



The Girl's Guide to Getting Lost: Hard Hikes for Wild Women



By Deanna Lynn Wulff



*Trails, Camps, Quotes, Tips, Facts, Stories, Men & Maps
Journeys in the Sierra Nevada and the Southwest*

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Front Cover: Cloud's Rest, Mill Creek

Warning

Many of the hikes described in this book are dangerous, strenuous and difficult. Navigating boulder-strewn routes requires top physical fitness and an adept ability to cross rugged terrain, sometimes with no water, no trail, no shade and no sense of the horizon. You should only attempt some of these hikes if you're in good mental and physical condition and have excellent route-finding skills. Although a few methods for trekking cross-country are detailed here, ultimately, the responsibility to make sound decisions about the weather, the wilderness and your health are yours to make. My advice is no substitute for your own common sense.

In other words, you're on your own. When you run into trouble in the wilderness, it will be you who has to figure your way out. Being lost is intense, frightening and life threatening. It's easy to make mistakes when you're afraid, injured, tired and not thinking clearly. I know. I've been lost a few times, and I've made poor choices in rapid succession.

First, don't panic. Second, think before you act. Third, work wisely until you find your way. Conserve your energy.

Ultimately, all of life comes with risks and challenges, for better and for worse. The good news is—problem solving in the backcountry will give you an advantage in the civilized world. If you build courage, self-reliance and mental endurance on the trail, you will carry those strengths with you always. They will be yours to keep, and no one will be able to take them from you.

Good luck on your journey.

It is better to conquer yourself than to win a thousand battles. Then the victory is yours. It cannot be taken from you, not by angels or by demons, heaven or hell.—Buddhist Proverb

Using This Guide

What I want is a little direction or no direction. Maybe something that tells me about a remote canyon and its length, but not a play-by-play, every-single-step is diagrammed so I can't possibly get lost or feel the full force of a mysterious, exciting, frightening hike with no established end. I want to walk in a place where the earth and the unknown are the masters, where each turn, plateau and curving hill unveils yet another delight. I don't want to know that at mile 2.5, I'll find a dry waterfall or that at mile 3.3, I'll find a mill. I want to discover the world with all its miracles for myself, without a guide taking away all the fun. So I toss my hiking book, leave it sitting in my truck and walk right up a mountain.

I realize that not everyone takes such an extreme view. In light of that, this guide has enough detail to get you hiking in relative safety, but not what's around every corner. I've included a short introduction, the hike's length and elevation gain, trailhead location, shower access, camping and dining options, an interesting fact, an inspiring quote and details on men in the area. I've also linked the trailhead GPS coordinates with Google Earth. You take it from there.

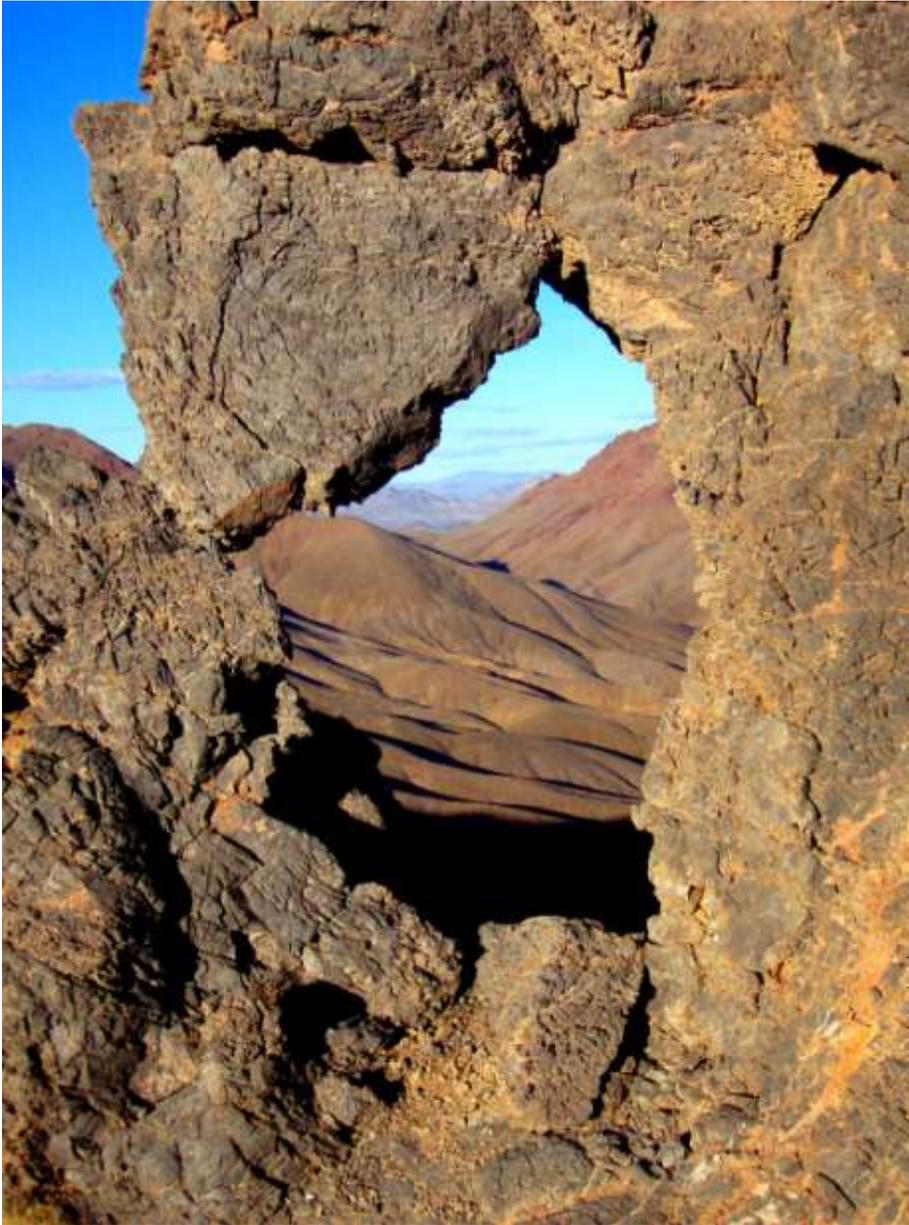
I encourage you to spend most of your time in nature and not in hotels. Frugality isn't the reason. Quite simply, the best experiences await you outside. My first summer in Yosemite is a testament to that. I walked all day and waited tables at night, and I never felt happier or healthier in all my life. A phenomenal sense of joy stayed with me all season. Yet, I had hardly enough savings for college. I had hardly a dime. So I came back the next summer and the next and many seasons after that. I went on to become a ranger and a river guide. I worked in Death Valley, the Grand Canyon and Sequoia-Kings Canyon, and many places in between. I chased beauty and wildness for 15 years. This book is about the best places I've come to know, and how they've changed me and helped me grow. In finding my own way, I hope to help you find yours.

So, this is two books. One that works as a guide to amazing places and the other that's a guide to an internal evolution that's taken place over land and time. The narrative scenes that introduce the hikes explore how it played out. Some names have been changed or simply not mentioned to honor my friends.

Specifically, the 29 hikes described here cover select portions of the Southwest, largely California, but also Utah and Arizona. This guide isn't a list of all great hikes everywhere. These are my favorite spots thus far. There will be more to come. To stay in touch, follow [my blog](#), subscribe to updates and join [the community](#). Or just go quietly into the woods and say nothing to no one at all.

Walking is the great adventure, the first meditation, a practice of heartiness and soul primary to humankind. Walking is the exact balance between spirit and humility.—Gary Snyder

Corkscrew Peak



Corkscrew Peak—There is only a brown park service sign, an arrow pointing into the sky and an unmaintained route that culminates at a barren, treeless, sunny, blackened crest. It looks like a spinning volcano. I've hiked to the peak many times: once with an old boyfriend, once with a former Phish follower who made it to the first crest with a cigarette ready for his pierced lips, and once with a lawyer who called me a misanthrope about halfway to the top.

"There is no sign of civilization here," she said, her arms crossed. "And you seem to like it."

Which is true. I never grow tired of this climb.

Today, I walk the three miles alone, following grapevine pathways of gravel around desert holly, beavertail cacti and silver cholla until I reach a small canyon at the mountain's base. A faint indent runs up a naked ridge, marked with the occasional unnecessary cairn. The destination is always in sight, and the direction is always the same: up.

But with each new plateau, the canvas under my boots changes color—from silver to pearl to bronze to olive to ruby to emerald—like a muted rainbow laid on its side. Near the top, black rocks jut out from the slope like thrones, and I crawl on all fours, searching for solid handholds on castle rocks. The final scramble makes me nervous; loose talus encircles the mountain, and pebbles and gravel spill out in mini avalanches around my feet. I dig in, keep my head down and strain to ascend. The reward is a small stone arch stretching out across the sky, framing the white salinity of Death Valley on one side and Nevada's stark response on the other.

I gaze around and quickly change out of my sweat-soaked clothes. A halo of sun encircles me, so I am half in shadow and half on fire. When I worked in the park, years ago, I sat here with a former drug-dealer, a man on the mend. Despite his abused body, riddled with tattoos and piercings, he made it all the way to this craggy arch.

Through a cough of exertion, he said something I'll never forget. "The way I see it," he said. "You've gotta get three things figured out in life—who you're gonna be with, where you're gonna live and what you're gonna do, and I don't have any of that shit figured out."

"Me neither," I said, and I handed him my water bottle. "But I think if you can get one of those figured out, you're doing pretty well."

"Agreed," he said. He reached out and drank half a liter of my water and then began patting himself down, looking for a match.

Not to have known, as most men have not, either the mountain or the desert, is not to have known oneself.—Joseph Wood Krutch

Details: Length—6-7 miles round-trip. Elevation gain—3,000 feet. Time—3-8 hours. This is a half-day hike, which leaves plenty of time for an afternoon swim at Stovepipe Wells. The actual peak is about 200 yards beyond the arch.

Getting there: From Highway 190, turn onto Scotty's Castle Road and head north. Make a right onto Daylight Pass Road toward Beatty, Nevada. Drive approximately 6 miles and park near the Corkscrew Peak sign. Trailhead GPS—[N36.73686 W116.97129](#).

Hazards: It's off-trail. Take a map and a friend. Check in with a ranger. There is no water, so carry enough for an all-day adventure, about 2 liters.

Essential gear: Zinc oxide. This hike is all sun, all the time. Save your skin. Wear a hat, pants and a long-sleeved shirt. You might even take a bandanna. Carry extra water and a warm sweater in the winter. It can be cold at the top.

Dining: Bring your own food and cook a meal outside, or try the 49'er Café at the Ranch for burgers and vegetarian entrées. The Toll Road Restaurant at [Stovepipe Wells](#) serves prime rib on Saturday nights, but the menu is mediocre. You can also waltz over to the tiny Badwater Saloon for a beer, but don't drink the tap water—it tastes like the exhaust pipe of a diesel truck—not that I know what that tastes like. But I can imagine.

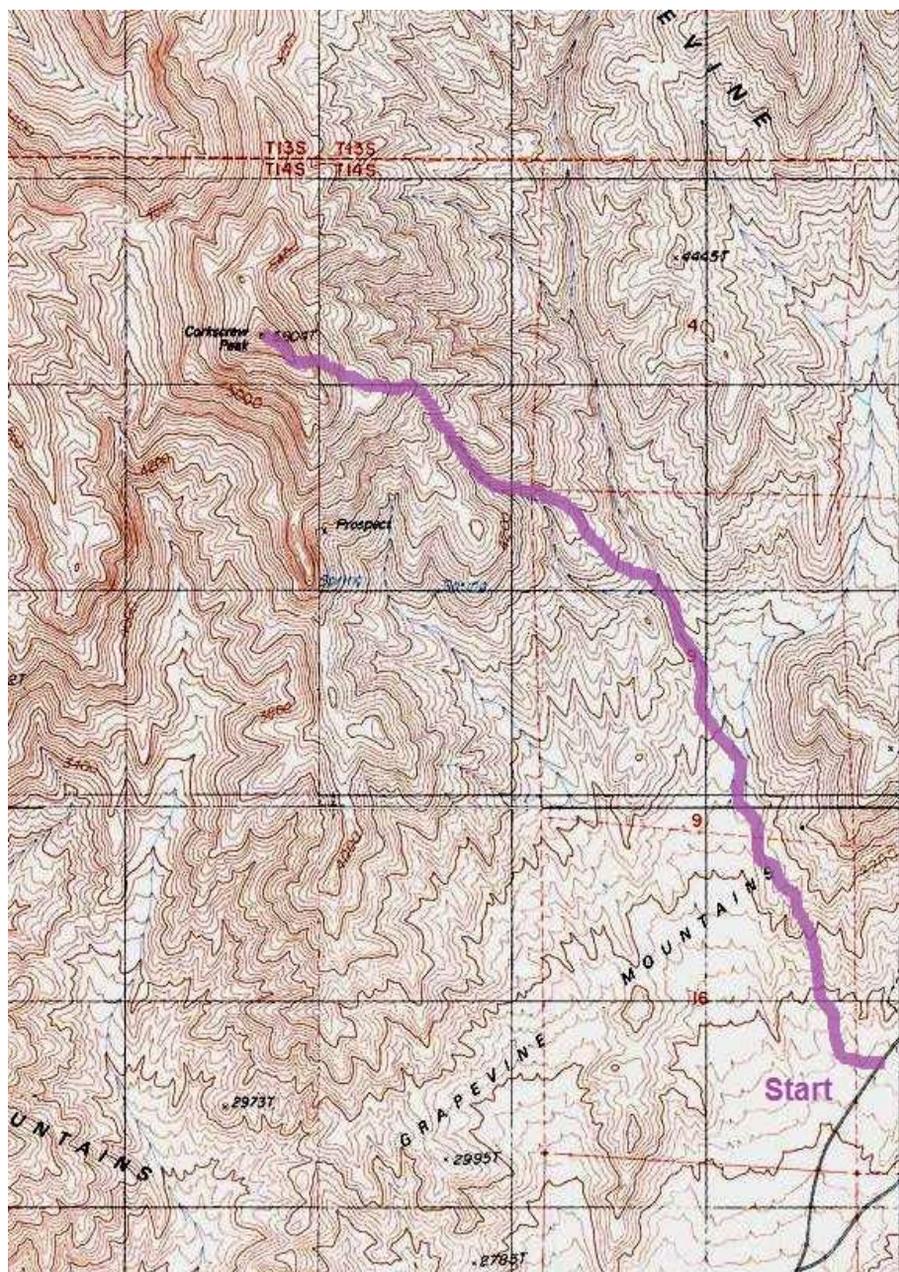
Camping: Try Emigrant Campground, off highway 190, about 8 miles west of Stovepipe Wells. It's free and has picnic tables, a bathroom, running water and ten spots. First-come, first-served. You can also camp 2 miles down most dirt roads, unless directed otherwise by a Park Service sign. Check out [your options](#).

Getting clean: Head to Stovepipe Wells and pay \$4 for a shower and all-day use of the outdoor pool. You can buy snacks at the store and read a book in the sun or shade. There are power outlets at the pool, but the Internet service is spotty and slow. It's best to assume you'll be reading a book or relaxing off-line.

Getting Dirty: Great climbs await you. Hike Wildrose Peak (9 miles round-trip) or Telescope Peak (14 miles round-trip); it's also the highest point in the park.

Men (1-10 Scale): Zero. This is not the place to look for love. Desert dwellers are anti-establishment outcasts and, in general, are a bit strange. Consider that Charles Manson hid out in the southern part of the park months before his arrest. He was found, only because he and his crew vandalized earth moving equipment. They believed there was a lost city under Death Valley. Their last hide-out was in Goler Canyon, a weird place. Don't go there.

Fact: The limestone and sandstone in the Funeral and Panamint Mountains indicate that Death Valley was once the site of a warm shallow sea through most of the Paleozoic Era (251 to 542 million years ago). You'll find seashells and fossils in odd places, like at the top of unnamed peaks that you discover.



Mount Whitney, Sequoia



Mount Whitney—I run. I don't look back. I don't pause to drink water although my throat is so parched you could light a match off my tongue. I don't even stop to tie my shoelaces, which are flapping all over the rocky trail. There is a ticket writer following me, and I've got to get out of here. I search for a place to change, stumbling downward and gasping.

At the trail crest, at about 13,000 feet, just 1.9 miles from the highest point in the lower 48, a Dudley-do-right ranger came sauntering on over. "Can I see your permit?" he smiled, all good natured like. I paused, "Uh, no. My friend John has it." The ranger took notes. "John who?" he asked. "John Muir," I said. He smiled. (We were standing on the John Muir trail.) Then I said, "My friend Ed Tilley has the permit. He is waiting down at Consultation Lake with altitude sickness." Now, I don't know any Ed, but I just bought a Tilley hat, and I was fondling it at the time. The ranger, still smiling, looked me over carefully, jotted a few more notes and then let me go. But he had a radio, and he could check my story with a short call to headquarters. So I began running.

And now, I sprint down the 99 switchbacks. At the bottom of the granite staircase, I find a rock pile and change from blue pants and a purple hat into beige shorts and a baseball cap. I tuck my hair into a bun. And I gallop onward, all the time thinking, *I want to be a ranger, and the last thing I need is a criminal record. Who ever heard of trail that requires a DAY hiking permit? It's ridiculous.* I scurry on. In my flustered hurry, I miss just about everything incredible about the Mount Whitney trail, which is an unparalleled spectacular expression of natural beauty from start to end. Lakes, summits, sculpted granite, cascades, creeks and meadows—all around are the highest, most rugged mountains in the Sierra Nevada. Eleven peaks rise more than 14,000 feet and are set tightly together in a sharp spiral of mountain majesty. The trail itself, etched gracefully out of stone, passes points that warrant their own day trip, including the jade-tinged Mirror Lake, the translucent Consultation Lake, the macabre-looking Hitchcock Lakes and the sky-colored Lone Pine Lake. Even the trees align themselves perfectly with clouds, creating a still-life memory.

But I don't notice the lakes, the spires or the golden sun reflecting the soft September light, because I'm so intent on escaping ticket-free. I can't have my reputation precede my arrival to National Park Service. I keep racing. Will there be a guard at trail's end? I worry. I decide to cut through brush on a self-made shortcut to the base, also a Park Service no-no. When I finish the hike, never having made it to the top, my legs are bleeding, my hair is frizzed out in four directions, and my face is fiery red. I look like I've been in combat with a cactus. But by God, that was fun.

Life is either a daring adventure or nothing. To keep our faces toward change and behave like free spirits in the presence of fate is strength undefeatable.—Helen Keller

Details: Length—20.4 miles round-trip. Elevation gain—6,134 feet. Time—8-12 hours. If you attempt this hike, you're a winner. If things don't work out because of the weather, altitude, physical stress, law enforcement or car trouble, try again next year. As you climb Whitney, keep a steady pace. Don't stop too often. It's best to snack lightly, drink often and ascend. Oh, and get a permit. Call (1-877-444-6777) and reserve your spot, or show up in person at the permit office in Lone Pine. Sometimes, people cancel their reservations, and a permit opens up. Check first thing in the morning or after 1 p.m., the day before your ascent.

Getting there: From Highway 395, in the town of Lone Pine, head up the Whitney Portal trail for 13 miles and park at the trailhead. Trailhead GPS—[N36.58706 W118.24019](#).

Hazards: Lightning, thunder, possible hypothermia and altitude sickness. When you hike above 12,000 feet, breathing is tough, so bag a few other high alpine peaks first. If you feel sick, stop. Go down. Not everyone handles altitude well; take care of yourself and your friends. Even super fit people have trouble here.

Essential gear: Sunblock, food and water. It's cold up high, so take gloves, a fuzzy hat, a jacket and a fleece vest. Bring your cowboy hat. Pack extra water. Your last chance to fill bottles is the stream at the base of the 99 switchbacks.

Dining: You may be tempted to eat at the Whitney Portal store, but don't. The burgers are flat and anti-climatic. Instead, head to Lone Pine. Order a burger at the Mount Whitney Restaurant. Yum. You earned it.

Camping: There are three national forest [campgrounds](#) near the trailhead, which cost \$17 to \$20. Call 1-877-444-6777 or go to <http://www.recreation.gov>. Or camp for free in the Alabama Hills just west of Lone Pine.

Getting clean: Shower at the Whitney Portal store, but don't expect glamorous conditions. Pay the cashier \$3 and bring your own soap, towel and flip flops. The lock didn't work when I was there; the floor was murky. Still, hot water works.

Getting dirty: Don't you need a rest day? Okay. Hike up Keasarge Pass, which is northwest of Independence. Or stroll up Wildrose Peak in Death Valley, a half-day hike, and then go sit by the [Stovepipe Wells](#) pool and relax. Ahh.

Men (1-10 Scale): Five. Men in tights. People on this trail are (by default) great because they're bagging the Sierra Nevada's highest peak. But breathing takes precedence over flirting here, at least for me. Chat it up on your way down.

Fact: If you think you're too old, too frail, too sick, too "whatever" to do this hike, remember Grandma Whitney, aka Hulda Crooks. She made her first ascent at age 66 and made 23 successful attempts afterward. She climbed it for the last time in 1987 and became the oldest woman to scale the peak at 91. A mountain south of Whitney is named in her honor, Crooks Peak. She lived to be 101.

