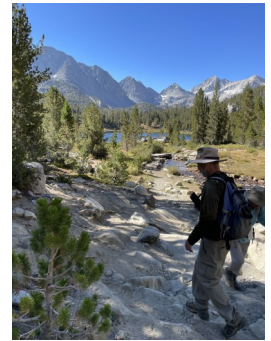


# CONTRA COSTA HILLS CLUB'S OUTING TO THE MAMMOTH LAKES REGION—SEPTEMBER 2-6, 2024

*Hiking on trails through forests and around lakes surrounded by peaks—such was the nature of the Contra Costa Hills Club's excellent five-day outing to the Mammoth Lakes region of California's Eastern Sierra Nevada. From September 2nd to 5th, 2024 we had ideal weather for our outing—sunny days and cool nights. The wonderful members of the club's Outings Committee ensured the success of this outing by visiting the area in advance to find suitable accommodation, restaurants, and a selection of trails that would suit hikers of varying levels of ability. To ensure that all the participants were hiking at their comfort level, on days 3 and 4 there were both easier hikes and harder hikes.*

*Thank you to all the members of the Outings Committee for a wonderful trip, the writers and photographers as well as Noël for proofreading, and Jo Anne for creating this beautiful brochure.*



Up the Switchbacks

## Monday, September 2, 2024, Day 1 Devils Postpile and Rainbow Falls

CCHC's outing to Mammoth Lakes in the eastern Sierra Nevada was an outstanding trip. However, day one was both long and challenging. Except for one couple who had travelled there one day early, for the other 23 of us it meant rising well before dawn, departing the Bay Area very early, and driving for five or six hours from sea level to 7,880 feet to the town of Mammoth Lakes. After checking into our accommodation at Holiday Haus, we quickly rejoined our carpools to go to the Mammoth Lakes Adventure Center. There we transferred to a shuttle bus to take us to Devils Postpile National Monument, a spectacular formation of basalt columns.

From outings leader Steve and the National Park Service website, we learned that Devils Postpile began about 100,000 years ago as a 400-foot-deep lava lake in a valley blocked by a natural dam. After the lava flow ceased, the molten rock began cooling into solid rock. As the rock solidified, it began to contract. Cracks, also called joints by geologists, began to form. At Devils Postpile this jointing formed multi-sided columns.



Devils Postpile—viewed from the base

From where the shuttle bus let us off, it was a half-mile walk to the Postpile. When we arrived at the formation, there were two ways to view it— from a lower trail or an upper trail. From the lower trail we could see the sun shining on the western face of the basalt columns. From the upper trail the smooth, polished surfaces of the tops of the pentagonal, hexagonal, and heptagonal columns were visible. After taking lots of

photos, we hiked 1.5 miles to Rainbow Falls, the highest waterfall on the middle fork of the San Joaquin River. This powerful waterfall, named for the rainbows that appear in its mist, plunges 101 feet. According to the interpretative panel at the viewpoint, this waterfall continues to move upstream due to undercutting. Currently, it's about 500 feet from its original location.



Devils Postpile—bird's eyeview

From Rainbow Falls it was a breath-challenging one-mile hike uphill to shuttle bus stop #10 at Reds Meadow Resort. There we caught the 6:15 shuttle back to our cars at the Adventure Center. That evening over supper several of us helped Jo Anne celebrate her 88th birthday.

-Noël

## Mammoth Lakes Outing, Day 2 Tuesday, September 3, 2024, Day 2 Convict Lake Loop - 7500'

On a bright warm morning 25 hikers, looking fresh and recovered from previous day's challenges, gathered to circumambulate three miles of Convict Lake, so named because of escaped convicts that were captured at site years ago. Geology lesson from Steven. Still acclimating to high altitudes, we paused often to admire serene water, turquoise in parts, and pine forests. Sniffing Ponderosa pine tree, was it a butterscotch or vanilla scent we were smelling? Lovely wax currant and rubber rabbitbrush plants bordered trail. Hiker approaching group asked, "Is this a bus?"

Thank you, Ed and Bill, for an excellent warmup hike.

TJ Lake via Lake George - 9000'

At Lake George a blast of wind met us as we began our rapid ascent (puff puff), three hikers soon peeling off to linger at lake. Ranger told them there is a bear sighting there every day, yikes!

Onward and upward we trekked to Lake Barrett and T(om)J(ones) (not THE Tom Jones) Lake. Shimmering water and peaks on high greeted us. Those who dared, soaked feet in brisk water. Descent was leisurely.

Thank you, Bill and Yvonne, for a memorable afternoon.

-Jan P.



Surrounded by Spectacular  
Mountains

## Wednesday, September 4, Day 3 Mosquito Flat to Box Lake

Eight 'Easy hikers' set off at 9 a.m. to explore the #1 rated hike in Mono County. It lived up to its name! The start of the trail bordered Rock Creek at 9300' elevation. The first part of the trail is known as Mosquito Flat but no mosquitos in sight fortunately. We next used Little Lakes Trail which ascended another 500' as we passed four beautiful lakes – Mack Lake, Marsh Lake, Heart Lake, and Box Lake. To that point we had hiked 1.95 miles. We turned back and revisited Heart Lake for lunch. The lakes and surrounding vegetation were gorgeous under clear blue skies. We saw lupine and yarrow among another few wildflowers. We returned at 1:30 p.m.



One of Many Babbling Brooks

To reach our lunch spot, our esteemed leader, Bill led us across the dangerous' route through a stream with potentially wobbly rocks. We called ourselves the 'rock hoppers'. Once across, we looked to our left to see a bridge! All feet made it without a spill. So how far and how high did we go? Each of the three GPS devices used by members recorded different data. Total distance varied from 3.75 to 4.5 miles. Total elevation ranged from 499' to 1,331'. We prefer to impress with the higher numbers, though not likely accurate.

The trail included a lot of rocks that required up to 24" steps up. Some of us 'easy' hikers took great care since each step could result in a tumble. About half-way out we saw the trail best-to-avoid since it was 4 miles to Mono Pass up a respectable 2,000 feet. We met many friendly hikers – some who had spent the night up the trail. Also, we met many friendly dogs of various sizes and breeds, all eagerly enjoying getting their exercise.

Arguably the best activity of the day was root beer floats and ice cream sundaes at Tom's Place Café. They were the largest and most expensive root beer floats any of us had seen. We felt quite deserving and enjoyed every slurp. Our leader, Bill is a gem – so patient, knowledgeable and supportive when needed. A wonderful day!!  
-Cameron



## Little Lakes Valley hike from Mosquito Flat to Gem Lake Leaders: Georgia, Steven, Lynne

“Are we there yet? Are we there yet? Is this the highlight of the hike? Is this the most spectacular view?” The answer was always: “Yes, we are there!” because at every step the view in every direction along Rock Creek Canyon was inspiring and gorgeous, whether it was at the first or eighth of the series of lakes. 16 members hiked in the John Muir Wilderness Area near Mammoth Lakes at the crest of the Eastern Sierra. The trail ascends with varying degrees of difficulty to each glacial carved lake and at the top we were surrounded by majestic peaks that rise over 13,000 feet in elevation. We were graced with blue skies and cheerful sunshine, with intermittent shade from whitebark and other pine trees. Late summer wildflowers included Mountain Indian Paintbrush, a white Mountain Gentian, and Rangers Buttons.

Before embarking, Lynne passed out snacks provided by Liz who had to miss this trip. We hiked up to Mack and Marsh Lakes, then continued across a small bridge to Heart Lake with a most stunning backdrop of mountains. (Okay, ALL the views were stunningest!) Here, Ed’s fishing pole vibrated, and he was obliged to stop to fish for trout. The rest of the intrepid



Gem Lake



View of Mammoth Mountains at Sunset

members continued to Box Lake, then along the Long Lake meadow. It was along a southern bank of scree that some of us were thrilled to witness a pika scamper for about 2 seconds before it disappeared. The final ascent led to Gem Lakes, our turn around point at 11,000 feet. The lunch stop here afforded a bit of time to appreciate patches of snow on the granite walls surrounding the lake and some hikers soaked their feet in the icy water. The group unanimously agreed to hike to an additional lake named Chickenfoot before we returned

down the trail. Our total distance was 9 miles with 1207 feet of elevation gain. Steven optimized the group’s pace in such a way that all hikers succeeded without over-exertion. Many thanks to Lynne, Georgia, and Steven who patiently, kindly, and expertly herded our clowder (new word to me: a group of cats).

-Arlene

## Thursday, September 5, Day 4 Hiking the Duck Pass Trail

Steven led 7 of us on this hike which is designated as one of the most popular trails in the Mammoth Lake Basin. The Duck Pass Trail is located in the John Muir Wilderness in Inyo National Forest. The road leading to the Duck Pass Trailhead passed by Lake Mary with its many boaters and fishermen and the large busy Cold Water Creek campground. The 6.6 miles hike starting at an elevation of 9150ft. to our destination of Barney Lake passed through beautiful pine forests. There were switchbacks and screes on the trail. Though the elevation climb was about 1700 feet we all managed well as Steven set an even pace with frequent stops to admire the views of beautiful alpine lakes (Arrowhead Lake, Skelton Lake, Red Lake and finally Barney Lake for lunch). This is a busy trail. I think we were envious of the many backpackers going or returning (most seemed to stay an average of 2-3 nights). There were many lucky dogs on leash, staying close to their owners. It was great seeing younger hikers (in



Lunch at Barney Lake

small groups as well as solo) seemingly climbing or descending the trails with minimal effort. Many were unencumbered by hiking poles, backpacks, or hats. Steven and Ed made a dash to Duck Pass which added another 630ft elevation gain and 1.2 miles for them. They easily overtook us on the return and waited with Arlene and Lewis at the parking lot for our slower group. Surrounded by spectacular views of the mountains, hearing and crossing clear running brooks, witnessing the changing light filtering through the trees and sharing this with great company is an amazing gift. We are very lucky indeed. Thank you, Steven!



View from the Duck Lake Pass

## Friday, September 6, 2024, Day 5 Going Home

As Lynne, Jan and I departed from Mammoth Lakes and our wonderful outing, we made our way home by heading north on 395 to travel through Yosemite National Park. However, we first visited dormant Panum Crater, a volcanic cone that is part of the Mono-Inyo Craters, a chain of recent volcanic cones south of Mono Lake and east of the Sierra Nevada. By recent, it last erupted between 600 and 700 years ago. After Lynne, the driver, navigated her vehicle on a rocky, gravel road east of 395, we could see the blackish-gray volcanic rocks in the near distance. We hiked up the 7,037' crater on the pumice-laden trail to the Plug Dome with an outer pumice rim and an inner jagged core of obsidian layered with pumice. We hiked around the crater while taking in views of Mono Lake to the north. We descended after exploring the interesting geologic wonder and then made our way to Navy Beach along the south shore of Mono Lake. It was the site of a U.S. military facility used to test new weapons and weapon systems during the Cold War. Today, only a monument stands. However, we took a short walk along the lake to get closer to the tufas that were prominent both in the water and on the land where we casually walked. It was now time to depart Mono Lake and continue through Tioga Pass for a most pleasant drive home.



One of the Many Alpine Lakes

-Stew