



Three Sisters Loop Hike

Rod's Trails

THREE SISTERS LOOP

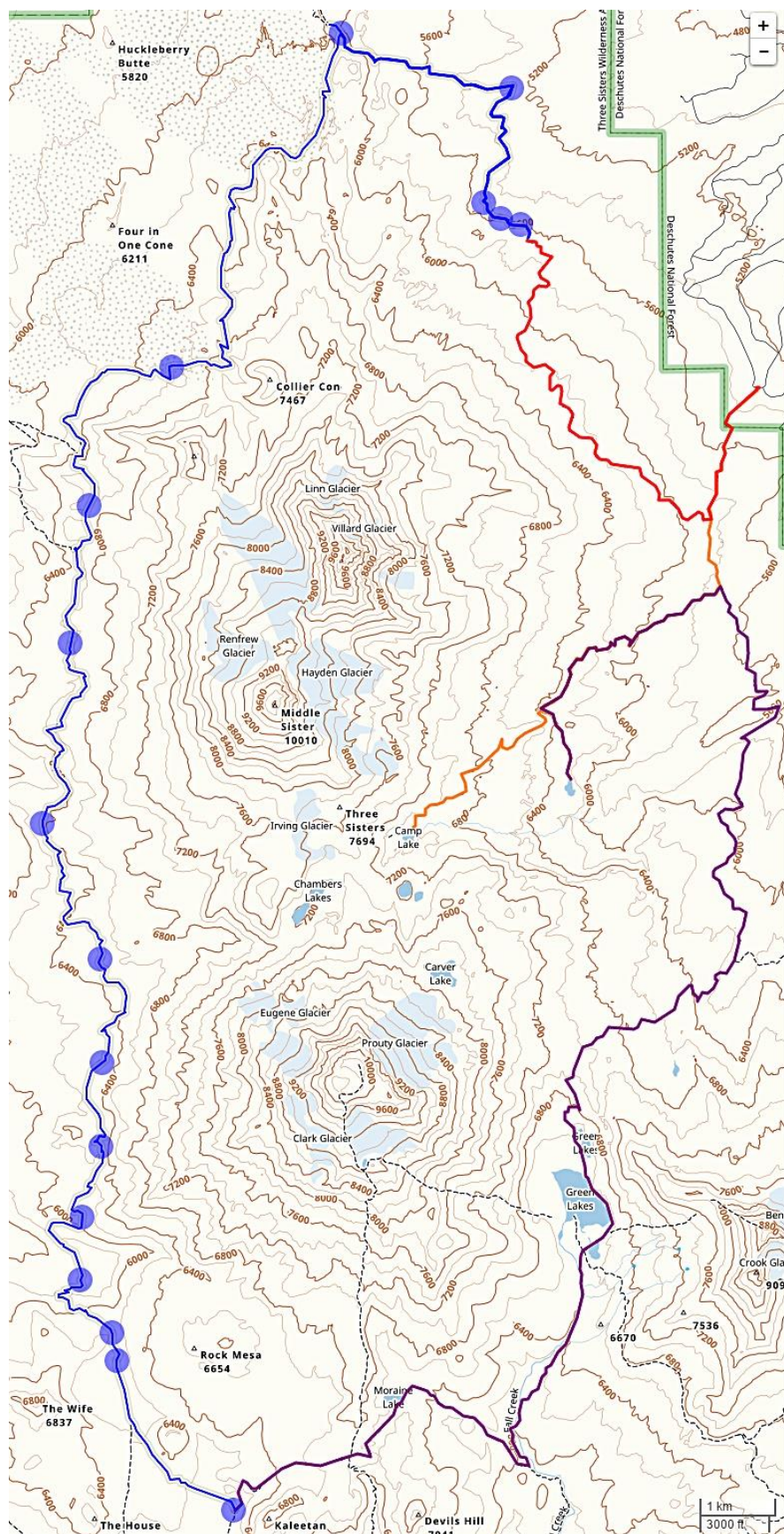
*OR "YOU KNOW ROD, YOU
REALLY SHOULD SLOW
DOWN, SMELL THE ROSES"*

August 8 – 11, 2016

The Three Sisters Loop in Central Oregon is a 3 to 6-day backpacking trip set in the Cascade Range among some of Oregon's prettiest peaks. I chose to add a few miles to the standard 50-mile loop by visiting Camp and Demaris Lakes to stretch it into about 60 miles. I recommend NOT doing what I did: all 60 miles in 3 days plus a few hours into day 4. Stop and smell the roses and stretch it into 5 days, maybe longer if you visit some of the lakes and mountain tops along the way.

There are lots of resources on the internet to get more information on the Sisters Loop. Google search: "sisters loop trail" ([here](#) is a good one from the [Clever Hiker](#)).

I wanted to do the Sisters Loop because it was something of an extension to my PCT adventure, with about 15 of the 50 miles on the PCT (blue dotted line until turns right at the northern apex).



DAY 1: AUGUST 8

POLE CREEK TRAILHEAD TO CAMP LAKE AND THEN TO DEMARIS LAKE

The first day was something of a trial run. That is, I didn't do but about 0.7 miles of the Sisters Loop, wanting to go to Camp Lake near the saddle of Middle and South Sisters and spend the night there. I started out at Pole Creek Trailhead and walked for about three miles (the yellow route) through the very devastating remnants of the Pole Creek Burn of 2012. I first went to Demaris Lake and found it to be quite beautiful and there was no a soul there, so figured if it was nasty or crowded at Camp Lake, then I would stay at Demaris. Demaris would be an awesome place to take Marguerite for a one-night stay.

I hiked up to Camp Lake with the weather settling in for clouds, rain and, what's that I see, a speck or two or snow. I took a few pictures of Camp Lake and hustled back down to Demaris. Still, no one was there and set up camp, ready for the rain. And, yes, it did rain during the night, but nothing too bad.

Total miles today: 13.3

I was able to get cell access so created a wall of text for my blog.

DAY 1: BLOG

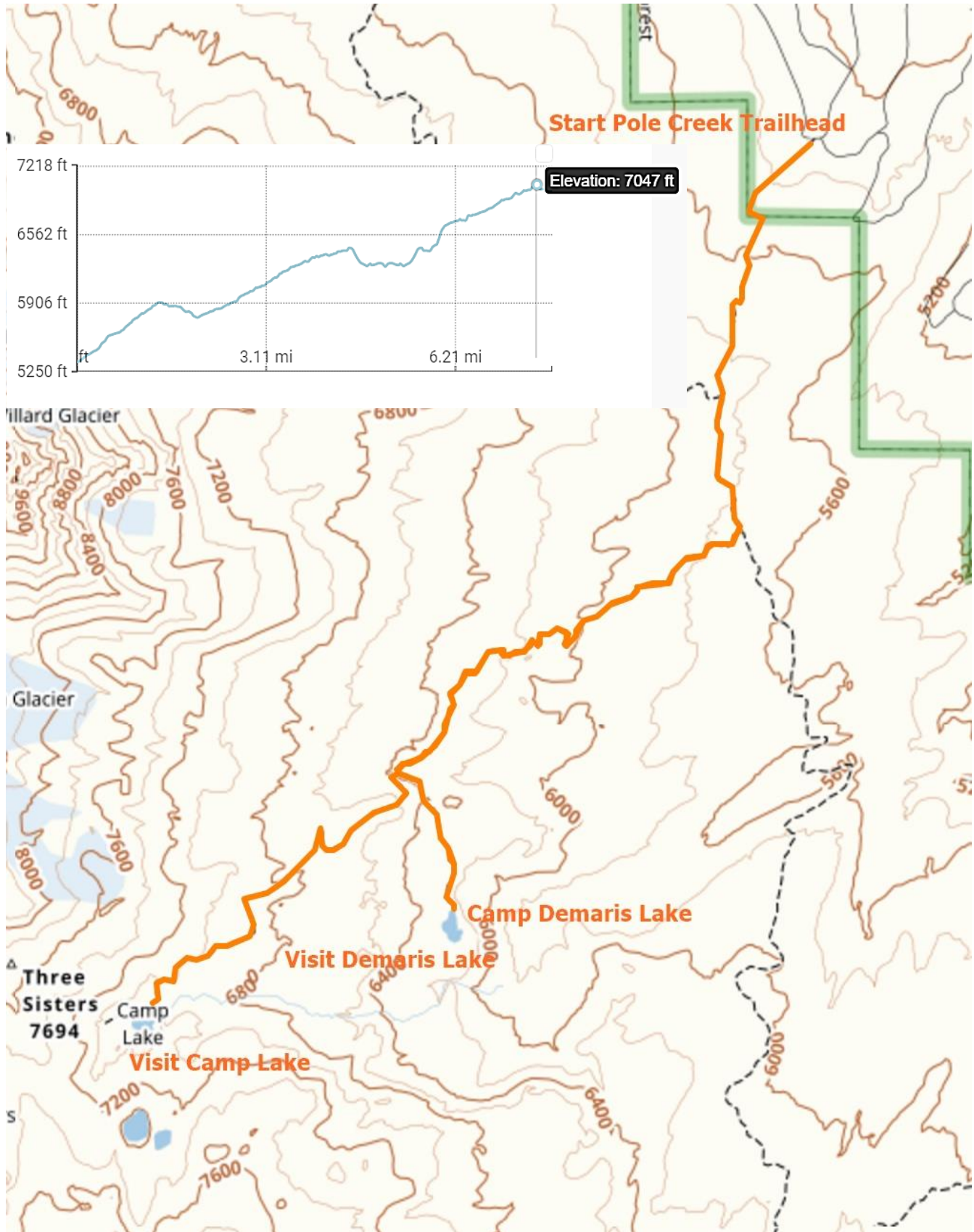
I am tired so this blog will not be very long. I am also dictating so hopefully this will turn out okay. I started at Pole Creek Trail today at 11 o'clock. For the first 3 miles I was in the pole Creek burn. It was really devastating. All trees were burned to just stumps. I then hiked to camp Lake which is at 7000 feet. It was windy and cold. There were many snow fields and I think I got snowed on once. I decided to stay at Demaris Lake. I hiked a total of 13.3 miles today. It is windy and drizzly now at camp but I am in my tent and it is warm in here. I have a beautiful view of the middle sister and if the clouds go away then it will be even better tomorrow morning. I

need to hang my bear bag tonight because I spilled peanut butter and bears probably really like peanut butter. I plan to hike 17.5 miles tomorrow to Wickiup plain. That is where we first went hiking with Elizabeth to moraine lake. I will go right by that lake and will think of Elizabeth and Marguerite on the other side of the lake when Elizabeth was 7 months old 😊. I feel good and both knees are fine. I will hit the PCT the day after tomorrow. I will try to leave a couple of pictures of the day but not too many. Talk to you tomorrow if I have cell service and I'm not too tired 😊 now I am going to read my Kindle and probably fall asleep real fast. It is 7:30.



On August 8, 2016, I started my trek around the Sisters Mountains. The trail joins the PCT so I declare it part of my PCT adventure.

DAY 1: MAP AND PICTURES





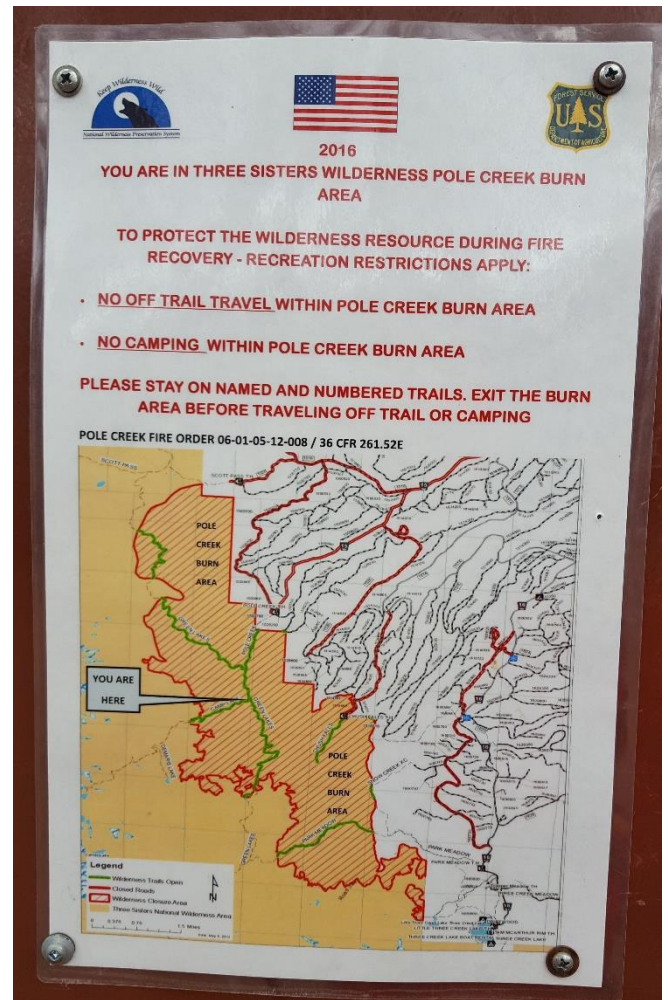
The Pole Creek Burn (2012) left much of the wilderness in charred stumps and dusty soil. Walk three miles in this from Trailhead.



Officially in the Three Sisters Wilderness now.



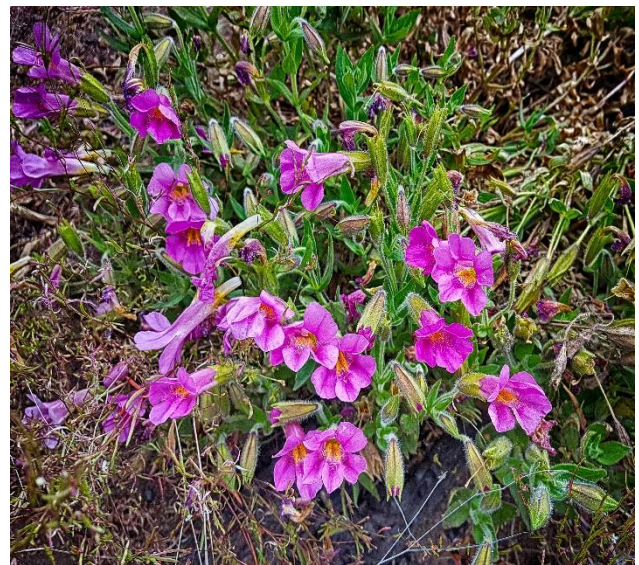
Fireweed (very pretty) is one of the first inhabitants after a devastating fire.



A picture posted on a tree about the restrictions in the burn. No camping.



Peanut M&Ms are perfect. I theorize that the peanut in the chocolate keeps the chocolate from melting. I have never had a Peanut M&M melt in the backpack. Proof positive :-).



Penstemon is common in the Pacific Northwest and an early arriver after a fire.

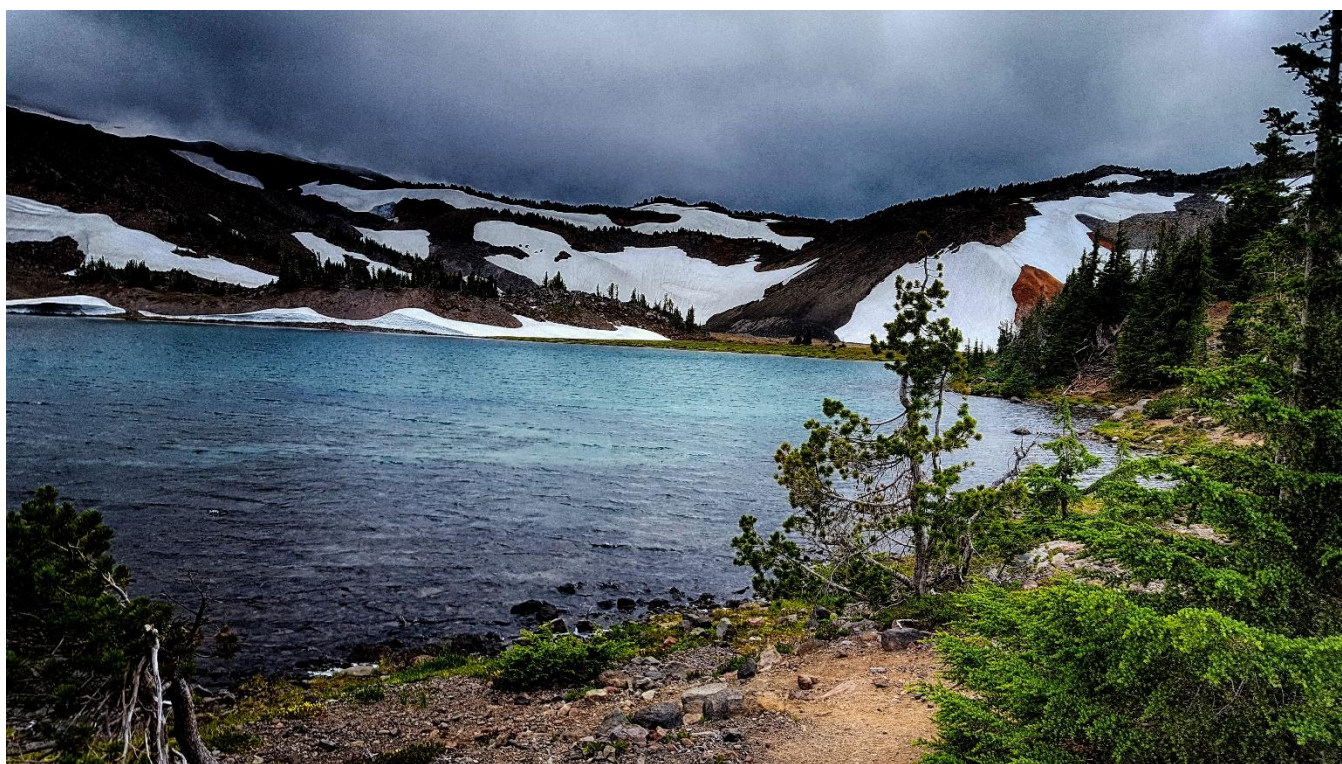
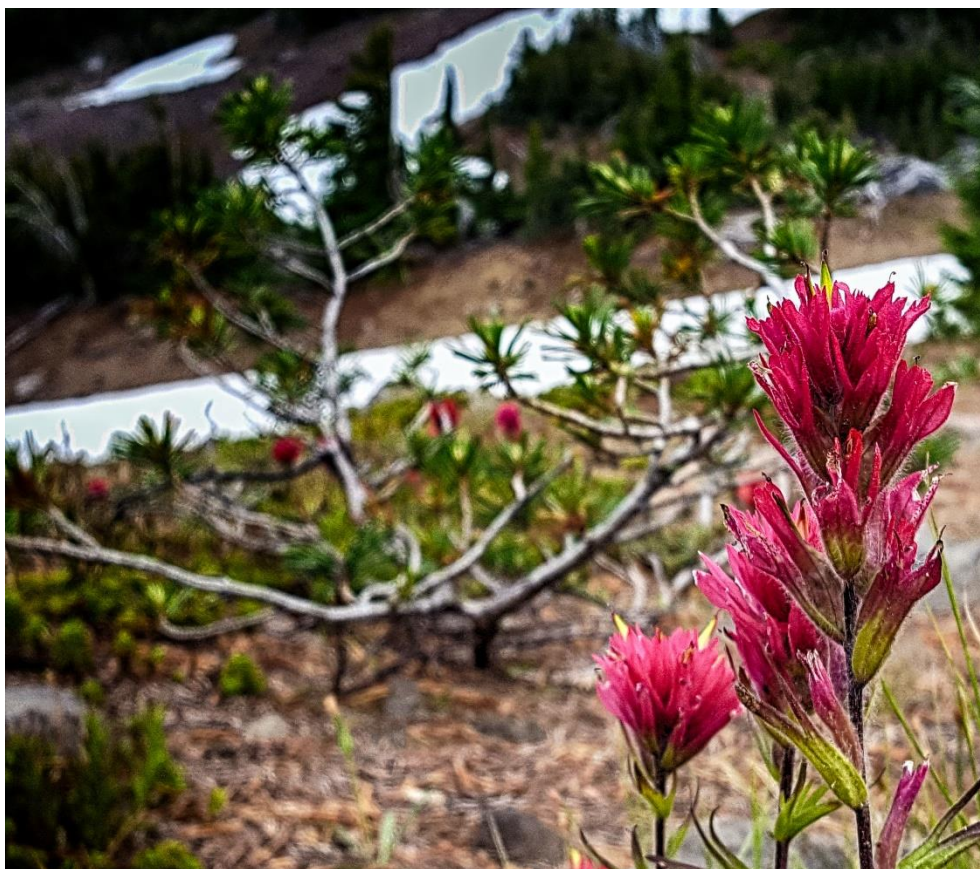


Demaris Lake is a beautiful little lake a few miles off the main trail. Day 1, I did not plan on doing any of the Sisters Loop. Day one was a warm up. So, after a visit to Camp Lake, I stayed here.



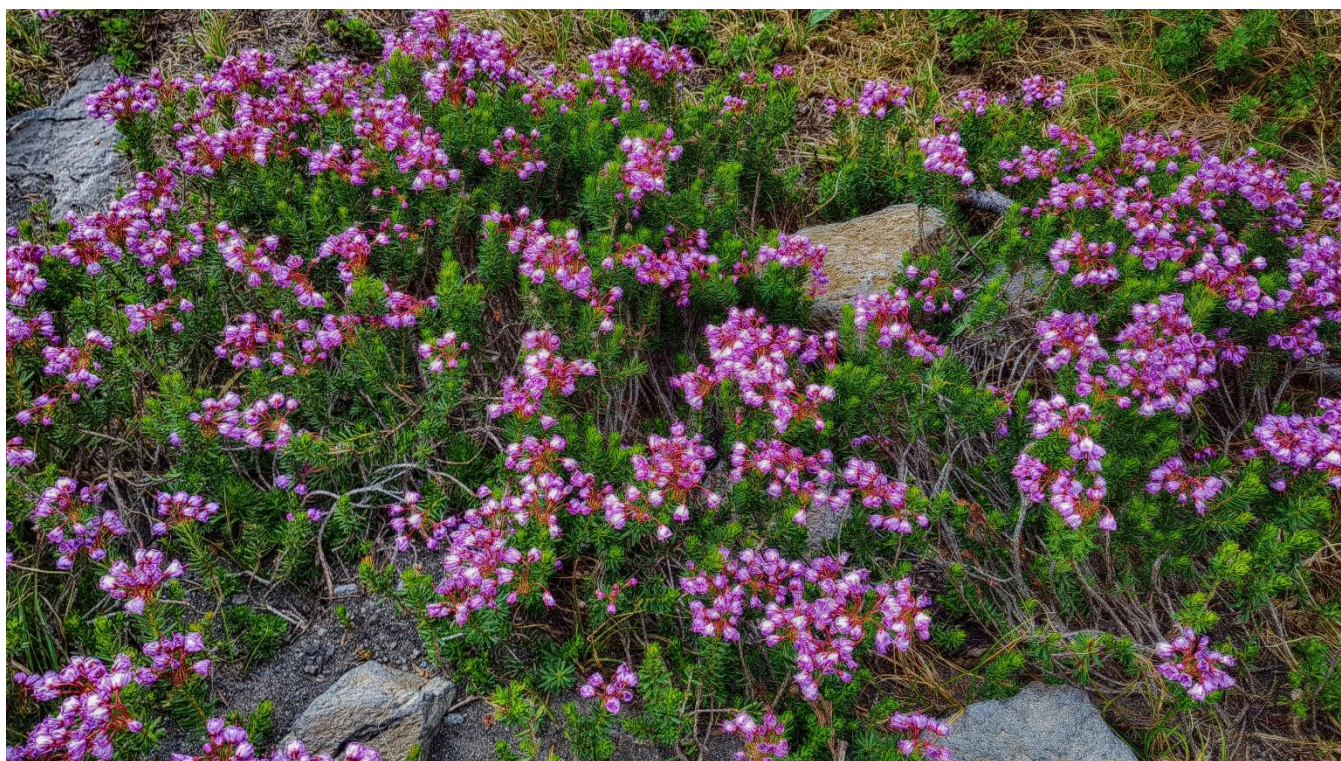
I love open-area trails like this to Camp Lake. It was not all like this, but it was wide open as the trees became sparse due to elevation.

The hike up to Camp Lake was rather chilly. As I climbed more and more snowfields appeared. It started misting a bit and darned if I saw a few snowflakes. I was taken by how flowers, especially Paintbrush and Heather can bloom very soon after the ice recedes a bit. The picture to the right is Paintbrush growing at the edge of a snowfield.



Burr...Camp Lake. Yeah, glaciers feeding that lake. No swimming here. Take a picture and get back to Demaris Lake where it is warm(er) and cozy.

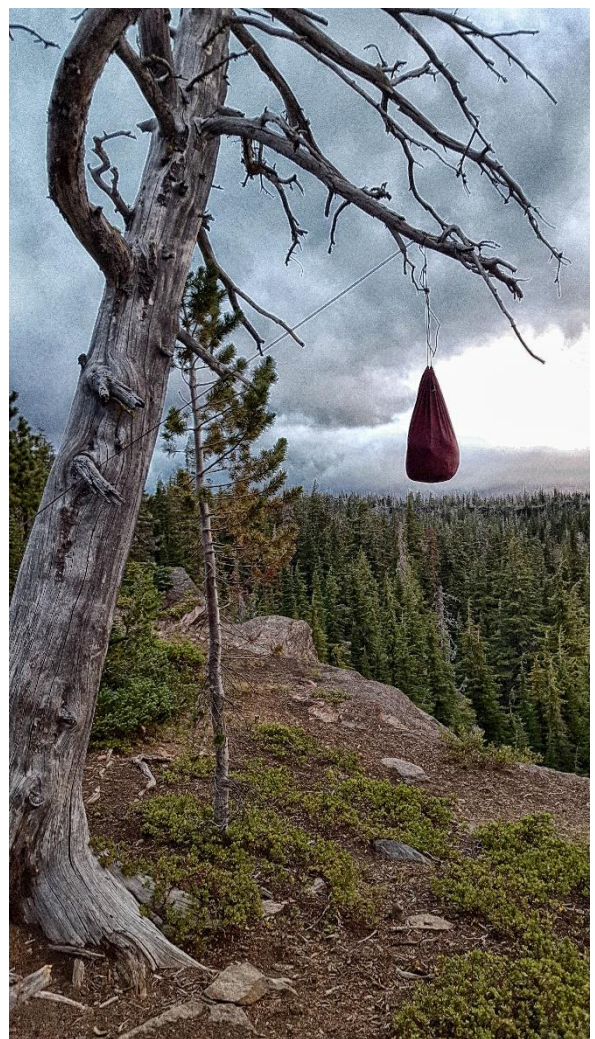
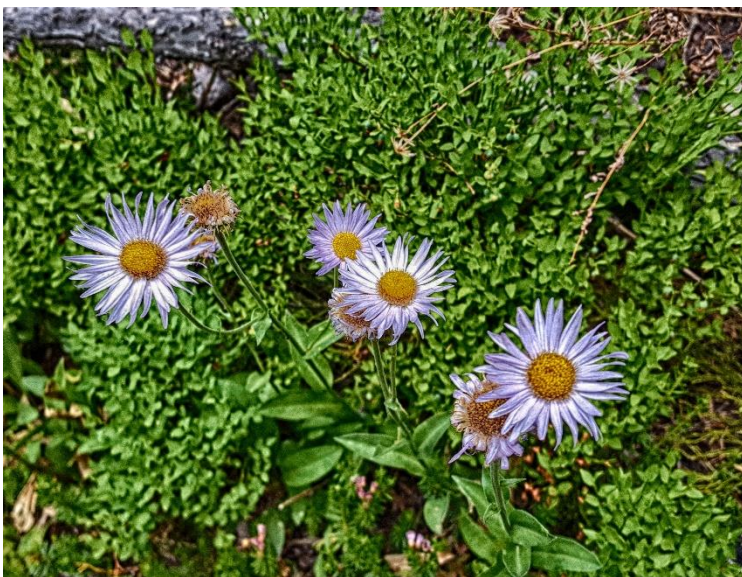
Red...I wondered why hummingbirds liked me so much. I met a guy and we were talking when a hummingbird hummed around us. He told me they like my flower-colored hat and shirt. I agreed at first and then it occurred to me that I had the Ohio State hat on – they probably like Ohio State (who doesn't?) and saw my hat and scarlet and gray colors. That's my story.



Mountain heather is so danged pretty. Definitely one of my favorites.



Back at Demaris Lake I found a good camping spot. Even had cell coverage so I could blog, but it turned out that I was too tired to blog for long. I think of things to say while I am hiking, but forget them when I settle down for the evening. I like the picture above because it is so surreal, but also rather typical of my campsites: walking pole, old fire pit, backpack where I left it and all snuggled in amongst the trees. Rather nice, in fact. I hung my bear bag of food and hit the sack. It has been a good day.



DAY 2: AUGUST 9

DEMARIS LAKE TO THE WICKIUP PLAINS

Day 2 was the first day of the main Sisters Loop. I didn't sleep well last night; my hip and back hurt most of the night so that I was rolling around trying to get comfortable most of the night. The morning was beautiful, with the rain giving way to beautiful puffy clouds and blue sky. I got a great picture of the Middle Sister from my camp. I thought that I was alone at the lake, but on my way out, I hiked about 50 yards along the rim of the lake came upon a young woman (couldn't have been over 30) that said "hello" to get my attention. Scared me, actually. She was very pleasant. She had arrived at the lake late last night, saw my camp and quietly moved off a bit so as not to bother me. Wow! She was so very quiet. We chatted a bit and discovered we were both doing the loop and in the same direction. We figured we would see each other along the trail and, indeed, we did from time to time. She was a fast hiker and we passed each other a few times.

I hiked 18 miles today, past Moraine Lake (yep, the very same one where Marguerite and Elizabeth had had their little tête-à-tête about eating 30 years ago, almost to the day. That is another story. But it made me a little sad when I walked across where we had played with our baby girl on the shore of the lake so many, but so very quick, years ago.

I walked a couple miles past Moraine Lake to the edge of the Wickiup Plains. There were supposed to be a couple of campsites at the intersection of the trail and the Wickiup Plains, but I sure couldn't find them. I had to improvise, finding a fairly flat spot big enough for my tent and a log to sit on. Good enough.



This picture of the Middle Sister from my camp at Demaris Lake is, I think, rather pretty. The sun was definitely cooperating, as was the mountain. If I could have removed that tree on the right though...

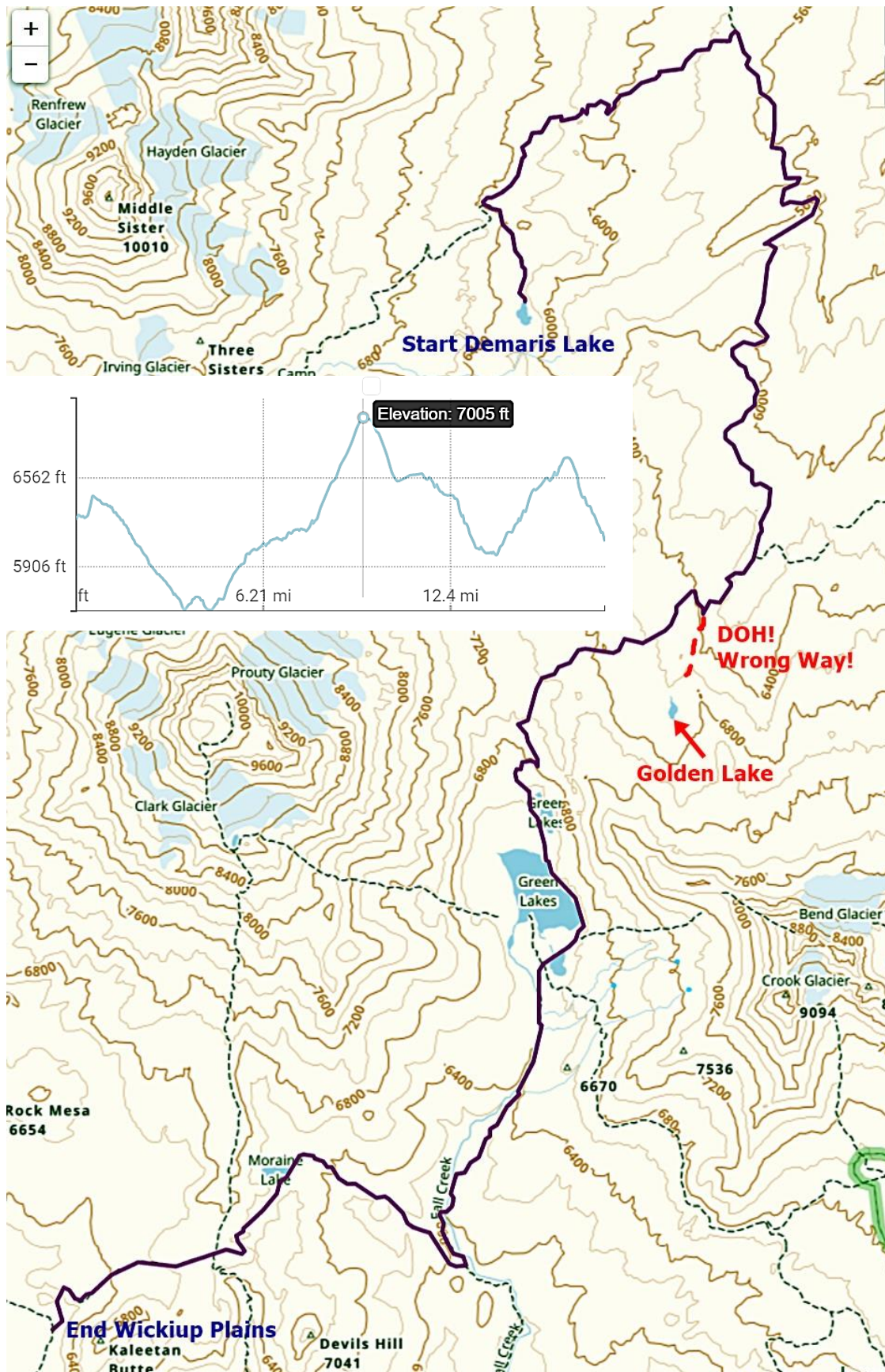
DAY 2: BLOG

Again a big blob of texts. No pictures this time because my cell service is very bad. Today I hike 18 miles and at Wickiup Plains. That is the farthest I have ever back packed in one day. Tomorrow because of circumstances not in my control, I have to hike 20 miles or maybe just 19. There is no place to camp between here and my next destination. That doesn't make any sense but I am going to leave it the way it is 😊. I saw several people on the trail today and I made friends with Erin, Katie, Brad, and Jenny. This is a train of thought so please bear with me. & I am dictating again so it might mess up 😊. Didn't sleep well last night because my hip hurt. Ibuprofen is my friend 😊. It rained on me last night but it was not too bad and I got my tent dried out before packing it for the most part. It was a stunningly beautiful morning and the South sister and the middle sister was staring right at me when I woke up. Pretty cool. I think Marguerite can go hiking to this lake and we can stay overnight. So you have a backpack tripped ahead of you Marguerite. Food is a pain in the butt. I eat it because I have to and don't like to cook but coffee is a wonderful, wonderful thing 😊 it is nice to have my Kindle and my coffee cup with me. Hummingbirds have been buzzing around me a lot and I discovered that they like my red hat. I got off trail today and was headed towards golden Lake which was the wrong way but now I think that is another good place to backpack with Marguerite. Aren't you a lucky girl? I got into the zone hiking today and hike for 4 hours straight without a break and just drinking water from my pack. It was crazy and I was almost high or something. Is there a back Packers hi the same way there is a runner's high? This trail is really pretty easy as far as backpacking in the mountains goes. I reached 7000 feet again today but it was a gradual in crying and the decline was also gradual. I wish I could post pictures of the mountains that I took. They are absolutely beautiful and I have never really seen the north and middle sisters this up clothes before. I hiked by Moraine Lake and took pictures and remembered that it was about 30 years ago to this day that Marguerite and I had our little girl on her first real hike to moraine Lake. I got just a little bit sad. As usual, I think of things to write about when I am hiking but forget them when I am at camp. I think pictures tell a bunch of words 😊 and this time I will not lose them also can post them this weekend at home if not sooner. Goodnight, & I hope I can post this. Creekgravel



Camp at Demaris Lake. No, I didn't have a fire. I rarely have a fire when backpacking. Like my little one-person tent? Bear proof..ha ha

DAY 2: MAP AND PICTURES

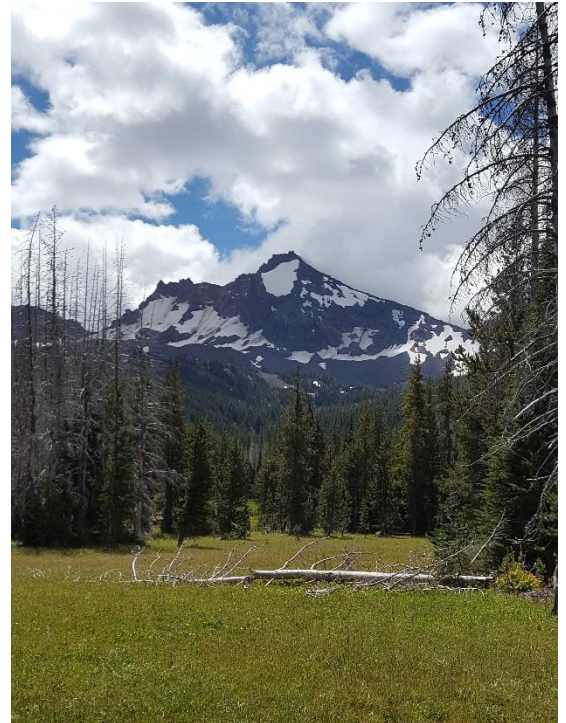




Glacial fed streams are the source of water up here. Crossing random logs can sometimes be an experience. This was pretty easy though.



A bunch of peaks. I think these are (left to right): Middle Sister, Little brother way back there and North Sister. A good photographer could spend days here.



Left: My two favorites living side-by-side: Heather and Paintbrush.

Above: Broken Top



It is pretty cool to have the trail always having a mountain **JUST RIGHT THERE.**



The only above-the-lake view I could get of Green Lakes. They are beautiful, but very busy with people, especially on weekends.

It was about here, at Green Lakes, that I was starting to feel the burn just a bit. I stopped, had some water and a bit of GORP, some jerky and an energy bar. My back was hurting so I took some ibuprofen. I started walking and powered through, almost with a “runner’s high” (but in this case backpacker’s high) all the way to Moraine Lake. Felt good.



Green Lakes and the South Sister. I rather like this picture.



That is lava flow from the South Sister. The water is stunningly clear.



30 years ago Marguerite and Elizabeth had their little fight about eating (Marguerite wanted Elizabeth to nurse and Elizabeth would have none of it) right over there at the far left dark spot on the shore of Moraine Lake.



Pussypaws and go right at the sign – you can't miss it.



Lookin' good, very good. That is, the mountain is lookin' good, not that old man.



Camp 2 at the edge of the Wickiup Plains. There were supposed to be a couple of sites earlier on, but I sure didn't see them. Low impact, don't disturb anything. Put the tent down and no fires.

DAY 3: AUGUST 10

WICKIUP PLAINS TO ALDER CREEK

FROM THE BLOG

I don't think I ever want to do 23 miles again in one day with a 40 lb. pack on my back – period. Ouch! I only wanted to do 20 (doable) miles to Yapoah Lake but couldn't find the unmarked trail (I guess that's why it's called 'unmarked'). So, the next spot to camp with water (I was running low on water too) was Alder Creek, another 3 miles down the trail. It was getting dark so I had to high-tail it, but made it by about 7:45 in time to eat, hang the bear bag and go to bed. The sound of Alder Creek was a beautiful lullaby though, so it was not all so bad. Still, no more 23 mile days!

Wednesday not only included 23 miles, but there was the climb of Opie Dilldock Pass (4500 feet to 6900 feet). That really isn't that bad, but the volcanic scree from Collier is one of those take-one-step-slide-halfway-back things.

But the start of the day was at about 2:00 AM at my campsite at the edge of the Wickiup Plain. Gorgeous Stars! I was sleeping (sort of – didn't sleep very well the entire trip). Something growled. Having been half awake anyway, I jolted alert. What is that? I listened...in the distance, towards my hanging bear bag, a growling sound, a rumble and what one could describe as claws scraping at a bear bag...*mommy!* I had hung my bear bag a good 50 yards away, so I figured I would be desert, not the main course. I should have hung the bag 100 yards away the way you are supposed to, but sheesh! 100 yards? That means a trip to hang it, a trip back to camp, then a trip to the bag in the morning and then back to camp. That is 400 yards! I'm gonna count that as part of my total mileage! I digress...

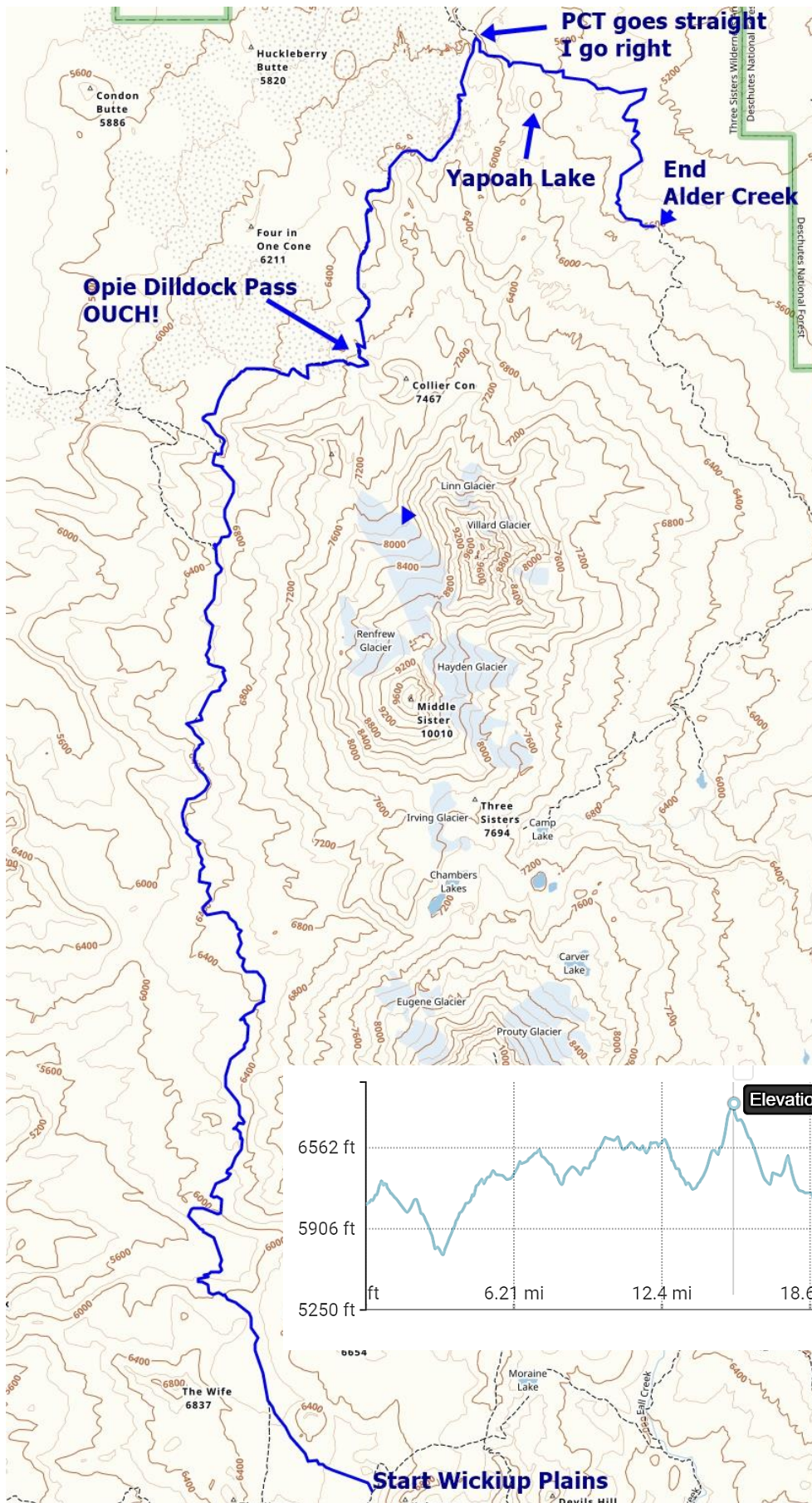
I leaned up on my elbow, listening. Sure enough, another growl and, yep, sounds like it is coming from my bear bag. Sure glad I have this 2-pound mesh tent between that bear and me – surely, he can't get through that...right. I yelled, "Get out! Boo!" Yeah, I figured on scaring him. I searched for my trusty knife, the one with the one-inch blade...yeah, gonna have to go Daniel Boone all over this bear's butt if he gets close.

I listened...quiet...then, right beside my tent! Rumble, rumble, rumble...growl, growl, growl... Yes, the hair on the back of my neck was definitely standing. I yelled again. quiet...then, as if the beast was timing its growls to my gyrations and yells...rumble, growl. But the intensity was about the same as it had been when I first heard the monster gnawing and pawing at my bear bag. Weird...Growl, rumble...in the tent with me!

I leaned towards the middle of the tent, doubling up so my head was over my chest and stomach...growl, rumble...my stomach! It's my stupid stomach!

Yep, the growls and rumbles had somehow thrown themselves into the night to sound as if they were coming from towards the bear bag...then just outside...and then in my tent. I guess maybe I should be eating a bit more and cooking might not be such a bad idea after all.

Sorry about that... 😊 ...but it's true. It is funny the things your mind does when you are on the edge of nowhere.





A cold morning over the Wickiup Plains. It was downright chilly and there might have been some frost here and there.

The objective of all this hiking this summer of 2016 is to celebrate my retirement by beginning my long-awaited trek of the Pacific Crest Trail. The intent is to do the entire thing but over several years. This Sisters Loop hike has only about 15 miles PCT and 45 other trails (around the Sisters Mountains). But, on day three, most of the hike was on the PCT. I met a few thru hikers along the way. I think it might take more than a few years to do it, but I will keep trying, but maybe with some other stuff thrown in, like the Sisters Loop and biking around the country. ☺



Below: Wickiup Plains in the morning.





Yeah, I really like wildflowers. The best bouquets I have ever seen are the ones that nature made. There are five varieties here if you count the little succulent that doesn't seem to be flowering, just adding its green.

Water,
water,
water...
Yay Water!
Yeah, I filter
this, but
probably
don't have to.
But giardia
is real, so
don't take a
chance
unless you
find it
coming
straight out
of the
ground...
wait for it...



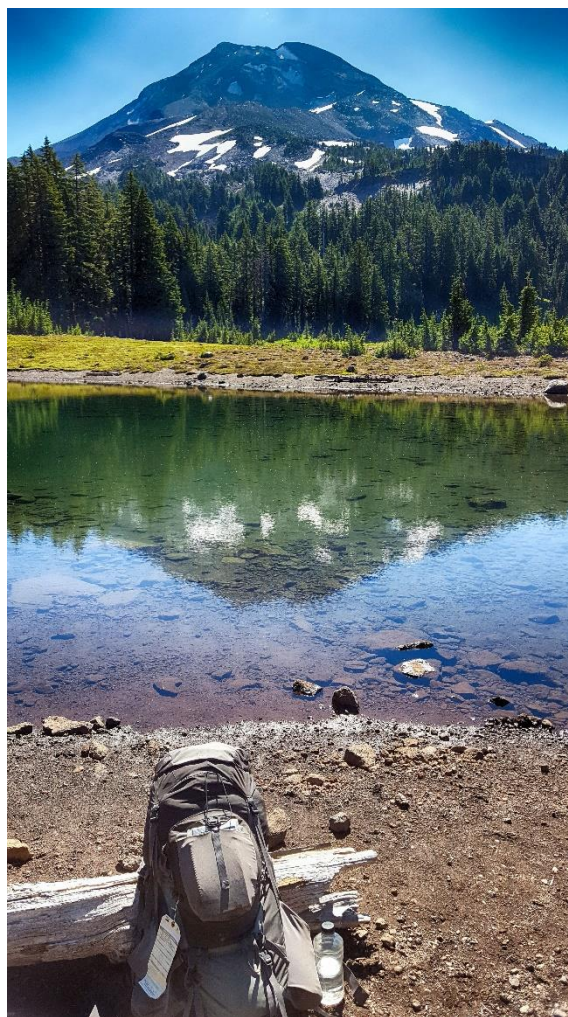
I saw several little notes like this along the trail. Folks backpacking together will sometimes get separated a bit, so leave notes like this. I hope those that find them pick the paper up...I suspect they do.



Lupine Meadows were prolific on the morning of day 3, on the east side of the mountains.

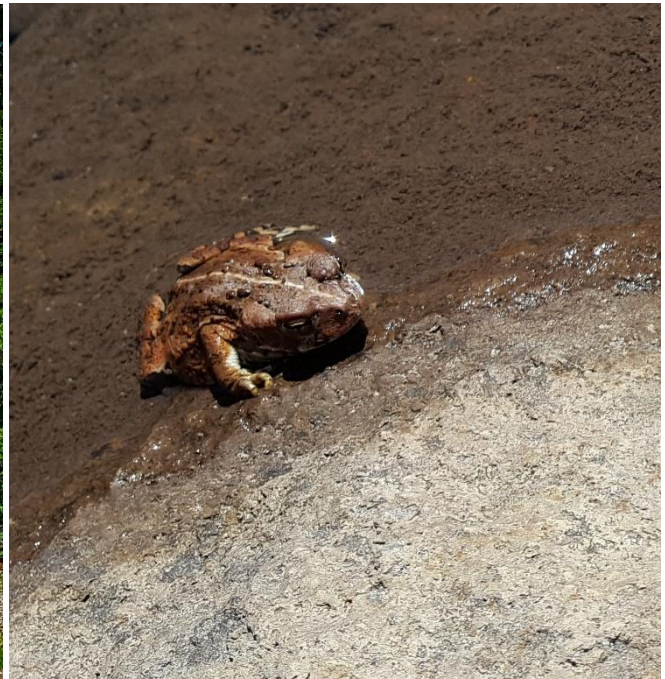


Above: Really like this picture. Right: Little Reese lake was a welcome rest stop.

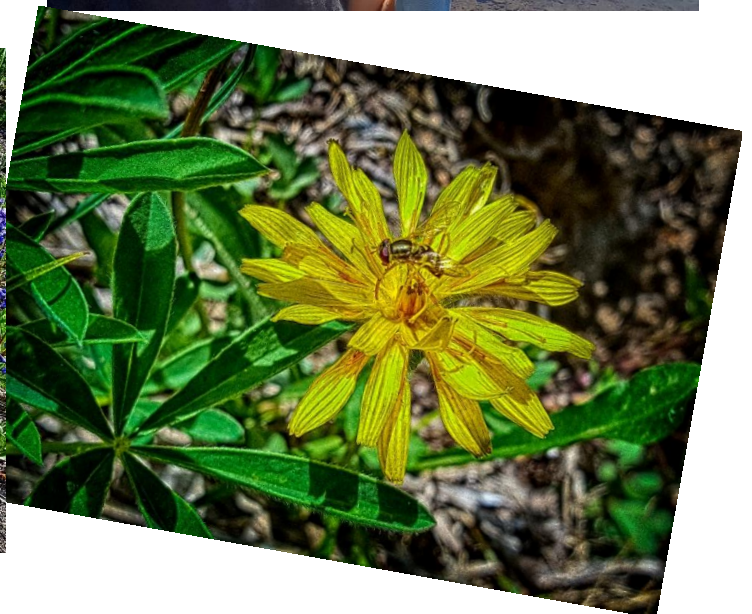




One of my favorite pictures of all time, for some reason that I can't quite put my finger on.



One does get a bit dirty. Reese lake was a great place to clean off a bit with my little buddy. We shared the same rock.





The trail to Opie Dilldock Pass



Bouquet and Creek - I like wildflowers. I should create some sort of wildflower picture and tracking them somewhere on my website. Yep, that is a good winter project: take all my flower photographs, identify the flowers and put them on my website. Call it Rod's Flowers.



Lava, lava everywhere! This, I think, is all from the North Sister as I approach Collier Dome





Mt. Washington, Three Finger Jack and Mt. Jefferson

Approaching the pass. This was the hardest part of the hike, going up that pass. Yep, that is trail way up there, heading towards Opid Dilldock Pass and Collier Cone. It was the hardest part of the entire hike (all 60 miles), but worth the extra effort. I just wish it hadn't been on my 23-mile day.

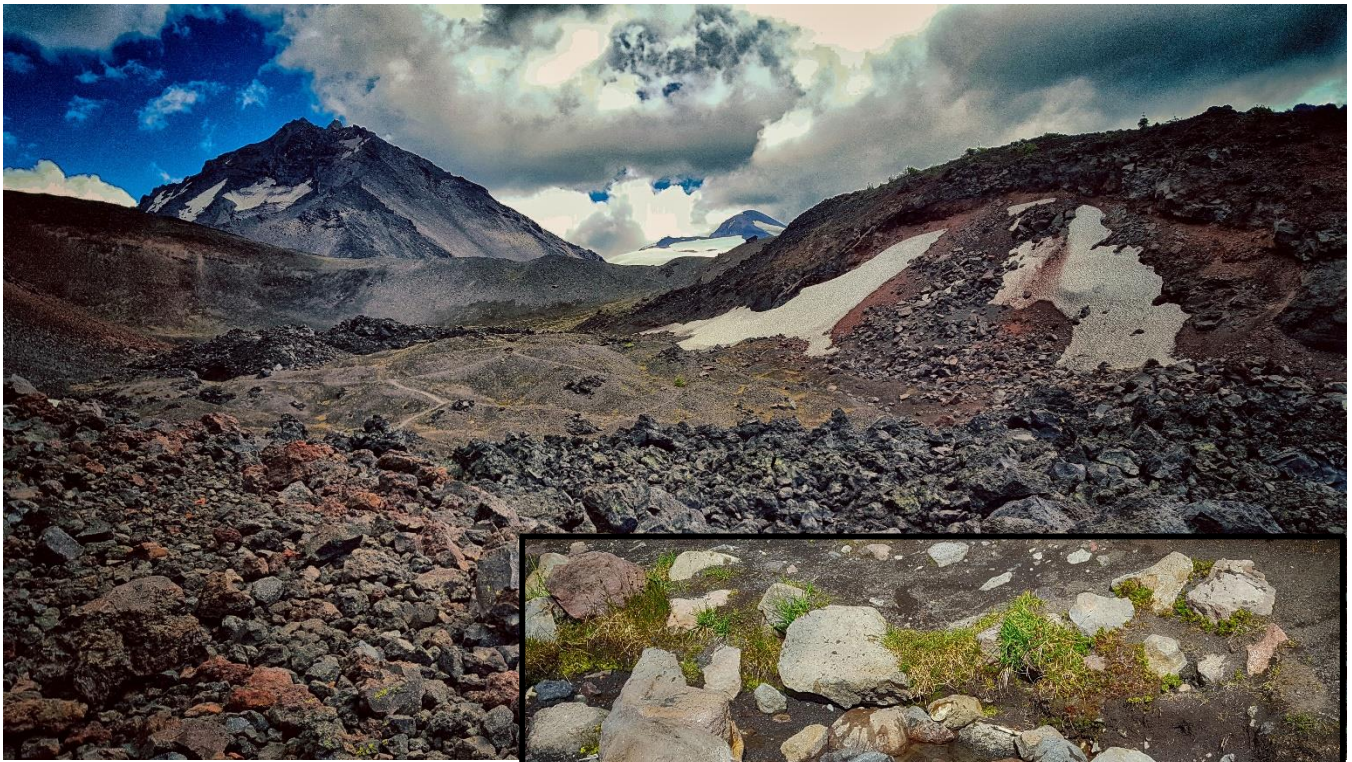




Just put one foot in front of the other and before long you are at the top...



...and you can take a selfie of you and your accomplishment.



Above: North Sister, Lava Scree and Ice Fields

Right: Minnie Scott Spring. The water is coming up right out of the ground. Nope, don't need to filter that. Drink deep and fill up your water bottles. First round is on Minnie Scott.



North Sister is watching.



DAY 4: AUGUST 11 ALDER CREEK TO POLE CREEK TRAILHEAD

FROM THE BLOG

The hike out was only six miles and all in the Pole Creek burn area. Truly a devastating fire. I like the hike even though it was in the burn area. I wasn't in a big hurry and could take my time. Began my walk as the sun came up. It was so very quiet and peaceful. Great way to end a hike.

Lessons Learned

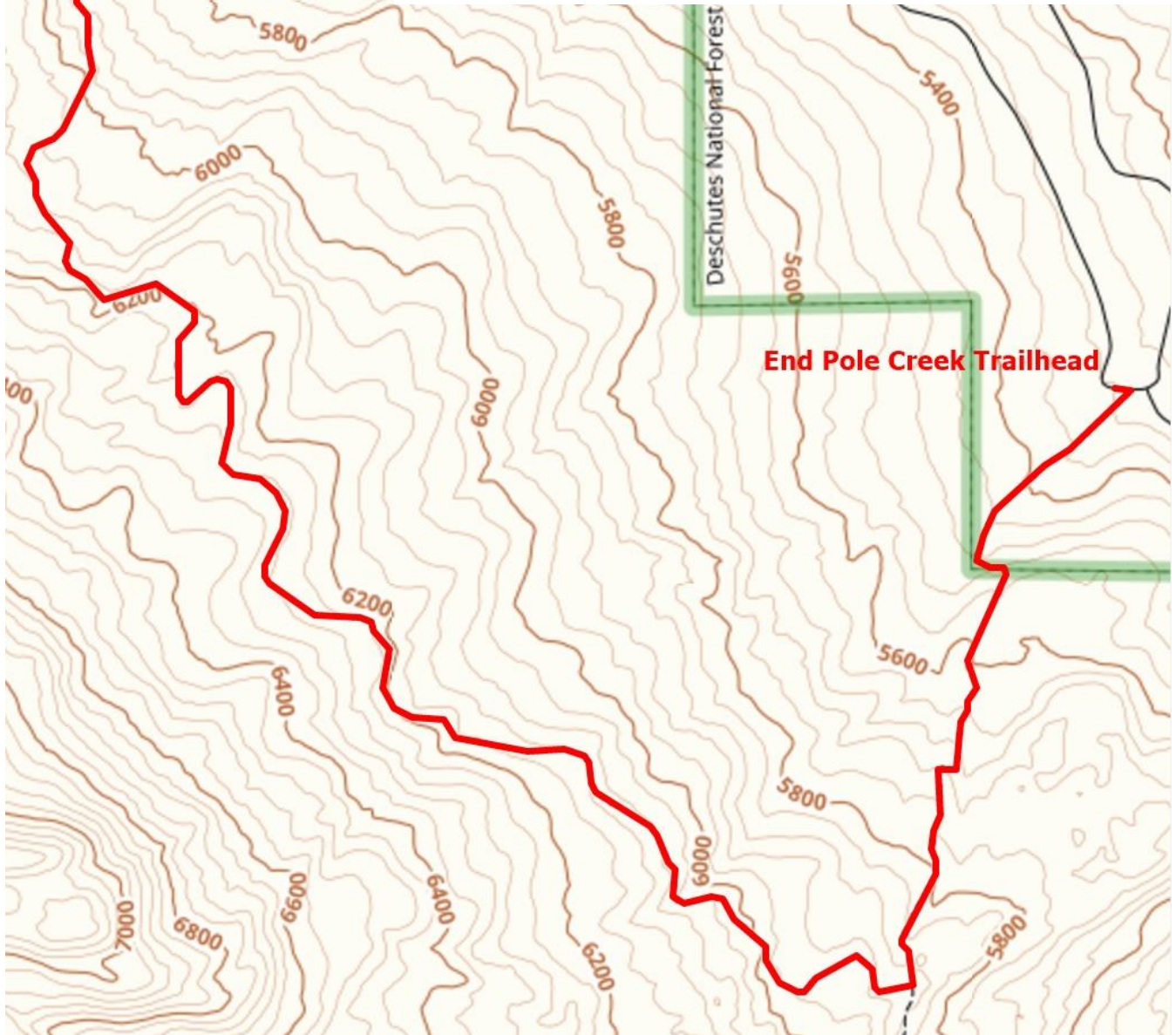
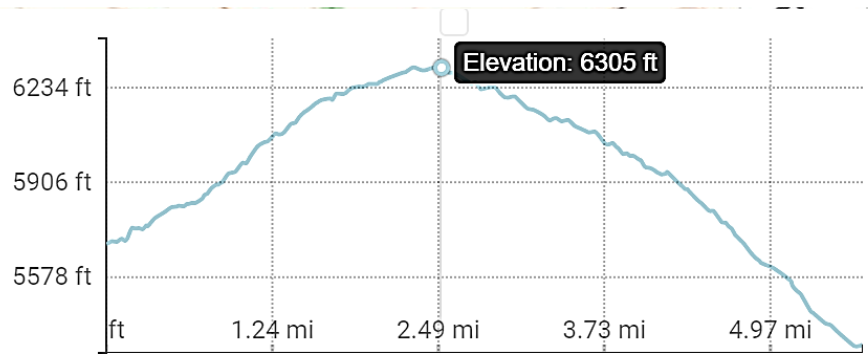
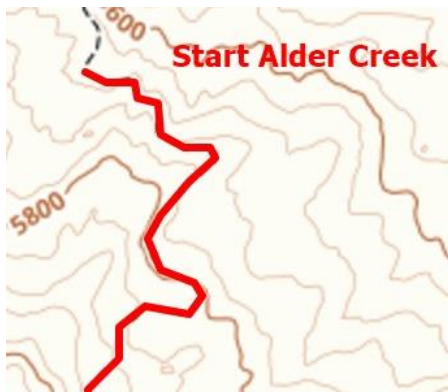
- The biggest lesson learned will be written up in my ponderment of the trip (coming). A hint is that I am not sure if I will make the entire PCT. It is not that I can't physically do it, rather, it is a *slow-down-and-smell-the-roses* thing, and, there are more roses than those found on the PCT. But I will continue to do the PCT, maybe just not all of it. Ponderment will tell it all.
- Eat and Cook! Although I don't like cooking, I think I am going to cook anyway. It gives me a routine at the end of the day. And, hot food can be pretty nice. When I got gas in Sisters on the way back, I smelled some hot sandwiches – I think my knees literally buckled at that smell, it was so good.
- Don't hike more than 18 to 20 miles in a day and try to average about 15. 15 is pretty easy, just put one foot in front of the other. At 15 miles a day, you can take your time to smell the roses...and there are a bunch of roses out there to smell.
- Each step I take is a step closer to home. That one is rather tied into the ponderment as well.

To Do

- Ponderment of the trip. In another blog.
- Bought some cool software for photo blogging – more pictures to come using that software. I didn't lose them this time
- Updated Gear and Food lists

Good Morning Sister: Only six miles to hike out this morning. Take it slow, listen to the quiet, smell the roses, make each step be meaningful and ponder...that's the way to backpack.





So, at the end of the 3rd day, there was very little left of me other than a pair of walking sticks – the only part that didn't feel broken and worn away. I had told myself that I was going to walk all the way to the car, thinking it was not allowed to camp at Alder Creek because it was in the Pole Creek Burn, and you can't camp in the burn. But when I saw some other folks there, they basically convinced me that it would be wiser to stay here for the night. Good choice, although it would have been cool – only a little – to have walked nearly 30 miles in one day. But now, as I sit here typing this about ten days later, my back still hurts (need a new pack or adjust the one I have AND make my pack lighter) and I feel a little broken. I am going to continue the PCT, but I may not finish it all. That is okay; I would rather slow down and do a few other things and not let the PCT be one driving force. I am going to bike, hike loop trails, and continue the PCT, but just perhaps not all of it...unless I can find someone to do it with. I don't like the lonely...



