bedrock that covers much of the greater range. Though semi-metamorphosed rock can be found in the Ritter Range and areas around Mono Lake, the northern Sierra peaks contain plugs, columnar basalt, and igneous extrusions in a uniquely concentrated form. Mountains like Red Lake Peak, Da-ek Dow Go-et, and Castle Peak are typical Sierra summits capped by plugs; others, like Raymond and Reynolds Peaks, are entirely composite volcanoes. This quality gives much of the northern Sierra peaks questionable climbing quality but extraordinary and unique textures. Just promise me you’ll test a hold before weighting it.

The exposed volcanism provides ample opportunity for unique ecosystems, especially moderate-altitude plant life. The Tahoe draba provides probably the best example. This plant almost exclusively grows in the northernmost Carson Range and areas on the Freel massif, preferring altitudes of over 9,000 feet and dry, rocky soils. Its short, reedy stems end in yellow four-petaled bulbs; seeing one is a highlight on carefully-trod treks.

The northern Sierra may be divided into several areas per political, wilderness, and geographical boundaries. In exploring the northern Sierra, I find the following distinctions most appropriate:



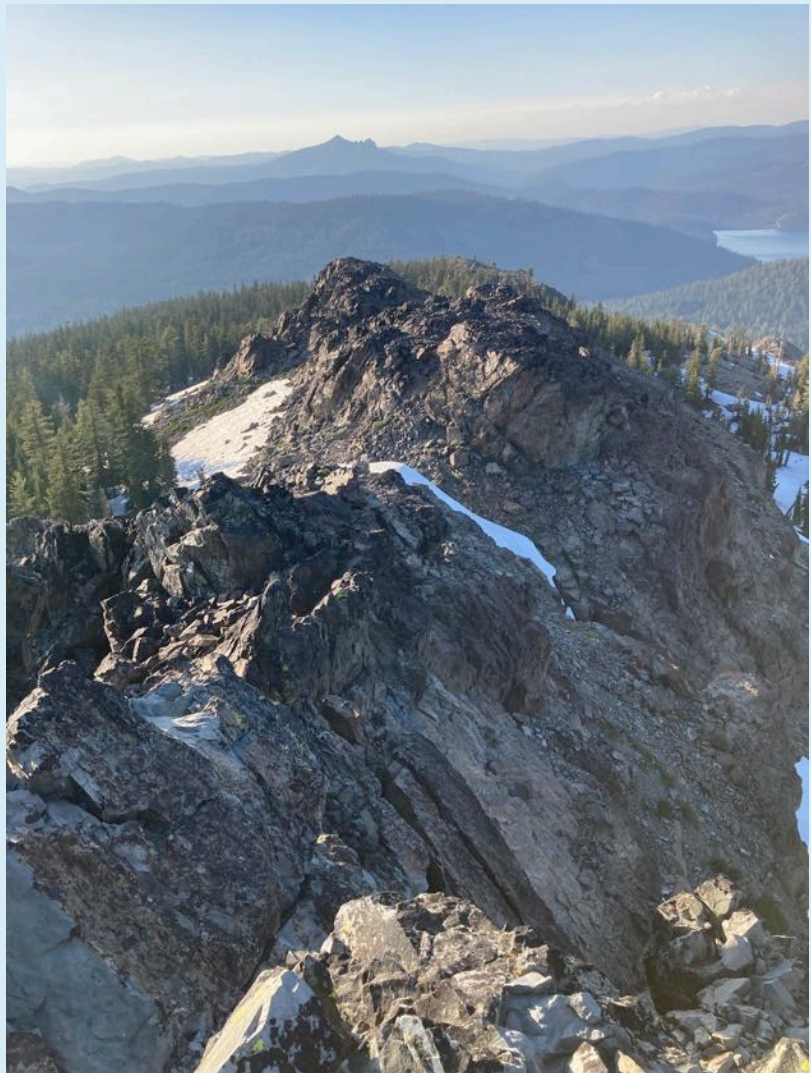
Draba (Photo by Dylan Kilby).

- **Northernmost Sierra:** Areas north of I-80, including Tahoe National Forest and Plumas National Forest. Prominent peaks are generally sparser, and central Tahoe National Forest holds snow late in the season.
- **Carson Range:** Range roughly to the immediate east and southeast of Lake Tahoe that corresponds to the Rose massif through the southernmost part of the Freel Massif north of I-89.
- **Granite Chief Wilderness and USFS Lands:** Circumscribed by the area south of I-80 to the Miller Meadows, which roughly corresponds to the USFS land boundary at Miller Lake. These peaks are not as high as Desolation Wilderness and consist of large swathes of lodgepole pine forests with the occasional volcanic plug.
- **Desolation Wilderness:** The namesake Desolation Wilderness and its boundaries. Though the most-used wilderness in the country primarily due to the waterfalls accessible from the west shores of Lake Tahoe, mountains within the Desolation Wilderness are between 9,000 and 10,000 feet high while requiring relatively greater commitment on approach compared to others in the northern Sierra.
- **Carson Pass:** The area roughly contained in and around the Carson Pass area, including south of I-50/I-89, Kirkwood, Mokelumne Peak, and north of the Blue Lakes Campgrounds. Here, there are taller and more challenging volcanic plugs, as well as notable ridgelines that make Kirkwood a destination ski resort.
- **Ebbetts Pass:** Areas south of Blue Lakes Campground until Highland Peak and Bear Valley. Ebbetts Pass is a transitional area from the northern Sierra to Sonora Pass and the (admittedly debatable) start of the High Sierra with Tower Peak. This area has the grandest composite volcanoes in the northern Sierra and the start of the worn granitic talus that surpasses the Hoover Wilderness.

Northern Sierra Peaks and Traverses

The aspiring or experienced mountaineer can find any number of adventures in the northern Sierra of various challenge and quality. The vast majority of the peaks, climbs, and traverses in and around Lake Tahoe are easy to moderate mountaineering difficulty, averaging Class 1 to Class 3 with most climbs in the 1 to low 2 range. Harder variations do, of course, exist for those willing to find them; some Class 4 traverses are mentioned here!

This article does not provide a comprehensive assessment of every mountain, climb, and gorge in the northern Sierra, though not for lack of desire. Maybe one day I'll write a book, as my mother keeps urging me to do. Until then, here are fifteen peaks and traverses that stand out in my two months (let alone the past three years) of northern Sierra mountaineering. Some of these are on the SPS and Tahoe Oguls lists; others



English Mountain Ridge (Photo by Dylan Kilby).

are ones I've identified as being significant or just plain fun. Included are my own scrambler ratings, descriptions, recommended routes, and goober stories.

English Mountain (8373', Class 2, Northernmost Sierra)

The hardest part about climbing English Mountain is getting there. Located deep within the Tahoe National Forest, accessing English requires driving down the seasonally-open yet paved Henness Pass Road and parking at or near Jackson Meadows Reservoir. After the reservoir, the road quickly becomes dirt that is ideally accessible with 4WD and high clearance. Luckily, there are plenty of places to start with a minor road walk.

This road walk gives way to one unheralded gem of the northern Sierra. When one thinks of this area, a person probably prefers Castle Peak or Mt. Lola. What's forgotten is an extraordinary crest that almost perfectly aligns north-to-south. The usual approach is Class 2 and winds its way up the north and around to the west of the summit block. For maximum fun and exciting (but not heavily exposed) Class 3 scrambling, traverse the crest proper and climb over the two false summits. It's worth experiencing some great granite and seasonal waterfalls from the melt that collects on the northwest side.

Castle Peak (9103', Class 1s3, Northernmost Sierra)

Oh wow, Dylan, Castle Peak? You mean one of the most famous and recognizable mountains north of Yosemite? Please, hold back my shock! Well, sometimes the good things require reminders. Castle Peak is immensely viewable north of I-80, practically shadowing the Donner Summit rest area (at which I may or may not have slept to prep for these climbs). Its name is well-deserved, with crenellated spires shooting out of bulbous volcanic rock. The approach is easy—simply walk up the PCT, then approach the false summit (“hiker’s summit”) from the west and traverse over the spires until you reach the true summit at the east. Though initially scary-looking, the Class 3 section is easy, and you'll be amazed at how nature can make such perfectly palm-sized slopers. If you want more fun, jump on over the ridgeline to Basin Peak, one of the Tahoe Oguls.

I first climbed Castle Peak in December 2020. Admittedly, I did not know what I was getting into. Now I'm older and wiser—well, older. The summit blocks scared me, and I wasn't sure how to cross them. Little by little, I took my

tentative steps across the sugar-dusted rock and realized, hey, maybe I do belong up here.



Old Man Mountain + Black Buttes Traverse (7789'/8028', Class 3, Northernmost Sierra)

Drive on I-80 from Sacramento toward Truckee, and Old Man Mountain will be one of the first Sierra mountains you'll identify as a true Sierra peak.

*Old Man Mountain
(Photo by Dylan
Kilby).*



Jobs Sister Ridge (Photo by Dylan Kilby).

straight up the Mt. Rose trail from the parking area and check-off the summit. I implore them to check out other peaks on the massif like Rose Knob, Sunflower Mountain (a Great Basin peak!), and Relay Peak. All provide great views of Mt. Rose itself while also being minor summits in their own right. Finally, the Mt. Rose Waterfall provides a refreshing dip for those who sought a longer ascent; the Tahoe Rim Trail from Relay Peak skirts alongside it for almost a quarter mile.

Tahoe Triple Crown: Freel Peak, Jobs Sister, and Jobs Peak (10,881'/10,823'/10,633', Class 2, Carson Range)

Freel Peak is on the SPS List, but its sister peaks are worth getting on while you're up there. The traverse is the "Tahoe Triple Crown," and bagging them in one day is a goal for many northern Sierra mountaineers. Starting either from the Tahoe Rim Trail or from Horse Meadow for less snow during early seasons ascents, this traverse circles around three prominent peaks in just a few miles. A clockwise loop starting at Freel Peak is strongly recommended over counterclockwise; the southeast face of Jobs Sister leading to the col of Jobs Peak is steep and sandy. Better to glide down than to face the Sisyphian "two feet up, one foot slid." Jobs Peak is also on the Great Basin List; all three peaks are Tahoe Oguls.

The most dirtbag moment of my life occurred at Jobs Peak. The summit canister is a mailbox embedded into a talus heap. Inside was a chocolate protein bar with "December 2022" written in sharpie. I was either the first hiker up Jobs Peak or the only brave one, for I savored every crumb of that protein bar.

Granite Chief Ridgeline: Granite Chief, Needle Peak, Lyon Peak (9006'/8971'/8891', Class 2+, Granite Chief Wilderness and USFS Lands)

Granite Chief is the eponymous mountain for its wilderness, rising up just a few thousand feet from where the PCT passes west of Palisades Tahoe. Most climbers end their journey at its summit, but intrepid

Previously you had nice granite hills covered in pine; Old Man Mountain's apple-bite summit stands out as "Oh, *that's* a mountain." Though short at barely under 7800', this combined with a traverse of the craggy Black Buttes from the west can be a long, challenging day for the northern Sierra mountaineer who thinks they've seen it all. The Black Buttes themselves stretch from roughly Grouse Ridge to the col between it and Old Man Mountain, where the chipped teeth summits of the former give way to the granite slabs of the latter.

This traverse can be a true sufferfest, depending on the conditions. I traversed the Black Buttes on May 29th, 2023—when ostensible spring was still in January. Between the inability to access Grouse Ridge, the warming slush of the south face, and the manzanita bushwhacking, I could only groan about how this was one hell of a start to my season. (It got better.)

Mt. Rose (10,776', Class 1, Carson Range)

As an SPS lister of considerable prominence and elevation for the area, Mt. Rose needs no introduction. What I will consider are the other areas of note around Mt. Rose. Most climbers tend to go

mountaineers will see there's a whole ridgeline that extends northwest. This includes the volcanic plug of Needle Peak, the talus jumble of Lyon Peak, and two unnamed rises. Both named peaks are Tahoe Oguls, as well as simply being nice times outside. Needle Peak requires low Class 3 moves to reach its summit; though it appears impossible from Granite Chief, circling around to the back side one will find ample routes.

One of the most regrettable sunburns of my life was doing this traverse. In Florida, it's well-known that you can get a sunburn in the shade. For some reason, I thought that California would be different—at altitude, no less. I diligently applied at noon and 2PM, but I guess I decided UV rays had curfew at 4PM. That night was red and painful, as I'm a side sleeper but my toasty cheeks could only take the softest caress.

Twin Peaks (8878', Class 1s2, Granite Chief Wilderness and USFS Lands)

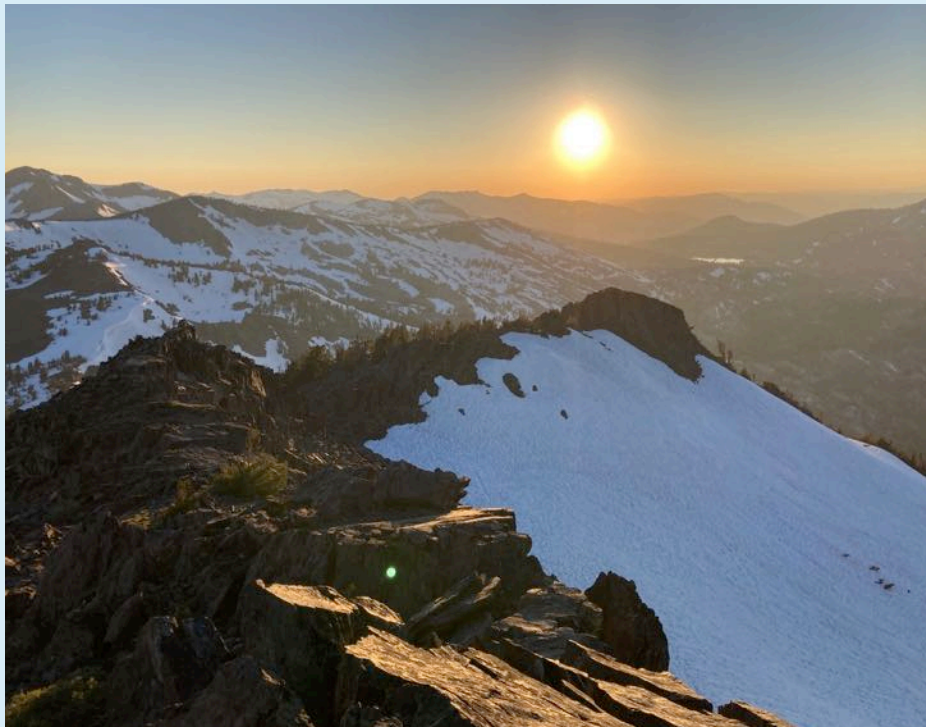
No, it's not the one down in Yosemite—and far as I can tell there are only ski lodges, none black. Twin Peaks is a sharp dual-summit visible from Eagle Rock on Lake Tahoe's west shore. While not the most prominent peak, both summits are fun up-and-over talus scrambles that plunge nearly straight down into the north canyon. As far as I know, climbing up the north faces would be a choss hellfest for those who can only have Type 2 fun.

For bonus points, do Twin Peaks in the winter. You'll have great snowy views toward Ellis Peak and Granite Chief, and you'll almost certainly have the place to yourself. I climbed Twin Peaks in February 2021, following recovery from a mountaineering accident, and standing atop its craggy true summit after staring at rock wondering if this sport was for me is one of my most cherished mountaineering memories.

Rubicon Peak (9183', Class 1s3, Desolation Wilderness)

Rubicon Peak just barely lies in the northernmost tip of Desolation Wilderness. The trailhead is located at the very end of the road at Rubicon Community, who welcome hikers so long as they are respectful and appropriately park (the "Don't Be A Dick" rule applies). Ninety-nine percent of the unmaintained yet clear trail is a steep Class 1 walk up to a large granite block that pokes up out of the timberline. Careful routefinding will show some nice, solid Class 3 moves that get you to a brief airy path with significant exposure to the left and right as you hit the high point.

An out-and-back can take only a few hours, making Rubicon Peak an excellent choice for half a day if you're like me and have itchy feet.



Mt. Tallac (9735', Class 1, Desolation Wilderness)

Sometimes the obvious needs to be repeated for the people in the back. Mt. Tallac is a platonic ideal of a northern Sierra mountain. Approachable from all sides in almost all conditions, this mountain has a ton to offer for any level of mountaineer. The typical ascent occurs from the Mt. Tallac trailhead, which passes by Fallen Leaf Lake before winding through a pine copse and traveling up the

*Sunset on Mt. Tallac
(Photo by Dylan Kilby).*



*McConnell Traverse
(Photo by Dylan Kilby).*

prominent peaks in Desolation Wilderness, with the exception of Dicks Peak. It's also strikingly gorgeous, with the section from Mt. Agassiz to Mt. Price being especially pretty with the former's diving board summit. This traverse is not for the ill-prepared; the section from Pyramid to Agassiz requires serious Class 4 (some would say Class 5) scrambling/climbing skills over a sustained distance, and a direct traverse from McConnell Peak to Tells Peak includes navigating manzanita and the granite pinnacle known as Selene's Bean, which I named after my cat's toes.

If a full traverse is too much, then you can easily break things up and have a phenomenal time in a picturesque and, indeed, desolate area of the northern Sierra. Pyramid Peak alone is a great climb, with well-earned SPS membership. Climbing Mt. Price and Mt. Agassiz gives you excellent footing on granite slabs while passing by alpine lakes. If you're up for it, climb the notch to the southwest of Mt. Price's summit. Finally, the northern Crystal Range Traverse from Tells Peak to Red Peak is a bushwhack, chossfest, and scramble best taken direct—and you'll knock off four Tahoe Oguls in a rarely-visited area.

[Round Top \(10,381', Class 3, Carson Pass\)](#)

If you've heard of the northern Sierra, then you've heard of Round Top. It's one of the first peaks you'll see when approaching Lake Tahoe from the south or Highway 89. Its rounded dome extends from The Sisters pinnacles to a lovely ridgeline that alternates between Class 3 and Class 4 scrambling. The recommended route is to start from the Carson Pass

northern side of a large talus bowl. But there's also the Cross Couloir, the Glen Alpine Trail, the S-Chute, the Desolation Wilderness approach . . . if you want excitement, it's there. And you will receive some of the greatest views of Lake Tahoe and Desolation Wilderness that you can get.

I've climbed Mt. Tallac twice: once in December 2020 and a second in June 2023. A winter ascent is a nice, moderate challenge that requires basic snow climbing skills if you take the normal route up the bowl. For the second ascent, I decided to climb up the bowl via the bump at the southeasternmost end of the bowl. I call this "The Nugget," because it's a cute little nugget doing its best. I found the easiest route up The Nugget to be Class 4, but perhaps someone smarter than I will find a better way.

[Crystal Range Traverse: Pyramid through Tells Peaks \(9983' through 8553', Class 4, Desolation Wilderness\)](#)

If you've done it all and want some real challenge, then test your mettle on a full traverse of the Crystal Range. This is an enormous undertaking of almost twenty miles that hits the highest and most

parking area, go up the col between Round Top and The Sisters, then go up the west ridge. It's an S-tier gem, and there's nothing more I can say.

Kirkwood Traverse: Thunder Mountain through Fourth of July Peak (9410' through 9805', Class 2s4, Carson Pass)

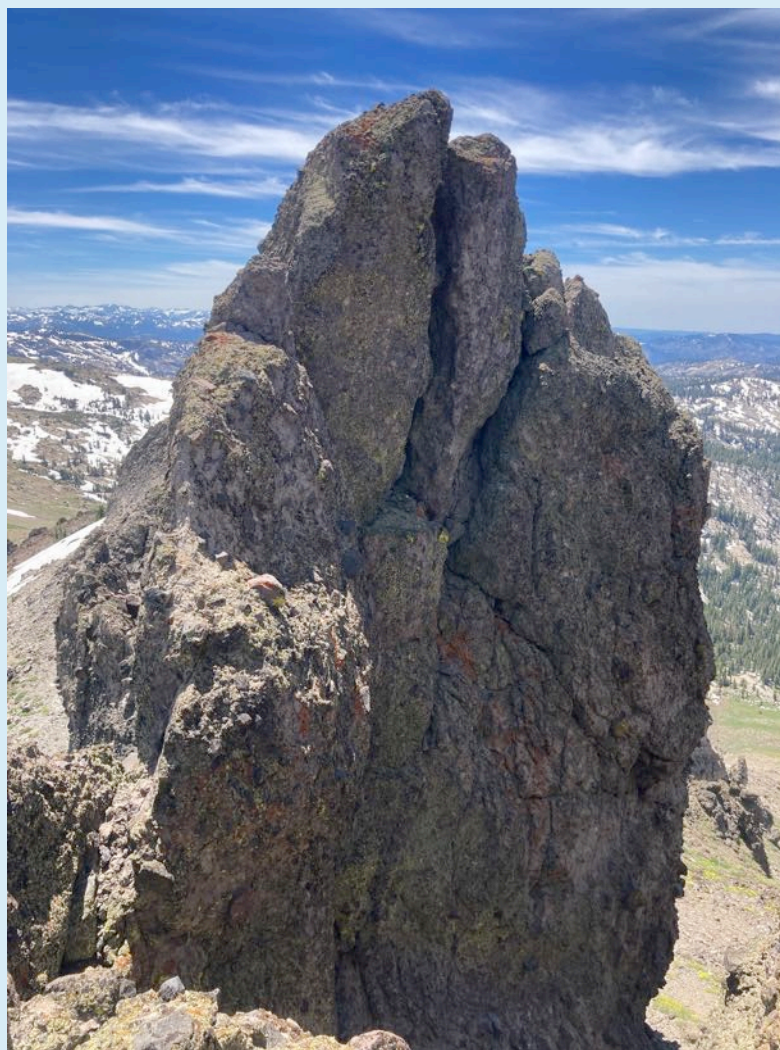
If you can't tell, I like traverses. It's nice to hit a chain of mountains without gaining and losing thousands of feet of elevation for every trailhead. Plus, I like the technical challenge of navigating rock pinnacles and cracked granite. If that sounds fun to you but not so much the full Crystal Range Traverse, then try what I call the Kirkwood Traverse. This hits a stretch of mountains that frame the southern end of the Kirkwood ski area, starting at the snaggletoothed Thunder Mountain (fantastic name) and ending at the short and sweet Fourth of July Peak.

In about ten miles, you'll hit several fun, a couple prominent, and a few historically important peaks. Highlights include the igneous extrusions along Covered Wagon Peak, the volcanic plugs of the Sentinels, and the heavily exposed but solid Class 4 summit block of Thimble Peak. This is another traverse on which I earned a wicked sunburn. I promise I've gotten better over the years.

Red Lake Peak and Stevens Peak (10,063'/10,059', Class 1s3, Carson Pass)

Just north of Round Top are two mountains that get far less attention than their SPS counterpart. Red Lake Peak and Stevens Peak are accessed from the same parking area, and they're short-and-sweet hikes for anyone who just wants to get outside. Red Lake Peak's summit is dotted with volcanic plugs that make for fun Class 3 scrambling; the high point is the last one, as best as I can tell. Then there's a nice ridgeline to Stevens Peak, from which one gains great views of basalt cliffs and talus that crackle along Carson Pass.

No funny stories this time; Red Lake Peak was the very first peak I climbed after



Thimble Peak summit block (Photo by Dylan Kilby).

a fairly significant mountaineering accident that happened in July 2020. To say I was nervous would be an understatement, with constant worries in my head about what would happen and if I would literally fall off the mountain. But that's a story for another article, which I swear will be shorter.

Highland Peak and Silver Peak (10,936'/10,800', Class 2, Ebbetts Pass)

We're getting down to the wire now. These two mountains close in on the 11,000' mark and are qualitatively different from the northern peaks. Highland Peak and Silver Peak share a ridgeline of fractured talus. They're two of the most striking mountains around, being easily visible from Ebbetts Pass and as far north as Mt. Rose. Hitting both peaks is a long day of sustained Class 2 scrambling up and down two false summits, plus scree on Highland Peak's northern end. It's easier to descend from Silver Peak by walking down from the southern col rather than retrace one's by-now-exhausted steps.

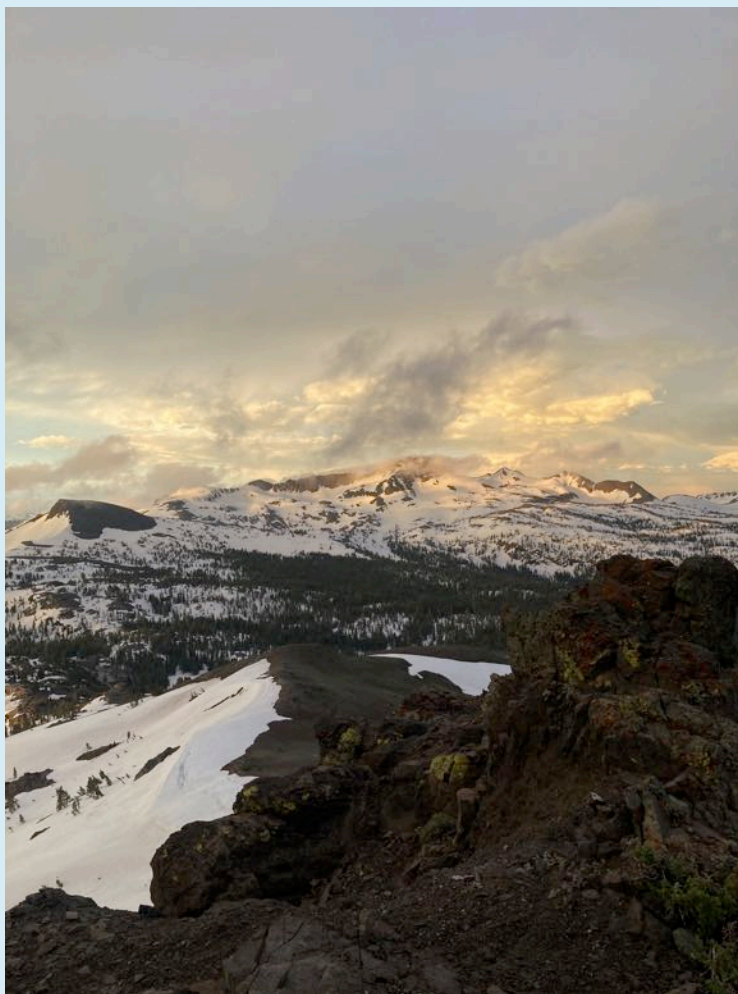
I climbed both of these peaks in mid-July 2023. At the start, two hikers kindly told me I should turn around, as the snow was impassable. Snow drifts up to six feet were still in the shadows of the ridgeline under which the PCT travels, they said. As mountaineers are wont to receive, they gave me confused and bless-your-heart glances as I told them my plans. Good thing I didn't listen to them: the snow cleared up after a mile, and I was awarded with the mountains all to myself.

Raymond Peak (10,014', Class 2+, Ebbetts Pass)

Raymond Peak (or "Brother Raymond") is the ultimate example of northern Sierra volcanism. From the PCT, it and its sister Reynolds Peak look unclimbable. There are tall, crumbly pinnacles all around, and the towering summit blocks look as if they are five days away from cracking under their own pressure. Both mountains are "composite volcanoes," in which progressive layers of ash, dust, and lava scoured by retreating glaciers have left the hardest and most brittle rocks.

The southeast face allows for a less steep but scree-filled method of climbing from the PCT. There's also the northern approach from Raymond Lake, which is steeper but shorter, yet nothing greater than Class 2. The summit blocks return to the bulbous lava of the northernmost Sierra, as if the volcanoes are given one lass hurrah before Yosemite. In mid-July 2023, the northern approach was of course still filled with snow, so I did what I do and snow climbed the climber's right chute until hitting the summit block. I couldn't find any information on it, so I'm claiming a first ascent. Can't say it was anything too special, but it's a route I made for myself and my abilities, and that's all that matters.

If you've reached the end of this article, then congratulations: the password is "Swordfish." Thanks for reading, enjoy the mountains, and try your hand at the northern Sierra—it's an adventure for all.



Top: Kirkland Traverse and Round Top. Above: Raymond Lake (Photos by Dylan Kilby).

The Obelisk and Spanish Mountain

By Sean Casserly

The Obelisk is a striking rock formation that marks the westernmost point of Kings Canyon National Park. Due to its remote location, this dome is not well known to many people. If you know where to look, this dome can be seen from Highway 180 while descending into Kings Canyon; however, clearer views come from the summit of Spanish Mountain. During Sean Casserly's day hike to Spanish Mountain during October of 2018, the summit view to the east provided the inspiration for a future visit. It would take almost five years for such a trip to come together. Initially overnight permits were reserved for a group of four, with the plan of having two climbers on two ropes. Interest in the obscure objective grew, and in the end the group expanded to six climbers: Sean Casserly, Michael Toffey, Todd Lyster, Dylan Doblar, Sean King, and Levi Cover. We adjusted the rope planning to include 3 climbers on two ropes. We took all of the available permits for Crown/Rancheria Trailhead and departed on July 1, 2023.



Background: Todd Lyster, last man down the freehanging rappel (Photo by Mike Toffey). Insert: Obelisk and the snowy valley (Photo by Sean Casserly).

The main non-climbing challenge surrounded the record high snow levels in the Sierra Nevada. After the Sierra received triple the amount of snowfall than the average winter, we had concerns about trail conditions and river crossings. The original itinerary for the trip was much more ambitious, but under the conditions granted to us, we resigned to focus primarily on the Obelisk. The



easiest way to approach the Obelisk (if you don't have a high clearance 4WD vehicle) is from Crown Valley Trailhead. After the huge snow year, however, Rancheria Creek and most named creeks throughout the Western Sierra Nevada were impassable. With differing objectives, the party split into two approach groups. Sean Casserly chose to take a solo direct "low approach" to Obelisk, while the others planned to climb a multi-pitch route on Mt Hoffman and then

take a "high approach" over Spanish Mountain. The low route meant less gain and distance but ran the risk of two impassable creek crossings. The high route meant no crossings but more elevation gain and more time hiking through snow. Both routes started from the Spanish Lake OHV trailhead, which usually opens on July 1st, but remained closed this year due to excessive fallen trees and snow cover.

Sean Casserly started on the "low approach" at 11:00 am. He followed the OHV road for 1.3 miles, then at 7,400' began hiking cross country towards the joining of Rancheria Creek and Statham Creek. After crossing an otherwise uncrossable Statham Creek with a fallen tree, he continued up Spanish Lake Trail past Statham Meadows and Spanish Lakes until snow drifts covered the forest understory. The second half of the approach was completely covered in snow. Another fallen tree made for a safe crossing of Rodgers Creek, and a snowy slog took him to base camp in the valley a quarter mile west of Obelisk. After climbing Mt Hoffman, the others started up the Spanish Lake OHV trail after 3pm. The snow proved more

challenging than anticipated and they were forced to set up camp along Rodgers Ridge short of Spanish Mountain.

The next morning Sean Casserly visited Tombstone Ridge while the others climbed Spanish Mountain and continued to the snowy valley where Sean had set up camp. Despite no previously documented ascents of Tombstone Ridge, the location was undoubtedly visited by survey parties of old. Both of our parties returned at about the same time and sorted gear before making our way to the West Face.



Top: Mike Toffey and Levi Cover battling suncups on the approach to Spanish Mountain (Photo by Todd Lyster). Above: In the moat (Photo by Levi Cover).

The Climb of The Obelisk

Type: Trad, 700 feet, seven pitches, Grade II

First Ascent: Fred Beckey and Hooman Aprin, 1971*

We ended up needing only five roped pitches. We had two teams of three. Mike led Team 1 with Sean K and Levi following while Todd and Dylan alternated leading Team 2 with Sean C following. The first challenge was identifying and getting to the start of pitch 1. The belay spot was across a steep snowfield and inside of a deep moat. Once situated, Mike led the first pitch, but having trouble in a tight chimney, he dropped his pack mid-climb and then set up an anchor from above. This left Sean and Levi to deal with three backpacks between two people. This was an ordeal that led them to take 1.5 hours climbing the first pitch. Team 2 followed, but Todd learned from watching Mike's lead and exited the chimney early and face climbed, avoiding most difficulties.

On pitch 2, Mike left his belay device at the belay station atop pitch 1! Five climbers were cramped on this tiny little belay station that was four inches wide. Mike did not want to belay with a munter hitch with two people on one rope, so Todd led up with the second rope and Mike's ATC. The pitch looked so steep and improbable from below that Todd thought Mike must have been off route, but key holds revealed themselves as he climbed, and the difficulties remained just under 5.8. This pitch was the crux, and the less experienced members of the party felt a lot of stress as they waited for the leaders to sort things out. Todd built his anchor, passed Mike his ATC, and then the rest of Team 1 started up. The "shenanigans" made it such that Sean K and Levi had to tie in practically right next to each other. This meant that Levi's face was right next to Sean's butt and they had to climb in sync up the most challenging pitch. To make things worse, Sean was experiencing some gastrointestinal issues; poor Levi! Sean C started next and found the route to be quite challenging. Dylan followed closely behind Sean C on the same rope. The most memorable move had climbers "grab the dongle" (a large, comically phallic horn of white granite) to surmount an overhang. Shortly after Team 2 joined Team 1.

Amateur hour was now over, and everything went smoothly from here. We were able to combine pitches 3 and 4 into one rope length. On our fourth pitch, Team 1 took a route to the right of an overhang while Dylan led Team 2 directly up the headwall. There were chicken heads everywhere making the climbing moves themselves easy; however, the pitch was completely vertical, making for some tiring yet spectacular climbing. We free soloed the final 5.4 pitch,

*According to SummitPost, the first ascent was by Allen Steck and Jim Wilson in 1947 via the south face.

Levi Cover following Team 1 and Dylan Doblal leading Team 2 on pitch 3 (Photo by Sean King).





were pretty scared, but we made it down without incident. We downclimbed a short 5.3 lie back instead of undergoing the 3rd optional rappel. We got back to camp shortly after 8pm, then had a late dinner together on a wet patch of dirt in the middle of a giant snow field.

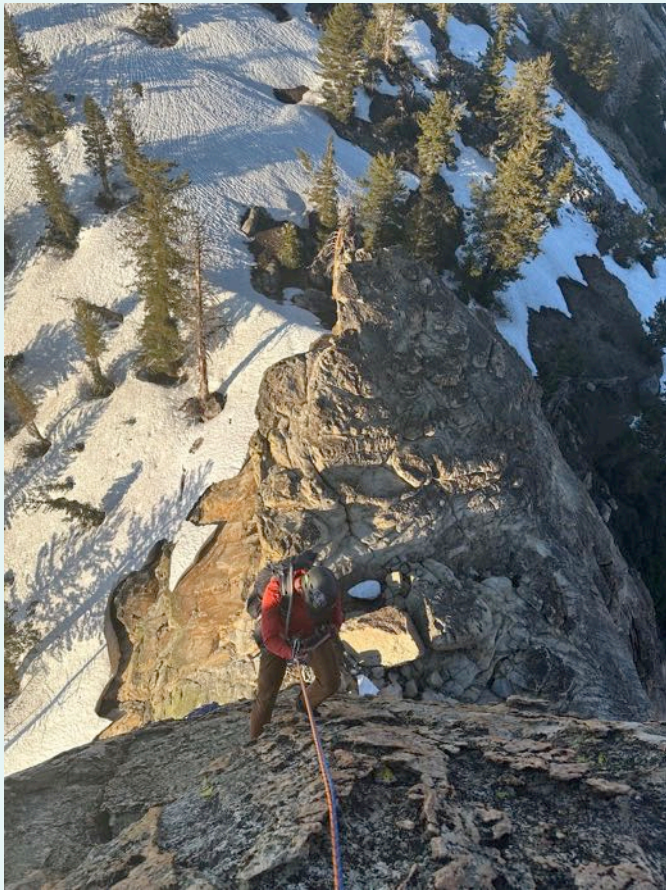
The next morning Levi climbed Tombstone Ridge and broke camp with Sean C. On their way to the trailhead, they scrambled up a challenging class 4 rock formation, which they referred to as "Geraldine Crest." The others decided to stay one more night and climb some more. Todd led Dylan and Sean K up the "Southeast Buttress," a four pitch 5.8 featuring a challenging offwidth start, a steep corner hand crack, and bullet rock over a steep bulge to the usual low angle chickenhead finish. Mike Toffey caught a cold and hiked Tombstone Ridge (and positioned himself for some excellent photos of the climbers on route) as a consolation prize.

and everyone felt very safe in doing so. I don't know where the 7th pitch is, so perhaps it was the summit block, which was more of a VE boulder problem. It took us 6 hours to complete the climb, but this would have been drastically reduced if we could have avoided the "shenanigans" on pitches 1 and 2. Confusing and contradictory route beta, the lack of a topo, and varied levels of multipitch experience all added to the adventure in their own way!

We changed out of our climbing shoes, then scrambled down to the first rappel station. This short rap was a nice warm up for the main event, which was a 160 foot free-hanging rappel to the notch. We tied our 60 and 70m ropes together, and off we went. Both Seans and Levi



Above: Todd Lyster leading the engaging 3rd pitch of the SE Buttress. Right: Todd Lyster leading Team 2 (Photos by Sean Casserly)



Is the Obelisk the hardest peak with a minimum prominence of 300 feet in the Sierra Nevada? At 5.8, The Hermit has a more difficult YDS rating; however, it is only one pitch, no more than twenty feet tall. Some may bring up Thunderbolt Peak; however, this has barely more than 200 feet of prominence, putting it in the same category as other challenging features such as Castle Rock Spire or Higher Cathedral Spire. A second question also arises; should the Obelisk be considered as a candidate for the SPS list? I will leave that to the readers to decide.

Ed. Note:

The Echo usually publishes articles contributed by our members, but SPS Chair Jason Pair admired this ambitious Obelisk climb which was described on the SPS Facebook page and thought it would be of interest to SPSers and deserved greater distribution. Although the author Sean Casserly is not currently a member, we hope he will join and look forward to hearing him explore his questions about the suitability of the Obelisk for listing!



Above: Mike Toffey taking a leap of faith (Photo by Todd Lyster). Below: All smiles on the summit of the Obelisk L to R: Levi Cover, Sean King, Mike Toffey, Sean Casserly, Todd Lyster, Dylan Doblal (Courtesy Sean Casserly).

Bago and Rixford

September 23-25, 2023

By Tina Bowman

In thirty-five years of leading outings, this was the most difficult for me to get from the planning stage to the trailhead. As participant Julie Coleman put it, it was “the little trip that could.”

Jim Fleming and I originally scheduled an outing to Kaweah for just after the quota period ended in Sequoia NP. Then they changed that date. Then thanks to the huge winter we had, the damaged Mineral King road was closed for the season. So we moved to the Kearsarge Pass Trail and climbs of Bago and Rixford. Then tropical storm Hilary wrecked the Onion Valley Road. Having a backup plan to go to Piute Pass and climb Pilot Knob (N) and Four Gables, we were fortunate that the day before I needed to get the “walk-up” permit (online, two weeks prior to the outing) Inyo County officially opened the road. (People had been driving around the road closed sign, but I was unwilling to do that for a Sierra Club outing.) Then, I screwed up trying to get the permit for Friday, September 22nd (I needed to refresh my browser). Finally, I secured a permit for Saturday, and we were set. Whew!

Three of the people originally on the Kaweah trip stuck with Jim and me through all of this uncertainty and made it on the outing: Julie, Orly Marmur, and SPS chair Jason Pair. Logan Sewell rounded out our group. So off we went on National Public Lands Day and the first day of autumn. The Kearsarge Pass trail was especially busy for

this time of year because of the JMT and PCT hikers using it as a resupply point, traveling the Sierra after the snow had mostly melted and the streams had calmed. Also, because the road into Kings Canyon was closed, again because of the winter damage, all the people hiking the Rae Lakes loop were coming in and out of Kearsarge Pass rather than Roads End.

We spent two nights at Charlotte Lake, saying hello to the ranger on Saturday on her way back to her patrol cabin after a day out and about her area. Sunday morning when we started for Bago, we said goodbye to Jason, who said he’d wave to us from Rixford. He needed to be back at work fixing people’s crooked teeth on Monday—and he had already climbed Bago. The week before the outing, member Jeff Temple had emailed me that the Bago register was wet, so I brought a new SPS book and brought home then old one to dry out (it went back to 2012, placed by Jack Wickel). The climb of Bago was straightforward, avoiding the remnant of a cornice, and everyone enjoyed the splendid views into Kings Canyon and all around.

After climbing University on Friday, Jason met a fellow named Isaac, who came by our camp Saturday night to say hello and joined us on the summit of Bago. Isaac tagged along as we headed down, back to the Kearsarge trail, and on to Rixford.



Mt. Bago from the junction of the JMT/PCT and Kearsarge Pass Trail (Photo by Tina Bowman).

Right: On the way to Bago, L to R Orly Marmur, Jim Fleming, Logan Sewell, and Julie Coleman. Below: On Rixford, L to R, Orly Marmur, Logan Sewell, Isaac Simons, and Julie Coleman (Photos by Tina Bowman).



Jim had climbed part of Rixford some years before and remembered about where the group he was with started up

from the trail on the south and then southeast slope. This went, but with more talus and trees to get through, and then more work to get to the summit than if we had left the trail a little farther east, where it crosses a small stream with a couple of short switchbacks east of the stream. After signing in after Jason, I scouted around for a better route down. A short chute on the west side of the south ridge would take us back to the saddle south of the summit area, but then we'd be going down the terrain we'd come up. Dropping down along the east ridge looked a lot better, scree after getting down from the summit area. Unfortunately, a lot of peaks run together in my memory, and I'd forgotten that when I last climbed it in 2007, I'd left the trail farther east and ascended the route we took down. It started looking familiar, but a lot of peaks have similar slopes, so I knew my memory might not be reliable.



Logan left early on Monday to get back to Costa Mesa, making us now a group of four.

Orly decided not to stop for lunch, so she left us at Flower Lake. Just before then an Inyo NF ranger coming up the trail asked to see our permit, so I hauled that out. A happy group of three said goodbye at the parking lot after three days of fine early fall weather with a little frost in places in the mornings. I hope never again to have so much trouble just to get an outing to the trail!



Outings

We've chosen the photo at right taken by Mat Kelliher, showing climbers ascending Mt. Emerson on an SPS trip, to represent the outings section. Do you have a photo you would like to see here? If so, please send your submission as an email attachment to tina@bowmanchange.com or via USPS to Tina Bowman.

Oct 4 | Wed

LTC

ER: Advanced Mountaineering Program (Fall 2023): Knots & Basic Safety Systems: First of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This will be an indoor workshop held in the evening reviewing ropes, harnesses, helmets, basic climbing gear, and knots in preparation for later workshops. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. To register please see <http://www.advancedmountaineeringprogram.org>. Ldrs: Patrick McKusky, Dan Richter.

Oct 7 | Sat

LTC

ER: Advanced Mountaineering Program (Fall 2023): Belay Skills: Second of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on belaying and related principles starting with standard sport climbing all the way up to advanced techniques to move large groups across dangerous terrain. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Ldrs: Patrick McKusky, Dan Richter.

SPS outings can always be viewed online on the electronic Angeles Chapter Schedule of Activities:

<http://angeles.sierraclub.org/activities>
<https://sierraclub.org/angeles/sierra-peaks/outings-schedule>

Oct 14 | Sat

LTC

ER: Advanced Mountaineering Program (Fall 2023): Rappelling: Third of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This workshop will focus on rappelling using a variety of techniques with a heavy emphasis on redundancy, safety,

OUTINGS

Leaders in this issue's schedule:

Patrick McKusky pamckucky@att.net
Robert Myers rmmyers@ix.netcom.com
Ann Pedreschi Shields apedreschi@sbcglobal.net
Dan Richter dan@danrichter.com

and efficiency. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Ldrs: Patrick McKusky, Dan Richter.

Oct 14 | Sat

LTC

LTC Seminar Fall 2023 #1: The Angeles Chapter Leadership Training Committee is kicking off 2023 training with another "hybrid" seminar, all virtual. Learn about essential topics from Sierra Club Values, Conservation, and Safety to best leadership practices, group management, trip planning, steps to leadership, and a First Aid overview, followed by our legendary scenarios. Because there's an online e-learning component and homework and a pre-exam, you'll want to register enough in advance to guarantee your spot as space is limited. Later applications may be accepted on a space-available basis but are not guaranteed, so register early. Come learn all about the best leadership practices of our outings program. Note: Our *Leader's Reference Book (LRB)* was revised in 2022 just as National Sierra Club launched a new *Outings Leadership Training ("OLT")* presenting the latest training on Sierra Club values, commitments, equity, and more. Angeles is already incorporating these trainings into our own, refining our seminar throughout 2023 and including National's online e-

Please note: Currently the Sierra Club requires all participants on an outing more than an hour from help to complete a medical form, and leaders for such outings must complete a safety management plan. Both are fairly simple forms, which are available at the LTC web site here: <https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/leadership-outings/forms-resources>.

learning. For registration and more information go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/leadership-seminar>.

Oct 21 -22 | Sat-Sun

LTC

ER: Advanced Mountaineering Program (Fall 2023): Anchors & Systems: Fourth of four climbing workshops aimed at developing skills for 3rd, 4th, and 5th class climbing both as a participant or a future Sierra Club M and E leader. This weekend completes the series of AMP workshops at Joshua Tree National Park and focuses on building anchors and applying previously learned skills in real world climbing situations with multiple participants. All participants must have prior roped climbing experience and commit to all four classes. Ldrs: Patrick McKusky, Dan Richter.

Nov 5 | Sun

LTC

LTC Seminar Fall 2023 #2: The Angeles Chapter Leadership Training Committee is kicking off 2023 training with another "hybrid" seminar, all virtual. Learn about essential topics from Sierra Club Values, Conservation, and Safety to best leadership practices, group management, trip planning, steps to leadership, and a First Aid overview, followed by our legendary scenarios. Because there's an online e-learning component and homework and a pre-exam, you'll want to register enough in advance to guarantee your spot as space is limited. Later applications may be accepted on a space-

Thinking of leading a trip or looking for info on a trip you've already decided on?

SPS Safety Chair Doug Mantle invites you to e-chat about it, get his input, flesh out your ideas—
sierradoug@icloud.com.

OUTINGS

available basis but are not guaranteed, so register early. Come learn all about the best leadership practices of our outings program. Note: Our *Leader's Reference Book (LRB)* was revised in 2022 just as National Sierra Club launched a new *Outings Leadership Training ("OLT")* presenting the latest training on Sierra Club values, commitments, equity, and more. Angeles is already incorporating these trainings into our own, refining our seminar throughout 2023 and including National's online e-learning. For registration and more information go to <https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/leadership-seminar>.

Nov 11-12 | Sat-Sun

LTC

C: Wilderness First Aid Course: The course runs from 7:30 am to 5:30 pm on Saturday and Sunday in Fullerton plus four hours of video lectures (on-demand) during the following week. This course meets the 24-hour WFA requirement for I/M/E leader ratings. Fee includes instruction, pdf of course notes and two laminated cards with response protocols. COVID precautions include distancing when possible and masks. Proof of CPR within previous 5 years, signed release of liability and proof of COVID vaccination status are required to enroll. Fee \$180 (full refund until 10/13/23). For sign-up, see instructions and application at <http://wildernessfirstaidcourse.org>.

SPS safety chair Doug Mantle notes that the INYOSAR (Inyo search and rescue) site on Instagram is a useful tool for determining the latest safety risks in the Sierra with related stories.

Dec 2-3 | Sat-Sun

LTC, WTC, HPS, DPS, SPS

I: Navigation: Mission Creek Preserve Navigation

Noodle: Navigation noodle at Mission Creek Preserve to satisfy the basic (I/M) level navigation requirements. Saturday for practice, skills refresher, altimeter, homework, campfire. Sunday checkoff or additional practice. Medical form required from all participants. Send email with contact info (mailing address, phone numbers), navigation experience/training, any WTC, leader rating, rideshare to Leader: Robert Myers. Assistant: Ann Shields. Note: Early (at least two weeks prior to the event) sign-up for all navigation checkoffs and practices is recommended. These outings require substantial pre-outing preparation work, including completion of both a comprehensive written exam and a route planning assignment that will be mailed to you prior to the checkoff. See Chapter 6 of the *Leader's Reference Book* for more information.

From the Outings Chair

Hello, SPSers!

I really hope that your peakbagging aspirations and goals have been going well this season, despite the amazing snow fields and a summer hurricane to boot! I've seen some fun trip reports and accomplishments so far, and I hope your climbing will continue until the rains and fresh snow arrive. I've been receiving a few new trip plans for late summer outings. It's definitely not too late to plan October outings, especially since permits will be easier to acquire late season! Again, we're really looking for qualified SPS Leaders to lead outings to any SPS (or even non-SPS) peaks—to help fulfill the goals of those lesser experienced peakbaggers! Please let me know if you have any questions about the paperwork requirements. Additionally, please also let me know if you need support on leadership or ratings advancement as well as suggestions for fun climbs. Again, it would be great if many of you can post your experiences to our SPS Facebook page <https://www.facebook.com/groups/366711653441263>) so we can be more informed and enjoy your adventures.

Happy Climbing,
Phil Bates

OUTINGS

You can visit the SPS website for an up-to-date listing of outings at <http://www.sierraclub.org/sps>.

Wilderness Permit Info

Most wilderness permit reservations are now made through <http://recreation.gov>. For day use permits for Desolation Wilderness, get a free permit from a local Forest Service office any time of year or at the trailhead in summer. For overnight permits year round, go to recreation.gov.

INYO NATIONAL FOREST

Web site: www.fs.usda.gov/main/inyo/home

All wilderness permits are reserved through <http://recreation.gov>. Follow instructions regarding permit pick up. This includes the “walk-up” permits (and you now have to pay for them!).

Eastern Sierra InterAgency Visitor Center, Lone Pine, CA
(760) 876-6200

White Mountain Ranger Station
Bishop, CA 93514
(760) 873-2500

Mammoth Lakes Visitor Center
Mammoth Lakes, CA 93546
(760) 924-5500

Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center, Lee Vining, CA 93541
(760) 647-304

KERN PLATEAU

Web site: www.fs.usda.gov/sequoia

Wilderness permits are required only for overnight stays in the Golden

Trout Wilderness. For trips departing from a Sequoia National Forest trailhead, permits are free via email using the application you'll find at https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/sequoia/passes-permits/recreation/?cid=fsbdev3_059517. For entry into the Golden Trout Wilderness from Inyo NF or Sequoia/Kings Canyon NPS, make your reservation through <http://recreation.gov>.

Cannell Meadow Ranger District
105 Whitney Road
P.O. Box 9
Kernville, CA 93238
Phone: 760/376-3781
Fax: 760/376-3795

Tule River Ranger District
32588 Highway 190
Springville, CA 93265
Phone: (559) 539-2607

YOSEMITE NATIONAL PARK

Web site: www.nps.gov/yose

Yosemite wilderness permit reservations become available by lottery twenty-four weeks in advance through <http://recreation.gov>. Any remaining reservations become available on a first-come, first-served basis after the lottery process is complete for that week's reservations up until seven days in advance. May-October walk-up unreserved permits (40% of the trailhead quota) are available on a first-come, first-served basis beginning at 11:00 a.m. on the day before the intended date at permit issuing stations. Reservations aren't needed from November through April, but permits are required. Trailhead quotas are in effect in winter. See <https://www.nps.gov/yose/planyourvisit/wildpermits.htm>.

If your starting trailhead is outside Yosemite NP, obtain your permit from the land agency that manages that trailhead.

SEQUOIA AND KINGS CANYON NP

47050 Generals Highway
Three Rivers, CA. 93271-9599
Phone (559) 565-3766 for permit & trail info. Fax (559) 565-4239

For general information go to www.nps.gov/seki. For wilderness permits go to www.nps.gov/seki/planyourvisit/wilderness_permits.htm.

Up to six months in advance of your trip, permits may be reserved at <http://recreation.gov>. Permits may be self-issued outside the quota period, from roughly mid-September to mid-May.

SIERRA NATIONAL FOREST (WESTSIDE) ENTRY

Web site: <https://www.fs.usda.gov/sierra>

Ansel Adams Wilderness—North
Bass Lake Ranger District
57003 Road 225
North Fork, CA 93643
Phone: (559) 887-2218

Ansel Adams Wilderness—South
John Muir, Kaiser, and Dinkey Lakes
Wildernesses
Pineridge/Kings River Ranger District
29688 Auberry Road
Prather, CA 93651
Phone: (559) 855-5355

See https://www.fs.usda.gov/detail/sierra/passes-permits/?cid=fsbdev7_018115 for wilderness permit information; reservations are made at <http://recreation.gov>.



Jeffrey W. Koepke

July 9, 1946-May 28, 2023

By Denise Barcon Koepke

Born on July 9, 1946 in Bedford, Ohio, Jeffery W. Koepke was the first born of three sons. He attended Oberlin College, graduating with a degree in chemistry and going on to graduate school at UCLA, where he received his Ph.D. in chemistry. After postdocs at Berkeley and Bell Labs in New Jersey, he then received a position at Unocal's research center in Brea, California, where he worked for approximately twenty years. Following the closure of the Unocal center, Jeff became a patent agent, working for a large intellectual property law firm in Orange County, and later for a start-up tech company, followed by consulting work.

At some point in his twenties or thirties, Jeff discovered a passion for mountain climbing. He climbed sixty-five Sierra peaks and more than twenty desert peaks. He met many fellow climbers during this time, including his good friend and climbing partner, Bob Meador. Jeff and Bob shared many funny, scary, and, at times, dangerous pursuits in the Sierra, which they enjoyed reminiscing about later in life. He also had the good fortune to meet many other Sierra Club climbers and share in their trips and experiences. These were some of the happiest times for Jeff. While he said he was never particularly athletic, he seemed to thrive with the challenge and camaraderie of the mountaineering community.

Jeff and Denise Barcon Koepke (Photo courtesy of Denise Barcon Koepke).

Jeff spent most of his adult life in California, living in Los Angeles, Orange County, and briefly in Santa Barbara County. He spent the last sixteen years in Irvine, enjoying a lovely neighborhood, walking his dog, and conversing with friendly neighbors. He also had lifelong passions for art museums, music, travel, movies, and genealogy. He devoted many hours to his genealogy research and volunteered at the Family History Center in Orange, California, where he assisted others who were researching their ancestors.

As fate would have it, Jeff met his wife, Denise, on a Sierra Club beach walk in Huntington Beach. They struck up a friendship which evolved into marriage in 1987 on the Palos Verdes peninsula. Jeff and Denise never had children, but they managed to have three shelties during their marriage who were essentially spoiled and treated like humans.

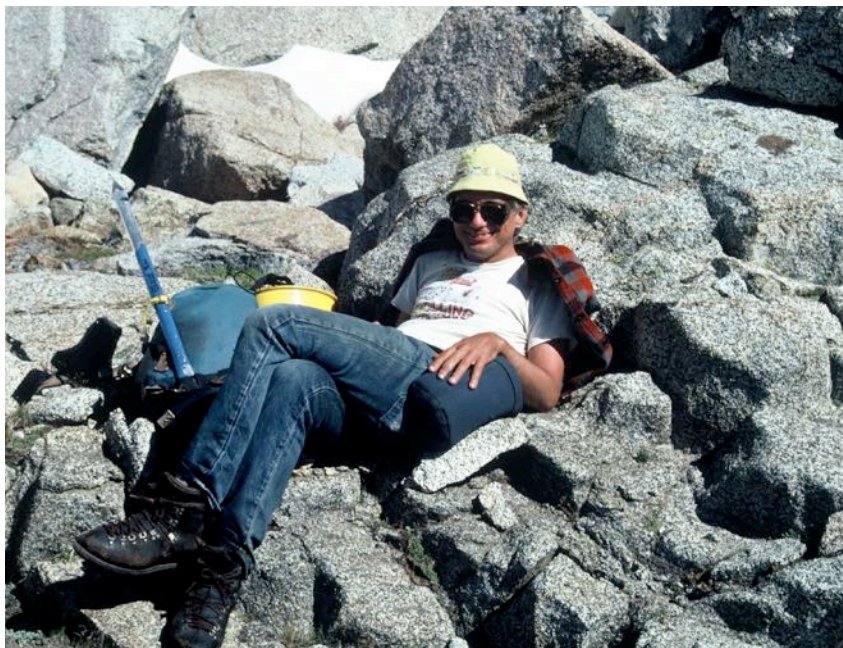
Jeff leaves behind his wife, two brothers, Steve and Bruce, several nieces and nephews, and friends and neighbors who will miss him. He was a kind, generous, intelligent soul who seemed to find many things in life to enjoy, including his beloved mountaineering during that stage of life when he was healthy and able to climb. He had the misfortune to suffer from difficult health issues after retiring but did his best to overcome what he could. Sadly, he lost his fight on May 28, 2023. He was seventy-six years old.

Jeff Koepke

By Tina Bowman

I met Jeff Koepke on an SPS trip led by Jackie Van Dalsem to Abbot, Mills, and Morgan #1 (now designated South) over Labor Day weekend in 1981 when I'd been an SPS member for a little more than a year. He pointed out to me that most people start out with the HPS, then DPS, and finally SPS. Really? I could see the logic, but I had started backpacking in the Sierra so starting to climb peaks there made sense to me.

Jeff became a climbing partner for private trips, not only to Sierra peaks but also to HPS peaks, where we ran the trails at times. Great conversation! We both were cat lovers. We did a dayhike in 1985 of Mt. Morrison with Tom Bowman and my kitten, Ishmael, who rode in a waist camera pack so I could bottle feed him. On this trip, as I recall, we also drove to see the bristlecone pines. We were all in my 1980 Datsun 210 station wagon, which got great gas mileage and had quite good



*Above: Jeff Koepke, on Mt. Darwin, August 2, 1986 (Photo by Tina Bowman).
At left: L to R, Jeff Koepke, unknown woman, Gene Olsen, Gene Gail.*

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clearance but was seemingly powered by hamsters. We came to a hill that the car just couldn't make with all of us in it, so I had Jeff and Tom walk to the where the hill eased off. In 1986 we made an attempt on Mt. Darwin, but, as I recall, making the transition from the glacier to rock on the usual route stymied us.

A chemist, he made his own sunscreen, which always amazed me.

Jeff was a very kind person, a gentle soul, and fine person to spend time with. I'll always remember him with fondness.

Jeff Koepke

By Mary McMannes

It took years for Jeff to convince me his name was spelled *Koepke* and not *Kopechne*. He emphatically said, "I am not related to Mary Jo Kopechne nor Teddy Kennedy!" I hope for a goodbye message I can get it right.

Born in wholesome Ohio along with eight Presidents, he was an easy friend to like. He pursued intellectual matters, and I never knew he had a doctorate, but he happily traded brainy laboratory matters for chasing Sierra peaks. He and his gang called Team Cinco did well in bagging difficult peaks, and then, it was team duo climbing with good friend Bob Meador working on the DPS List and state highpoints.

In later life, the peak fever subsided when the fickle finger of fate visits one with health maladies. He threw

himself into genealogy studies, and he became a valuable asset for anyone searching out family trees. I was lucky to pick his brain, and he generously met me often at the local archives as I tried to find our family's Ohio Shawnee Indian. Sad to say, we never found him, but I learned how to navigate the searches and learned plenty about DNA from the expert.

He said he was lucky when Denise married him—she being the Wonderful Wife or "W squared." He often said, "Who would have put up with me this long?" They both loved classical music, Bruce Springsteen and sent exquisite Madonna (not that one) cards at Christmas. Jeff was funny, fun, and generous to all who had the good fortune to know him. I will miss checking in with him via email. I will miss his funny one liners. He was proud to be an SPSer, and as a final favor to him, we will take him back to the Sierra as his final resting place.

Dare to Lead! Virtual Leadership Training Fall Seminars 2023

Interested in starting on your path to become an Angeles Chapter outings leader? The first step is to take the Leadership Training Seminar offered virtually this fall on Saturday, October 14, and Sunday, November 5. The five-hour class costs \$25. Get more information and the application here: <https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/leadership-seminar>, where you can also check for the dates for future seminars. At this site, <https://www.sierraclub.org/angeles/leadership-outings/angeles-chapter-leadership-training-program>, you can learn more about the Leadership Training Program.





Steve Curry

August 28, 1951-July 18, 2023

By Greg Mason

One of our own longtime Sierra Club climbers, Steve Curry, left us on the afternoon of 18 July 2023 after he finished a hike in Death Valley NP's Golden Canyon. He was a young 71. By all accounts he was solo hiking on the scenic trail which visits Red Cathedral and several other beautiful sites. The loop hike is almost five miles if you consider the half-mile path to Red Cathedral. Even longer if you go to Zabriskie Point from the Gold Canyon trailhead. The conditions were extreme heat (>120F) which surely contributed to this tragedy.

For those who remember Steve Curry on SPS trips, as I do on several, know him as a wonderful climbing partner and

Steve Curry in Rock Creek Canyon, March 2023 (Photo by Marisa Fernandez).

gentle soul. My best memory of him was a climb we did on the North Couloir of Red Slate in June 2007 with Nile Sorenson and Alex Amies. Go to the SPS *Echo* Archives and read Steve's trip report, Vol 51, No 4. Steve has five or so trip reports, for which he really enjoyed "being the scribe" despite not leading these adventures.

I have not seen Steve in years, and it was an awful morning reading about Steve in the *LA Times*. The story recounts interviewing and photographing Steve at the trailhead where he succumbed. *LA Times* reporters, Hayley Smith and Lorraine Orr, are likely the last ones to talk to Steve that fateful day. [See the links provided below.]

Steve leaves behind a climbing legacy with the Sierra Club. I'm sure other sections like Hundred Peaks and Desert Peaks saw Steve on many a hike. But mostly he leaves behind his loving wife, Rima, who has written some beautiful and sad words on the GoFundme page started after his death. Please go to that site to see her poems.

I have never hiked in DV in the summer, but Steve felt compelled to hike on this extremely hot day. It's usually unwise to do so. It's a beautiful place I leave for the winter months to explore. Also, remember the safe way to hike in remote areas is with a competent partner. You never know what's going to happen. Goodbye Steve. Happy climbing in the beyond.

Former SPS member Steve Curry died at the end of a hike in Death Valley on July 25th. Here are a couple of links with the story and information about Steve with some photos as well: <https://ktna.com/news/local-news/los-angeles-man-who-died-at-death-valley-national-park-identified/> and <https://geniuscelebs.com/los-angeles-steve-curry-death-cause-and-obituary/> and https://enewspaper.latimes.com/desktop/latimes/default.aspx?token=42e23962a5d74614be16bae3d62d13e7&utm_id=106249&sfmc_id=2451116&edid=a564c881-a75b-433b-8f0c-1d58df3b0864. There's also a Gofundme account to help his widow, Rima: <https://gofund.me/7c238104>

Remembering Steve Curry

By Beth Epstein

Steve Curry loved being outdoors. He also loved being with people outdoors. That led him to the Sierra Club and to the Wilderness Travel Course in San Gabriel Valley, first as a student in 2003, then as an instructor, and, in turn, to the Sierra Peaks Section. We moved in those circles in common and were friends but went on only one trip together, to Kern Peak in 2007.

I knew he had stepped away from club activities a few years ago, I expect for health concerns, but on the first night of classes at WTC this year he appeared as a student in the front row of our class. That was a complete testament to his nature: he had a beginner's mind, and his humility allowed him to come back to a place as a student where he had once been a master. He was curious and humble and sought to know and experience things for himself, in an almost scientific way. I am convinced that was one of the things that must have driven him to hike in Death Valley in conditions he knew were so dangerous.

His wife Rima held a memorial at Deukmejian Park on August 26. I am always amazed that just the right people appear at these events to help usher us along in our grief. The voice of one of his former WTC students, Emmy, was especially memorable. She categorized her WTC leaders as either drill sergeants or nurturers and counted Steve among the nurturers. She also made us all laugh and appreciate the comforting ironies of our lives with her empathy for Rima, who is not a hiker, and how hard it must have been to share Steve with the outdoors AND with the Sierra Club.

Another remarkable speaker at Steve's memorial was a former electrician colleague, who told of how Steve had saved his life at the start of his career after a series of missteps that "OSHA would frown upon": standing on top of a ladder, he gripped a live wire in the ceiling and fell to the ground. The friend had driven from Arizona to be there.

Anne Marie Richardson, Sierra Club outings leader and former Leadership Training Committee Chair, also spoke of how she could always count on Steve to be completely prepared and ready as a trip participant, and navigation instructor Diane Dunbar described how she and Steve were caught on a ridge at Mt. Pinos in a hail storm at a recent navigation, and how they were both just delighted to be there as they ran to a more sheltered spot. His delight is something many people recognized, but I think is best described by his friend and fellow WTC instructor, Dawn Burkhardt, who later wrote to me that she knew "that he deeply appreciated being outdoors, in the desert or in the mountains, and that when he was outdoors he was as happy as he ever was, and grateful to have the time and opportunity. I (sic) believe he appreciated it more than most people and that he felt outrageously, lottery-winning lucky to be able to get out into it . . . and also that probably we all should take more moments to reconnect with that pure wonder and appreciation."

Recalling that 2007 Kern Peak trip, I remembered that Steve had found the key to the class 3 route on Indianhead Peak, and in my mind there was a photo of him rounding the corner away into the sunlight, his shaggy reddish hair illuminated by the sun against the copper-red rock. I never did find that photo, but when I received photos from other folks who had been on the trip, I did get a surprise: Steve was always

Steve Curry relaxing at the trailhead after a 2007 climb of Lyell and Maclure (Photo by Tina Bowman).



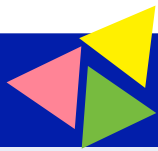
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helping someone with something, reading maps together, or grinning with delight in a group. There were a lot of things I hadn't seen, and wished I had. I realized that I wished I had talked to him about a lot of things—about his life, about his experience on a trip where my friend Brian Reynolds fell to his death, about what it was that gave him so much joy in the outdoors. His loss is a reminder to me not to waste those chances. He'd be the first one to agree.



Clockwise from above: Diana Estrada, Jorge Estrada and Steve Curry en route to Kern Peak, 2007 (Photo by Edd Ruskowitz). Steve second from left on the summit of Maclure, 2007 (Photo by Tina Bowman). Steve Curry and Alex Amies en route to Red Slate Couloir. More photos of this trip may be seen here: <https://photos.app.goo.gl/5ZsSP5VrnHB1xU7> (Photo by Greg Mason).



Mystery Peak Challenge Answer

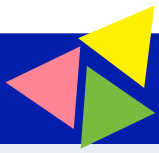
First and only person to respond was Romain Wacziarg, who nailed it. The NOAA photo shows the ridge of Cardinal Mountain on the left, Split Mountain (red and black peak), Birch Mountain, The Thumb barely peaking over the ridge, and Mount Tinemaha on the right.

It took a bit of sleuthing to find this image. “Around the Web” in the last issue included a link for an April 3, 2023, online *New York Times* article “See What California’s Record Snowpack Looks Like, Up Close,” with exciting video footage and photos of the snow survey flights measuring the Sierra snowpack from a NOAA twin turboprop flying through the Sierra 500’ off the ground. The article’s mention of the “five hour course” flown linked to the website of National Operational Hydrologic Remote Sensing Center of NOAA’s National Weather Service:

<https://www.nohrsc.noaa.gov/snowsurvey/surveys.html?year=2023&survey=16>.

That page had a map showing the named Snow Survey flight lines and a link called “Aerial Survey Photos,” which opened the photos taken. Lo and behold, the photos were named according to the Snow Survey flight lines on the map. The photo we used was for Line CA123, just south of Split Mountain. To confirm, we generated a google earth image to match, which showed Split, Thumb, Birch, and Tinemaha over the shoulder of Cardinal, and North and Middle Pal barely perceptible behind and left of Split.





Mystery Peak Challenge

This occasional just-for-fun puzzle is for you to figure out which Sierra peak or peaks are featured in the image. If you have a fine mystery peak puzzle to challenge *Echo* readers, please send it to tina@bowmanchange.com. We welcome any mountain images, including those from popular culture—imagery used and abused in film and print!

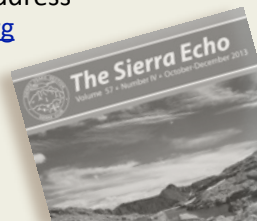
George Christiansen sent us this photo taken from a rough 4WD road in August. Which SPS peak is featured?

Send your answer to Tina Bowman at tina@bowmanchange.com.



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The Sierra Echo

is a quarterly publication of the Sierra Peaks Section of the Sierra Club's Angeles Chapter. For more information, see the back of this newsletter. All questions, copy, and photo submissions should be directed to Tina Bowman, Editor, *The Sierra Echo*, preferably via email at tina@bowmanchange.com. The *Echo* will be available as a PDF download at the SPS website and via a link sent to all SPS members and *Echo* subscribers.





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Deadline for all submissions is three (3) weeks prior to the publication date, i.e., Feb 22, May 25, Aug 25, and Nov 24.

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