

Hiking Half Dome: A Long Day's Journey Into Height

What does it take to hike Half Dome in one day?

It takes about 18 miles of walking through cool darkness, blazing sunlight, and hilly terrain.

It takes the strength, dexterity, stamina, and willingness to summit and return.

And it takes someone who's not afraid of heights, crowds, or the elements.

In fact, Half Dome in [Yosemite](#), the crown jewel of the national park system, is one of the world's most famous and photographed mountains.

I was fortunate enough to scale its 8,842-foot summit a few years ago from the Yosemite Valley floor during a one-day, 18.2-mile round-trip with five hiking buddies. Below are some tips for making your hike a success and the story of our trek.

Hill Training Is Absolutely Essential.

My normal hike had been a hilly, 2-mile trail, four times a week. But I knew that wouldn't prepare me for a steeper trek nine times as long. So two months in advance, our group started a strenuous 6-mile Saturday hike on a Marin County hill to get our legs, lungs and bodies ready for both the steepness and the distance we'd cover at Half Dome.

Over the next few months, we worked our way up to 15 miles. We also got accustomed to using hiking poles for balance, and carrying lots of water on our backs in Camelbaks for the eventual Half Dome hike, as well as other essentials such as sunscreen, sunglasses, hats, energy bars, and cameras.

The Longest Day.

On our big day, my Half Dome Half-Dozen hikers rose early, ate hearty breakfasts lit by our headlamps, and hit the trail by 6:30 a.m. for the 4,800-foot elevation gain. A pedometer measured 28,817 steps for the 18.2-mile day, equal to about 17 vertical feet per minute during the first half of the trek.

As we walked through the trails from the valley floor, we began our heavy breathing — trying to catch our collective breath in the increasingly thinner air.

Hiking past the cascading Vernal and Nevada Falls, the early morning mist floated over us, cooling our bodies for the long hike ahead. Up, up, up we climbed. To beat the day's heat — and the day's crowd to the summit — we planned to hit the summit by 11am.

A Cable Stairway to Heaven.

Then we reached Quarter Dome. We looked up a 900-foot-high cliff with an eye-popping 60-degree incline to view the summit. Here, I saw many hikers take one look, shake their heads, and

turn around because of the steepness and potential danger.

It's important to note that you should NOT attempt to summit if the cables are down, if rain is predicted which makes this hill slippery, or if there's any chance of lightning.

But we had our eyes on the prize, so we literally pulled ourselves — Batman-style — up the final section of metal cables and railroad ties — step-by-step, up and over the top of the summit.

Top Of The World.

Here, we relaxed to enjoy the 360-degree view of Yosemite Valley and 40-mile visibility, devoured our lunches, and drank much-needed fluids to replenish what we'd lost from exertion.

We then began our five-hour descent, so it took just as long to walk downhill as up because of rocky terrain, even with hiker's poles for balance. Finally, after 10 hours, we celebrated with an extensive tailgate party, then rewarded ourselves further with dinner at the [Ahwanee Hotel](#).

The Daily Deluge.

Each day, over 700 people attempt this hike from spring through fall. All people using the Half Dome Trail above the sub-dome must now have a permit on Fridays, Saturdays, Sundays, and federal holidays when the cables are up.

Half Dome can be enjoyed by people of all ages. It takes commitment and practice to reach the top of this strenuous hike. Descending is no walk in the park, either, as you negotiate miles of granite steps and rock gardens. But the views and waterfalls are well worth it.

Read more about Half Dome: www.yosemite.com.

About The Author

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