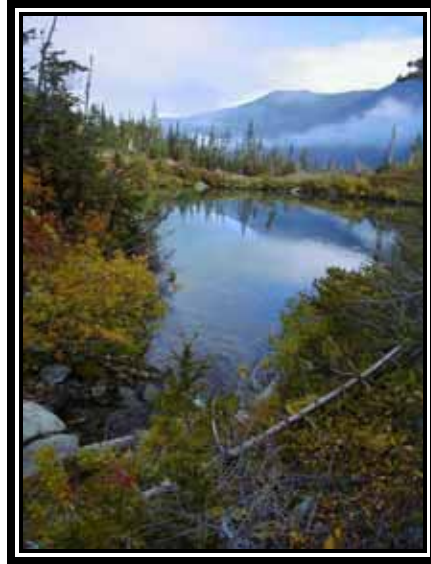


*Pacific Biodiversity Institute
Unprotected Wilderness Trip*

Golden Horn Wilderness - September 16 and 17, 2000



On a sunny fall afternoon a group of Pacific Biodiversity Institute (PBI) members, staff and board members went to the unprotected wilderness area that we call the Golden Horn wilderness. The purpose for our trip was to gather information about the area and to consider what type of protection this incredible area deserves.

Access and Route

The Golden Horn wilderness is south of the Pasayten Wilderness, east of the North Cascade National Park and is bordered by the North Cascade Highway (Hwy. 20). This unprotected wilderness area is approximately 146 square miles (93,440 acres). This is a huge and incredibly diverse area. Life zones follow the elevations from the high alpine regions down to the river valley bottoms. Our route started at Hart's Pass. To access our hiking route from Hwy. 20 follow the signs to Mazama. At the junction in Mazama turn left (northwest) on County road 9140. Lost River County road 9140 turns into FS road 5400. We parked one car at the end of the road that leads to the Riverbend Campground. We took the rest of the cars up to Hart's Pass. FS road 5400 is passable in passenger cars. It is a dirt one-lane road, which usually has room for an oncoming car to pass. There are steep cliffs and hairpin turns. Honking before going around tight curves, to alert oncoming drivers, is recommended. By the way, the narrowest part of the road is called "Dead Horse Point" and there is an appropriate story about the unfortunate death of an entire pack train. According to Sally Portman's book, *The Smiling Country*, in the early days "at one spot the "road" engineered by Ballard dangled on the side of a sheer cliff where for 18 feet planks rested on iron pins hammered into the face of the rock." Note that the name and history doesn't seem to slow everyone down.

Along FS 5400 there were Bigleaf maple (*Acer macrophyllum*) which are more usual on the west side of the Cascades. We stopped to pick blue elderberries (*Sambucus*) for later jelly making. Though I would like to add that we were not the obnoxious people parked in the middle of the road holding up traffic picking berries.

When you get to Hart's Pass turn left on to FS 500. There is a trailhead and parking at the road's end. This sign announces that you are on the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), a National Scenic Trail that goes from Mexico to Canada and in the fall is frequented by hikers that have traveled the entire distance, 2,650 miles, in one hiking season (usually 4 or 5 months). We ran into two thru-hikers and gave them congratulations (at this point they were one or two days from having hiked the whole trail) and food.

We couldn't have asked for better weather for our trip, around 75°F, sunny but with some low clouds rolling around and through passes and over ridges. The group spent about 45 minutes looking at the mining activity around Brown Bear Mine. This area had been very active in the past starting around the turn of the century. This area hasn't changed much apparently-someone shot off a pistol while we were having lunch (as a way to call his son). The adult son suggested we take the gun away from his father...

Following the PCT south we followed the gentle grade and took in the fall day. The larches had not started their annual turn to their golden color. The larch is an unusual tree in that it is the only deciduous conifer. It sheds its needles in the fall.



Picking *Vaccinium deliciosum*.

Approximately 3 miles after Hart's Pass we consider camping and scout out the water situation. A group of hikers spread out down the east side of the ridge to find a water source. We were unable to find one so we continued to Glacier Pass. The trail winds down through the *Vaccinium deliciosum*, with scarlet leaves brightened by the afternoon light. This was our first blueberry-eating stop. According to the *Cascade Olympic Natural History*, the wild variety of berries is referred to as huckleberries but since they are *Vaccinium*, they are still technically blueberries.

Glacier Pass has many single campsites and one large group site with a creek running through it. The camp was fairly clean, no litter, and was not particularly abused in comparison with other horse camps. The camp was interesting in that it did have a good variety of tree species: subalpine fir, Pacific silver fir, mountain hemlock, and the huge Englemann spruce (pictured to the right).



We had one “howler” and one “hooter” in the group. Jasper, Lucie’s dog, howls on command and we wondered if we would get any wolves howling in return. We didn’t but we had a good time trying. Peter can do a spotted owl hoot but again, we didn’t get any response. This was as close to singing around the fire as we got. We did do some humming of the Olympic games theme while hanging our food bags though.

On the morning of September 17, 2000 the group took an exploratory trip down to three unnamed lakes in a basin approximately a half-mile from the camp. The early morning brought fog that lay sleepily in the valleys. Then as the sun warmed the air and the fog rose and disappeared. The lakes were an incredible aqua color in contrast to the red-hues of the huckleberry bushes. We didn’t have time to dedicate to finding amphibians in the area.



Following the trail to the junction of the PCT and Trail 480 we began to see the Pacific yew. This tree grows in shrub like clusters and though it is a conifer, it has arils (which most people would incorrectly call a berry). We also noted that at the junction, near the bridge, the Forest Service had brought in a Caterpillar (the heavy machinery type-not the cute furry kind). They widened the trail to approximately 7 feet but it was unclear as to why a hiking trail should be so wide and aggressively maintained

with the nearest road 8 miles away. There also seemed to be a great deal of extra timber that had been cut for the bridge project.



As we started down Trail 480 along the thick slide alder (*Alnus sinuata*) of Brush Creek we observed the great avalanche shoots carved into the mountainsides. Northwest Indians used to cut the slide alder stem and use it for perfume-not a bad idea after a long hike. There is also a beaver dam along the creek. Peter discussed how important this was for the ecology of this area. The dams create a great deal of biodiversity, providing habitat, and raising water tables. The trapping of beaver contributed to areas drying out and there being less wildlife in those areas.

There were many types of berries down the watershed. As we continued down into dry forest there was bitter cherry, red elderberries, high-brush cranberry, maple, and eventually old-growth Douglas fir.

Land Use

Recreation



Trail 480 is regularly used for mountain biking and hiking. We saw approximately 7 mountain bike riders. There were many hikers along the PCT. We didn't find any evidence hunting. Some people do "hobby mining" in these areas.

Mining

The very first mining took place in this area, called the Slate Creek District, in approximately 1880. Since that time there has been flurries of mining activity including several booms in the early years. What remains is the road to Hart's Pass and various mining pits. There are people who set up camps and mine during the summer.

Logging

One had the sense of getting near a road, while heading down Trail 480 since there was logging just before the parking lot. Some of the trees that had been cut down during the salvage logging had been left lying on the ground.

Flora

Trees

Checklist:

- Engelmann spruce (*Picea engelmannii*)
- Subalpine larch (*Larix lyallii*)
- Douglas-fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*)
- Subalpine fir (*Abies lasiocarpa*)
- White bark pine (*Pinus albicaulis*)
- Mountain Hemlock (*Tsuga mertensiana*)
- Pacific silver fir (*Abies amabilis*)
- Pacific yew (*Taxus brevifolia*)

References

Mathews, Daniel. 1994. *Cascade-Olympic Natural History*, Second Edition. Raven

Editions.

Portman, Sally. 1993. *The Smiling Country*. Winthrop: Sun Mountain Resorts Inc.