

Black Butte hike gives panoramic view of Cascades

By Mark Morical
WesCom News Service

The Cascade Lakes Highway corridor west of Bend is so choked with hiking options, sometimes it is hard to know where to begin.

Early in the season, as trails higher in the Central Oregon Cascades are still blocked by snow, the choices are a little bit easier.

The snow is melting fast now and most areas will soon be accessible, but last month we were looking for a trail in the Three Sisters Wilderness that was relatively snow-free.

And I mean relatively, because plodding through lingering snowdrifts was a pretty significant part of a hike to Sisters Mirror Lake with my 10-year-old son Mason.

While snow still clung to popular hiking trails such as Green Lakes, Soda Creek and Todd Lake, the Mirror Lakes trailhead appeared snow-free, located at about 5,500 feet in elevation just south of Devils Lake.

The trail gains just 600 feet on the way to the lake, so it makes for a good hike with youngsters or folks simply looking for a fairly easy hike in the wilderness near Bend.

On a cloudy Saturday we started out from the trailhead, located about 30 miles southwest of Bend along Cascade Lakes Highway. About a quarter of a mile into the trek, the trail crossed a picturesque creek that was trickling serenely



Mount Bachelor in the background at Sisters Mirror Lake.

Mark Morical/WesCom News Service

through the subalpine forest. A couple of small logs allowed us to cross the creek safely.

We hiked past mountain hemlock trees, dark-green moss clinging to them, and several areas of lava rock. About 2 miles into the 8-mile round-trip hike we encountered the first patch of snow. It was small and we did not think much of it, but

in the back of my mind I knew the snow patches would only become bigger and bigger as we climbed.

But we never lost the trail on the way to the lake, and Mason seemed to enjoy "surfing" along the top of the melting snow piles. Once hikers do lose track of the trail due to snow, it is time to turn around and head back to the trailhead before

they get lost.

When we finally arrived at the lake, we found skirting the edge of the water a trail that was submerged from recent snowmelt. Still, we managed to walk around and up the bank on one side, finding other small lakes in the process.

According to oregonhiking.com, more than a dozen smaller lakes

can be found in the meadows behind Sisters Mirror Lake. We explored two or three of them before deciding to turn back.

By walking around the southwest side of the lake, hikers can see the summit of South Sister reflected in the lake, according to trails.com. The problem was, there was just too much snow on the southwest side of the lake, and South Sister was shrouded in clouds anyway. So we settled for some peekaboo views of Mount Bachelor from the east side of the lake after checking out the smaller lakes.

For better Cascade views, hikers can return on a loop through Wickiup Plain, which features unobstructed views of South Sister, according to oregonhiking.com.

Another option from Sisters Mirror Lake is to take the Pacific Crest Trail south to 6,520-foot Koosah Mountain, which offers even more splendid views of Cascade peaks.

The trip back to the trailhead went quickly, as we once again traipsed through the snow to get back to dry ground.

The 8.2-mile hike required 3 hours, 40 minutes, and we climbed about 700 feet, topping out at 6,040 feet at the lake.

The snow that we encountered is likely mostly gone by now, so hikers for the rest of this summer should expect a clear trail on the way to Sisters Mirror Lake.

CLAYCOMB

Continued from Page 1B

minutes and then rest of the time list out what items they'll need to carry and which gear works best. So with that said, let me hit a few basic things you need to know and then I'll list out items I suggest carrying.

First off, you need a reason to go. I backpack so I can hunt or fish in the backcountry. Maybe you just want to see cool country, climb a mountain or take pictures (always take a camera). Next question, where should you go? Grab a Forest Service map and find a fun looking area or read a local book that tells of good hikes. After determining where you're going to go, buy a map from MyTopoMaps. They will make you as detailed of a map as you want. You might even be able to get a 20 percent discount if you mention my name to her. They make the best maps. Last year there were some petroglyphs where we were going. I wouldn't have known it if I hadn't gotten



Tom Claycomb photo

Though having a lot of supplies can be good, a backpack doesn't have to be this loaded.

a MyTopoMap of the area.

MEALS

You'll need to plan your meals.

If you forget an item there's no running down to the local grocery store or making a midnight run to

McDonald's. You'll have to do without. So plan and pack for each meal and snack.

For breakfast I eat flavored oatmeal and supplement it with huckleberries. For lunch I make peanut butter and jelly sandwiches. They're easy to make, don't spoil and have protein and energy. For dinner I like to eat a decent meal. I love the Mountain House prepared meals or check out Stephen Weston's book "In The Wild Chef." He has a ton of tasty and yet easy to prepare recipes.

COOKING GEAR

I use an Army mess kit and small aluminum coffee pot to cook with. Take a plastic cup, spoon, fork and plastic plate.

WATER

I use Aquamira products. Their filtered straws or water bottles keep me from having to pack in water. I also use a small aluminum coffee pot to heat water for coffee, oatmeal or sterilize drinking water.

FIRST AID

I don't carry much first aid gear, but I always carry Adventure Medical Kits moleskin and band-aids.

Also, their small rolls of duct tape are handy to tape on torn boot soles, broken tent poles, ripped tents or people that snore. Take an extra pair of glasses if you have them and a tube of Mupirocin for cuts.

LIGHTS/FIRE GEAR

You'll want a headlight, and I love the Coast rechargeable HP7R flashlights. To start a fire, I carry waterproof matches, a couple of boxes of regular matches and some fire-starting material in case it's wet. I also take two to three cheap Bic lighters. You can break them over damp wood.

CLOTHES

I wear Irish Setter boots. Check out their Drifter series or their Vapr Treks are super light. Brown-ing Hiking socks. Take two pairs. Carhartt base layers for cool nights. Nylon fast drying zip off pants and cap. I don't pack a lot of clothing.

SLEEPING GEAR

Lightweight tent, sleeping bag and pads. I like Alps Mountaineering gear. Take a tarp to lay on the inside of your tent so your bag doesn't get wet.

WHISPERER

Continued from Page 1B

Brannaman offered an example of winning a horse with kindness. Say you're trying to get a finicky horse into a trailer. An effective, low-stress way to entice the horse on board is to wave a flag on a long stick behind it. The horse will begin to think inside the horse trailer is the safest place for it to be.

"You're not using the flag like a whip. You're using the horse's natural instinct to want to move away from something kind of scary," Brannaman said. "You soothe the horse as it moves closer to where you want it to be."

In his clinics, Brannaman often encounters common mistakes. One is someone trying to out-muscle a much more powerful horse.

"Anybody who still stays with that (strong arm) method they won't survive too awful long before they're doing something else for a living," Brannaman said. "I grew up around that mentality."

'THE IDAHO COWBOYS'

Brannaman was born in Wisconsin in 1962 but grew up with horses in Idaho and Montana. In the 2001 autobiography, "The Faraway Horses: The Adventures and Wisdom of One of America's Most Renowned Horsemen," which Brannaman wrote with William Reynolds, he details how his rodeo-riding father taught Brannaman and his older brother rope tricks from an early age.

Soon, they performed the tricks on television and at rodeos and fairs around the country as: "The Idaho Cowboys, Buckshot and Smokie, from Coeur d'Alene, Idaho." Physical abuse by the hands and whips of their father, however, betrayed such a rustic idyllic childhood. After being placed with a foster family, Brannaman graduated high school at 17, when he began working under his mentor, Ray Hunt. Hunt's empathetic approach to horsemanship struck a chord with Brannaman. Now married with three children, Brannaman said the relationships people have with horses aren't that different than those he has with people.

"There's just a logical approach to things where you set things up and allow them to happen, rather than trying to make them happen," Brannaman said.

Brannaman held his first horsemanship clinic 36 years ago in Montana. He now spends 40 weeks each year giving clinics throughout 30 to 35 states. He also instructs in Italy, England, Spain, Australia and New Zealand.

Brannaman worked as an on-site expert to help with authenticity. He's published several books, some of which are part equine handbook and part autobiography.

Nicholas Evans, the author of "The Horse Whisperer," has written that Brannaman's "skill, understanding and his gentle, loving heart

have parted the clouds for countless troubled creatures. Buck is the Zen master of the horse world." Evans' praise appears on the covers of several of Brannaman's books, including the 2004 "Believe: A Horseman's Journey," which Brannaman co-wrote with Reynolds.

Reynolds met Brannaman about 35 years ago when he attended one of his early clinics in Malibu, California. Then working in advertising, Reynolds was struck by Brannaman's natural way with horses and people. He approached Brannaman about helping him sell his work to a broader audience. Brannaman went along with the plan, although personal salesmanship still seems to

be a foreign concept to the horseman.

"My mentors were humble men who didn't do a lot of self-promotion," Brannaman said. "They weren't trying to be in a circus."

Reynolds is working with Brannaman on a third book called "The Making of a Bridle Horse." It will be released next year. They're also working on revisions of Brannaman's previous two books. Brannaman didn't mention any of these projects in an interview with The Bulletin. Nor did Brannaman mention the 2011 documentary "Buck," which is available on Netflix and won the Audience Award for Documentary at the Sundance Film Festival.

"Of course Buck didn't

mention those things!" Reynolds said with a laugh. "Buck is incredibly humble and self-effacing. He's just not someone who chooses to

promote himself verbally. He wants people to come and be a part of the experience (of his clinics). Horses and life, it's all the same to him."

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