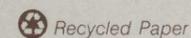


foxtail pine
Pinus balfouriana

Map designed and prepared by Caldwell & Associates

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MINERAL KING

Sequoia National Park

California

HIKING IN MINERAL KING — A GUIDE

Mineral King — the very name conjures up forgotten dreams of mineral wealth. For a few short years in the late 1870s, this quiet mountain valley promised to become another Comstock Lode, another fountain of rich silver ore as limitless as the great mines of Nevada. And like so many human dreams, these miners' visions were based as much on faith and optimism as on reality.

Optimism named Mineral King; optimism brought to this place the mining investments that made this small alpine valley accessible to the outside world. Optimism sent hopeful, if often ignorant, miners scrambling over Mineral King's awesome peaks, scratching out small rock-bound holes wherever a bit of "color" showed in the rock. Optimism brought men to Mineral King, and continued optimism clouded and confused their efforts. And finally, after nearly a decade of sacrifice, when the last remaining bit of optimism finally faded, the hardened miners realized that they had discovered something more enduring and more precious than silver, a simple mountain valley of exquisite beauty.

The miners of the 1870s were not the first men to visit the valley we now call Mineral King. Indians came here. Bedrock mortars, food-grinding holes worn deeply into solid rock, tell us of hundreds of years of continuous human occupation starting perhaps as early as 1000 A.D. European settlement in this part of California began in the early 1850s, but the rugged canyons and peaks that form the headwaters of the East Fork of the Kaweah River protected Mineral King from curious eyes. Not until 1864, when a hunter named James O'Farrell entered the region from the south, did Mineral King become a part of the known world. O'Farrell became a regular visitor to the valley, enjoying its tranquil summer beauty. In the summer of 1872, while pursuing a wounded deer, he discovered and claimed what he believed to be a mineral deposit. The following summer others came to search the colored mountains, and one, James Crabtree of Porterville, located the mine that would make Mineral King a household word in the mining industry.

Crabtree claimed the White Chief Mine in July, 1873, and within a few weeks the word was out. Silver had been discovered in the southern Sierra! Anxious prospectors streamed into the area that fall, staking claims wherever the colored and fractured mountains of Mineral King gave some small promise of mineral deposition. Winter soon forced the miners out of the district, but many plans were laid during the damp, cold winter of 1873-1874. When spring finally

reached the high country, hundreds were waiting to enter the district and strike it rich.

Supported by the hopes that gave the Mineral King Mining District its name, the miners built a good trail to the remote valley and erected a small town on the open flats beneath the red peaks. While the newly formed New England Tunnel and Smelter Company attempted to mill the seemingly rich ore from Crabtree's White Chief Mine, other miners claimed mine after mine on the surrounding slopes. Dreams are not the same as silver, however, and the White Chief ores could not be reduced to metal. Avalanches hit the mine repeatedly during the winter months. Faith in the district began to evaporate. By 1877 the Mineral King mining boom seemed to be nearing its end.

In late 1878, however, new vigor and excitement returned to the district. Tom Fowler, a state senator from Visalia, announced that he had purchased O'Farrell's Empire Mine and was prepared to invest substantial sums towards its development. The summer of 1879 witnessed enormous activity in the district. In the space of one short alpine summer, Fowler constructed a road from Three Rivers to Mineral King, erected a stamp mill in Mineral King Valley, and connected his rapidly growing mine to the mill with a mile-long bucket tramway. Only one small problem developed in Fowler's carefully laid plans — the Empire Mine had no more silver to share than had the White Chief.

By 1880 Fowler's dream was dead, buried in a mountain of debts and swept away by the vicious winter avalanches of Empire Mountain itself. Fowler's road remained, however, and Mineral King became a quiet retreat for refugees from the summer heat of California's great Central Valley. In 1893 the government took an interest in the area and declared it as part of the Sierra Forest Preserve, the ancestor of our modern Sierran national forest.

After the turn of the century, the U.S. Forest Service began to lease recreational cabin sites in the Mineral King Valley, and the cabin communities that still dot the valley came into existence. In 1926 Congress enlarged Sequoia National Park so that the park almost surrounded the Mineral King Valley and the valley itself became a national forest game refuge.

Mineral King returned to the public eye in the late 1940s when the rapidly growing California ski industry noted the valley's heavy winter snows and convenient southerly location. Interest accelerated in the early 1960s in developing the area, and in 1965 the Forest Service solicited bids for the development of a major ski resort in the valley. Several serious proposals were made, and with a great deal of

publicity, the Forest Service chose the Walt Disney Corporation to build and operate the new resort. The Disney bid called for large-scale development with a skiing capacity of 10,000 persons daily. Restaurants and hotels were to be scaled accordingly.

As the immense scale of the proposed development became apparent, opposition to the project began to develop. By the middle 1970s law suits filed to stop the project had resulted in a stalemate. Public opinion was deeply divided. Congress finally resolved the decade-long dilemma in 1978 when it transferred the valley to Sequoia and Kings Canyon National Parks and directed that the area be managed for natural, rather than recreational, values.

Today, Mineral King's real treasure is apparent to all who visit this magical place. Here the natural beauties that exemplify California's Sierra Nevada as one of the earth's delights reach their climax. And the way to see these beauties is to walk! By hiking just a few miles, more than half a dozen lake basins that surround the valley floor may be reached. But don't underestimate these miles.

All the trails in Mineral King Valley begin at an altitude of at least 7,500 feet, and all proceed steeply uphill to their destinations. Most hikers will feel the results of these altitudes in the form of increased shortness of breath of surprising tiredness. More serious problems such as headaches and nausea may indicate the onset of altitude sickness. The best cure is to move to a lower altitude. Let your body adjust to Mineral King's altitude for a day or two before you try an ambitious hike.

Once you've spent a day or two acclimating to this altitude, you are ready to try the trails. But first, some words of advice. Parking is limited in Mineral King. If possible, leave your car at your campsite or at your cabin, and walk to the trailhead. Secondly, while Mineral King has an extensive trail system and loop trails of several days duration may be taken, none of the trails described in this pamphlet is of the loop variety. Finally, there is no easy trail out of Mineral King. Every trail that begins at Mineral King must climb steeply to reach the alpine lake basins or the passes that dot the valley rim. For most hikers in good health, however, the effort is worth it. No exhilaration matches that of climbing into a high mountain basin.

Often the best way to first venture into the areas that surround Mineral King is with a ranger guide. During the summer months ranger-conducted walks are presented in Mineral King almost daily. For information check at the ranger station or in the current copy of the *Sequoia Bark* newspaper.

During the early summer, mosquitoes can be a particular nuisance. It is wise to always carry repellent. Mineral King's streams and lakes are well-known for their sparkling clarity, but their purity cannot be guaranteed. It is best to carry your drinking water. Water is available at the ranger station or in Cold Springs Campground.

As long as you stay on trails, hiking can be both safe and enjoyable. But for your safety and the protection of the park's features, we ask that you observe a small number of common-sense rules.

- (1) Please stay on trails — taking shortcuts can be dangerous to you and damaging to the trail.
- (2) Dogs and all other pets are prohibited on all park trails.
- (3) Park trails are closed to all wheeled vehicles including bicycles and trail bikes.
- (4) Smoking is not permitted while traveling on park trails. If you must smoke, stop and do it safely and pack the cigarette butts out.
- (5) The valley floor is closed to camping except in Cold Springs Campground.
- (6) Carry out all litter — film wrappers, plastic bags, pull tabs, everything.
- (7) Wood fires are not permitted in the Mineral King Drainage. So plan accordingly or take a self-contained stove.
- (8) Remember, you are starting your hike at 7,500 feet. Hiking at this altitude is strenuous. Gauge your hiking to the least fit member of your party.

TIMBER GAP TRAIL

Distance: 2 miles (one way)

Elevation Gain: 1,400 feet

Starting Point: Sawtooth Pass parking area

The trail to Timber Gap follows the path of history. It begins by crossing a sage-covered flat and then climbs sharply along Monarch Creek following an old mining route. Paths branch out in all directions — remnants of the myriad of trails that criss-crossed Empire Mountain during the mining boom of the last century. Level sections usually indicate newer trail. Two-tenths of a mile from the valley floor the trail splits — Timber Gap to the left, and Monarch and Crystal Lakes to the right. Continuing to climb steadily, the trail passes through a dense red fir forest and then comes out onto an extensive open sloop. In the mid-summer, this slope is covered with flowers such as blue bells, Indian paintbrush, and Queen Ann's lace. These slopes would be covered with red fir if it were not for the winter avalanches. Timber Gap, protected from avalanches, still has an abundant forest of red fir. Stumps stand as evidence that miners used this grove for timber to shore-up the mine tunnels and to fuel their stoves.

From Timber Gap you can see north into the valley of the Middle Fork of the Kaweah River. Alta Peak is in the distance.

MONARCH LAKES TRAIL

Distance: 4.2 miles (one way)

Elevation Gain: 2,580 feet

Starting Point: Sawtooth Pass parking area

The routes to Monarch Lake and Timber Gap use the same trail for .2 mile, but if you wish to proceed toward Monarch Lake, take the right hand trail when you come to the junction. Ground Hog Meadow, one trail mile and 920 vertical feet from Mineral King, is named for the marmots that frequent the area. The whistle pig, or yellow-bellied marmot, is a member of the rodent family, and like its eastern cousin, the woodchuck hibernates during the colder months. Above Ground Hog Meadow, the Monarch Lakes Trail begins a long series of switchbacks that pass in and out of red fir forest. The trail eventually crosses into the Chihuahua Bowl. The trail to Cobalt and Crystal Lakes branches off in this area. Two more switch backs and you return to the Monarch drainage, continuing a steady ascent towards Lower Monarch Lake. Snow often covers portions of the trail as you approach the lake; choose your footing carefully. At the lake, Sawtooth Peak looms to the east. Camping is permitted at Monarch Lake, but you must camp at least 100 feet from the shoreline and have a wilderness permit. Use only self-contained stoves at this or any other camping spot off the valley floor. Upper Monarch Lake is one-quarter mile to the southeast. The trail continues north towards Sawtooth Pass. This 1.3 mile, 1200 foot climb over decomposing granite is very difficult and tiring, but Sawtooth Pass offers one of the grandest views in the southern Sierra.

CRYSTAL LAKE TRAIL

Distance: 4.9 miles (one way)

Elevation Gain: 3,000 feet

Starting Point: Sawtooth Pass parking area

The rugged hike to little-visited Crystal Lake branches from the Monarch Lake Trail 3.2 miles from the trailhead. Watch carefully for the Crystal Lake Trail junction. It is easy to miss. Soon after leaving the junction the route enters the barren Chihuahua Bowl. Near the south rim of this open amphitheater look for remnants of the old Chihuahua Mine. Named for an area of rich mines in Mexico, this mine was another of Mineral King's disappointments. Winter avalanches periodically scour this basin. In fact, during the winter of 1969, the avalanche that demolished the store on the valley floor began here.

Crossing the bowl, the trail climbs steeply to a ridge covered by that lover of high elevations, the foxtail pine. From the ridge a panoramic view unfolds. To the southwest the peaks of White Chief and Farewell Gap are visible. Crystal Creek descends steeply from the east, passing by the small Cobalt Lakes, before it descends into Mineral King Valley. The route ascends over broken talus until it finally arrives at the narrow outlet of Crystal Lake. Camping is best on the terrace just below the lake. The campsites, trail and small dam on Crystal Lake were built by the Mt. Whitney Power Company between 1903 and 1905 to augment late summer flows in the East Fork. Today the Southern California Edison Co. operates the facility. Mineral Peak to the north of Crystal Lake and Rainbow Mountain to the south both display the striking meeting point of the light-colored granites and darker metamorphic rocks that compose this mountain. The rocks differ in age by nearly 100 million years.

There is no trail beyond Crystal Lake, but a short scramble up the bluffs to the northeast will bring you to Little Crystal Lake.

FRANKLIN LAKES TRAIL

Distance: 5.4 miles (one way)

Elevation Gain: 2,527 feet

Starting Point: Eagle-Mosquito parking area

Beginning at the Eagle-Mosquito trailhead, the route to Franklin Lakes leaves the Eagle Lake Trail about .2 of a mile beyond the trailhead, fords the East Fork of the Kaweah River (dangerous when the river is high), and joins the Farewell Gap - Franklin Lakes Trail a short distance up the valley. During high water, it's best to follow the road back across the creek to the Pack Station where the trail begins. This wide trail was at one time an old road leading to Aspen Flat, a quarter-mile ahead. The road was abandoned in the early 1970s and vehicles are no longer allowed in this part of the valley. Boulder-hopping Crystal Creek, the trail leaves the valley floor and the old road and begins to climb in earnest through manzanita, ceanothus, and isolated junipers. About 1.5 miles up the trail, the outlet of Franklin Lakes is crossed. Here, the trail begins a series of short switchbacks before it reaches a major trail intersection. At this point, one trail continues straight ahead for a distance of 4.5 miles to Farewell Gap (elev. 10,587 feet).

The Franklin Lakes route leads to the left and steadily climbs the south slope of the steep valley created by Franklin Creek. The multicolored rock so much in evidence has been changed by heat and pressure until it no longer resembles the ancient sediments once deposited as sand and silt.

Minerals such as silver and zinc, formed as part of these metamorphic rocks, gave rise to a silver rush of sorts during the period 1873-1880. Needless to say, the bonanza never occurred. Today, the treasure of Mineral King lies not in precious metals, but in its natural values. At the 9,900 foot elevation, the trail crosses Franklin Creek for the second time, still a mile or so from the lake. A few campsites are located here and prospect holes are much in evidence. A rock and masonry dam built in 1904-05 by Mt. Whitney Power Co. marks the beginning of Franklin Lake and the end of our route. Scattered foxtail pine and an occasional juniper dot the steep slopes surrounding the lake. You have come 5.4 miles and reached an elevation of 10,327 feet — welcome to the 'high Sierra'!

WHITE CHIEF TRAIL

Distance: Bowl: 2.9 miles (one way)

Valley's end: 4.1 miles

Elevation Gain: Bowl: 1,400 feet

Valley's end: 2,200 feet

Starting Point: Eagle-Mosquito parking area

The steep but very scenic trail to White Chief Canyon begins at the cabin area where the Mineral King Road ends. Parking is often difficult in this area. Please don't block access to cabins. Leaving the trailhead the route begins a gentle ascent, soon arriving at mysterious Spring Creek. This large stream issues full-blown from the mountainside a few hundred feet above the trail. A glance at the opposite, east side of Mineral King Valley gives a clue to the secret of Spring Creek. The white band visible across the canyon is marble, a soluble rock in which caves are often found. A similar marble band passes through the mountain above us and Spring Creek emerges from its caves. Where do you think the water started its trip down the mountain?

Past Spring Creek the trail ascends steadily up the west side of the Mineral King Valley. Contrast the vegetation on this slope with that visible across the valley. At this altitude the slopes of the Sierra usually are densely forested with red fir, but periodic snowslides thin the always-growing forest. Which side of the valley seems to show more signs of avalanches? Can you guess why?

One mile from the trailhead, the White Chief Trail separates from the trail that leads to Eagle and Mosquito Lakes. Take the left-hand fork and follow the steeply climbing and often rough trail to the lower rim of White Chief Basin. These steep bluffs offer a full sample of Mineral King's alpine conifers. Red fir, western white pine, foxtail pine, lodgepole pine and Sierra juniper are all found in this vicinity. Above these rocky bluffs the trail finds

itself at the lower end of a gentle meadow area surrounded by rugged cliffs. Just as you reach the meadow look for signs of the old Crabtree Cabin. Built during the mining boom of the 1870s by the discoverer of the White Chief Mine, this ruin is perhaps the oldest remaining structure in the Mineral King area.

During mid-summer the White Chief meadows are a flower garden of rare variety and beauty. Compare the wet, streamside areas with the drier slopes that surround them. Do the same plants grow in both areas? But don't spend all your time looking at the flowers. Spectacular geology surrounds you. Look for signs of white marble, and study how White Chief Creek interacts with the marble formations. In late summer this creek totally disappears into the ground in the upper sections of the meadows. Where do you suppose it comes out again?

At the head of the meadows, the trail crosses the creek and climbs to the old White Chief Mine. Here, a nearly horizontal passageway has been blasted into the marble at the foot of the mine, and dangerous vertical shafts can be found above. The mine is private property. Do not enter. Miners tried to spend a winter here once. An avalanche in February, 1878, destroyed their bunkhouse and nearly brought an end to the company that owned the mine.

The trail, increasingly faint, continues for another mile above the mine, wandering through a scenic area pock-marked with caverns and sinkholes. The trail finally disappears altogether in the giant glacial cirque that forms the head of the canyon. Several old cabin ruins can be found in this area, one of them built into a natural cavern.

EAGLE LAKE TRAIL

Distance: 3.4 miles (one way)

Elevation Gain: 2,200 feet

Starting Point: Eagle-Mosquito parking area

The Eagle Lake Trail follows the same route as the White Chief Trail for the first mile. At the junction take the right hand trail and proceed up toward Eagle Canyon. Take your time and enjoy the flowers. In the early part of the season the lupine and snow plants are abundant in the shady areas. In the meadows you might see rein orchis, leopard lily, Indian paintbrush or shooting stars. Eventually the trail gains the lower rim of Eagle Basin. Within one-quarter of a mile you'll see Eagle Creek disappearing into a large hole — a sink hole. Where the water goes is not known. Some suspect that it provides the water for Spring Creek (See description of White Chief hike). In the densely wooded area

above the sink hole we arrive at another trail junction. To continue toward Eagle Lake take the left-hand fork. The trail climbs through a boulder field and finally emerges at Eagle Lake.

Surrounded by mountain crests, Eagle Lake is a typical glacially-formed lake called a tarn. An alpine glacier begins by accumulating snow in the highest parts of its range. As the depth of the snow increases, pressure changes the bottom layers to ice and the glacier begins to move under its own weight. As the glacier travels forward it carves and sculpts the rock over which it passes. Different rocks have different degrees of hardness. As glacial ice encounters harder rock, it rides up and over it. Eagle Lake is held in place by just such a ridge of erosion-resistant rock. The lake was dammed by the Mt. Whitney Power Co. in the early days of this century to enlarge its storage capacity.

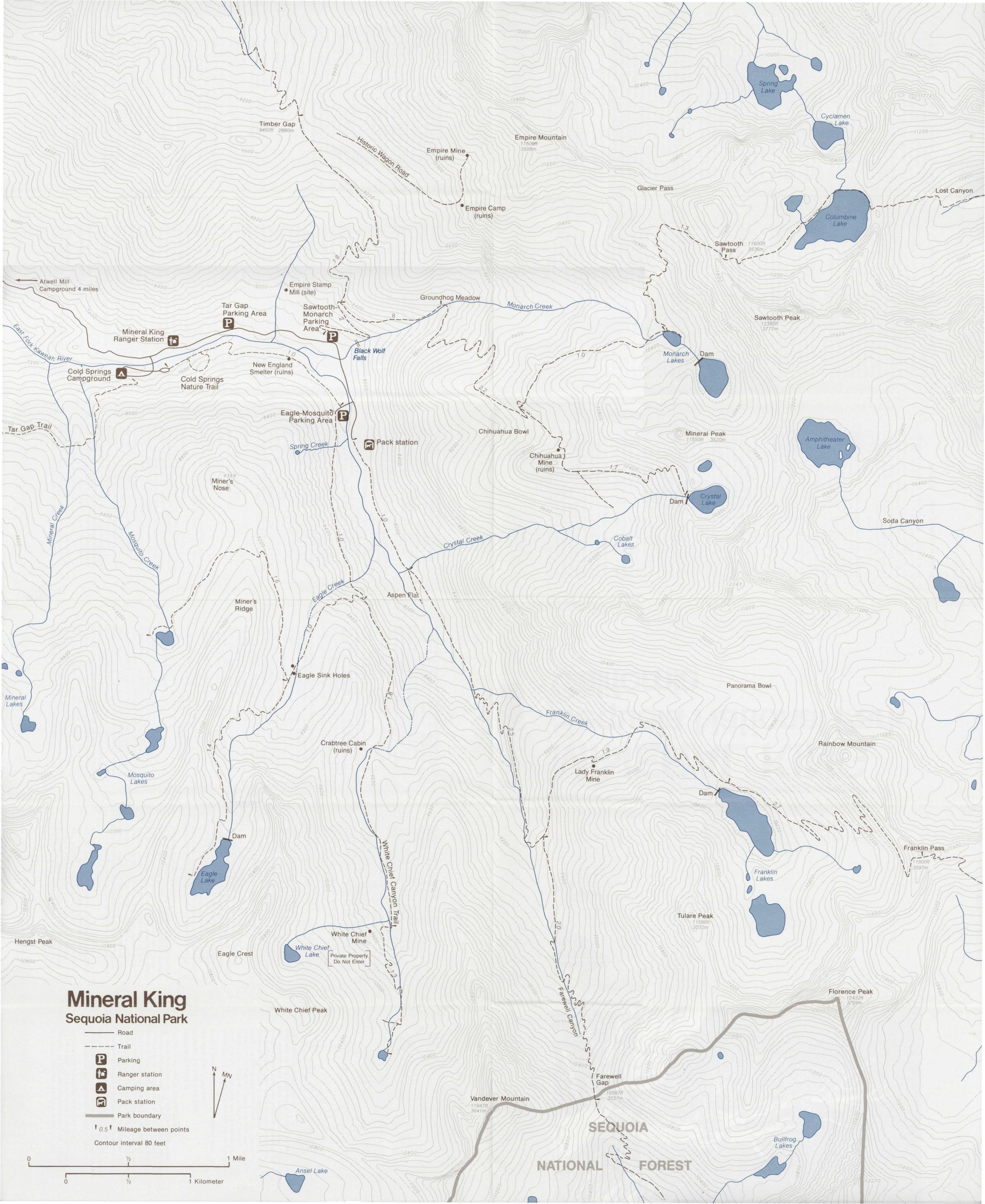
MOSQUITO LAKE #1

Distance: 3.6 miles (one way)

Elevation Gain: 1,190 feet

Starting Point: Eagle-Mosquito parking area

White Chief, Eagle, and Mosquito Lakes share the same trail for 1 mile. Take the right hand trail at this junction and again at the next trail junction. The trail takes you up and over Miner's Ridge. You will drop about 200 feet to Mosquito Lake #1. The lake is surrounded by a red fir forest. While the trail ends mid-way up the lake, many people hike up the drainage to the other four lakes to fish for brook and rainbow trout. There is a steep climb to the next lake with no real trail but little elevation change from the second to the fifth lake.

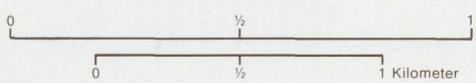


Mineral King Sequoia National Park

-  Road
-  Trail
-  Parking
-  Ranger station
-  Camping area
-  Pack station
-  Park boundary



0.5 Mileage between points
Contour interval 80 feet



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