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and continued...*



Relaxing and cooking crawdads at Lower Rosary

HOT DAYS AND COLD WATER

*A long walk goes a long way
to Lower Rosary Lake*

Words and Photos by Dante Zuñiga-West

Adventures demand persistence, and the best ones are worth the sweat, mosquito bites and boot-blisters that come along with them. These are thoughts one tries to keep in mind step-for-step when the weight of a 50-pound pack and half a 60-pound canoe hinders a three-mile hike through thick Oregon wilderness as darkness begins to set in.

On Highway 58, just .3 miles past Willamette Pass, lies an entry point to the Pacific Crest Trail. It's a little hard to find, and one is best advised not to park at the ODOT maintenance shed that flanks the trailhead, because you'll be ticketed. If you attempt to traverse this portion of the PCT in early spring, you may do battle with snow, but during the summer all you need is bug spray and determination — and a canoe, that is, if you want to camp out, catch your meals and hide from the world while floating on the crystal blue waters of Lower Rosary Lake.

As we hiked our way up the twisty trail, surrounded by Douglas firs and clouds of bloodsucking insects, my partner reminded me that this was a bad idea. She was right, but that wouldn't stop us because we are both stubborn and in love with the outdoors as well as each other.

There is no easy way to haul a canoe three miles up a dirt trail after a full day of work, unless you purchase a canoe cart, which allows for two wheels and a buggy to help shoulder the burden. This is a luxury we were not afforded given that I am cheap, and our trip was a last-minute sort of thing, hastily planned in the interest of escape.

The hike up, which should normally take an hour or less, took about three, compounded by a constant (slightly painful) readjusting of our load. This was less than pleasant to endure, as my partner expressed to me, but these breaks in the trek allowed for glimpses of a setting sun and the quiet blue majesty of Odell Lake.

Two miles in, the darkness came and we strapped on headlamps and continued as the trail snaked northward toward the

three gorgeous bodies of water strung across the mountains like the beads of a rosary — hence, the namesake. When we finally reached the edge of Lower Rosary Lake, we pitched camp and fell asleep to the sound of wind on the water. We awoke to the splashing of fish snatching bugs for breakfast, and a view that belongs on a postcard you might send to someone who hasn't seen Oregon — maybe this wasn't such a bad idea after all.

Whether relaxing by the shore, jogging along the trail or trout fishing on the water, you simply can't deny the beauty and peace of Lower Rosary in the summer. The weather is nice and hot, and the water is icy cold. We paddled across and made camp on the north shore, then grabbed the rods and started casting line. What we caught was serious sunburn and some hard-fighting rainbow trout.

"There are some nice fish in Lower Rosary," says ODFW fish biologist Jeff Ziller. "And the crayfish are fair game, too."

Ziller says that, unlike Upper Rosary Lake and Middle Rosary Lake, both of which are stocked with rainbow trout, Lower Rosary has seen success with the natural breeding of native trout. You can keep five trout per day, permitted that you have a fishing license and some skill.

As for the crayfish, you have to be sneaky, and it helps to have a long stick. Some of those little suckers are pretty aggressive — and they certainly don't enjoy being lunch — so expect to get pinched at least once. Also, don't do this sort of thing without swimwear, because after roasting in the sun, a dip in Lower Rosary's waters is a little slice of heaven (no religious parody intended).

After two days of campfire-cooked trout, boiled crawdads, soreness, sunburn and a mosquito kill-count of more than 240, the hardest part of our Rosary Lakes adventure wasn't getting there or living off the local wildlife — it was leaving. A hard day in the outdoors beats a tough one back in the civilized world on any occasion, even if it takes a while to hoof it. **EW**

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