

Kayaking a temporary lake

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

In the never-ending quest to enjoy outdoor activities while waiting for the snowed-in high country to open up, an email from a friend prompted this little adventure. The email contained three photos of Fish Lake, a peculiar body of water near Clear Lake that doesn't even exist for part of the year. It was time to break out the kayaks.

When it's early in the season, as it is now, water is abundant and Fish Lake overflows into Fish Lake Creek, which flows into Clear Lake. By summer's end, however, both Fish Lake and the creek will be completely dry; and the lake will be replaced by a wildflower-filled meadow!

The lake's peculiar geology causes this unusual annual phenomenon. Each year, the lake's basin fills with snowmelt and flow from subterranean springs beneath the Cascade lava flows. But the underlying lava and volcanic soils are so porous that the lake cannot sustain itself when the water input tapers off. This unusual occurrence is all part of the complicated hydrology system that gives rise to the McKenzie River.

Even though the lake goes dry each year, there is an active population of fish in this seasonal lake; and they survive by retreating into the lake's principal tributary, Hackleman Creek, as the water level begins to fall.

While exploring the lake on kayaks, we discovered that there are at least two other small streams tumbling into the lake.

As it turned out, we weren't the only ones to come up with the idea of kayaking Fish Lake that day. I counted eleven other kayakers, and two more were departing just as we arrived.

Fish Lake, of course, is rather shallow; and the lake bottom is visible much of the time. Looking down into the water, I couldn't help but think of the times I had walked across that same lake bottom. In fact, some well-defined trails lie there awaiting the reemergence of the meadow later in the summer.

We started by checking out the lake's outlet, which is choked with logs; so there is no danger of becoming caught in the current. At that location, the current is just strong enough to hold your kayak in place against the logs but is easily escaped with minimal effort.

Paddling back up the lake, I was impressed by the number of waterfowl on the temporary lake. Quite a few goldeneyes were present, and I saw a single ruddy duck. Of particular interest was a pair of Canada geese shepherding five tiny goslings down a very steep bank, for what was almost surely their first swim.

Fish Lake proved to be quite a bit bigger than I had previously thought. Paddling all the way up to Hackleman

Creek turned out to be more of a chore than I had anticipated, especially in a bargain-basement inflatable kayak.

This upper part of the lake is where we discovered those two small tributary streams. Approaching the inlet of Hackleman Creek, the water becomes quite shallow and marshy in places. To actually enter the creek, it is necessary to swing right and then left through the marshy areas. We continued upstream against a mild current until we encountered a log across the creek. We probably could have slithered over it, but it seemed like as good a place to turn around as any, so we did.

On the way back to our launch point, we had excellent views of the historic site surrounding the Fish Lake Station that once served the Santiam Wagon Road. The Santiam Wagon Road was built in the 1860s and stretched from Sweet Home across Santiam Pass, down Indian Ford Creek, through Camp Polk, and eventually reached the Deschutes River north of present-day Redmond. Little more than a wide trail, the road was a principal trade route between western and eastern Oregon through the remainder of the nineteenth century and on into the twentieth.

In response to the increasing cross-state traffic on the road, roadhouses appeared along the way, the largest of which was at Fish Lake. There, shelters were built to

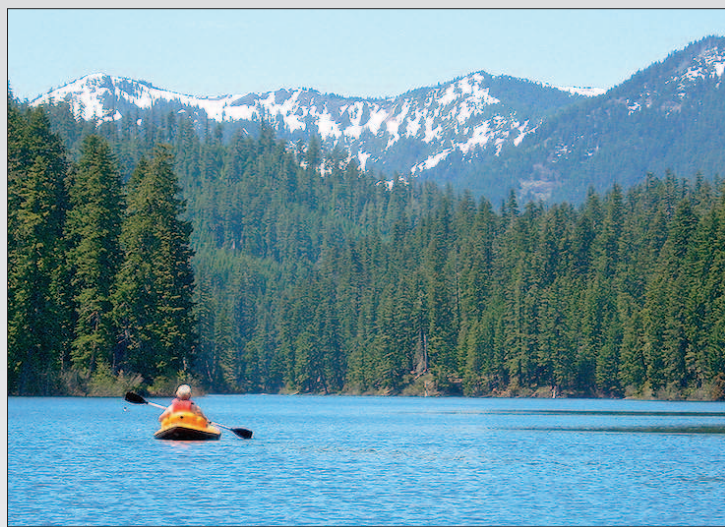


PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

A kayaker skims the surface of Fish Lake, a feat that will not be possible during the late summer.

accommodate travelers; and the site is reported to have included a hotel, blacksmith shop, cabins, and a saloon.

Of special interest at this historic location is the pioneer grave of Charity Ann Noble. Married at the age of 17 to James P. Marks, Charity died in childbirth at this remote way station less than two years later. The Marks family was crossing Santiam Pass in October of 1875 when they were trapped by a snowstorm. Both Mrs. Marks and the infant died and were buried together at the site.

Starting in 1905, the site was used by the U.S. Forest Service as a Ranger outpost. The structures remaining there today date primarily from 1910, 1924, and those built by the Civilian Conservation Corps in the 1930s. The old wagon road became obsolete in 1939 when the new Santiam Pass highway was completed along its present-day route. This new road means that

today you don't need to worry about becoming trapped by a snowstorm if you choose to visit the old Fish Lake station.

The site and buildings continue to be used by the Forest Service as part of the Fish Lake Guard Station. Trails reach out from this location, and you can retrace part of the historic Santiam Wagon Road for varying distances of your choice. It is 2.6 miles to the Hackleman Road trailhead, 3.6 miles to Lost Prairie, and about nine miles to Tombstone Pass, when snow conditions permit.

Travel west from Sisters over Santiam Pass on Highway 20. At the Santiam "Y," take the left fork on Highway 20 toward Eugene and Corvallis. Three miles later, take the next left fork toward Eugene on Highway 126. Fish Lake is about a mile on the right. The first road, to the Guard Station, is usually gated; so take the Forest Service-marked roadside turnoff that follows.

Hot July Savings!
\$300 DISCOUNT
For the month of July when you start a comprehensive treatment program!
New Patients Only. Not valid with any other offer.

Call today for a **FREE exam including X-ray and photos!**

Smile by Mykaila
541-382-0410
410 E. Cascade Ave., Sisters

THE BRACE PLACE
Central Oregon Orthodontic Specialists

CentralOregonBracePlace.com

Breakfast (& Lunch) any time
Our menu is made from scratch, every day

Amazingly fresh omelettes, incredible egg scrambles, generous burritos, fresh-baked everything, eggs Benedict, quiche-lorraine, waffles, pancakes, biscuits & gravy, granola, smoked salmon and cinnamon babka French toast are just a few of our delicious breakfasts.

Have you tried our quinoa scramble?
Vegan & Gluten-free Options
Tues.-Sat. 7:30 a.m.-5 p.m.
Sun. 7:30 a.m.-3 p.m.
541-549-6562 • 473 E. Hood Ave.
www.lamagiccafe.com

Breakfast • Lunch • Bakery

Counseling & Psychotherapy
Individual • Family • Grief
Relationship • Businesses
Coaching Trauma • Transitions
Special services for Veterans

Jim Joerger, Ed.D.
Licensed Psychologist
30 Years Experience
503-319-7857 | 392 E. Main Ave.

Expand Your Living Space

Say cool in the summer
Enjoy your deck or patio
Energy savings for you home
Sun protection from UV rays
Add value to your home

Highest quality
Durable fabrics
Schedule your **FREE** in-home consultation today!
541.788.8444
www.budgetblinds.com

Budget Blinds
Style and service for every budget.™