

EL PICACHO DEL DIABLO 10171+ FEET CLASS 3

MILEAGE: 290 miles of paved road, 58 miles of good paved mountain road, 2.3 miles of fair dirt road

INTRODUCTION: El Picacho del Diablo (Devil's Peak) is the highest mountain in Baja California. It is also known as La Providencia (Providence) and Cerro de la Encantada (Enchanted Mountain). Among DPS'ers it's commonly referred to as Big Picacho. The first ascent of the mountain (north and slightly higher summit) was credited to Donald McLain in 1911 via a west face route. The south summit was finally reached in 1932 by Norman Clyde, Bestor Robinson, Glen Dawson, Nathan Clark, Richard Jones and Walter Brem.

Because El Picacho del Diablo is a complex mountain with numerous routes, it is beyond the scope of this guide to categorize them all for the reader. Most ascents of the mountain will be done along one of the following routes; either the western approach route via Blue Bottle Saddle and Campo Noche to the summit or the eastern approach up Cañon del Diablo to Campo Noche and the summit. Both of these routes share Campo Noche, a small but popular campsite located at 6300 feet elevation along the creek in Cañon del Diablo, as a usual overnight camping spot. From Campo Noche the Class 3 climb proceeds E up Night Wash, Slot Wash and Wall Street to the slightly higher northern summit. The traverse to the southern summit is Class 4. These climbs will not be detailed here, since excellent guides already exist that clearly explain (in words and pictures) these popular routes as well as the seldom done, more difficult lines on the mountain. Anyone planning an attempt on El Picacho del Diablo should consider obtaining a copy of John Robinson's book "Camping and Climbing in Baja" and Jerry Schad's "Parque Nacional San Pedro Martir-Topographic Map and Visitor's Guide to Baja's Highest Mountains". These two guides are the "bibles" to Big Picacho and should be referred to and taken along on a climb of the mountain. What will be described in detail here are the driving approaches to the mountain, both from the west and the east.

DRIVE/WESTERN ROUTE: From Tijuana, BC drive S on Mexico Highway 1 to Ensenada. Enter Ensenada on Mexico Highway 1-D, driving past the port area (on your right coming in) to a major fork and stop sign at a Pemex gas station. Bear right, following the main road, Lazaro Cardenas Blvd, as it heads E then SE through an area of restaurants and nightclubs (the harbor is on your right) to its end in about 1.3 miles. Turn left (E) here onto Calle General Agustin Sangines and drive 0.6 miles to a stoplight at the junction with Mexico Highway 1. There is a Pemex gas station on the NW corner of this intersection. Turn right (S) here on Mexico Highway 1 and drive about 74 miles to the town of Colonet. Continue S from Colonet on Highway 1 about 8.0 miles to the signed junction for San Telmo and the Observatory. Turn left (E) and drive 48 miles of good pavement to the entrance station of Parque Nacional Sierra San Pedro Martir, en route passing through the small village of San Telmo (5.8 miles E of Mexico Highway 1). Continue 10.2 miles E from the entrance station to the far side of Vallecitos meadow, where you'll make a sharp right on a fair dirt road heading SE. Follow this dirt road 2.3 miles to a sandy wash and the trailhead for Blue Bottle saddle. This is a common starting point for El Picacho del Diablo and is listed as Trail #4 in Jerry Schad's map-guide (see Introduction above). The previous 4WD to an alternate TH is now closed. Park Here. Note: camping is not allowed at the TH. Camp in one of the campgrounds adjacent to the entrance station.

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CLIMB/WESTERN APPROACH: Starting from the trailhead, Blue Bottle Saddle is your next objective. From this saddle follow Schad's Trail #5 as it first traverses E from the saddle, then drops (3200 foot elevation loss) NW to Campo Noche, where you'll most likely spend the first night. Water is available here from a spring-fed creek located near the camp. The next day follow Schad's Trail #9 to the summit and back to Campo Noche, where you'll probably spend a second night. On the third day begin the long uphill grind back to Blue Bottle Saddle and from there to the cars. A variation on Schad's Trail #9 to the summit exists in the vicinity of Campo Noche. About 300 feet higher and S up the canyon from Campo Noche is Cedaroak Camp at 6600 feet elevation. From here the "Teapot" route heads up the W face of the mountain and joins Trail #9 in Slot Wash. See John Robinson's book (page 85) for details.

ROUND TRIP STATS/WESTERN APPROACH/2WD: 8400 feet elevation gain, 16 miles, 3 days

DRIVE/EASTERN ROUTE: From the border crossing at Mexicali drive SE on Lopez Mateos Boulevard, following the signs for San Felipe. As a point of reference, Lopez Mateos Boulevard has a set of train tracks running down the middle of it. 5.0 miles from the border you'll come to a traffic light at the Sanchez Taboada traffic circle (Pemex gas station and liquor store on the right). Drive into the traffic circle and bear right at the first major road exiting the circle heading S. In 0.6 miles you'll come to a stop sign at the junction of Mexico Highways 2 and 5. Continue 87 miles S on Mexico Highway 5 to its junction with Mexico Highway 3. Turn right (W) on Highway 3 and drive 20.4 miles to a dirt road identified with two signs; a blue one with the letters SARH on it and a red one reading "Villa del Sol". Turn left here on good dirt and drive 4.2 miles to a junction. Turning left (S), in 0.4 miles you'll see an abandoned rancho just off the road. Continue S from here for 10.6 miles across a dry lake (Laguna Diablo or Devil's Lake) to an intersection. Turn right (W) here and drive 1.2 miles to a fork (rancho on the right). Bear right, following the road 1.0 mile along the rancho's barbed wire fence to where another road merges from the left. Continue straight 5.0 miles from here to the trailhead at the mouth of Cañon Diablito (Little Devil Canyon).

CLIMB/EASTERN ROUTE: The entrance to Cañon del Diablo is about 1.8 miles NW of Cañon Diablito and is accessed via a trail. Follow Schad's Trail #8 up Cañon del Diablo to Campo Noche, then Trail #9 to the summit. NOTE: A rope, sling and carabiners are useful in getting through the pool at the mouth of Cañon del Diablo.

ROUND TRIP STATS/EASTERN ROUTE: 8400 feet elevation gain, 28 miles, 4 days

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SIDELINES

1. El Picacho del Diablo is one of the seven DPS emblem peaks. Based on elevation gain, length of climb and difficulty, it is one of the most demanding peaks on the DPS list. Anyone making it to the top of this granite giant will certainly feel a sense of accomplishment.
2. U.S. citizens who travel S of Maneadero (10 miles S of Ensenada) on Mexico Highway 1 or S of Mexicali on Highway 5 are officially required to have a valid tourist card. The most common form of this card, the single-entry version is valid for 90 days and should be surrendered to the Mexican border authorities upon leaving Mexico. Tourist cards are available from the American Automobile Association (members only), Mexican Consulates in the U.S., any Mexican Government Tourism Office or at the border from Mexican immigration authorities. These cards should be validated at your port of entry into Mexico. Anyone found in possession of an expired card is subject to fine. In spite of these regulations, many people travel in Baja without a tourist card and are never checked by the authorities. Tourist cards are mentioned here only to inform you of the "official" regulations as they relate to travel to El Picacho del Diablo.
3. See SIDELINES 4 and 5, Cerro Pescadores, Guide No. 9.1 for important information on Mexican automobile insurance and gasoline available in Mexico.
4. John Robinson's book "Camping and Climbing in Baja", published by La Siesta Press in Glendale, CA is available at most large backpacking shops (REI, Sport Chalet, A16, etc...) and at some map shops. Jerry Schad's "Parque Nacional San Pedro Martir-Topographic Map and Visitor's Guide to Baja's Highest Mountains" published by Centra Publications, 4705 Laurel Street, San Diego, CA 92105 is available from the Map Centre, Inc., 2611 University Avenue, San Diego, CA 92104; Phone (619) 291-3830. In addition to these two guides, it's a good idea to have the AAA Baja California map and Baja California guidebook (197 pages) with you during your trip to Mexico.
5. During the months of November and December there may be Mexican bighorn sheep hunters on the slopes of El Picacho del Diablo. At this time of year it would be advisable to stay away from the east side (Cañon del Diablo) route on the mountain. Approaching from the west (Blue Bottle Route) at this time of year, also not recommended, will generally mean cold weather conditions and a chance of ice along the route from Blue Bottle Saddle to Campo Noche. Mid-September through October and April through May seem to be good times to do the peak from either side.
6. Even though the running water at Campo Noche looks fine, don't take any chances. As you would normally do in the Sierra, boil it vigorously or treat with iodine to be sure you don't contract giardia or something worse.
7. Cerro Botella Azul (Blue Bottle Peak) is located about 0.15 miles SE of Blue Bottle Saddle. It's the highpoint of the western plateau and has a climbing register on the top. From the summit you'll get great views across Cañon del Diablo to the west face of Big Picacho.

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8. An observatory is located along the eastern escarpment of the San Pedro Martir plateau. Continuing E from Vallecitos Meadow on the park's main dirt road will bring you to a locked gate about 1.5 miles before the observatory. The dome-shaped building houses the largest reflector telescope in Mexico.