

Markleeville Peak

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Friends of Hope Valley Spring 2008

Markleeville Peak, at 9415ft., is not the most challenging peak in eastern Alpine County, but it's a great warm-up or conditioning climb with excellent views, and you won't find a crowd at the summit. So get out your Mokelumne Wilderness map or that old 15 minute Markleeville topographical map and take a look.

Note mileage turning onto Blue Lakes Road, drive past Charity Valley, and park at the pull off 8.4 miles in. Traverse northeast up brush covered steep slopes. The initial steepness gives way to gentler, thinly treed slopes with western white pine and hemlock on the north slopes of the gully to your left.

This outing is all off-trail. There's faint evidence of a trail on the southwest ridge near the top, but winter has erased most of the trail. Total elevation gain is about 1,700 feet with a distance of about 2 miles each way. This is the easiest way up. This peak can be climbed from Grover Hot Springs via the northeast ridge, a strenuous hike of about 12 miles round trip and 3800 feet of elevation gain.

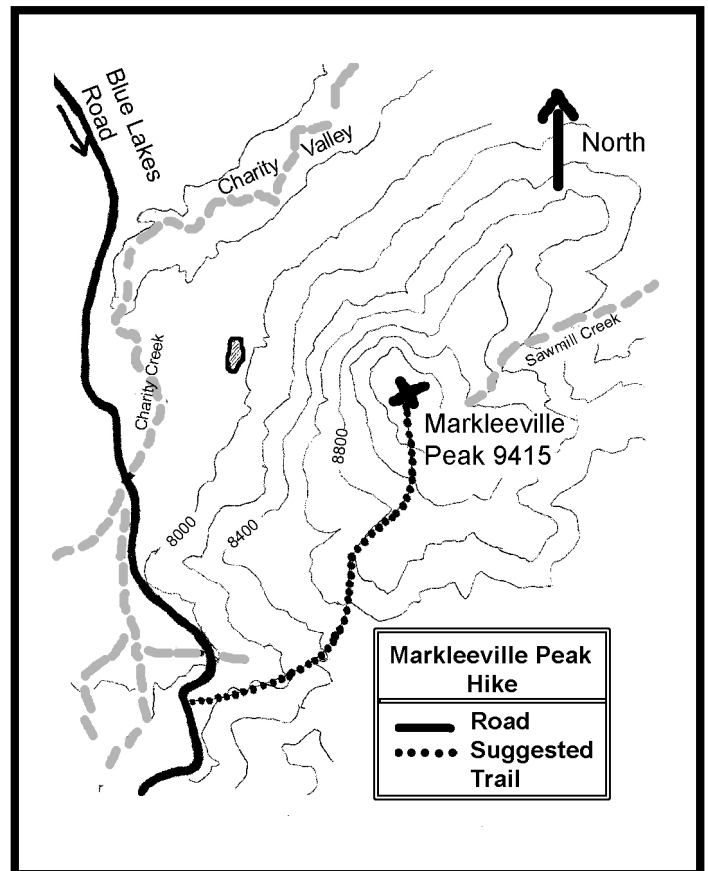
Continue more easterly as you get higher and gain the southwest ridge where a left turn to the north will take you behind a false peak and the summit. Sign the register (sometimes there, sometimes not), hunker down out of the wind, and take a break.

Surprisingly good views can be had from the summit. To the west, Round Top is the high point and the snow covered ridges of the Sierra crest hide Blue Lakes. Red Lake, Stevens, Waterhouse, Thompson, and other peaks range across the north to the Freel – Jobs Peak complex. Just across Charity Valley is Hawkins Peak while further east are the Pine Nuts, Mt Grant and the Sweetwater Range. Impressive peaks to the south include Silver, Highland, and Tryon with the Raymond – Reynolds group closer and Jeff Davis immediately to the south.

Mid-June through mid July will bring the most colorful displays of wildflowers in this area. Phlox, lupine, mule ears, paintbrush, buckwheat and sego lilies will be in bloom. Along moist slopes or snowmelt rivulets, you might find the common monkeyflower, columbine, and perhaps even elephanthead .

Deer, coyote, bear, and many varieties of smaller mammals can be found here. Numerous bird species inhabit these slopes also. Insects are abundant – seasonally you'll find ticks (which are actually arachnids, not insects), no-see-ums, mosquitoes, biting flies and finally yellow jackets by late summer. Flying insects are kept down by the winds on the mostly open upper slopes.

Start early or pick a cool day for this hike. There's little cover and the sun can be intense. Be prepared for wind. Absolutely know the weather before ascending any peak. Go lightweight but bring layers appropriate for the weather. Pack at least 2 liters of water (cache extra water in the car) and high energy snacks. Depending on where you park, you will summit in 1.5 to 2 hours and a side trip to Jeff Davis on the way out could mean 4 – 5 hours start to finish.



Eastern Alpine County has more than a dozen walk up peaks that can be climbed in similar fashion. Pick one, enjoy the hike, go at your own pace, and bring the 10 essentials. And please, leave no trace.