

Eastern Sierra **Wilderness Guide**



Produced by FRIENDS OF THE INYO

"I believe that at least in the present phase of our civilization we have a profound, a fundamental need for areas of wilderness - a need that is not only recreational and spiritual but also educational and scientific, and withal essential to a true understanding of ourselves, our culture, our own natures, and our place in all nature."

– Howard Zahniser, author of the 1964 Wilderness Act



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Introduction

California’s Eastern Sierra region is defined by wilderness. As you drive along Highway 395, the majestic peaks you see to the east and west are, for the most part, federally designated wilderness areas. As defined by the original Wilderness Act of 1964, a wilderness area is a section of publicly owned land “where the earth and its community of life are untrammeled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain.”

Inside designated wilderness boundaries, the American people have determined that these lands will forever remain “affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man’s work substantially unnoticeable.” Inside these lines, families and friends can return year after year to the same mountain meadow to make camp, count shooting stars, and catch some fish without fear of finding a parking lot. Inside these lines, a doe can return year after year to the same mountain meadow to raise fawns in peace without fear of returning to find the meadow diked and dried.

The rules governing wilderness are neither complicated nor cumbersome. Travel is only allowed by foot (human or otherwise), motorized equipment is largely prohibited (except for emergencies), and above all, the forces of nature are to be respected. For the best and most complete information about wilderness, visit wilderness.net.

Thanks to the hard work of countless people leading up to the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009, there’s nearly half a million more acres for you

and yours to get out and enjoy in the Eastern Sierra. Luckily, you don’t need to rush. These lands will be here – as wild as they are today – for generations to come thanks to the American tradition of wilderness.

A stream of individuals came together and worked for years, sometimes for decades, to help preserve the creatures and landscapes that are important to this place and to our souls. Hundreds of people made phone calls, wrote letters, and sought the ways and means to help keep Eastern California a socially, economically and environmentally functional landscape. They believe in a place where, in spring, the choice of where to walk is literally endless, and where bighorn sheep still prospect over a range that spans hundreds of miles, overlooking rivers large and small.

You can honor these places and people by supporting Friends of the Inyo, the non-profit conservation organization based in Bishop that produced this Wilderness Guide, with support from Mono County Tourism and Film Commission. Friends of the Inyo was founded in 1986 by volunteers who wanted to see wild places protected and enjoyed. Today, Friends of the Inyo is dedicated to the preservation, exploration and stewardship of Eastern Sierra’s public lands, work that is made possible through member support, grant funding and federal agency partnerships. Connecting people to their public lands is essential to the future of wilderness, and everyone at Friends of the Inyo hopes this guide helps you discover your favorite wild place.

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THIS LAND IS YOUR LAND

Wilderness Explained

WILDERNESS EXPLAINED

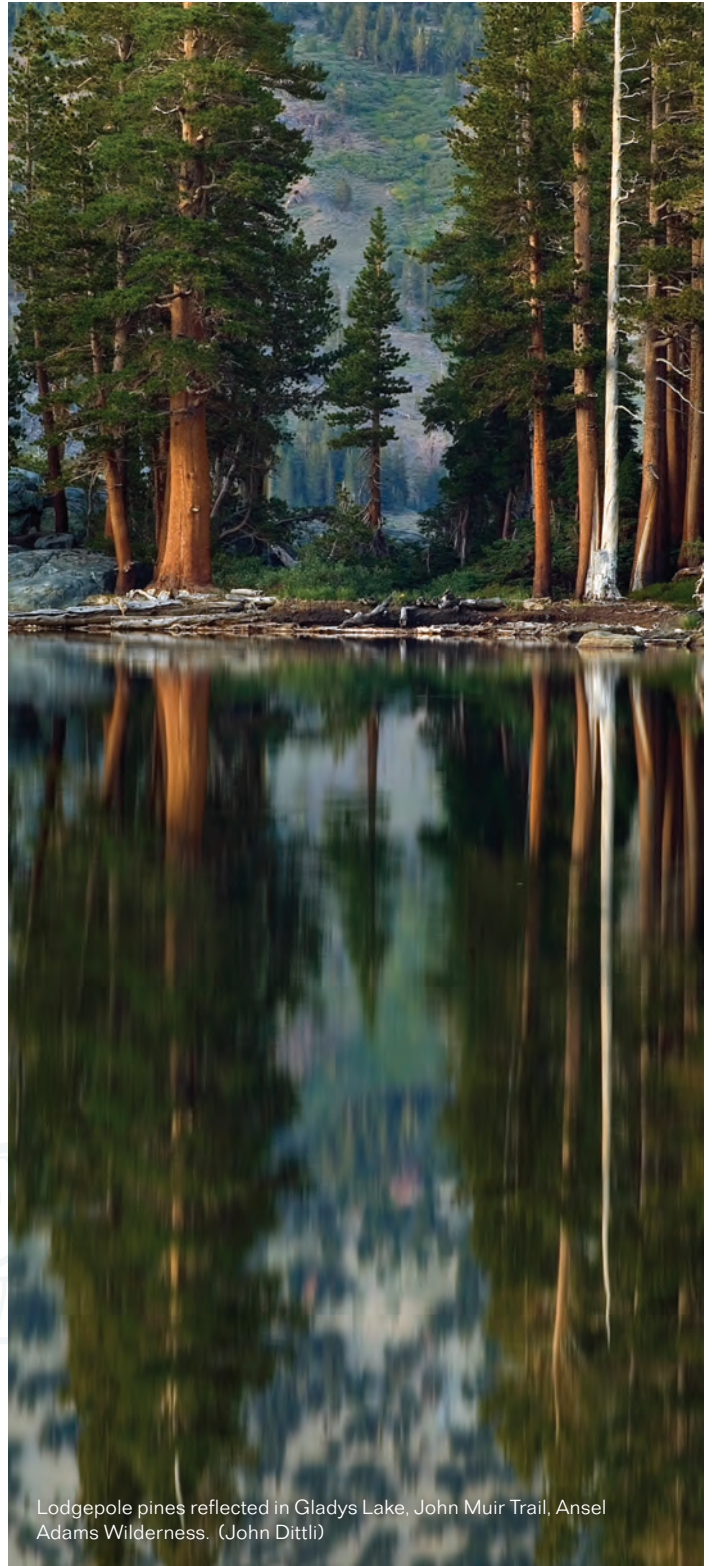
The most long-lasting and certain way to protect public lands was through law passed by Congress and signed by the president. In the early 1930s, Bob Marshall, who dreamed of wilderness protected by law, had stated, "Areas...should be set aside by an act of Congress. This would give them as close an approximation to permanence as could be realized in a world of shifting desires." The time was right to create and pass a bill that preserved wilderness.

However, passage of a bill preserving wilderness was not easy. Howard Zahniser wrote the first draft of the Wilderness Act in 1956. The journey of the Wilderness Act covers nine years, 65 rewrites, and 18 public hearings. In August 1964, after the Senate had passed it for the second time, the House of Representatives overwhelmingly passed the Wilderness Act of 1964 - with only one dissenting vote! President Lyndon B. Johnson signed the Wilderness Act into law on September 3 of that year.

With passage of the Wilderness Act of 1964, Americans chartered a new course in world history – to preserve some of a country's last remaining wild places to protect their natural processes and values from development.

– Wilderness.net

WHAT IS WILDERNESS? The Wilderness Act of 1964 defines wilderness as: "an area of undeveloped federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation." The purpose of the Act is clear: "It is hereby declared to be the policy of the Congress to secure for the American people of present and future generations the benefits of an enduring resource of Wilderness."



Lodgepole pines reflected in Gladys Lake, John Muir Trail, Ansel Adams Wilderness. (John Dittli)

Wilderness Q's and A's

How is Wilderness designated?

Wilderness can only be designated by an Act of Congress. Recommendations for wilderness can come from the land management agencies: Bureau of Land Management (BLM), United States Forest Service (USFS), National Park Service (NPS), or directly from the people.

Why do we need Wilderness in the Eastern Sierra?

Wilderness is the best means to ensure that our unspoiled views of the west slope of the White Mountains or the steep eastern scarp of the Sierra, our clean trout-bearing streams, spring wildflower shows, herds of deer and pronghorn antelope, petroglyph murals and remaining wild landscapes are protected for future generations of residents and Eastern Sierra visitors. As California's population and development pressures continue to increase, wilderness designation ensures that our area's most vital economic resource, our unparalleled wild lands, will remain as they are today.

What Wilderness areas were added to the Eastern Sierra in 2009 when President Obama signed the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act into law?

The Omnibus included the Eastern Sierra and Northern San Gabriels Wild Heritage Act, a bi-partisan bill co-sponsored by Senator Barbara Boxer and Representative Howard P. "Buck" McKeon, that has permanently protected nearly a half million acres of wild places right here in the Eastern Sierra. This included 79,820 acres in the Hoover Wilderness, 528 acres in the Ansel Adams Wilderness, 34,342 in the Granite Mountain Wilderness, 14,721 in the Owens River Headwaters Wilderness, 229,993 in the White Mountain Wilderness, and 70,411 acres in the John Muir Wilderness Additions. The Wilderness Bill also designated three new Wild & Scenic Rivers in the Eastern Sierra: the Owens River Headwaters (19 river miles), Cottonwood Creek in the White Mountains (21.5 river miles), and sections of the Amargosa River east of Death Valley (26 river miles).

What activities are allowed in Wilderness?

You can hunt, fish, walk, backpack, climb, ride a horse, hire a mountain guide or packer, photograph, ski, snow board and camp in wilderness. One of the express purposes of the Wilderness Act is to ensure that current and future generations will continue to have wild lands to do just these things. Always bring a map, water and hiking supplies when visiting wilderness.

Does Wilderness benefit our local economy?

Yes. Wilderness areas attract tourists from around the world to the Eastern Sierra. These visitors come to hike, backpack, fish, hunt, horseback ride, climb, camp, back country ski, photograph or simply view the beautiful scenery. Wilderness preserves what draws people to the Eastern Sierra and provides many other benefits to local communities, including: preservation of our scenic viewshed, a continuing supply of clean water from

protected watersheds, undisturbed ecosystems for scientific research, healthy fish and wildlife populations, as well as the value of just knowing that wild places are there.

How many acres of Wilderness are there in the United States?

Currently, according to wilderness.net, the total acreage of the National Wilderness Preservation System is 109,512,737, contained within 757 areas. Some may believe that wilderness is all in the remote high-elevation mountains or vast sandy deserts of the Western states, but the six states of Connecticut, Delaware, Iowa, Kansas, Maryland and Rhode Island also contain federally designated wilderness. It's true, however, that California, Arizona, Nevada, Alaska and Oregon do have the most wildernesses, with Alaska containing 52% of it, so that a mere 2.75% of the land in the contiguous United States is considered wilderness.

Who manages them?

The National Wilderness Preservation System is jointly managed by four agencies in the Departments of Agriculture and the Interior: the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS), Forest Service, and National Park Service (NPS). Common to all agencies is the guidance and direction provided by the Wilderness Act. Although other legislation is followed where applicable, and each agency has its own wilderness policy, the Act bonds these agencies together in the planning, implementation and monitoring of wilderness.



Bureau of Land Management *

The BLM manages about 270 million acres, 8,752,349 of which are wilderness. Among other activities, the Bureau conserves these lands and their historical and cultural resources for the public's use and enjoyment.



Fish and Wildlife Service

The FWS conserves the nation's wild animals and their habitats by managing a system of more than 500 national wildlife refuges and other areas, totaling about 91 million acres of land and water, 20,702,488 of which are wilderness.



United States Forest Service

The USFS manages national forests and grasslands. It conducts forestry research and works with forest managers on state and private lands. The Forest Service oversees nearly 200 million acres of national forest and other lands, 36,167,532 of which are wilderness.



National Park Service

The NPS was established to protect the nation's natural, historical, and cultural resources and to provide places for recreation. It manages 51 national parks and more than 300 national monuments, historic sites, memorials, seashores, and battlefields. It oversees 43,890,368 acres of wilderness.

*Agency statistics and descriptions culled from wilderness.net.



Pronghorn antelope grazing on West Dry Lake, Dry Lakes Plateau, Bodie Hills. (John Dittli)

The National Conservation Lands

The National Conservation Lands (formally the National Landscape Conservation System) is the nation's newest, permanently protected collection of public lands – 28 million acres of nationally significant landscapes set aside for current and future generations because of their outstanding cultural, ecological and scientific importance. The National Conservation Lands consist of the last places where you can experience the history of the American West. From the rivers, which Lewis and Clark explored, to pioneer trails, to Native American sites, the heritage and beauty of these places are safeguarded for all to see.

First established by Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt in 2000 and made permanent by an act of Congress in 2009, the National Conservation Lands system reflects our new understanding that truly conserving natural and cultural values means protecting large landscapes – entire ecosystems and archaeological districts – more than small, isolated tracts surrounded by development.

– www.ConservationLands.org

WILDERNESS STUDY AREAS

America's Conservation Lands are uniquely diverse, encompassing red-rock deserts and rugged ocean coastlines, deep river canyons and broad Alaskan tundra. They range from remote and wild areas to very accessible landscapes.

Here in the Eastern Sierra, the Bureau of Land Management Bishop and Ridgecrest Field Offices manage 33 units of the National Conservation Lands, including designated wilderness areas such as Granite Mountain.

Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) are part of this system, and 14 of the Conservation Lands on the Eastside fall under this

designation. They are public lands that have been found to have wilderness characteristics and await approval or denial of wilderness designation from Congress.

The Eastern Sierra's Bodie Hills and the Volcanic Tableland area WSAs, described here, are wonderful entry points for exploring the Conservation Lands. For more information about the other Eastern Sierra WSAs, visit www.friendsoftheinyo.org.

THE BODIE HILLS

The Bodie Hills are best known as the gateway to Bodie State Historic Park. Visitors who venture beyond the state park into the three Wilderness Study Areas surrounding it enjoy hiking, biking, camping, botanizing, bird watching, hunting and motor touring through aspen-tinged valleys and across high plateaus with vistas of the Sierra Nevada, Mono Lake and the Great Basin. The Bodie Hills are home to pronghorn antelope, sage grouse and mule deer, and contain one of the highest concentrations of archaeological resources in the region. Cattle grazing is permitted in the Bodie Hills—be mindful of cows, wildlife and private property while exploring the Bodie Hills, and always leave cultural artifacts in place.

Bodie Mountain

23,360 acres, northeast of Lee Vining

The Big Alkali Basin is a wetland area with hot springs. Large sources of obsidian rock, used by Paiutes to make arrowheads and tools, give the area cultural importance. Some cultural features are associated with the ghost town of Bodie, including a historic Chinese settlement and a wood pole transmission line (the first infrastructure built to transmit electricity over long distances). Just outside the WSA border, Bodie and Potato Peaks offer fantastic hiking with sweeping views.



Wildflower mix, Potato & Bodie Peaks, Bodie Hills. (John Dittli)

Bodie

14,455 acres, northeast of Lee Vining, southeast of Bridgeport

In the heart of the hills, a large cinder cone, Beauty Peak, rises over Dry Lakes Plateau, dotted with ephemeral lakes. Hike through the narrow canyons of Rough and Atastra Creeks and up to the plateau.

Mt. Biedeman

12,420 acres, northeast of Mono Lake

Flanked by two adjoining mountains, Mt. Biedeman is a prominent geographic landform and a wonderful Great Basin day hike destination that has unparalleled views of Mono Lake and the Eastern Sierra. Clusters of little yellow heads of the Mono County Phacelia, a rare flower, grow in the sandy soils. This WSA is in the ethnographic territory of the Mono Lake Paiute Indian Tribe, used for pinyon nut and seed collection, and hunting.

THE VOLCANIC TABLELANDS

Gazing upon a landscape of pink mounds, elevated terraces, and steep slopes with jagged contours, it's fun to imagine what it was like thousands of years ago, when hot gases and debris from neighboring volcanic eruptions were deposited upon the land, forming the desert we see today. The Long Valley Caldera eruption deposited rhyolitic ash throughout the Tablelands, which welded into the pink and red rocks of the Bishop Tuff. The vegetation of the area is primarily shadscale shrub, with plant species such as spiny hopsage, shadscale, ephedra, and indigo bush. Wide-open spaces, unique geography and amazing views make these lands a popular destination for hiking, bouldering, camping, scenic photography, hunting, horseback riding, biking and motor touring on designated roads.

Chidago Canyon

20,245 acres, north of Bishop, west of Chalfant

Along with amazing geology, Chidago Canyon is great habitat for raptors, including the majestic golden eagle. Ancient petroglyphs are found in multiple areas. This area has cultural significance to Paiutes.

Fish Slough

14,450 acres, 5 miles north of Bishop

This wetland area forms an island oasis in the middle of the arid desert, a key habitat for migratory birds and home to the endangered Owens pupfish, a two-inch desert fish that nearly went extinct but was saved through local conservation efforts. The rock formations at the Happy and Sad Boulders on the edge of the WSA have become a world-famous bouldering destination.

Volcanic Tablelands

11,840 acres, northwest of Bishop

The fractured topography is a result of faulting action that took place after the eruption. Large mammals are rare in this area due to lack of water, but there are plenty of small mammals, lizards, and raptors. This is an area of historic seed collecting by Paiutes.

Casa Diablo

5,547 acres, 5 miles east of Tom's Place

At 7,912 feet, Casa Diablo Mountain is made of older, denser granite bedrock. This area is critical winter habitat for the Casa Diablo mule deer herd.



Chidago Canyon petroglyphs. (Catherine Billey)

Hoover Wilderness

ACREAGE: 124,468 acres

LOCATION: West of Bridgeport and Lee Vining, Mono County

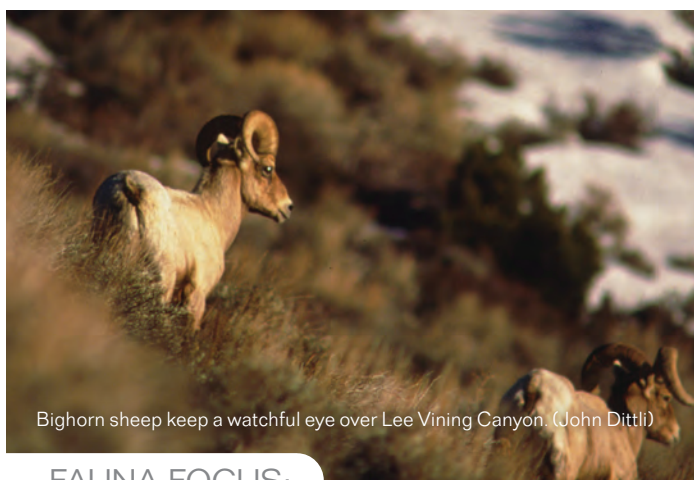
MANAGEMENT: The Inyo and Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forests

ACCESS: Sonora Pass (Highway 108), Green Creek Road, Virginia Lakes Road, Tioga Pass Road (Highway 120)

ACTIVITIES: Equestrian, hiking, fishing, hunting, mountaineering, rock climbing, wildlife viewing



Hikers atop the Tioga Crest in the Hoover Wilderness addition. (Friends of the Inyo)



Bighorn sheep keep a watchful eye over Lee Vining Canyon. (John Dittli)

HOOVER WILDERNESS



The Hoover Wilderness ranks as an original member of the National Wilderness Preservation System, first established as a Primitive area in 1931 and then a Wild area in 1957. Congress designated the Hoover Wilderness in 1964.

One visit will prove why this area was protected early on. Bordering Yosemite National Park, the Hoover represents a classic High Sierra landscape of 11,000-foot snow-capped peaks and deeply carved glacial valleys dotted with tranquil alpine lakes, lush meadows, and extensive conifer forests.



Hoover Wilderness. (John Dittli)

HIGHLIGHTS:

Hiking the 20 Lakes Basin; Lundy Canyon and Green Creek fall color viewing; fishing the West Walker headwaters.

With approximately nine miles of the Pacific Crest National Scenic Trail and many fish-bearing lakes and streams, the Hoover Wilderness Addition is one of the premier recreation destinations in the Eastern Sierra.

The Headwaters of the West Walker River offers some of the best backcountry fishing in the Sierra. The river's spring- and snowmelt-fed lower reaches

hold trophy-size trout (as do world-famous lakes such as Poore and Kirman, just outside the wilderness boundary). The headwaters' lakes and streams provide fine wild trout habitat.

This area also offers spectacular scenery, high quality habitat for mule deer, black bear, grouse and chukar, and exceptional opportunities for solitude for the adventurous sportsman. The West Walker Headwaters area of the Hoover lies within the X-12 hunting zone, which offers the third highest number of tags in the state and has a high hunter success rate.

FAUNA FOCUS:

The wild sheep ranks highest among the animal mountaineers of the Sierra. Possessed of keen sight and scent, and strong limbs, he dwells secure amid the loftiest summits, leaping unscathed from crag to crag, up and down the fronts of giddy precipices, crossing foaming torrents and slopes of frozen snow, exposed to the wildest storms, yet maintaining a brave, warm life, and developing from generation to generation in perfect strength and beauty.

—John Muir, "The Mountains of California"

The rocky, alpine habitat of the new southern additions to the Hoover Wilderness near Lee Vining Canyon supports a herd of reintroduced Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep, an endangered species. In the 1990s, the Sierra Nevada bighorn sheep population neared extinction—only 100 or so animals survived. Thanks to the work of wildlife ecologist Dr. John Wehausen, the Sierra Nevada Bighorn Sheep Foundation, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the California Department of Fish and Game, their numbers are on the rise again. These "animal mountaineers" can be spotted by a patient eye in many of the Eastern Sierra's highest (and newest) wilderness reaches, including the Hoover, John Muir (near Pine Creek Canyon) and White Mountains Wilderness areas.

LOCAL LORE:

Byng Hunt's Golden Land Ethic - By Tony Dublino

Lundy Canyon is a spectacle in the fall. Large aspen groves and fields of willow are painted yellow as winter's impending winds tempt the fate of each colorful day.

Because it seemed likely the groves would be in a colorful state, Byng Hunt suggested it for an afternoon hike. Hunt is a Mono County Supervisor from Mammoth, and after more than 30 years enjoying Sierra canyons, he knows how to time it right.

Hunt and I naturally begin talking local politics as we drive out of the placid Mono Basin and into Lundy Canyon. The drive to the trailhead winds slowly through yellow-green aspens, and it seems the upper elevations will be in full glory. We have difficulty finding parking on this off-season Wednesday, indicating the canyon's burgeoning fame for being a great fall color spot.

Walking up the trail, we pass numerous hikers, photographers and painters who are busy at their craft. Hunt, too, takes many photos. It seems at every turn, he stops to admire another new perspective of color, and snaps photos while recounting stories from his past. We discuss our respective love for the digital photography revolution.

"Growing up in the Seattle area, we spent all kinds of time in the Cascades." He takes a moment to snap another photo, "That's where I got my land ethic," he says.

After leaving the Mountains near his northwest home, Hunt spent some time in San Diego, vacationing in Mammoth before the siren song began. He eventually took a paycut, and a pharmacy career into Mammoth in 1976, where he has been ever since.

He arrived in Mammoth as it was changing rapidly, Hunt says. By the time the Town of Mammoth wanted to incorporate, he had developed an interest in local development issues and successfully sought a position on the Town's first planning

commission. He later became a Mammoth Town Councilman and then a County Supervisor. He explains all this as we climb a steep, rocky section of trail that would have left many of his colleagues panting.

The grove of aspens above the beaver ponds is reflecting leave's light, where we stop to take more pictures. "This is why I got into politics," he admits. "To protect these areas for our children, and our children's children." It seems a place worth protecting.

"It's all about your personal land ethic," Hunt says. "Where do you get your land ethic?" he asks, and I stop to think about the question for a moment. "From experiences like these," I eventually respond.

"I got mine from my youth," he said. Hiking in the Cascades, being a boy scout in search of a merit badge, seeking summits and climbing routes, skiing, this is where his land ethic comes from. We stop amid a golden grove of aspens where we discuss a golden land ethic.

"It's how you feel about the land," he says. "Whether you feel it is something that should be conquered, tamed," he says, "or whether it should be protected."

Hunt isn't convinced he has personally achieved any one thing after nearly 20 years in politics. "It's always a group of individuals that accomplishes anything," he admits. "I have just been there to influence discussions, to offer my perspective."

Hunt may be underestimating his influence over the years. Although many people who pass us wave and nod without recognizing Byng, or how many times his opinion and decisions have effected this very place, but he is clearly not in it for recognition, contentedly distracted by yet another golden vista.



Hoover Wilderness in summer glory, near Yosemite National Park (John Dittli)

Granite Mountain Wilderness

ACREAGE: 34,342 acres

LOCATION: East of Lee Vining, west of Benton

MANAGEMENT: Bureau of Land Management

ACCESS: SR 120 East

ACTIVITIES: Rock climbing, hiking, dispersed camping, wild mustang viewing

HIGHLIGHTS: Hiking Granite Mountain, viewing wild horses

GRANITE MOUNTAIN WILDERNESS



Much of what makes the Great Basin's ecology unique is represented in Granite Mountain Wilderness, including sagebrush steppe, open alluvial basins, granite ridges and basaltic plateaus. This is a landscape that has often been overlooked in the wilderness preservation system. Not as flashy as the high alpine country, not green and lush as the thick forests of the East, the Great Basin lies at the heart of the American West. It's a huge and seemingly empty land, but is still in need of protection from over-grazing, mining, and wind farm proposals.

That's why Granite Mountain Wilderness is so critical. A prime example of what the Great Basin looked like long ago, it is home to several herds of wild horses, mule deer use it as a migration corridor, and sage grouse, eagles and hawks soar above.

The Granite Mountain Wilderness hugs the northern side of SR 120 East, one of California's wildest and loneliest stretches of paved road. It swings east from Lee Vining toward Nevada. Along the way, the road passes by huge, land-bound Mono Lake before descending into the Granite Basin. To the north, Granite Mountain dominates the horizon, a rumble of weathered granite rock, covered with sage and rabbitbrush and a scattering of pinyon and juniper pines. Granite coves and overhangs challenge climbers and boulderers. Raptors wing through the nooks and crannies of the convoluted rock formations, deer hide from the desert sun and graze in dry meadows in the evening. Wild horses move like ghosts at the base of the mountain, their foals close at heel. To the south, Glass Mountain's obsidian-domed crest sparkles in the sunlight. Giant canyons carved out of glass and soft volcanic tuff wind toward the road from the summit. Aspens and willows line the canyon floors and wild roses fill the summer air. To the east, the White Mountains tower over it all and the Sierra Nevada does the same to the west.

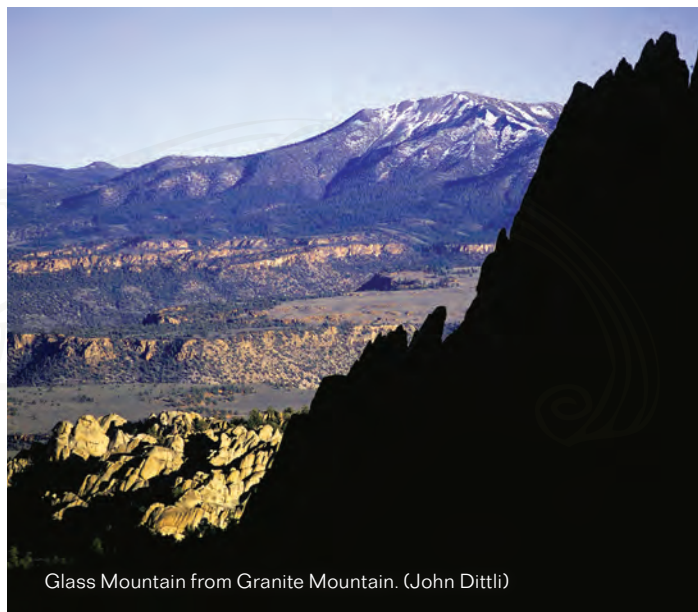
The wilderness is widely dotted with archeological sites, left behind when the Mono Lake Paiutes wintered here to escape the heavy snows. It is a supremely wild place, little changed from a century ago.



Granite Mountain. (John Dittli)



Granite Meadow. (Bill Mitchell)



Glass Mountain from Granite Mountain. (John Dittli)

LOCAL LORE:

Scott Justham - Going the Extra Mile with Wilderness Stewardship

Former Bishop Bureau of Land Management Ranger Scott Justham goes the extra mile when it comes to protecting the wild lands of the Eastern Sierra. Justham has done just about everything it takes, from helping staff an aid station for the Alabama Hills marathon to removing graffiti from Tuttle Creek boulders to supervising a Student Conservation Association crew during a ten-day work trip doing wilderness restoration of old roads in the Granite Mountain Wilderness area. Decom-pacting the old road bed, vertical mulching, live transplants, and some bitterbrush plants were all part of the restoration equation. The crew completed 16 restoration sites – some over half a mile long. “Restoration never happens quickly, but with

an SCA crew of six people you sure can get a lot of work done,” Justham said in a Facebook post, grateful for the help. “The crew was amazing.”

His love for the wild, severe lands he’s responsible for is obvious. Along with removing graffiti and handing out energy drinks to exhausted runners, he’s spent hours, days, and months working with climbers and boulderers in the Volcanic Tablelands area, trying to educate users about everything from the principles of “leave no trace” to how to avoid disturbing nesting raptors.

It’s a tribute to Justham and those like him that places like Granite Mountain get the protection they so truly deserve.



Jeffrey Rock. (John Dittli)

Ansel Adams Wilderness



Thousand Island Lake. (Todd Vogel)

ACREAGE: 232,000 acres

LOCATION: The Ansel Adams Wilderness is sandwiched between Yosemite National Park and the Hoover Wilderness to the north and the John Muir Wilderness to the southeast.

MANAGEMENT: Forest Service and the National Park Service

ACCESS: S.R. 120 West/Tioga Pass Road, Walker Lake and Parker Lake Roads, the June Lake Loop Road, S.R. 203 to Mammoth Lakes, the Reds Meadow Road

ACTIVITIES: Hiking, backpacking, fishing, hunting, rock climbing, mountaineering, wildlife viewing, photography, equestrian



The United States Congress designated the Minarets Wilderness in 1964, which was expanded and renamed the Ansel Adams Wilderness in 1984.

It is one of the high Sierra's most unique landscapes; a place where the sparkling silver-grey granite so common to most of the Sierra gives way to the ragged black and sienna-colored volcanic peaks and spires of the Ritter Range. In fact, the ebony spires of the Minarets are some of the oldest exposed rock in the Sierra, the last remnants of the jagged rim of a now-extinct volcano. At the edge of the wilderness, Mammoth Mountain, now dormant, still vents enough carbon monoxide gases from deep within the earth to unsettle even the hardy locals who call this place home. Hot springs deep within the Reds Meadow area testify to a violent and spectacular past and offer a unique reward after a long day's hike.

The Ansel Adams Wilderness also holds some of the Sierra's biggest natural lakes. Thousand Island Lake and Garnet Lake at the base of Mts. Banner and Ritter are each more than a mile long, and almost as far across. The fishing is legendary, the trout fat. It's big country here, with wide open alpine basins rimmed by 12,000-foot peaks, rolling velvety meadows, and sun-warmed tarns that tempt one to swim. The



Garnet Lake. (Catherine Billey)

broad basins and plentiful riparian areas support the forage and habitat necessary for abundant wildlife: black bears and mule deer, pika and alpine chipmunk, mountain lion and coyote, golden-mantled squirrel, weasel, sharp-whistled marmot, badger and beaver are all here.



Ansel Adams Wilderness signage. (Drew Foster)

HIGHLIGHTS:

Glacier Canyon, Dana Plateau, the High Trail, Thousand Island Lake, Lake Ediza and the Minarets.

The John Muir and Pacific Crest Trails also cut through the Ansel Adams, climbing out of Yosemite to the west, crossing the outlet of Thousand Island Lake before heading south toward Mammoth Pass. The easy access from Mammoth Lakes makes the Ansel Adams one of the most heavily visited and popular wildernesses in the country. Because the land is so big and rugged, solitude is usually just a few minutes from the trail.



FLORA FOCUS:

Wildflowers on the High Trail

The High Trail to Thousand Island Lake along a section of the Pacific Crest Trail is one of the Eastern Sierra's most spectacular hikes. It is also possibly the best high elevation hike in the region for flowers, especially following a wet winter. The High Trail begins in Reds Meadow and the Agnew Meadows Campground, then climbs sharply to a bench overlooking the Middle Fork of the San Joaquin River as it crashes down out of Thousand Island Lake before heading to Reds Meadow. Here the trail levels out for about three gorgeous miles, and the flower show begins.

More than a dozen freshwater springs gush out of the San Joaquin Ridge high above the trail at a contact point between two rock formations, then cascade hundreds of feet down the pumice slopes in white ribbons to cross the trail. Each spring is lined with purple lupine and violet-blue monkshood, orange tiger lilies and iridescent periwinkle penstemons, flaming red Indian paintbrush and brilliant yellow arnica, some growing four and five feet tall. Orange-gold Kelley's tiger lilies, relatively rare in the Eastern Sierra, are common here, lining the springs like a tongue of flame. Across the Middle Fork canyon, the Ritter Range spires some 13,000 feet into the sky, with massive Mts. Ritter and Banner guarding the southwestern skyline. The lush flower gardens against the spires and ramparts of the Minarets make this hike a photographer's and flower lover's dream.

LOCAL LORE: Andrea Mead Lawrence – Olympian and Conservationist

Andrea Mead Lawrence is best known to the world for her two gold medals in Alpine skiing at the 1952 Olympics when she was just 19 years old. But to the Eastern Sierra she called home, she was something else as well – a deft, fierce and compassionate advocate for the land, and the rivers, plants, animals, meadows and canyons upon it.

When Lawrence died in 2009 after a long battle with cancer, she left behind not just her Olympic record, five children, and countless friends and admirers, but a fundamental transformation of the environmental laws that govern the state of California. Her fight to save Mammoth Lakes from a fleet of eight-story condominiums eventually took her to the California Supreme Court. In the end, the court sided with Lawrence and the Friends of Mammoth plaintiffs and required developers proposing projects on private land to adhere to the state's highest envi-



Andrea Mead Lawrence

ronmental law, the California Environmental Quality Act. Lawrence later went on to champion several wilderness bills and, along with Nancy Whitmore and other locals, was instrumental in saving the historic ghost town of Bodie from development. She was tireless – no sooner completing one job before beginning another. She was directly involved in local politics, winning four terms (or 16 years) on the Mono County Board of Supervisors.

“Andrea in her lifetime was the most significant and effective citizen activist in California,” said attorney Antonio Rossmann in an April 2009 New York Times article shortly after Lawrence’s death. He worked with Lawrence on water issues in Inyo County.

In 2002, Bud Greenspan told The New York Times that “It is indeed rare to find someone who throughout her life pursued two passions in the purest and highest form of the human spirit.”

On April 29, 2010 U.S. Senator Barbara Boxer and U.S. Representative Howard P. “Buck” McKeon announced legislation to rename Peak 12,240 in Mono County “Mt. Andrea Lawrence” in her memory. The mountain sits just southeast of Yosemite National Park in the Ansel Adams Wilderness, above the John Muir and Pacific Crest Trail. The Senate unanimously passed the Mt. Andrea Lawrence Designation Act on October 19, 2011. The measure then went to the House of Representatives, where McKeon introduced an identical bill. “Andrea Lawrence was an Olympic champion who dedicated her life to protecting the treasures of the Eastern Sierra,” Boxer said. “Her passion and achievements were larger than life, which is why I cannot think of a more fitting tribute than to name this majestic peak in her honor.”



LEFT TO RIGHT:

Norman Clyde (Courtesy of Eastern California Museum), Preparing for the climb to entomb Starr's remains are Eichorn, Ranger Mace, Clyde, Al Norris and Douglas Robinson (Courtesy William Alsop), Pete Starr (Courtesy William Alsop).



HISTORY FOCUS:

Norman Clyde and Pete Starr – Two Sierra Legends, By Catherine Billey

In the fall of 1933, Norman Clyde, the man who would eventually have a 13,920 foot peak in the Sierra Nevada named after him, gave a talk at Tamarack Lodge in Mammoth about the search for a missing mountaineer, Walter “Pete” Starr, Jr. A prominent young San Francisco attorney and experienced mountain climber, Starr was killed that August while attempting to climb the northwest face of Michael Minaret in what is now the Ansel Adams Wilderness. He had nearly completed his “Guide to the John Muir Trail and the High Sierra Region,” posthumously published by his father.

Though no detailed account exists of that long-ago evening at Tamarack, there was likely a fire burning in the river-rock fireplace as Clyde described the recovery efforts involving a first aerial search in Sierra history and a daunting boots-on-the-ground exploration by a team of mountaineers that included a very young Glen Dawson and Jules Eichorn – both destined for their own legendary status – in addition to the experienced Clyde.

Dawson, the only surviving member of the Starr mountaineering search team, turned 100 in June, 2012. A serious Sierra



Ediza Lake. (Catherine Billey)

Nevada mountaineer since 1929, he remembered being asked to assist with the search and driving up to Reds Meadow from Los Angeles in his yellow Model A Ford with a rumble seat. He and Eichorn climbed to the top of Michael Minaret but did not see Starr. Dawson had previously climbed with Clyde as part of a team making the first ascent of the East Face of Whitney in August, 1931, and recalled that Clyde's pants were often made more of patches than the original material. Although he went on a few other climbs with Clyde, he said "I preferred to climb with somebody of my own nature than with him. He carried a lot of equipment and he was kind of slow and methodical moving."

That methodical approach served Clyde in eventually locating Starr. Clyde chose to continue searching on his own after the mountaineering team was called off due to safety concerns. It was obvious after the two-week search that Starr was no longer alive, but Clyde believed it would be a source of closure for the family if at least his remains were found. For five days, he systematically climbed in the rugged terrain above the sparkling waters of Lake Ediza, where Starr had made his last camp. Clinging to the northwest face of Michael Minaret, a droning of flies alerted Clyde to climb in a new direction and he soon sighted Starr on a ledge below the summit. "He had obviously fallen, perhaps several hundred feet, to instantaneous death," Clyde wrote. "The life of the daring young climber had come to a sudden and tragic end."

William Alsop, who wrote "Missing in the Minarets," imagined the moment more vividly. "It was a poignant first meeting of two Sierra legends: Clyde, peering out from under his broad-brimmed campaign hat, rope coiled about his chest, standing among the ruins of the ancient range as a storm gathered; Starr, the debonair 'club man,' clad in khaki trousers and white undershirt, arms outstretched, lying on his back on a narrow ledge, facing the heavens."

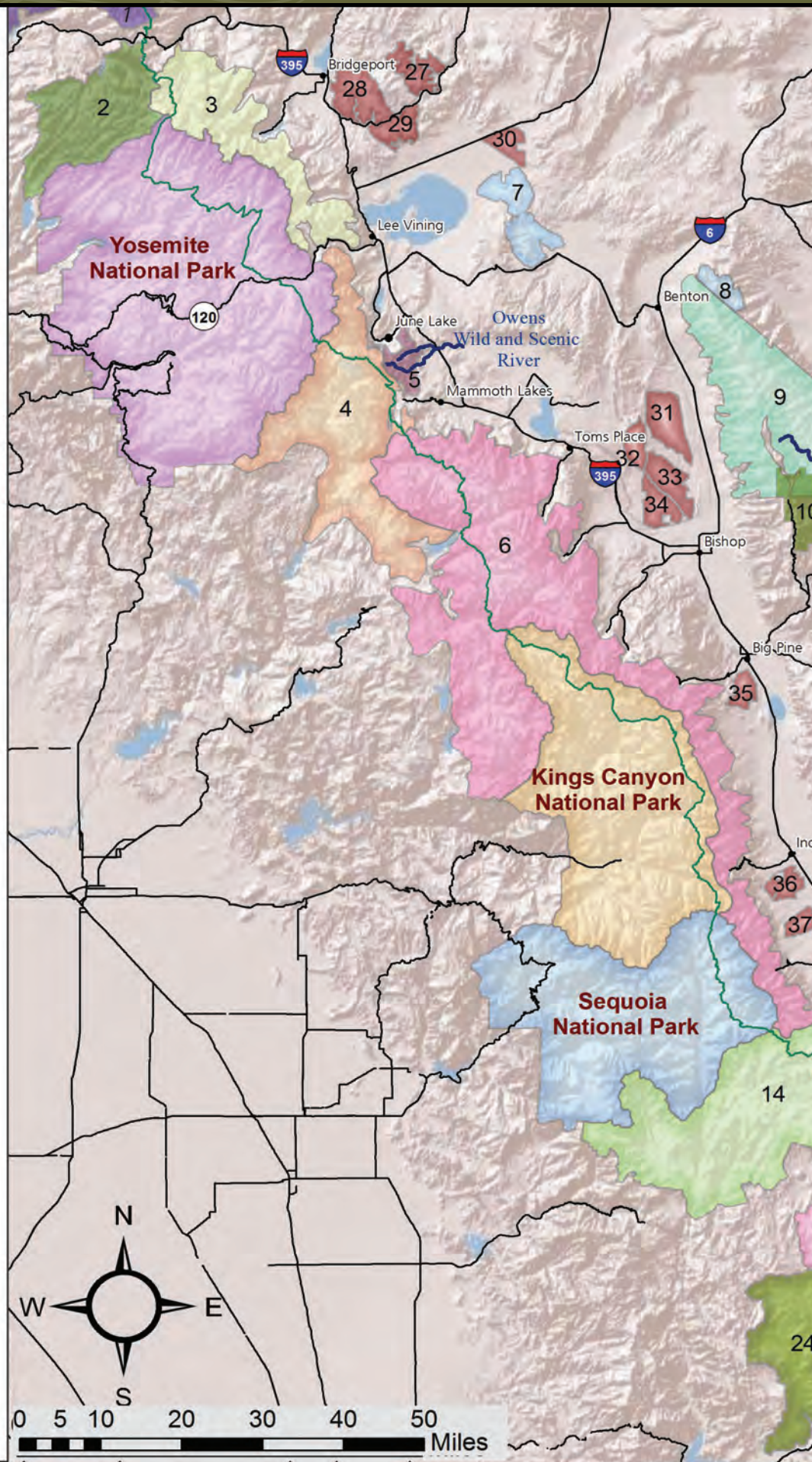
Starr was buried where he fell. It is, at 12,000 feet, the highest known grave not just in the High Sierra, but in the lower 48 states.

In his forward to "Norman Clyde of the Sierra Nevada: Rambles Through the Range of Light," Francis P. Farquhar, who coordinated the aerial search for Starr and was president of the Sierra Club in 1933, wrote that Clyde's extraordinary mountaineering ability was matched only by his intellectual depth, and though he was known to be cantankerous in his middle years, he was above all a man of great kindness. "Time and again he went out of his way to rescue people in trouble in the mountains," Farquhar wrote.

Born in 1885, he is credited today with more than 1,000 first ascents. The Los Angeles Times described Clyde from 1923 onward as one of the best known mountaineers of the West. He was the first to climb the tallest Minaret that now bears his name, and by 1929, the Times reported him as the only man who had climbed all 14,000-plus peaks in California. He was known to carry a 90-pound pack that carried everything from classic literature in the original Greek and Latin to iron frying pans. Phil Pister, a retired Fishery Biologist in Bishop, well-known locally in his own right, knew Clyde in the latter half of his life and said no one will ever beat his record. "Every peak he did was a first ascent," Pister said in a 2008 interview.

Some might wonder what could drive a man to such extreme exploits. Few people in Clyde's long life knew that he had been married in 1915, but lost his bride to pulmonary tuberculosis after what were apparently three sweet years. He refused to speak of it once he moved from the sea to the Eastern Sierra, suggesting that his heart had been broken. But in the spectacular Sierra backcountry, Clyde began a different kind of love affair – one that lasted up until his death at the age of 87.

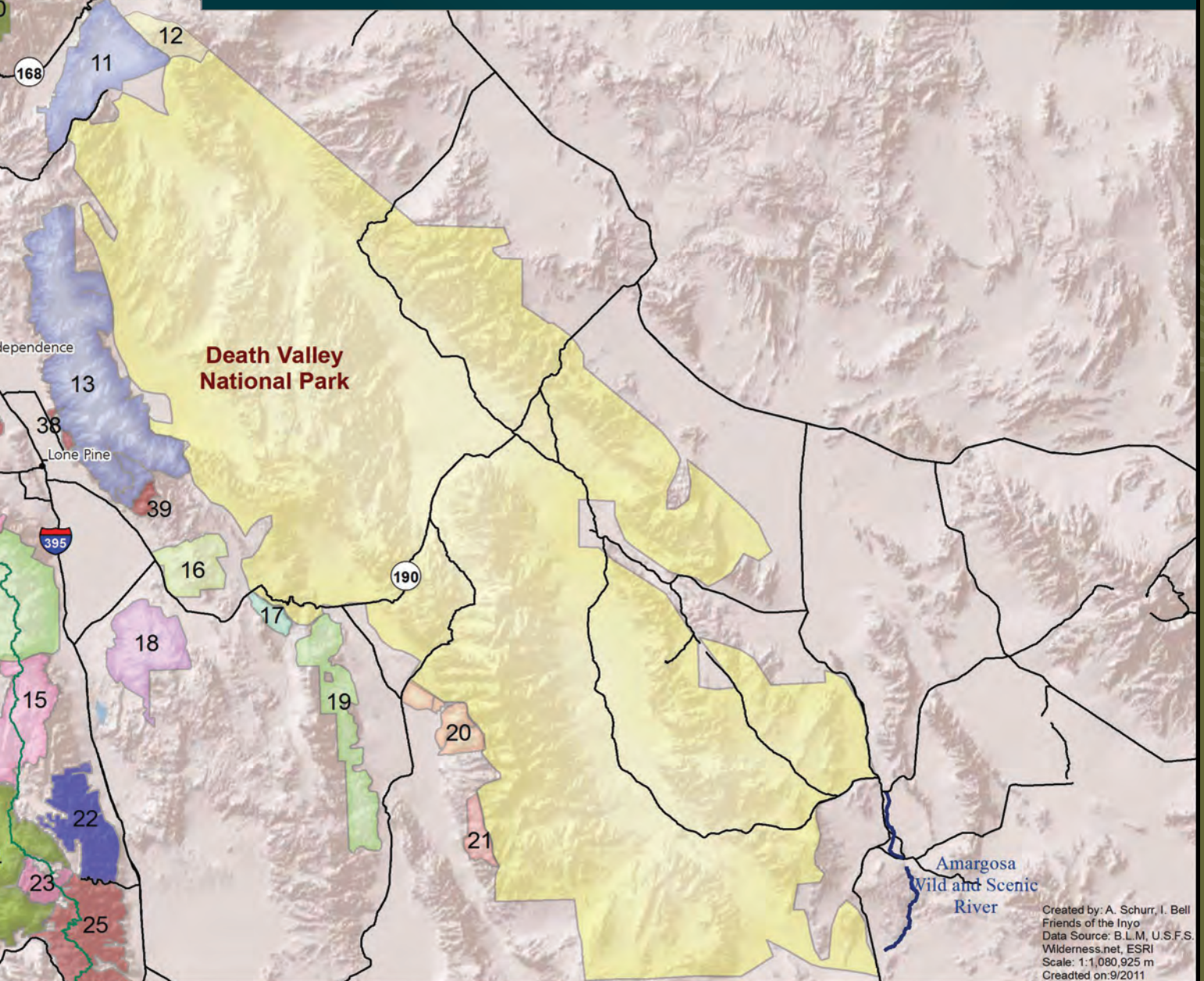
- Wild and Scenic Rivers
- Pacific Crest Trail
- 7 Carson Iceberg
- 2 Emigrant
- 3 Hoover
- 4 Ansel Adams
- 5 Owens River Headwaters
- 6 John Muir
- 7 Granite Mountain
- 8 Boundary Peak
- 9 White Mountains
- 10 Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest
- 11 Piper Mountain
- 12 Sylvania Mountains
- 13 Inyo Mountains
- 14 Golden Trout
- 15 South Sierra
- 16 Malpais Mesa
- 17 Darwin Falls
- 18 Coso Range
- 19 Argus Range
- 20 Surprise Canyon
- 21 Manly Peak
- 22 Sacatar Trail
- 23 Chimney Peak
- 24 Domeland
- 25 Owens Peak
- Wilderness Study Areas**
- 26 Slinkard
- 27 Bodie
- 28 Bodie Mountain
- 29 Mount Biedeman
- 30 Excelsior
- 31 Chidago Canyon
- 32 Casa Diablo
- 33 Fish Slough
- 34 Volcanic Tablelands
- 35 Crater Mountain
- 36 Independence Creek
- 37 Symmes Creek
- 38 Southern Inyo
- 39 Cerro Gordo



Eastern Sierra

WILDERNESS MAP

Cottonwood Creek
Wild and Scenic
River



WILDERNESS MAP

Created by: A. Schurr, I. Bell
Friends of the Inyo
Data Source: B.L.M., U.S.F.S.
Wilderness.net, ESRI
Scale: 1:1,080,925 m
Created on: 9/2011



Glass Creek Meadow winter ski. (Todd Vogel)

Owens River Headwaters Wilderness

ACREAGE: 14,721 acres

LOCATION: North of Mammoth Lakes, south of June Lake

MANAGEMENT: Inyo National Forest

ACCESS: S.R. 203 to Minaret Vista, S.R 158 (June Lake Loop), Obsidian Dome Road

ACTIVITIES: Hiking, backpacking, cross country skiing, wild-life viewing, birding, wildflowers, dispersed camping



The Owens River Headwaters Wilderness was created in 2009. Within this wilderness can be found lush meadows, high alpine ridges and peaks, and the headwaters of one of the country's most famous fishing streams – the Owens River. The headwaters of the Owens River contain the Eastern Sierra's largest red fir forest, its biggest alpine meadow

and an astonishing variety of flowers and plants, all because of the unique weather here. The Owens River Headwaters Wilderness lies in the same low "gap" in the Sierra crest that contains Mammoth Mountain, famous for its extremely snowy winters. Pacific storms sweep across the Central Valley, funnel over the crest, and dump enormous amounts of snow on Mammoth Mountain and the ridges, peaks and meadows nearby. The result is that abundant snowmelt not only drains into the river, but also into an extensive series



San Joaquin Ridge. (John Dittli)

HIGHLIGHTS:

Yost Lake and Yost Meadow, the view from San Joaquin Ridge, Glass Creek Meadow.

of meadows, flush with springs and colored with extensive carpets of wildflowers. In fact, Glass Creek Meadow, located just north and east of Mammoth Lakes, is the largest sub-alpine meadow east of the Sierra



Angler, Owens River Headwater Wilderness. (John Dittli)

FAUNA FOCUS:

Conifer Cornucopia

The wet storms that sweep over the wilderness create conifer forests more like those on the western slope of the Sierra than the arid Eastside. The largest stand of old growth red firs in the region grow here, as does mountain hemlock, and limber pine. At the lower elevations of the wilderness, large stands of Jeffrey pine extend for miles in every direction, a result of the higher than usual precipitation that comes over the Mammoth Pass gap in the Sierra Crest.

crest, containing more than 100 seeps and springs fed by the abundant snowfall, which drains through the volcanic mountainsides and emerges above ground to water the meadow. The low gap in the Sierra also gives animals, such as deer, a relatively easy way to move between the east and west side of the Sierra Nevada range making the wilderness vital habitat for both deer and predators. Another product of the wetter weather patterns is the unusual forest within the wilderness. The Owens River Headwater Wilderness contains the largest stand of old-growth red firs in the Eastern Sierra. These giant trees can exceed eight feet in diameter. The northern border of the wilderness, the San Joaquin Ridge, is a local favorite for its views of the Sierra crest and for the excellent backcountry ski opportunities both on the ridge and on nearby Whitewing ridge.

LOCAL LORE:

Dr. Connie Millar

Research scientist Dr. Connie Millar, who received her Masters in Wildland Resources and a Doctorate in Genetics, has been studying the headwaters of the Owens River for nearly 30 years. Nobody could be more pleased that it is now protected forever, and for plenty of reasons. "The kinds of meadows you find there, like Glass Creek Meadow, are an endangered community," she said. "It's more common for the Eastern Sierra to have small pocket meadows, but this meadow is over a mile long. And the flora and fauna there are amazing; there are endangered Yosemite toads everywhere, even the mountain vole, which is becoming hard to find."

This lush, green wilderness is also critical as a veritable living laboratory of how climate has changed over the past thousands of years. "The Headwaters Wilderness is of international importance," she said. Clear, precise evidence of glaciation, lake and meadow level changes, species growth and loss, and volcanism is all here. That gives scientists a rare "baseline" level of

information about how climate changes affect natural systems. "Understanding what happened in the past 1,000 years gives us insight into the future 1,000 years," she said.

For instance, high above verdant Glass Creek Meadow on the windswept ridge of a peak poetically called Whitewing, lies the preserved trunks of whole trees that died long ago when what is now called the Inyo Craters chain erupted. "They are big straight logs, some two to three feet in diameter and 50 feet long," she said. "When we got there, we realized it was a perfectly preserved forest from the Medieval period, and that the trees were of species that were more common at much lower elevations in the mountains, like White pine and Sugar pine. It's not something you would expect at such a high elevation so by that we know that the climate then was warmer and wetter. So this is a place that tells us what happened, and how and why, and that helps us to make decisions now about how to manage the land into the future."



Glass Creek Meadow. (John Dittli)



Big Moccasin Lake, East Pinnacles Creek. (John Dittli)

John Muir Wilderness

ACREAGE: 651,992 acres

LOCATION: Follows Eastern Sierra crest between Mammoth Lakes and Olancha, California.

MANAGEMENT: Inyo National Forest, Sierra National Forest

ACCESS: S.R. 203 to Mammoth Lakes, McGee Creek, Rock Creek, Bishop Creek Road, Big Pine Creek Road, Sawmill, Taboose, Shepherd, Baxter and Kearsarge Pass (Onion Valley) Roads, Mount Whitney Portal Road, Horseshoe Meadows Road.

ACTIVITIES: Hiking, backpacking, equestrian, fishing, hunting, mountaineering, wildlife and bird viewing



Designated in 1964, the John Muir Wilderness gained some 70,000 acres in 2009. It includes about 100 miles of the John Muir and Pacific Crest trails and is considered by its many admirers across the world to be one of the most beautiful wildernesses in the world. Within the John Muir Wilderness, you can find exquisite turquoise lakes strung together like a jeweled necklace, some with sand beaches, or fine, broad meadows and wildflower gardens that stretch for miles. Steep, silver granite peaks rise like a shout of joy from emerald meadows filled with wildflowers. Hot springs trickle out of the cracks in granite rocks, forming a steaming pool beneath old growth cedar and red fir. Deer, bighorn sheep and black bear, high country pika and marmots, share this quintessential alpine wilderness.

The John Muir Wilderness is long but narrow, averaging about 20 miles wide. Its northern border is just to the west of the town of Mammoth Lakes, near the Mammoth Pass area. Its southern border is south of Lone Pine and Mount Whitney. The western border of the wilderness is mostly Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park along with the Golden Trout, Dinkey Lakes and Monarch Wilderness areas. The eastern border is the Owens Valley. Elevations here range between 4,000 feet just below Mount Whitney to the top of Mt Whitney, at 14,492 feet above sea level the tallest mountain in the lower 48 states. The wilderness includes 57 peaks higher than 13,000, and many above 14,000 feet besides Mount Whitney. The John Muir drains several rivers, including the south and middle forks of the San Joaquin River and the north fork of the Kings River, all of which are known for their trout fishing. The weather is classic Sierra; warm sunny days, mild nights, with an occasional July snowstorm thrown in just to keep you awake. It's not easy to get in and it's not easy to get out of this wilderness and that is a big part of its attraction. You can get lost here, for an hour, a day, a few weeks, a whole summer. And no, you won't ever want to return home.



John Muir Trail sign. (John Dittli)

HIGHLIGHTS:

Long distance hiking via the John Muir and Pacific Crest Trails, Little Lakes Valley, the Mount Whitney Trail, and most of California's "Fourteeners"



Mt. Langley, Lone Pine Peak and Mt. Whitney in the Sierra's Eastern Scarp as seen from Lone Pine. (Catherine Billey)

GEOLOGY FOCUS:

The Sierra's Eastern Scarp

The sheer escarpment of the Eastern Sierra that dominates the John Muir Wilderness was created when the Sierra Nevada bedrock granite began to rise more than 10 million years ago. At the same time, the valleys we know as Antelope Valley, Long Valley, and the Owens Valley, began to sink along the Owens Valley fault line. The Sierra is still rising at the rate of about 1.5 inches every century, extremely quick in geological time. This rate of uplift raises the mountains faster than erosion can wear them down, which is why the Sierra is still gaining elevation.

The Eastern Sierra is thus characterized by very deep, very precipitous canyons that are relatively short in distance from top to bottom compared to their western Sierra counterparts. And even though the Sierra drains massive amounts of eroded debris into the Owens Valley each year, burying the bedrock some 5,000 feet deep in some places, the valley continues to drop.

The end result is that the Sierra Nevada is a very young, very active mountain range, showing little weathering and erosion compared to, say, the Colorado Rocky Mountains which are much older and which are losing elevation, not gaining it. The Sierra's youth means the range also has comparatively little soil, and that limits the plants and animals to the most hardy.

LOCAL LORE: The John Muir Trail

The following is an excerpt from "Walk the Sky: Following the John Muir Trail, Photography by John Dittli, Essays by Mark A. Schlenz" (Companion Press, 2009)

Walk away quietly in any direction and taste the freedom of the mountaineer. Climb the mountains and get their good tidings, Nature's peace will flow into you as sunshine flows into trees. The winds will blow their own freshness into you and the storms their energy, while cares will drop off like autumn leaves.

—John Muir

DANCING THE EARTH by Mark A. Schlenz

Have you walked the John Muir Trail? If you have ever stepped out upon any portion of this two-hundred-and-twenty-mile pathway in the sky, if only for a few steps, you have followed the



Mt. Russell as seen from Mt. Whitney summit. (John Dittli)

trail of John Muir. You have followed his footsteps into mountain realms where wildness still calls us to journey ever further out so that we may, at last, arrive more deeply and fully within. If you have ever measured any length at all of the John Muir Trail with your own legs, your body and your spirit have also, no doubt, made some calculation of how much further—and how much longer—you would need to keep on walking in order to actually hike every mile of the trail's entire length. If only for a few heartbeats and several exhilarated paces, your whole being had a determined desire to just keep right on walking until you had done so. If you have ever felt the trail's earthbound pull beneath your feet, your heart has dreamed of following it skyward forever. Whether or not you ever do complete the entire route of the John Muir Trail, you have, in some immeasurably precious way, walked the sky.

For some, completing the John Muir Trail may comfortably involve several summers of "section-hiking" different portions, allowing ample time to camp and explore the adjacent high country. Others commit to "through-hiking" the trail: they travel the whole High Sierra span between Yosemite and Mount Whitney in a single season's journey, planning food drops or making side trips over the passes to resupply and perhaps even enjoy a few days of trail break. Completely self-sustained through-hikers prefer to carry all of their provisions and equipment necessary to complete their journeys in one uninterrupted wilderness journey from the outset. Through-hikers train in preparation or else work it out on the trail; they invest in ultra-light technologies, gear down, or just carry too much. They pack everything they'll need for two to three weeks and make steady 12-to-20-mile-a-day progress on a demanding itinerary that requires careful rationing of supplies and rest-days. Most trek north-to-south, though some do march south-to-north: a very select few may even turn right around and double back for the return trek. Through-hikers traveling the entire Pacific Crest Trail from Mexico to Canada may cover the JMT miles of their route in a matter of what seems like a very few days. Day-hikers in the Sierra, on the other hand, may only cover a few miles of the trail at any time. But, regardless of their ambitions or achievements, every walker who has ever even yearned to set foot on the wilderness path has somehow followed the trail of John Muir.

The John Muir Trail memorializes America's most influential naturalist for his rich legacies to environmental awareness. The trail's dedication recognizes Muir's remarkable mountaineering exploration, as well as his landmark natural science observations in the Sierra Nevada, and it honors his advocacy for appreciation and

protection of the range's wilderness grandeur. Today the John Muir Trail's entire length traverses designated wilderness area, threading fragile alpine habitats and pristine forests at the headwaters of the Rush Creek drainage and the Merced, Tuolumne, San Joaquin, Kings, and Kern Rivers. What better tribute to Muir's wilderness vision as founding Sierra Club President and tireless defender of his most beloved mountains?

Yet important as his legacy is to wilderness preservation, Muir is equally revered for his legacy as a wilderness traveler, for his legendary inspiration as a walker, a wanderer, a simple sojourner burdened only by barest necessities, at home on bare ground. As much as he influenced America's conservation of its wilderness heritage as the nation's frontiers were vanishing, Muir also inspired Americans to preserve their own health and freedom simply by walking—even as new technologies had begun to displace this essentially human activity in modern life. As a pilgrim to the wild, Muir helped secure wilderness as a place of pilgrimage when walking was first approaching obsolescence in human history.

The almost religious naturalist fervor of Muir's praise-filled accounts of his mountain and forest wanderings transformed "howling wilderness" into "holy ground" and helped to baptize American wilderness preservation as a sacred public trust. In the same period, progress of the Industrial Revolution was rapidly transforming the most fundamental physical functions of modern daily life. As he resisted the landscape's transformation by train and automobile witnessed in his lifetime, preferring always to travel by foot, Muir is not just a founding father of the American wilderness preservation movement: he is also a legendary embodiment of the pilgrim spirit—that timeless longing in the human mind and body to walk.

Shortly after the end of the Civil War, in September of 1867, John Muir set out on foot from his home in Indianapolis with the intention of walking to South America. He journeyed as far as Florida before fever stopped his progress. Muir's journal of the excursion, published after his death as "A Thousand Mile Walk to the Gulf," is a landmark in the literature of walking as an early written account of such a lengthy peregrination made, presumably, for the sole purpose of pure pleasure. Most of Muir's notable literary works would be drawn from journals and articles written during his almost constant travels for the next decade of his vagabond life.

After some months of recovery from his fever, Muir arrived by ship in San Francisco and promptly set out from town afoot over Pacheco Pass where he first glimpsed the distant Sierra Nevada.



Sunrise, Marie Lake. (John Dittli)



Matlock Lake, near Kearsarge Pass, Onion Valley in John Muir Wilderness. (Todd Vogel)

In the summer of 1869, as the nation celebrated completion of the first transcontinental railroad, Muir rambled the high country of his Range of Light writing the journals he would revise and publish near the end of his life as "My First Summer in the Sierra." While his writing of this period has inspired generations to enjoy walking for its own sake, Muir wrote at the historic moment when iron rails were reshaping the continent's landscapes and, after eons of foot-borne migrations, new technologies were replacing human mobility in modern travel. By the end of his lifetime, Model-T Fords were taking over America's streets and byways. In coming decades pedestrians would face growing inconveniences and hazards as more people preferred to be carried about by machines.

We are evolved to walk—and walking has greatly furthered our evolutionary journey. Human thought, language, and culture may owe nearly everything to our abilities to stand and travel upright and so use our hands to hold and carry our young and possessions, to fashion and use tools, to create and communicate with symbols. We evolved as a migratory species and our bodies—as well as our minds—are not necessarily best suited for sedentary existence. Sitting, and even standing, strain our musculoskeletal structure, but the biomechanics of walking come as naturally and are as inspiring to us as breathing.

Striding over uneven ground enhances our dance with the earth

in ways lost even to avid walkers who only know sidewalks, graded paths, and carefully leveled surfaces still left to pedestrians in our developed landscapes. On level ground, our steps tend toward a consistent timing, length, and placement. Built environments minimize demands on our balance responses, and our musculoskeletal systems constantly repeat certain movements and alignments within a relatively limited variety of planes on relatively evened surfaces. We encounter fewer random obstacles and the curbs, stair-steps, or ramps we meet have regular proportions with relation to our bodies.

On the John Muir Trail, on the other hand, every step—and every root, large stone, or stream-crossing in our path—requires specially adapted activations of muscles, tendons, and ligaments within our hips, knees, ankles, and feet to meet varying surfaces, distances, heights, and levels with each footfall. Each step requires that these joints create operational stability through ever-changing orientations and alignments in relation to one another, the pull of gravity, momentum, and trail conditions. Though we may dance a steady two-step on city sidewalks, wilderness walking involves us in an uninhibited improvisation of creative choreography spontaneous to each moment. The infinite variety and spontaneity of our biomechanics in wilderness walking brings more comprehensive activity and conditioning to our bodies and helps awaken our senses and our minds to both our internal and external environments as we dance with infinitely varied terrain.

When you walk the John Muir Trail, every step covers land protected within National Parks and designated wilderness areas. You tread trails historically constructed and maintained by trail crews using hand tools and construction materials hauled into remote camps supplied by mule-trains. You walk where only walkers have gone or will go. Beyond the trailheads at Yosemite and Whitney Portals, only the highway over Tioga Pass through Tuolumne Meadows and the switchbacking road to Devil's Postpile come near enough to the John Muir Trail for vehicle access, and even these near contacts with motorized travel are easily detoured. You can virtually walk the entire length of the John Muir Trail without crossing paths with a vehicle or even setting foot on paved ground along the way.



Hikers at Summit Lake on Mono Pass. (Catherine Billey)



White Mountains Wilderness

ACREAGE: 253,000 acres

LOCATION: East of Bishop and Mammoth Lakes

MANAGEMENT: Inyo National Forest, Ridgecrest and Bishop Bureau of Land Management

ACCESS: SR 168 (Westgard Pass Road), SR 264 (Fish Lake Valley Road), Silver Canyon Road, Trail Canyon Road, several rough gravel access routes

ACTIVITIES: Hiking, backpacking, wildlife viewing, birding, rock hounding, meteorological and high-altitude scientific study, sightseeing



Designated through the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act of March 31, 2009, the White Mountains Wilderness is located on the easternmost border of California and the Great Basin, and the westernmost border of Nevada. The White Mountains Wilderness contains California's third highest peak, 14,246-foot-tall White Mountain, which is also the highest peak in the Great Basin.

The Whites, as they are commonly called, rise abruptly from the arid, 4,000-foot Owens and Fish Lake valleys to the top of White Mountain. Many peaks in the range exceed 13,000 feet. The 60-mile long range lies in the rain shadow of the equally high Sierra Nevada range to the west. The Sierra takes most of the moisture headed inland from the Pacific Coast, leaving little for the range in the shadow of the Sierra, the White Mountains. The Whites are thus a high-desert range. They contain several springs but only a few perennial streams. One of these is Cottonwood Creek, the only creek in the Great Basin that is protected from its origins to its terminus in the desert far below.

The Whites are a severe and stunning range, full of precipitously steep canyons, high broad alpine tundra plateaus, and gorgeous wildflower shows after a wet winter. The feeling of space and light and distance is incomparable. Trees are limited, trails are rugged, and – with the exception of White Mountain itself – the range is relatively little visited. The arid, high altitude air makes for some of the best stargazing in the world. Mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, and pronghorn antelope make their home in the steep and wild canyons, accompanied by their predators, mountain lions and coyotes.

Outside of the wilderness, the University of California's Barcroft Station at 12,470 feet hosts some of the world's foremost scientific studies on weather, climate change, and high altitude. Other research stations are scattered at various, slightly lower locations as well.

FLORA FOCUS:



Bristlecone Hikers. (John Dittli)

Ancient Bristlecone Pine Forest

The starkly elegant bristlecone pine, or *Pinus balfouriana*, is considered to be the oldest living tree in the world. The oldest living thing alive is called the Methuselah tree. It makes its home in the White Mountains, but is not identified to the public for fear of damage and/or vandalism. Bristlecones are uniquely capable of surviving the extreme wind, poor and dry soils, cold, and the short growing season of the White Mountains. They grow very slowly and their wood is resinous, thus resistant to disease, insects, and fungus. Although the White Mountains hold the greatest population of bristlecones in the country, the Rocky Mountains of Colorado, New Mexico and Arizona, and the Great Basin of Utah and Nevada also host bristlecone pine groves. The twisted and photogenic foxtail pine, common to the highest reaches of the Southern Sierra plateaus and mountainsides is closely related to the bristlecone.

LOCAL LORE:

Naturalist Derham Giuliani

Perhaps nobody loved the White Mountains more or knew them better than self-taught naturalist and former Big Pine resident Derham Giuliani who died in 2010 at the age of 79. He spent most of his life tramping through the Whites, accumulating a vast knowledge about the wild, rugged range.

"It's Giuliani's 25-year census of golden-mantled ground squirrels that many find most intriguing," wrote environmental journalist Tom Knudson in a 2009 article. "Few people, after all, study the same species for a quarter century, week after week, at their own expense. Giuliani's diligence paid off when he plotted his observations on a chart and ... tied the sightings to elevation. Golden-mantled ground squirrels, he discovered, are heading for higher ground."

Giuliani left a larger scientific legacy as well, in the form of published articles, scientific specimens, field notes, and data taken down over a lifetime of field study.

Giuliani was born near San Francisco, where his early love of the natural world found him studying out on the foggy dunes near his home, feet in the sand, knees on the ground, watching, listening, and taking notes on everything he saw. Although he got a degree in mathematics and loved the symmetry and beauty of numbers, he found being indoors impossible. He visited then moved to the Eastern Sierra when he was in his 20s. He never left. He made a career of collecting butterflies and beetles for scientific collections such as the California Academy of Sciences and the Los Angeles County Museum. He was also supported by private individuals, including butterfly taxonomist and author Dr. John Emmel and Big Pine teacher and scientist Enid Larsen. Giuliani lived by himself for some 40 years in Big Pine, in a small house on the land of a good friend. He lived simply, with no phone and few family connections, spending every spare moment outdoors. "I've always been interested in natural history," he said in an article in the Inyo Register. "I never outgrew it."



Derham Giuliani at Slot Canyon. (Ceal Klingler)



Cottonwood Creek, Whites. (John Dittli)



Eastern Sierra Scarp from Chocolate Mountain. (Todd Vogel)

Inyo Mountains Wilderness

ACREAGE: 198,360 acres

LOCATION: East of Independence and Big Pine, west of Death Valley National Park

MANAGEMENT: Inyo National Forest, Bureau of Land Management

ACCESS: SR 168 (Westgard Pass Road), Mazourka Canyon Road, Saline Valley Road

ACTIVITIES: Rockhounding, exploring old mines, hiking, backpacking



The Inyo Mountains are a steep, extremely rugged and isolated desert mountain range. The highest, Keynot Peak, rises to almost 11,000 feet. The Inyos are a relatively unusual mountain range for the region because its eight perennial streams drain from the east side. These slender green threads of life provide safe harbor for a surprisingly large and diverse array of wildlife that can all be found in these riparian “islands in a sea of desert”: mule deer, desert bighorn sheep, mountain lions, and even the exotic and rare Inyo Mountain slender salamander. Creosote, shadscale, and sagebrush cover the lower elevations, pinyon and juniper the midlevel slopes, and bristlecone and limber pine dominate the highest peaks.

Mining has played a central role in the rich human history of the Inyo Mountains. The salt deposits left behind eons ago when Saline Valley was a shallow lake were tempting enough for salt miners to build a fantastic tram from the valley floor nearly to the



Saline Valley. (Todd Vogel)

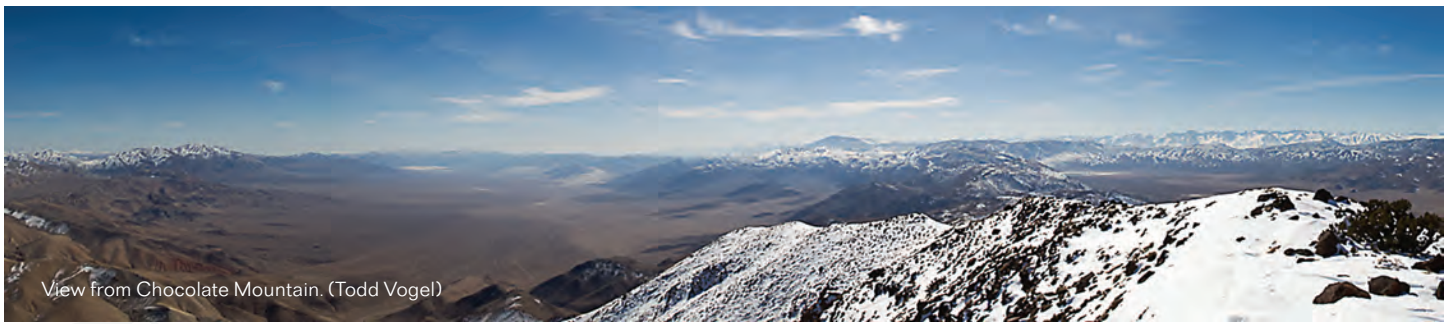
HIGHLIGHTS:

MAZOURKA CANYON, WINNEDUMAH ROCK

The Inyo Mountains Wilderness was created in 1994 and is located on the eastern edge of the Owens Valley, east of Independence and Big Pine and south of Bishop. The short, narrow high-desert range shares its eastern border with Death Valley National Park and separates Saline Valley from the Owens Valley.

top of the range. The remarkably intact remains of this endeavor and many other mining efforts are still in evidence, scattered across the ridges and draws of the range.

This wilderness is as isolated and hard to reach as any you will find, but a group of intrepid volunteers who love the Inyos have nevertheless managed to carve out and maintain a 40-mile section of trail here, called the Lonesome Miners Trail – a challenging trail that will essentially guarantee a pristine desert mountain adventure.



View from Chocolate Mountain. (Todd Vogel)

Piper Mountain Wilderness

ACREAGE: 72,192 acres

LOCATION: Northeast of Big Pine, west of Death Valley National Park

MANAGEMENT: Bureau of Land Management

ACCESS: SR 168 (Westgard Pass Road), approximately 20 miles north and east of Big Pine

ACTIVITIES: Rockhounding, hiking, backpacking

HIGHLIGHTS: Chocolate Mountain



The Piper, Sylvania, and Inyo Mountains meet in the Piper Mountain Wilderness. The wilderness also forms the upper end of Eureka Valley—the desert valley immediately north of Death Valley National Park. Piper Mountain at 7,546 feet, also called Chocolate Mountain on topographical maps, gives the wilderness its name. The Piper Mountains are a subset of the Inyo range and resemble them in many ways, but they have no perennial streams. When Piper was proposed as wilderness, several rough four-wheel-drive roads were allowed to remain and they divide the wilderness into three sections. All three different areas of the wilderness harbor desert bighorn sheep.



Owens Valley Salamander. (Ceal Klingler)

FAUNA FOCUS:

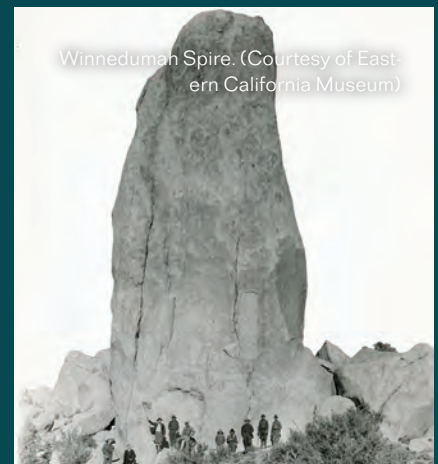
The Slender Salamander

Hidden deep in the knife-edged canyons and draws of the Inyo Mountains is a rare and fragile reminder of the power of water in the desert. Discovered in 1973, the small, lungless Inyo Mountain salamander is one of only a few slender salamander subspecies in California. It is endemic to the small springs and riparian areas of the Inyo and Piper Mountains, where it is confined to only 16 known places. It is a short, stocky salamander with a greenish-brown cast, and because it respire through its skin, it must live in moist areas. The slender salamander is a state-protected species due to its rarity; threats include mining and cattle and wild burro grazing.

LOCAL LORE:

The Story of Winnedumah

High on the crest of the Inyo Mountains east of Independence, a startling 80-foot granite spire known as Winnedumah cuts the ridge line and seems to stand sentry over the Owens Valley. One story holds that thousands of years ago, a Paiute tribe was being chased into the Inyo Mountains by a rival tribe. The tribe's medicine man, Winnedumah, stood at the top of the mountain and began to pray for the salvation of his tribe. Suddenly, he was transformed into the giant monolith and the enemies were swept away. The medicine man stands there today, watching over the valley and modern day tribes.



Winnedumah Spire. (Courtesy of Eastern California Museum)



Mt. Langley from South Fork Lake. (Todd Vogel)



Packers at South Fork Lake. (Todd Vogel)

Golden Trout Wilderness

ACREAGE: 303,511 acres

LOCATION: Southwest of Lone Pine and Mt. Whitney along the Sierra crest, bordered by the John Muir Wilderness to the north east and Sequoia Kings Canyon National Park to the north.

MANAGEMENT: Inyo National Forest, Sequoia National Forest

ACCESS: Horseshoe Meadows Road, Nine Mile Road

ACTIVITIES: Hiking, backpacking, mountaineering, fishing, sightseeing, wildlife viewing, birding, equestrian, hunting

HIGHLIGHTS: Horseshoe Meadows/Cottonwood Lakes, north and south forks of the Kern Wild and Scenic River



The United States Congress designated the Golden Trout Wilderness in 1978 to protect the southern Sierra mountains and meadows, and the rare, coveted native golden trout that lives only in the regions' streams and rivers.

The Golden Trout Wilderness contains the southernmost high alpine country of the Sierra Nevada as well as the long, green meadows of the giant Kern Plateau where it drops abruptly into the deep gorge of the wild and swift forks of the Kern River. It is a landscape marked by some of the most challenging whitewater in the country, by clean, white angular granite boulders, by massive, towering peaks, and by the elegantly twisted southern Sierra species of the foxtail pine, closely related to the bristlecone pine.

The Golden Trout Wilderness is also known for its lakes and streams – most notably Cottonwood Lakes, that sit like turquoise gems in deep green cirques surrounded by the white peaks and the gold and russet twisted trunks of ancient foxtail pines. The Kern Plateau at the southern end of the wilderness includes Monache Meadows and other giant meadows.



Golden Trout. (bigstock.com)

FAUNA FOCUS:

Golden Trout

"I can liken it to nothing more accurately than a twenty dollar gold piece, the same satin finish.... It gleamed and melted and glowed as though fresh from the mold.... I thought then, and have ever since, that the Golden Trout, fresh from the water, is one of the most beautiful fish that swims." So said Stewart Edwards White in 1903, after his first sighting of the rare golden trout. Isolated by the rugged topography of the southern Sierra, Golden Trout owe their existence to powerful geologic forces which have been at work on the Kern Plateau for millions of years. Some streams became isolated and for reasons unknown, the fish that survived in these "safe pockets" slowly evolved into the unique, molten-gold color today called the golden trout. But by the 1800's, the golden trout was facing unprecedented challenges. Prospectors, shepherds, loggers and anglers "discovered" the Kern Plateau. Overgrazing by domestic sheep and cattle damaged the lush, wet meadows and clean, oxygen-rich waters, willows and dense grasses that protected the stream banks and cooled the water. Other strains of trout were introduced and the easy-going golden, not as aggressive as the new varieties of trout, began to decline. Today, the rich meadows and streams that provide a home for the golden trout are being restored, and domestic stock grazing has been reduced or eliminated in many areas in hopes that the Golden will recover and once again flash through the morning light like an escaped sunbeam.

DESERT WILDERNESSES

Death Valley Wilderness

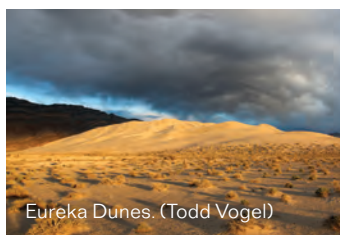
ACREAGE: 3,099,770 acres

LOCATION: East of Lone Pine, west of Las Vegas, north of Baker

MANAGEMENT: National Park Service

ACCESS: SR. 190, Big Pine Road, Saline Valley Road, North Eureka Road, Scotty's Castle Road, many other minor roads

ACTIVITIES: Hiking, backpacking, rockhounding, ghost towns, mining towns, wildlife viewing



Eureka Dunes. (Todd Vogel)



Surprise Canyon. (Todd Vogel)

Death Valley Wilderness was created in 1994, adding more than three million acres to America's wild desert heritage. Huge and stark, stunning in its austerity, sparked by unexpected, verdant green oases, Death Valley is truly one of the world's most unique places: a landscape marked by extremes of both topography and climate. Annual rainfall in Death Valley itself measures slightly less than two inches. For six months each year, heat sears the valley floor. In July, temperatures average 116 degrees Fahrenheit. During the other six months, while the nearby Sierra Nevada is twenty feet deep in snow, Death Valley is barefoot weather, a siren call to the snow-weary. Telescope Peak in the Panamint Range rises to 11,049 feet, the highest point in the middle of the park. Nearby Badwater, 15 or so miles to the east, is 282 feet below sea level, the lowest point in North America. More than 1,000 species of plants have been identified within the park and an astonishing variety of rodents, mammals, reptiles and birds inhabit the deep canyons, oases, plains and mountain tops. Wildflowers bloom, covering the bare slopes with green and gold, magenta and white when enough rain falls during the winter and spring. When it does not, the valley retains its austere beauty, a place where silence can be almost perfect and the soul can breathe and renew.

Other Desert Wildernesses (all created by the 1994 Desert Protection Act)

ACREAGE: Malpais Mesa: 31,905 Argus Range: 65,725, Coso Range: 49,296 Darwin Falls: 8,190 acres, Surprise Canyon: 24,433 acres, Manly Peak: 12,897 acres

MANAGEMENT: Bureau of Land Management

LOCAL LORE: Surprise Canyon

Surprise Canyon rises abruptly from the floor of Panamint Valley, climbing to the not-so-old ruins of the mining town of Panamint City. From the valley floor, Surprise is nothing special – a silver-grey gash in rugged sheer mountains, looking no different from any other desert canyon. But within a few miles of driving up the road, the magic begins. The air cools and grows damp. The sound of water trickles through the evening. Crickets and frogs (yes, frogs) grumble and chirp. The sound of water intensifies and grows.

In a few miles, Surprise Canyon creek tumbles down over silver rocks below the trailhead parking area, filling the soft desert air with the sound of a mountain stream. Heading up the canyon, the creek continues flowing steadily. Thick green cottonwoods shadow the creek, and willows and grapevine radiate out toward the high sheer walls of the canyon. On the south side of the canyon, if you are lucky and observant, the rare Panamint daisy – as big as a human hand – grows on a high, sheer slope, an extravagant pageantry of lush yellow.

Continuing up the canyon, the walls narrow and deepen and the creek carves a slender route through walls of silver-white granite, smooth as desert sandstone. Ribboned waterfalls drop ten feet down the white rock into deep pools. Dragonflies flit through the mist. The waterfalls keep coming, one after another, and the canyon walls deepen more. Then abruptly, the canyon opens up. The desert crowds back in and the creek disappears under thick brush. The canyon is once again dry. But in another mile, Surprise surprises again. Another spring appears, covered under a thick wall of grapevine a quarter mile long. Lavender desert asters, orange globe mallows and yellow bitterbrush push through the grapevine and willows. A rare Panamint rattler slithers out of the trail. The haunting call of a canyon wren descends through the evening air.

Up ahead still further, the extensive and well-preserved buildings of Panamint City lie in a juniper-and-pinyon-pine-covered bowl, waiting for discovery. This is Surprise Canyon. It lives up to its name.

Friends of the Inyo EASTERN SIERRA WILDERNESS GUIDE

Visitor Resources

Trip Planning (Lodging, Dining, Shopping, Transportation, Activities)

Inyo County: www.theothersideofcalifornia.com or call 760-873-8405 (Bishop Chamber)

Death Valley: www.deathvalleychamber.org or call 760-852-4420

Lone Pine: www.lonepinechamber.com or call 760-876-4444

Bishop: www.bishopvisitor.com or call 888-395-3952

Mono County: www.monocounty.org or call 800-845-7922

Mammoth Lakes: www.visitmammoth.com or call 888-466-2666

Devils Postpile National Monument: www.nps.gov/depo or call 760-934-2289

June Lake: www.junelakeloop.org

Lee Vining: www.leevining.com (or www.monolake.org) or call 760-647-6629

Mono Lake State Tufa Reserve: www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=514 or call 760-647-6331

Bodie State Historic Park: www.parks.ca.gov/?page_id=509 or call 760-647-6445

Bridgeport: www.BridgeportCalifornia.com or call 760-932-7500

Travel (Local and Regional Bus and Air Service)

Eastern Sierra Transit Authority: www.EasternSierraTransitAuthority.com, 800-922-1930

Yosemite Area Regional Transportation System (YARTS): www.Yarts.com, 877-989-2787

Flights to Mammoth-Yosemite Airport (MMH): www.alaskaair.com and www.United.com

Road Information

800-427-ROAD or www.dot.ca.gov

Road Closures

Due to winter snowfall at higher elevations, the following mountain passes are closed, generally from November to May. Other access roads to high-elevation wilderness areas also have seasonal closures.

Hwy. 120 – Tioga Pass into Yosemite

Hwy. 108 – Sonora Pass

Hwy. 89 – Monitor Pass

Emergency Contacts

911 for all emergencies

Mammoth Hospital, Mammoth Lakes 760-934-3311

Northern Inyo Hospital, Bishop 760-873-5811

Friends of the Inyo

EASTERN SIERRA WILDERNESS GUIDE

Visitor Resources

Recreation, Camping & Wilderness Permit Information

Mono and Inyo Counties have over 100 developed campgrounds. The majority are forest service campgrounds. Get details and make reservations on these national forest and state park websites. The Bureau of Land Management's Bishop field office manages several no-reservation campgrounds in the region, too. For questions regarding trail conditions or area-specific information, please contact the ranger station nearest your trailhead.

For questions regarding wilderness travel or wilderness permits for the Inyo National Forest, please contact the Wilderness Permit Office at: **Inyo National Forest, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 200, Bishop, CA 93514 or call the Wilderness Information Line: (760) 873-2483.**

Permits are required for overnight camping in all forest service and national park wilderness areas. Get wilderness permit details online or call one of the visitor centers below.

Inyo National Forest
www.fs.fed.us/r5/inyo

Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest
www.fs.fed.us/r4/htnf

Bureau of Land Management, Bishop
www.blm.gov/ca/bishop

Death Valley National Park
www.nps.gov/deva

Sequoia-Kings Canyon National Park
www.nps.gov/seki

Yosemite National Park
www.nps.gov/yose

Visitor Centers & Maps

Lone Pine
Interagency Visitor Center on Hwy 136 at US 395 or call 760-876-6222

Bishop
White Mountain Ranger Station on Hwy 395 or call 760-873-2500

Mammoth Lakes
Mammoth Lakes California Welcome Center on Hwy 203 or call 760-924-5500

Lee Vining
Mono Basin Scenic Area Visitor Center on US 395 or call 760-647-3044
Mono Lake Committee Visitor Center on US 395 or call 760-647-6595

Bridgeport
Bridgeport Ranger Station on US 395 or call 760-932-7070
Northern Mono Chamber Visitor Center on Hwy 395 or call 530-495-2945

Wilderness Resources

General Wilderness Information: www.wilderness.net

National Conservation Lands Foundation: www.ourconservationlegacy.org

The Wilderness Society: www.wilderness.org



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*As featured in California's Official State Visitor's Guide, 2010.

