

Hiking to Cabot and Carl Lakes

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This trail actually offers the choice of two distinct hiking options. The first option is a modest, fairly easy hike to Cabot Lake, which is a nice little jaunt of less than four miles round trip. A more challenging option on this trail, however, is to hike all the way to Carl Lake. Add in a little lakeside exploration, and you’ve got yourself a very respectable 10-mile hike.

Almost all of this hike is tucked away in the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area. Hikers enter the wilderness only a couple hundred yards from the trailhead parking area. 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.

The first mile-and-a-half is inside the boundaries of 2003’s B&B burn, which scorched more than 90,000 acres of forest. Today it isn’t exactly what most people would call a forest, but the forest’s regeneration process is certainly evident. Some young lodgepole pines are now over 10 feet in height.

There are some

wildflowers, such as fireweed, but most are being choked out by the explosive growth of the snowbrush or ceanothus. These fragrant, evergreen shrubs are growing so successfully that the trail is nearly obscured in places. Ceanothus thrives in the sunlight and open country created in the aftermath of fires. There are many areas where the plants far exceed head height.

Leaving the burn area is like passing into a different world. Along with a mature, living mixed conifer forest, and other vegetation, are a multitude of huckleberry bushes. The berry pickings in the Cabot Lake area were pretty slim this year; but, if you hurry, you may still find a few of the tasty treats in areas farther up the trail. We hike this trail every year; and this year’s hike was, by far, our slowest trip ever — primarily due to huckleberry delays!

Cabot Lake lies just short of the two-mile point and is not marked or visible at this point; so, keep alert for a trail leading off to the right. The picturesque little lake is a short distance down a steep slope. Although this Cabot Lake turnoff is quite well worn, it is still easy to pass by if you are not paying

attention; so keep alert for the trail on the right. You will know you have gone too far if you start to climb uphill and begin to see switchbacks.

If you choose to continue to Carl Lake, the trail begins a serious climb after leaving Cabot Lake. Those previously mentioned switchbacks, however, help temper the 1,000-foot elevation gain. When the trail starts to flatten out along the ridge above Cabot Lake, it turns due west. Eventually, the trail turns north and passes a series of ponds, some of which can be very inviting for swimmers on a hot day — a resource we took advantage of on our way out.

Much of the trail over the entire route has many, many rocks and boulders to step on or around, making the trek somewhat tedious and more difficult because of the constant need to take care among the rocks. The area above the switchbacks is the worst stretch because of erosion from water runoff. Since the rocky trail requires so much attention and vigilance, remember to stop once in a while to enjoy the scenery.

Last year, we hiked this trail in early November (not recommended) with some snow on the ground. The trail



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Carl Lake snuggles up against the flanks of Mt. Jefferson in the northernmost corner of Deschutes National Forest. Note the illegal campsite at far left center.

was a virtual creek in some areas; so it was not surprising to see how the trail has deteriorated. A small Forest Service crew was working in this area to help mitigate the trail damage.

After the last pond, the trail trends uphill again; then, suddenly, you’re there. Carl Lake

is beautifully situated between the mountains and the valley below. North of where the trail reaches the lake is a relatively narrow wall of rock that keeps the lake perched in place. Further inspection of this spot shows that, at times of heavy

See **HIKE** on page 24



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