

**PLAN & GO**

Hiking

Plan & Go | The John Muir Trail

# Plan & Go | The John Muir Trail

All you need to know to complete one of the world's greatest trails

Gerret Kalkoffen

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sandiburg press

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## 0. Preface

This book is meant to give you all the information you need to prepare for and successfully complete the John Muir Trail (JMT). I am convinced you will be well prepared and save a lot of time on planning if you read the following chapters.

The book's title is a reference to my approach to anything. I find it best to put generous thought into how I want to do something, plan, organize, and then get moving. I try to convey the most important hiking information in a short but comprehensive manner. If you are looking for elaborate stories on the JMT, its history, and details on flora and fauna, this is not the book for you. However, if you are toying with the idea of hiking the JMT or have already accepted the challenge and wonder how to prepare for it, then I hope this helps – both for inexperienced hikers as well as experts.

The setting of the JMT in the California High Sierra Mountains is breathtaking. Each day, you will experience new landscapes: lush meadows with grazing deer, clear streams sparkling amidst dark pine forests, or nothing but sun-burnt rocks and boulders. Throughout a long summer stretch, weather conditions will be very pleasant. It is absolutely worth taking a few weeks to experience the solitude and nature's beauty along the trail. I promise completing the JMT will be one of the greatest and most memorable experiences of your life.

# 1. Introduction

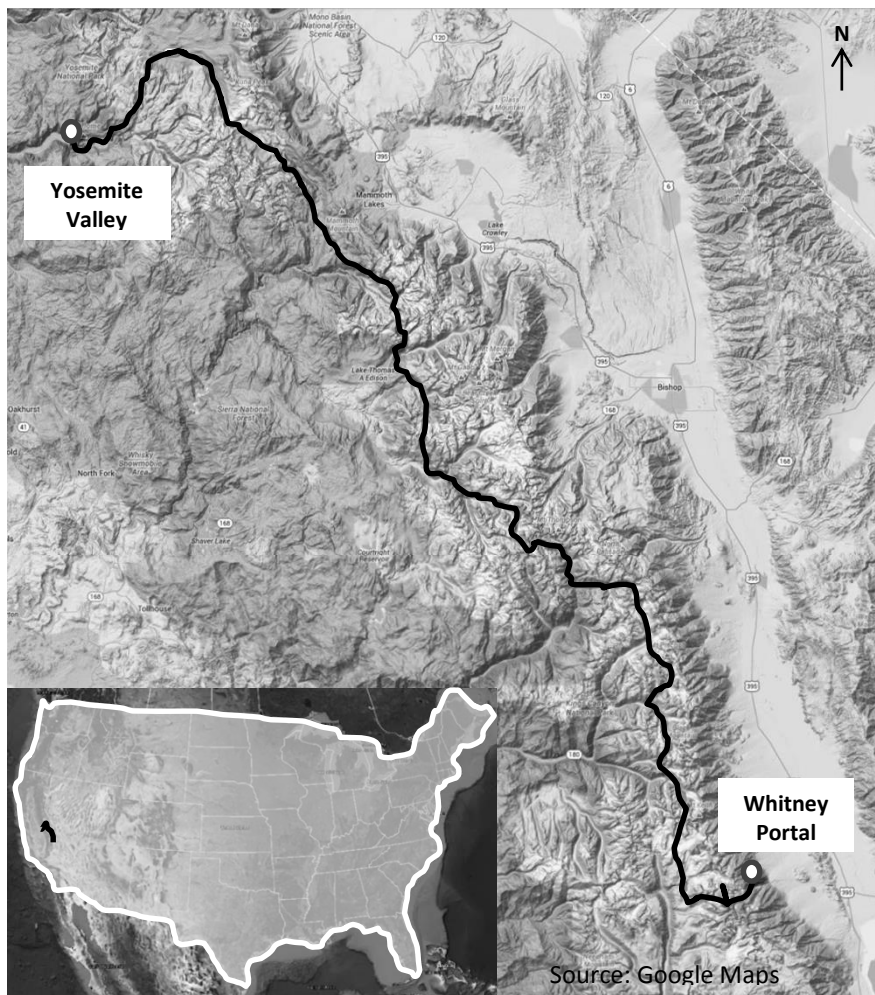
After months of witnessing me prepare – making travel arrangements, researching gear, reading forums, and working out – my wife said I should write a book. I snickered but kept that thought in the back of my mind while on the trail, noting each evening in my tent what worked well and what could have gone better. In conversations with fellow JMT hikers I realized that many experiences were shared and, especially, that many similar mistakes were reoccurring. With my aversion to repeating each other's mistakes, I decided that this repetition was unnecessary and my wife was – of course – right: passing on the experiences of how to prepare and what worked on the JMT would be of value to most anyone attempting this hike.

That's the story of how this book came to life. Now, here is the story of what it is about. The JMT is a 211mi/340km trail from Yosemite Valley to the highest point of the continental US, Mt. Whitney. From the top of Mt. Whitney, it is another 11mi/18km to the nearest trailhead at Whitney Portal.

The trail was named after John Muir, a Scottish conservationist and first president of the Sierra Club, a driving force behind this trail and other preservations<sup>1</sup>. In total, the JMT runs through five of the US' most picturesque national parks and offers spectacular sceneries of canyons, cliffs, forests, lakes, rivers, peaks and passes of over 14,000ft. It is one of the most renowned and widely recognized as one of the greatest trails in the world.

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<sup>1</sup> [www.sierraclub.org](http://www.sierraclub.org)



**Figure 1 Overview of the John Muir Trail**

Finally, here is how I came to hike the JMT. I had just moved to San Diego, California, with a vague idea of wanting to switch careers (i.e., I was not working and had time to spare). One of my best friends, Josh, was on a one-year sabbatical and looking for an adventure, despite having just walked 450mi/720km along the ancient pilgrimage route Camino de Santiago. He called me one day and asked if I had heard of the JMT. I said no, but looked into it and was stunned. Though I love hiking, I had never camped for more than 3 days in a row. I had consequently never dealt with planning large quantities of light weight food, fitting that food into a bear canister, and

how to resupply myself via mail. I was also not familiar with the specifics of the High Sierra, how to treat water, how much of it to carry, and which gear and clothing were appropriate for the conditions. However, my initial concerns were put on hold when I saw pictures of the trail.

After a quick chat with Josh, we decided to go for it. I bought a book, read lots of blogs, several online forums, and the National Parks' websites. I soon learned that getting a wilderness permit would be the bottle neck, but we got lucky. As I continued my research, I grew more confident. I was gathering lots of answers to my early questions and reading up on trail descriptions. I found that the JMT would be the perfect amount of adventure: it is in remote wilderness areas, but is decently frequented by hikers, has occasional ranger stations and sporadic ins/outs to nearby towns. The more sources I combined, the better my picture of the JMT was and the more capable I felt of the challenge.

Essentially, that is why I wrote this book. I want you to have a clear picture of what to expect on the JMT and how best to prepare yourself. Chapter 2 describes the physical challenges of the trail and gives guidance on estimating the time it will take to complete it. This initial estimate of your trail hiking days allows you to prepare the Long Lead Items of Chapter 3, such as permits and travel plans. Chapter 4 lets you know what to expect regarding weather and trail conditions, campsites, and water. How to prepare for all this physically and logistically is the topic of Chapter 5. Then, Chapter 6 takes a close look at gear options for this High Sierra setting and their correct use. Finally, Chapter 7 offers some personal experiences and anecdotes from Josh's and my adventure. Additionally, the Appendices provide checklists, elevation profiles, side trip suggestions and more, to round-off your picture of and preparation for the hike.

I hope you will find all the information you need herein and feel confident to hike the JMT.

*Happy Trails!*

## 2. Requirements and Time

Can you hike the JMT? If you are interested in hiking and have some experience, the answer is probably yes. However, 222mi/360km with 47,800ft/14,600m gain and 43,200ft/13,200m loss reaching its highest point at 14,500ft/4,420m Mt. Whitney is a challenge for anyone<sup>2</sup>.

General requirements on the trail are surefootedness, ability to deal with high altitudes, and a good overall level of fitness and endurance. However, since the JMT is maintained to be passed by horses, this is a non-technical trail, i.e. no climbing skills are needed. Nevertheless, in the winter months / when snow is present, special gear and skills are necessary for safe travels.

Further requirements for the logistics are a strong back and knees to carry the load of your backpack (approx. 30-45lb/14-20kg), resistance to dry air and both hot and cold temperatures, and the ability to camp (using a gas stove, setting up your tent and pad, following nature's call in the wild, etc.).

In order to have an adequate challenge, start by planning your days on the trail. As a first guideline, use Figure 2 - based on your age and fitness level. The chart is meant to help you with an initial assessment of how many days you will take for the JMT. This is the first step to all your further planning, especially regarding food and resupply. *To read more, click [here](http://www.planandgo hiking.com) or visit [www.planandgo hiking.com](http://www.planandgo hiking.com)*

Take the row with your age on the left and move right to the column corresponding to your level of fitness. For example, "John", a 40 year old of average fitness should plan to take roughly 16-18 days, so let us say 17.

---

<sup>2</sup> All distances and elevation gains/losses are from Yosemite Valley Happy Isles to Whitney Portal.

Age	70	18	21	23		
	60	16	18	21	Not Advised	
	50	14	16	18	21	
	40	12	14	16	18	21
	30	11	13	15	17	19
	20	10	12	14	16	18
		Very Fit		Average		Less Fit
Level of Fitness						

**Figure 2 Estimate of Trail Days on the JMT**

With your estimate of trail days (ETD), you can calculate your average miles per day: divide 222 miles by your ETD.

Average miles per day = 222 miles / ETD

Taking the above example of John leads to  $222/17 = 13$  miles per day on average. That might not sound like much, but keep in mind that every horizontal mile is accompanied by 230ft up and 210ft down, i.e., equivalent to approx. 500 stair steps up and 450 steps down.

While on the JMT, I met a 74 year old who was planning 24 days with his wife; a 67 year old who was doing the JMT in 32 day (for the 8<sup>th</sup> time!); a 63 year old who finished in 16 days; and a 50 year old who completed the JMT in 15 days. On average, most people will spend 15-20 days between Yosemite and Whitney Portal. Schedules vary greatly on how each one allocates time on and off the trail, hiking and relaxing.

In order to account for these differences and to give you a more personalized trail itinerary, consider the following questions: *To read more, click [here](#)*

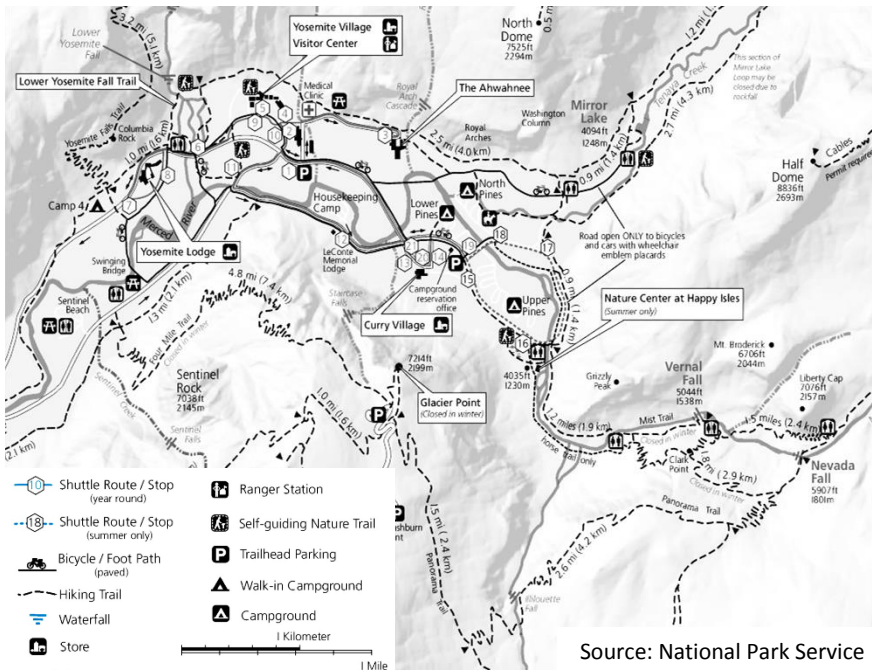


Figure 3 Yosemite Valley Map

## b. Hiking Buddy

Finding the right hiking buddy for this challenging endeavor can be a challenge in itself. Depending on who your friends are, this part may be complicated or not. Either way, your prospective hiking buddy<sup>3</sup> will need sufficient time to prepare, so you need to think about who you want to give a heads up. But before you start asking everyone you know, you may want to consider this:

- You will be spending 2+ weeks with this person, day and night
- You should have somewhat similar hiking speeds
- Your buddy should be likely to keep his commitment

To read more, click [here](#)

<sup>3</sup> For simplicity, I am using the male, singular form “hiking buddy”, which shall also include all female and multiple “buddies” if applicable.

Of most things, however, each of you will need or want your own (see Chapter 6 *Gear*). Though sharing a tent would also save some weight, it does not outweigh the comfort of being able to retreat alone after a long day.

Especially if this is your first multi-day hike, a friend by your side can keep spirits up and make recovering easier. You can help keep each other on schedule, discuss how far to walk, where to set up camp, where to rest, remind each other to put on sun screen, etc. In case of an emergency, it is obviously good to have someone close. Though the JMT is quite frequented in the summer time, you never know when another hiker will pass.

For several other reasons, it is wonderful to bring a companion... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## **c. Travel Arrangements**

Getting to and from the main trailheads at Yosemite Valley and Whitney Portal takes some planning, but is still rather convenient when you consider that you are entering a wilderness zone. Depending on where you are coming from and which direction you want to walk the JMT, choose a combination of the below means of transportation and make sure to check the schedules [Travel Arrangements].

The following map shows all the possible travel options. Further below, you will find the specifics of each of these options explained in more detail...

*To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Travelling by rental car**

Renting a car can save you a lot of time if public transport connections are unfortunate for your location and/or date of travel. The closest rental car centers to the trail heads are... *To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Travelling by airplane**

Most out-of-state hikers will fly into San Francisco or Los Angeles. Any combination of the above buses, trains, and rental cars is then easily available. Additionally, there are regular scheduled flights between...

*To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Travelling with your own car**

There is long-term parking at both trailheads, so you can choose to leave your car at your start or finishing point. After strenuous weeks of hiking, being able to get in your car and take off without having to worry about bus connections can be worth getting the logistics over with before starting your trek. Remember not to leave any food or scented items in your car. Having a cell phone charger that plugs into your lighter outlet may come in handy.

## 4. What to Expect

This Chapter is intended to give you an impression of the conditions on the JMT. This can serve as a guide to choosing your gear and making your preparations. Later, you can compare your thoughts with a gear overview in Chapter 6 *Gear* and my personal experiences in Chapter 7 *Plan and Go*.

### a. Weather & Conditions

#### Temperature

The most important measure in deciding what kind of clothing to bring is the expected temperature. In order to estimate temperatures along the trail, it is useful to use a lapse rate. As a rule of thumb, deduct... *To read more, click [here](#)*

Remember that you will be at altitudes well above 9,000ft for a great portion of the trail. This means that while temperatures may be fairly low during the day, due to low humidity and aerosols, the sun will be merciless. At the same time, this source of warmth will set early behind other peaks and temperatures will drop quickly. Additionally, any water you find for washing clothes and yourself will likely be around 40-60°F / 4-15°C. Keep this in mind when planning your arrivals to camp. At the end of a long day, your energy and body heat fade. And while you will want to wash off dust and sweat, regaining a comfortable temperature becomes a challenge after sunset. This means, the earlier you can set out in the morning, the more distance you can cover before the sun is too hot, but also arrive at camp and get washed up while the sun is still out and strong enough to dry/warm you.

#### Precipitation

From June to September, when most hikers hit the trail, it will only rain occasionally – if at all. However, there is a fair chance that it will rain at least once while you are hiking, especially in June (see Table 1).

Table 2 reads as follows: Taking the row of July: July has an average precipitation of 0.3in./1cm, historically wet Julys reached up to 4.2in./11cm; there is usually one day of rainfall of greater than 0.01in./0.3cm and one with more than 0.1in./3mm; there are zero days with any stronger precipitation let alone snowfall. So in a nutshell... *To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Other Conditions**

Wild fires are unpredictable but common occurrences in California. Most recently in 2013, forest fires devastated large areas in the Yosemite Wilderness as well as around Mammoth. The fires never got close enough to the JMT to pose an immediate threat to hikers, but the partially thick smoke put stress on breathing and reduced visibility.

While you cannot prepare in advance for a wild fire, you can take the right precautions if you are aware of wild fires in the area... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## **b. Trails**

The JMT is wonderful. It is mostly a somewhat narrow, single lane trail that feels like a minimal disruption to the surrounding wilderness. As the trail is frequented (scarcely) by horses and mules, there is never a need for climbing (involving your hands). However, there are very steep, winding passages with sudden drop-offs to the sides, where you wonder how these large animals do it. The drop-offs and ledges also call for you to be fairly resistant to heights.

The predominant surfaces you walk on are... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## c. Campsites

### Regulations

Park services and common sense command you to use established campsites. These campsites are neither marked nor equipped with a picnic bench. They are simply flattened patches that should be in accordance with the selection guidelines (i.e. not on vegetation and at least 100ft away from water and trails). However, if you find an established campsite that does not meet the required distances, it may still be reasonable to use it instead of flattening other vegetation. Established campsites are plentiful along the JMT, giving you a wide variety of spots to choose from.

Wood campfires are only allowed in pre-existing fire rings. Generally, campfires are prohibited above 9,600ft in Yosemite, above 10,000ft in John Muir and Ansel Adams Wilderness as well as in San Joaquin and Kings Canyon National Park, and above 11,200ft in Sequoia National Park. There are some additional local restrictions and there may be strict “no fire” rules for all altitudes in times of drought. That said, refraining from campfires altogether – decreasing the risk of wild fires and conserving the limited timber – has a strong advocacy.

### Choosing a Campsite

When choosing a campsite, consider two factors: climate and strategy.

Climate will be the more important factor. Remember to avoid... *To read more, click [here](#)*

Strategy plays a role in choosing your campsite along the way with regard to daily distances and strenuous segments. You will find that certain areas at the foot of a steep incline will have... *To read more, click [here](#)*

For considerations regarding daily distances, see the next Chapter 5a *Your Itinerary*.

## d. Water

There is plenty. Even in late August, after three months of hardly any rain, the abundant snowfalls of winter and spring still feed the countless rivers and lakes. Large parts of the JMT lead you right along beautiful bodies of water – babbling in brooks or lying peaceful, mirroring the peaks. You rarely walk for more than one hour before a stream crosses your path. So water availability is not an issue.

While the waters look clear, they may be contaminated. The global prevalence of the protozoan *Giardia lamblia* and the *E.coli* bacteria does not stop in the Sierra Nevada. Both lead to diarrhea and abdominal cramps, sometimes with a delay of 5-15 days post exposure. Fortunately, both can be filtered and/or killed with common treatment methods (see Chapter 6d *Food & Drinks*). Equally important, however, is a good camp hygiene to limit the spread of microbe-borne illness – especially after a squat with a view.

In order to not to add to the problem, make sure to always... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## 5. Preparation & Planning

Congratulations! If you are still reading, you have not been discouraged by some of the hardship any multi-day backpacking journey may bring. While the remoteness of the JMT provides spectacular sceneries, it also calls for some advanced preparation, but nothing unmanageable. And rest assured that it is worth it – good preparation will make your hike all the more enjoyable, allowing you to fully submerge in the vast, peaceful mountains.

### a. Your Itinerary

#### Macro-Planning

The below flow chart visualizes the first steps in planning your overall trip...

*To read more, click [here](#)*

As described in Chapter 3 *Long Lead Items*, the most important item to secure in advance is a trail permit. In order to know for when to get a permit it is good to know how long you estimate to take for your trip, when would be a good time for you, and when other hiking buddies are available. Most people... *To read more, click [here](#)*

#### Micro-Planning

In order to have enough food up to and after resupply and make it to the trail's end in time to catch your bus or rental car, your master itinerary and ETD need to be broken down into specific campsite goals along the trail.

For example,... *To read more, click [here](#)*

Repeat this process of roughly marking and reassessing campsites with the distance-elevation profile and topographic map for each section. When your markings to the distance-elevation profile are final you can transfer the markings into your map, as you will most likely be using this on the trail.

Of course, they will only be approximate campsite locations, but this way you have an excellent measure for staying on track with your macro planning.

Use caution when planning side trips and be sure to factor them in correctly as they will not appear on the distance-elevation profile.

## **b. Athletic Training**

For many readers the JMT will be their greatest adventure to date – and their greatest physical challenge. Don't be afraid to accept the challenge! With a decent level of fitness and the right mindset, you will revel in your accomplishment and soon seek the next.

### **Hiking Style**

In order for you to use your energy efficiently and keep strains to your joints and tendons at a minimum, it is useful to adopt a good hiking style. Be especially conscious about the following three things on the trail:

*To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Trekking Poles**

Various forums and literature state that the use of trekking poles may increase your daily distance by up to 25%. Whether or not this is true, they have some definite advantages. When carrying a heavy pack, especially one in which the weight is not evenly distributed, you can easily lose your balance. Having poles secure in the ground gives... *To read more, click [here](#)*

Before taking poles on the JMT it is very useful to try them on a nearby trail to see how they feel. Practice the motion which is a little different from your usual one. If you cannot get comfortable or find that poles cause additional exhaustion, let it be. Especially if you already have problems with your shoulders or wrists, poles may cause unnecessary stress.

Additionally, exercises with light to medium weights are great to strengthen shoulder and back muscles that will be needed for pole use. A good exercise can be done with... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## c. Food

This will be the most important chapter to some. And food should not be underestimated in its ability to revive energy and keep spirits up. Looking forward to a good meal is motivational and having it in your tummy lets you fall asleep satisfied. Putting effort into planning and preparing balanced meals with a lot of variety is well worth it. Nothing is worse than knowing you will have to eat something you do not want to.

Here are some guidelines for choosing your food: *To read more, click [here](#)*

Determining how much food to bring has two aspects. Firstly, it is a matter of calories. Your meals should provide... *To read more, click [here](#)*

The following three pages provide some suggestions on which type of food to bring along for breakfast, lunch, snacks, dinner: *To read more, click [here](#)*

Despite the suggestions given above, some will choose not to prepare meals at all. We met a 64-year-old on the trail who ate nothing but power bars. He said he was quite content and did not get sick of them in his 15(!) trail days. Others eat a quick cereal bar for breakfast, pack- and warm-up while getting going, thus saving time and gas for a hot breakfast. Some alternate their food strategy depending on the campsite, the arrival time, and the difficulty of the day ahead – nice spots and slow days might invite you to enjoy a nice morning coffee or spend a long evening with celebratory dining. In summary, your food strategy is a matter of your personal preference, the tightness of your schedule, access to food / your resupply strategy, and access to gas.

#### **d. Resupply**

All but extreme hikers will need at least one resupply on the JMT. Commonly, bear canisters hold 6-10 days of food, depending on how much food you calculate, and how well you package, compress and pack it. So if your itinerary exceeds the restrictions of the bear canister, sending yourself food and goods to a pick-up destination is a simple remedy.

You have three options for your resupply: *To read more, click [here](#)*

## 6. Gear

### a. Clothing

“My face is sweating, but I’m still freezing.” – This is a normal morning in the High Sierra. While the clear air and high altitudes allow the sun to shine with unknown power in early hours, they are also responsible for rapid temperature drops after sunset. So if you are hiking in the summer months, apart from a rare rain shower, days will be warm and nights will be cold. It’s that simple.

During the day, most hikers wear... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## **b. Hiking**

### **Shoes & Boots**

Undoubtedly the most stressed piece of gear on your trip will be your shoes. Any good shoe has a thick, cushioning sole with non-slip tread. Beyond that, there are different opinions on which style is best suited...

*To read more, click [here](#)*

I strongly recommend using your prospective shoes on a few hikes to break them in and see how they handle. If in doubt, try another pair – getting your shoes right is essential. Then again, do not take shoes that are too worn down and have little tread left. You would not want their early exodus on the 222 miles.

### **Socks & Gaiters**

A good sock can significantly add to your hiking comfort. Most modern trail socks are made of merino wool or polyester. Both fibers have outstanding properties regarding moisture wicking and temperature regulation. Thick socks, especially those with hidden seams, provide cushioning and help the shoe evenly embrace your foot, reducing rubbing and blisters. Though less stylish in a shoes-shorts combo and slightly warmer, socks that go (well) above your ankle collect less sand and stones, keep your legs cleaner, and protect against the sun.

Another way to keep out sand and stones are... *To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Backpacks**

Just like shoes, an ill-fitting backpack can cause considerable pain – chaffing along straps or back aches from a restrictive fit. There is also a multitude of styles, capacities, and functionalities. Here is a list of decision criteria to find a pack that is right for you... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## Trekking Poles

Chapter 5 *Preparation & Planning* offered some advice on how to correctly use trekking poles. They can be of great service both for propulsion and providing a sense of security on steep stretches of trail. Here is what to look out for when purchasing trekking poles: *To read more, click [here](#)*

## c. Sleeping

This section supports your decisions in putting together a comfortable sleeping environment. To most, this will consist of a tent, sleeping bag, and a pad. However, there are some alternatives.

### Shelters

If you are hiking as a couple, you will probably share a tent. Should you be joined by a hiking buddy, the weight savings might be exceeded by the benefits of separate sleeping arrangements. Here, you have three options to choose from... *To read more, click [here](#)*

### Sleeping Bags

Sleeping bags come in an overwhelming multitude of varieties. It is all the more important to understand which are the relevant features for this adventure and those to come. A sleeping bag is a significant investment that should last for 15+ years.

Below is an overview of important sleeping bag properties to help you make an informed decision... *To read more, click [here](#)*

### Sleeping Pads

A sleeping pad should literally support a good night's sleep. The two main criteria are cushioning and insulation. You can count on the ground being hard and cold wherever you camp along the JMT. There are three popular and equally suitable alternatives:

Air pads, similar to the ones used in swimming pools, have a thin air-tight shell that is inflated through a mouth valve. In order to cut down on weight, they are often semi-rectangular in shape. They are very light weight, roll-up very small, and offer exceptional cushioning - especially those with a thickness of 2in/5cm and up. On the downside,... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## **Sleeping Gear**

Apart from the clothing you wear in your sleeping bag, additional gear for comfort is some form of pillow, eye mask, ear plugs, and insect repellent.

An alternative to packing an inflatable pillow is... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## d. Food & Drinks

While Chapter 5c *Food* discussed the type of food and drinks to bring and send as resupply, this Chapter focusses on the various gears needed to store, prepare, and eat the food as well as treat and store water.

### Bear Canisters

For the storage of food and any other scented items, bear canisters are mandated in most stretches along the JMT – especially at Yosemite and Mt. Whitney. This means, you will carry a bear canister throughout your journey. As you may not need a bear canister on many other occasions, you can choose to rent, buy used, or buy new.

Bear canisters for rent are available at selected outdoor stores in California, directly from some manufacturers (see list below), and at most wilderness permit offices. Check the respective rental terms, especially regarding returning the canister via mail.

When purchasing a new bear canister, there are a few things to look out for. As a first step, the canister must be national park approved (SIBBG for black bears, IGBC for grizzly bears).

Here is a list of the currently approved models: *To read more, click [here](#)*

The most important criterion for choosing a canister is... *To read more, click [here](#)*



Bear spray, pepper spray, and other deterrents are prohibited in several national parks and especially in Yosemite National Park.

Using a bear canister properly and keeping your campsite food and odor free is precaution enough. Save the weight of carrying a spray that could harm both you and the wildlife.

## Stoves & Fuel

The preparation of your meals will undoubtedly require a stove, as campfires are prohibited above certain elevations (see Chapter 4c *Campsites*) and illegal all together during droughts. Two stove fuel types are most common and almost certainly in stock at resupply cabins:

*To read more, click [here](#)*

That leads to the very important question of how much fuel to carry. This is a function of how much mass needs to be heated from/to which temperature at which elevation, ambient temperature, and efficiency circumstances. Assuming we want 8oz/235ml of hot water for coffee in the morning and 8oz/235ml for porridge/oatmeal, none for lunch, and 16oz/470ml for an instant meal in the evening along with one cup of tea at 8oz/235ml, that... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## Pots, Pans, and Utensils

Deciding which kind of pot and/or pan to bring depends on your choice of food and on the amount of people you will be cooking for. For example, if you are cooking for 1-2 people, one pot of approx. 3x6in/7.5x15.5cm with a capacity of just over 32oz/0.9ltr is sufficient. The more liquid the contents are, i.e. soups or water, the better the heat energy circulation and the narrower the pot's base can be. Especially if you plan on only boiling water during a summer trip, an integrated canister system is the quickest, most efficient way of heating. However, if you intend to prepare solid meals, opt for... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## Water Treatment

As discussed earlier in the book, it is advised to treat any water in the High Sierra before drinking. There are six options for doing so: *To read more, click [here](#)*

## Water Storage

How to store the treated water for convenient and frequent access is also worth putting some thought into. Two options are most common: *To read more, click [here](#)*

This leads to the question of what size your container(s) should be and how much water to carry after each resupply. My non-scientific answer is... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## e. Medical & Personal Care

For light weight enthusiasts, the following is especially painful. It deals with bringing several items of which you hope never to use them – not once, not for any purpose. Nonetheless, a well-equipped first aid kit is vital in an emergency. Your medical kit should include any personal medications you regularly take, including such that were recommended by your doctor for this specific trip. There are various well equipped pre-packed first-aid kits. Also, hikers have different needs and standards regarding personal care when outdoors. Limit yourself to the minimum you feel comfortable with. Below are some suggestions on what to pack: *To read more, click [here](#)*

## **f. Miscellaneous**

The following gear can be just as important as the gear listed earlier, it just does not fit in specific categories. *To read more, click [here](#)*

## **g. Pack & Adjust your Pack**

As you pack your backpack, do pay attention to two things: the weight distribution and the internal organization of your gear.

Regarding weight distribution it is important to... *To read more, click [here](#)*

A well-considered internal organization and distribution of gear among the compartments and pockets of your pack can save time and nerves.

## 7. Personal JMT Experience

In this section, I describe my specific preparation, travel arrangements, gear, and experiences along the trail. It is my trip summary with my good friend Josh, meant to exemplify what worked (for us). It offers only my personal experience and opinion. If you are inexperienced and/or unsure about certain options, I hope this gives you some additional reference points.

### a. Plan

First, I researched the JMT and decided which direction to walk it. We chose north-to-south, because... *To read more, click [here](#)*

I had a decent backpack and what I thought was a good sleeping bag, but still needed quite a bit of gear. What I was most unsure about before the trip was what to expect temperature-wise and how to prepare for sleeping arrangements. I couldn't quite believe the numbers from temperature charts, thinking it was impossible it would get that cold in California in the summer. On the other hand, I found it difficult to gauge in online forums, who were the "normal" hikers and who were the "minimalist" ultra-light hikers with a latent death wish. Talk of not needing a tent and sleeping under the stars sounded appealing but also risky. In hindsight, I would consider both Josh's and my approach to be very average / common for the trail and fitting to most people's comfort levels. Here is a list of my gear: *To read more, click [here](#)*

Besides gear, food and nutrition play a major role. In addition to the suggestions in Chapter 5c *Food*, here are some personal remarks on the food we brought... *To read more, click [here](#)*

As you can conclude from my comments, I was very happy with our breakfast, snack, and dinner options, just not with the smoked sausages / lack of variety for lunch. However, quantity-wise, 2.5-3.5oz/70-100g are a

good amount of meat or fish. Overall, I can recommend a similar pack list, if you substitute 4 of the sausage portions with jerky, different fish, or vegetarian options.

I sent our resupply package so that it would arrive a good week before our pick-up. We planned one resupply at... *To read more, click [here](#)*

We organized our food by trail sections. Figure 16 gives you an idea of how we tried to spread out and sort the four-times 8-day sections worth of food for the two of us. Each horizontal row was one section for one person and consisted of eight “blocks” with breakfast, lunch, snacks, and dinner. Puncturing and letting all air out of our freeze-dried meals, we each just managed to squeeze one sections’ worth into our 700 cu. In. bear canisters.

This is exactly what we packed per person per trail section: *To read more, click [here](#)*

## b. Go

On the second day before our entry date in Yosemite (Day -1), our adventure began. It was exciting to finally execute on the months of planning. We picked up our rental car (credit card needed at pick-up!) in the morning and drove from San Diego to Merced. At the motel, we took a dip in the pool and walked across the street for one of our last fresh meals. We savored a fresh salad and speculated about what lay ahead. The next morning (Day 0) we drove the short distance to... *To read more, click [here](#)*

Day 6 took us over 10,895ft Silver Pass and its beautiful lake with sandy shores all the way down to Mono Creek at 7,870ft. The campground near the Vermilion trailhead was the busiest we stayed at. It is located just beneath the switchbacks leading up to Bear Ridge. We had heard horror stories about how strenuous this section was supposed to be. Nevertheless, as we ascended in the morning of Day 7, we found it quite enjoyable. Most of the path is well shaded in a lush forest and the morning temperatures eased the countless, but steadily inclining zigzags. Around Marie Lake we bumped into a gentle cowboy leading 8 mules. He was carrying gear and food for a group of hikers. After incredibly steep granite switchbacks leading down to Lake Edison, I told him I would freak out if I had to do all this on a horse. He replied he would freak out if he had to carry a backpack and eat dried food for three weeks – his dinner last night was grilled chicken with green beans and a beer... *To read more, click [here](#)*



**Figure 4 Silver Pass and Pack Mules**

Day 15 – exhilarated on the peak of the Continental US. We got up at 4am, packed our stuff and began climbing. In utter darkness, Josh used his headlamp while I had my LED-solar-charger-combo tucked in my top backpack pocket and shining over my shoulder. After about 1,500 vertical feet from our campsite, we reached the Mt. Whitney cut-off where you could leave your pack and ascend along the ridge. From here the view over Guitar Lake to the mountains around is magnificent - especially as you witness the sun slowly lifting dusk with shades of light blue and violet until it bursts out in blazing orange and red. At 7:35am on August 14<sup>th</sup>, 2013, we had reached the peak of 14,495ft Mt. Whitney, the highest point in the Continental US. The feeling of joy and accomplishment was second to none. The steady inclines and passes over 12-and-13,000ft in the past days had given us time to acclimatize well, validating the decision of hiking the JMT north-to-south. After absorbing the views and emotions, we signed the register and hit a big red button someone had left beside the book. “That was EASY!”, said the talking button before we shut the lid to the register and began our descent from 14,495ft to 8,365ft, non-stop. Though very beautiful, we were only focused on finishing this last steep part accident-free and completing the trail.



**Figure 5 Sunrise on the way to and on top of Mt. Whitney**

At 3:15pm, we sat in front of a burger and a beer at Whitney Portal, saying cheers. 222mi now lay behind us. Keith and Nichole also arrived, as did Bob, a soft spoken 64-year old who had solely eaten cereal and power bars on the trail, the infamous “Bob-bars”. With our first non-dehydrated meal...

*To read more, click [here](#)*

## Appendices

### A. Checklists

These checklists are meant to assist you in your preparations. Depending on the month you are hiking and your personal preferences, you can add or remove certain items from the lists. For those who are unsure about what to pack: if you stick to the lists, you will be in good shape... *To read more, click [here](#) or visit [www.planandgohiking.com](http://www.planandgohiking.com)*

## **B. Timeline**

This is a summarized overview of the most important things you need to keep in mind as you prepare for your adventure. Please note that this is a generic timeline – depending on which direction you hike the JMT, how many resupplies you plan, etc. your personal timeline will differ. In any case, it helps to start early and be among the first to request a permit 24 weeks in advance to your entry date... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## C. Map & Elevation Profiles

As described earlier in the book, there are different ways to navigate along the trail – with (physical) maps, phone map apps, or GPS devices. This section is not meant to substitute any means of navigation on the JMT, but rather give you a first understanding of where the trail will take you. Furthermore, the elevation profiles are provided in such detail that you can refine your general miles-per-day scheme depending on the gain and loss you'll be facing each day. Thereafter, you can conveniently approximate campsites and check how these are located in relation to morning inclines and your resupply spot(s). It helps to have elevation maps along on the trail so you can gauge how far you want to go depending on your condition and what's ahead throughout the day, as well as to plan for the next.

Figure 33 provides an aerial view of the JMT among the Sierra Nevada peaks as well as a compact elevation profile... *To read more, click [here](#)*

## D. Side Trips

There are infinite lakes and peaks to venture out to. With the scenery changing frequently, you will find a more interesting, beautiful, and surprising landscape each day to soak-up and relish. If your time and planning allow, there are magnificent side trips from the JMT.

Here is a list of some of the most beautiful side trips: *To read more, click [here](#)*

Any of the adjacent peaks and lakes are included in the JMT permit, with the exception of Half Dome. Due to the crowds in Yosemite Valley, the trek along the cables up to Half Dome's peak requires a separate permit, which is, unfortunately, hard to come by. *To read more, click [here](#)*

## **E. Internal References**

Marked with [ ] throughout the book; in order of appearance:

### **Chapter 3a *Permits***

*To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Chapter 3c *Travel Arrangements***

*To read more, click [here](#)*

### **Chapter 5d *Resupply***

*To read more, click [here](#)*

## F. Literature & Links

*To read more, click [here](#)*

And of course, visit:

Plan & Go: The John Muir Trail

[www.planandgohiking.com](http://www.planandgohiking.com)

for all the herein listed links, as well as more information, pictures, videos, help on calculations, and other posts.

I look forward to and appreciate your feedback!

## G. List of Abbreviations

\$	US Dollar
°C	Degree Celsius
°F	Degree Fahrenheit
am / pm	Ante Meridiem / Post Meridiem
CA	California
cm	Centimeter
cu.	Cubic
e.g.	“for example”
etc.	“and so forth”
ETD	Estimate of Trail Days
ft	Foot
gal	Gallon
i.e.	“that is”
IGBC	Interagency Grizzly Bear Committee
in.	Inch
inl.	Inlet
Jct.	Junction
JMT	John Muir Trail
k	Thousand (kilo)
kg	Kilogram
km	Kilometer
lb	Pound (imperial)
LED	Light Emitting Diode
ltr	Liter
m	Meter
mi	Mile
min	Minute
Mt.	Mount
MTR	Muir Trail Ranch
outl.	Outlet
PO	Post Office
SIBBG	Sierra Interagency Black Bear Group
St.	Street
Stn	Station

## About the Author

Gerret was born 1981 in Hamburg, Germany. Since before he can remember, his father took him along on hikes and sparked his love of the outdoors. Gerret has since enjoyed hiking trips in various parts of the Alps, the Philippines, China, New Zealand, Canada, and the US. With his background in business and engineering, Gerret is always interested in improved gear and technical solutions. Besides the peace he feels when in nature, he enjoys the physical challenge the mountains pose. Currently, Gerret is an overjoyed expectant first-time father and so very proud of his wife Nadja. The soon-to-be three live in San Diego, California.

## Special Thanks

I would especially like to thank:

My father, who introduced me to any sport I know how to play, investing much of his valued time. He also infected me with his passion for the mountains that he had developed as a child on various hikes with his father. In his smart but gentle manner, my father continues to be the supreme guidance in my life.

My friend Josh, who had the idea for this trip – just as he did for our first hitch-/ hiking trip in 1999 through southern Germany. Josh never ceases to amaze me with his unorthodox approaches at solving problems. He is equally goofy as well-educated. I am extremely thankful for his friendship.

My wife Nadja, who has always supported my travel and adventure plans, regardless of whether or not she could be a part of them. I admire her strength and intelligence, and am madly in love with her humor and beauty. I could not imagine a better companion with whom to journey through life.

## Disclaimer

This book describes physically challenging activities in a remote outdoors environment. There are inherent risks related to hiking, mountain climbing, mountain environment and climate, adapting to altitude, relying on gear, and providing oneself with appropriate nourishment. Discuss with your doctor the implications based on your personal condition.

This book is not a medical guidebook. Information and advice given in this book are intended as reference and explicitly not as a substitute for any professional medical advice, specifically if you are aware of a precondition or issue.

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*Hiking the JMT is the  
experience of a lifetime!  
Each day I was stunned by  
nature's perfection and  
frankly, surprised by what  
my body is capable of –  
humbling and empowering.  
Every second was precious.*

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