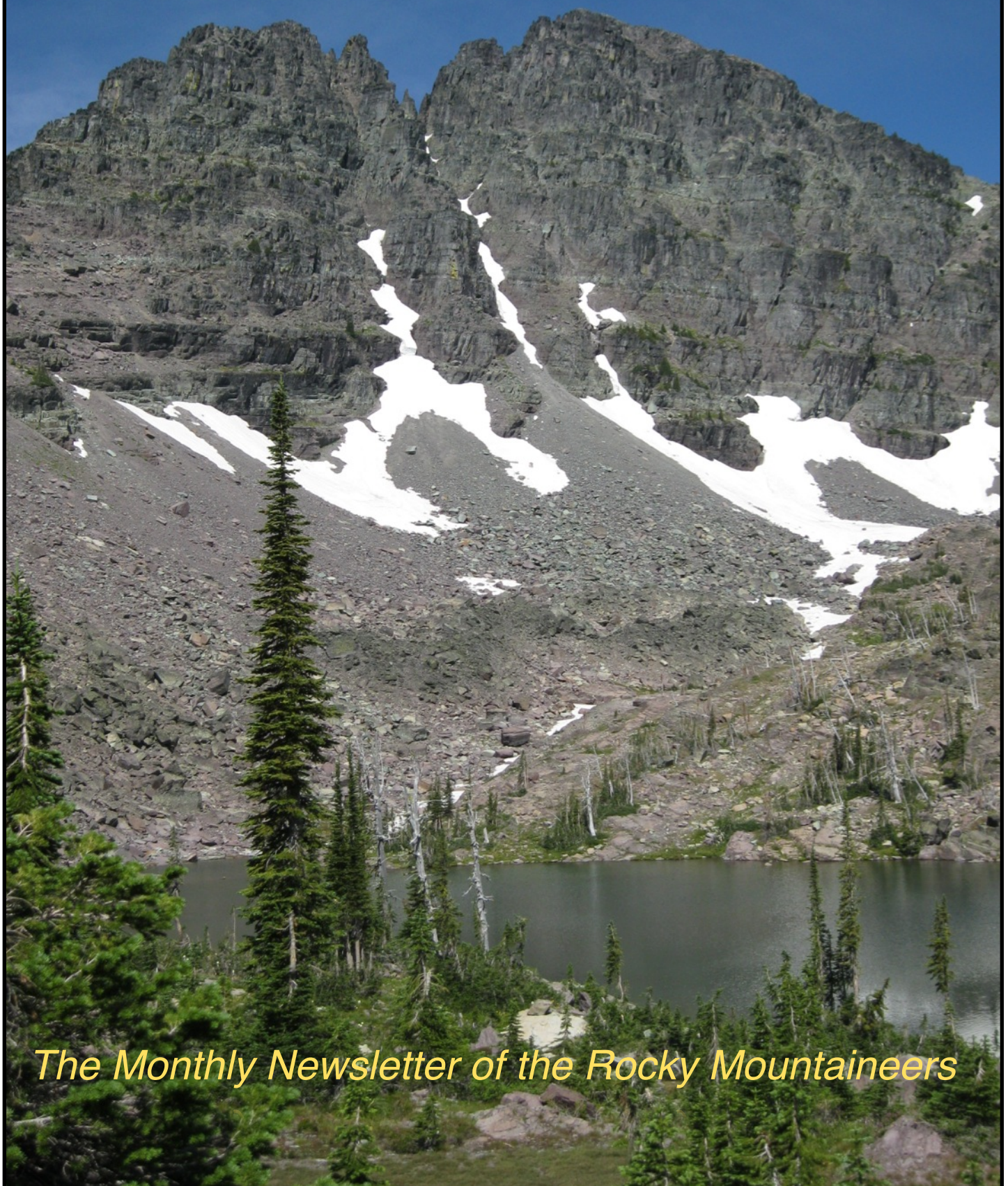


AUGUST 2014

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: Gray Wolf Peak above Scenic Lake in the Mission Mountains. Photo by Dan Saxton,

TRIP REPORTS

Photos along with trip reports are greatly appreciated!

NOTE: We had the Glacier Classic from August 29-31; trip reports from it will appear in the September newsletter.

Saturday, August 2, 2014 - Ptarmigan Point and Peak 8,894'

Alden Wright joined me for a challenging loop up the Swan Range's 3rd highest peak, an unnamed 9,083' crest (prominence 2,463') unofficially called "Ptarmigan Point" after the benchmark on its summit. We began on the Clearwater Lake Road about 1/3 of a mile south of where it is currently closed to repair a culvert, and bushwhacked up a nice and open ridge to the bottom of the steep wall of the Swan Crest west of Fisher Peak. The climb up was long, but the woods were open and it was as pleasant as it could be. After 3,500 feet of climbing, we topped out on the crest just north of Fisher, offering dramatic views of that ragged summit and its Class 4 north ridge.



Alden Wright with Fisher Peak behind. Photo by Dan Saxton.

George Lake filled the valley to the east - at 7,100 feet it is surprisingly huge for its elevation and after some map checking I have surmised that it is almost certainly the LARGEST lake in Montana above 7,000 feet outside the Beartooths at 0.85 mile long and 0.25 mile wide (Although Lake Agnes in the Pioneer Mts is of a very similar size). To the north was the

striking red pyramid of Peak 8,894, which is on the Rocky Mountaineers' Swan Range list.



George Lake from the slopes of Peak 8,894'. Photo by Dan Saxton.

We dropped off the ridge on a short goat path into a magnificently lush beargrass meadow - it was so dense that the slope was completely white.



Beargrass heaven!
Photo by Dan Saxton.

Next, we crossed the very nice basin above George Lake - there were some bugs but not too troublesome. The S ridge of Peak 8,894 was easy walking and a little bit of scrambling near the top. There was no cairn or register on top, but I'm sure others have been there before.



The view of Ptarmigan was impressive - still plenty of snow on its E side. A snowless route led into the basin below it and up a nice meadow to the crest, which we followed. Lots of different varieties of flowers, green corridors, rock slabs, and a half-frozen little pond in a depression blessed this seldom-visited basin along Ptarmigan's eastern flank.

Ptarmigan Point from Peak 8,894'. Photo by Dan Saxton.



Shortly after Alden and I reached the crest of the summit ridge, it narrowed and became low Class 3, with a couple slightly exposed scrambling moves and a little loose rock, but nothing too difficult. The top had splendid views of the Swan Crest, the Bob, and the Missions - it's hard to believe this peak is actually unnamed! The west face was a nearly vertical drop for at least

1000 feet. The forecast had been for thunderstorms, and it did look a bit gray towards the Bitterroots far to the south, but apart from a few clouds nothing big materialized over us.



The view south along the Swan Crest from Ptarmigan Point. Photo by Dan Saxton.

We chose the west ridge immediately south of the summit crest to descend, and it was tough - loose rock the first 500 feet, then a steep and craggy crest that we had to carefully make our way down. Once we reached treeline, I couldn't find any semblance of a path leading down (even though this ridge is considered the "standard route," if you want to call it such, up Ptarmigan), so we just plunged straight down as directly as we could towards Clearwater Lake. It took about an hour of steep bushwhacking to reach the bottom, and we stumbled upon a path near the road that seemed to lead back up to where we had come from - so maybe there is an easier route up/down that ridge? It was an easy 15-20 minute walk back to the truck from there. The climb was only 8-9 miles RT for the loop, but it was at least 5,500 feet of vertical (Alden's GPS unit said more) and took us 11 1/2 hours. But it is truly magnificent up high, and I highly recommend all skilled adventurers to explore the hidden glories of the Swan Crest! *Dan Saxton*

Saturday, August 9, 2014 - Gray Wolf Peak

Fred McDonald and I set out from the Twin Lakes trailhead for Gray Wolf at 7:45am. The herd path to Riddell Lakes is easy to find after going about 3/4 mi up the old logging road (blocked by rocks at the bottom where you park). It has been well-brushed out in its lower sections, but blowdown increases higher up although it is not too terrible. Lots of berries along the way!



It took us about 3 hrs to get to the upper Riddell Lake, and from there we went over the low pass towards Scenic Lake, meeting a lone guy who had just climbed the peak. He said he had dropped down directly from the notch on the east ridge and traversed over - but Fred and I upon seeing it shortly afterwards couldn't figure out how he had done it.....

After passing Scenic Lake, we climbed up the slabby ridge to the northeast and angled up it, climbing a short Class 3 section up a steep step to gain the gradual crest. This led us to the notch, the crux of the normal route on Gray Wolf. In the far distance along the face of Gray Wolf, Fred noticed 3 mountain goats.



The notch on Gray Wolf, the technical crux of the route is just above the "catwalk." Photo by Dan Saxton.

To get into the notch, it is necessary to traverse on small ledges just to the south of where the crest drops off into it. I would rate it high class 3 - low class 4 due to some exposure, but good scramblers should have no problem. There is an interesting "catwalk" running the length of the notch, and at its west end was a steep pointy snow bridge that we had to down climb about 50 feet of Class 3 to get around it. Just above that was the Class 4 crux, a 50-foot high cliff with several ledges. It had excellent handholds and footholds, however, and was more fun than scary. A ledge traverse ran left from the top of the cliff, and from there it was simple Class 2+/easy Class 3 the rest of the way to the summit, which we reached at 1:45pm. Gorgeous day and views everywhere - we spent over an hour on top!

The return was uneventful - we soaked our feet in Upper Riddell Lake before the long drop down the path and reached my truck at 7:15pm. Gray Wolf is definitely a classic peak and being only an hour from town it's easy to see why it's a local mecca for the strong climbers and alpinists! *Dan Saxton*



East Saint Mary's Peak and Lowary Peak from the summit of Gray Wolf. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Saturday, August 16, 2014 - Smith Creek Pass ("Attempt" on Peak 9,075)

I headed up the Smith Creek Pass Trail to attempt Peak 9,075, hoping for clearing up conditions as the low pressure system began to depart. Unfortunately, my hopes were dashed - the peaks were socked in up high. The Smith Creek Pass Trail is in good shape, no downed logs at all and a nice easy grade the whole way. In some places, however, the overgrowing grass/brush, saturated with water, thoroughly soaked my boots and socks. When I reached the pass, it was basically a cloud whiteout and I could not even see Cooney Mountain up to the south. On and off rain also began to fall. Knowing that I'd have miles of above-treeline walking (and very wet feet), I waited for a while but without any improvement in the weather - so I headed back down. A disappointment - but it does give me incentive to return on a better day to do the Peak 9,075-Cooney Mountain Traverse! *Dan Saxton*



Interesting bark stripping along the trail to Smith Creek Pass. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Sunday, August 24, 2014 - Heart and Pearl Lakes

My goal for this trip was an interesting and easy destination for my wife Sally while the rest of the party could go further. So my original choice was Glen Lake in the Bitterroots. But then Dan Saxton pointed out that the road to the trailhead was closed, so I moved the trip to Heart and Pearl Lakes in the northern Bitterroots. Steve Schombel, Hedwig Vogel-Wright, Sally Wright, and Alden Wright started hiking at 10:40 am. Steve, Hedwig, and I arrived at Heart Lake after an hour and a half of hiking with a few huckleberry and thimbleberry interludes. After a half hour stop for lunch, we went on to Pearl Lake. The highlight of the trip was seeing about 17 mountain goats traversing the ridge above us. Unfortunately, we brought neither a camera with a telephoto or binoculars. Our cell-phone pictures got some of the goats, but they were not very clear. There were lots of flowers and huckleberries, but the

fall colors had only just begun. Sally made it to Heart Lake, and Hedwig and I caught up to her just before she got back to the trailhead at 5 pm. *Alden Wright*



At Pearl Lake. Photo by Alden Wright.

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.

Please send trip proposals by email to Alden Wright for posting on the website or use the Facebook page to post them.

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

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



Saint Joseph Peak from Saint Mary Peak. Photo by Dan Saxton.

Saturday-Sunday, September 13-14, 2014 - TRIANGLE PEAK (7,800+')

Description: This high point is way back in the Rattlesnake Wilderness. The plan is to backpack a few miles from the West Fork Gold Creek trailhead to the last?? reliable source of water, camp, and do the next 6 - 6 1/2 miles and @2100 feet and out on Sunday. Notice the question marks. I know there may be a stagnant pool near the Boulder Peak turnoff, but I do not want to filter water out of it. I would appreciate if any readers know more about this route and can pass along info. Also, some maps show a trail almost all the way to the peak, while others show the trail ending a mile or two short of the peak. Send contact info to ssbell@rockymountaineers.com if you are interested and I'll tell you more.

Overall I've had a disappointing summer for peak bagging, so I'd like to end on a positive note.

Leader: Steve Schombel: ssbell@rockymountaineers.com

Saturday, September 27, 2014 - MCLEOD PEAK (8,620') - note date change from previous newsletter - no longer Saturday, September 20.

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 a relatively 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. Hopefully the weather will cooperate with no early season snowstorms.

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

Leader: Dan Saxton: apologist497@yahoo.com

Sunday, September 28, 2014 - CHARITY PEAK - REVISITED (6,560')

Description: This peak is the high point of the ridge on the west edge of the Evaro Hill corridor and is one of our "Missoula Horizon" peaks. We will access it from Mill Creek north of Frenchtown, walking on a logging road most of the way, 3 1/2 - 4 miles one way.

Leader: Julie Kahl: jawkal@hotmail.com

Sunday, October 12, 2014 - SPOTTED DOG WMA

Description: Weather and road conditions will ultimately decide what we do in this area, but the plan will be to park at one of the trailheads and climb to the highest point (approx. 6,200ft). More details will follow on Facebook and in the next newsletter - but make plans!

Leader: Julie Kahl: jawkal@hotmail.com

Looking ahead.....

Our first fall meeting will be next **7 pm Tuesday, Sept. 9 at the Trail Head store on East Front Street**. This will be our trip report meeting where members can show slides and tell stories about trips. We will limit each presentation to 10 minutes. Slides can be on a USB drive or a CD or you can bring your own computer. We will have a business meeting for whoever is interested at 6 pm.



Inclined slab along the way to Gray Wolf Peak. Photo by Dan Saxton.

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.