

GRAY WOLF / BCH-PENINSULA TRAIL CREW NOTES

5/24 – 5/27/24

Location: Upper S. Fork Skokomish Trail, ONF with a little bit in ONP (former stock trail to mile 3.2, currently not to stock standards).

Crew members:

Rebecca Wanagel
Martin Knowles
Bernt Ericson
Mike Forsyth
Paul Kamps
Randy Kraxberger
Perry Sproed
Patrick Williams

Pack-Out Crew:

David Graves
Josie Dean
Julie Metzger
Greg King

Estimated On-Trail Volunteer Hours: 235 (main crew) + 14 (pack out crew)

Report written by Rebecca.

Objectives:

1. Clear trail of logs from trailhead to Riley Camp (6.8 miles).
2. Fix tread where necessary for safety.
3. Spot hand brushing / tread cleaning as needed or when there was time.

Metrics achieved:

1. Main trail cleared to Riley Camp. Nearly 50 logs with some messy projects (branches and multiple rotten snag parts), many of them 30-36 inches. One was a 56" doug fir.
2. 210-foot trail re-alignment at the top project (see before picture below). Ironically, this re-alignment actually put the trail back where it used to be. There was an old trail sign on a tree on our route.
3. Hand brushed entire re-route. Hand brushed as much as possible and / or where critically necessary along the rest of the route.

The Upper S. Fork Skokomish is a unique trail. It starts off for the first half-mile on what feels like an old road, because it is. There are numerous dips in the tread from old culverts being removed, and the trail is mostly gravel. You are way up high above the river at that point. Soon the gravel gives way to dirt and there is an old post laying on the ground, remnants of a trail sign from a bygone era. The culvert dips stop and the tread gets rockier with less stable footing. But still good trail. Then, shortly before Rule Creek and the first crossing of the Skok, the trail goes around a bend that is more exposed to sun and, voila! bear grass! Blooming! Here you are right alongside the Skok, still a bit above it, with views of a narrow canyon bounded by towering cliffs.

Then you cross over Rule Creek on a footlog that Rebecca is begging the FS to replace. Yikes that thing is rotten! One person at a time! Shortly after that you cross the Skok (see pictures below). Rise up for about a mile, away from the river and then back down, through the groves of trilliums. At 3.2 you come to a camp area and the last horse ford from an era when stock came in to this point to camp. Here you have to ford the river (see below) and start working your way through countless old growth cedars up towards the Olympic National Park and a uniquely gorgeous Sundown Pass and Sundown Lake.

However, for this trip, we were unable to get that high. We had to make it a goal to stop at Riley Camp because:

- a. That would be all we had time for, given the number and size of the logs as well as the distance and river and creek fording we had to do.
- b. Martin and Rebecca scouted this trip 6 days before we commenced, and found that from Riley on up was still under thick snow.

Up to the second crossing / camp, stock used to ride. At this point, stock would be completely unable to get even to that point. There are many stock-blocking problems (Rebecca has a specific list). Most of those could be fixed with skilled sawyers, a team of great trail workers and some time. One of them, the exit out of Tumble Creek, would be a much bigger project to accomplish. Anyhow, all that to say that even in the bygone days, I cannot imagine the trail was ever a stock trail past the second crossing / camp. There are gullies and other features that tell me that stock always used to stop at this camp.



1.2 miles from the trailhead finds you having to cross the Skokomish River, we call it the first crossing because it's the first of two times you are walking over or through this torrent of water. There used to be a bridge here, remnants are still there on the east bank, but that's long gone. Rebecca is working with ONF in the hopes that maybe another bridge could be installed to replace the old one. Meanwhile, for too many years to count, we've been getting over this river using a nature-donated huge cedar tree. Over the years we and others have done some improvements to make this crossing safer. It is what it is but, fortunately, it's quite wide and, since it's cedar, it is still solid and not rotting.



This was one of the first major projects. A 40" fir. Handled with ease, as always with this group of sawyers. We had two teams which I named Team 462 and Team 362, after – obviously – the saws we had. Team 462 took the biggest of the logs. Team 362 cut more logs, but they were overall less photogenic (the projects, not the people). So, I really don't have good pictures from Team 362 but we were working hard!



Second crossing of the Skok. This one used to have a footlog until about 6-ish years ago when it was washed out by the river. Now it is a ford. One we did *multiple* times. The water felt like – well – melted snow (see note above about the lingering snow in the Sundown basin).



This tree posed a bit of a conundrum. The log itself was 56", so let's just call it 5-feet. As you can see, it also wasn't down on the ground. The top of it was too high even for the height this team had within them, and the 36" bar they were using. It was also top bound (compression on the top). Which means they really needed to be able to take a big notch out of the top and then saw up from the bottom (because it wants to collapse downward). Easier said than done when something is this big and too high. Martin came up with the idea of taking a huge chunk out of the bottom first. This accomplished getting rid of a whole big bunch of the wood (less chance of getting the saw stuck) and giving them large, heavy and stable steps to use for sawing the top of the log (see below). It also drastically reduced the amount of upward sawing with a heavy saw they had to do.

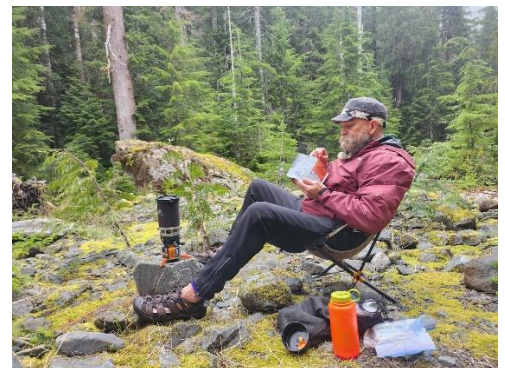
They accomplished this unique cut like this: First they bored into the log about in the middle and cut down 5 times for 5 slices. Then Martin took the saw and held it sideways at the top of the slices, drove the felling dogs into the log to hold the saw steady, and ripped the log lengthwise.



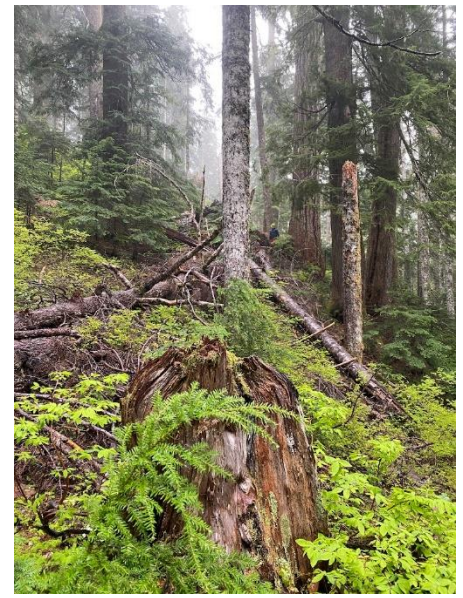
They all took turns piecing apart the log. Sometimes taking a break and getting a cool picture taken with a log frame. 😊



Finished cut! Pictures from both sides, one taken later in the day on the hike out.



We camped one night in the parking lot and then by a creek commonly known as StartUp Creek. That is not an official map name, but I believe it probably has its origins because this is where the trail takes a decidedly upward slope towards ONP and Sundown Pass. Here we are lounging for dinner by Randy's tent. This creek was also a ford where we had to change shoes.



This was the top project, just below Riley Camp. This project was in the ONP, though most of the trail to that point was in ONF. It does a dip from ONF to ONP back to ONF and back to ONP before it stays there shortly after Riley.

Okay, so when we scouted this we figured we'd be cutting this mess out. That pile of trees is lengthwise in the trail, multiple trees high on top of each other. We knew if we had enough time and gas that we'd be able to clear this safely. So we brought lots of extra gas and oil for this purpose, which all got carried up up to here.

But then ...

- a. It was pouring rain all day on this Sunday when we got to here.
- b. We arrived at this project at about 10:00(ish) on the last day of work.
- c. It was cold dumping, Olympics-style rain.
- d. Even if it was sunny and warm, there wasn't enough time.
- e. (and this one is critical) When we started looking around to figure out whether we should clear it or re-align the trail, we discovered an old trail marker embedded in a tree exactly on the route we would have chosen to re-align. Meaning that's where the trail used to be. It somehow had meandered down. Way down.
- f. The rain by then had soaked through everything, even the best of the rain gear (oh, I'm sorry, did I already mention the rain?).
- g. So we opted to do a re-alignment. It ended up being 210 feet, starting at the bottom of this mess and curving up to exit behind the rootball you can see in the distance. The team cut out a few logs, cut off the rootball roots, dug in the tread including a water bar built with rocks, and gave it a solid hand brushing. This "re-alignment" (which I am now air quoting because technically it's simply a reconstruction of the original) was in better shape than the actual trail when we were done.
- h. I don't have pictures of the final realignment because ... rain. None of us felt like stopping to take pictures and our phones were buried in plastic bags in our packs anyway. At least mine was. Also, it just looks like a trail. But to imagine it, look at the center picture above. The new / old trail starts about where I was standing to take the picture and goes on the hillside to the left to re-join the other trail above at the rootball.

And all the gas / oil got carried back out ...



On Monday morning, it took lots of crew cooperation and communication, but we managed to get all the tools back to the second crossing and back across the river – to be picked up by our amazing pack-out crew of Josie, Julie, David and Greg. I took this picture just to document the problem with the exit out of Tumble Creek for stock, but it turned out to be the only evidence I have of this crew. Thank you, pack out crew! 😊