

JULY 2014

THE MOUNTAIN EAR



The Monthly Newsletter of the Rocky Mountaineers



Climb. Hike. Ski. Bike. Paddle. Dedicated to the Enjoyment and Promotion of Responsible Outdoor Adventure.

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The Mountain Ear is the club newsletter of The Rocky Mountaineers and is published at the end of every month. Anyone wishing to contribute articles of interest are welcomed and encouraged to do so - contact the editor.

Membership application can be found at the end of the newsletter.

ABOUT THE CLUB:

Mission Statement:

The Rocky Mountaineers is a non-profit club dedicated to the enjoyment and promotion of responsible outdoor adventures.

Meetings and Presentations: Meetings are held the second Tuesday, September through May, at 6:00 PM at the Trail Head. Each meeting is followed by a featured presentation or speaker at 7:00 PM.

Please be sure to check out our **Facebook group** to receive the latest up-to-date news and post short-notice trip proposals:

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/rockymountaineers/>

Cover Photo: Castle Crag in the Bitterroot Mountains northwest of Hamilton, Montana. Photo by Dan Saxton,

TRIP REPORTS

Photos along with trip reports are greatly appreciated!

Thursday - Saturday, July 3-5, 2014 - West Cabinet Mountains

Steve Schombel started off on this trip but was turned around by high creek waters not too far in. He decided it was best to return at a later date.

Saturday, July 26, 2014 - Castle Crag



Castle Crag from its east ridge. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Four of us - Dan, Todd, Bryan, and Norman - started off from the Sheafman Creek Trailhead just before 8am to scale this iconic Bitterroot peak. We made good time up the creek, but I can see why it does seem like a long way in! Castle Crag is not even visible until you get close to the first lake, Garrard Lake. When we got to that area, the mosquitoes started to make their fury known - it's that time of year once again right after the snow melts while

everything is still damp. So we had to keep moving until the bugs eased up a little bit after Knaack Lake. At Knaack Lake, we scrambled up the green gully at the S end, it put us a little above Aichele Lake. For a couple of the guys, it was their first time doing extensive cross-country so we moved at a slow pace, but with such a beautiful, cloudless day and magnificent views everywhere there was no need to rush.



Norman Singley overlooking the head of Mill Creek. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Once we reached the ridge, it was about a mile of endless rock hopping to the top. We stayed below the crest most of the time to avoid a couple impassable fins, but there was no steep scrambling, keeping the difficulty at Class 2+. There was an alternative Class 4 route up the summit block, but since that went right above the sheer east face, it was not for us. The top of Castle Crag was reached at about 1:15pm and we luxuriated on top for an hour. The summit area is quite large and gentle, but with sheer drop-offs to the east, north, and west. The horizon was the maximum view - endless mountains all around! Most of the north facing slopes still had snow up high. Small puffs of the Lost Horse fire near Hamilton wafted up from behind Canyon Peak, reminding us of the potential every summer has to make life miserable in the mountains.....



Our group atop Castle Crag. Photo by Bryan Kercher.

The way down the rocks was just as slow as the way up - I was able to explore one of the fins along the crest of the ridge more closely, there was a fascinating jigsaw set of rocks that looked like it was going to fall apart off the mountain anytime. We stopped at Aichele Lake and filtered some water, then took a nice slabby route back to Knaack Lake. The mosquitoes followed us most of the way down the canyon, unfortunately - but they were the only damper to a truly marvelous day. The hike took 12 1/2 hrs and was about 15 miles long - we were all tired but satisfied. Castle Crag is truly a classic summit! *Dan Saxton*



The summit fin of Castle Crag. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Sunday, July 27, 2014 - Skookum Butte

As we anticipated a hot day we met early, 8AM, and Roy R. drove Steve S. and Dave R. and Julie K., up Elk Meadows Rd. to the road back to the trail head, a few miles on the other side of the Idaho Border. We were on the trail a little after 9AM. Here we played a FS numbers game - the sign said the Lookout was 1 mile, and Granite Lake was 3 miles. But a sign just below the lookout said it was still 1 1/2 miles to Granite Lake, making the lookout 1 1/2 miles. Anyway, once we got past the lower area that had been clear cut 14 years ago, the trail that switchbacks up the side of the ridge was mostly shaded. The lookout itself is set in a very large "pile of rocks." It's pretty deteriorated. We all summited before 11 AM, and had some lunch. The view was expansive, some haze from the Deep Creek fire, but we could see Mt. Jumbo and Mt. Sentinel, the backside of the Bitterroots, and Beaver Ridge in Idaho and the Mission Mts. Some ridges and summits still had quite a bit of snow and there was a small patch of snow in the grass below the lookout. Roy was curious about Peak 118 just to the north for a future climb. We saw quite a bit of wild flowers including white penstemons, bog orchids and lots of bear grass in all stages of blossoming. It was a busy place with a few other hiking parties.



Skookum Butte Lookout. Photo by Julie Kahl.

The sun was overhead on the hike back out, not much shade, but it didn't take long to get down. We sat in the shade at the trailhead, and Roy passed out good brownies. We decided to drive out the West Fork Butte Road, as Roy had never been down it and it gave us a chance to scope out the approach to Peak 118. WFB Rd. comes out at the Earl Tennant Campground area, and just above the camp, we had to wait, parked in the shade, as a FS guy and a pick-up truck worked to pull out an other pick-up that had its right rear tire off the shoulder of the road. Everybody shook hands, the women and kids got back in their trucks, and we could get on our way again. It was a nice day, with good company, and it's always nice when you come back with new places to explore in mind.

Julie K.



Bitterroots from Skookum Butte.
Photo by Dave Robertson.

UPCOMING TRIPS AND ADVENTURES

Trip Notes:

Please contact the trip leader for more information regarding any listed trips. Mileage listed is round trip mileage. Elevation listed is gain only. For information on Class Rating see below:

Class Rating System

CLASS 1 – HIKING Mostly on trails, but may also include some easy cross country travel.

CLASS 2 – EASY SCRAMBLING Rugged off trail hiking, no hands required.

CLASS 3 – SCRAMBLING Use of hand to ascend some sections of rock. Little to no exposure; a fall would not likely cause serious injury.

CLASS 4 – CLIMBING Easy climbing, great exposure; a fall would quite possibly cause serious injury. Use of a rope and protection at times possible.

CLASS 5 – TECHNICAL CLIMBING Use of rope, protection and belay are a must.

CLASS 6 – AID CLIMBING Use of equipment to support your weight as you climb.

**I do not see a lot of other trips proposed besides mine - please feel free to submit your own to Facebook, or to me so I can place it in the next newsletter! Summer's here and it's time to be climbing! :-)*

Saturday, August 2, 2014 - PTARMIGAN POINT (9,083') AND PEAK 8,894'

Rating: Class 3 (?), 7-8 miles, 5,000' elevation gain

Description: Ptarmigan Point is the 3rd highest peak in the Swan Range and arguably one of Montana's most significant officially unnamed summits. There is very little information about this peak anywhere, except that it's basically a direct assault up one of the several western ridgelines from the road east of Clearwater Lake. I am proposing going up one of the more southern westerly ridges and traversing over to the reddish-colored Peak 8,894', which is on the Swan Range list and is probably a very little-climbed summit but which should provide a great perspective of Ptarmigan. Then it should be a relatively easy traverse over to Ptarmigan itself, and a steep descent down one of its western ridgelines. Despite the short horizontal distance, this will be a tough grunt - all mostly steep cross-country and perhaps some bushwhacking down low! So I request that all participants be good at off-trail travel and comfortable with scrambling. But the reward of climbing a truly lofty summit is second to none!

Leader: Dan Saxton: apologist497@yahoo.com



Ptarmigan Point is at center left, with Peak 8,894' immediately to its right in this marvelous view from Crescent Mountain. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Saturday, August 9, 2014 - GRAY WOLF PEAK (9,002')

Rating: Class 3+/a bit class 4, 10-11 miles, 5,500' elevation gain

Description: This is the craggy Missions summit at the south end of the range, with a somewhat notorious reputation due to its sheer ruggedness as seen from a distance. But its easiest route up the east ridge is not technical and, in fact, according to Forest Dean who climbed it last year, only particularly difficult in one short section (low class 4 at worst?). Nevertheless, I'd only encourage good scramblers to join this trip, and the group size should be small, perhaps 3-4 people at most. We will be taking the usual route up from the Twin Lakes along the herd/climber's path to Riddell Lakes, go over the pass and drop a bit to Scenic Lakes, and then access Gray Wolf's east ridge and take that to the summit. The most difficult section involves dropping into and climbing out of a notch along the ridge; this is where the class 4 is. Remember to get the usual tribal permit (\$17 from Bob Ward's) - this should be an enjoyable climb!

Leader: Dan Saxton: apologist497@yahoo.com



The first view of Gray Wolf from the standard route up East Saint Mary's Peak. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Saturday, August 16, 2014 - PEAK 9,075 - COONEY MOUNTAIN TRAVERSE

Rating: Class 3 (?), 14-15 miles, 7,000' elevation gain

Description: It looks like this will be this year's most challenging but definitely most intriguing hike that I will offer in terms of endurance. Peak 9,075' is the fourth highest peak in the Swan Range a few miles north of Holland Peak, and there is not one shred of information I can find on it anywhere. It sits in a very beautiful location at the headwaters of Little Salmon Creek and Albino Creek. There is a most interesting connecting ridge which leads towards Peak 8,905' and Cooney Mountain (8,709'), both peaks on the Swan Range list. Thankfully, a trail leads us easily up to Smith Creek Pass but then we must drop 1,000' down its east side before taking leave of the trail to climb Peak 9,075', which should be a straightforward ascent up talus. Then we go south to intersect the main Swan Crest and follow it over Peak 8,905 - it looks like some class 3 sections possible but we'll have to see how it looks first from Peak 9,075. Then it's over to Cooney and down Cooney's west ridge back to the trail and return that way. Only very fit hikers should come on this trip, and a small group size is probably ideal. But as always, sometimes the hardest hikes are the most spectacular ones!

Leader: Dan Saxton: apologist497@yahoo.com

.....~Glacier Classic, August 22-24: see below!~.....

Saturday, September 6, 2014 - MOUNT CALOWAHCAN (9,061')

Rating: Class 4, 8 miles RT, 5,800' elevation gain

Description: Calowahcan is one of Montana's signature peaks, striking awe into all who behold it, its lofty crags tantalizing the experienced climber. And that is what participants need to be: experienced in scrambling. I am only desiring 3 or 4 people at most to join me in the most technically challenging climb I am offering this year, but one that promises to be memorably exhilarating. Don't be fooled by the "short length" of this trip - look at the elevation gain!

It looks like we will start at the Eagle Pass trailhead along the canal at the bottom of the Missions, follow the trail for a little bit, and then bushwhack to the WNW ridge of



Calowahcan, making a direct frontal assault upon its pinnacle. It is fairly straightforward up the ridge to within a few hundred feet of the summit, from which a notch blocks direct progress, forcing us into the west face. There, we must endure thousands of feet of exposure below, scrambling up ledges with loose rock - definitely a solid Class 4, but it can be done without technical equipment in *good weather*. Once atop the summit, we can revel in the grand view over the Mission Valley 6,000 feet below and over to McDonald Peak's glacier-clad northern face!

NOTE: Tribal permit required; a year pass is available for \$17 at Bob Ward's.

Leader: Dan Saxton:
apologist497@yahoo.com

***due to some interest, I am OK with shifting this trip forward a week (to the 13th) if that proves most convenient for everyone. But for now I will schedule it for the 6th.**

What we will see on the west face of Calowahcan. Photo by Joel Nelson.

Saturday, September 13, 2014 - SAINT JOSEPH PEAK (9,587')

Rating: Class 3, 10 miles RT, 5,000' elevation gain

Description: Join me for a climb of the highest peak in the northern section of the main Bitterroots, Saint Joseph - somewhat unimpressive as viewed from the valley, but giving no doubt as to who's king when viewed from all the nearby summits! We will start at the Bass Creek Overlook, climb Little Saint Joe, and then do the traverse to Saint Joseph and back. There is a Class 3 section on the N side of the summit pyramid, so please be comfortable with scrambling.

Leader: Dan Saxton: apologist497@yahoo.com

Saturday, September 20, 2014 - MCLEOD PEAK (8,620')

Rating: Class 2+ or mild Class 3, 10-11 miles RT, 4,500' elevation gain

Description: The highest peak in the Rattlesnake, nestled way back in there and only visible from the south at a long distance (or high up in Missoula ;-)), McLeod is either a long bike ride and an easy ascent or a more difficult long walk in from the west but manageable for those who don't have two wheels. This trip falls into the latter class, so I am calling on all non-bikers (and bikers who are willing to surrender their privileges!) to join me in scaling McLeod from the west! We'll start at the mouth of Finley Creek and follow the primitive path along it to the valley's head, scramble up to the ridge, and take it to the summit.

NOTE: Tribal permit required; a year pass is available for \$17 at Bob Ward's.

Leader: Dan Saxton: apologist497@yahoo.com



***There may be some flexibility in the trips I've proposed, I will put note of any changes on Facebook, or in this newsletter if possible. Dan Saxton**

Peak 8,894' at right, and Ptarmigan Point barely visible at left, from the Swan Crest north of Fisher Peak. Photo by Pat Caffrey.

The Rocky Mountaineers' 10th Annual GLACIER CLASSIC

August 22-24, 2014

Many Glacier Campground - Glacier National Park

Please join us for The Rocky Mountaineers' biggest annual event -- The Glacier Classic! Starting in 2005, we are now holding our 10th Classic. This year we will be basing our activities out of Many Glacier on the east side of Glacier National Park. Dates are Friday, August 22nd through Sunday the 24th with most participants arriving Friday evening. Come and climb peaks, hike some trails, eat, socialize with friends new and old, and have a great weekend in this crown jewel of the National Park system.

Our goal is to acquire the Group Site (there is only one) at Many Glacier Campground. The Park Service does not allow reservations for this particular site, so it is first come, first served. **Hopefully, we can have a volunteer or two arrive very early Friday morning (or even preferably Thursday morning) to secure the site for the weekend. Please let us know if you could help on this!!** If we fail to get the group site, we will then attempt to get an adequate number of regular sites (again, early arrival volunteers needed- this campground usually fills by late morning). The group site is limited to 24 people. Let us know (sooner the better) if you would like to have a spot. Tents only (or sleep in your vehicle). If you want to get your own site that is fine too...feel free to join us in the group site for meals, etc. Just let us know either way so we can plan accordingly.

The itinerary: Most of the participants will plan to arrive on Friday afternoon or evening---**but note the Friday trip listed below.** Friday night we will cook food, have some drinks, and maybe a campfire if restrictions are not in place. Typically after dinner and when most folks have arrived, we will have the trip leaders for the following day discuss what they have planned and get everyone organized. Saturday morning, we will head out on one of the listed trips (below), or create your own (let us know if you'd like us to publish it). Saturday evening we meet back in the campground for more food, refreshments and fun. On Sunday, you can again partake in a trip, or head home at your leisure.

Again, please let us know if you plan on coming. We want to try to ensure we get enough tent space for everyone. Car pooling from Missoula or other locations is also encouraged- we will help facilitate if interested. Contact Forest Dean (240-7612) or mtnear1@gmail.com to sign up or ask questions. You are encouraged to bring bear spray. Hope to see you there!



The classic view from Ptarmigan Tunnel. Photo by the late Vernon Garner, "Saintgrizzly," author of the best single page dedicated to the park: <http://www.summitpost.org/glacier-national-park-mt/170953>

Scheduled Trips....

Friday

Mount Siyeh (10,014')

Rating: Class 3; *Distance:* 8 miles RT. *Elevation Gain:* 4000+ vertical feet

Description: For those rolling into the beginning of the Glacier Classic, join me on one of Glacier's best introductions to climbing - the park's easiest 10,000' foot peak. We'll start at Siyeh Bend on Sun Road and go up the usual south side route, which is Class 3 up some cliff bands. One highlight will be staring thousands of feet down the sheer north face to Cracker Lake below!

Leader: Dan Saxton, apologist497@yahoo.com

Saturday

Iceberg Peak

Rating: Class 3; *Distance:* 12 miles round trip. *Elevation Gain:* 4100 feet.

Description: This will be a climbing trip via the Iceberg Notch route. Will hike the trail to Iceberg Lake, then ascend the steep Notch on the north side of the lake. From there, will climb west to the summit (9146') and its dramatic views looking down at Iceberg Lake. Depending on the desire of group, options exist for a loop trip (head south to Swiftcurrent Pass) or traverse to the north for a climb of Ipasha Peak (9450').

Leader: Forest Dean, mtnear1@gmail.com

Mount Henkel/Crowfeet Mountain

Rating: Class 3; *Distance:* 8 miles round trip. *Elevation Gain:* 4800 feet.

Description: My thoughts were to offer a "moderate" trip, in between Iceberg Peak and Angel Wing in technical difficulty. This route loops up the south basin and ridge of Mount Henkel and traverses over to Crowfeet, from which it is down a steep scree slope with some short cliffs to Ptarmigan Lake and back via the trail. Gorgeous views of Glacier will greet us all the way. **Please take note that since this is an active Grizzly Bear area, the slopes may possibly be closed and another hike will then have to be proposed.** But hopefully some of you can make plans for this one!

Leader: Dan Saxton, apologist497@yahoo.com

Angel Wing

Rating: Class 2; *Distance:* 14 miles (all but 3.5 miles are trail travel). *Elevation Gain:* 2400 feet

Description: We leave Many Glacier Campground, 5000', Saturday morning for an all day hike following the Grinnell Glacier Trail. Five excellent trail miles climbs us to upper Grinnell Lake, 6500' at the terminus of Grinnell Glacier. From there we scramble over rocky moraines and ancient bedrock to reach the summit of Angel Wing at 7400'. Views are spectacular with a sheer cliff drop off into Grinnell Lake. We may hear Grinnell Glacier rumbling alongside as it collapses and recedes under the summer heat. We should see goats, bighorn sheep, several species of birds and many small mammals. The later like to invade unguarded packs looking for goodies. We'll also see large ancient algae fossils, stromatolites, in the bedrock.

Leader: Vick Applegate: 549-0027 k7vk@arri.net

Iceberg Lake

Rating: Class 1 (hike); *Distance:* 8 miles round trip. *Elevation Gain:* 1200 feet.

Description: This is one of the most scenic (and popular) hikes in the Park. The trail gains elevation gradually as it heads to the lake nestled in an amphitheater surrounded by sheer rock walls of Mt. Wilbur and Iceberg Peak.

Leader: Julie Kahl, jawkal@hotmail.com

Sunday

Allen Mountain

Rating: Class 4; *Distance:* 8 miles RT. *Elevation Gain:* 4500'

Description: This climb will start from the parking lot by the Many Glacier hotel and climb (mostly off trail) to the Snow Moon Lake basin. From there, a couple different routes (one on steep snow, another on steep rock) access the ridges leading to the 9376' summit of Allen. An ice axe and possibly crampons may be needed for this trip.

Leader: Forest Dean, mtnear1@gmail.com

Cracker Lake

Rating: Class 1; *Distance:* 12.6 miles RT, *Elevation Gain:* 1400'

Description: "Spectacular views of mountains, wildflower meadows and a Cerulean blue lake." That's the description at glacierhikers.com. Besides the spectacular views, there is an old mine site to explore, although you can't go into the mine. A more complete description is given at <http://www.hikinginglacier.com/cracker-lake.htm>.

Leader: Alden Wright, alden@rockymountaineers.com

Looking ahead.....

In September, we will be resuming our monthly meetings! Stay tuned for more info - traditionally this first meeting will have presentations from our members' summer trips, so get your slideshows ready!

THE ROCKY MOUNTAINEERS MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

Annual Membership Fee: \$10.00

Note: Membership includes all members of a family or household.

Make checks payable to 'The Rocky Mountaineers' and send to: The Rocky Mountaineers, PO Box 4262, Missoula, MT 59806

Name: _____

Additional Family Members' Names:

Address: _____

Home Phone: _____

Cell Phone (optional): _____

Email: _____

Additional Email (optional):

Joining or maintaining your Rocky Mountaineers membership has never been easier!

PayPal is now available on the Rocky Mountaineers website. Click on the membership link on the main page.