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## Climbed Whitney. No Big Deal.

By Chris Lavin



Bea and Esther Dean on Mount Whitney  
Photo provided

who complete it are not under the age of 10.

"I was very fine," said Esther, who was carrying about 18-20 pounds at any given time. "It was kind of exciting but scary."

It took a week, and they hiked 70 miles. They took an assemblage of food for their movable campout, and they mixed it up: salami, candy, cheese, sausages, instant mashed potatoes, dried cherries, pine nuts. At night everyone could choose their own dinner, a kind of hiker smorgasbord. "It was good," Esther said.

"We've done lots of trips," dad Dean said. High Sierras, elsewhere. They spent nights together in a tent, but got to see the Perseids meteor shower on their trek to Whitney, which was a highlight. They came upon numerous hikers along the way who wished them well. One had a pre-printed "Mount Whitney" sheet that the girls held for a photo at the top. "Lots of people knew who we were by then," said Dean. Such is the nature of traveling with children on long journeys on well-worn paths.

Near the top, the hikers got to leave their main packs below, and reach the summit to get their final view. "It was great," said Esther. Did she do anything while she was up there? What was the final outcome?

"We had M&Ms," she said. "They were really good."

Imagine being a parent and saying to your little kids who are wearing heavy packs on a steep mountainside in inclement weather, "If there's a big gust, drop down and just lean into the mountain." What?

That's what Jeb Dean of Lafayette told his girls, Bea and Esther, ages 8 and 9 respectively, on their journey up Mount Whitney this summer. But he didn't have to worry. His two mountaineering girls had it under control.

"Most of the time the wind was blowing us into the mountain," said Esther, who is 9. "So we didn't really have to fight it that much."

The Dean family took to Whitney over the summer for a weeklong sojourn to the top of California's highest peak, which at 14,505 feet, remains one of the state's premier destinations for adventurer-seeking hikers. It's a hard, arduous, and long journey for most. But most of the ones

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[back](#)

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