

# Robinson Lake is a short ticket to serene wilderness

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Many of us have our own places in the mountains that have special meaning. One reader and long-time *Nugget* subscriber, a California resident named Ricks Mattson, contacted me to share just such a special spot. The place is Robinson Lake, a not-too-distant wilderness site that I was completely unfamiliar with. Mattson proposed to his late wife at Robinson Lake, and he still returns there to honor her memory.

So, to follow up on this tip, I first had to locate the place. Robinson Lake can be found just off Highway 126 on the way to Eugene, a few miles below Sahalie and Koosah Falls on the McKenzie River. I spotted it on the map just inside the western edge of the boundary to the Mt. Washington Wilderness Area. My first impression was that it would be a fairly substantial hike to reach the lake, but then I noticed that a road penetrates the forest to within about a quarter mile of the site. As it turns out, the road has an excellent smooth gravel base suitable for all types of vehicles.

We arrived at the trailhead to find a profusion of Indian paintbrush flowers and an equestrian club forming up to begin an overnight trek into

the region; so this is a suitable trail for equestrians, as well. As it turned out, though, we didn't see the horses on the trail until we were returning and nearly back to the trailhead. Apparently, they took a little longer to get organized than we foot travelers.

After obtaining our free wilderness permit at the trailhead kiosk, we plunged into the woods but didn't make it very far because we immediately encountered a dense patch of ripe huckleberries. As a result, we were a little slow in making much progress toward the lake; but the berries were very good. Not surprisingly, given our warm dry conditions, the huckleberries are early this year.

The forest path to the lake is very easy, short, and pleasant. As we approached the lake, a trail sign appeared at a fork in the path; and the lake itself is a short distance up the left fork. Surrounded by a mature, green, mixed-conifer forest, Robinson Lake is beautiful and serene. It's easy to see how it came to play such a prominent role in Mattson's life and take such an important place in his heart.

Although we did encounter some other hikers along the trail, we saw no one else at the lake during our stop there. My hiking friend seems to have propensities similar to

those of a water spaniel and was in the water for a swim within minutes of our arrival; so further exploration was temporarily delayed.

Since the day was still young, and we had plenty of energy left, we elected to explore farther up the trail and visit nearby Kuitan Lake. Even with adding this additional destination to our itinerary, the resultant hike was still not much more than a three-mile round trip. The trail to Kuitan Lake passes through a lush and stately forest that brings to mind the often-cited image of a woodland cathedral.

Except for one long switchback (shortly after leaving Robinson Lake) that gains about 150 feet of elevation, the trail to Kuitan Lake is mostly flat and in good condition. After about a mile and a half, keep an eye out for a fairly well-established user trail on the left. Previous travelers had thoughtfully constructed a small rock cairn at trailside to further mark the side trail. Staying on the main trail here would take the hiker toward Hand Lake and the Old McKenzie Highway (242), a distance of about seven more miles – one way.

The trail into Kuitan Lake is a little longer and much fainter than the trail fork leading to Robinson Lake. The trail becomes even more

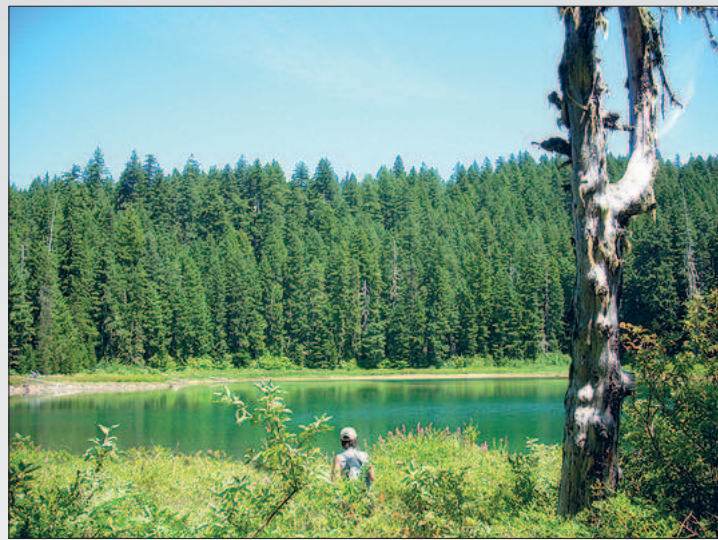


PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Robinson Lake is a special place for hikers.

difficult to trace when it skirts fallen trees, which will not be cleared since this is not an "official" trail. Kuitan is another pretty little wilderness lake that is even smaller than the more oft-frequented Robinson Lake.

These charming little wilderness lakes do not seem to be very well known to Sisters hikers. My thanks to Ricks Mattson for sharing his experiences and knowledge of the trail into Robinson Lake, thereby introducing the rest of us to a fine gem in our local wilderness. "It is a very spiritual place," Mattson said, "and time seems to stand still when I am there."

Perhaps a visit to Robinson Lake will make this destination a special place for you,

too. To reach the trailhead to Robinson Lake, take Highway 20 west from Sisters to the Santiam "Y." Take the left fork to stay on Highway 20 for a little over three miles, then take the next left fork to turn toward Eugene on Highway 126. From there, it's about eight more miles (past Sahalie and Koosah Falls) to a turnoff on the left, Forest Road 2664, which is conveniently also named "Robinson Lake Road." A conventional green street sign marks the road. This fine gravel road leads 4.4 miles to the trailhead. There were no signs requiring a forest parking pass, but free wilderness passes are required and available at the trailhead kiosk.

## Quilt Raffle for FURRY FRIENDS FOUNDATION

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The quilt is currently on display at The Nugget office, 442 E. Main Ave. Bring your pup by for a dog cookie and have a look!

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Drawing will be held Monday, September 7, 2015.

100% of the proceeds go to Furry Friends Foundation.

Tickets are \$1 each, six for \$5 or go for it, 25 for \$20.

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"No, No!" by Valerie Fercho-Tillery | 44" x 62"