



Parish Lake with a view of North Pyramid. WILLIAM L. SULLIVAN/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL



View of Mount Jefferson from the Old Cascades backpacking loop.

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View from Scar Mountain on the Old Cascades Loop.

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Route

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Day 1 (NF-1161 Quarry Trailhead to Middle Pyramid): 10.48 miles. 3,155 feet of elevation gain

My Old Cascades Crest Loop hike began at an unmarked trailhead at a quarry a few miles south of Highway 22. From 22, take Parish Lake Road to Scar Mountain Road, and after two and a half miles turn left onto NF-1161. You'll approach the quarry in just under two miles.

The quarry provides ample parking, and pullout spots if you need a night to camp before or after backpacking the loop. Alpine Running started and ended their inaugural 50k ultramarathon here earlier in the summer, and though there are a handful of access points to the Loop, I chose to start here for the inspiring views of Mount Jefferson and Three Fingered Jack.

I hopped on the Scar Mountain Trail where it passes

the quarry on its way to Trapper's Butte. The early afternoon temperature was in the mid-60s. It was breezy, and the dry flowerless rhododendrons made clicking sounds above bobbing pink fireweed on either side of the trail. Through the trees I caught glimpses of Jefferson, bisected by puffy clouds.

Trapper's Butte was about four miles in. At 4,800 feet, there was a nice view of Jefferson, Jack, and Washington before the single track descended to the North Pyramid Trail. In the forest on the way down were somber mossy rock outcrops the size of two-story homes. Little hemlock cones and the occasional paper wasp nest dotted a trail faintly imprinted with mountain bike tires. Among the ferns and salal grew Vanilla Leaf, Bride's Bonnet and Queen's Cup, the latter thrusting its single waxy blueberry at the end of a thin stem.

A retired Forest Service archeologist told me the biggest Doug Fir in his district was at Parish Lake. Though not technically part of the loop, I wanted to see if I could find it, and maybe spend the night. I followed what I thought were his instructions but couldn't locate the fabled fir. Feeling antsy to move, I set off towards the loop, passing blushing vine maple and a trio of hammock campers along the way. I found two good and one decent campsite at Parish, but the lake is a little over a mile off the circuit, something to keep in mind.

After crossing Pyramid Creek, I filled my water bladder for the 2,300 foot hoof to the top of Middle Pyramid.

The views from the top of Middle Pyramid were stunning—sunrays spangling through clouds, rosy mist rising, the green of the firs carpeting South Pyramid deepening with the shifting dusky light.

There was just enough room for a small tent. A couple pieces of metal from a fire lookout were pounded into the rock. Getting stakes in was a losing battle, I anchored the best I could with stones. Wind shook the tent as twilight fell, and in the morning I awoke in cloud cover.

Day Two (Middle Pyramid to NF-1161 Quarry Trailhead): 22.93 miles. 4,528 feet of elevation gain

I took the Pyramids Trail down from the mountaintop, a steep mile and three quarters drop to a lush meadow rimmed by a soaring rock amphitheater. Mist turned to rain that ticked onto bright devil's club leaves. A startled pair of grouse flapped off.

Earlier in the season this stretch was awash in colorful life. Bees and butterflies hovered among wild strawberry, pink and white trillium, and the drooping red and yellow flowers of Western Columbine. The rhodies were flowering. A fizzle of tiny flowers adorned three foot tall False Solomon's seal. Hooker's Fairybell, cream-colored hanging bells, stood guard over a damp trail peppered with golden cup mushrooms, also known as orange peel fungus.

This vegetation patch was now swaddled in dense fog. South Pyramid Creek, which earlier had leapt off a waterfall, was drying up. I scurried down to refill my water. A couple mountain bikers were staging at the nearby Pyramids Trailhead, a fine starting point to access the Loop.

Here and at other points of entry was a Forest Service sign reminding folks of the risks of the recent Bruler Fire. We could be evacuated "with short or no

notice." While the fire may have frightened people away from the Old Cascades, I had found in my tramps and runs before and after Bruler that this area received little traffic. It may be the montane ruggedness, the lack of recognizable campsites, or the burley elevation profile, but as I hiked through huge Doug Firs and cedars I felt I was wandering through a forgotten cathedral. In total, I would cross three bikers and one runner on the whole of the Loop that gorgeous August weekend.

Eleven miles and 4,500 feet down from my summit start, I step-stoned my way across Pyramid Creek. There is at least one good campsite here for those looking to split up the Loop.

Then I began a long ascent to Scar Mountain. This stretch briefly jagged out of the Willamette National Forest and into the Middle Santiam Wilderness. I have heard this area called a "no-person's land" and a "lost world" of monster trees and deep solitude. I did come upon a football-sized pinecone. The last running creek to gather water was roughly two miles from Pyramid Creek. Past that, an alder stand brought a welcome shift in light from hours in fir tunnels. I passed through smells of skunk cabbage, resinous pockets and a sweet white-flowering groundcover.

After seven miles the Gordon Peak trail met the Scar Mountain trail. The forest opened up to a wide view of the Three Pyramid Mountains, which after 2,400 feet of climbing and 900 feet to the top of Scar to go, I only briefly paused to take in.

Strange bulbous rocks appeared on my way up to the summit. The trees grew sparse as plates of scree slid underfoot. The clouds had cleared out, leaving a welcome warm sun and the musty scent of drying flora. A raspy hawk cawed as it soared across the pale blue. I panted my way to the top of Scar, where an opening in the rock wall granted a breathtaking panoramic view of Jefferson, Three Fingered Jack, Mount Washington, and the Three Sisters.

From Scar Mountain to the trailhead where I started my trek was just shy of two miles. The vista payoff atop Scar reignited my energy and eased the pain of this last stretch. Along the way I stopped to chat with a mountain biker who was also stoked on the Old Cascade Crest backcountry. A few more rises and dips through the woods and I was spit back out at the quarry, happy to get into my car for some water before a lengthy stretching session.

'Zone of cooperation'

The Old Cascades Crest Loop was made possible by a collaboration of trail stewards, government agents, mountain bikers and trail runners. Beth Dayton, president of the Salem Area Trail Alliance, said that a "zone of cooperation" has emerged between volunteer groups around the restoration of the loop.

The loop description here does not include every trail segment, and is but one way to get into the Old Cascades. There are many side trails, peak trails, and off-trail swaths of land waiting to be explored. Route finding and map reading skills are a must. But for those hungry for rugged detachment or a strenuous escape, lace up, pack a water filter and a compass, and go see what's out there.

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Obituaries

Clare Elizabeth "Liz" Geren Blodgett

Clare Elizabeth "Liz" Geren Blodgett passed away peacefully on Friday, August 13, 2021 at home in Seattle, Washington. Liz was born on February 7, 1956 to Walter Geren and Clare Elmira (Findley) Geren in Ocean Lake, Oregon. She was raised in Sitka, Alaska, and Silverton, Oregon, graduating from Silverton Union High School in 1974. Liz married John Blodgett in 1983 in Sitka, Alaska. She later graduated from Highline Community College in Kent, Washington with her nursing degree, and she worked in Whitefish, Montana and the Seattle area. Liz and John raised their children in Lolo and Whitefish, Montana. After John's death in 2004, she relocated to Seattle, Washington.

Liz leaves behind her children, Dallas (Jennifer) Blodgett, Kalispell, Montana; Brettaine (Gary) Thurston, Lebanon, Oregon; and Katy Blodgett, Springfield, Oregon; and grandchildren Jack, Emma, and Barrett. Liz is survived by her partner, Duane Stecher of Seattle. In addition, Liz is also survived by her siblings, Walter (Karen) Geren; Brian Geren; Marilyn (Larry) Geren Hickman; and Linda (David) Geren Jacquot. Liz will also be greatly missed by stepchildren Michael Burnett, Jr. (deceased), Charlie Burnett, Charlyne Burnett Alford, Sarah Burnett, and Duane's daughters Victoria, Stephanie, and Andrea, as well as their children.

A memorial service will be held at the Silverton Senior Center in Silverton, Oregon on Saturday, September 18, 2021 at 1 PM. Cremation was handled by Elemental Cremation and Burial in Seattle, Washington.

Miller

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The registration deadline is Sept. 25. To get on the list, call Woods at (541) 745-5334 or email him at Shawn.k.woods@odfw.oregon.gov.

Halibut heaven

Beginning Sept. 13, halibut anglers will be allowed to keep two fish a day with all-depth fishing open every day off the central coast from Cape Falcon near Manzanita to Humbug Mountain near Brookings.

The season bag limit remains at six halibut. The season will close when the allowed catch of 240,595 pounds are landed, or Oct. 31, whichever comes first. High winds and heavy seas off the Oregon coast

during the spring was blamed, or credited depending on how you look at it, with the expanded opportunity.

As a bonus, because the all-depth recreational bottomfishing season opened in September, you can keep both bottomfish and halibut in the area from Falcon to Humbug.

All-depth halibut season also remains open daily from Humbug south to the California border until the allowed catch of 8,000 pounds crosses the docks, or Oct. 31.

For an online PDF map and details about of the updated halibut seasons, go to myodfw.com/pacific-halibut-sport-regulations.

Thought for the week: The thickness of the air mattress is directly correlated to the age of the camper.

Contact Henry via email at HenryMillerSJ@gmail.com.