GRAYWOLF / BCHW-PENINSULA TRAIL CREW NOTES

August 9-14, 2025

Location: Appleton Pass, Boulder Lake and Olympic Hotsprings trails, ONP – STOCK TRAILS
(though to my knowledge, no stock uses Appleton Pass or Boulder Lake anymore with the road being long-closed)
Report written by Rebecca.

Crew members:
Rebecca Wanagel
Martin Knowles
Barbara Maxwell
Eric Nagle
Rick King
Sonya Langford
Julie Metzger

BCHW packers:

Rachael Taylor-Tuller
Matthew Tuller

Starring the incredible:
- *Blue
- *Possi
- *Biskit
- *Maizey

Total hours spent working or packing on trail: **430** (as always, this does not include the countless hours organizing beforehand and reporting afterward … and writing this report 😉)

1. BRUSHING:
   a. We power brushed (two teams) the bottom **4.4 miles** of Appleton Pass trail. From mile 3.7 to 4.4 was some of the thickest brush we ever had to endure, never mind clear. A towering wall of elderberry, alder, salmonberry, mountain ash and others; obscuring the trail to where Martin had to stop a few times to check his map app to see where the trail went before resuming work. This was making it so that hikers could not see their feet at all on a trail that was rocky and rough and – due to the vegetation – always wet and slippery. Let's just say that Appleton Pass trail had developed a well-deserved bad reputation and many were avoiding getting to the pass from this side (it's accessible from the Sol Duc too).
   b. From 4.4 to the pass at 5.1 miles we hand brushed small trees and heather that was infringing on the trail, and pulled as many small tree saplings as we could that would otherwise grow big and block the trail (this was done as much as possible all along the trail).

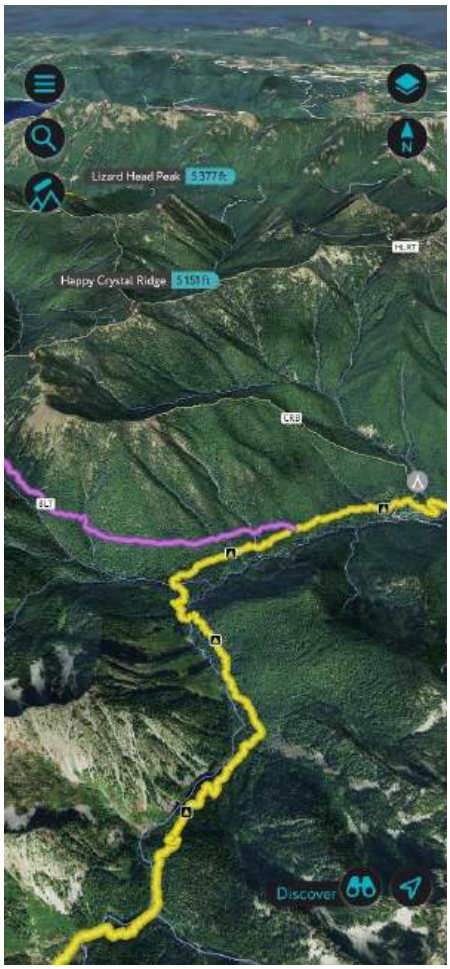
2. TREAD AND DRAINAGE
   a. Tread repair was on an as-needed basis except for one 30-foot re-alignment where tread had to be grubbed in to get around two uprooted rootballs.
   b. Drainages cleaned for the entire Appleton Pass trail – dozens of them.
3. LOGOUT – cleared **79** downed trees from the three trails.

Meet the trails:
1. Olympic Hotsprings (2.2 miles): this one starts at the old trailhead approximately 7-8 miles from Madison Falls parking lot where we started. The trailhead signs have plenty of references to nudity, defaced "no bikes" and "no pets" signs, and tons of graffiti all over the outhouse building. Ug. This relatively easy trail takes you to the Boulder Creek Campground where we stayed for the duration.
2. Appleton Pass (5.1 from Boulder Creek Campground).
3. Boulder Lake (3.5 from Boulder Creek Campground)

Elevations:
Madison Falls trailhead – 266 ft
Olympic Hotsprings trailhead – 1831 ft
Boulder Creek Campground – 2234 ft
Appleton Pass – 5135 ft
Boulder Lake – 4334 ft

Similar to our Long Ridge trip in July, this was a tough one.

Saturday, August 9



We met at Madison Falls trailhead, organized gear for packer pickup and headed up the road with somewhat lightened packs. It's about 7-8 miles on old road (with a ½-mile bike push over a rough bypass trail), and 2.2 miles on trail to get to Boulder Creek Campground. Barbara and Eric had e-bikes; Julie, Martin and Rebecca were on regular bikes; Rick and Sonya on foot. All of us were on foot for the 2.2-mile trail as there are no bikes allowed once the road ends. The road is an uphill grind.

Camp is at the grey triangle on the right side of the picture. The split is the Appleton (yellow) / Boulder (purple) junction. The road we took to get to camp is out of view. This is looking north, the Strait in the background.

Boulder Creek Campground is the old car campground from when there was a resort at the Olympic Hotsprings. Now it is a backcountry camp area but, due to its history, a very large and spacious one and it even has working bear wires.

The Olympic Hotsprings trail is a tame one in no small part because it was the old road to get to BC Campground. It was converted to trail many years ago.

There is history of it being decommissioned from road to trail, recommissioned in order to install a suspension bridge at Crystal Creek, decommissioned when bridge was finished, recommissioned shortly thereafter when the new expensive bridge had to be disassembled and removed due to being anchored on an unstable bluff, then finally decommissioned again …).

We all got to the campground at different times and then waited for the packers to arrive. Once they got there, we helped them unload and then we put tools together and organized gear to hit the work hard the next day.

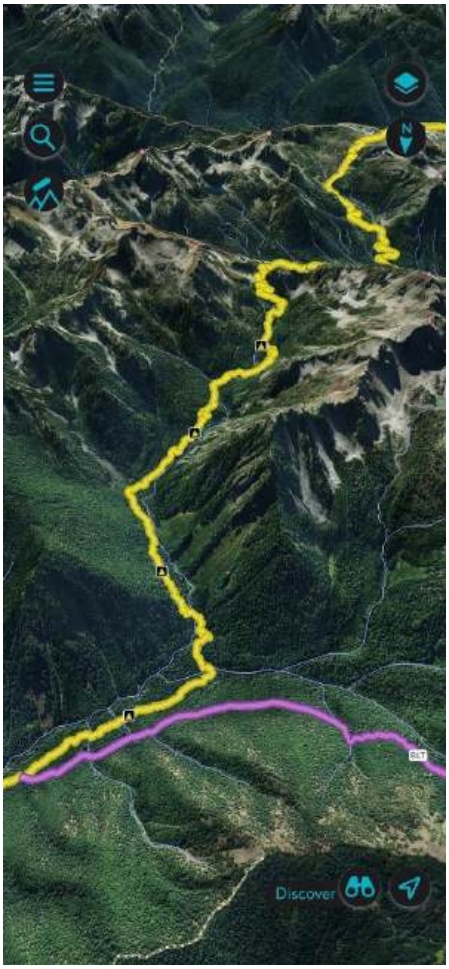
Plenty of peaceful river views on the way up.

Rick and Sonya were lucky to have spotted a close-up view of a bear on their walk.

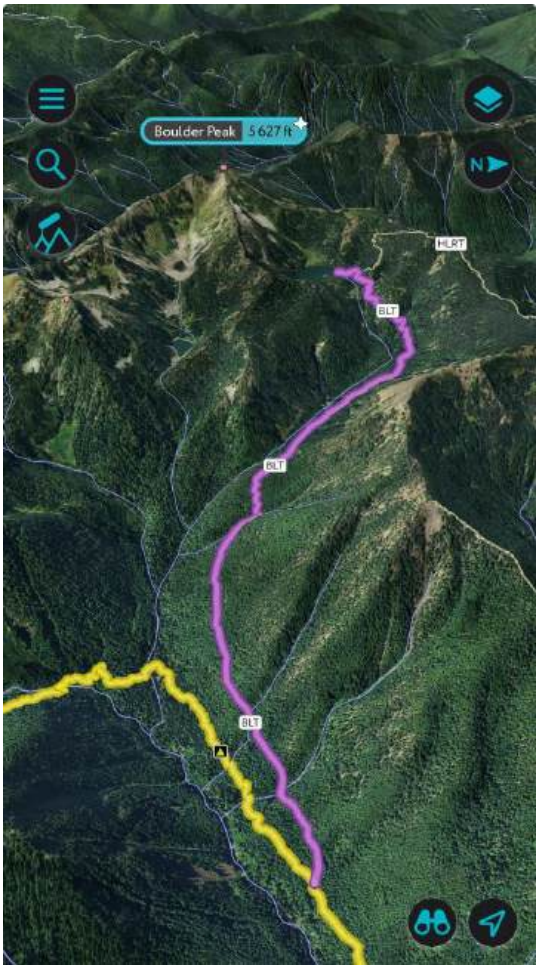
Huge thanks again to the Tullers for getting our gear to our campsite. This trip was on very short notice, but they were able to help us out! (The short notice was because we were originally scheduled to work some trails down in the central / south Olympics, but it had to be moved due to the devastating Bear Gulch fire). The Tullers are becoming a vital link to getting trail work done in the backcountry and we are extremely appreciative for their partnership and passion!

Some horse / mule pictures:

Sunday and Monday, August 10 and 11



Appleton Pass trail, yellow, and Boulder Lake trail, purple, split from each other ¾ mile south of our camp. Appleton heads up high, switchbacking furiously near the pass to gain more elevation in a short distance. Map view looking south.



Boulder Lake trail with the glorious Boulder Lake as a reward. The lake has Boulder Peak as a backdrop.

This is a trail. Seriously. There is a trail hiding in that brush.

Wait for it …

Voila!

The brushing crew of Martin, Barbara, Eric, Sonya and Julie hiked 3.7 miles to get to the start of some of the worst brush the Olympics can throw at a hiking path, giving Appleton Pass trail on the Elwha side a well-deserved bad reputation. Many people choose to get to Appleton Pass via the Sol Duc side instead, even though (in my opinion) this is a much more beautiful approach.

This crew had to work in the hot sun because, well, that's where the brush grows like this. They did have water nearby but this was some incredibly hard hard hard work! They had to get through about ¾ mile of this, which took them two days. Each day was a lot of hiking, long hours, backbreaking work.

A nearly brand new ONP-built footlog crossing the S. Fork of Boulder Creek has been the unfortunate victim of Nature's impeccable aim with falling trees.

Julie is smiling here (because Julie is nearly always smiling no matter how hard the work), but this broken footlog is now steep enough to make you really pay attention!

The lower falls on Boulder Creek are really lovely.

The work was extremely difficult but you can't beat the views of this jobsite.

Martin is barely visible as he runs that weed whacker for hours on end. For numerous reasons, this was some of the hardest brush to contend with that we've experienced.

Sonya has recently started working with the Graywolf crew. We are lucky!

The cleanup isn't really any easier than the brushing itself. All the vegetation was so tall and thick, it was hard to find places to throw the huge piles of cut debris.

Meanwhile, Rick and Rebecca were the saw team for the first two days. We cleared from the campground to the Boulder / Appleton junction, up to Boulder Lake – then got the saw back to the junction and started clearing up towards Appleton Pass. Hiking with the weight of the saw and all the equipment / fuel that goes with it is taxing and exhausting.

Like Sonya, this was also Rick's first time on a backcountry crew. We are thrilled and hope they both keep coming back. He took the first log out of camp, before the junction.

We correctly predicted that the rootball would settle down once cut, but caused no problems with the cut because the angle was correct to allow for the movement.

We had protected the edges of this fairly new turnpike to make sure we didn't crush the curb logs.

We had a few projects that gave us something to think about. This one, for example, was leaning on an unstable chunk of a snag (standing dead tree). If the rootball goes, so does that snag. We analyzed the project and decided the rootball, for various reasons, was NOT going to move.

We still take precautions with our positioning in case our prediction proved incorrect, but it went off without a hitch.

This log was notched by Martin some 5 or 6 years ago when it first fell. At that time, freshly on the ground, several of us thought it had a serious sliding potential, so we notched it for hikers. This time my gut said that it was going to stay on the hillside (they settle with age and lose the memory of their original shape). We cut the tree to open up the trail and the remaining piece stayed on the hillside as predicted.

We got to a tree with a detached rootball. A small one by Olympics standards, fortunately, because it was right in the middle of the trail.

Rick did a skilled job of cutting the tree portion without getting the saw chain in the dirt, and then we managed to push the rootball off the trail!

This was our reward at the top. Boulder Lake.

Looking north:
Yikes. The brushing crew had to fight their way through this mess three times before Rick and Rebecca's Removal Regiment got to it. Many trees down in this one area, some in different directions, oddly.

Looking south:
Two rootballs had uprooted and they must have been standing sentinel on either side of the trail, because now the trail runs directly under both of them. We decided that Nature wins this round and we'll do a short re-alignment around the rootballs, cutting out a few of the trees to allow passage.

Rebecca got the hole opened up wide, making Rick move about 14 heavy rounds in the process (bwhaa ha ha).

Later in the crew Eric did some skilled tread work. Barbara and Sonya pose on the new trail going around the rootball.

Tuesday, August 12

Today we switched the teams up a bit. Julie headed back to work yesterday. Barbara, Sonya, Eric and Rick went up to start working the brushers downtrail at a faster pace (the thickest of the thick brush was finished, now it was back to normal trailside vegetation). Within the crew, they moved cleaners to the brushers and operators to the cleaning crew. Being on the weed whacker all day is hard on your back! Martin took Rick's place as Rebecca's saw partner.

We started out the day hiking to the project with the rootballs. We had left one long piece that we wanted the group to push off. Sonya is taking the picture, Julie was gone by then, and you can barely see Barbara and Eric in the brush, but we're a team!

Up and up and up they had to hike to get back to the tool cache. Sonya in front because this was her THIRD time going up this trail, Rick following.

We planned it so that either Rick or Martin was on the brush crew just in case anything went wrong with the equipment. Here's Rick on his tool for the day.

More trail exposed!

This was an interesting, complex project. The downed large tree's rootball is firmly leaning on the cross tree, which was still attached to its rootball in the ground behind me (the picture taker). The pressure of all of it is causing that tree to lean and be bound up in the branches above. We thought about this project while we ate lunch.

We decided to cut the big one first and Martin took that cut. The rootball was leaning on the cross log, which in turn was freely suspended on the far side, we knew that cutting the cross log was going to cause some movement. We didn't think it would actually drop the rootball into the trail because of the way it was caught on the live diagonal tree. But still, cutting the large one first allowed us to be far away from the whole mess once we cut the cross log.

We chose a compound angle (angles in two different directions) on the first cut to allow the tree stem away from the rootball to fall down and away from the sawyer. We knew it would do that because it was:

a) Suspended off the ground
b) Bound on the side of two fir trees, above the flange. When that happens, the log will move out when it drops because the flanges flare out.

I got in on the action cutting off more rounds. My sister, when she saw this picture, teased if I was making furniture due to the thin slice. In reality, that slice weighs 185 pounds (doug fir is 39 lbs per cubic foot). I was also angling it to mimic the line of the trail, so it is wider on the part you cannot see, but still … we take size into account when deciding how big to make the rounds and whether or not we have a hillside to help them self-evacuate (we did not).

I got to cut the cross log, which was severely side bound (bowed and trapped). This log wanted to spring both out and up, so we chose another compound cut to allow for this movement. I ended up needing to do this many times as the log pivoted. I just kept chasing it. Notice how far forward I am from the original sawdust in the foreground.

Martin had to take over for the last couple of cuts on the cross log because it just kept pivoting up and away and got too high for me. Here is the finished product. Later in the day as the other crew came through, they made the tread much better. We had to keep moving up to get the remainder of the trees on this trail.

Wednesday, August 13

Just one picture from this day. Martin and Rick were now the saw team and they went to clear the 10 or so logs that were on the Olympic Hotsprings trail, which caused the packers some hassle on the way in. Eric went up to the rootball project to put in the tread. Sonya and Rebecca were the brushing crew now, taking the brusher along the edges of the trail (and cleaning up the resulting debris) for the last 2.4 miles to the campground. The brush was sparser because I had run a crew here several years ago. Barbara, meanwhile, was cleaning out all the drainages! There were dozens, so she was relieved when she got down to where Julie had already done a bunch in the trail below the junction.

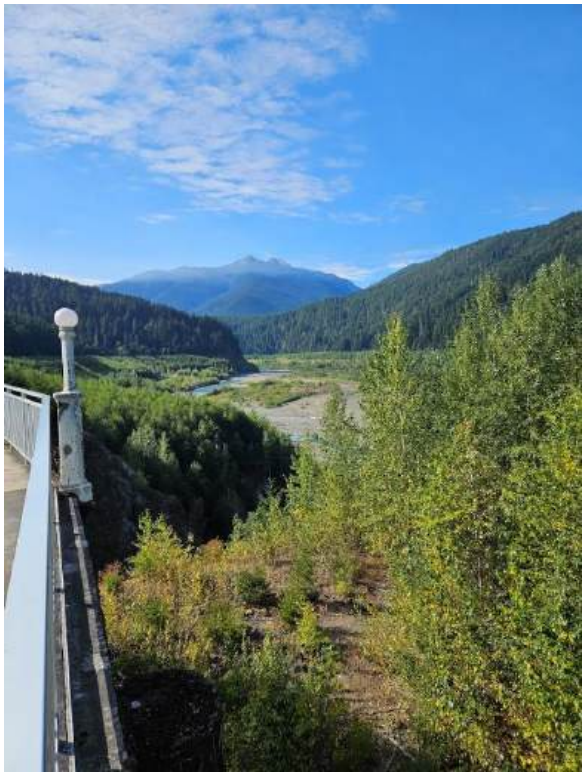
This is our only picture from Wednesday. Rick cutting one of the trees on the OHS trail.

It looks wide because remember, this is an old road turned to trail.

Do you ever wonder why you see us putting a pie slice in the log like that? That's because logs in this position have "top bind" which means the compression (stuck saw opportunity) is on the top. By taking out a slice we achieve two things:

a) Once we move to the bottom to finish the cut by sawing upward, we've allowed the tree to drop slowly instead of with a powerful bang. It's safer and causes it to have far less movement. This happens because we've removed some of the opposing pressures.
b) b) The pie slice gives the tree room to close in on itself as we finish the cut from the bottom. That allows it to finish its drop.

Thursday, August 13 – homeward bound.



We had some iconic Elwha views on the way down.

But the clouds were telling a story of changing weather.

The weather had been hot (too hot) and dry, then cooled and became perfect on this day … up until the Tullers, who arrived after we had already left (we cached the gear for them to pack) were on their way out. That's when the forecasted rain made its debut. When Martin went back to the corral to retrieve the gear, he saw this:

Oof. Sorry 'bout that. ☹️

The End