

# Three Fingered Jack tarn reflects impact of drought

By Craig F. Eisenbeis  
Correspondent

I was traveling in Germany when I received an email from a reader lamenting the condition of the scenic little mountain lake, or tarn, on the eastern slopes of Three Fingered Jack. “The beautiful glacial-colored moraine lake up at the overlook spot was a sludgy mud hole that looked brown...,” she said. She blamed it on this year’s lack of snow and the continued hot, dry weather. I told her I would check it out when I returned to Sisters.

Interestingly, I was experiencing the same hot, dry weather in Europe. Travel guidebooks said to expect cool wet weather as the norm, and we packed accordingly. Except for one drizzly day in Cologne and some rain on the day of our departure from Budapest, every day was hot and dry, with temperatures in the 90s. Record heat and shrinking waterways that brought river commerce to a standstill were the topic of European headlines.

While winging our way home, one of the things on

my mind was hiking up to see the disappointing mud hole on Three Fingered Jack.

The last leg of our return trip flew directly over the Warm Springs fire, and we could see much of the state completely blanketed in smoke — a circumstance that would contribute to a lack of enthusiasm on the part of potential hiking partners to visit the tarn. Nevertheless, I made it up there last week, and what I found was a sharp contrast to other visits to the tarn.

Even before reaching the tarn, however, it was obvious that things were quite different from previous years. There was no snow, at all. Except for a tiny remnant, the snowfield on the flanks of Three Fingered Jack was just plain gone. Any case for the survival of the Three Fingered Jack “glacier” was quite definitely dismissed.

After struggling up the steep and loose rock of the former glacier’s moraine, I could see that my friend’s report on the sad condition of the tarn was quite accurate. A much shallower, brown puddle would be the

best way to describe what remains of the tarn this year.

Most of the upper portion of Canyon Creek, usually fed by melting snows, was completely dry. The celebrated lush wildflower meadows of Canyon Creek were reduced to shriveled, dry, brown sticks and leaves. The occasional surviving flower, and we saw only a handful on the entire hike, was a peculiar cause for excitement. Even the ubiquitous lupine — usually still resplendent in September, or even October — was completely spent.

On the plus side of the ledger, there were many fewer hikers in the area than I am accustomed to seeing. When I was there in June, the parking area at the trail-head overflowed with more than 30 cars. Last week, only about a half-dozen were present.

Another high point of the hike was the fact that we were lucky enough to see a bear on our way out. When it saw us, the young black bear hightailed it out of there as fast as its little legs could manage.

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PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

The turquoise-green tarn on the slopes of Three Fingered Jack is seen here in September of 2011.



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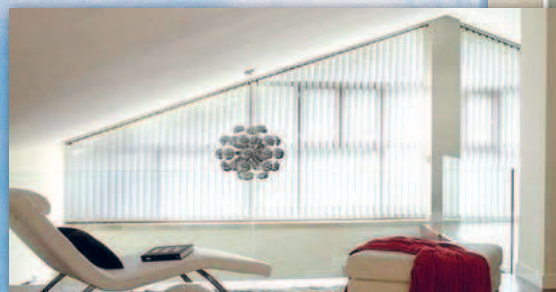
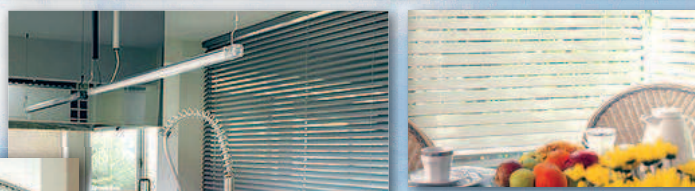
August 2015. The lack of snow in the Cascades is evident in the drastically changed condition of Three Fingered Jack’s tarn.

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