

Hiking the White Clouds

September 2009

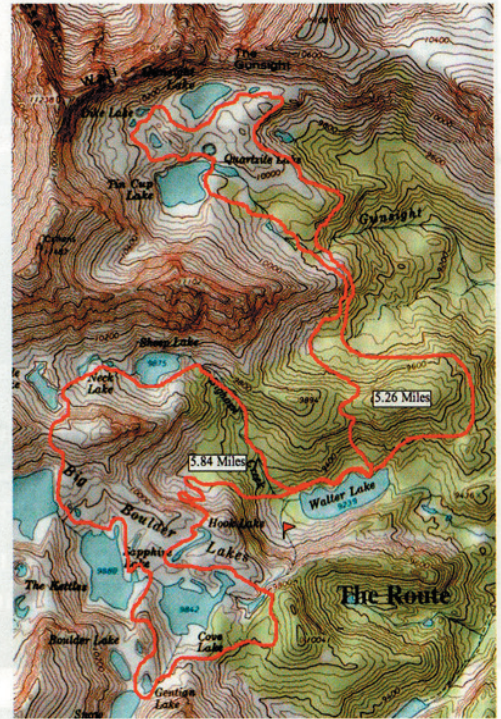
Déjà vu all over again!

Maybe some will remember the original article about hiking Idaho's White Cloud mountains that I wrote last summer and that was published in GAC in April of this year. In it, I noted that while hiking the north end of the White Clouds, we missed seeing most all of the lakes in the Big Boulder basin. This was due largely to goat 'troubles'. I had mentioned in this article that Sassy-Brown (SB), my smaller-than-he-should-be Oberhasli had much earlier stopped 'carrying' anything other than himself.

So during the trek to the upper lakes from Walker Lake, our basecamp in this area, he, SB, got to a point where he lay down. Little Brother, always more of a follower than a worker, then followed SB and lay down himself. Blackjack, who detests climbing in the first place saw an opportunity to join in the trend, and with three out of four already down, what's a lone goat to do? So down Cocoa-Brownie went. About this time, as I see my carefully laid plans flitting away like a lonely sparrow, I am thinking, "So whoever wanted these bloody goats anyway???" Then I remembered. It was me. Like the great philosopher Pogo in the comic strip of yesteryear said, "We have found the enemy, and they is us!" I did, however get a little satisfaction out of putting my fat finger in Sassy-Brown's face and told him, "Well, buddy, you will never see the mountains again!" And he hasn't.

But I digress.

This time, I loaded up Little Brother and my two LaManchas, Blackjack & Cocoa-Brownie, and joined by a church companion (my normal hiking companion had other 'obligations') we set off on the 20th of July for this area again in hopes of completing what I had started last year. This time we elected to head in from a trail on the NE side of the White Clouds at a trailhead called Livingston Mill. I guess this place had once been a thriving silver-mining community, but at this point is only a landmark and some empty buildings. And a likely superfund cleanup site.



The Trail Head

The trail in from this TH is about 2 miles of anybody-can-use-it trail (not my favorite kind of trail), then there is the junction with the trail that we came in on last year. From this point on, it is a hiker-packstock kind of trail and you are able to leave the motorcycles behind. Interestingly, at this junction the trail crosses a very enthusiastic stream on a bridge fashioned out of a couple of large logs placed side by side, and flattened to make a good walking surface. This arrangement occurs again further up the trail at another stream crossing.

Remember that this is the same bridge that all three of these goats crossed last year with only a minimum of encouragement. But this year, all 3 balked, possibly because the stream was going full tilt, and making a *lot* of noise. I finally got Cocoa-Brownie (CB) across the bridge, but had to remove pants and shoes and 'encourage' the other two through the water. The next one of these bridges we came to, here we go again.

By this time I was maximum put out. So off came the pants and shoes, and I unceremoniously grabbed Blackjack and dragged him unwillingly through the water. The other two, observing Blackjack's trek through this stream up to his stomach apparently said to themselves, "Uh oh, I doan wanna do that..." and they jumped up onto the log bridge and pranced across like it was the easiest thing in the world. Uh huh. Something here about single-minded creatures. The rest of the way to our basecamp location was pretty much textbook, if not a little strenuous since there was still a lot of 'up' to be done. This particular trail has a total of 2000' feet of altitude gain.



Tuesday morning we explored the middle and south basins and 10 or so regular lakes and numerous other 'pothole' lakes. On the way up to this basin we passed some other folks and asked them about routes, and such. Later in the day we passed them in the upper basin and one of their company remarked, "Well, I see you got off trying to find this basin!" And I replied, "Um, no, not really. We decided to do the middle basin first, then we came over that 10,400 foot pass into this basin. It was quite



an adventure!" And it was. But the view from the top of the pass was heavenly. Talk about your catbird seat!

Wednesday was the morning to try to get to the north basin. We had discussed this with yesterday's folks, and they were unsure about how to go about this one since it was real challenging, but we did agree on the way to try.

And this way was to climb straight up about 700' to the top of the ridge directly behind our campsite, descend about 300' into a marshy meadow, then climb back up and around the end of a ridge ending up at the first lake at the 10000' level. I will have to say that after doing an end run around the ridge, you came into a breathtakingly pretty meadow that extended up this drainage to the lakes. It was lush and green, and had a picture-perfect stream right down the middle. The lakes were their own reward, and breathtaking as well. We had lunch and explored this complete cirque and its many lakes. On the way back we decided to circumvent

the 700' ridge that we had climbed over that morning. I tried to maintain about the 9400' level and go around the end of it back to the basecamp. It added a mile or so, but we were so tired at this point that neither one of us wanted to summit this ridge again!



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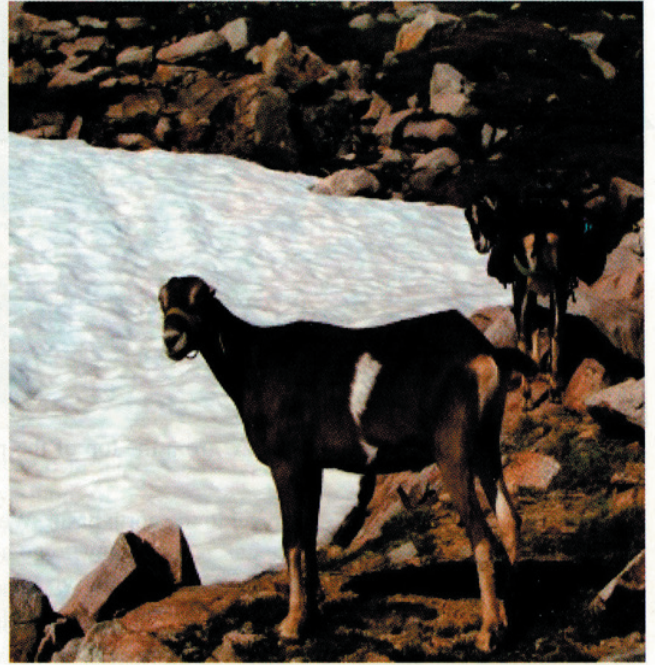
Thursday was 'out' day, and going out was pretty much routine except that the goats apparently decided that opposing me regarding the bridges wasn't worth it, and I didn't have to disrobe again!

The last two miles was crowded with motorcycles, but as much as I don't like running into them at all on the trail, every one was beyond courteous and most shut off their engines completely. Just couldn't complain about that!

A beautiful hike... a wonderful hike... and I suspect one that I will do again at some point in the future.

Larry Robinson
Idaho City, ID

Pictures: <http://www.boiselarry.com/recent/2009/wc2009/wc2009.html>



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away!**