

WILDERNESS HIKING

Big Pine Canyon Inyo National Forest



TRAILHEAD LOCATION

From Hwy 395, turn west on Crocker Street in Big Pine and continue approximately 10 miles to the end of the road. Overnight parking is located about ½ mile below the end of the road. Day use parking is at the end of the road.

NORTH FORK TRAIL DESCRIPTION

The North Fork trail offers access to Big Pine Lakes and the Palisade Glacier, the largest glacier in the Sierra. The Palisade Crest, rising above 14,000 feet, contains some of the finest alpine climbing in California. The Big Pine Lakes (or North Fork) trail zigzags through a slope of sagebrush, manzanita and Jeffrey pine before it reaches Second Falls then follows the creek to its headwaters. While walking through a forest of lodgepole pine, hikers will pass a cabin built by movie actor Lon Chaney. At a junction in the trail, you can head to Black Lake, where splendid views of the Palisade Glacier and Crest can be seen. The trail from Black Lake rejoins the main trail near Fourth Lake.

The main trail takes hikers past First, Second and Third Lakes. Third Lake is fed directly by the Palisade Glacier; its milky turquoise color is from the glacial powder carried from the melting glacier. The imposing dark mountain above Third Lake is Temple Crag. Fishing enthusiasts can find rainbow trout in most of the lakes in the canyon and golden trout in the higher lakes.

The trail to the Palisade Glacier is about ½ mile above Third Lake. Turn left and follow switchbacks along grassy benches and boulders to Sam Mack Meadow. The last ½ mile to the glacier requires boulder hopping and the trail is very obscure. Hikers can meander safely along the lower part of the glacier where the slope is gentle, but should avoid the upper reaches unless well experienced on ice and snow.

SOUTH FORK TRAIL DESCRIPTION

The South Fork trail climbs beneath the jagged peaks of the Middle Palisade Crest and provides access to the Middle Palisade Glacier. On the steep slopes below Willow Lake are a few gnarled limber pines stand along the trail. The few lakes in this drainage contain both brook and golden trout. The trail above Willow Lake becomes indistinct with rock cairns marking the way to the upper lakes.

BAKER CREEK TRAIL DESCRIPTION

The Baker Creek trail is now seldom used as the creek can be reached by a jeep road from Bishop, but it provides spectacular views of the Palisade Crest. The trail starts at a junction on the North Fork trail, about 1 ½ miles from the trailhead. It crosses a ridge and winds through a stand of Jeffrey pines and then climbs past Grouse Spring to a high point on a gentle ridge. Here views of the Middle Palisade and Disappointment Peak tower above the glacier. To the north are the high rolling meadows of Baker Creek and Coyote Flat, a remnant of an ancient plain that existed before warping and faulting formed the mountains of the Sierra Nevada.

Weather conditions can change rapidly in the Sierra Nevada. Hikers should carry ample clothing for the anticipated changes. It is recommended that all hikers boil water for 3 to 5 minutes or use a filtering system before drinking due to giardia in most of the waters.

Pack stock often use trails in the Big Pine area. Please remember that stock have the right of way on all trails. Stand quietly off trail until all stock have passed to avoid spooking the animals.

PLEASE pack out all trash including empty bait containers.

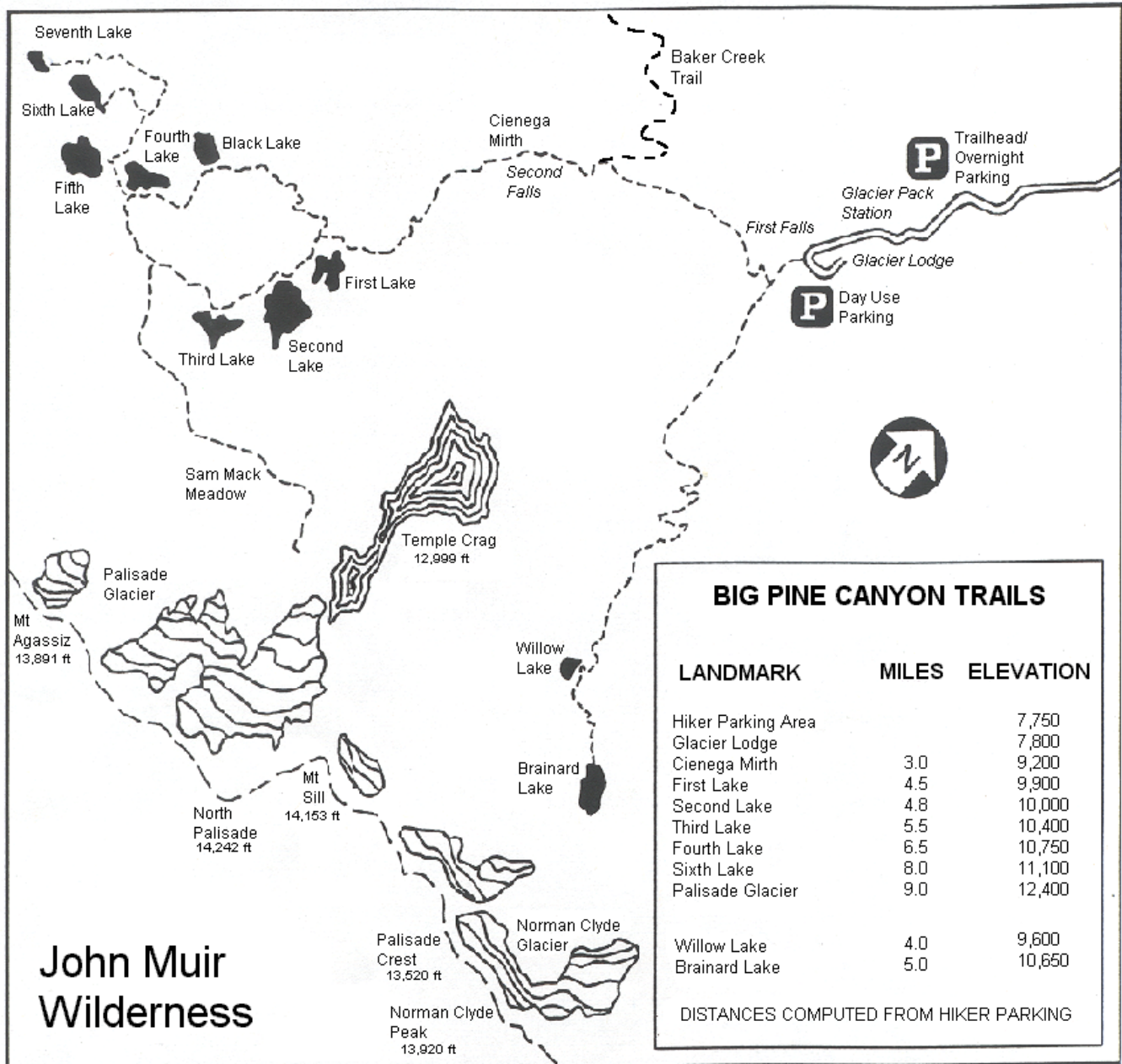


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GUIDEBOOKS

- Sierra South—100 Backcountry Trips by Thomas & Jason Winnett (Wilderness Press)
- Best Short Hikes in California's Southern Sierra by Karen & Terry Whitehill (The Mountaineers)
- Geology of the Sierra Nevada by Mary Hill (University of California Press)
- The High Sierra: Peaks, Passes and Trails by R.J. Secor (The Mountaineers)

MAPS

- USFS—John Muir Wilderness Map (topo)
- USGS—Split Mountain 7.5 minute quad (topo)
- North Palisade 7.5 minute quad (topo)
- Coyote Flat 7.5 minute quad (topo)
- Mt. Thompson 7.5 minute quad (topo)
- Wilderness Press—Mt. Goddard (topo, 15 minute series)

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