

Emigrant Wilderness Report

August 19 - 23, 2005

by Herb Steierman

After encountering three *trainees* with packs on at Wunderlick County Park on Wednesday (8/17) and learning they were heading up to the Emigrant Wilderness, I started drooling. And why shouldn't I have not drooled - the winter had provided such abundant rain that I was sure the wild flowers would be outstanding. So I looked at my calendar, found a four night open window, and decided to do it starting on Friday (8/19). Short notice, but what to heck, I wanted to capture more flowers on film, and then of course I'm retired!

My planned itinerary was to start at the Gianelli Cabin trailhead, spend the first night at Powell Lake (about 2 miles), the next two nights at Long Lake (about 8 miles) with the layover day scouting the nearby lakes, the last night at Toejam Lake (about 6 miles), and the last day return to the trailhead (about 8 miles).



Tiger Lily

Friday, August 19

I reached the Summit Ranger Station at noon (located at 1 Pinecrest Road where Dodge Ridge Ski area is identified). Got my wilderness permit, directions to the trailhead, and a recommendation for lunch. Down the Pinecrest road 0.9 mile is a sit down restaurant called The Steam Donkey where for about \$10 I got a chicken sandwich and a drink, sitting outside enjoying the scenery. After lunch, I traveled to the trailhead by (a) making a turn at the Dodge Ridge Ski area sign (0.6 mile from the Steam Donkey or 0.3 mile from the Ranger Station), (b) continuing 4.3 miles until the road T's making a left hand turn on to Crabtree Road, and (c) continuing on this road for another 8.5 miles to the Gianelli Cabin trailhead passing along the way a horse camp (1.8 miles from the T) and the Crabtree Camp trailhead road (4.5 miles from the T). For what it's worth, there is a pay public shower in the parking area near the restaurant.

At 2:10P I was ready to go, fully greased up, camera pouch on, pack on, on a clear 70 degree day with a slight breeze. The GPS elevation indicated 8665'. The three maps I own all show a very steep initial climb (about 500' in 0.5 mile), nearly due east, straight up the fall line of the mountain, but in actuality the trail has been rerouted with a quite reasonable grade. The new trail



Lowell Lake

first goes north to circumnavigate a stream bed (about 0.3 miles) and then has a number of north-south switchbacks as you progress eastward up the slope. At the crest (3:05P and 9134') near Burst Rock is the wilderness boundary, the new trail merges with the old.

At 3:50P I reached the Powell Lake trail junction, marked with *ducks* (8905', NAD27 UTM coordinate 11S0249667-4231903). 10 minutes later I found myself a home for the night on the east side of the lake (8864',

11S0249810-4232015). It was an established campsite complete with fire ring, good water access, and nice views of the lake. Although I didn't have any intentions to swim, the water was moderately warm and the lake bottom was either of sand or granite, but no mud. There appeared to be only one other party at the lake, camping on the north side just east of the main peninsula. This is probably the optimum place to stay, but with a long next day I wasn't too interested in optimum, more in convenience.

After setting up camp, I had dinner at about 6P on a rock perch over looking the lake. With a simple long sleeve shirt and my bandana used as a shield over my ears and neck, I was able to tolerate the few mosquitoes (as this would be the case for the entire trip). As dusk approached, the bats came out to provide a splendid aerial display of bug control over the lake.

Unfortunately, I was not honored with the same show at the other lakes I visited. I saw a few fish jump, but information from others made it sound like this was not a grand fishing hole.

Saturday, August 20

By 8:45A I had finished breakfast, was packed, and ready for my days journey. The air temperature was 50 degrees, the skies clear. At 10:15A I had reached the junction to Chewing Gum Lake (8742', 11S0251011-4231945). At 3:30P I had reached the junction to Wire Lakes to the west (8854', 11S0257906-4229645) and a few minutes later to the east was the junction to Long Lake (8875', 11S0258005-4229564). Both trail junctions were marked only with *ducks*. At 4:20P I had reached my home for the next couple nights at Long Lake.

Throughout the day I had stopped many times to take pictures of wild flowers. Most prevalent were a purple daisy and a hundred and one varieties of lupine, but there were also various varieties of monkeyflower, paintbrush, white mariposa lilies, tiger lilies, pussypaws, penstemon, much more, and of course a lot of DYCs. The meadows were lush with green and wild flowers, evidence of the abundant rain this past winter. Even the steeper sloped areas had lots of color. Of course this was my expectation and my reason to trek here on the spur of the moment, I'm glad it came true.

The major creeks were flowing such as the ones in Whiteside Meadow, Salt Lick Meadow, and Spring Meadow. Although crossing them was not a problem, some renavigation was required. There were several sections of trail which had been rerouted to avoid the wet.



Lewis Monkeyflower



Long Lake

At Long Lake there are many dead trees growing out of the water making it an obvious looking dammed lake. The north end of the lake has many islands which would have been more appealing had it not been for these misplaced dead trees. After scouting the northwest shore, I found two well established campsites. There were

likely others further south, but by that time I was totally zonked so I chose the second camp site (8741', 11S0258833-4229045). As a camp, it was quite nice. Of course there was a fire pit (who cares!), but best of all someone had made a sitting bench by propping a log against some

sloped granite to provide a great place to relax with back support. There were ample choices of flat ground with soft pine needles to set up a tent. Immediately south of the camp was a small drainage where abundant wild flowers grew, and I guess the camp deer liked what was growing there too because I often saw he (or she) grazing there. Otherwise, the deer was not a problem. Water access was a minor issue since most of the lake shore in the area was boggy. During my two day stay at Long Lake, I didn't see one fish jump, so it is definitely not a fisherman's paradise.

Sunday, August 21

By 9:30A, after a well deserved good nights sleep, I had finished breakfast and was ready for a day of scouting and of taking pictures. It took me but 30 minutes to traverse the 1 mile climb up to the main trail junction. From there my plan was to go towards Deer Lake, to Wood Lake, to Karls Lake, and to Red Can Lake. Of course plans are made to be changed.

The area of trail from the Long Lake junction down to Deer Lake is a drainage of many small lakes, meadows, bogs, and of course much water and green and wild flowers. No doubt, this is a beautiful section of trail. Often, because of the wet, the trail had taken a diversion from its more normal drier times.



Trail from Wire/Long Lakes to Deer Lake

At Deer Lake, where the drainage from both the small lakes and Long Lake enter Deer Lake, is a trail crossing. Here I had some fairly easy rock hopping to cross without getting wet. But this is also where I ended up diverting from my day's plan. Just as I crossed the creek, the obvious trail goes straight and the non obvious *main* trail goes to the right. Of course I went straight (silly me) and ended up at the south end of Long Lake. I even thought I was gaining too much elevation, but the trail was so well marked that I just assumed it had to be right. Besides, I was busy along the way taking pictures, and it was probably the creek outlet from Long Lake which parallels this trail that provided the resource for such beauty. So after about an hour travel and picture taking, I found myself at the base of the two dams of Long Lake (8737', 11S0258541-4228050). So what to heck, I was there, I did a bit more scouting.



Long Lake Creek Outlet

The south end of Long Lake is much more picturesque than the north. There was a couple camping in the area, he said he had been coming here for many years since his Boy Scout days. It is definitely out of the way and seems to not have the short comings of where I was camped, it had nice camp sites and better water access and good spots for swimming and boulders to sit on for views. I still don't think I would plan this as a destination, but one never knows.

After my diversion, I headed towards Wood Lake reaching it at 1P. Immediately when you reach the Lake, the trail junctions in three directions. The east junction is probably to various campsites, the west junction up over a small granite face is used to circumnavigate the lake, and the other west junction goes down to a delightful campsite on a

small nearby peninsula. Not realizing there were two west bound trails and the fact that I was hungry for lunch, I headed down looking for a place to eat.

I suspect the peninsula campsite is just legal, that is the main camp area is about 100 feet in three directions from the lake. But what a great place. Lots of flat ground for tents, easy water access, lots of trees for shade, and great views. While having a relaxing lunch, I observed many fish jump. Three years previous I also had lunch at Wood Lake but in the channel area between the two main lake halves, and there I saw large (maybe 20") trout swimming in the channel. A fisherman's haven!

I decided that I would leave a trip to Karls Lake and Red Can Lake for another outing. So I meandered back to Long Lake stopping along the way for more pictures. At 4:30P I was back home.

Monday, August 22

By 8:50A, I had finished breakfast and other chores and was ready to move on. Again the day was perfect with clear skies and nice temperatures. I retraced my original route stopping along the way for more pictures and an occasional snack. At 12:30P I reached the junction of Toejam Lake (8806', 11S0255371-4232291), marked only with *ducks*.



Toejam Lake

Toejam Lake is 2 miles from the junction with virtually no net elevation change, but has a 200' dip in between. Most of the trail is well maintained, but as you get close to the lake there are some steep granite areas which are more difficult to

follow. But it really didn't matter (even as I got screwed up both coming and going along this area) because the trail is easily found by identifying the natural features shown on the map. Of course, on the way back I used my GPS to navigate.

Toejam Lake is quite nice to view, it is a natural high alpine lake. It's really amazing that the lake is nestled nearly at the top of the ridge, it made me wonder where all the water came from. It's not particularly large, and there appears to be a foot path entirely around it (although after I set up camp I only covered only about 3/4 of it).

The main trail in follows the east shore line to several identifiable campsites near the southeast corner. These certainly weren't perfect (and in fact had much room for improvement), but I picked the fairly large campsite shaded by trees (8802', 11S0254787-4230212) rather than the one which was a bit closer to the lake outlet and more exposed. My primary complaint was the discourtesy of the previous packer groups, there was horse poop at the adjoining campsite to the north and the same to the south. Although the main area was clean, some of the best views (and what would have been my preferred camp location) was inundated with the droppings and smell horse poop. It irritated me so much that I called in a concern to the Forest Service after I returned home - for the wilderness permit rules state that stock should be kept 100' away from campsites and this was certainly not the case.



Lemmon's Paintbrush

Water access was easy, but a nice view for dinner was a bit more difficult to find. The water was certainly warm enough to swim if you were so inclined. At dusk, I saw lots of fish jumping, but the ones nearby were maybe 4" in size. Alas, no bats and no aerial show. Also at dusk I heard a group of two others at the lake, but could not see them, they were on the west shore in the area that I didn't scout. This certainly would be an optional location for a future trip.

Tuesday, August 23

By 8:10A after getting up at 6A I was fed, packed up, and ready for my journey out. I had already taken photographic advantage of the morning sun casting warm colors over the mirrored lake (too bad the picture didn't come out!). It was going to be a full day with 8 miles of trail, about +1500' gain and -1700' loss, and then the drive back to the Bay Area.

The journey back was again picturesque, I was surprised how many photos I shot on return. Because there were several steep climbs, I stopped a few times to relax, refuel, and to enjoy the expansive scenery. After the junction to Chewing Gum Lake where the trail crests (about 9100'), I enjoyed the view of Chewing Gum Lake below (about 8800') and ultimately the Crabtree Camp trailhead (about 7200').



White Lupine

Throughout the trip I bumped into about a dozen groups. But on this leg, I met up with a set of what looked like four college kids studying entomology (since each had a bug net attached to their pack). When she asked how the mosquitoes were, I replied that "they were not so bad, but you won't need the nets since they will come to you." You know, if you can't share your years of experience with the young, the world would just turn to crap.

I reached the car at 2P, washed up, changed clothes, and as a 6 on the grunge meter I was ready to go. I stayed entirely on the Crabtree road for 13.4 miles until I reached HWY-108. From there I headed towards Sonora for a well deserved Mexican dinner at Cocina Michoacana (13955 Mono Way, south side of the street and just east of the Burger King). This was my first time at this location of this family owned business, but I always stop at the one in Groveland on HWY-120, yummy yummy.

All in all, it was definitely a grand trip.

Equipment Review

GPS - This year I upgraded my GPS to the Garmin Legend C. At about 6 ounces and with map download capability, it was definitely a big help navigating. I need to rely on it more!

Digital Voice Recorder - At 2 ounces and tiny enough to fit in any pocket, it was extremely useful to take notes throughout the day. The model I bought, Olympus bottom of the line (\$30), holds a bit more than an hour of recording and has three voice directories. I use the first directory for car notes, the second directory for general hiking notes, and the third directory for the all important photographic notes. A great toy.



Elephant Head

Glad Bowl - It's been a couple years since I switched to a 24 ounce Glad bowl with lid for my dinner/breakfast bowl, but I learned a new trick with it. Besides using it to carry fragile food, and using the lid to let food steep without the worry of bugs and dirt, I learned that cleanup is a breeze by just placing a small amount of hot water in the container, closing the lid, and shaking it vigorously.



Large Waxed Yellow Mushroom (~2' wide)

Water Bag - This year I purchased a Nalgene 96 ounce wide mouth water bag and a MSR wide mouth cap with valve spout. Among other things, I learned that the valve spout is useful when washing your hands since you can set the water flow to a low level and scrub up nicely.

Alcohol Stove - The first real extended test of my homemade alcohol stove. It's real simple, it's absolutely (too) quiet, and it works well, but it requires a prior knowledge of how much fuel to use to boil a certain quantity of water. Too much fuel is wasteful since once ignition begins it can't be put out, too little fuel isn't as serious since it basically means waiting about one minute for the stove to cool down to add more fuel. The stove may de-ignite when the fuel is cold, but this problem goes away once the stove has been lit for about one minute. I determined that 24 ounces of water requires two coffee measures worth of fuel to boil in 15 minutes, where 24 ounces is used for a 10 ounce cup of hot coco and the remaining used to reconstitute dinner or oatmeal. On this trip I used ever so slightly less than 4 ounces (by weight) of fuel per day which allowed for a dinner/breakfast pot of 24 ounces of water plus a 10 ounce pot for another drink at dinner plus a dinner/breakfast pot of about 4 ounces for cleanup. Boiling more than 24 ounces at a time did not work since there was just not enough heat generated by the stove. At an outbound weight of stove plus fuel plus fuel bottle of $(4+16+4=)$ 24 ounces, it's hard to beat for a solo trip. I wouldn't recommend it for group trips or maybe even solo trips of longer duration since alcohol has half the BTU output of white gas which means twice as much fuel volume and weight to lug along. I was able to tote 16 ounces by weight of fuel in a fully loaded 16 fluid ounce narrow-neck lexan bottle - obviously another day would require another bottle. The lexan bottle was used because alcohol fuel shouldn't be stored in aluminum bottles.



Western Bisort (Buckwheat)