



THE FOOTHILLS

The lower elevations offer wonderful winter visits -- green and usually snowless! The foothills house more biological diversity (different kinds of plants and animals) than the conifer forests and High Sierra combined. Flowers appear in January. Ticks appear in December; watch out for them and poison oak (see page 5).

HOSPITAL ROCK PICNIC AREA:

Western Mono people once lived here; exhibits offer insight into their lifestyle. A trail built by the Civilian Conservation Corps leads to a waterfall; 1/4-mile round-trip. Careful! People often drown here.

MARBLE FALLS: This trail climbs 3.9 miles (6 km) through chaparral to a lovely cascade. Park across the main road from Potwisha Campground (no non-camper parking in the campground). From the trailhead near site #14, follow the dirt road across the concrete ditch. The trail starts on the right.

PARADISE CREEK: Park at Hospital Rock and walk to Buck-eye Flat Campground. Follow the footpath across from site #26 and cross the footbridge over the Middle Fork. The trail then follows Paradise Creek, not the Middle Fork, for 1-1/2 miles (1.6 km) before growing faint.

MIDDLE FORK: Leading through chaparral to highcountry, the first miles offer views of Moro Rock and Castle Rocks. Park at Hospital Rock. Walk toward Buckeye Flat Campground but turn left on the dirt road before the campground. Go 1.3 miles (2 km) to a parking area. Panther Creek Falls is 3 miles (5 km) beyond that. Use caution at stream crossings.

SOUTH FORK

These trails start at tiny South Fork Campground (closed for winter), at the end of a 13-mile road that leaves Hwy 198 at the west end of Three Rivers. This partly unpaved road can be very slippery when wet.

LADYBUG: Hike along the South Fork of the Kaweah River in the upper foothills (moderately steep). From the campground, cross the river via footbridge. The trail ends 3 miles (5 km) up at one of the lowest-elevation sequoia groves.

GARFIELD: A steep 5-mile (8.3 km) one-way climb to Garfield sequoia grove. Start on the south side of the river in the campground.

Highlights

EXPLORING IN WINTER

BE SAFE: Review safety advice on page 5. Carry a map, warm clothes, and water. Orient yourself before heading out and tell someone where you are going. You are on your own in the winter woods.

TRAVEL ON SNOW: There is plenty to see from wintry roadsides, but try skis or snowshoes. You don't need to go far or fast, and it's a great way to enjoy the snowy forest.

WALKERS & SNOWSHOERS: Don't walk in ski tracks. Your footprints harden and catch ski tips, making it dangerous for skiers.

VISIT THE SNOW FOREST: Conical-shaped trees evolved to catch less snow, minimizing the amount that weighs them down. Flexible branches bend to dump what snow has piled up when it gets too heavy. Conifer needles are tough and slippery, so snow tends to slide off easily.

WATCH FOR WILDLIFE SIGNS: Deer, cougars, bobcats, martens, weasels, coyotes, and Douglas squirrels (called chickarees) may be active all year. Bears may stay active, so continue to store food properly (see page 10). Winter birds greet you from the trees: ravens, juncos, chickadees, red-breasted nuthatches, brown creepers, and white-headed woodpeckers, to name a few. Look for the sweep of wings in the snow where an owl caught a rodent for dinner.



GRANT GROVE

The only plowed trail is the Grant Tree loop. Beware of slipping on ice on the path!

Rent skis or snowshoes at the Grant Grove Market. Buy a ski trail map and follow the colored markers on trees. See pages 8-9 for details on snowplay areas.

KINGS CANYON PARK VISITOR

CENTER: Explore the exhibits and see the film about this park.

TALKS & SNOWSHOE WALKS: Check local schedules to see if a ranger-led walk is taking place. Showshoes are loaned for free!

GENERAL GRANT TREE: The only trail in the area that is plowed in winter. General Grant is the world's third-largest living tree (see the story below). Visit historic Gamlin Cabin and the Fallen Monarch along this 1/3-mile (.5 km) paved trail. A guide is sold at the visitor center. North and west of the visitor center 1 mile (1.6 km).

PANORAMIC POINT ROAD:

Once snow flies this becomes a ski or snowshoe trail to a spectacular vista of the High Sierra. Park at Grant Village, go east through the visitor center parking lot, left around the meadow, then right at the sign "Panoramic Point 2.3 miles (3.7 km)." It's 1/4 mile (.4 km) up to the viewpoint. The 4-mile (6.4 km) round-trip Park Ridge Trail begins here.

NEARBY VIEWPOINTS

OVERLOOKS & VIEWS: For a view of the High Sierra, drive to Kings Canyon Overlook, about 6 miles (9.5 km) south of Grant Grove on the Generals Highway.

For a look out over the Kings Canyon, drive the Hume Lake Road, 8 miles (13 km) north of Grant Grove on Hwy 180.

About 6 miles (9.5 km) south of Grant Grove, across the Generals Highway from the Quail Flat junction, Redwood Canyon Overlook faces west over one of the world's largest sequoia groves. Early studies in this grove revealed the strong positive relationship between fire and sequoia reproduction.

USFS NATIONAL FOREST

Explore Giant Sequoia National Monument, a part of Sequoia National Forest (see page 2 for details). Check page 5 for road closures.

Three USFS trailheads offer snowplay, cross-country ski trails, and snowmobile routes. Rent skis, snowshoes, or buy snowplay equipment at Grant Grove or Montecito Lake Resort (see page 9 for details). Ask for information and a map at Kings Canyon Visitor Center:

• Cherry Gap is on Highway 180 2.5 miles (4km) north of Grant

Grove. It offers 10 miles (16km) of marked winter routes, including a ski trail to the Chicago Stump at the edge of Converse Basin grove. Virtually every mature sequoia in this huge grove was felled early in the 1900s. The stump is a remnant of a tree taken to exhibit at the 1893 Chicago World's Fair.

South of Grant Grove on the Generals Highway are two trailheads with restrooms:

• Quail Flat (6 miles/9.6km south of Hwy 180) has 23 miles (37km) of trails and snowmobile routes. Some connect to Big Meadows.

• Big Meadows (8 miles/13km south of Hwy 180) offers 23 miles (37km) of marked, groomed trails and routes that traverse meadows and forest. One route goes to the 1916 Buck Rock Fire Lookout (the tower is closed in winter).

THE FLOOR OF THE KINGS CANYON

Highway 180 down into the canyon closes in winter due to rock falling from the canyon walls onto the road. You can get a good view out over the canyon between Hume Lake Road junction on Hwy 180 and Hume Lake. The road reopens mid-April; return then if you can to enjoy one of our nation's deepest gorges. See page 9 "In the Kings Canyon" for details.

IN SEQUOIA NATIONAL PARK

GIANT FOREST

Rent snowshoes and cross-country skis downstairs at Wuksachi Lodge, and purchase a ski-trail map. Talk to a ranger, then carefully follow the yellow triangular markers above eye level on trees (other than sequoias).

GIANT FOREST MUSEUM: The best place to start your visit and learn about the Big Trees.

BIG TREES TRAIL: This 2/3-mile (1 km) trail (no yellow markers) circles Round Meadow. Colorful trailside panels describe sequoia ecology. Park at Giant Forest Museum or, once it is plowed, the small lot near Round Meadow. Then ski or snowshoe on either side of the road (not in the road).

When there is no snow, paved trails lead from the north end of the museum plaza, around the meadow, and back via the other side of the road.

GENERAL SHERMAN TREE:

Once much snow flies, access to the world's largest tree is from the parking area along the Generals Highway. The trail from there is not plowed, but snow is usually packed down enough to walk on it. Through mid-winter, if condi-

tions permit, the upper trail and parking stay open (take the Wolverton Road between the Sherman Tree and Lodgepole and follow signs). From there you walk down to the tree. While this upper option is open, the lower parking area along the Generals Highway requires an accessibility permit for parking.

If the upper trail is too steep and you don't have an official placard, just ask for one at any visitor center. If you can walk down but not back up, have your driver pick you up at the lower parking area on the Generals Highway.

MORO ROCK/CRESCENT MEADOW ROAD

This 3-mile (5 km), dead-end road closes in winter to become a ski and snowshoe trail. It begins at the Giant Forest Museum on the Generals Highway, crosses the southwest portions of the sequoia grove, and ends at Crescent Meadow. Highlights include:

MORO ROCK: A granite dome with a steep 1/4-mile (.4 km) staircase to the summit (300 foot /91 m elevation gain). Don't climb if there is any ice or snow on the stairs;

it is very dangerous. A spectacular view of the Great Western Divide and the western half of the park. 2 miles (3.2 km) from the Generals Highway.

TUNNEL LOG: A fallen sequoia that was tunneled through. The only tree you can ski through in these parks. 2.7 miles (4.3 km) from the Generals Highway.

CRESCENT MEADOW: Several trails connect here. It is 1 mile (1.6 km) from here to Tharp's Log, the hollow fallen sequoia lived in by Giant Forest's first settler. The summer High Sierra Trail runs 71 miles (114 km) to Mt. Whitney (highest peak in the lower 48 states at 14,494 feet/ 4417 m).

MINERAL KING



The steep road to this subalpine valley closed at the park boundary as of November 1; it reopens May 28, if weather permits. Skis or snowshoes are required for winter visits. Page 8 has more details.

IN KINGS CANYON PARK

84th Annual Nation's Christmas Tree Ceremony

December 13, 2008 at 2:30 pm
Held annually at the base of the General Grant Tree on the 2nd Sunday of December

This event celebrates both the holiday season and two honors given to the General Grant Tree:

- President Coolidge designated it the official Nation's Christmas Tree in 1926 (the "National Christmas Tree" is lit on the Mall in Washington, D.C.); and
- In 1956, President Dwight Eisenhower proclaimed the tree the only living National Shrine, and had his personal representative, Fleet Admiral Nimitz, officially dedicated it on Veteran's Day that year.

Each year during the ceremony, park rangers place a large wreath at the base of this giant sequoia in memory of men and women who gave their lives in service to their country. Caroling and readings are also part of the ceremony.

The event is sponsored by the Sanger Chamber of Commerce. Parking is limited. Chartered buses from Sanger are available. Information: 559-875-4575.

