

GRAY WOLF / BCH TRAIL CREW NOTES

3/16/24

Location: Elwha-Hurricane Hill Trail, ONP

Crew members:

Rebecca Wanagel

Martin Knowles

David Graves

Estimated On-Trail Volunteer Hours: 31

Report written by Rebecca.

Objective: Provide David with a solid day of chainsaw training. David is venturing on the journey that Martin and Rebecca took years ago – that of adding chainsaw to his skills and certifications after a long background of crosscut experience.

Rebecca's note: it is difficult to consistently find ample opportunities for real-world saw training. We need trees that fell across an actual trail. As one of the BCHW instructor / evaluators, I much prefer to train and evaluate for certification on a trail that needs clearing wherever and whenever possible.

Trees across trails provide the following valuable teaching and learning opportunities:

1. Trees on hillsides.
2. Trees on top of each other.
3. Trees of a variety of sizes and complexities.
4. Trees that must be removed or the trail is blocked (unless completely unsafe to do so, in which case it has to be routed around but that tends to be rare).
5. Involved rootballs, most of the time also on hillsides, sometimes detached.
6. Complex binds as a result of trees falling between other trees or landing on stumps, rocks, etc that cause binds in every which way, many times multiple binds per single project.
7. Every project tends to be different than the last one – so the brain must constantly analyze and adjust to each new situation.
8. Heavy equipment must be carried a long way.
9. Hiking miles – oftentimes with steep hills - plus the weight of the equipment that provide ample opportunity for fatigue. Learning to deal with mental and physical fatigue is part of the process.

Metrics achieved:

1. 7 miles round trip hiked (4.2 of which was the actual trail, the rest was the approach along the Olympic Hot Springs Road and the bypass). 2500 feet elevation gain. 2500 feet elevation loss. All while carrying a chainsaw, saw kit (extra chains, filing supplies, wedges, etc), gas, oil, axe, radios, first aid, water, food and other misc supplies we'd need for the day. The uphill was brutally slow. The downhill caused wobbly knees by the bottom. Good early season training!
2. 11 logs cut. Just getting to them was the herculean effort.
3. A brainful of knowledge and practice for David.



Left: a cedar that was on the ground below the trail, broken off and suspended above the trail. Too much debris below the trail to just cut one large piece so David went up on the hillside. First, he made sure he had good solid footing (he did), then he cut it up into manageable size chunks which we were able to toss off the trail.

Right: Martin watching David's technique as he worked his way through what was a multi-log (medium to small, uncomplex) mess that was on the trail. This was a good place to learn not to wrestle with heavy log chunks trying to get them out of the way, but rather to just cut them. Also, a good place to learn techniques to keep the saw chain out of the dirt when cutting something that is on the ground, and how to limb dirty stobs without dulling the chain.





This was a 42" log that broke when it came down. It was fully broken at the top, which is in the right of the top left picture. That shattered end was jammed behind some large roots coming off of that tree. It was cracked, but not broken through, at the other end of the area that needed to be cleared. Beyond that, the rest of the broken-off tree (this one had snapped off of its rootball) was behind large trees, unable to go anywhere. This project lay almost along the trail line. The hillside was extremely wet (lots of devils club) made worse by the tree and its mess blocking any hope of drainage. Below the trail it was – fortunately – wide open. No standing trees to block the path, so we knew we could send a really long billet down in one piece.

Top left and top right pictures, Martin went down below to do an offside cut on the tree that was too large for the bar we had. We do that fairly often when it's a tree larger than the bar. He only did that one offside cut and we did that first because the broken end jammed into the roots was preventing any possibility of any movement, even though the tree was partially cracked not far to his left. He was doing the offside cut where the wood was still solid.

Middle left and middle right: David is nibbling away at the split, fractured end. He was learning how to open up V shapes in his cut so he could see what he was doing and watching for the unpredictability of split pieces springing and grabbing the saw.

Bottom left: David moved back to the cut Martin had started from the other side. He lined up the cut perfectly and sent the 25-30 foot billet rolling uneventfully down the hill in one piece. Sorry I didn't manage of picture of that piece going – I was jockeying myself into a good picture position as the log went.

Bottom right: It left behind a mess which Martin and I cleaned up so the hillside could drain, while David went back to cut that smaller log that you can see in one of the pictures. In this picture, Martin is standing on the trail and you can see the long space that used to be the log. If you look closely, you can see how excellent David's line up was on the cut. (the saw is not running – he is posing – that is why his face shield is up).



Left: These two trees were the top project we did, which was at 2800 feet (we started the day at 300). One tree had a detached rootball and was resting on the other tree. The first tree (bottom one) was broken off at the far end, but threaded between standing trees. We decided on a cut that would put a face notch in both the compressed side and the top, plus an angle to allow for the tree to pivot itself straight and drop down between the trees below the trail.

Right: The long piece from the left picture is now down on the hill below the trail, and David is working on cutting this tree back farther. The other tree is resting on this one, but the one he is cutting had no chance of movement (rootball still had a lot of embedded roots in the ground).



Left: Starting on the second tree of this project.

Right: This cut, as happens to all of us sometimes, did not go to plan. It could have been fatigue (see my above list about fatigue being one of the factors that have to be trained to deal with). The angles weren't correct and the bar was too far embedded to be able to respond quickly when the binds started to trap the saw. This tree had significant side bind but it also had a tendency to pull upward slightly on the rootball side. The side bind didn't move much due to a billet from the other tree that was trapping it, and the cut angles didn't allow for the upward movement and fast saw reaction. This is absolutely no biggie – we've all learned our lessons by getting the saw stuck. I have plenty of stories to share in that realm. Suffice to say there is a good reason why we always carry a spare bar, heh heh.

We simply remove the powerhead from the bar, put on the spare bar and another chain and make a new cut. Great experience for David.

It was a highly successful day with lots of learning and "trigger time." The only way to get fluent, experienced and safe with that saw in all situations is time spent doing it. We all got lots of physical training time too. So now I should leave the laptop and go do some stretching. 😊