

Camp on your own island

By ZACH URNESS
Statesman Journal

OAKRIDGE — There's something unique about camping on an island.

Severed from the mainland and all its inhabitants, you become governor of an adopted patch of earth in a way that's different from camping near a trail or road.

The solitude is deeper and more satisfying — you might score your own swimming hole or viewpoint, and there's little concern of an obnoxious group showing up next door. But island camping also can be lonely, especially on a solo trip, without even the mainland chipmunks around to keep you company.

That was my experience, at least, during a trip to one of Oregon's only mountain lakes where it's possible to boat in and set up tent on an island.

Summit Lake, southeast of Oakridge, is one of the great secret places in the Cascade Mountains not just because of its islands, but also because of the clear water and views of Diamond Peak.

Days spent gliding across sapphire water in a canoe or kayak, weaving among islands and peninsulas in search of sand beaches and groves of huckleberries, is an experience close to heaven.

Despite these charms, the lake remains uncrowded due to three major problems: awful road access, late snowmelt and mosquitoes.

Try driving here in a low-clearance vehicle and your muffler might fall off. Try visiting in June, July or early August and you'll get massacred by bloodthirsty hordes of tiny vampires that seem to lurch out loud if you try mosquito repellent.

Summit Lake, which also is home to a boat ramp, outhouse and small campground, is a classic high-risk, high-reward outdoor experience.

In other words, do your homework.

Trip Planning

The ideal time to visit Summit Lake is early September, after Memorial Day, when the weather is warm enough for swimming but the nights are cool enough to eliminate mosquitoes.

I brought my backpacking gear, an inflatable kayak and made sure to include a shovel. Apparently, some people have trouble understanding the concept of burying their poop on the lake's islands and the Forest Service has made bringing a shovel a requirement.

After driving down I-5 to Eugene and heading east on Highway 58, I arrived in Oakridge and was faced with a decision.

Summit Lake is located in a sort of no man's land on the southern border of the Diamond Peak Wilderness, and two routes provide access.

The quicker route takes the turn-off to Crescent Lake and follows Forest Service Road 6010, one of the worst roads in the state, to Summit Lake. Full of deep ruts and large boulders, the road is treacherous any time of the year but particularly in early summer due to late snowmelt that makes it easy to get stuck in snow or mud.

I opted for the longer route, which follows paved FSR 21 most of the way and includes less time on awful FSR 6010.

Summit Lake

After the less-than-enjoyable drive, I arrived at Summit Lake and got my first view.

It is, in a word, stunning.



Zach Urness/Statesman-Journal via AP

This photo taken Sept. 8 shows an island and the blue expanse of Summit Lake with Diamond Peak in the background, in the Deschutes National Forest near Oakridge.

The sparkling blue water rolls across the horizon while Diamond Peak juts overhead like a giant pyramid. The boat ramp, campsite and outhouse are found on the lake's north end.

Upon arrival, I met a family that has been coming here for 20 years. They said Summit Lake gets a fair amount of visitors on August and September weekends but stays mostly quiet mid-week.

I parked near the boat ramp, inflated my kayak and began loading up gear. A canoe would be a better choice, but on a solo trip, I opted for easier traveling.

All loaded up, I pushed off from the shoreline and onto the water.

Berry Island

The first thing that grabs your attention about Summit Lake is the clarity of the water.

At 5,600 feet, the lake is filled by pure snowmelt — there are no inlet creeks — and the rocky geology means there isn't much sediment either. The result is sapphire-tinted water so clear you can see your boat's shadow on the bottom of the lake.

The majority of boat-in camping spots are on the north end, among a scattering of small islands off a main peninsula that juts into the lake.

Some of the islands are too small for campsites, but after boating around for less than 45 minutes, I pulled to the rocky shore of a promising patch of land. A small wooden sign proclaimed the site Berry Island (elevation 5,650 feet), the perfect nighttime home.

There was a giddy excitement in making camp on my own island, of climbing a few steps to its highest point and surveying the breadth of my kingdom.

It wasn't much — less than an acre in size — but it had character. A grove of drooping pines provided shade, and the shoreline included large basalt boulders on one side and a sliver of sand beach on the other.

I wasted no time setting up my tent and organizing camp, then celebrating with a cool swim. I spent the rest of the day exploring surrounding islands and peninsulas — and found many other outstanding campsites — and unsuccessfully trying to catch fish.

Fishing, from what I was told, is not good here.

By the time evening arrived, I'd arranged a nice place for reading and star-watching. Fire restrictions still were in place, so I was without a campfire, which is just as well since I'd need to haul out wood from the mainland.

If you go:

In a nutshell: A very pretty mountain lake just south of the Diamond Peak Wilderness

Season: Late June/July to September/October, depending on snow. Mosquitoes are very bad until late August.

Elevation: 5,600 feet

Development: Small campground with three official sites, small boat ramp and pit toilet. There are dispersed campsites around the lake as well.

Island camping: There are many boat-in campsites where it's possible to make camp via canoe or kayak.

Information: Crescent Ranger District Office, (541) 433-3200

Coordinates: 43.46253,

-122.13376

Hike the PCT: The Pacific Crest Trail runs alongside Summit Lake and can be hiked to the north or south. Heading north takes you into the Diamond Peak Wilderness, with high-lights such as Rockpile and Marie lakes.

Climb Diamond Peak: You don't need ropes to ascend the dramatic shield volcano that rises over Willamette Pass. The route goes off-trail and requires around 12 miles hiking and more than 3,500 feet of climb, but you can start the journey from the PCT at Summit Lake.

Timpanogas and Indigo Lake: These two very pretty mountain lakes can be reached with a fairly short drive from Summit Lake. From a campground at Timpanogas Lake, hike 2 miles to Indigo Lake or explore other trails.

Windy Lakes: A trail visits multiple mountain lakes from a route that begins near Summit Lake off awful FSR 398.

(Cutting wood from the island's few trees would not be responsible).

Nighttime was utterly silent on Berry Island, and, in a small way, I missed the conversations I often have with fellow campers.

It was a small complaint.

The next morning I'd do more swimming and exploring before packing up and leaving Berry Island for the next traveler.

There's something unique about camping on an island, and Summit Lake is a near-perfect place to experience it.

Sleeping hunter wakes up to black bear biting his head

BOISE (AP) — A hunter asleep in the remote Idaho wilderness woke up when he felt something tugging on his hair. Then he heard the black bear breathing.

Stephen Vouch, 29, reached behind his head and felt it was wet. He yelled when he realized a bear was biting at his head.

"He got a hold of my head, and that's what woke me up," the Boise resident said Wednesday, who was in the rugged area hunting bighorn sheep with friends. "That's when I kind of freaked out. That's when I could hear the bear breathing on me."

His scream startled the bear, which jumped and hit the tarp above where they were sleeping. The tarp tumbled, entangling the animal and the hunters around 2 a.m. Friday.

"That's when my buddy's gun went off," Vouch said.

The bear, wounded by a shot from the .45-caliber handgun, scrambled into a nearby tree. Vouch, cut but not seriously injured, shot and killed it.

Vouch said he and his friends were prepared with medical supplies for emergencies but didn't have a satellite phone, so he didn't receive medical care for three days.

The hunting group patched him up, then rafted downstream before flying out of the remote Frank Church River of No Return Wilderness on Sunday. Vouch was treated Monday at a hospital for cuts to his head and released.

Idaho Fish and Game officials estimate that the male bear was about 3 to 7 years old and weighed 200

to 275 pounds. Jon Rachael, state wildlife manager with the department, said it's not clear why the bear entered the camp because the hunters had stored their food properly.

One possibility is the bear may have become accustomed to finding food from the many rafters that float the Middle Fork of the Salmon River each summer, he said.

Or the bear may have never encountered people, and out of curiosity, chomped on what may have appeared to be fur, Rachael said. If the bear intended to kill, the attack would have been much more violent, he said.

It's the second time this year that someone sleeping outdoors in Idaho has been attacked by a black bear. In early September, state officials trapped and killed a black bear near McCall in west-central Idaho that bit a sleeping firefighter who had been battling blazes in the region.

Rachael said it's been a tough year for bears because destructive wildfires and drought have made for an exceptionally bad berry season, a key food source.

In bear country, Rachael recommends bear spray rather than guns because of the danger of accidentally shooting fellow campers while trying to fend off a bear.

Vouch said he plans to return to the area within the next several weeks to continue hunting for bighorn sheep. In Idaho, the opportunity to hunt Rocky Mountain bighorn sheep is rare — hunters are allowed to harvest only one in a lifetime.

BRIEFLY

Oregon wildlife officials ask public to report sick elk

SALEM (AP) — Oregon authorities are enlisting hunters and other outdoors types in the fight against a disease hurting elk.

The *Statesman Journal* reports that the state Department of Fish and Wildlife is asking people who spend time in the woods to watch for and report limping elk. Those animals could be suffering from hoof disease, a bacterial infection that causes severe lameness.

Elk with the disease have deformed, overgrown or broken hooves and other abnormalities.

Department veterinarians say last year's public sightings were helpful in tracking the disease.

Fish and Wildlife veterinary staffers are also asking hunters who kill infected elk to save the hooves so the department can analyze them.

Hoof disease does not affect the meat of the elk and is not a risk to human health.

Groups plan lawsuit over fed's 5-state bull trout plan

BOISE, Idaho (AP) — Two conservation groups say a federal plan to bolster bull trout falls short and they've

filed a 60-day notice of their intention to sue.

Alliance for the Wild Rockies and Friends of the Wild Swan in a notice sent Wednesday to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell say the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's plan to recover threatened bull trout in five western states violates the Endangered Species Act.

The agency last month released its Bull Trout Recovery Plan outlining actions to boost populations in six recovery units spread over Idaho, Oregon, Washington, Montana and a tiny portion of Nevada.

Central Oregon reservoirs reach record low levels

BEND (AP) — The Wickiup Reservoir and the Prineville Reservoir are both at their lowest points in more than 20 years.

The *Bulletin* reports that Wickiup, which serves as a major water source for farmland in Jefferson County, was only 9 percent full Wednesday. Typically, the it is about 32 percent full.

The last time the Wickiup was this low was in 1994.

Elsewhere in Central Oregon, the Prineville Reservoir is only 30 percent full, its lowest point since 1992.

A trip on behalf of outdoor opportunities

By PAT WRAY
For the *Corvallis Gazette-Times*

Like most outdoorsmen, I like to be outdoors. I prefer it, actually. Yet there I was, prowling the corridors of congressional and senate office buildings in Washington, D.C. last week, searching out the lairs of Oregon's power brokers. I was doing the same thing as thousands of dark-suited, business card-flashing people — trying to exchange my information and passion for influence and votes.

I was not lobbying, because non-profit organizations like the Backcountry Hunters and Anglers are prohibited from lobbying more than a small percentage of their time. I was educating legislators — or trying to — and I'm not sure how effective I was.

I'd warned the BHA folks when they asked me to travel to D.C. on their behalf that they could find someone better.

They thought differently. They needed someone from Oregon to join other westerners in a last-minute push on behalf of the Land and Water Conservation Fund, which was about to sunset.

I considered declining, but the LWCF occupies a special place in my heart because it has been doing so much good for so long for so many people. Off to our nation's capitol I went, wearing a dark suit and flashing business cards.

First created in 1965, the Land and Water Conservation Fund collects royalties from offshore oil and gas development to purchase, conserve

and enhance public lands. In the fifty years of its existence it has pumped more than \$300 million into every Oregon county. And every LWCF dollar is matched many times over by state, local and private funds.

The most recent big-ticket LWCF item in Oregon was the purchase of a 10,198-acre portion of the Lower Deschutes River Ranch.

The LWCF share of that cost was only \$135,000, a relatively small part of the \$3 million purchase price, but the presence of LWCF grant money provided a stable foundation on which the Trust for Public Lands could build. After acquiring the ranch, the Trust then sold the land to the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife, markedly enhancing public access to the lower Deschutes River and connecting to a 15,000-acre BLM parcel.

Much of the LWCF money has been used to achieve linkages between disconnected pieces of public lands, angering some legislators who believe state and federal governments should not own land. But for those hunters, anglers and hikers frustrated by their inability to access public lands surrounded by private holdings, the LWCF has been a godsend.

It's not just users of wild lands who benefit. Here in Benton County, LWCF money has helped pay for

restrooms at Willamette, Cloverland and Avery parks, construction of tennis courts at Highland View and Western View middle schools and development of the Philomath City Park. There are other projects too numerous to mention. In short, the Land and Water Conservation Fund has had a positive impact on every citizen of Benton County, economically if not directly. The same can be said of almost every county in the nation.

It was a pretty easy message to deliver to our state's senators and congressmen. I visited and spoke with staffers in the offices of all but one. I ran out of hours and missed Suzanne Bonamici.

In the end, we were unsuccessful. The Land and Water Conservation Fund was allowed to sunset on Sept. 30. Now we have to hope for future reauthorization. But it's going to require that outdoorsmen, including tennis players and picnickers, help some Republican legislators realize that the

good of the people is more important than their own dogmatic opposition to the concept of public land ownership.

As ever, the future of our outdoors will be decided in marble rooms, way way indoors.

By Pat Wray is an outdoor columnist for the *Corvallis Gazette-Times*

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