

# Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

*Thursday, August 15, 1963 – Illinois Valley New*  
**In the Wake of the Saddle Bums**

When I read in the News Anne Benjamine’s account of the Saddle Bums’ ride around the long high ridge route from Oregon Caves to Bolan Lake, and the many wildflowers they saw along the trail, in fancy my mouth got to watering so copiously I had to do something about it or drown in my dreams. And so, although I am grounded, due to the fact that little Fly-foot is at present, enjoying his summer vacation in the ancestral pastures of Arabia with other blue-blooded members of the wild Cragmaster clan, I decided to make the trip on foot and alone, over the same course my fellow Saddle Bums traveled.

Accordingly, I made up a 25-pound pack containing bedroll, camera outfit, two-day grub supply and a canteen of water and was ready for the long hike. My neighbor obligingly deposited me at Oregon Caves, and at 8 a.m. I set out along the beautiful winding Monument trail, heading for Mt. Elijah and points miles and miles beyond.

As I progressed along the trail I catalogued the many flowers that Anne mentioned seeing in the high mountain meadows they rode through – wild flower gardens whose variety of colors and species are almost too spectacular to be believed without being seen. I identified and recorded the names of 64 species of flowers along the trail, from the dainty little Enchanter’s Nightshade to the magnificent, fragrant Cascade Lily. To name only a few of the more eye-catching species, the large clumps

of pale blue or light purple Fragrant Monardella were plentiful along the way; and the striking Scarlet Gilia, or Skyrocket, whose great clusters of star-mouthed inch-long slender scarlet trumpets brightened the trail at intervals, presented one of the most conspicuous displays of all.

Several species of blue Penstemons and the large purple-flowered Pride-of-the-Mountain added frequent splashes of color to the floral panorama. Along the side of Swan Mountain, growing just beside the trail, almost underfoot, I saw the delicately beautiful little Rosy Orthocarpus slyly pilfering the crumbs of sunlight allowed to fall to earth by the encroaching Greenleaf Manzanita. But the flower that provided me with the greatest thrill is the Orange-flowered Mountain Dandelion, a tall, handsome dandelion type with rather showy reddish - orange flowers – a new one to add to my long list (about 1,300) of the wildplants of our area. The finding of this one new (to me) flower more than paid my fare for the entire journey.

Of the trees, there is one in particular found here and there along this high mountain trail that, to me, is about the loveliest of all of our beautiful conifers, with its dainty soft short foliage so placed around the twigs as to give them an attractive starry effect. It is the Mountain Hemlock and is found only at these high elevations. I wonder if the Saddle Bum riders recognized this tree.

Enjoying the wildplants, the wonderful scenery and the pure clean air of this high mountain trail occupied much of my time, but not all of it. A few minor troubles and a major-thrill or two were destined to be woven into the fabric of my adventure, altogether making it one of my most memorable and delightful experiences – now that it’s safely in the past.

way to various points along the Sucker Creek Trail; others tell you all the important places you’ve been along your back trail. But alas! There is positively no indication that a trail to Tannen exists, much less where it might take off from this meadow. Of course I eventually found it – and if I’d met a grizzly bear on the trail at this point, and he had hesitated one second too long in stepping politely to one side, I’d have ripped him limb from limb with my bare hands.

I had intended to spend the night in Green Valley, as the Saddle Bums had, but found myself there much too early to stop. I passed the Denman cabin, on the side of Craggy Mountain, at 1:30 and was in Green Valley an hour later. Consulting my map, I decided that by pouring on a little more coal I could make Tannen before dark. It was the longest 30 miles I ever traveled in one day, but at 7:15 I waddled into the little campground where the Boundary Trail runs into the Tannen Lake road – and not even the fabled nectar that Juniper guzzled could compare with the sparkling cold spring water I found close by.

Having rested and eaten, and found a suitable spot for my sleeping bag under the trees nearby, I prepared to sleep in a zoo with the other wild animals. Deer made eerie vocal-noises all around me, no doubt expressing their disapproval of my presence in their private preserve. It was bright moonlight, and once in the night I heard something nearby, raised up in my sleeping bag and tried to imitate the sound a disturbed deer makes, something between a loud hiss and a whistle, and a black bear that was on the trail within 20 feet of me, and looked as big as Paul Bunyan’s blue bull in the moonlight, went galloping up the trail like the heel-flies were after him. Ten minutes later he was back, but after taking another look at the strange critter that had startled him, shuffled peacefully off among the trees. Again later in the night I was awakened by a rustling sound near the head of my bed where I had placed my pack and surprised an old porcupine in the act of sneaking up on my grub supply. All in all it was a wild night, but I enjoyed it – mostly, I now suspect, for its memory value.

An additional 10-mile hike the following morning took me to a friend’s cabin on the Bolan Lake road. There I rested up till next day when my 77-year old friend – may he wear wings and dine on strawberry shortcake forever – brought me home in his rattletrap pickup, none the worse for wear except for a couple of complaining toenails that were beginning to resent the pounding they were getting.

And so ended one of the most enjoyable hikes I’ve ever made, one that I planned on making some time ago, and finally inspired to get on with by reading of the Saddle Bums’ ride over much of the same route.

No one who has never been up in our mountains on one of these beautiful forest trails can visualize the really important rich potential of our little Illinois Valley world – the clear, invigorating air and unpolluted spring water to be found up there. And just as important is the feeling of peace and freedom, from care experienced, as if a burden, however small or great, had been abandoned somewhere along the trail.

It’s a wonderfully exhilarating experience – as any lucky Saddle Bum can tell you.

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