



2010-Hiking the Year Away

Where I live in Idaho, I only have little more than 2-1/2 months of summer to hike in. So it is obligatory that one go like mad to jam as much as possible into these couple of months or so of hopefully good summer weather. And I definitely did, getting in 130 miles or so. But that is far from the whole story. This was a summer of 'busts', hikingly speaking, and a poignant reminder that, as I tell my hiking partner, the 'hiking plan' is only gets you to the trailhead (TH). By the time I exit the woods, I usually have gone from the original plan, to revision 'Z'. *So trudge on with me through this summer if you dare!*

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The first venture was into the Mable Lakes area (44.45583, -115.15194), which is basically at the west end of the Stanley Basin in Idaho. The only reason this hike even was necessary this year, was due to last year's plan 'busting' and the inability to finish the hike I had originally programmed. So this year is not the first time things have not gone according to my carefully planned script.

My usual plan is to target a specific area, and then try to 'bag' all of the lakes in that area. So this year this year, I planned to explore Mable Lakes, proceed over the ridge to the north, collect a couple of lakes there, then continue down the drainage to Fall Creek, explore the lake basins in that area, lake 7805 & Iris Lake, then back up Fall Creek to Finger/Moon lakes, then over the ridge to the south, and out to the TH. Sounds like a very nice orderly little package, eh?

Well, up to the point of getting to the jump-off place for Iris/7805, it was orderly. After that? Not so. If you have looked a map of this area, you know that it is a 2000' very steep ascent to Iris. What the map doesn't show is the almost impenetrable jungle on the way up. Hiking partner is a 75yo lady, and not up to this kind of challenge, so we didn't make it very far into this area.

So I cut my losses and abandoned Iris/7805 to another time, and moved on to Finger Lakes. They were quite interesting, especially since there was an Otter family at Little Finger Lake, and they were, as always, definitely ready to put on an impromptu Otter show for us.

From there it was on to 'Moon' lake and a surprise for sure. And that was, that Moon lake was exceptionally beautiful, with a deep turquoise color, and as well, one of a very few lakes that drain out through its banks, or bottom, and ends up with a lot of shoreline looking not unlike many of the irrigation reservoirs here in Idaho. To cap this experience, the fish in this lake were exceptionally large and swimming near the shore where they were eminently visible. My kingdom for a fishing pole! Moon Lake was the last for this trip, so it was on up the ridge and out.

Our second jaunt was a completion of the Little Queens River/Queens River Loop on the western edge of the Sawtooth National Recreation Area (roughly 43.89889, -115.14194). This is one that I have wanted to do for some time, but since it promised to be kind of a long jaunt, it had to have a fairly big time slot to accommodate it. So I gave it the first couple of weeks in August this year. Why August? Because in Idaho August can always be counted on to be severe clear and sunny. Right? Welcome to lightning central. On this trip, which eventually got cut short due to the horrid weather, I was exposed to more lightning than I have been since I have been in Boise. One morning, about 7 days in, after being subjected to 3 completely different waves of extreme lightning/thunder in the same night, I consulted an Oracle (tongue firmly in cheek here). Oracle said, "Larry, get out of Dodge." So I did. Sadly, between navigational errors (mine), and just plain crappy weather, we missed a lot of the lakes I had wanted to 'bag'. So this one goes back in the bucket for another grab.

My third venture was sort of an impromptu event, and I decided to sally forth back into the Falls Creek area to attempt to gain Iris Lake for the second time. A side benefit would be that I would be able to retrieve my goat's highline, which I inadvertently left the trip before. Unfortunately, things began to disintegrate rather rapidly. Just before I was to leave, a lightning-caused fire closed the TH I had planned on using. So I had to default to another TH that only added a little extra mileage to this venture. The good news was that it passed by my favorite hot spring. The bad news was that it involved 3 river crossings.

In spite of the fact that I don't have any trouble with my guys regarding water crossings, I personally *DON'T* like deep & strong river navigations. This could possibly be due in part of my almost 70yo age level. One tends to get a lot more conservative with time.

However, cross the rivers we did, and on down the middle fork of the Salmon River we went. This was sufficiently interesting to make the trip worthwhile (If you look at the pictures on my website, referenced at the end of this epistle, you will see what I mean).

Once at the Fall Creek jumping off point for Iris Lake, on up we went. All went well until just about at the top of this drainage, where believe it or not, the goats bailed on me. In all fairness, I have to tell you that they were carrying saddles and packs, and where I had muscled my way up to achieve the point I found myself, was perilously close to mountain climbing. It just might be said that the goats had more sense than I. Two factors combined to make me bail again. One; I was very tired and the thought of going down to where the goats were and trying to find another way up was more than I could stomach, and Two; the previously mentioned fire was pluming enthusiastically one ridge behind me, and the prudent course of action seemed to be, 'get out of dodge... again!'

So, back up the river, splash into the hot spring again, and on out. Trips this year seem to be star-crossed.

Our fourth and last attempt for 2010 was to venture over to the highly-touted Strawberry Wilderness in Oregon, and visit the 8 or so lakes in that area. One of the reasons for choosing this location was that the weather everywhere else was less than optimal, and this area was supposed to be good for 3-4 days. Time would show that to be patently false.

However, away we went. First day we traveled the 180 or so road miles, then hiked into and made camp at Slide Lake (44.28944 -118.66167). Weather was great. So far, so good.

Next day we set out to explore High Lake, Mud Lake and others. Weather was very mixed, a lot of threat, but fortunately no action other than a chilly wind. So we pretty much were able to wrap that part of this area up. That night? A hurricane. Wind blew, the tent flapped, the rain sounded like hail, and my tent leaked for the first time in the 6 or so years I have had it. Bummer.

Next morning we were fortunate enough to have a brief weather respite, and so had breakfast and prepared to hit the trail. Naturally, just as soon as we had the tarp irretrievably down, the rain started in earnest. Murphy lives! So down the trail we went, with the goats bumping my rear attempting to say, "Let's get going to where it isn't doing this!" After about a mile of the five miles we had to go, they settled down and resigned themselves to being sopping water-babies. ;-)

We did take a short side jaunt to Strawberry Lake, which originally had been on the must-visit agenda, but there was so much fog and low cloud that it could barely be seen. Since we were pretty well completely wet, it was time to bag this one as well.

The lasting impression from this area, is that my contention there is very little that can compare with the Sawtooth and White Cloud mountains in Idaho. These lakes were either algae-filled or muddy or both, and certainly not up to the pristine standards I have come to expect in my Idaho hiking.

In the final analysis, we got in lots of hiking, and that was good. We also proved the adage that 'life is what happens when you are making other plans!' But all hiking is good hiking, and my sights are already firmly set on 2011. T'will be along wait indeed.

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