Finding the hidden secrets of Yapoah Lake

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

Yapoah Lake turned out to be a little bit of a mystery for me, and there are probably some folks out there who would have preferred that it remain that way. This remote little lake came to my attention when a reader contacted me hoping that I could help her find it. I told her that I didn't have a clue, but I'd be glad to help her look.

She explained that, about 20 years ago, she had been a volunteer in the Forest Service's Passport in Time project. At that time, anthropology students from Portland State University were camped at the lake and engaged in a project there. She had hiked in each day to assist.

"I've remained curious about the lake," she said, "and now would love to explore the area."

She was hoping to lead her current hiking group into the lake. The only problem was that she couldn't remember how to find it.

I asked around and mostly earned blank looks, but one person remembered something about a marked tree along the Scott Pass Trail. So, one day last fall, we set out to see if we could find the lake. We didn't — but had an interesting time trying. We found the marked tree and spent several hours beating brush and crawling over logs. Finally, we decided that we'd had enough and headed back.

I originally thought that we'd gone too far west and accidentally circled around the lake, since we eventually emerged farther south on the Green Lakes Trail. As I learned later, though, we hadn't gone far enough west!

Looking for an interesting hike a couple of weeks ago, I thought it might be fun to give it another shot. The lake is obvious on any map; it's southwest of the junction of the Scott Pass and Green Lakes Trails. For some reason, though, the location of the access trail seemed shrouded in secrecy; and the Forest Service offered no help, either. I suggested the exploratory hike to a friend and received an enthusiastic "let's go" response, so off we went.

The hike into this area has never been exactly a scenic wonder, and the Pole Creek Fire certainly didn't help. Even before the fire, this portion of the Scott Pass Trail was mostly bug-killed lodgepole pine forest. Some of this area was not burned, but that is not immediately evident because it's mostly dead, anyway. Our destination, on the other hand, well … that's an entirely different story.

The trail is in good condition, but the forest is extremely dry right now. This hike totals about five or six miles, depending on how much wandering and exploring you do. We saw deer and elk tracks; and equestrians, with whom we talked on our first foray into the area, saw a bear near the first trail fork. That fork is about a mile and a quarter from the trailhead. Be sure to bear left at the fork. Do not cross the creek, if indeed there is any creek remaining at all.

The trail signage is a bit confusing, because the sign for the left fork says "Green Lakes Trail." What it actually means is that it's another half mile to the fork for the Green Lakes Trail. When you arrive at that second trail junction, Yapoah Lake is a short distance off-trail to the southwest.

PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Yapoah Lake is a little-known off-trail destination west of Sisters.

Generally speaking, the forest becomes greener and healthier as you head west.

See **YAPOAH LAKE** *on page 19*

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