

## WHORL MOUNTAIN &amp; MATTERHORN PEAK DAYHIKE



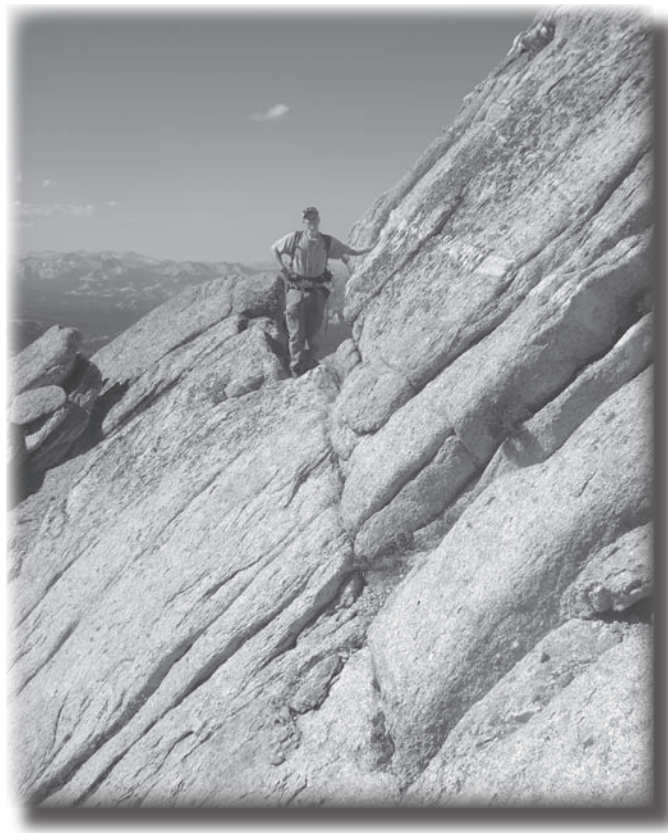
## WHORL MOUNTAIN ASCENT

We met at the Twin Lakes Resort trailhead shortly before 6:00 am for Day 1 of the Sierra Challenge. Some of us were planning Whorl and Matterhorn, some only Whorl, some only Matterhorn and about 6 were doing The Doodad (which was the challenge peak of the day). We all started off at a good clip at 3 mph, some of us taking the long switchbacks and others taking the shorter, steep trail along the waterfall. Shortly after leaving the established horse creek trail, Bob and his group broke away for The Doodad. There were 5 of us in the group heading to Whorl; Patrick, Chris, Adam, Tom, Bill and myself. The trail is difficult to follow, weaving in and out of boulders, trees and heavy bush. We leave the creek and navigate towards Horse Creek Pass. Now the trail is mainly boulder hopping and a little tedious. “The secret of this kind of climbing is like Zen. Don’t think. Just dance along. It’s the easiest thing in the world, actually easier than

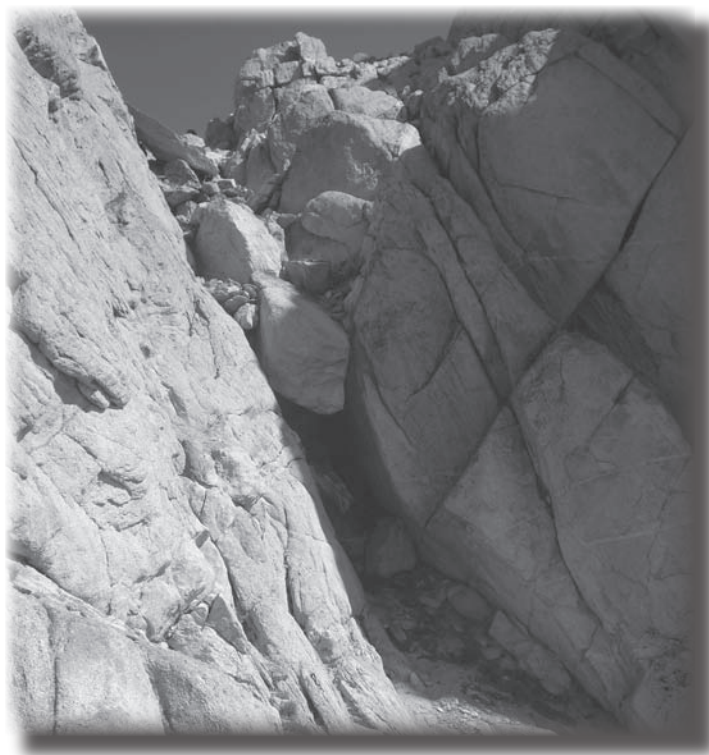
walking on flat ground which is monotonous. The cute little problems present themselves at each step and yet you never hesitate and you find yourself on some other boulder you picked out for no special reason at all, just like Zen.”

Adam and Bill choose the lower pass over a snowfield whereas the rest of us followed Tom and took the higher pass. We all appeared to arrive above the pass at the same, and were all taken in by the beautiful scenery. Once above the pass it opens up into a grassy meadow with streams flowing down to a serene lake next to a snow field. I figured this is where Japhy, Morley and Smith camped in the Jack Kerouac’s Novel the Dharma Bums. This novel was actually my inspiration to climb Matterhorn Peak later today (as it was Patrick’s). We took a break and then saw Adam taking off for Whorl and we all followed him. Bill started to fall a little behind at this point, and Patrick and Chris took the lead. We followed the route description we all had read in

Secor as well as Bob's trip report. Staying low, crossing the bench along the east face Whorl, we found the 3 chutes that are key to a class 3 ascent. I had read that a common mistake is to start up too soon, so I stayed low until I could see the 3 chutes. These chutes are not obvious, but there is really nowhere else to go that would be class 3. Make sure you start up the 3rd chute to the west. Patrick and Chris were leading the route, followed by me, Adam and Tom. Bill had stopped to put on some safety gear and was a ways back. We climbed a ways up the first chute until it ended, then traversed over to the 2nd chute marked in both chutes with a cairn. Then we continued up the 2nd chute near the top then traversed over to the 1st chute (again marked with cairns). Once into the 1st chute you can see the chock stone and can either traverse a small ledge into the chute, or more easily is to climb up the ridge 50 ft to a long chimney that leads to a large ledge just below the chock stone. From here we crawled up through the chock stone and up to the ridge. At this point Patrick and Chris were ahead of me and the others behind, so I continued without the beta of a class 1 ledge. I ended up climbing class 3 to the false summit just to the south, and then Tom saw



*Traverse from 3rd chute*



*Whorl's chock stone*

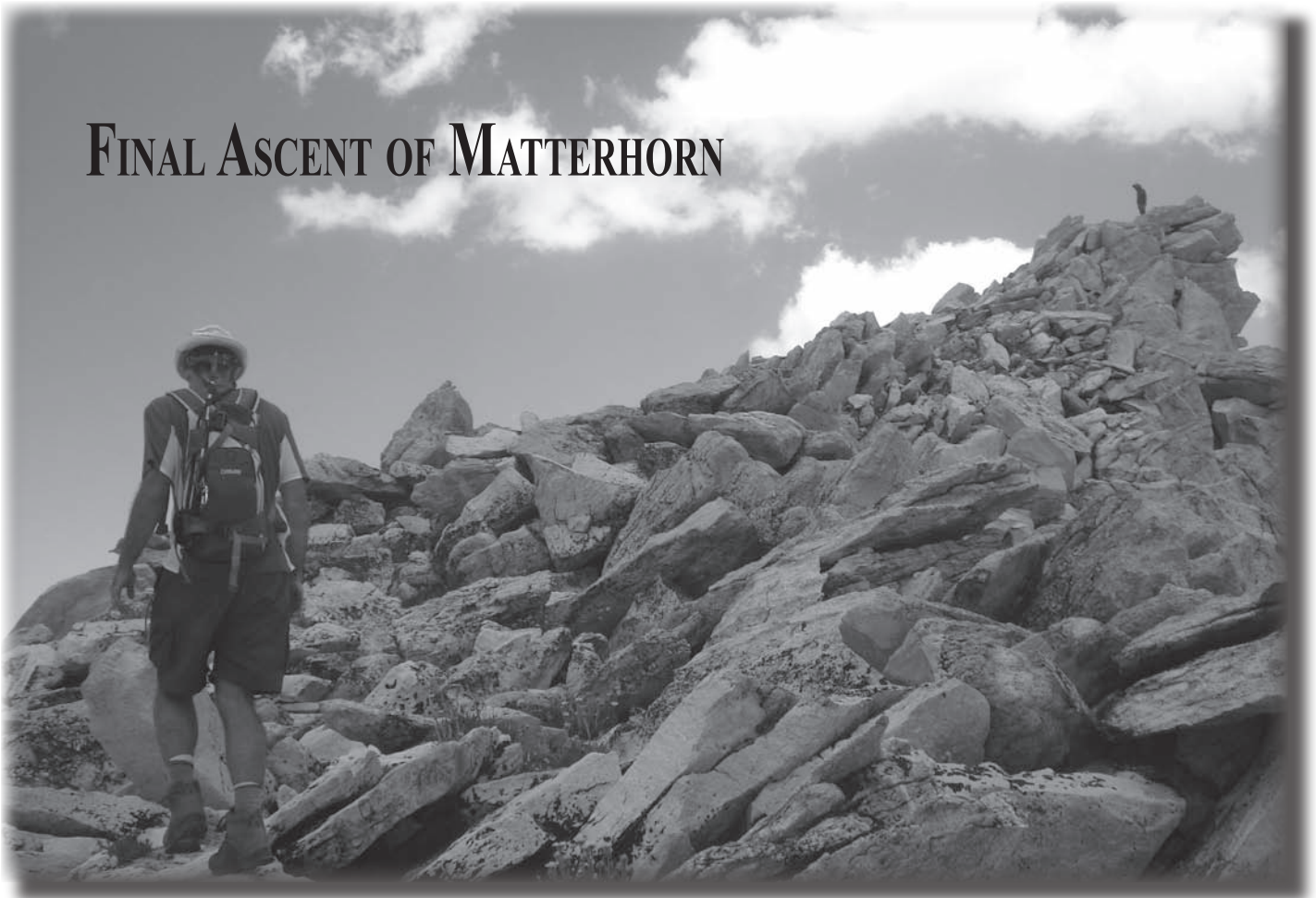
me and corrected my mistake. It was fun traversing the ridge and hooking back up with the ledge just in time to

meet Tom and Adam for the short hike to the summit. The views were great. We hung out for a bit, signed the register dating back to 1981. Took a short video and some pictures and then headed down. We were still a bit nervous that some of the clouds were going to build into a thunderstorm and still wanted to hike Matterhorn today.

## ON TO MATTERHORN PEAK

The descent of Whorl was straightforward. This time we cut to the east a little sooner, cutting off a little extra mileage that I took by staying low during the ascent. We made short work of it and soon started to ascend back up towards Matterhorn. At this point Chris decided to head back to the trailhead as he had already previously climbed Matterhorn and wanted to save his energy for Rodgers tomorrow. Patrick took off up the tedious south east slope of Matterhorn. Having already climbed 5000 ft I was running out of energy. Tom soon caught up with me and passed me. We slogged our way to the summit, meeting up with Bob Burd and his Gang on their descent. Patrick took the direct route to Matterhorn (class 3 or 4)

## FINAL ASCENT OF MATTERHORN



while Tom and I took south west ridge class 2 route. I made it! Whereas the south east slope route might not be worthy of the name of the peak, the views and exposure to the north and west might come a little closer. I first wanted to hike to this peak after reading Dharma Bums 3 years ago. At the time, I had never hiked any Sierra Peak or any peak harder than class 1. I actually wanted to live the experience as related in the novel so bad that I researched guided trips, thinking it was so far beyond my abilities to consider ascending myself. Well, here I am 3 years later thinking this peak was simple (which it was) and I day hiked it along with a much more technical peak (Whorl). Makes me wonder what I will be climbing in another 3 years. I thought of the Zen Saying “When you get to the top of a mountain, keep climbing”. Trying to relate that to where I was in my life. Well, enough of the Zen. On the summit we took in the views, recorded a short video from the summit, signed the summit log and headed back down. Patrick wanted to hang out a bit longer. We had met 2 others on the summit and he was chatting with them.

### BACK TO TWIN LAKES TRAILHEAD

The descent was quick; many sections of loose sand were soft enough to plunge step down. I felt like yodelaying while running down. I headed directly over to the ridge to check out the pass higher than the one we crosses. It looked like it would possibly lead all the way down, but definitely not worth risking to see if it does. So I angled over to hook up with the pass we crossed on the ascent. From there Tom and I made our tedious descent; often losing the trail as we did on our ascent. After much boulder hopping, traversing talus, sliding down scree, whacking through bushes and cairn following we made our way back to the trailhead. A total of 10 hrs 20 minutes, 16 miles and 6500 feet elevation gain. A great hike. Maybe Matterhorn did not quite live up to my expectations, but Whorl more than made up for it. I loved the 3 chute ascent of Whorl and the chock stone. Now to eat and figure out where to camp and get to bed early for tomorrow’s hike.

## TRIP REPORT

# Tunnabora Peak (13,563')

July 12-15, 2007

by Greg Gerlach

I was looking for a way to do Tunnabora Peak and avoid the hassle of obtaining a permit for the Mount Whitney Trailhead. I considered Shepherd Pass but decided against it because the trail starts low in the desert. I settled on Horseshoe Meadows and Cottonwood Pass. It's long, about 56 miles, but I figured that I could use the workout. I drove up to Lone Pine Wednesday afternoon, picked up my permit from the Inter-Agency Visitor Center located just south of town, then drove up to the Tuttle Creek Campground located along the Horseshoe Meadows road.

The next morning, Thursday, I was up and on the road early, drove back into Lone Pine for breakfast, and was hiking up the Cottonwood Pass Trail by 8:00 a.m. I continued up the trail, passing Cottonwood Pass, the national park boundary and Rock Creek along the way. I continued up the trail, finally stopping and making camp

at 6:30 p.m. at Lower Crabtree Meadows. The 19 or so mile hike in took me about 10 ½ hours

On Friday, I was hiking along the trail at 8:15 a.m. towards Wallace Lake. The cutoff trail to the lake from the John Muir Trail is not signed, but I located the trail in short order. The trail is intermittent, and it really saves time and effort to look for it. Upon reaching Wallace Lake, I set up camp, prepared my daypack, then headed southeast up the canyon toward Tunnabora Peak at 1:10 p.m. I made my way up the canyon toward a meadow located at about 11,800' in elevation, then headed southwest up through a class 2 boulder field that provided a convenient break in the cliffs. From the top of the cliffs, I proceeded east up the canyon and made a left turn towards the peak just before Tulainyo Lake, then trudged the final 800' or so up the southwestern slope to the summit. I arrived on top at 3:20 p.m. and the climbing was mostly class 1 with easy class 2 at the top. I read the entries in the peak register and was surprised to see

that I was only the second person to climb the peak this year. Also, the peak register was placed on September 22, 2004 and is about 1/5 full. After signing the summit book, I made my way back to Wallace Lake, arriving at 5:30 p.m. I spent the rest of the afternoon and evening relaxing and reading.

On Saturday, I woke up not looking forward to the 26 mile hike out. I gathered up my gear, had some breakfast and was on my way down the trail at 8:00 a.m. Unlike the previous day, I easily located and followed the Wallace Lake Trail down to the John Muir Trail. I made it to Rock Creek at 3:00 p.m., which I had tentatively planned to camp at, but pushed ahead to the Siberian Outpost because the topo map showed that I should find water there and I still had several hours of daylight left in the day. I arrived at the outpost at 5:30 p.m., then went looking for water. The meadows were bone dry, but I did manage to find a stagnant pool of water after searching along the stream course for an hour. I headed back to my pack and settled in for the night.

I was up at 7:00 a.m. on Sunday and hiking toward the Horseshoe Meadows Trailhead by 7:45 a.m. The 8 mile hike out took me about 3 hours.

## FLORENCE (12,432), VANDEVER (11,947)

### TRIP REPORT

August 19-20, 2006  
by Darrick Danta

**Florence from Franklin Pass.  
The route goes from the right across  
to near the ridge, then up**

*Photo by Darrick Danta*

Mid-August is the perfect time for a Mineral King weekend backpack: marmots have gotten their fill of radiator hoses, so you can safely leave your car without need of shrink-wrapping it in chicken wire; the wild flowers are in full glory; the days are still long; and the evenings have yet to feel the bite of approaching fall. This particular weekend found Jennifer Washington, Doug Owens, and Eric Lesser assembled at 8:00 am and ready to embark on a moderately paced trip co-led by Sara and Darrick Danta with the emphasis on fun!

The trail picks up at the end of the road from the parking area and heads SSE along the Kaweah River, crosses Franklin Creek, then continues up Farewell Canyon to a junction at 9358'. At this point we dropped packs and donned our peak bagging configurations. The main trail continues SSE over grassy

terrain, but different spurs peel off at intervals; one takes a more direct route closer to the stream, but looked more problematic owing to lingering snow in the deeper stretches. This area is of geologic interest: underlain as it is by limestone, it is home to numerous caves, underground drainage, and springs. This particular type of hydrology is termed "deranged," which of course appeals to those of the peak-bagging ilk!

Upon reaching Farewell Gap, simply turn right, scramble up the easy 2nd class talus-y slope, and you're at the top. The descent may take a bit longer owing to loose rocks, but overall it is an easy climb. We then ambled back down to our gear, re-packed, and continued NNE around the side of the hill extending from Tulare Peak. Our plan was to try out a new camp spot located just beyond where the trail



*Sara, Eric, and Doug enjoying the smoky views from atop Vandever.*

crosses Franklin Creek. The map shows a small flat area which the leaders thought would make a suitable site; we also predicted that we would be running out of daylight and energy at about this point. In the event our prediction on the latter point proved accurate; however, on the former we were somewhat mistaken since even after searching for quite some time we could find only marginal flat ground on which to camp, and this not contiguous. Spirits remained undaunted, though, as we selected a central kitchen area and enjoyed a tremendous happy hour.

Next day we headed up the trail to Franklin Lakes, where most groups make camp. And for good reason: there is plenty of flat ground just below the concrete dam; numerous wide ledges above the lake; and even a couple toilets. The trail continues around the Lakes, then ascends to Franklin Pass. This a stunning piece of Sierra scenery with grand vistas on either side and spectacular rock formations closer at hand. Florence Peak is clearly visible from this point, but negotiating around and through some large blocks presents a minor challenge; after trying both ways, I can recommend staying the left (south). A use trail leads around to the base of the hill. The final push top the top involves climbing up talus to boulders, with

a surprisingly rocky summit block compared with Vandever. The views are lovely, and the descent rewarded with an excellent lunch spot back near the Pass.

On the way up, the trail from lower Franklin Lake to the Pass is merely annoying given that the grade is so slight. On the way down, however, I began wondering what possessed anyone to construct a trail that seemingly takes 10 steps to drop one inch. No doubt the crew was paid by the mile, and wanted to milk this section for all its worth; my mantra became WWBD (What Would Barbee Do?),

thinking what terrible things would befall me merely for the thought of cutting a switchback!

Eventually we made it back to our camp, again Ere-packed, and headed out, reaching the cars by around 4. Another perfect Sierra weekend with a couple peaks thrown in for good measure!



*Sara braving the stream where a few years earlier a stroke of bad luck sidelined her.*

# Pilot Knob (S) from the North

TRIP REPORT

October 29, 2007 - by Daryn Dodge

## (NW Ridge Routes)

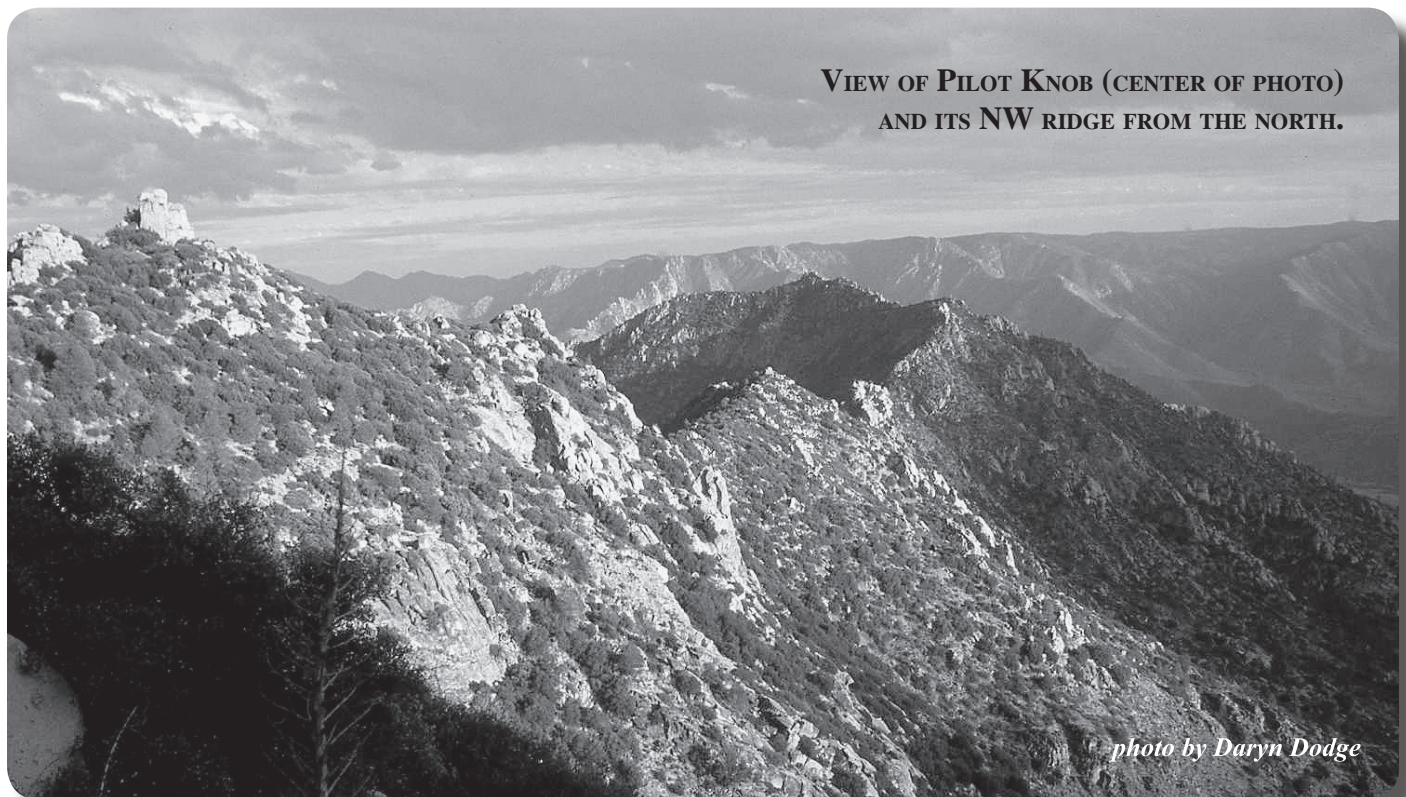
The standard route from the southeast side of Pilot Knob (S) has been closed to climbers by the local Indian reservation and there is talk of suspending or removing the peak from the SPS List.

So Steve Eckert and I wanted to explore possibilities for climbing it from the north. A brief review of some past trip write-ups for Pilot Knob did not reveal any information for a northern approach. It appears no one climbs Pilot Knob (S) from this side because of the longer driving and hiking approach compared to the south side.

However, climbing Pilot Knob from the north did not seem to be without merit, as nearby Big Meadow is a good base camp for other SPS List peaks includ-

ing Sirretta Peak, Taylor Dome and Rockhouse Peak, as well as Pilot Knob. The Jenkins guidebook "Exploring the Southern Sierra: East Side" gave good driving instructions from Big Meadow that could get me within 5 miles of the peak. Darrick Danta also recently explored a driving approach for Pilot Knob from the north and said that dirt roads were in good shape with no closed gates hindering access.

The short version for this northern approach is that we did successfully reach Pilot Knob. This route



**VIEW OF PILOT KNOB (CENTER OF PHOTO)  
AND ITS NW RIDGE FROM THE NORTH.**

*photo by Daryn Dodge*

can be easily done as a dayhike by fit hikers with a high tolerance for bushwhacking. I enjoy a good bushwhack just like the next guy, but be warned this route has more bushwhacking opportunities than any other peak on the SPS List.

Following the Jenkins guidebook driving instructions to Bartolas Point, it's about a 25 mile drive on Cherry Hill Road from Sherman Pass Road to get to a gate that appears to be usually open. From here, we drove another 2.3 miles to an intersection and took the left fork another 0.8 miles where we set up camp in a flat area for the night. Most of the drive was on good dirt roads, but the last 8-10 miles was quite rutted in places. A 2W high-clearance vehicle is recommended.

**I**n the morning, we started hiking SE through forest and sparse brush towards Point 7146 on the 7.5-min map. This point is near the southern end of Bartolas Country, which is also considered the southern terminus of the Kern Plateau, and represents the beginning of the NW ridge route of Pilot Knob. As the terrain was forested and fairly featureless, Steve used his compass and GPS to keep us going in the right direction.

We skirted around Point 7146 on its NE side with little effort and saw Pilot Knob for the first time - the summit block really did look knobby - roughly 2.5 miles away and nearly 1000 feet lower than we were at the moment. This was going to be the first SPS peak that I actually climbed "down" to. The plateau quickly narrowed to more of a ridge as we continued SE towards Point 6917, but the terrain was still easy walking. However, the hiking/climbing difficulties increased dramatically soon after passing Point 6917, with increased brush density and more challenging route-finding along a narrow ridgeline.

Steve and I attempted to stay on or near the ridgeline trying to avoid the heaviest brush sections as we worked our way towards the peak. The rock climbing itself was primarily class 2 with a little class 3 in places and would have been fun, except for all the

stinkin' brush! The bushwhacking was so intense at times that it felt like we were often fighting for every foot of forward progress towards Pilot Knob.

Just prior to reaching the low point on the ridge, we decided we had had enough of the brush, and dropped down on the west side and contoured over towards a west facing gully on the Pilot Knob massif. Unfortunately, getting to the gully proved only marginally easier in avoiding brush. But the gully itself went easier and we managed to fight our way back up to the ridgeline, about 0.3 mi. from Pilot Knob's summit. We stayed mostly just below the ridge on its north side, occasionally popping up on top of the ridge. We found occasional short sections of clear paths through the brush on the north side.

At the base of the summit rocks we searched in vain for a route to the top up the west, north and south sides, but all

were class 4-5 in difficulty. So we dropped down on the north side of the ridge again, and then contoured around to the east side of Pilot Knob where we joined the ducked standard route up to the summit. It took us 5.5 hours to reach the summit, nearly 5 hours of which was used up just to cross the last 2.5 miles of ridgeline to the summit.

**F**or our return we tried staying 100-200 feet below the north side of the ridge for the first 0.3 mile, where we thought the brush was less. Steve thought this went better, but I thought we were doing just as much bushwhacking as we were up near the ridge. We were eventually forced up onto the ridge where it begins to drop to the low point on the NW ridge. We crossed to the west side, and then descended down below the ridge low point in a relatively brush-free chute. Here we decided to contour down and across below the NW ridge eventually dropping down to about an elev. 5200 where we thought the brush was less dense. The brush was less in places, but there were still pockets of dense brush we had push through.

Our goal was to reach a gully that ascended up to

“. . . be warned this route has more bushwhacking opportunities than any other peak on the SPS List.”



Point 6917. On our traverse to Pilot Knob earlier in the day, Steve had spied this gully, which appeared to be largely free of brush. The map shows a stream running down this gully, but it was bone dry when we got there. However, we were happy to find that it was mostly free of brush at the bottom and we were able to have a rather enjoyable 1600 climb with only had two bands of dense brush to cross. We lost the gully in these two brushy sections and stumbled around till we found a continuation of the gully. As we neared the plateau and gully became vague, we followed a string of tall ponderosa and sugar pine trees. The brush under the trees was less dense. Venturing outside of the line of trees led to nearly impenetrable brush.

**B**ack up on the plateau near Point 6917 the bushwhacking was over. We took a short break, and then quickly headed back to camp where Steve and I enjoyed a well-earned round of Dos Equis beer, courtesy of Steve. Even though we had an extra 1000 feet of climbing on the return leg, and were quite tired from much bushwhacking, it took us 15 minutes less for the return leg of our journey. This was due mainly to taking the relatively brush-free gully up to the plateau on our way back. Clearly, if we were to do this route again, we would use this gully route, or some variation of it, in both directions. It was

far better than battling the extensive brush high on the NW ridge itself. However, if a “controlled” burn some day clears the brush on the NW ridge, it would be a fine class 2-3 scramble to Pilot Knob.

**O**ther useful factoids: Round trip distance was about 7 miles with total hiking time of 11 hrs 15 min, and 4300 feet of total elevation gain, most of it on the way back to camp. Although the map indicated about 3100 feet of gain, we got lots of bonus gain by constantly moving up and down across the terrain to avoid dense sections of brush. It got quite warm here even at the end of October with overcast skies most of the day. With the heat and the energy-sapping bushwhacking activities, I went through nearly all my food and found that 3 quarts of water was not enough for the hike. And did I mention that nearly all the brush we waded through had pointy needles and spines? There was an over-abundance of holly-like bushes with prickly leaves, and Yucca-type plants with spikes. Bring full-body armor for skin protection, including gloves for when you get tripped-up by the brush. Nearby Bartolas Creek was dry, so bring all the water you need especially if hiking this route mid- to late-season. A longer version of this trip write-up along with our mapped route can be found on the climber.org website.



*photo by Daryn Dodge*

***View of the southern edge of the Kern Plateau from the summit of Pilot Knob, and the connecting NW ridge between these two points.***