

## Winding Trails: by Al Hobart

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Illinois Valley News

### Illinois - Rogue Rivers Loop Hike

"There's a long, long trail a-winding" that is without a doubt one of the most beautiful and interesting in existence; exceptionally beautiful because of the unimaginably rugged and scenic views along its wavy, winding course; and of additional exciting interest because of the abundance of wildlife seen along the way. It is the combined trails of the Illinois and Rogue River canyons, a continuous hiking course of about 80 miles.

For several years I've been thinking of making this trip, but always something intervened to sidetrack the adventure. Then this month the gears of fate finally began meshing properly, and two other Kindred Souls - Dean and Charles - got the same idea and their vacations at the same time. When they told me - the 3rd K S - of their idea, plans and preparations were made at once for a 6-day hiking trip down one river and up the other.

Our hike began at Oak Flat, 20 miles below Selma, on the Illinois. We were driven to that point by Charles' brother, Louis, on Sunday afternoon. Earlier the same day Dean, Charles, and I had gone down the Rogue in two Volkswagens, leaving one of them at Whiskey Creek, the intended termination point of our hike. We camped our first night on Brigg's Creek, a short distance below Oak Flat. Here the road ends and the Illinois River trail begins.

Monday morning - we set out down the river over a route that the Forest Service has made into a trail-traveler's dream, each carrying a pack of around 40 pounds.

Wherever the trail passes through land over which the Forest Service has jurisdiction you can almost count on finding it in excellent condition - allowing time, of course, for the maintenance crews to go over the route each spring. We not only found this to be true on our own account but heard from others along our route that the FS has this reputation. But the Forest Service no longer has jurisdiction over all the land that our trail passed through. Along the Rogue River, over a stretch referred to on some FS maps as being under

the management of "other" we often found the trail in terrible condition. In many places flood and great slides have completely obliterated the trail, making travel both difficult and dangerous. However, belatedly, the politicians controlling the "other" purse-strings are reluctantly beginning to stir, and at last hopes are being rekindled for rebuilding and repair of the Rogue River trail.

On our first day of hiking we made 18 miles. That part of the trail that passes over Bald Mt we found to be still un-worked, but we were told a contract is being let for its improvement. Along this part of the trail lie a series of large grassy mountain meadows, where numerous bears have made well-packed trails. In one magnificent meadow we saw a huge black bear and 5 deer. That evening we made camp on a 100-foot-high bluff overlooking the river near the mouth of Silver Creek.

Tuesday we hiked only 10 or 12 miles, camping for the night beside Nancy Creek, at another Oak Flat only a few miles from where the Illinois joins the Rogue at Agness.

Next morning, Wednesday, we were on the Rogue, where for two miles we followed a road, crossed to

the northeast side of the river above Agness and hit the Rogue River trail a few miles farther upriver, near Illahe. That night we camped on a level sandy beach at Big Bend. It was here that our near bread famine was relieved when the famous old riverman, Glen Wooldridge, pulled in with his jet riverboat. Learning of our shortage he obligingly ran up the river some distance and came back with a loaf of bread for us. We met up with some wonderful people in Rogue canyon.

Thursday we did another long stretch up the steep-canyoned, incomparably lovely Rogue, stopping for the night at Marial. Here we were warmly greeted by "Casey" Stengel at the Mule Creek Guard Station, who gave us hot coffee and use of the Station campground and facilities. Next morning he took us up the road a short, distance to where the interrupted trail resumes.

That day, Friday, we saw the worst of the Rogue River trail, where the great flood had washed out the trail for a mile or more, and massive slides added their contribution to the havoc. But much of the day's hiking was on very good trail, much of it cut in the side of rocky cliffs high above the river. Once looking down and across

the river we saw a big brown bear with two little cubs making their way leisurely up along the rocky river bank.

Friday we spent the last night of our long hike at Rocky Bar, where we had a sumptuous dinner at the lodge and a swell breakfast Saturday morning; well-fortified with Mary Camp's delicious hotcakes, bacon, and eggs, we were ferried back across the river to our trail. 7 or 8 miles farther up the river, at Whiskey Creek, we spent a pleasant hour with Lou Martin, an interesting old river dog who is famous for his 3-in-1 coffee. When someone protested at the heaping teaspoon of instant coffee he was putting in each cup he was squelched with the query: "Do you want coffee or water?"

Another mile of steep climbing brought us to the waiting Volkswagen. Our 75-mile hike was ended. A few blistered toes and protesting muscles failed to detract from our accomplishment.

And by the time we left Galice, some distance upriver, with hot juicy hamburgers and cold liquid refreshments under our belts, we were already looking eagerly into a rosy future, seeking other such wonderful trails to conquer.

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