

## GRAY WOLF / BCH-PENINSULA TRAIL CREW NOTES

8/1-8/6/2024

Location:

Happy Lake Ridge Trail, ONP, a hiker and stock trail, though we don't think it's been used for stock since the road closed.

### **Crew members:**

Rebecca Wanagel  
Martin Knowles  
Paul Kamps  
Randy Kraxberger  
Jonathan Hamlin  
Bernt Ericson  
Barbara Maxwell  
Eric Nagle  
Ted Spoon

Estimated On-Trail Volunteer Hours: 407

Report written by Rebecca.

### **Objectives met:**

1. Cleared the trail of downed logs (about 60) from the trailhead junction with Olympic Hot Springs Road to approximately 1 mile west of the Happy Lake junction (approximately 6 miles of cleared trail).
2. Brushed (with 2 power brushers) from mile 2.5 to a little past the Happy Lake junction (approximately 3 miles of thoroughly brushed trail). We focused the bulk of our very thorough brushing on the UPHILL side of the trail. That was because most of this trail is benched into the hillside, so brushing the upper part allowed us to encourage hikers back to the upper edge, slowing down trail erosion from people avoiding the foliage. Where the trail was flatter, we tended to brush both sides. We also focused our brushing on woody-stemmed items, not the soft grasses and flowers, because we know the only way to make a lasting difference is to push hard-stemmed foliage way back.
3. Hand-brushed critical spots on the trail for the rest of the trail from Happy Lake junction to Aurora Ridge / Boulder Lake Trail junction (approximately 2.4 miles). This took care of places where hikers were literally being pushed off the trail.
4. Repaired / widened tread on a triage basis (as in, the tread was too narrow to be safe) throughout the work zone. Delineated the trail better where folks were starting to cause braided trails by not being sure where to go.

### **Narrative:**

Okay, this was "fun" but not so much fun that we have any desire to do this trail again for a long (long long) time. Let's just say there was a disproportionately high hard-hiking:work ratio, more than normal. That being said, we were all in better shape by the end of it and, as always, we were happy and honored to get yet another trail in good condition for some time to come. We all love giving to our community in this way. This trip just pushed the envelope a bit. 😊

A little background: this trail is supposed to be – and used to be – a stock trail. I was imagining that stock and their riders used to be able to park at the Happy Ridge trailhead, ride up that hill (more on that below) and continue on around to Boulder Lake, which I'm visualizing was a lovely place to camp for them. From there on down through Boulder Creek Campground and back to the trailhead. Or maybe they did it in the opposite direction, but either way it was a beautiful, rideable loop. Same for those who backpack without horses.

But that was then, this is now. Due to the river changing course, the Olympic Hot Springs Road has been closed for many years. I have no idea if it will ever be rebuilt, and I can't imagine that riders want to subject their animals' hooves to the asphalt for the many miles it takes to get to the trailhead. Likewise, lots of folks don't have the desire to walk that long steep uphill road walk just to get to the trailhead. Due to this and, I'm sure other factors, the trail was in neglected condition. Lots of logs in the way and terrible brush obscuring the trail and pushing hikers to the downhill edge, degrading the tread. Sometimes the trail was hard to see, so hikers were starting to go every which way at various confusing points.

Happy Lake Ridge Trail starts at approximately 1700 feet and climbs 5.1 miles to about 5300 feet to the junction with the Happy Lake trail. From there it does a series of steep ups and downs as it undulates across the ridge for 2.4 miles to the junction with Aurora Ridge / Boulder Lake trail. There are some flat and downhill parts on the way up, so the net gain from trailhead to lake trail junction is 3900 feet. From the lake trail junction, you have to descend a steep ½ mile 500-foot drop to get to Happy Lake, the only place to camp and the only realistic source of water. Every morning, we had to climb back out of the 500-foot hole to get back to the junction.

*Personal note from Rebecca: I am deeply touched by the variation in the terrain of the Olympic National Park with the changing elevations. As you climb from the thousands to the five-thousands, the plants, views, trees, and smells change nearly with every foot. Salal gives way to oregon grape to huckleberries (which ripened on our trip) to smaller trees and Alaskan Yellow Cedars, sub-alpine firs with curvy trunks showing their struggle to stay alive under the snow for most of the year, and lots of heather, mountain azalea and sitka mountain ash. During July, the wildflowers put on a brilliant show. It is a joy to experience.*

Day 1: We shuttled everything across the ½ mile bypass and, thankfully, had a ride waiting for us on the other side to get to the trailhead. Our driver was Clay Murdach and we were very appreciative! We did have to clear a few things off the road on the way up, as there were downed trees in the way. From there we hiked uphill in the oppressive heat to the junction and descended to the lake to set up camp. However, because it's impossible to carry camp and tools / equipment at the same time ...

Day 2: We had to go all the way back down to the trailhead and redo the climb with the tools, starting our work ½ way up the trail (except one saw team which started clearing logs as soon as there were some). The reason for starting the bulk of the work at mile 2.5 is that is where the trail started getting bad. Until then, other than a handful of logs down, it looked like it had received maintenance more recently than the upper part. We quickly figured out why. The grinding hill wears you down, body and spirit. The heat and humidity were oppressive. And the bugs ... don't get me started on the bugs. We lived in our bug head nets – literally. We wore them all the time, even over our work hard hats. Except for one poor crew member who had the misfortune of finding their carefully-packed bug net just as we were waiting for the ride at the trailhead on the last day.

Day 3 and 4: more going down to retrieve tools and working up. The team with the larger saw cleared 3 quite large trees (one was 54") that were right next to each other, two of which were very hard to get over, under or around. The teams that used the smaller saw cleared all the rest of the logs. Yellow jackets nesting in the trail stung several of us.

Day 5 had one team member resting, two had left 2 days prior (and took out one saw plus its equipment on top of their camp (yikes! That must have been awful), one heading out that day – so we had 3 people hike the tools back down to the trailhead and 2 went on to clear the rest of the logs to the Aurora junction. However, that plan was snuffed out when, after our second cut of the day, we had a rare but unfortunate saw failure. Fixable, certainly, but not in the field and not with what we had on hand. So that team of 2 went back to camp, reshuffled gear, and followed the other 3 in taking the rest of the tools down to the trailhead. Then back up we all went, with our packs empty, climbing up the 3900 feet and down the 500 to the lake. (lake to trailhead roundtrip is 11.2 miles).

Day 6 had us all pack up and descend one last time. We arrived at the trailhead, pulled the tools from the cache and organized them – with lots of time left over before Clay arrived to take us back to the bypass. We were really happy to see that truck!

Despite an illness and the fact that some team members had to leave early and the massive amounts of slow hiking we had to do to achieve the goal, we managed to get this trail back up to snuff. It had been a long time since it was maintained. We could tell some of those logs had been down for too many years to figure. It is much better now! Brushed, cleared, tended and pleasant to hike once again. We are proud of our accomplishment.

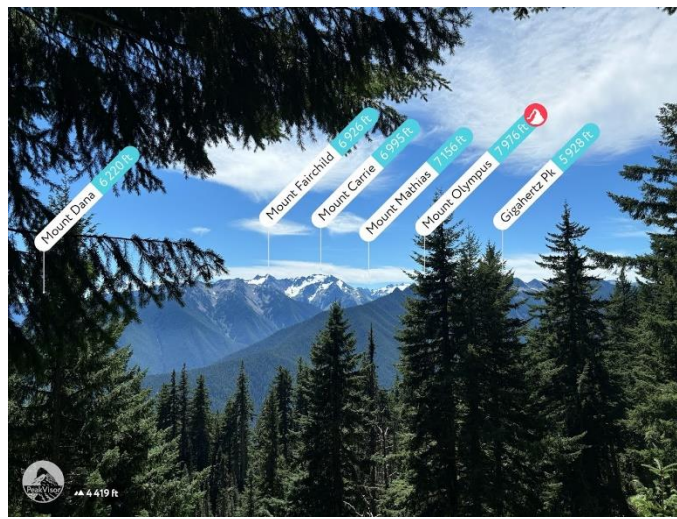
Our reward, besides knowing we did such good for a National Park trail, was stunning views and the company of fabulous people.

Murphy's Law ... our final hour, waiting at the trailhead ... was in chilly temps with no bugs.



Clearing had to be done on the road on the way to the trailhead.





Great views from up high on the trail. Mt. Olympus, Mt. Carrie and others on one side ...



Mt. Baker on the other.



The sign lies. It's actually 5.1 to the trailhead. Several of us tracked it.



Typical dinner gathering. A good time to make plans for the next day and relax.



Beautiful sunsets.



Good friendships are made on this crew. Randy and Paul are two of our skilled sawyers.





This tree was no fun to climb over with a loaded pack. It was good to see it gone!



Randy showing the can of fire extinguisher we keep in each saw kit during the months of July-September. It's so dry and the fire danger is high! We are on high alert for sparks and make sure we follow all precautions to avoid starting any type of fire.



Bernt starting a cut – wearing the mandatory bug net over his hard hat.





Eric loaded up on day 2, headed back up the trail.



Rebecca cutting out a tree just west of the lake junction – also sporting the bug net look.



Ted brushing with a view in the background. View obscured by bug net, of course.





Randy and Rebecca ready to go finish the logs west of the junction (until the saw broke, that is). Paul and Barbara prepped to take tools down the trail to the cache on day 5.



The 54" log, freshly cut.



Nice photography from Jonathan ("Texas"), but the view really was this lovely!



Our views were long and sometimes moody.



Trail before ...



And after.





Before ...



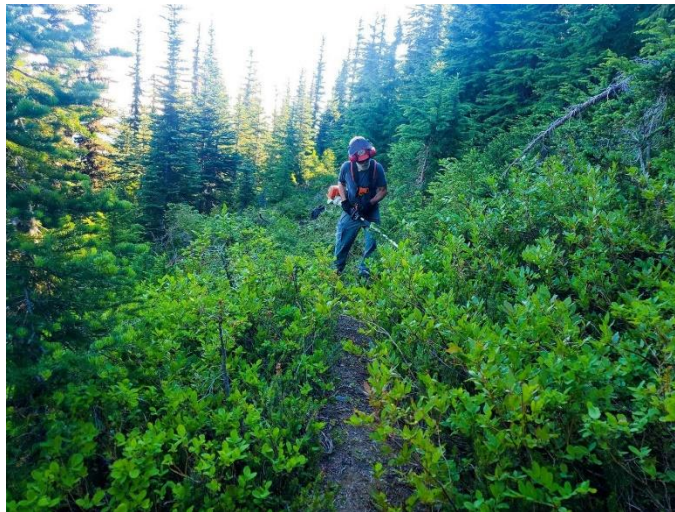
After.



Before ...



After.



Picture credit: Texas!