

*Pacific Biodiversity Institute's
Unprotected Wilderness Report*

**Noisy-Diobsud Additions
Marblemount-Upper Stagit- August 5-6, 2000**



Photo by Joel Stocker

This report describes an exploratory outing on August 5 and 6, 2000 that covered two areas near the Noisy-Diobsud Wilderness, which borders the North Cascade National Park. The first area explored Sauk Mountain and Sauk Lake. The second area explored was the east side of Baker Lake. There were ten people who participated in the trip. Peter Morrison, an ecologist and Pacific Biodiversity Institute executive director, lead the group.

Location and Access

Sauk Mountain

The Sauk Mountain trailhead can be access by the North Cascade Hwy. 20. Rockport State park is in between the towns of Concrete (to the west) and Marblemount (to the east). Just west of the state park is FS road 1030. Follow this switch-backing road to a short spur road, off to the right, which leads to parking and the Sauk Mountain trailhead. The road was a little rough and dusty when we were there in August but it was passable to passenger cars.



Our route took the steep trail up to Sauk Mountain. On the top there is opportunity to continue along the ridge, we follow the ridge for a short distance. The trail continues steeply down the other side of Sauk Mountain to Sauk Lake. This is a beautiful tarn in a southeast-facing basin between Sauk and Bald Mountains. There were places that the trail was snow covered and the vegetative growth obscured the trail. The lake was surprisingly unvisited and no one else camped at lake despite the fact that it was a sunny, August, weekend day and it is only a 3-mile hike in.

We camped at the lake and explored around the circumference of the lake and the surrounding hillside. There are lush but steep meadows around the lake and up to Sauk and Bald Mountains. We tried to climb up to

Bald Mountain but it was very steep and difficult getting up to the ridge, so we only went part way.

The following is a PBI member, Joel Stocker's, account of our trip:

Sauk Lake mountain adventure from the eyes of an Eastern Yankee

I recently made what has become my semi-traditional cross-country trip from the East to the West Coast. The goal this year- a hike with PBI. Pam asked me to give my New England account of this latest mid-August trip. Without going back to my childhood it all started in 1990 when Peter Morrison introduced me to a great lifetime experience. I had gone out to Seattle from Connecticut and spent half the summer working with him and his Wilderness Society staff mapping old growth forests. This summer, when he mentioned PBI was planning trips into roadless areas, I jumped at the chance to join in.

Their trip into the Upper Skagit River Watershed of Mount Baker–Snoqualmie National Forest looked perfect. Enticed by the description over email [“A simple hike to a lake, set up camp, explore the surrounding roadless area and document what we see - maybe more hiking the next day”] I turned in frequent flyer miles and headed out. Then, I met the staff. Clearly innocent looking on the surface and quite friendly. In reality, seasoned interns who eat mountains for breakfast. I discovered this detail too late. The definition of ‘simple’ suddenly had new meaning. Since I was originally asked to provide details on my trip (and not just complain about the pain) I’ll give a quick run down.

In short story format it was an incredible experience. Absolutely gorgeous weather, stunning views, and, yes, a great group of people. In the long form... the setting: Sauk Mountain and Lake in the North Cascades, just south of the Noisy Diobsud Wilderness. From the parking area looking up the view is a postcard from Europe. Steep switch backs cutting through flowered meadows lead up to the top of the mountain. In short, you park on a mountain, then climb even higher. In detail, eight people set out on the trip. Peter, Pam, Rebecca, Kirsten, Lucie, Suzanne, Jay, myself and Lucie’s dog Jasper (a good sized dog with a pack that, in hindsight, should have had my water bottles in it). Mark and Rita followed behind with day packs. Amazing clear weather allowed panoramic views of the surrounding Cascades and a snow capped Mount Baker

off to the West. At the peak we enjoyed this view, ate lunch, looked at wildflowers, and discussed the best the route down the lake in the valley below (our camping destination). Although I was not in pain yet, going down meant coming up (the only way out).

A few highlights. First, the adventure of Pam and Peter's self arrest training. We brought ice axes and there was snow - they intended to use both. Sliding down on our backs and catching ourselves with the picks made for embarrassing photos but was a great deal of fun. A side benefit, the snow, and the places I found it, kept me cool while finishing the hike. Second, when we arrived at Sauk Lake a short swim was required. This proved snow was nothing compared to a freshly melted glacier. Some, like Kirsten, seemed to thrive on the liquid ice. My core temperature returned to normal while setting up tents.

After setting camp the second half of our day began – exploring the roadless area. Our destination was the ridgeline to the North. The attempt was amazing; basically we climbed the steep side of a giant salad bowl - waist high native plants of every type imaginable and spectacular views of ice flows mixing with the lake below. Good intentioned, these Eastern legs couldn't make the ridge. I'll blame the impending darkness.

In the morning we did hike out (slowly) back to the parking lot. The pain was real now. Although a good pain, the type people strive for at the local gym, it was still a problem because the trip wasn't quite over. There was yet another hike through some amazing old growth stands lining the Eastern side of Baker Lake. In theory there was a very large Douglass Fir. I collapsed before reaching it, as had Jay – he was found sleeping in a bed of moss by the trailhead. In the end I survived to write this column (quite happily I might add). A parting tip: On Monday, after everyone else had gone back to work, I stayed near Baker Lake and spent half the day in a local hot spring. By Tuesday I could walk again.



Baker Lake

The northern portion of Baker Lake can be accessed by taking FS road 11. From Hwy. 20 go through Concrete up Burpee Hill and intersect FS 11. Take FS 11 all the way to its end. There is a parking lot and restroom here. Follow the trail (and hordes of people if it is a Sunday in August). You will cross several large wood bridges. The trail stays up the hillside from the shore of Baker Lake. Our group took this trail five miles up to a faint trail that leads to a huge Douglas-fir.

Wilderness Potential

In Rockport State Park there are huge Douglas fir, their branches heavy with lichen and a carpet of mosses and ferns below. The park is sadly; just a remnant of once was common in this part of the world. From the top of Sauk Mountain the patch work of logging on top of even older cuts can be seen but the beauty of Sauk Mountain literally, rises above

all that humans have done to the landscape. The Stagit River carves its valley below. Despite the abuses of the surrounding landscape this was one of the most glorious trip of the summer season. We had a wonderfully group, the uplands were in full bloom, and the patches of snow lingered.

On a Sunday morning when we were returning from our campsite at Sauk Lake we were amazed at the number of people using this area for recreation. People, old and young were out for the beautiful wildflower season and on this morning one could see from Mount Baker all the way to Mount Rainer. The meadows are lush and possess a great deal of diversity, there are many people recreating in this beautiful landscape, yet it is unprotected. There are over 54 square miles of unprotected wilderness surrounding the Noisy-Diobsud Wilderness. This area is a likely candidate to be added to the Noisy-Diobsud Wilderness.

Land Use

Logging

The view from Sauk Mountain gives a silent history lesson in intensive logging.



Recreation

The Noisy-Diobsud Additions is a prime hiking area. Its proximity to Seattle makes this a perfect area to diffuse recreational user. The hikers are already there but the protection is not. While on our wilderness trip we took advantage of the remaining snowfields to practice self-arresting with ice axes. We did not see any bicyclists, signs of hunting, or other recreation. There were a number of motorboats on Baker Lake.

Trees

Much of the area we were in near Sauk Mountain was not forested. About 5 miles in at there is trail that veers east and leads to a Douglas fir (*Pseudotsuga menziesii*) for which the measured diameter was over 11 feet!

Herbs

Checklist:

Broadleaf arnica (*Arnica latifolia*)
Arnica sylvestri
 CAL?
 CANO
 HELA
 HGLA
 Hydrophyllum fendleri
 Kannalis
 LICO
 Ozmorhiza
 Bracted pedicularis (*Pedicularis bracteosa*)
 Penstemmon
 Red Mountain-heath (*Phyllodoce empetrifomis*)
 Purple lavender (*spirea douglasii*)
 RILU
 Five-leaved bramble (*rubus pedatus*)
 Salmonberry (*Rubus sanqueni*)
 Saxifraga punetata
 Sedges
 SEIR
 Arrowleaf Groundel (*Senecio triangularis*)
 SOSI
 Tiarella latifolia
 Cascade huckleberry (*Vaccinium deliciosum*)
 Big huckleberry (*Vaccinium membranaceum*)
 Sitka valerian (*Valeriana sitchensis*)
 RHAL
 Lutketa Pcetrata
 Phacelia hastate
 Viol (orbiculatat)
 Ccirsium
 Polygamen bistortides
 Sword Fern (*Polystichum munitum*)
 Deer fern (*Blechnum spicant*)
 Maidenhair fern (*Adiantum pedatum*)
 Bracken (*Pteridium aquilinum*)
 Lady fern (*Athyrium filix-femina*)
 Columbine (*Aquilegia Formosa*)
 Spring beauties (*Claytonia lanceolata*)
 Violet (*Viola dpp.*)
 Lupine (*Lupinus latifolia*)
 Yarrow (*Achillea millefolium*)
 Indian-paintbrush (*Castilleha sp.*)

Fauna

Birds

Checklist:

- Stellar's Jay (*Cyanocitta stelleri*)
- Spruce grouse (*Dendragapus canadensis*)
- Chickadee (*Parus gambeli*)
- Varied thrush (*Ixoreus naevius*)

Amphibian

- Western Toad (*Bufo boreas*)
- Garter snake (*Thamnophis sirtalis*)

Mammals

- Pika (*Ochotona princeps*)
- Marmot (*Marmota caligata*)

References

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