

Kaweah Peaks Ridge from the southwest

Jim Koontz, Fred Peters, and Pete Murphy. This is supposed to go class 3 directly from the saddle between Squaretop and Bilko Pinnacle.

Southwest Ridge. Class 4. First ascent August 28, 1969, by Andy Smatko and Bill Schuler. From the saddle between Bilko Pinnacle and Squaretop, descend 40 feet to the southwest and go around a sharp buttress. Ascend a steep chute to the Southwest Ridge, encountering one 30-foot class 4 pitch. Follow the Southwest Ridge to the top.

"Second Kaweah" (4164 m; 13,680 ft; 1.0 mi NW of Mount Kaweah)

This peak is also known as "Gray Kaweah" and "False Kaweah." First ascent 1922 by Norman Clyde. The south slope from the High Sierra Trail is class 2, as is the traverse from Mount Kaweah. The high point is the southeastern summit.

The three pinnacles on the northwest ridge are loose class 3; they were first climbed on August 29, 1953, by Jim Koontz, Fred Peters, and Pete Murphy.

East Spur. IV, 5.9. First ascent August 1985 by Claude and Nancy Fiddler. This is a loose and undesirable climb.

Mount Kaweah (4207 m+; 13,802 ft)

This mountain has also been called "Big Kaweah" and "Great Kaweah." It is the highest point in the southwestern High Sierra.

South Slopes. Class 1. First ascent September 1881 by Judge William B. Wallace, Captain James Albert Wright, and Reverend Frederick H. Wales. First winter ascent April 13, 1994, by Paul Richins, Bob Carlson, Colin Fuller, and Robin Fuller. This is a simple cross-country hike from the High Sierra Trail. Leave the trail at its high point (3220 m+; 10,600 ft+; UTM 662407) between the trail junction in the Big Arroyo and the junction with the trail leading to Moraine Lake. This is near a pond that is usually dry.

East Ridge. Class 3. First ascent August 17, 1966, by Bill Schuler. This is a direct route to the summit of Mount Kaweah from the southern approach to Kaweah Pass. Don't climb the northeast ridge leading directly up from Kaweah

First winter ascent May 1, 2003, by Reiner Stenzel, Susan Livingston, and R. J. Secor.

“State Peak Ridge” (12,080 ft+; 12,000 ft+; 0.4 mi NE of State Peak; UTM 633884)

Class 2. This steep pass has been used on ski tours of the Cirque Crest.

“Cirque Ridge” (11,840 ft+; 11,920 ft+; 0.8 mi SSW of Marion Peak; UTM 643896)

Class 2–3. This “pass” actually crosses the steep southeast ridge of Peak 12,400+ (12,400 ft+). The easiest crossing is a little farther southeast than what would be expected from studying the Marion Peak 7.5-minute quadrangle.

“Windy Point” (11,200 ft+; 11,150 ft; 1.5 mi N of Horseshoe Lakes)

This is not a peak but rather a point where there is a fantastic view of the Middle Fork of the Kings River. It can be easily reached during the approach to Gray Pass by following the crest of Windy Ridge out to the point. The National Park Service also recognizes this as a great viewpoint: A line-of-sight radio repeater has been installed on the summit.

“Gray Pass” (10,760 ft+; 10,000 ft+; 2.8 mi ESE of Windy Peak)

Class 1. Gray Pass, White Pass, and Red Pass are the three passes used on Roper’s High Route between Horseshoe Lakes and Marion Lake. From Horseshoe Lakes hike north, past the largest Horseshoe Lake, to the steep slope that drops into Windy Canyon. Go northeast, across the crest of Windy Ridge, and descend to the small lake (UTM 605918). Traverse east along a small bench from the pond to Gray Pass, which overlooks the south fork of Cartridge Creek. Descend the southeast side of the pass by means of a shallow, grassy gully to the stream at the bottom of this canyon. *Further reading:* Roper, pp. 94–95.

“White Pass” (11,680 ft+; 11,680 ft+; 0.7 mi NW of Marion Peak)

Class 2. The western approach to this pass starts where the description for Gray Pass ends. Continue up the stream a short distance to a round lake. Head east-northeast from the lake to the basin immediately northwest of Marion Peak. White Pass is the almost-level saddle low on Marion Peak’s northwest ridge, characterized by the white talus. From the top of the pass, climb the ridge leading toward Marion

Peak a very short distance in order to bypass a small cliff on the north side of the pass. Make a level traverse to the east across talus before making a gradual descent through some loose chutes until you are immediately west of and below Red Pass.

“Red Pass” (11,560 ft+; 11,600 ft+; 0.2 mi S of Red Point)

Class 2. After traversing and descending from White Pass climb the easy but loose western side of Red Pass to its summit. Descend the eastern side of the pass and head toward Marion Lake. There is a cliff above the southwestern side of Marion Lake, which is bypassed by means of a gully on its northern side.

Red Point (11,884 ft; 11,840 ft+)

First ascent August 11, 1945, by Art Reyman. Class 1 from Red Pass.

Marion Peak (12,719 ft; 12,719 ft)

The northeast ridge is class 2 and was first climbed from Marion Lake on July 22, 1902, by Joseph N. LeConte and Curtis Lindley. The entire northeast ridge from Cartridge Pass is class 2, traversing many interesting, small peaks along the Cirque Crest. This traverse was climbed August 29, 2003, by Chris Libby.

The northwest ridge, rising from White Pass, is class 3. First ascent August 11, 1945, by Art Reyman. The north buttress is allegedly grade III, 5.10.

Marion Peak has been descended on its southeast side via a loose chute with a feasible direct descent to the South Fork of the Kings River. This is class 2, with a lot of nasty brush along the floor of the canyon.

WRINKLE: MARION PEAK TO STATE PEAK

This traverse is typically done on the southeast side of the Cirque Crest, descending a loose gully on the southeast slope of Marion Peak, crossing Cirque Ridge and State Peak Ridge before climbing the northeast ridge of State Peak.

“Marion Pass” (12,040 ft+; 12,080 ft+; 0.5 mi ENE of Marion Peak)

Class 2. This pass leads from Lake Basin to the southeast side of Cirque Crest.



Mount Thompson from the west

Mount Thompson (13,494 ft; 13,440 ft+)

Southwest Face. Class 2. First ascent August 14, 1939, by Jack Sturgeon. A narrow chute north of Lake 12,120+ (12,132 ft) leads up to the small plateau south of the summit of Mount Thompson. *Variation:* Class 2. The southwest face can also be reached from Sunset Lake. Cross the glacier northwest of Mount Thompson (an ice ax may be needed). There are three cols in the ridge between Mount Thompson and Point Powell when viewed from the north. The Northeast Chute of Point Powell leads to the highest, right-hand col. Instead, climb the chute leading to the middle col (i.e. the Powell-Thompson Col), and then descend its south side about 300 feet. Traverse east from here along the bottom of the cliffs on the southern side of the West Ridge of Mount Thompson to a chute that leads to the summit plateau.

West Ridge. Class 3. Climb to the lower col between Mount Thompson and Point Powell; those approaching from the north may need ice axes to cross the glacier northwest of Mount Thompson. Traverse across the southern side of the West Ridge to a chute that leads to the summit plateau.

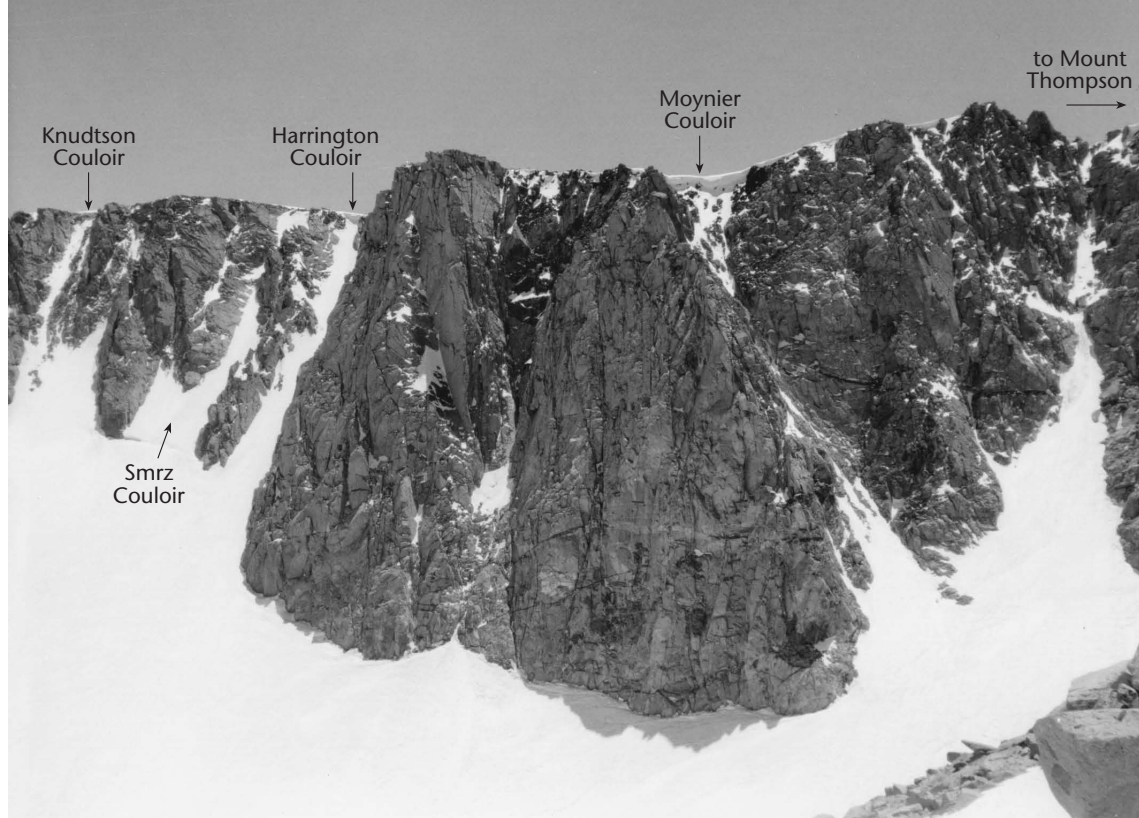
Northwest Face. Class 3. First ascent June 30, 1931, by Norman Clyde. Ascend the glacier northwest of Mount Thompson from Sunset Lake to the base of a steep ramp

close to where the Northwest Face meets Thompson Ridge. This ramp is on the left side of the Northwest Face and rises diagonally from right to left, ending at a notch high on Thompson Ridge. Ascend the chute, bypassing an obstruction to its left, to a notch on the ridge. Keep to the left side of the ridge while climbing to the summit.

Thompson Ridge. Class 3. First ascent September 1959 by Henry Mandolf, Charles Bell, and Stuart Ferguson. Follow the ridge south from Ski Mountaineers Peak (13,280 ft+; 13,323 ft) to the deep notch between it and Mount Thompson. Climb over broken benches on the east side of the ridge to the summit. *Variation:* Class 4. First ascent July 16, 1986, by Vern Clevenger. Or climb the ridge directly along its crest.

Moynier Couloir. III, 5.6, AI2 or WI3. First ascent August 1986 by John Moynier. This narrow, 900-foot couloir is on the far, right-hand side of the face rising above the glacier northeast of Mount Thompson. It cannot be seen until one is near the eastern base of Thompson Ridge. It has six pitches of moderate ice climbing, with the crux passing a chockstone about two-thirds of the way, followed by 70-degree ice. *Further reading:* Fiddler, pp. 231–233.

Harrington Couloir. III, AI2 or WI3. First ascent early 1980s by Bob Harrington. There are three moderate ice



Mount Thompson couloirs from the north

couloirs visible on the northeast face of Mount Thompson. This route ascends the right-hand couloir. This 900-foot couloir is wide, straight, and enclosed by sharp ridges. It is 70 degrees at its top.

Srnz Couloir. III, AI2 or WI3, 5.6. First ascent August 1990 by John Moynier and Scott Andrews. This is the middle couloir on the northeast face of Mount Thompson. Overcome the bergschrund at its far right-hand side, then climb 600 feet of 55–60-degree snow/ice to a 12-foot-high rock band. Climb a two-inch-wide crack on the left side of a nearby boulder (5.6 to 5.8, depending on the amount of ice that can be hooked above the boulder). This is followed by steeper (up to 65-degree) snow/ice to the top.

Knudtson Couloir. III, AI3 or WI3. First ascent September 16, 1984, by Bruce Knudtson and Larry Cobb. This 800-foot couloir is the far left-hand (southeast) one that rises to the crest from the glacier northeast of Mount Thompson. Overcome the bergschrund on its left side and climb the narrow, thin couloir to the 70-degree crux in the middle. The couloir varies between 45 and 70 degrees in angle and ends at a point about 0.5 mile southeast of the summit of Mount Thompson.

Southeast Face. Class 3–4. Descended September 16, 1984, by Larry Cobb and Bruce Knudtson. There are many ledges and small cliffs on this side of the peak.

Peak 12,486 (12,440 ft+; 1.1 mi NNW of Mount Thompson)

First ascent July 15, 1961, by Kenneth Taylor and party. The summit rocks are class 3.

Peak 13,040+ (13,040 ft+; 0.6 mi WNW of Mount Thompson)

First ascent August 14, 1971, by Dave King. A crack on the southeast face is class 4.

East Face. III, 5.10b. First ascent 1994 by Eric Tipton and Pat Brennan. This route ascends the vertical crack on the right side of the east face that ends just north of the summit. The third pitch, the crux, passes through three small roofs.

“Powell-Thompson Col” (12,880 ft+; 12,720 ft+; 0.5 mi W of Mount Thompson; UTM 560115)

Class 2; ice ax required. This is a convoluted cross-country route, leading to the easy southern routes on Point Powell and Mount Thompson. Echo Col is preferred for those

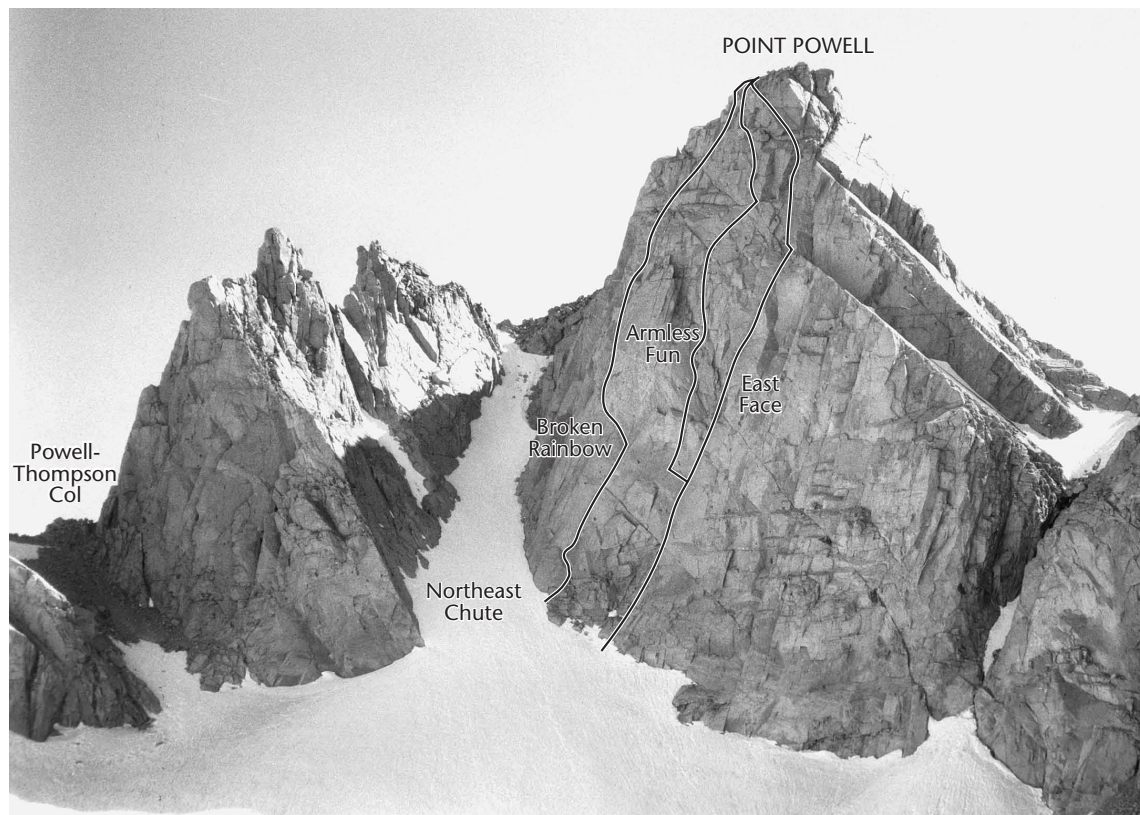
seeking a more direct cross-country route between Sabrina Basin and the John Muir Trail east of Muir Pass. Pass the largest of the Baboon Lakes on its east shore and head south from the southernmost lake, aiming for the small pass north-northwest of Sunset Lake (Pass 11,560+; 11,520 ft+; UTM 564133). Go through the pass and bypass Sunset Lake on a bench above its western shore. Continue south and climb onto the glacier northwest of Mount Thompson. Three cols can be seen above the glacier. The highest, right-hand col is the Northeast Chute of Point Powell. The lowest col is to the left. The correct col is the middle one, a little higher than the left-hand col and much lower than the right-hand col. The upper part of the chute leading to Powell-Thompson Col is filled with loose rocks. Descend the steep southern side of the col and turn southeast, passing Lake 12,120+ (12,132 ft) on its northeastern shore. Continue downstream to the 11,400-foot contour. Make a slightly ascending traverse to the right, going around Point 12,120+ (12,080 ft+), and hike up to Lake 11,725 (11,710 ft). One can continue on to the John Muir Trail east of Helen Lake via Keating Pass.

Point Powell, east face

“Point Powell” (13,360 ft+; 13,360 ft+; UTM 557115)

Confusion has surrounded the naming of this peak, formerly called “Mount Powell.” In 1911 the Board of Geographic Names named a peak in memory of John Wesley Powell, the noted western explorer and former director of the United States Geological Survey. Unfortunately, on the Mount Goddard 15-minute map, the name was placed incorrectly on the lower, western summit of this plateau (Peak 13,356; 13,360 ft+; UTM 554111), informally known as “Point Wesley.” This error made its way onto early editions of the Mount Darwin 7.5-minute map. The Board of Geographic Names detected this mistake in 1983 and directed the USGS Mapping Center to place the name Mount Powell on the third peak, informally called “Point John” (Peak 13,364; 13,360+; 1.4 mi SE of Mount Wallace; UTM 550113). This peak is on the Sierra Club Sierra Peaks Section’s “List of Qualifying Peaks.”

South Side. Class 2. First ascent August 1, 1925, by Walter L. Huber and James Rennie (who believed they were climbing Mount Powell). Leave the John Muir Trail east of Helen Lake at 11,000 feet; this is the same departure point for Echo



Northwest Face, Right Side. II, 5.7. First ascent August 1966 by Gary Colliver, Andy Lichtman, and Mark Waller. Climb an open book that ends in a bowl.

Northwest Face, Left Side. II, 5.8, A2. First ascent August 1966 by Andy Lichtman and Mike Cohen. Aid climbing on the face leads up a crack past an overhang. This is followed by free climbing to the top of a pinnacle high on the face.

Northeast Ridge. II, 5.6. First ascent July 1982 by Galen Rowell. Follow the ridge to the summit.

Peak 12,320+ (12,287 ft; 0.5 mi SW of Beartrap Lake)

First ascent July 1947 by W. J. Losh, via the class 2–3 west ridge.

“Ursula Pass” (11,840 ft+; 11,760 ft+; 0.4 mi S of Beartrap Lake)

Class 2. This pass, named here in memory of Ursula Slager, provides access to Bear Lakes Basin from the Hilgard Branch of Bear Creek. Leave the Italy Pass Trail downstream from Lake Italy and ascend to the south, past Beartrap Lake and a smaller lake, to the broad saddle above. Descend the south side of the pass by going east to Coronet Lake.

Peak 12,560+ (12,550 ft; 0.5 mi SW of Brown Bear Lake)

First ascent July 11, 1934, by James Wright via the class 2 west ridge.

“White Bear Pass” (11,880 ft+; 11,760 ft+; 0.1 mi NW of White Bear Lake)

Class 2. This pass leads to White Bear Lake and to Bear Lakes Basin, from the Hilgard Branch of Bear Creek. Leave the Italy Pass Trail at the point where it crosses the Hilgard Branch downstream from Lake Italy. Contour south on the eastern bank of the stream before traversing up to the northern and eastern sides, and climb steep terrain to the broad saddle above; the final approach to the pass is made from the left (northeast). White Bear Lake is on the southeast side of the pass. Black Bear Lake can be reached by crossing a sandy saddle to the southeast of White Bear Lake. *Further reading:* Roper, p. 125.

Peak 12,760+ (12,756 ft; 1.0 mi SW of Italy Pass)

First ascent July 13, 1933, by George Rockwood and David Brower, who described the southeast slope as being one of the better sand climbs in the High Sierra. The northwest ridge is class 3.

“Dancing Bear Pass” (12,120 ft+; 12,080 ft+; 1.0 mi SW of Italy Pass)

Class 2. This pass leads to Bear Lakes Basin from the western side of Italy Pass. The easiest route traverses south from the western side of Italy Pass before turning west and meeting the northeastern side of Dancing Bear Pass. (An alternate route leaves the eastern shore of Jumble Lake and ascends steep talus to the entrance of the pass.) The pass is a long gravel corridor. Descend the southwestern side of the pass by aiming for the sandy saddle between White Bear Lake and Black Bear Lake. *Further reading:* Roper, p. 128.

Mount Julius Caesar (13,200 ft+; 13,196 ft)

First ascent August 12, 1928, by Alfred and Myrtle Prater. First winter ascent March 18, 1965, by Tom Ross and Peter Lewis. The west ridge, the southwest slope, and the south ridge from Italy Pass are all class 2. The southeast ridge goes class 3–4 by keeping to the southwest side of the crest and then crossing the ridge crest at a notch, marked by a less-jagged section of ridge; first ascent September 22, 2001, by Dee Booth and Arun Mahajan. A party led by Steve Eckert climbed the class 2 southeast bowl above Chalfant Lake on August 8, 1997; first winter ascent April 14, 2002, by Paul Richins, Colin Fuller, and Robin Fuller.

The peak has been climbed from the western cirque between Mount Julius Caesar and Bear Creek Spire. Climb south from the cirque up a class 2 slope to the top of the Sierra crest, and follow the crest (class 3) to the summit. This was first done on August 9, 1953, by Jim Koontz, Pete Murphy, Al Wolf, and Ed Toby.

Peak 13,160+ (13,120 ft+; 0.6 mi S of Bear Creek Spire)

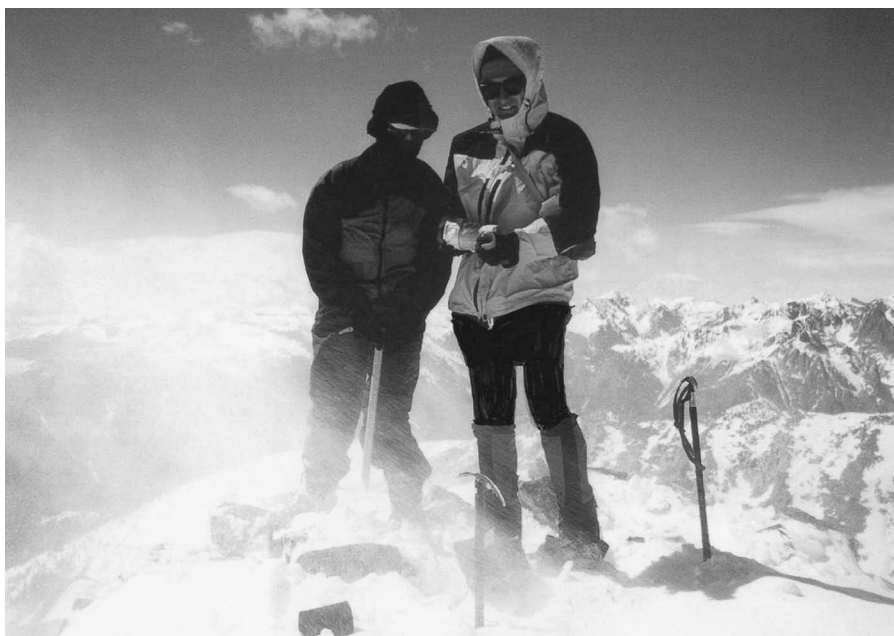
South Slope. Class 2. First ascent August 2, 1969, by a party led by Andy Smatko. Climb the south slope to the summit of the east peak. The higher, west peak is easy from there. A convenient descent route goes south, down a chute between the two summits.

West Ridge. Class 3. Descended July 8, 1954, by Jim Koontz, Mike Loughman, Dan Popper, and Roger Popper. Climb a chute on the southern side of the cirque that is west of the peak. This chute leads to the Sierra crest. Follow the crest eastward to a point just below the summit. Climb onto a ledge that crosses the west face to a point about 200 feet below the summit. The ledge ends about 100 feet north of the summit.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

R. J. Secor has been hiking and skiing since he learned to walk. An enthusiastic peak-bagger, he has attained coveted List Completion status *twice* in the Sierra Peaks Section of the Sierra Club with more than 700 mountain ascents in the High Sierra, climbing as many as sixty peaks in a single year. He has also done extensive climbing in Baja California, Arizona, Nevada, Utah, Idaho, Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, Montana, British Columbia, Alberta, and Alaska. Other mountain adventures have taken him as far afield as the Himalaya in Tibet and Nepal, the Karakoram in Pakistan, the Andes in Argentina, and the volcanoes of Mexico.

The High Sierra: Peaks, Passes, and Trails is a compilation of almost thirty-five years of Secor's copious notes and exchanges with other Sierra hikers, climbers, and skiers. His other books are *Mexico's Volcanoes: A Climbing Guide* (1981 and third edition 2001), *Aconcagua: A Climbing Guide* (1994 and second edition 1999) from The Mountaineers Books, and *Denali Climbing Guide* (1998) from Stackpole Books. He is an elected Honorary Member of the Southern California Mountaineers Association, and an active member of the Sierra Club, the American Alpine Club, and the California Mountaineering Club.



Susan Livingston and the author atop State Peak, May 1, 2003. Photo by Reiner Stenzel.