

# Cabot Lake: A mild adventure in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness

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Based on input from many readers, there is quite a bit of interest in short- to mid-length hikes to wilderness destinations. With a round trip of only about four easy miles, the hike to Cabot Lake certainly qualifies. This gentle, well-maintained trail has only some slight ups and downs, with negligible elevation change.

Almost all of this hike is within the boundaries of the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area. Hikers enter the wilderness only a couple of hundred yards from the trailhead parking area. Therefore, a free wilderness permit is required. During the early part of this hike, the namesake of the wilderness, Mt. Jefferson itself, is clearly visible to the northwest.

Much of this trail is within the 2003 B & B burn, a forest fire which scorched more than 90,000 acres of our local forestland. Today it isn't exactly what most people would call a forest, but it is quite apparent that the forest's regeneration process is well underway. Young lodgepole pines are sprouting everywhere.

Lodgepoles are a pioneer species that are typically among the first trees to colonize a burned-over area. Their cones are designed to open and release their seeds in the wake of a fire, and they will often dominate a regenerating forest for the first hundred

years or so. As they continue to grow in the B & B burn, it won't be long before these young lodgepole saplings form dense fire-prone thickets of their own.

New ponderosa pines are also in evidence, as are a few white pines, hemlocks, and other small conifers, including some nice noble firs. Wildflowers are well past their peak; but we did manage to find, eat, and bring home quite a few of the season's last huckleberries.

One plant that is doing a little too well for hikers' tastes is the snowbrush, or ceanothus. These fragrant evergreen shrubs are growing so successfully that only a few years after the fire, portions of the trail were completely obscured in some areas. Since that time, however, trail crews have done a good job of keeping this route open. Still, ceanothus thrives in the sunlight and open country created in the aftermath of fires; and there are a few spots where the aggressive plant is threatening to encroach upon the trail again. There are also many areas where the plants far exceed head height.

Passing beyond the margin of the burn area is like crossing into a different world, and the change in the ecosystem is immediately obvious. It is something of a relief to see mature living trees and other forest vegetation that survived the fire. This habitat at the fire's margin is also the area where you have the best

chance to find any late season huckleberries that escaped our notice during our visit to the area.

The side trail to Cabot Lake leaves the main trail just short of two miles from the trailhead. The lake is not visible at this point, and the side trail to the lake is not marked. Although this turnoff is quite well worn, it is still easy to pass by if you are not paying attention; so keep alert for a trail leading off to the right. You will know you have gone too far if you start to climb uphill and begin to see switchbacks.

Assuming you turn at the right spot, the picturesque little lake is just a short distance down a moderately steep slope on an unmaintained user trail. This is a great place for a lunch stop, a swim, or just a little relaxation at the midpoint of this modest little hike. While we were taking our break, we saw a family of four engaged in fishing on the far side of the lake; but fish are not the only denizens of this wilderness lake. I have also seen orange-bellied aquatic salamanders, commonly called water dogs, at this lake.

One interesting note is that, while most of us think of the Warm Springs Indian Reservation as being somewhere between Madras and Portland, the reservation reaches south very close to this location, reminding us that the Confederated Tribes are actually our close neighbors.

Hikers who are looking for more than a casual jaunt in the woods might also consider hiking all the way to Carl Lake. Before continuing on, however, hikers should be prepared for a round trip totaling 10 miles and an elevation gain of about 1,000 feet. The generous switchbacks to Carl Lake, however, are such that the climb is not extremely strenuous.

Speaking of being prepared, our hike to Cabot Lake brought up sobering and pointed reminders of the dangers of wilderness travel. At the trailhead was a flyer and photo of a lost 65-year-old hiker, who has been missing in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness since June. Then, after we had traveled only a short distance, we encountered searchers looking for another lost hiker, a 21-year-old who disappeared in late July.

Both hikers were traveling alone in the wilderness and failed to leave a detailed itinerary with friends or family. Neither has been seen since, and both searches are now suspended.

I will admit to sometimes hiking alone; but I never undertake long hikes into remote areas alone. Further, I always leave detailed instructions about where to find me and I try to be overly prepared for unexpected situations.

In my columns, I often write about safety, the Ten Essentials, hiking with a companion, and leaving detailed information about your route



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

A hiker relaxes at Cabot Lake in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness.

and destinations. I fear, however, that such warnings are sometimes tempered by the "it will never happen to me" mentality. Do not be lulled into complacency; always be fully prepared.

To reach the Cabot Lake Trailhead and enjoy this hike, take Highway 20 west from Sisters for 12 miles and turn right onto Jack Lake Road (Forest Road 12). Continue about four miles to where the road starts a curve to the right; instead, take the Jack Creek turnoff to the left (Road 1230). In about two miles, the pavement ends and the road splits. Take the right fork and stay on road 1230 to its end, a total of about 12 miles from Highway 20. This is not a fee-use area, but a free wilderness pass is required.

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