

Guidance & Directions to the “Forks of the Kern”

www.TimHuckaby.com

Before you go

Make sure you handle your permits:

California Fire Permit:

<http://www.preventwildfireca.org/Permits/>

The fire permit is free and easy to obtain online.

FYI: In August of 2016 The Western Divide Ranger District voided all fire permits in the area precluding us from having campfires at the site. Now that the drought is over fire permits are easy to get.

Golden Trout Wilderness Permit:

http://www.fs.usda.gov/Internet/FSE_DOCUMENTS/fsbdev3_058990.pdf

The Golden Trout Wilderness Permit is free. I wouldn't call the process easy because to handle it in advance remotely it requires you to fax the form and the ranger district to fax back a confirmation. Sometimes I have to call to get them to complete the process.

Western Divide Ranger District 559-539-2607

Hydrologist at western divide: Don Kavlosky

Reasons to call the Western Divide Ranger District:

- The Roads to the trailhead are closed during the winter. If you want to hike outside the season (~November through mid-April) call the Western Divide Ranger District to see if the roads to the forks of the Kern Trailhead are open.
- Another reason to call the Western Divide Ranger District is to get a feel for the flow on the Little Kern River. In the Spring of non-drought years, the Little Kern River may be too dangerous to cross. I have crossed the little Kern when it's raging, but with the help of a rope tied from trees on both sides. Each april, I secure a rope between two trees at the crossing, but it never seems to survive the winter.

Background

There are hundreds of primitive campsites that line the Upper Kern river for miles. The first one of the Forks trail is just 2.4 miles from the trailhead. Typically the farther you hike up stream the better the fishing gets. The “Huckaby site” is where I usually set up. It has it all:

- It's not a long hike (4.2 miles) designed for Fly Fishermen that backpack (not the other way around)
- The 400 yard stretch of river from the site upstream is spectacular fly fishing with a number of tail-outs, a huge slow moving pool, tons of pocket water and seemingly endless good runs.
- The huge slow moving pool in front of the site is suitable for bathing and swimming even in spring runoff conditions
- There is a primitive porta-potty I made from stones and surrounded by trees just about 75 yards upstream from the site.
- The site is huge and can suit a bunch of tents on flat ground.

- The site has a primitive fire pit with a bbq grill I hauled there myself (gone missing in 2016).
- The site has primitive benches to sit on around the fire.
- The site has plenty of large rocks suitable for meal preparation
- The site has plenty of shade by large pines, oaks, etc.
- The site has a nearby cache with tons of extra supplies including a spare tent, tools, food, etc.

Driving Directions to the Trailhead

Technically, there are 3 major routes and multiple dirt road routes to drive the first 280 of the ~300 miles it takes to get to the Forks of the Kern Trailhead from Carlsbad where we live. The reason for this document, really, is that last 20 miles and then the directions to hiking to the Huckaby's favorite Primitive spot on the River. The total hike to the site is only 4.2 miles, but don't underestimate the heat and the ruggedness. It can take up to 2 hours to hike it. You have to be fit for that hike out, gaining back that 1100 feet you lose hiking into the canyon.

There are two major driving routes from the South:

1. Hwy 395 way through Kernville
2. Hwy 99 way through Bakersfield to Kernville.

And one route from the West:

- Hwy 99 through Porterville.

And one route from the East:

- Which is a painful 100 miles over the sierras by way of Nine Mile Canyon Road just north of Pearsonville to Kennedy Meadows and over the Sherman Pass popping you out just short of the Johnsondale Bridge. Actually I'm not even sure this is possible because there are a lot of dirt roads involved and all the mapping programs say it is dramatically faster to go south on the 395 all the way to Lake Isabella, through Kernville and back up.

I have taken all of the routes many times, but the easiest way is the 99 through Bakersfield to Kernville. So those are the directions I will detail here.

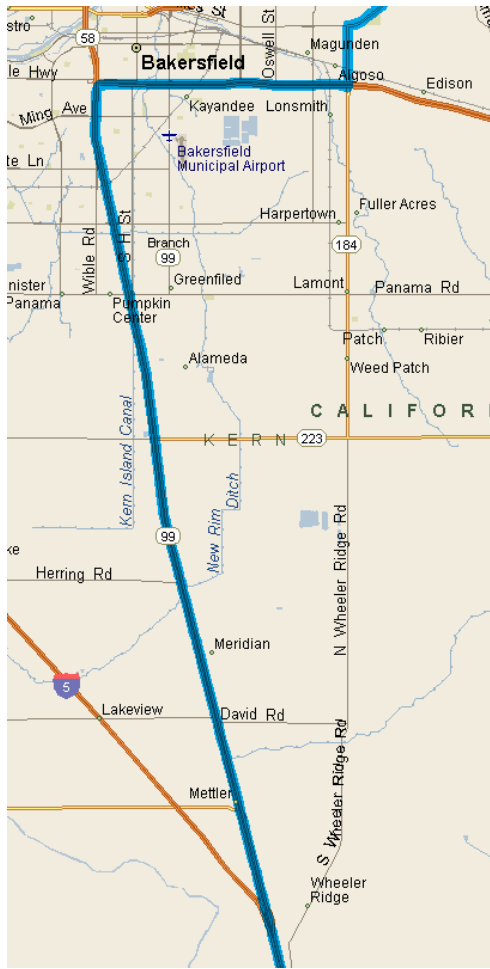
If you want to go from the west then get to Mountain Road 50 by way of Earlimart and Ducor.

If you want to go from the north then get to Mountain Road 50 by way of Porterville.

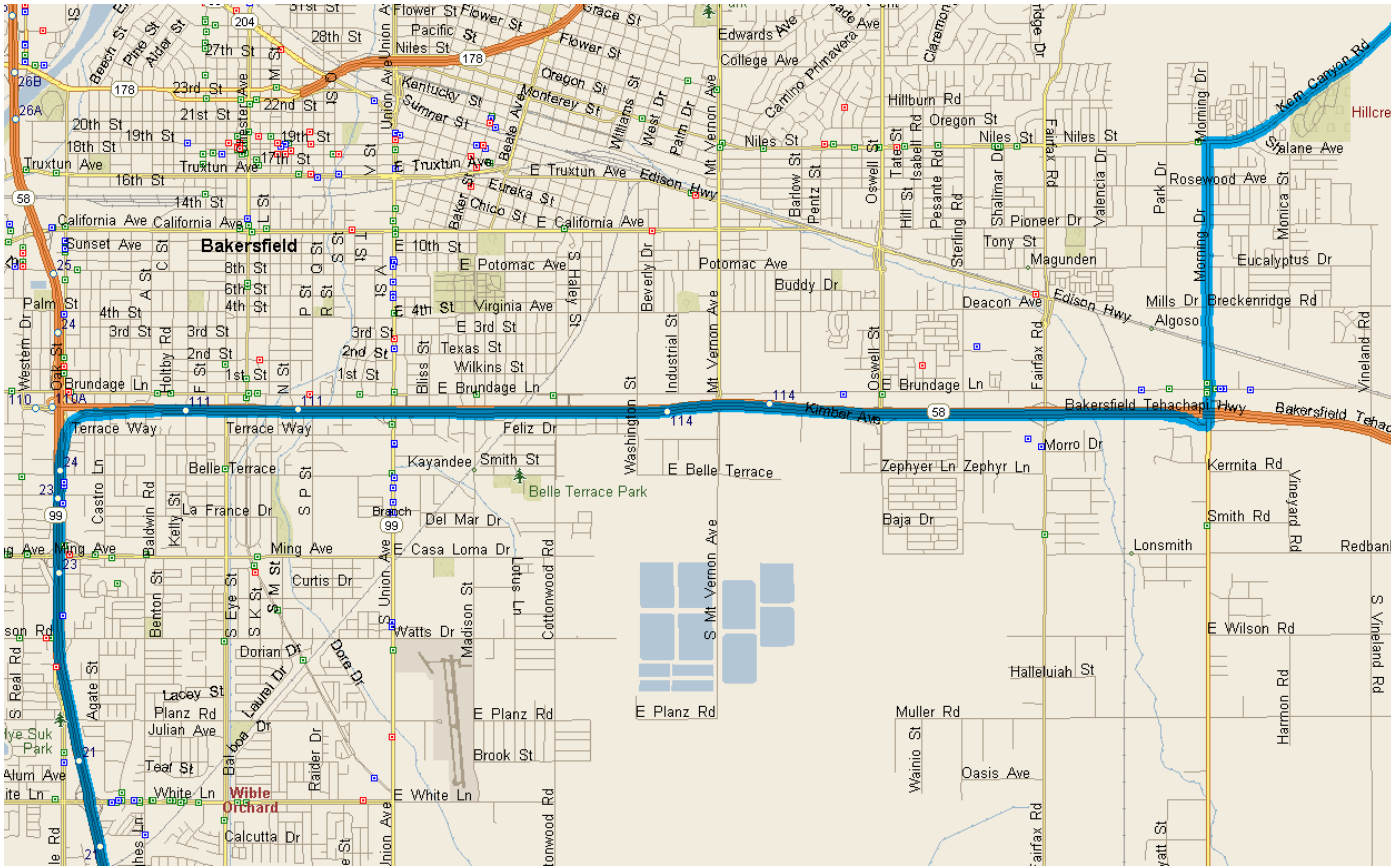
Then pick up the directions with a left turn on NF-2282 (that is the intersection is very close to the tiny city of Johnsondale, CA detailed below).

From Carlsbad:

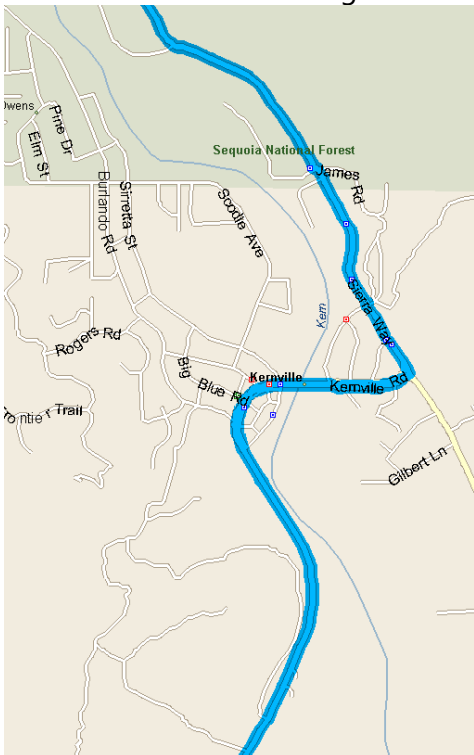
- Aim your GPS for Kernville, CA
- Go North on 5 through Los Angeles, pass magic Mountain and veer right on the 99 where the 5/99 split is just Short of Bakersfield



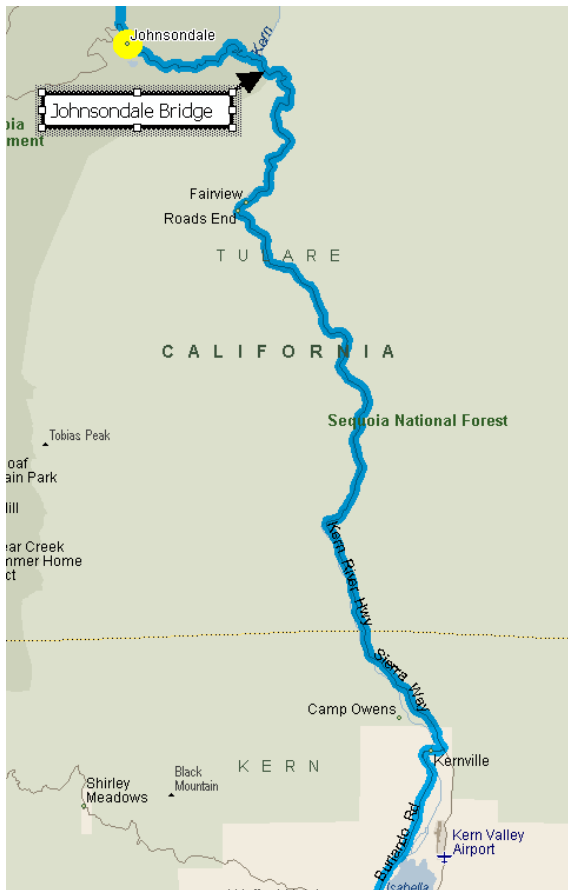
- At exit 24, keep RIGHT onto CA-58 [Bakersfield Tehachapi Hwy]
- Bear LEFT (North) onto CA-184 [Weedpatch Hwy]
- Turn RIGHT (East) onto CA-184 [Kern Canyon Rd]
- Turn RIGHT (East) onto CA-178 [Kern Canyon Rd]



- Go 32 miles towards Lake Isabella
- Turn LEFT (North-West) onto CA-155 [Kernville Rd] towards Kernville
- Turn LEFT (North) onto Sierra Way (after driving through the city of Kernville and crossing the river). You'll lose your cell signal here
- The road name soon changes to the Kern river Highway



- ~18 miles you'll pass Sherman Pass on your right then you'll cross the Johnsondale Bridge.
- After the Johnsondale bridge the road name changes to Mountain Road 99 (MR-99)
- ~3 miles after you cross the bridge you'll drive through the tiny city of Johnsondale



- Right after Johnsondale, you'll pass the Mountain Road 50 (MR-50) junction where the directions from the north or west come in. The road name changes to NF-2282 here
- Here at the MR-50 junction reset your odometer or gps to 0.
- At mile 20.2 the road turns into Lloyd meadow Road and the big sign and gate for camp Whitsett is on your right.
- at mile 28.4 you'll hit the Peppermint campground (this is a good place to spend the night if you come in too late or when it's too hot to hike in and want to sleep before hiking in at dawn. But, you can also just sleep at the trailhead in the parking lot). Peppermint campground has running water and costs a bit of money (self-pay). The trailhead dirt parking lot does not have running water, is free and technically you are probably not supposed to camp there. there is a port-a-potty at the trailhead, though.
- At mile 36.2 you'll see the sign for the turnoff to "George bush tree". I have no idea what the hell that is; and will never know.
- At mile 36.8 turn right on the dirt road, Lloyd flat. There is a sign for the forks of the Kern trailhead there on your right.



- Its 2.4 miles on the dirt road to the trailhead. When you get to the end by the trailhead you'll be forced into a counter clockwise loop into a very large dirt parking lot. The GPS coordinates of the dirt parking lot are: [36.138538, -118.451797](#) There is a porta-potty 150 yards forward in the dirt road loop.

Directions for the Hike in

From the big dirt parking lot if you look in an eastern direction towards where you entered the dirt parking lot you'll see a large sign marking the actual trailhead. It's really hard to miss.

The Altitude at the Trailhead is 5,844; gps coords: [36.138538, -118.451797](#). You'll lose 1,100 feet of it in the first 2.2 miles down into the canyon to the little Kern River. That is why this is a "reverse hike" because you hike in heavy with food downhill and hike out lighter up hill.

Using a handheld or wearable GPS will be bulletproof with these directions, but if you got the distance gene you don't need one.

- Its 2.2 miles down the switchbacks to the bottom. The views are spectacular. On the way you'll pass the Golden Trout Wilderness sign (vandalized in 2016 and now gone) and you'll get peeks at the Kern.
- When you get to the bottom there is an open sandy area. Straight in front of you 100 feet is the little Kern River, but in summer you will not be able to see it from there because of the trees. It's also a tough cross right there. At this point the trail is sandy and goes right / south (down river) or Left / North (up river). To the right about 1/2 mile down is the actual confluence where the Little Kern River meets the main fork of the Kern River.
- You want to go Left, upstream on the sandy trail passing two big pine trees to the third big pine tree. This is the easiest crossing of the little Kern. In drought years it's 8" of water; simple crossing. In big snowpack years in the spring during runoff it can be a challenge. You'll find walking sticks on both sides from prior hikers that will help you cross in bare feet. And there has been a rope strung across the little Kern many years (including 2016) to help make the crossing easy. I have strung that rope in years where it's not there.



View of the Little Kern River Crossing in drought conditions



View of the Little Kern River Crossing in spring conditions with a rope line across to help



Mer goes about 5'10" and you can see she is up to her knees in July using the rope and her trekking poles to cross the Little Kern.



My nephews Sam and Tommy crossing the Little Kern in July of a drought year

Once across the little Kern River you'll be staring at a large open sandy area like a beach about 200 yards wide and long. The trail will be barely discernable in this area. look for footprints.



Keep going straight and you'll soon see where the trail picks up on the other side of the sandy area.



The trail parallels the north side of the river for 2 more miles before you make it to the "Huckaby site". The views of the river are spectacular. If you are a fly fisherman you will say to yourself, "I cannot believe I'm passing up this water and not fishing it."



You'll see many primitive campsites on your right on the river and there are many more you won't see. The rest of the directions take you to the Huckaby's favorite primitive site at GPS coordinates: 36.141421, -118.410793.

- At mile 3.5 you'll see a primitive camp site, looking down, on your right towards the river
- At 3.67 the trail will fork – it doesn't matter which fork you take. They re-join in about 200 yards. Once they rejoin, it's 11 minutes at a normal pace to the "Huckaby" site at gps coords: 36.141421, -118.410793

This is the view to the "huckaby site" where you are going from about 1/3 mile away. Notice the flat water with the rocky face on the other side of the river. That is where the site is.



- At mile 4.17 you'll hit the Huckaby's favorite primitive site on your right. You'll see the fire pit and primitive benches around it made of logs.
- Standing in the 100 foot long site, looking back at the trail from which you came:



- Standing in the site near in one of the many tent locations on the site looking at the river:



- View of fire pit and primitive benches looking back at the trail from which you came:



- View from the fire pit looking down at the river:



- The monster I landed in front of the site on my very first cast in early April, 2015:

