

Pack Trip Into Mountain Lakes Wild Area Opens Spectacular New World

Photos and Story

By DICK BRIGGS

If you're among that variety of nature lovers who prefer the high country to the lowlands or the seashore; if you're exhilarated by the nippy frost that blows in on an early morning breeze; if the peace and silence of the wilderness overwhelms you; if the view of a primeval

world spread before you on a lofty mountain crag is worth the aches and stiffened joints that develop from a three-day pack-trip—then a sojourn into the Mountain Lakes Wild Area is an adventure worthy of your camping menu.

Eons ago tall peaks filled the valley which now forms the cradle for some 16 mountain lakes.

many of them stocked with eastern brook trout.

Later, the peaks were undermined by volcanic activity and they fell away leaving the 6,000-foot high valley forming the wilderness recreation area of some 23,000 acres. Remnants of the craters which supported those lofty spires form parts of the circuitous trail that starts near

Varney Creek and winds some 20 miles over alternately steep hills, craggy summits, and flat lands forested with red fir, white bark pine and mountain hemlock. Within its confines are five summits with the buttress of Aspen Butte (el: 8,263), the highest in elevation, located near the southeast corner of the wilderness.

About four miles north of Aspen Butte is Mt. Harrison, second highest of the summits, where brushy slopes meet in a rounded peak at an elevation of 7,930 feet.

The other three mountains rise in the western sections of the wild area with Crater Mountain the highest in elevation at 7,800, followed by Whiteface Peak, 7,706 feet, and Greylock Mountain, 7,600.

Few varieties of game range along these mountain slopes and valleys that offer little browse for foraging animals. Most common to the area is the chipmunk, which ranges at all elevations within the wild area.

In the higher elevations, its neighbor is the rarely observed Cony, a short-eared mammal found principally in rock slides of the mountainous area of Asia and Western North America. The chubby mammal gathers hay and stockpiles it in the sun for curing during August and early September. It emits a shrill "cek" when aroused.

Deer are found more frequently at the lower altitudes (such as Clover Lake, about 6,000 feet) where grasses grow more abundantly and coyotes and bear are even less frequent visitors.

Backpackers planning to hike the nearly 20 miles of trail should allow three or four days to insure a pleasant, leisurely trip. For campers on a weekend outing the seven-mile trek to Lake Harriette is suited for those in good physical condition. Those less hardy should set their destination at Como Lake or Eb and Zeb lakes, situated about five miles from Varney Creek along the trail to Harriette Lake.

The trail ascends steadily from its starting point to a rise about one-half mile south of Como Lake.

A camper carrying a bedroll and grub will find the hike to Harriette Lake no easy jaunt, as inferred in an article published in a magazine of nationwide circulation.

Bob Asher, ranger and fire control officer of the Klamath District, Winema National Forest, reported that a number of tourists started out for the wild area this summer after reading the article.

Of the number who headed into the wilderness, few completed the journey and one turned back after hiking halfway to Como Lake. "The trail is not as steep as some but the ascent is steady and one should be in fair condition to attempt it," Asher stated.

People with histories of cardiac or other serious ailments should explore the wild area from horseback, if at all.

Campsites located at each of the mountain lakes are maintained by a one-man mountain patrol in the form of Terry McGhehey, 19, a sophomore student majoring in forestry at Central Oregon College. McGhehey makes the loop tour on horseback each weekend, clearing rocks from the trail, cleaning campgrounds, and replacing weathered trail signs with new ones.

It was last Saturday that I accompanied McGhehey on horseback during his two-day trip through the wild area in order that I might observe some of its grandeur and take note of some of the recreational features enjoyed by more than 2,000 outdoorsmen annually.

The mount assigned to me was Paint, a dappled black and white horse of doubtful heritage, who

was fitted with a saddle through the courtesy of Ranger Asher and made ready for the two-day journey which was to start from the Pelican Guard Station. As I approached, she regarded me doubtfully and correctly appraised my lack of horsemanship; however, Paint, of ancient vintage by horse standards, bore my weight good - naturedly as I

bounced about helplessly during most of the sojourn.

McGhehey's mount was Norma, a gray mare, and the pack horse, Rinky Dink, carried the provisions, in addition to a rubber raft which is used to collect refuse thrown in the lakes by thoughtless and careless camp-

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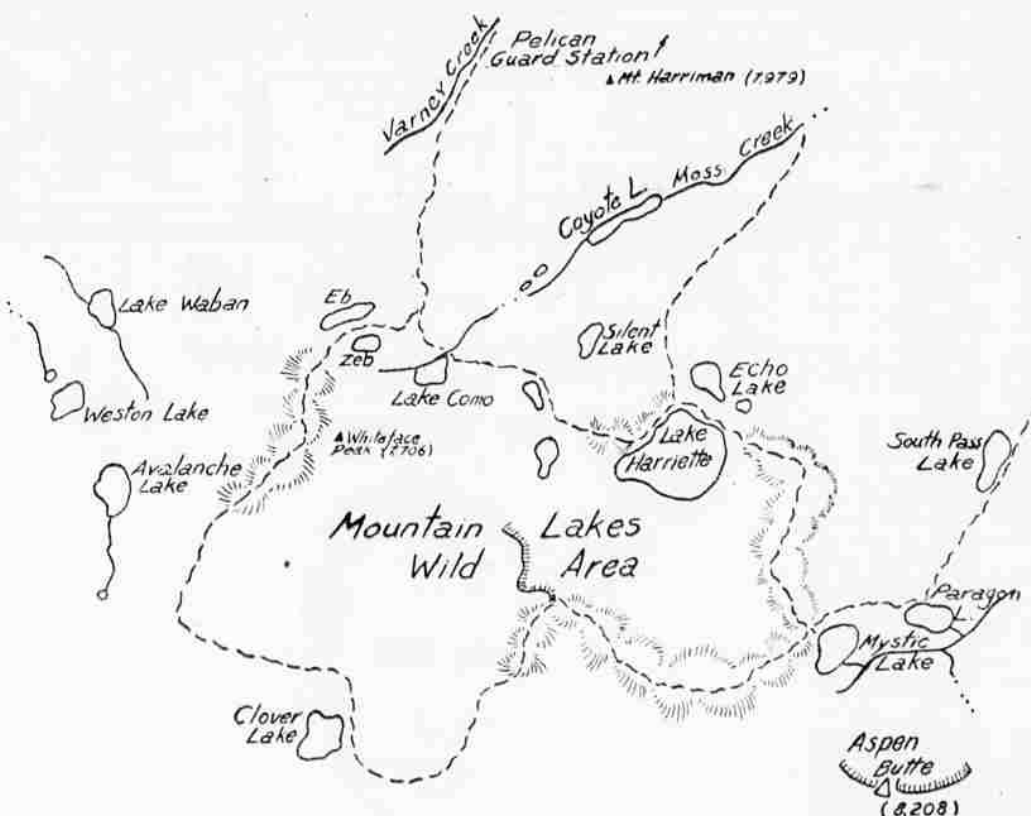
WILDERNESS, TROUT STOCKED LAKES ATTRACT CAMPERS — A vista depicting the terrain between the slopes of Mt. Harrison and Aspen Butte, with Agency and Klamath lakes in the background, is characteristic of the 23,071 acres comprising the Mountain Lakes Wild Area, about 30 miles west of Klamath Falls. Accessible

by three mountain trails, the region is the setting for some 16 mountain lakes, many stocked with eastern brook trout. Noting the spectacular view from a ridge near Aspen Butte is Terry McGhehey, mountain patrolman of the Winema Forest. To the left is Mt. Harrison, situated to the northeast of the wilderness.



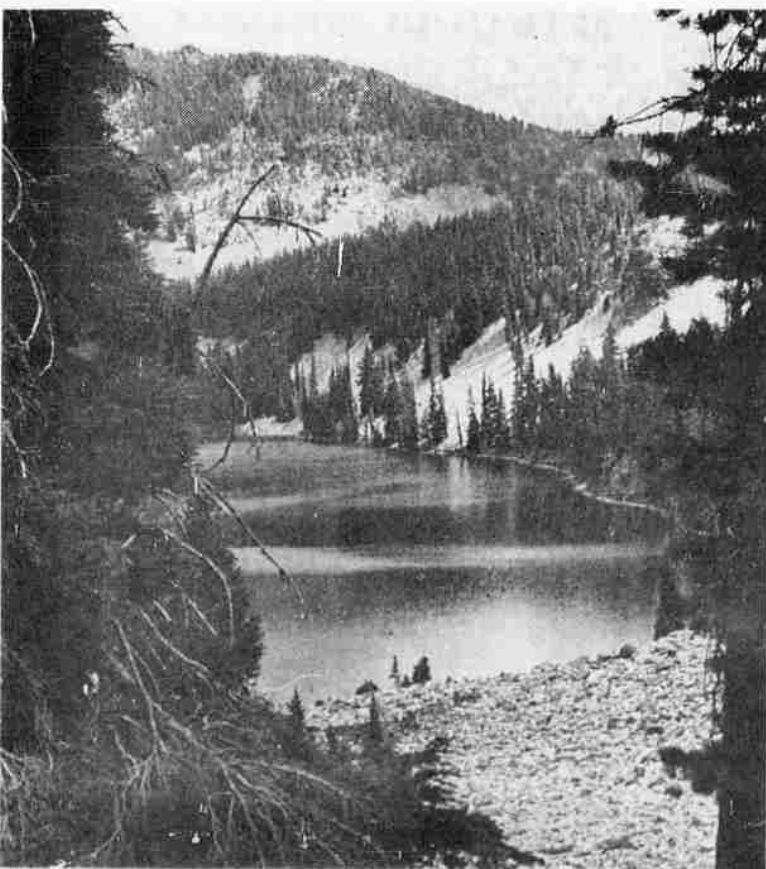
AZURE JEWEL AGLEAM IN A WILDERNESS — Harriette Lake glistens from the base of unbroken slopes of timber, as glimpsed from a high outcrop in the southern part of

the wilderness vastness. Agency and Klamath lakes appear dimly above the point where the two mountains intersect.



LAKE OF THE WOODS A PALE RIBBON — Mt. McLoughlin (el: 9,497), appearing ghost-like through a bluish haze, towers over Lake of the Woods in a view from

the western region of the wild area. The mountain and the lake, popular landmarks in Klamath County, are located outside of the dedicated township.



ROCKY BOWL CRADLE FOR ICY LAKE — Largest of the mountain lakes in the Wild Area, Harriette Lake (el: 6,740), is approximately seven miles by trail via Varney Creek. Nearly 70 acres in area, the lake has a maximum depth of 63 feet and is a favorite site of dry fly fishermen. Speculation is that the lake may be suitable for the production of lake trout.



TREES THRIVE NEAR BEDS OF SLAG — Islands of hardy evergreens flourish along slaggy slopes near Whiteface (el: 7,706), in the western portion of the Mountain Lakes Wild Area. The weathered rims of mountain craters form the beds for parts of the wilderness trail.



TRAVELERS QUENCH THIRST IN A CRYSTAL LAKE — McGhehey and his horse, Norma, satisfy their thirst at Clover Lake before continuing along the Wild Area trail to Whiteface Mountain on the final part of the two-day ride.