



Tehipite Topics

September 2004 ☘ Vol. 50, No. 6

www.tehipite.sierraclub.org

This is Your Newsletter!

We need you! Tell us about your trip. Let us know about a conservation issue. Send us your pictures. We need articles about the environment, about Sierra Club activities, and about anything else of interest to Tehipite Chapter members. Don't tell us you can't write. Just write it down and we'll clean it up. *Tehipite Topics* also accepts some advertising. Contact your volunteer editors at Rasmussen@BigBaldy.com. ☘

Chapter General Meeting

Amazon, Machu Piccu and Galapagos

presented by Dick Haas

Wednesday, September 8th, 2004

7:00 P.M.

Unitarian Church
4144 N. Millbrook
Fresno, California



Atop Mt. Whitney (A *very* long day hike!)

New Outings Leader Policy

by Richard Sloan, Chapter Chair

In order to achieve a superior, volunteer-run outings program that supports the Sierra Club's conservation mission at acceptable risk, the National Sierra Club's Outdoor Activities Governance Committee (OAGC) has adopted a Leader Standards Policy. The OAGC requires that all persons leading outdoor activities obtain and keep current the knowledge and skills listed in the policy. The policy may be found at <http://clubhouse.sierraclub.org/outings/>. The user ID is "clubhouse". The password is "explore". The requirements are not very hard to meet. All our Outing Leaders should check the web site and renew their medical skills if they need to. If you need to attend Red Cross Basic First Aid there is money available to send you.

See Leader Policy, back page

Merced Group

Conservation Committee and Executive Committee Meeting

Thursday, September 9th, 7:00 P.M.
Merced School Employees Federal Credit Union
1021 Olivewood Dr., Merced

General Meeting

Thursday, September 16th, 7:30 P.M.
Merced School Employees Federal Credit Union
1021 Olivewood Dr., Merced

Featured Speaker: Susan Austin, Project Director of Nature Conservancy's Merced Grasslands Project.

The Nature Conservancy's Merced Grassland Project

Along the eastern edge of the San Joaquin Valley lies California's largest and most intact expanse of vernal pool-grasslands habitat. The Nature Conservancy's ecological assessment of the Central Valley eco-region ranks the Merced Grasslands as a high conservation priority.

Susan Austin, Project Director of the Nature Conservancy's Merced Grasslands Project, will discuss the Nature Conservancy's ongoing efforts to protect this important landscape.

Outings

September 18th - Saturday
Sierra Vista Scenic Byway

See Merced Group, page 2



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Merced Group, from page 1

Of the original 53 routes designated nationally as “scenic byways”, only three were in California. This is one of them. The drive starts in North Fork and takes us on a 100 mile arc that gives a great overview of the San Joaquin River drainage with some interesting features along the way. In his book, *The San Joaquin, the Sierra, and Beyond*, Bill Sanford suggests several noteworthy stops along the way. These include the geographical center of California, Redinger overlook, Mile High Vista (with views of Mammoth Pool, Mt. Ritter, and Eagle Beaks), Arch Rock, Globe Rock, and Meadow Vista. We’ll hit these and more, finishing with a short hike to Fresno Dome or a stop at Nelder Grove of Redwoods, depending on the desires of the group. A dinner stop in Madera on the way home will also be an option.

Meet at the parking lot behind the United Methodist Church in Merced at 7:45 A.M. for carpooling and final directions. The church is at 899 Yosemite Parkway. We’ll pull out promptly at 8:00. Bring a lunch, snacks, and water.

Need more info or further directions? Contact Rod Webster at (209) 723-4747 or Bill Sanford at (209) 357-0701.

Merced Group

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MT RAINIER

August 18-20, 2004

by Marcia Rasmussen

The last few days before Mt. Rainier were a blur. I remember sorting mountains of gear in our living room while my husband John pulled two all-nighters at work. I remember digging pulleys and snow pickets and ice axes out of the depths of our spare bedroom. I hardly had time to get excited that we were about to climb what is perhaps *the* finest peak in the 48 contiguous states. But somehow this trip all came together, and on Wednesday I found myself in the Paradise ranger station at Rainier National Park, filling out the paperwork for our climb with my heart pounding.

When most people set out to climb Rainier, they hire a guide, pay lots of money, and switch their brains to low power for a couple of days. That isn't the way I wanted to do it. I wanted to do all the planning, find my own way across the glaciers, and take responsibility for my own team's safety. That meant that each of us would carry about sixty pounds of our own gear. So when John, my friend Elizabeth, and I finally left the Paradise ranger station at 7:30 A.M., we were groaning under the weight of our packs, looking at the snow-covered peak that seemed impossibly far away.

The first two miles or so were on dry ground. Our heavy plastic double-layered mountaineering boots clunked along the trail, seeming very out of place. But soon we forded a babbling stream of glacier melt, and we were on snow.

The Muir Snowfield had looked almost flat, viewed through the telescope at the visitor center. It wasn't. We trudged upward, hour after hour. I tried to work out a rhythm with my footsteps and my breathing. My whole world was the crunch, crunch of each footstep, the sound of my own

breathing, and the creaking of my overstuffed backpack. I often stopped to breathe, take in the beauty of the glaciers around us, and gaze upward at the peak that never seemed to grow nearer.

We eventually arrived at Camp Muir. That's the last snowy outpost of the civilized world, with its tiny ranger station, primitive guide hut, solar outhouse, and a small cluster of tents. Here we rested for a short while, and then roped ourselves together to set off across the Cowlitz glacier. We still had a long way to go.

The Cowlitz was our shakedown glacier. It was fairly easy traveling, only mildly uphill, and the crevasses were mostly pretty easy to recognize. I was first on the rope, Elizabeth was tied into the middle about fifty feet behind me, and John brought up the rear, about fifty feet behind her. Each climber must take care to leave just the right amount of slack in the rope. If it's too tight, another climber might be pulled off his feet. If it's too loose, and a climber drops into a crevasse, she has a long fall before the rope catches her. As the leader, it was my job to find the route and make sure it was safe. I'd constantly be watching for irregularities in the snow surface, which might reveal hidden crevasses. And each time we crossed a crevasse, I probed with my ice axe to see if the snow was solid enough to support a climber's weight. Several times I found that it wasn't, and had to search for a safer route.

The Cowlitz glacier ended, and we faced a huge rubble heap of rocks, loosely held together by volcanic ash. It was dry and dusty and very steep. We took the crampons off our boots, reeled in the rope that had stretched between us, and moved closer together. Traveling as a tight group, the climbers are less likely to be hit by loose rocks that are kicked off by the other climbers' boots. We moved nervously here, sliding in the loose scree, holding our breath when one of us fell, choking in the cloud of ash that rose with each footstep. It was very steep here, and dangerous.



At the top of Cathedral Gap, we could finally see our campsite out on the Ingraham glacier. We fastened our crampons to our boots again, heaved a sigh of relief that we were almost there, and set off across the glacier. A short while later, we arrived in Ingraham Flats, which would be our home for the next two days.

Arriving in camp on the glacier doesn't mean that the work is done for the day. Elizabeth fired up the stove and set to work melting snow for our water supply. John and I began hacking away at the ice with shovel and axe, to build a level platform for our tent. Darkness quickly overtook us, and we worked by headlamp. Several hours later, we were huddled in our yellow dome tent, wrapped in down sleeping bags, gobbling a huge steaming pot of couscous that Elizabeth had cooked. I shivered awhile in my sleeping bag



before supper took its effect and I was warm enough to sleep. I am hearing impaired, but this was one time I didn't especially mind. Elizabeth and John lay awake listening the cracking and groaning of the glacier. Oblivious to the scary noises, I dropped right off to sleep.

Thursday was a rest day. We ate, napped, watched some other climbers higher on the mountain, ate again, and napped some more. We were interested to see other climbers descending the huge rock feature known as Disappointment Cleaver. We weren't sure of the route, so we carefully observed their progress. As we watched two parties near the bottom of the Cleaver, suddenly a huge chunk of ice fell from between the parties. The climbing route followed an imaginary ledge along the top of the block. One party

had just passed the block, and another was just about to cross. It was a block of ice about half the size of my house, and it just let go and fell. I'm sure the climbers up there were quaking in their boots. All of us in camp just watched and gasped, knowing that we would pass that way tomorrow.

For safety, climbers normally set out for the summit in the wee hours of the morning. During the night, the colder temperatures make the snow more solid and easier to climb. After the morning sun warms the glacier, the snow bridges that cover the crevasses weaken, and there's more chance of a climber falling through. With this in mind, we crawled into our sleeping bags about 6:00 P.M. and set our alarm for 11:40, planning to depart at midnight. This time I lay awake for a long time. It had just dawned on me that I was leading this team, and going up into a dangerous place where I had never been before. The responsibility weighed on me heavily, and suddenly I wasn't so sure of myself. I dropped into fitful sleep and dreamed twisted dreams that I could never quite remember the next day.

At 11:40 the alarm rang, and we began shuffling around in the dark. I found my headlamp and switched it on. My inner boots were carefully set inside the tent, with my glacier glasses down inside the left boot. I had been terrified that, in the darkness, I would forget my sunglasses and suffer in the blinding glare all day. Glacier glasses in the left boot. Lip balm in the right boot. My outer boots were tied to the outside of the tent, carefully, so they wouldn't blow away during the night. My pack was ready to go, huddled up against the outside of the tent. Crampons were stuck in the snow a couple feet away. Everything was ready. The rope was stretched out on the glacier. All we had to do was tie in and go.

So around midnight, the three of us set off across the Ingraham glacier under the starlight. Three dots of light in a row, we were the only climbers out on the expanse of the glacier. Each climber lives in his own little circle of light. My small universe consisted of my red boots, the ice axe in my gloved hand, and the circle of snow lit by the glow of my headlamp. The only sound I heard was the rhythmic crunch, crunch of my crampons against the hardened snow. Behind me stretched the rope that was my umbilical cord, connecting me to the other climbers. Elizabeth and John were each in their own small pools of light. Except for the rope connection, they might as well have been light years away.

High up on the Ingraham, we could look down on the camp and see dots of yellow light, other climbers who were beginning their trek across the glacier. We were the first party to reach the Cleaver, and I was very glad. The rock is unstable, and it's easy to kick boulders down onto the climbers below. With no one above us, we were in relative safety.

We had worried about how the route got up onto the Cleaver. There's always a deep crevasse between a glacier and a rock feature, essentially a moat to cross. And here was the section where the giant block of ice had fallen the day before. I told myself that many people had already been this way, and we could have faith that their footprints would be there to guide us. But when I reached the bottom of the cleaver, those footsteps led me across a very narrow, exposed bridge of ice. *Gulp.* My headlamp shone off into the darkness below my feet, and I couldn't see the bottom. But it was the only way to go, so I went. Beyond that, a six inch wide ledge of soft gravelly sand threaded its way along the near-vertical wall. The whole thing was very loose, and each step released a shower of scree into the crevasse below. A chunk of earth gave way under Elizabeth's boots. I heard her gasp behind me in the dark, but there wasn't anything to do except continue and hope nobody fell.

The rest of the Cleaver wasn't so bad in the dark. We took off our crampons, unroped ourselves, and followed a faint rugged trail. Again, we traveled close together for safety on the rocky Cleaver. I was glad to have the others near. We stopped a couple times to rest, turned off our headlamps, and gazed up at the stars. I was feeling tired, but it was cold and we were sweaty, so we couldn't stop for long. The route was marked with wands bearing tiny little flags of reflector tape. Some were spaced far apart, so we didn't always know if we were on the route. I took a wrong turn once. I was definitely following a path, but it seemed to be heading off toward the back side of the Cleaver, instead of along the ridge. I knew we were supposed to be on the ridge. Elizabeth remembered seeing another wand farther back, so we had to backtrack and find it again. I was relieved to have Elizabeth take the lead for awhile. I was beginning to feel weak and shaky.

"How much more Cleaver can there be???" The Cleaver seemed to go on and on forever. But finally, after a couple hours or so, there was snow underneath our feet again, and we knew the Cleaver was behind us. We stopped to rest, snacked, guzzled water, and then roped up again. Some of the other parties had caught up with us by now, and there was a bit of a traffic jam. I carefully threaded my team around them, and headed off across the upper glaciers.

For a long time, the various parties leapfrogged each other. A faster team would come up behind us, and we'd have to step off the track and let them by. I was feeling very tired and slow. My rhythm slowed to two steps for every three breathing cycles. I wasn't sure why I was so weak. I told myself that it's normal to feel weak and tired up here, but I couldn't help noticing that all the other teams were moving faster than we were. I was really beginning to suffer. My trembling hand could barely hold the ice axe, and I wondered how long I would be able to continue. I was getting cold, too. Dripping with sweat underneath my parka, I would shiver whenever we stopped. I just kept telling myself that soon the sun would come up, and it would be warmer then. One foot in front of the other, stop and breathe, one foot in front of the other. Breathe, step, breathe.

Finally I could see a faint glow of red on the horizon. Bit by bit, the snow around me became more visible. I began to see the shapes of other climbers in the darkness. Every time I looked over my shoulder, the red glow on the horizon was a little bigger, and a little brighter. Then, finally, a ray of sunshine hit the glacier.

The upper mountain seemed to be an endless series of steep switchbacks. After daybreak, we could see that the switchbacks were meandering around huge crevasses, which had been invisible in the dark. It was amazing to look down into the crevasses. Some were a brilliant pale blue, and some had fantastic icicle formations. All were apparently bottomless. I carefully probed with my ice axe, and stepped across each snow bridge gingerly.

Again, I was concerned that I was so slow. Painfully slow. I apologized to my team, but my crawling pace was all I had to give. Most of the other teams had long since passed us and disappeared. I began to wonder if I was going to make it to the summit at all. No, I wasn't going to quit, but wouldn't there be a point where the legs just wouldn't go anymore, and I'd fall into a crumpled heap on the snow?

And then we saw rocks. Black rocks that could have marked the rim of the summit crater. I told myself I mustn't dare hope. But I hoped anyway. And sure enough, it *was* the rim of the summit crater!

The true summit is way around on the far side of the rim, about 30 minutes away. We dropped our packs, unroped, and trudged to the highest point on the far side. The crater was wonderfully warm and sunny. It felt so much nicer to be rid of the heavy packs. But still, we were all very tired, and could barely force ourselves to walk up to the summit. Finally there, we signed the summit register, hugged each other, smiled, and took lots of pictures. The view was stunning. Elizabeth, who knew the local geography bet-

ter than we Californians, showed us Puget Sound on one side, and on the other, past Mt. Adams and St. Helens, and Hood, off to Mt. Jefferson and the Sisters. We stood there at 14,411 feet for awhile, just admiring all that was below. It was only 8:00 A.M.

Finally, it was time to turn around and descend. Hour by hour, the sun was warming the snow bridges over the crevasses, making travel more hazardous. All the snow had turned to soft-serve ice cream. We took turns slipping and sliding and landing on our butts in the snow.



Mostly the return trip was uneventful. I tried to retrace the same route we had taken on the ascent. Everything was just a lot softer, and a lot more slippery. About halfway down the upper glacier, we passed a team of two men who were still ascending. I was a little concerned to see a party that was going up so late in the day. But I was especially worried to see that they were not roped. Harnesses, but no rope. We stopped and their leader asked how much farther it was to the summit. I really had no idea, and must have sounded quite foolish. "No rope?" I asked, trying not to sound condescending. "We have a rope," he answered. Oh, one of those invisible ones, I guess. They passed, and Elizabeth and John noted that they weren't wearing crampons. We couldn't believe that they were so foolish or naïve to venture up onto the glacier unroped. There was nothing to do but wish them luck.

About the time we reached the top of the Cleaver, I realized why I had been feeling so bad all morning. It wasn't the altitude or the exertion. It was a migraine. The headache phase finally kicked in on the Cleaver, and the bright sunlight brought on waves of nausea. I quietly gulped two Vicodin that I carried in my first aid kit. And I started to worry. I knew that a really bad migraine could immobilize me for hours, unable even to open my eyes. That could *not* happen here! The Vicodin took the edge off the headache, but I still felt really awful. Finally I sat down on a rock and

burst into tears. Oddly enough, that seemed to help, and in a couple minutes I was able to pick myself up and go on.

So we made our way down the rest of the Cleaver, and re-crossed the glacier back to the camp at Ingraham Flats. I can't tell you how glad I was to finally reach our tent. What I needed most was to lie down for awhile and block out the glaring light. We were supposed to go all the way back down to the Paradise trailhead that day, and I seriously doubted if I could make it unless the migraine got a whole lot better.

It took all the strength I could summon to get up and say "Let's go." It was only about five and a half miles to the trailhead, but to all of us it seemed more like twenty. It was about 6:00 P.M. before we packed up and started down. We would be descending the Muir Snowfield in the dark.

It was a very long way down. We arrived in Camp Muir with a little daylight left, and took a rest. Then we started down across the snowfield into a magnificent sunset, under an orange sliver of moon. The snow had begun to re-harden and form a glaze on its surface. Once John fell and started to slide. The lightbulb came on in our tired minds, and all at once we realized we could sit and glissade down the mountain instead of walking. So giggling and screaming, we careened down the mountain on our backsides like a bunch of lunatics.

But finally, the snow ran out. With little more than two miles left to go, we faced a maze of rocky trail. We came to the stream of glacier melt again, and groped in the dark to find the crossing. We were beyond exhaustion by now. We had been up for nearly 24 hours, and our legs no longer worked properly. A heavy fog set in. We wondered if we were on the right trail. We searched all around in the fog for trail signs. Finally we reached paved trail and knew we were getting close to the parking lot. It was an eight foot wide asphalt highway, but John and I were staggering so badly that we had to go single file to avoid falling over onto each other. We came to a trail intersection and found a sign that said 0.1 mile to the parking lot. We knew we were right there, but in the fog we still couldn't find it.

At last, the truck emerged from the fog. We were all soaked to the skin from glissading down the snowfield. The three of us plopped down in the middle of the parking lot and began stripping off layers of wet Gore-tex and fleece.

That's pretty much the end of our story. We started driving back toward Elizabeth's house in Portland, and ended

See Rainier, page 7

Trip Schedule

Outing Ratings

Distance	Elevation Gain
1) up to 6 miles	A) under 1,000 feet
2) 6 to 10 miles	B) 1,000 to 2,000 feet
3) 10 to 15 miles	C) 2,000 to 3,000 feet
4) 15 to 20 miles	D) 3,000 to 4,000 feet
5) over 20 miles	E) over 4,000 feet

Our Tehipite Chapter Outings Chair is Bruce Busch (559) 225-8935 or tehipite50@netzero.com. Please contact him with any questions concerning our outings program. Contact the trip leader directly if you are interested in one of the listed trips.

Tehipite Chapter outings are free and open to the public. All leaders are unpaid volunteers assuming responsibility for a good trip, and your cooperation is mandatory. For your safety, participation on a trip is at the sole discretion of the outings leader. Please call the leader well in advance for details, reservations, or if you plan to cancel. Outings officially start at the trailhead. Travel responsibility rests on each participant. Carpooling is encouraged, but leaders can not be responsible for the organization of carpools. The Sierra Club does not provide insurance for transportation. Drivers are normally reimbursed five cents per mile by passengers. No guns, pets, or radios are permitted on trips.

September 4th - Saturday

Day Hike (2A) Moderate
Weaver Lake. Location: Jennie Lakes Wilderness, just outside the border of Kings Canyon and Sequoia National

Parks. This is a 4.2 mile hike, with a small incline to the Lake.

Dave Wallace (559) 284-2586

September 11th - Saturday

Day Hike (3C) Strenuous
Pear lake

Walt Taguchi (559) 435-2818

September 18th - Saturday

Day Hike (3C) Strenuous
Mitchell Peak

Bruce Busch (559) 225-8935

September 25th - Saturday

Day Hike (1A) Easy to Moderate
Grant Grove, Kings Canyon Park.

A nice combo of different trails starting up at Panoramic Point.

Don Redmond (559) 268-1537

October 2nd - Saturday

Day Hike (2B) Moderate
Nellie Lake

Walt Taguchi (559) 435-2818

October 9th - Saturday

Day Hike (2B) Cross Country
Mt. Ian Campbell and (if time permits) Kings Castle. We will leave Fresno at 6:00 A.M., from a location to be announced.

Gerald Vinnard (559) 431-5780

gvinnard@cviip.net

October 8th-11th, Friday-Monday

Car Camp. Leave Friday evening and drive to Ballarat and camp out. In the morning hike 6 miles to Panamint City Ghost Town located in a juniper/pinon pine forest. That evening we will have steaks at Panamint City and camp at China Garden or the hot springs in the Saline Valley. Sunday we will explore the Saline Valley or Lookout ghost town depending on what the group wants to do. Monday morning will be exploring and then return to Fresno. Panamint City hike is a fast paced (3D) hike.

Richard Sloan (559) 696-2971

October 16th - Saturday

Day hike (1A) Easy to Moderate
Pincushion ridge. Millerton lake recreation area. A gentle climb up to a tabletop hill to view the lower river canyon and Millerton lake.

Don Redmond (559) 268-1537

October 23rd - Saturday

Day Hike (1A)
Moderate-Cross Country
Dewey Point

Walt Taguchi (559) 435-2818

October 30th - Saturday

Day Hike (2B) Moderate
Twin Lakes and George Lake

Kathy Hart (559) 229-1752

Rainier, from page 6

up napping in a rest area, the three of us overlapping like damp sardines in the cab of the truck. The mountain was climbed. The dream was accomplished. I have to say that this was probably the hardest physical thing I've ever done in my life. But one of the most rewarding.

Throughout the journey, as I crossed the glaciers, I peered down into every crevasse, and a quotation haunted me.

“...and if you gaze into the abyss, the abyss will gaze into you.” (*Friedrich Nietzsche*)

I couldn't help myself. I had to look into the crevasses. And the longer I looked into their icy blue depths, the longer I *needed* to look. I was addicted. And yes, as I gazed into the abyss, I felt the abyss also gaze into me. It got way down inside me and became part of me. And I know that I will always need to go back to the glaciers again, just to peer down into the crevasse one more time. ☘



**SIERRA
CLUB**

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Meetings

General Meeting - Wed., Sept. 8, 7:00 P.M.
 Executive Committee - Wed., Sept. 15, 7:30 P.M.
 Conservation Committee - Wed., Oct. 6, 7:00 P.M.
 Unitarian Church
 4144 N. Millbrook
 Fresno

Leader Policy, from page 1

The leader of any Sierra Club Outing must...

- Be a Sierra Club member.
- Be at least 18 years of age.
- Have First Aid certification equivalent to or higher than the American Red Cross Basic.
- Complete the Outings Leader Training - Basic.
- Have outing participant skills appropriate for the activities of the trip towards the advanced end of the scale.
- Provisionally Lead at least one outing and receive a positive evaluation from the Mentor Leader.
- Receive approval to lead outings from the Outings Chair or delegated authority of the Entity sponsoring the Outing.

In addition, the leader of an outing that includes an overnight stay away from cars (Level 2) must...

- Successfully complete the Outings Leader Training - Core Workshop ("OLT201") or comparable training from local outings Entity.
- Provisionally Lead at least one outing that includes an overnight stay away from cars and receive a positive evaluation by the Mentor Leader. ☞

Exploring an Old Cabin in Death Valley



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RiverTree Volunteers Incorporated

*Performing Restoration Projects
 Invasive Weed Removal
 River and Watershed Cleanups*

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