

## Yosemite / Eastern Sierras July 21-22, 2007

It's become a tradition to make a summer pilgrimage out to the Eastern Sierra each year, typically involving a hike or two in Yosemite, a hot spring, some volcanic features, and a hike in the high Sierra. I feel like the entire Eastern Sierra should be a big national park - the beauty is everywhere and so varied. In many ways, though it is nice to be able to just go and get away from the crowds and hassle at least for a weekend.

I think the tradition started 3 years ago with our trip to Mt Whitney. That was one of the best few days in the summer of 2004 - we started with a hike to Mt Dana in Yosemite, visiting Devil's Postpile and a hot spring in the evening, hiking in the John Muir wilderness from South Lake, and then hiking Mt Whitney. Since then, I made a trip to Mt Agassiz, which included Mt Hoffmann in Yosemite, hot springs in the Long Valley and Obsidian Dome. Then last year, it was Mt Morgan, which included Dana Lake in Yosemite and the Black Point Fissures. This year planned to follow the pattern too - I had maps for some of the granite domes in Tuolumne Meadows and for climbing Mt Gould down by Independence. Then there would probably be some side trips too as time permitted. And sometimes it's those side trips that prove to be the most memorable.

My alarm beeped too early, just after 5 AM Saturday morning. The weather forecast was for sunny and 75 in the mountains, about as nice as it gets, and no thunderstorms. Typically, July has the most storms as the monsoon kicks moisture across the desert southwest. But the winds were out of the NW, bringing beautiful weather.

In fact, I don't think I've ever seen it so clear. Just beyond the edge of the fog swirling around the windmills at the Altamont pass, the bright red-orange sun lit the edge of the fog, and far away, the jagged edge of the Sierra came into view. On a good day, you can see the Sierra from the top of Mt Diablo almost 4000 feet up, but here, the mountains were visible from 580 at the 1008 ft Altamont pass! It looks like a great day was in store.

It was a smooth and uneventful ride to the park boundary - from my door to the entrance station was 2:45 (including a rest stop at the Tuolumne river vista for some Starbucks frappuccino and granola bars for breakfast). After a short stop at Olmstead point (it's hard to pass straight through), I reached the Cathedral Lakes trailhead shortly after 9:00. There were already quite a few cars - probably mostly backpackers out on the trails.

Most people, when they go down the JMT to Cathedral Lakes, never think to stop at some of the wonderful granite domes just off the trail. I had maps for the Medlicott/Mariuolumne domes and Fairview domes. It looked like plenty of fun, but I wasn't sure how steep or slick the rock would be. It turns out Mariuolumne dome at 9970 is the highest dome in Tuolumne meadows, and Fairview dome is the tallest (above the surrounding terrain). Medlicott is slightly smaller at 9880 ft. Taking the main trail about 2/3 of the way to Cathedral lakes, I went off-trail to the west where the domes were pretty obvious. Crossing a nice meadow and through a few trees, I arrived at the base of the complex of domes.

There are several domes all connected - Medlicott, Mariuolumne, Drug, and one other small one that looked like an igloo (but not sure if it had a name). In this 1.5 mile wide mass of granite domes is a nice meadow and 2 hidden lakes as well. The first one I went up to was Medlicott - at 9880 ft, it gave one of the most amazing views I've seen in Yosemite. The sky was so clear - I could easily see down Yosemite Valley, with the signature peak of Half Dome sticking up, Tenaya canyon, the domes all around Tenaya Lake, and far away, I could make out the shapes of the east bay hills (probably close to 200 mi visibility !!) Tenaya Lake shone in its brilliant blue with Tenaya Peak guarding it, and countless other domes and peaks filled the horizon. It was one of those perfect moments in the mountains.

I decided to make a loop, hitting Mariuolumne dome, crossing down to the meadow, past one lake, over the igloo, over to the other lake, and back down to the trail. It was a beautiful loop, with stunning views everywhere you looked. I think I met only 2 other people on this part of the hike - they were rock climbers who had just finished one of the routes on Mariuolumne dome and were resting on the top. Mariuolumne has a strange name, and I'm never sure I'm even pronouncing it right - supposedly it is a combination of Mariposa and Tuolumne (since the dome straddles the border between those 2 counties). Drug dome at the base of Mariuolumne is kind of strange too - did rock climbers pull out their joints when they finished the climb?

Looking across toward Fairview dome to the northeast, I started to reconsider my plan - it looked a lot steeper and smoother than I originally thought. Sam's book said it was class 3 in places and I wondered if that was with rock shoes - I wasn't sure if my shoes were good enough. I was thinking about skipping that one, and spending more time by Medlicott dome and swimming in the lakes. So I scrambled down the gully from Mariuolumne dome down to the meadow and one lake. Climbing up the igloo was a lot of fun too, and provided a great view. Cross-countrying to the west took me to the other lake by Medlicott dome - the lake was so clear and beautiful, surrounded by clean granite most of the way. It beckoned at least a short swim.

This time, I remembered my swim trunks, so I changed and took a dip. The shallows were full of tadpoles (which I found out were yellow-legged frogs, native to the high country). It reminded me of being a kid again, trying to catch tadpoles in the creek! The water was pretty warm too - I think I ended up spending 1/2 hour enjoying the swim. I had thought about bringing my swim goggles but didn't - now I wish I had them! The lake was at least 10 feet deep and the bottom was clearly visible in the emerald colored water. The visibility might have been 30 feet. Oh well - next time.

It was easy scrambling down the class 2 slabs and cross-countrying it south back to the trail to the east. About a mile back down the trail, a small trail headed off to the left, which looked like it was heading toward Fairview dome. Even though it was a little later than originally planned (I was planning on skipping Fairview), I wanted to at least have a quick look. I met a family at the base of the dome where it just popped out of the trees. Turns out they were looking for the trail to Cathedral lakes (which I showed them to), and that they had just come down from Fairview dome (I was surprised, but welcomed the

news). I think they were in tennis shoes, so I reconsidered trying to go up the dome in my hiking boots.

It turned out to be not so bad - maybe about like near the top of Lembert dome (in fact you could compare the steepness of the domes and it looked very similar!). I slowly made my way up, though my calves were fairly tired from hiking on slabs for the last few hours - I think you use muscles you don't normally use! Next thing I knew, the dome slowly got easier, and it was rounding out to the 9731 ft summit. I saw 3 rock cairns on top - wasn't sure which one was the top, so of course I visited all 3. As I was resting and having a snack, a pair of climbers just finished the Lucky Streaks route (6 pitches, 5.10b). We chatted a bit, and it turned out one was doing research on some of the frogs in the high country. I showed them my pictures of the tadpoles from earlier and they were pleased to see that they were doing well. The view was fantastic - Tuolumne meadows and all of its domes in the crisp clean air, the Cathedral range, Mt Dana and Mt Conness, and countless peaks of the high country were all around. I was surprised that so few people seem to even know of Fairview dome - the hike is relatively short (probably even shorter than Lembert dome), and the view was so great. It was like finding a hidden gem!

My fears of descending the dome and slipping on the smooth granite were quickly dispelled when the pair of climbers started heading down in their sandals! They picked up their gear, and we chatted as we hiked back down. Next thing I knew, we were at the bottom! I hardly even noticed how steep the descent was! We went due south from the summit down a "class 2 sea of granite". We parted ways (they were taking the shortcut back to the road), and I went back to the main trail back to the car. It was interesting who you'd run into on the trail - turned out one of the people had gone to MIT and worked with David Wilson (I worked with him years ago on our tiling project! small world...)

It was about 4:00 when I was back down - and I made my customary stop at the Mobil station by 120 and 395. Gas was 3.89 a gallon (always almost a dollar more than normal), so I only put in a few gallons to hold me over until cheaper gas could be obtained. And I had my usual ice cream (ice cream after hikes has been a tradition for so many years), and it was especially good, since it was over 90 outside (you forgot how hot it is in the valley after you've been in the mountains for a while).

Heading back south on 395 and passing the June Lake loop, I found the Mammoth Scenic loop drive. Last time I had taken this, I just went straight through without knowing what to look for, but now I knew. Turning right on the Inyo craters road and driving for a few miles on the gravel roads took me to a turnoff toward "Inyo Craters 1/4 mi". I decided at the last minute to make this detour, so I didn't really know what to expect. Hiking about 5 minutes through the pine forest, I saw a hill with a bunch of railings and some people looking over. hmmm - must be interesting... the people were studying something pretty hard. There were two craters, formed by phreatic explosions. Water came into contact with heated volcanic rocks, and the pressure of the steam blasted the rocks above to form each crater. Both of the craters now have lakes - one turquoise and one brown.

Coincidentally, I was wearing my t-shirt from Crater Lake national park, and here I was at two crater lakes, though not "the" Crater Lake.

I feel like one of the greatest things about these trips to the mountains when I go on my own was being able to pick my own schedule - having the freedom to go where I wanted, and not having people to tell me no that I couldn't do something. I had been on trips before where I felt restricted on where I could go - maybe there was a lack of trust that I would be safe, or we had to be on a schedule, or maybe the organizer didn't want to have too much unpredictability. And of course when there was a group, it was easiest to stick to the original plan. On many of these trips to the Eastern Sierra, there were only a couple things in "the agenda", and sticking just to the plan, I would probably have missed a number of short side trips. And it was often these unexpected side trips that proved to be the most fun and interesting. Like the trip last year when I ended up visiting the fissures at Black Point near Mono Lake - this was a wonderful and unexpected surprise, finding lava slot canyons out in the desert.

I saw on the map that I was only a couple miles from the "Earthquake Fault" outside Mammoth Lakes. It sounded familiar, but I don't ever remember actually stopping to look around. Turned out there was a fair amount to see. The "Earthquake Fault" was actually a misnomer - it was actually a fissure in the basalt lava that covers the area. In fact, this fissure was also pretty similar to one of the Black Point fissures.

Paths followed along both sides of the fissure, and a path once went down into the fissure, though it had now been blocked off (maybe somebody slipped, a lawsuit was filed, and the area had to be closed). It was probably about 3-4 feet wide and 30 feet deep. At least you could still get into part of the fissure at the far end. A path went down into the crack, which quickly narrowed down and deepened to about 20 feet. It looked like the path ended, when I noticed two caves. I thought they might just be small pockets between the talus boulders, but I took a few flash pictures to have a better look. Turned out the lower one was deeper than I thought, so I went down a few feet very carefully. It suddenly got pretty chilly - there was a dramatic thermocline. My foot slipped a bit on the way down and soon I realized I had slipped on solid ice - there was ice all around the cave, on the floor, the walls and some on the ceiling! The insulating lava rock trapped the cold air from the winter, and when ice forms in the cave, it doesn't melt easily. Many of the caves in Lava Beds are the same way - formed in lava, they trap the cold air and ice, so even in the heat of summer, you can find glaciers inside the caves. The pit further back inside the cave was pretty deep, and unfortunately without a good flashlight and rope, it was hard to explore much more... this would have to wait for the next trip).

The upper cave was pretty short - about 15 feet long and about 4 feet wide, and at the end, light was visible from another entrance. It must have connected with more of the fissure on the other side of a breakdown pile (and behind the railings!), but I'd have to eat a magic mushroom to fit through the opening - oh well.

By now, it was about 6:30, and I was looking forward to getting down to a hot spring. The Long Valley is adjacent to Mammoth, and the northern area has at least a dozen hot

springs. I had directions to Little Hot Creek - I heard that it was beautiful, though it was a little farther to get to than the others. But hopefully, the distance might be a filter for the others, since the closer (and easier to get to) ones tend to be the most crowded. Unfortunately, the directions were a little bit off (some roads were re-named and a new road had been built, so the "2nd left" should now be the "3rd left") I finally managed to cross-reference the directions with my map and figure out where the spring was. I surprised a group of campers when I arrived - most people come from the other way (another new road, which wasn't even on my map, had been built, and everybody takes it now, since it is in much better condition than the way I came!) I found the campground before the hot spring (which was surprising too, since supposedly everyone knows where the springs are, but don't go to the campground).

All's well that ends well though - the hot springs were wonderful, a great way to soak and relax the sore muscles. My calves had seen more granite slabs than they have in quite some time, and they needed a good soak. As a bonus, the area around the hot spring had a beautiful view looking down the Long Valley and also some interesting travertine caves begged for a look. As the sun dropped low, a few more people showed up, and we started chatting about everything from bears getting trapped in people's cars, to roads around the hot springs always changing, to thoughts about some of the crazy campers ("wild animals") that were camped on the hill behind the springs. My timing must have been impeccable - a couple people had arrived a couple hours before me to get the spring ready (the water comes out very hot and the flow is adjusted to make it the right temperature). When I showed up, the temperature was perfect and I jumped right in! I feel like I should return the favor next time.

The sun dropped below the hill, covering the upper slopes of the Sierra in hues of pink and purple, and a brilliant Belt of Venus graced the sky in the opposite direction. Venus, Jupiter and some of the brighter stars started coming out. I thought it was beautiful, but the locals thought it mediocre. There weren't any clouds to liven the sky into red hues this time - it was "too clear"! I guess it would be easy to become jaded in sunset expectations, but I was quite happy with the one we did have that night. I do remember my last trip to the Eastern Sierra in October last year when an early season storm was rolling in, creating a 100 mile long Sierra Wave, which was lit from underneath in brilliant scarlet hues by the setting sun.

Quite a few more people started coming out as well - the spring was pretty full now. I think in the last few years, as more people get to know about these springs, and as new roads are built and improved, the place has lost its charm a little. Though I've never complained about any of the springs losing their charm!

It was starting to get dark, and I didn't want to have to navigate miles of poor dirt roads in my Honda Civic in the dark. Fortunately I got some decent directions from one of the other campers (that included how to take the new road to connect with one of the other better roads), and I found my way out pretty easily. I carefully drew the new road on my AAA map and saved the GPS coordinates (Little Hot Creek is definitely one of the nicest

springs, and is worth revisiting). I just hope not too many more people find out about it and it gets even more crowded.

Back on the main road heading toward the green church by the intersection with 395, I headed south toward Bishop. I had reservations at the Motel 6 in town, and I picked up fast food to go for dinner. I had been wrapped up so much in seeing places and soaking in the hot spring that I didn't end up eating until after 9:00 in my motel room. The quarter pounder was very enjoyable. It was great to feel relaxed and spend a little time reading. There is always something free and invigorating about being alone relatively far away and exploring and savoring the sights around. I had a nice shower and got my pack ready for a big day tomorrow, and promptly hit the sack.

July 22

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I had some weird dreams overnight - and pretty vivid ones too right before I woke up. This always seems to happen when I'm anticipating a big day. In one of the dreams, I found myself climbing around on a bunch of white round looking rocks, which I later found to be bubbles frozen in white lava. And then the sunrise peeked on the mountains behind me. Then I woke up and found it still dark outside.

Well the dream came true for the most part - I got up around 5:30 and peeked out my window to see the eastern side of the mountains bathed in a warm yellowish light. And I seem to always find some interesting volcanic geology in the Eastern Sierra (later in the day, I stopped at Lower Rock Creek and found lava bubbles, and yesterday there was quite a bit of interesting geology).

I got the last of my stuff together and checked out just after 6:00. Taking my free coffee from the front desk, I headed south toward Independence. I didn't really need the coffee to stay awake - the anticipation of the big day kept me going just fine. At least the coffee was decent and didn't taste like motor oil! It was a little further than I thought to get to Independence - it was about 40 miles (I thought it was only about 15-20). But the drive was pretty easy early in the morning.

I reached the town of Independence, which doesn't have much more than a couple motels, restaurants, a museum, and the turnoff to Onion Valley. I headed up the Onion Valley road toward the mountains - it started out in the flat desert, but soon started switch backing up the steep eastern face of the mountains. A significant wildfire had burned recently (they've had a few storms with dry lightning in the last couple weeks, and actually there was evidence of wildfires in many places) I felt lucky that nothing was still burning (I had originally planned this whole trip a week ago but postponed it when some other things came up...maybe that was a good thing). I heard that it had also been really windy over the last few weeks (up until just a couple days ago), which probably helped spread the fires. And the locals said being out in the wind was worse than being out in the rain.

Switch backing up above the burn area, the road passed over some glacial moraines through some nice forest and up to rocky granite faces - the construction of the road was actually quite a sight to behold - and the views get even better with each switchback. I wonder how many people just go right past it and never enjoy the experience. The road ended in a large parking area at 9200 feet. Even though I didn't see anybody on the 15 mile road, the parking lot was almost full. A lot of people use the trail to reach the high country of Kings Canyon national park.

The trail goes up to Kearsarge Pass, and then I could scramble off-trail to the north to reach 13005 ft Mount Gould. The route was supposedly pretty straightforward, so I got my things together, greased myself with sunscreen and hit the trail around 7:15. It started with some easy switchbacks through high desert scrub and a few trees. It was interesting to think that soon it will be beautiful forest with alpine lakes. The trail was pretty empty - I guess most people either head out later and backpack in, or just do pretty easy dayhikes. I'd love to do a multi-day backpacking trip someday.

About an hour into the hike, I stopped for a drink. I thought I had plenty of water - I had 3 bottles, and I even threw a couple extra empty bottles away. It just occurred to me that they were only 1/2 liter bottles, not 1 liter bottles, so I only had 1.5 liters instead of 3. Hmmm - I probably should have kept the other 2 bottles and filled them at the trailhead. I could either hike back down or see if I could get more water later on. The trail was pretty dry and dusty, and running out of water at 12,000 or 13,000 feet wouldn't be good. Plus I had come quite a ways to do this hike, so turning back because of running out of water would be a real bummer.

At least the scenery was gorgeous as I passed about 10,500 feet - alpine lakes surrounded by rugged granite peaks. One of the most beautiful of these lakes was Heart Lake - about the 4th on the chain of glacial lakes. The lake was very clear - emerald and turquoise in color. I noticed a group of people camping by the lake, so I scrambled down toward the lake for a better view. I found the campers and we chatted for a little while. It was nice to take a break for a bit, and I think this helped quite a bit to acclimatize to the altitude. But the biggest benefit of meeting with the campers was that they had some extra iodine pills they were willing to share. Each pill was good for 1/2 liter, and they gave me about 8 of them. That should be plenty. I had already finished 2 of my 3 bottles by the time I reached Heart Lake, so I re-filled those two and continued on.

Back on the trail, the trees thinned, and just a few small shrubs clung to the slopes by the trail. I had originally confused Heart Lake with Big Pothole Lake, since they are both in "pothole" basins with no outlet stream. Both the lakes were very clear - kind of like Crater Lake, which doesn't have any outlet, and all the water comes straight from rain and snowmelt. The trail came up over a ridge and when I saw Big Pothole Lake, I realized immediately where I was. Soon ahead, the trail made a large switchback across the barren rocky slope, then switch backed again toward the Kearsarge Pass. About 3 hours after starting the hike, I reached the 11,800 ft pass.

Just on the other side of the pass, the trail descended about 1000 feet down to the Kearsarge lakes basin. Countless high peaks appeared all around - all hidden until moments before I reached the pass. Reaching the pass and suddenly seeing another 180 degrees of scenery was exhilarating. Especially in the high country. This pass was actually the border with Kings Canyon National Park (though no guard was there to collect my \$20 for entering...) A group of backpackers was also hanging out - they were on a several days trip, heading down into the Kearsarge lakes, and eventually to the Rae Lakes on the other side of Glen pass. A bunch of people were on their way out - they were just camping one night, over at Charlotte Lake. I actually met far more backpackers than day hikers. I guess many day hikers just come in a little ways to go fishing or maybe go to the pass, but they wouldn't arrive until later.

I headed off-trail to the north, scrambling up an endless class 2 sea of granite boulders. (Not a class 2 sea of granite slabs as yesterday). A sandy use trail switchbacked its way up the slope - it was kind of a slog up the scree and sand - you'd take 2 steps forward and 1 step backward since with each step you were pushing a little of the mountain back down. The route was pretty straightforward - mostly just staying on the ridge to the south of Mt Gould. As I got closer to the top, the slope steepened a bit and became rockier, so now it was more boulder hopping. Still pretty easy, but a bit tedious. And then, finally, the summit block was visible! Or at least what I thought was the summit.

I heard the slabs near the summit were easy class 3, so I carefully scrambled up the peak and enjoyed the view. The Kearsarge lakes basin lay far below to the south and west, and the Owens valley lay 9,000 feet below and probably 30 degrees hotter to the east. The view to the south was spectacular - I'm pretty sure Mt Whitney was there somewhere. But when I turned around and looked to the north, I saw another summit block - hmmm it seemed a few feet higher than where I was. I looked for the register where I was, but found none. Hmmm - I must still not be on the true summit.

I scrambled back down to the north (this was only class 2, so easier than the way I went up), and headed toward the higher summit. The block must have been 20 feet high and looked pretty intimidating. I was a bit squeamish about attempting it - maybe I would just have to enjoy the view from the base of the summit block and sign the register another day. I was a little lower than the first summit I reached, but could now overlook a large snowfield on the northeast side of the summit, and down to the Golden Trout lakes. I decided to explore around the summit - it was a beautiful, classic high sierra granite summit - large angular blocks in different directions made for some pretty fun climbing. Since I was alone at the summit, I was quite careful in maneuvering around the large blocks, and didn't want "summit fever" to get in the way of reason.

As I traversed the summit block, I found a staircase of ledges - probably about 5 steps, each about 3-4 feet high and a foot wide. This added up to about 20 feet - hmmm, maybe this was a way up to the summit. There were great holds everywhere, so I carefully made my way up the steps, and when I climbed the last one, right in front of my face was a dark green ammo container - the summit register! Yay - I made it! And those big steps were actually a lot of fun. I looked around and found that yeah, this was definitely the



summit. It is always amusing to read the other entries in the log - seeing where people came from, what the conditions were like, and how many people came up each day. There were about a half dozen entries from yesterday, but none from today - I guess I was the first one up. I didn't see anyone on the trail up, but maybe there would be some later. A few entries of people that narrowly missed a thunderstorm at the summit, and an entry of someone who climbed for the sunrise (wow, that takes dedication). A lot of people from the Bay area or the LA area. A few from other states. (Later in the day I met a guy from Tennessee who was finishing a 10 day backpacking trip).

I had a tip from summitpost that the best view is from a small peak on the ridge north of Mt Gould, on the way to Dragon Peak. From Mt Gould itself, this ridge blocks much of the north view. It was about a 10 minute traverse to a highpoint on this ridge - it was pretty obvious where to go, since there was some sort of weather station and antennas there (the locals called it trash, but for me it was a great landmark to aim for). The traverse was mostly on a pretty flat sandy plateau, which then dropped sharply on the other side of the ridge. Interesting how much of the Sierra has these flat and sandy and rocky plateaus, which abruptly end in steep cliffs when the glaciers cut through the rock.

It was a little tedious scrambling over the class 2 and a little class 3 boulders to reach the plateau, but once on the plateau, it was like a walk in the park. I reached the small summit just behind the weather station, and when I did, it added another 180 degrees to the panoramic view! Instead of having the ridge blocking part of the view, I now had the complete view. It was one of the views that made me want to keep coming back to the high Sierra. The sheer granite faces of the mountains with patches of snow still clinging to the high peaks, the vivid blue lakes, and the edge of the trees were all far below, stretched in an enormous panoramic view. The lakes were part of the famous Rae Lakes basin, and I know of several people who have made the journey to the Rae Lakes, involving at least a 4 or 5 day backpacking trips. In fact, there was a group from the Stanford Outing club at the Rae Lakes on a 6 day backpacking trip that same moment - I was wondering if they could see me far up on the peak when I was looking down.

Most people start from the Road's End in Kings Canyon, and hike a 46 mile loop to reach the Rae Lakes. I'd love to do that sometime, especially now after seeing the grandeur of the lakes. And I would want to spend at least 2 nights at the lakes - there are probably a dozen lakes total, some of which are so blue you wouldn't believe it. Patches of snow still clung to the shore of the upper lakes, and the color of the water went from an emerald green to turquoise to a vivid blue - at least as blue as Crater Lake in Oregon. The water was so clear - the lake was probably at least 50-60 feet deep and you could see the bottom. It was interesting to be able to at least see the Rae Lakes in a dayhike (even though actually getting there would probably double the length of the hike).

I watched a marmot playfully scampering around on the rocks, his nose going a mile a minute looking for signs of something to eat. I wonder how they survive in such an austere and barren environment. A cool breeze was coming over the ridge from the lakes and you couldn't have asked for better weather. The air was so clean - again the visibility was probably 200 miles like yesterday - it was like you could touch the peaks across the

valley, even though they might be 10 miles away! This was one of those moments where all I could do was worship my God in heaven who created all this magnificent scenery - the evidence of His design was all around. And he created me to be able to enjoy all of it!

A few small clouds were swirling around the high peaks, but nothing too threatening. Though it was about 1:00 already, and I still had a way to go to head back down and drive back to the Bay Area. It was one of those times I kept saying "just a few more minutes"... an hour later I was back on the trail heading down. Since I had traversed the ridge up and over Mt Gould to get to the weather station, I didn't want to have to go back the same way. So I traversed around the peak, scrambling over loose class 2 rocks and slowly making my way back to the ridge on the south side of the peak. It was a bit tedious but never difficult.

Back on the ridge, it was an easy trek back down the sandy slope toward Kearsarge Pass. Now, instead of 2 steps forward and 1 backward, it was 2 steps forward, 1 step forward. It was kind of fun surfing down the sandy scree downhill. In no time I was back at the pass where I met up with a group of backpackers who were resting from a long climb. One of the guys there had climbed Mt Gould on a previous trip and remembered the "interesting ledges" on the summit block pretty well. He was alone when he went, and was very scared of falling and hurting himself - I guess when I was up there I was concentrating on the ledges and not even thinking about falling.

It was almost 2:00, and I figured it was another couple hours back to the trailhead. It was a pretty uneventful hike back down along the trail. But along the way, I ran into a backpacker who was on his last day of a 10 day backpacking trip. He was from Tennessee and had flown to Reno, and then taken a bus to Mammoth, where he started on the JMT. Passing through the high country of the John Muir wilderness, Evolution valley, and finally the Rae Lakes and Kearsarge lakes, he reached the Kearsarge pass and was finishing his trek at Onion Valley. Amazing how we met each other - he had 160 miles of memories on the JMT and about 4 to go. We talked about so many things - from how one of his food drops failed to show up, to other treks he'd been on, to what Manzanar was like, to some of his favorite music - classical music played on a banjo and a string bass. We talked all the way back to the trailhead and I got him a ride back to Independence (he had planned to hitchhike back to town originally). I'm trying to imagine what it must have felt to drop the 6000 feet in elevation back to the Owen's valley, where the temperature shot up to 99 degrees, being in a car again, and seeing buildings and civilization again! I've always kind of dreamed of having that kind of experience - it must have been very cleansing to purge the mind of the troubles of this world and see everything fresh again. I wonder if he felt what Jesus would have felt, after returning from 40 days in the desert wilderness. I had been gone only for a weekend and I felt the trip was very cleansing - it's hard to imagine what 10 days must have been like. I took him to a motel in town where he checked in, was finally able to drop his pack, take a shower, eat at a restaurant, and settle in a real bed for the night! The next morning his brother was going to meet him in town and take him back to the airport

where he'd fly back to Tennessee. He said the hike was a bit more difficult than he expected, but was so rewarding at the same time.

After we had talked about Manzanar a bit, it piqued my interest to have at least a short visit. We had actually made pretty good time on the trail - it was only about 4:00, so I figured I could spend maybe 1/2 hour or so. Manzanar was only about 5 minutes away. When my family lived in China Lake when I was a kid, we went up to Manzanar a couple times and my dad remembers quite a bit.

It was quite a shock - from being in the mountains where it was 70 degrees and beautiful in the wild nature, to 30 minutes later visiting a former internment camp (some people say prison camp or concentration camp) where the weather was a dusty 100 degrees! It was a sad chapter of American history - where over 10,000 Japanese Americans were forced from their families to live in exile from their homes for up to 4 years during WWII. Much of the former city of Manzanar was gone now - the buildings removed and sold many years ago, but some parts had been recently restored. The museum at the visitor center was amazing - filled with stories and photos and artwork of people interned at Manzanar. One of the guard towers was rebuilt recently, as well as a couple of the barracks buildings, the entrance stations, and the auditorium (which was now the visitor center). A monument stood in the cemetery, a silent sentinel to the pain suffered in the desert internment camp.

It was definitely an emotional experience, which sort of reminded me of Alcatraz. The beautiful city of SF lay just a few miles behind the bars in the prison cells in Alcatraz, and at Manzanar, the beautiful mountains lay just a few miles out of reach behind the barbed wire encircling the square mile town.

Heading north on 395, I slowly started making my way back home to San Jose. It was hard to leave the beautiful countryside, but it was getting late. I was hoping to at least get back by midnight. I refilled fuel for my car and my body at Bishop, and continued north. My book talked about some interesting formations just near the road at Little Rock Creek, and since I would be passing right through there, I decided to take one last little side trip. The book mentioned to turn on Sherwin Grade road, but I couldn't find it. Turned out it had been renamed to Little Rock Creek road and my map didn't have a Sherwin Grade road. But I figured Little Rock Creek road would still go to the same place, so I decided to turn off and have a look. Just a couple miles down the road, a deep canyon opened to the left and there was a dirt turnout with a couple other cars. Hmm - there must be something here to see - why would these other cars be pulled out? I walked around to have a little look, and there I found some interesting lava formations, and then I found the lava bubbles like those in my dream the night before! Hmm - like this was meant to happen somehow?

Walking to the edge of the canyon, dodging scrubby and thorny bushes in the desert, I found a deep (probably 500-600 feet deep) cut in the landscape. Amazing! The landscape was Bishop Tuff, a volcanic ash that was thrown out when the Long Valley was formed supposedly 700,000 years ago. It is believed that it threw ash reaching 1/3 of the

way across the US (like Yellowstone as well. In fact the Long Valley is in many ways similar to Yellowstone). The canyon had deep lava palisades on both sides, vertical columns of rock at least 100-200 feet tall. And the bottom looked like a linear oasis of pine and aspen trees. They say this is a beautiful place to see in the autumn when the line of trees all turns bright yellow and orange.

Back on 395 north and turning on 120 west, heading over the Tioga Pass, I continued my way back to the Bay Area. Ellery Lake shimmered in the late afternoon light, beckoning at least a short visit. Winding over the pass and past Tuolumne meadows (it felt like an eternity since I was there last time, though it was just yesterday!), and then past beautiful Tenaya Lake, I reached Olmstead point just around sunset. The alpenglow shone yellow and orange on the 2000 ft rounded face of Mt Conness, and the tip of Tenaya Peak as well as the tops of Clouds rest and Half Dome were lit in a golden light. It was a peaceful way to end a great trip. A few clouds lit up orange far to the east - actually the first bands of moisture of a subtropical system that brought rain to the central valley and thunderstorms all along the Sierra the next day (whew! I missed the bad weather by 1 day!). A little further along the Tioga road, the western horizon was lit in a brilliant red with bright Venus shining above.

A rather uneventful trip back home - though I was tired and my legs were getting stiff. The fog was once again blowing heavy over the windmills in the Altamont pass, and the bay was already all covered, shrouding the waxing half-moon as I headed back home. My goal was to make it back by midnight, and my clock just changed to 12:00 as I hit the button for my garage door opener back home - a fitting way to end a wonderful weekend. I had to be in the dentist's chair 8 hours later in Foster City so I tried to get a good night sleep. I was quite tired and sleep came easily - it would take at least several days or weeks to really start digesting everything from the weekend.

I ended up taking over 350 pictures during the last 2 days - enough to take up a whole CD! It was a great weekend, and the only casualties were some very tired muscles and a very dirty car. I'll be back.