



NATURE, EXPOSED

Testing the waters of human interaction, in the nude

By Pat Newson

GARRETT STRADER

I went to the mild as the wild because I wished to deliberately expose only the essential facts of life and see if I could not uncover some truth in it. This was not to affiliate myself with known outdoorsy visionaries (see nudehiker.blogspot.com for a Northwest example), those arbiters and champions of dignity and expressively non-sexual physical freedom.

No, this was a social experiment for public eyes, for unassuming outdoors enthusiasts with opinions. My photographer and I, on a suddenly sunny Sunday, went where both water and public sentiment require thermometers: the Mighty McKenzie.

The hike to Tamolitch Pool is not the most exhausting of treks, but we wanted to play it safe, cut down on potential chafe and, of course, see how the public on this popular track would interact with the domestic life. When we arrived at the trailhead, the lot was moderately full but we managed to strip clean, don our packs and start moving before anybody could catch us with our pants down.

The first group we passed along the trail elicited a curt nod; the second, an elegant laugh; the third, the stern concern of a solitary hiker thoroughly unimpressed by the concept. Group after group of mountain bikers, hikers, men, women, children and dogs were greeted with our cavalier posterity. By the time we reached the pool, we had encountered at least thirty (primarily silent) smirking individuals.

The far side of the pool provides an excellent photographic vantage point down into the clear blue beauty. We relaxed there with a couple 22-ounce beers and climbed down around the far side for a dip. Now, the day was warm, and the sun lingered on skin while stationary, but it was shaded at the water's edge. Nonetheless, I managed one tactilely retractive jump and flubbed my way out in a convulsive display for the onlookers on the cliffs above.

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After that, people seemed more responsive. One woman at the pool took our picture and told us about an ABC (anything but clothes) run she participated in — winning, in fact, for best costume: “A book of Mormon, and nothing else.” On the way back, a quartet of repressed teenagers had one thing amongst them to say: “Are you fucking kidding me?” Another lone cyclist called ahead that he was “coming up behind and not appreciating the view.”

We got back to the lot just in time for a carload of recent Arkansas transplants to catch us before we could reclathe enough to avoid pressing flesh to the fake leather seats in the van. They had backpacks full of Pabst and an

encouraging attitude, though they did advise us not to try our social experiment in their home state.

We climbed aboard, tried not to stick skin to seat, and headed back to Eugene. But the day was not done. We stopped at the market in McKenzie Bridge, picked up a six-pack and a hitchhiker from Oklahoma. He was impressed by our earlier maneuver and agreed to the ride despite our plan to visit Terwilliger Hot Springs before we dropped him off.

As we arrived, state troopers and park rangers were in the process of ticketing other visitors. We carried up the road a bit, said goodbye to our six friends and smoked some cigarettes before returning for the hike in, unsure of the legal ramifications of trail nudity. Because it was daytime, and with potential enforcement present, we paid the \$5 day-use fee.

After the short hike, the hot pools beckoned. The majority of soaking mammals had no use for clothing. Here people didn't mind if you were naked. It was more odd if you weren't. This was the place for open dialogue concerning natural propriety, but it wasn't like the good ol' stargazin' nights at Cougar. Can't do that anymore. Rules, regulations, restrictions, conditions. So I climbed up in the cave and basked in that sulfur steam, pondering nature, nudity and the rises (no pun intended) we received from unsuspecting nature-lovers. **EW**

Tamolitch Pool directions: Hwy 126 East approx. 70 miles to Trailbridge Reservoir; cross bridge, bear right half a mile, park, undress, hike, swim, contract mild hypothermia.

Terwilliger Hot Springs directions: Hwy 126 to Cougar Reservoir turnoff, follow up, turn right at dam, continue approx. 4 miles to lot, undress, hike, soak.

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