

Has Lost Lake gone missing?

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

Most local travelers know that Lost Lake lies along that low, flat stretch of Highway 20 between Santiam Pass and the Santiam “Y.” I’ve always thought it a bit odd that such a conspicuously located feature should be named as “lost.” Lately, however, it *does* seem to be lost.

I had seen recent reports that, in this year of extreme drought, Lost Lake’s water was being lost through a big drain hole into a subterranean lava tube. So I decided to investigate it, myself. I didn’t expect it to be much of a “hike,” and it wasn’t. I guess I’d characterize it as more of a “wander.” Still, since we didn’t know exactly where the hole was, we covered a couple of miles as we wandered in search of it.

After about 40 minutes of aimless wandering, we finally found it. If you want to investigate for yourself, I can save you some wandering by reporting that the much-celebrated drain is on the south side of the “lake” remnant about three quarters of the way toward the east end.

Being on the south side places the hole between the highway and what remains of the lake. During our wander, we discovered quite a bit of marshy ground and three little streams flowing into the lake’s basin. The principal stream, of course, is Lost Lake Creek. The other two

are spring-fed from the east.

Reaching the drain hole requires crossing bogs and streams; but, if you are patient, you can pick your way across on logs or grass hummocks and remain dry. We did! But it added quite a bit of distance to the wander.

The hole itself is not all that big — maybe eight or 10 feet across; and it’s not all that deep, either. Flowing in on the west side of the hole, the water just sort of disappears down into the north side of the hole. Also, the amount of water going down the drain right now appears to be quite a bit less than the amount flowing into the lake basin. So, evaporation and further seepage are also taking a toll.

For the most part, though, the lake really is pretty much “lost.” There just isn’t much of it left. In wandering over the lake bottom, I was pleasantly surprised to see a minimal amount of trash on the bottom of the lake. A few bottles, a golf ball, and a small propeller were the highlights. I kept the golf ball.

A hopeful osprey circled overhead during our entire visit. Any remaining fish in the lake would be easy prey in the shallow water, but we did not see any success on the osprey’s part. A heron was also shopping, but there wasn’t much action there either. Canada geese were busy eating something, and we decided that their quarry may have been little toadlets



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

This year’s extreme drought has made the lava tube drain hole in Lost Lake much more apparent.

or froglets that were leaping around with every step we took. There wasn’t much else on the baked-dry and deeply cracked lake bottom where the geese were busy pecking away at the surface. I read that geese, although principally herbivores, occasionally eat insects, fish, and tadpoles. It wouldn’t be much of a leap (was that a pun?) for them to chow down on fully metamorphosized tadpoles.

The geology and hydrology of the Cascade Mountains is such that the disappearance of surface water into the porous lava

rock, including lava tubes, is a standard premise. That water from the melting Cascade snows suddenly bubbles back to the surface, at lower elevations, from springs and streams all over the western part of Central Oregon. One of the most conspicuous examples, of course, is the dramatic birth of the Metolius River from Cascade waters that have long ago seeped underground.

Fish Lake, off Highway 126 just past the turnoff to Eugene, is an excellent and prominent example of surface water disappearing into the

lava substrata only to appear later, farther downhill — in this case, in the McKenzie River. Each year, Fish Lake normally fills in the spring and is dry by summer. Due to this year’s drought, however, Fish Lake was dry while it was still spring.

Typically, water is always draining out of Lost Lake into the lava tube beneath it; but, in this ultra-dry year, this phenomenon is exaggerated and much more visible. If you would like to check it out for yourself, Lost Lake is 24 miles west of Sisters on Highway 20.



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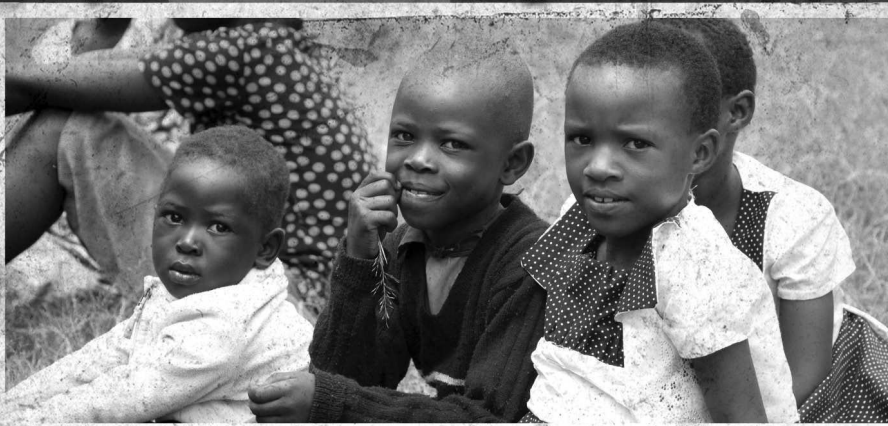
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