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# LODGEPOLE/ WOLVERTON Sequoia National Park California

## TRAILS OF LODGEPOLE/WOLVERTON

### INTRODUCTION

Ice-sculpted granite peaks — crystalline, rock-rimmed lakes — ancient, storm-battered foxtail pines — all these beauties and more await the hiker who explores the trail leading towards the high country of Sequoia National Park from the Lodgepole/Wolverton area.

At the heart of this country is the canyon of the Marble Fork of the Kaweah River. Lodgepole, located in this canyon at an altitude of 6,700 feet, is the human center for area activities. From Lodgepole, or nearby Wolverton, scenic trails lead north, east, and south into country that can only be described as true "High Sierra." These are not trails for the faint of heart. The shortest of these routes is a four-mile-long round trip, and much of the most exciting scenery requires long, all-day hikes to appreciate.

This pamphlet provides information on the four major trails beginning at Lodgepole or Wolverton. Trails immediately to the west of Lodgepole, in the Giant Forest area, are described in the separate pamphlet "Trails of Giant Forest." Within these two areas there is a hike for every taste and ability. Choose a walk that suits you, but do choose one! There is no better way to know Sequoia National Park.

### THE TOKOPAH TRAIL

Distance: 1.7 miles (one way)

Difficulty: Easy (500 feet altitude gain)

Starting point: Lodgepole Campground

Towering cliffs, a sparkling stream, and a giant, cascading waterfall all await discovery along the Tokopah Trail. This popular day-hike begins in the Log Bridge area of Lodgepole Campground; look for the trailhead just after you cross the bridge. Parking is available in the large lot just before the bridge, about 200 yards short of the trailhead.

Much of the charm of the Tokopah Trail comes from the fact that it follows closely the banks of the Marble Fork of the Kaweah River. Look for bird life in the clear, tumbling waters of the stream. The dipper, or water ouzel, a small gray bird often seen standing on streamside rocks, feeds beneath the water on aquatic insects. The ouzel can usually be found either flying along water or perched on a streamside rock bounding or "dipping" as it looks for food.

Life in many forms is abundant along this friendly stream. Deer and squirrels are seen frequently, and during July, a hike along this trail may disclose 30 to 40 different wildflower species blooming at one time. A good deal of this floral richness is explained by the fact

that the trail passes through a wide variety of habitats, each with its own specially adapted plant life.

Perhaps the most interesting story the Tokopah Valley has to share is a story of mountain building and erosion. This steep-walled canyon has a surprisingly flat and open floor. (In cross section it might best be described as "U-shaped.") To the geologist that by itself is almost enough to tell the recent geological story of this place. The Tokopah Canyon is not solely the product of the Marble Fork. Rivers by themselves tend to cut "V-shaped" canyons with narrow floors and sloping walls. The "U-shaped" profile of this gorge tells us that while the river may have initiated its shaping, the canyon we see today is the result of glacial erosion.

The ancient Tokopah Glacier was formed during the Ice Age when winter snows accumulated on the high ridges to the east in amounts too large to melt. Ultimately, the snow accumulated to such depths that it compressed into ice and began to creep downhill. At times, the mass of ice that crept slowly down this canyon was over 500 feet deep even where the campground is today. In the process, immense amounts of soil and rock were scoured away and the canyon widened to its present configuration.

The story of glacial erosion is most easily visible in the uppermost one-quarter mile of the Tokopah Trail. Here, our route emerges from the forest into a barren, rocky gorge hemmed in by massive granite cliffs. Slowly moving ice sculpted this scene, removing uncounted tons of hard rock. The "Watchtower," the 1,600 foot tall cliff dominating the southern wall of the canyon, owes its shape to the work of ice. Too hard to be ground away by the glacier, this mass of rock was left standing when the ice last melted away barely 10,000 years ago. Geologists call these middle altitude glacial canyons "yosemites," after the most famous canyon of this type.

As we approach Tokopah Falls we enter the "High Sierra." Left below are the thick conifer forests which clothe the middle-altitude slopes of the Sierra. In their place, one finds a sometimes harsh land of sunshine and rock. Different plants and animals live here. Look for the stunted junipers that grow on the dry bluffs above the trail. Watch, also, for two of the high country's most common animals — the marmot and the pika. These two animals inhabit rocky areas and are often seen near the base of Tokopah Falls. Marmots, the largest member of the squirrel family, subsist mostly on green leafy vegetation growing fat during the summer in preparation for a long winter's sleep. The guinea-pig-like pika, on the other hand, industriously harvests grasses and seeds during the late summer and fall, and remains active beneath the snow during even the worst

winters. Feeding these wild animals disrupts their natural habits and is prohibited.

The Tokopah Trail ends at the base of 1200-foot-high Tokopah Falls, a rolling cascade at its best in early summer, when the snowpack in the Pear Lake region upstream is melting. Please do not travel beyond the end of the trail. Slippery rock surfaces make off-trail exploration in this area especially dangerous. Several fatalities have occurred here. When the river is high, don't forget that it, too, deserves respect. Cold, rushing mountain rivers are far more powerful than they appear. Please be careful.

### THE LAKES TRAIL

Distance: (one way, via Watchtower Trail)

Heather Lake, 4.6 miles

Emerald Lake, 5.7 miles

Pear Lake, 6.7 miles

Difficulty: Strenuous (2,300 feet altitude gain)

Starting point: Wolverton parking area

The most popular backcountry trail in Sequoia National Park, the Lakes Trail leads up through dense forests into a clean, polished granite world of rock, sky, and water. Heather Lake, the most easily accessible of Sequoia's alpine lakes, is found along this route, as is the "Watchtower" cliff with its spectacular views.

Our hike begins at the Wolverton parking area; the trailhead is plainly visible to the left as you enter the area. For the first mile, our route trends almost due east following a series of gravel ridges. These are the lateral (side) moraines of the ancient Tokopah Glacier, giant ridges of crushed rock and gravel pushed up by the glacier as it moved down the canyon immediately to the north. The ridge we are following was moved rock by rock from the lake basins we are climbing to see.

Approximately one mile from the trailhead we turn to the south, climbing along the densely forested east wall of the Wolverton Creek basin. The dominant tree here is the red fir, perhaps the best adapted of all the Sierra's trees to long winters and deep snow. The tall, narrow shape of the fir, together with its short, tight needles, make this tree highly resistant to the ravages of heavy winter snows. This is important, for although the high altitudes endure colder winter temperatures, this is the zone of the heaviest winter precipitation. Mid-winter snow depths here in excess of ten feet are not exceptional.

At a distance of 1.7 miles from Wolverton our first trail junction comes into view. The trail to the right climbs to Panther Gap and the Alta Peak (see the next section of this pamphlet), but we turn to the left and continue our

ascent. Shortly, we arrive at another junction. Both the "Watchtower" and "Hump" Trails lead to the lakes, but the experiences they offer are quite different. Under most conditions the Watchtower route is preferred. Although slightly longer, it pursues an easier grade, and the rocky promontory called "The Watchtower" (no actual tower), allows grand vistas of Tokopah Valley, some 1,600 feet directly below, and the alpine ridges to the north and east. This view, by itself, justifies the climb. The trail east of the Watchtower, blasted out of solid rock, skirts the upper edge of the cliffs above Tokopah Falls and then rejoins the Hump Trail just short of Heather Lake.

From its western junction with the Watchtower Trail, the Hump Trail climbs steeply through dense forest, passing over the ridge above the Watchtower and then dropping to Heather Lake. Although this route is approximately one-third mile shorter, the steep grades and lack of a view make it a second choice under most conditions. The Hump route is useful, however, early in the season when snow may remain on the ledges east of the Watchtower, and for those uncomfortable with heights.

Heather Lake, the first of the lakes along the Lakes Trail, is a popular destination for day hikers. Fishing and even some swimming occur in the cold waters of the lake. Camping is prohibited. Like all the lakes along this trail, Heather Lake was formed by a glacier eroding rock of differing resistances. The basins that now contain these lakes were scoured out because those areas contained relatively more fractured bedrock. As the glacier melted, these basins in the glacier's course filled with water, to become lakes or "tarns."

Beyond Heather Lake, our trail makes a short climb, passes along a sparsely forested terrace, and then begins a leisurely descent into the canyon that holds Emerald and Aster Lakes. Here, far more than at Heather Lake, the story of glacial erosion clearly presents itself. The north slope of Alta Peak, at the head of the Emerald Canyon, collected snow to an enormous depth during the Ice Age, and eventually this mass of consolidated ice flowed down the canyon, leaving behind a barren, well-polished world dotted with lakes and ponds. Some of the gravel that formed the moraines at Wolverton came from this area. Emerald Lake, just above the trail to the right, is a popular camping area. Aster Lake, downstream less than one-quarter mile, is reserved for day-use only.

The Emerald Lake Basin is the site of a long-term research study on the effects of acid precipitation on Sierran ecosystems. Various types of research equipment are scattered throughout the basin. These should not be disturbed.

About two-thirds of a mile past Emerald Lake a side trail branches to the left, leading several hundred yards to the Pear Lake Ranger Station. Here emergency assistance is available during the summer months. But our route keeps to the right, and after one more climb we arrive at Pear Lake, the end of the Lakes Trail. A large lake firmly entrenched in hard granite, Pear Lake is a shimmering surface of light and motion in a world of rock. Camping is allowed here, and Pear Lake is a popular base camp for hiking into the trailless areas beyond.

#### THE ALTA PEAK/ALTA MEADOW TRAILS

Distance: (one way)

Panther Gap, 2.7 miles  
Mehrtzen Meadow, 4.0 miles  
Alta Meadow, 5.7 miles  
Alta Peak, 6.9 miles

Difficulty: Alta Meadow — strenuous  
(2,100 feet altitude gain)  
Alta Peak — very strenuous  
(4,000 feet altitude gain)

Starting point: Wolverton parking area

"Alta" in Spanish means "high," and no better name could be given to Alta Meadow and Alta Peak. Nowhere else within day-hiking distance of Lodgepole/Wolverton can you obtain the views and feeling of space available in the Alta Country.

Although the formal "Alta Trail" begins in Giant Forest, the shortest trail route to the Alta Country begins at Wolverton. For the first 1.7 miles our route follows the Lakes Trail (see above). Then, at the first junction, where the Lakes Trail turns to the left, we proceed to the right and continue through the red fir forest for another mile, arriving after a good climb at Panther Gap (alt. 8,450).

The sparse vegetation at Panther Gap makes it easier to see the grand view. Directly to the south is the canyon of the Middle Fork of the Kaweah River. The scale here is every bit as big as it looks; the river is nearly 5,000 feet below the Gap. To the east and southeast are the high peaks of the Great Western Divide. As we continue our hike, these summits will become even more visible.

East of Panther Gap, the Alta Trail crosses a series of steep, brushy avalanche chutes. Here, in winter, snow slides roar down into the forests below. In summer, hanging gardens, lush with colorful flowers, fill these same chutes. One mile east of Panther Gap, the Alta Trail intersects the Seven-Mile-Hill Trail, which descends to connect with the High Sierra Trail. Our route continues to the left, where within a few hundred yards we arrive at Mehrten Meadow. A well-used

camping spot during the summer months, Mehrten Meadow takes its name from the pioneer ranching family that used this range during the late 19th century.

Our steady climb continues beyond Mehrten Meadow as we approach the southwest slope of Alta Peak. Soon, just as the main slope of the peak comes into view, another trail junction appears. A choice of destinations must now be made. To the right, an easy one-mile trail leads to scenic Alta Meadow with its lush flower gardens and spacious views of the Great Western Divide. The other fork leads to the summit of Alta Peak, 2.1 miles and nearly 2,000 vertical feet ahead.

The Alta Meadow Trail, physically by far the easier of the two, remains nearly level beyond the junction. Almost immediately it crosses a large winter avalanche zone. An open, sunny place in summer, this slope, dotted with stunted, broken trees, is a testimony to the harshness of winter in the high country. As we turn the corner of the ridge, increasingly exciting views of the peaks to the east open. Rounding another corner, we find ourselves at the head of spacious Alta Meadow. Nearly a mile long and perched on a terrace with Alta Peak above and the Middle Fork Canyon below, Alta Meadow affords one of the great views of the Sierra.

To climb Alta Peak is to ascend into another world — the harsh, yet exciting world found above timberline. Don't undertake this trail unless you are in good physical condition. The steep grades and high altitudes found along this route make it one of the most strenuous trails in the western half of Sequoia National Park.

As you ascend, foxtail pines begin to appear. These picturesque timberline trees may live for more than a thousand years and grow so slowly that a magnifying lens sometimes is necessary to count their annual rings. Finally, you reach timberline and the last trees are below you. In some ways the extreme High Sierra is a desert. Low humidities and intense solar radiation combine with low temperatures to make life difficult here. Note how the few plants that survive, hug the ground, usually growing no taller than a few inches.

The summit of Alta Peak (11,204 feet) tells you why you climbed the long, steep trail that brought you here. A 360° panorama of peaks, foothills, and plains almost overwhelm the senses. To the east, the peaks that form the heart of the Sequoia National Park stand in impressive review; the highest of the nearby summits, the Kaweahs, rise to 13,800 feet above sea level. To the west, views extend as far as the clarity of the atmosphere will allow. On a clear day even the coast ranges west of the San Joaquin Valley may be visible. The precipitous north face of Alta Peak discloses views

of Emerald and Pear Lakes, nearly 1,700 feet below. Even Mount Whitney, the highest peak in California, can be glimpsed through a gap in the Great Western Divide. What more need be said; from the summit of Alta Peak it is possible to envision how an eagle might see the Sierra.

#### THE TWIN LAKES TRAIL

Distance: (one way)

Silliman Creek, 2.1 miles  
Clover Creek, 5.0 miles  
Twin Lakes, 6.8 miles

Difficulty: Strenuous (2,700 feet altitude gain)

Starting point: Lodgepole Campground

Each Sierran trail has its own character. The Lakes Trail, for example, explores a country scoured nearly free of soils by ancient glaciers, while the Alta Trail seeks heights that give its user unexcelled vistas. The Twin Lakes Trail is like neither of its neighbors; its beauty is the beauty of small details — an exquisite meadow wildflower — a bubbling forest brook — a glimpse of a shy pine marten.

A trip to Twin Lakes begins in the Log Bridge section of Lodgepole Campground. Leave your vehicle in the large parking area in the center of the campground, and walk along the camp roads, crossing over the road bridge that leads into Log Bridge area. Less than fifty yards past the sign that marks the beginning of the Tokopah Trail, another trail sign appears on the road shoulder, this pointing toward the Clover Creek and Twin Lakes country.

The first mile of the Twin Lakes Trail reminds us that any trail leading to the high country must start by going up! Lodgepole drops away as a steady grade takes us to the summit of the gravel ridge or moraine pushed up in the geological past by the glacier that once filled this canyon. On a hot, summer afternoon it is hard to believe that less than 10,000 years ago this entire canyon was filled with over 500 feet of glacial ice. The summit of the moraine marks a major change in vegetation. The south-facing slopes above Lodgepole dry quickly in the spring and support a drought resistant vegetation consisting largely of pine, cedar, and manzanita. Suddenly, however, as we proceed into the level forest lands above the moraine, we find ourselves in a thick red fir forest. Moist, deep soils make the difference.

For nearly a mile our route wends its way through this level, almost featureless forest. Silliman Creek marks the north end of this plateau and the resumption of our climb. Within half a mile Cahoon Meadow appears. Meadows like this remain free of forest trees because they are too wet, even during the summer months.

Beyond Cahoon Meadow the trail climbs through the forest to Cahoon Gap (altitude 8,700 feet) and then descends to a trail junction on the banks of Clover Creek. Here, adjacent to popular campsites, we take the right-hand fork and begin the final ascent to Twin Lakes. The left fork leads to JO Pass and the Rowell Meadow area of Sequoia National Forest.

From the JO Pass Junction to Twin Lakes is less than two miles, but in that distance the trail ascends nearly a thousand vertical feet. Subtle changes in vegetation mark the increasing altitude, but since this country was much less heavily glaciated than the Alta Peak country to the south, the changes that come here with altitude are not so obvious. Finally, the forested lip of the Twin Lakes basin is gained, and within a short distance the trail is on the banks of the larger of the two lakes.

Although glacial in origin, these lakes were not formed in exactly the same manner as Pear or Emerald Lakes. Twin Lakes are held in place by a dam of earthen debris pushed up in front of a glacier while it was advancing. When the ice melted, the resulting depression filled with water. This dam is known as a terminal moraine. If you have the opportunity to visit both Pear and Twin Lakes, notice how the lakes differ. Pear Lake, gouged out of hard rock, is deep and relatively barren. Twin Lakes, on the other hand, are shallow and tree-lined. The combination of warmer water, resulting from the shallow nature of Twin Lakes, and the presence of deeper soils, make this area a much richer environment for life.

Our trail continues beyond the lakes, and a steep one and a half mile climb brings one to the summit of Silliman Pass. Here, on the Silliman Crest, you are on the boundary of Kings Canyon National Park, and many of the peaks that form the heart of this wilderness park are visible to the north. Ranger and Beville Lakes lie along the trail approximately two miles down the other side.

#### A FEW MORE THINGS TO REMEMBER

Many of the areas described in this pamphlet as day-hike destinations are also popular destinations for overnight backpacking trips. If you intend to stay out overnight you need to be aware of several additional points. The most important of these is that all overnight trail travelers must have wilderness permits, which can be obtained at the Lodgepole Visitor Center. The number of permits issued daily is limited to prevent overcrowding; reservations are available and recommended during the busy summer season. Wilderness permits are NOT required for day hiking.

Because of the fragile nature of these alpine areas, a number of special camping regulations control local use. The Tokopah area is completely closed to all overnight use, and along the Lakes Trail camping is permitted only at Emerald and Pear Lakes and there only in designated sites. Certain limitations also apply along the Alta Peak and Twin Lakes trails; please check for local restrictions. Because trees are often scarce in the high country, open campfires are discouraged in all areas and prohibited in many, including Pear and Emerald Lakes, Alta Meadow, and Twin Lakes. Pets are not allowed on any national park trail.

Mountain travel is only as safe as you make it. If you leave the trail, use caution; slippery rocks can lead to falls and injuries. Early in the season be careful as you cross snowbanks. Not only can icy surfaces be dangerous, but spring snowbanks may be unstable. Streams and rivers always should be treated with caution and respect; they are usually more powerful than they appear. Don't allow children to play unattended near the water.

Use common sense when it comes to drinking water. Streams are unreliable sources of safe water. Human or natural contaminants may be present. Day hikers are safest when they carry water from treated sources. To be completely safe, backpackers should boil all untreated water one full minute before consuming.

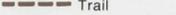
Human waste is a major cause of water contamination. Imitate the cat; bury all waste in soils to a depth of at least six inches and at least 100 feet away from streams or meadows. Leave nothing behind that you carried in. All trash and refuse should be packed out of the backcountry. Do you want to see litter along the trail?

Preserving the beauty and integrity of these wilderness areas is everyone's responsibility. One careless person can spoil an experience for hundreds of others. Please do your share.

# Lodgepole/Wolverton

## Sequoia National Park

Trail descriptions (over)

-  Tokopah Trail
-  Lakes Trail
-  Alta Peak / Alta Meadow Trail
-  Twin Lakes Trail
-  Trail
-  Road
-  Ranger station
-  Campground
-  Picnic area
-  Stable
-  Winter recreation area
-  Grocery store
-  Gas station
-  Post office

