

TRAIL CREW NOTES

6/23-7/1 (trail crew)

7/2-7/4 (packers)

Location: Elwha, ONP

Crew members:

Rebecca Wanagel

Martin Knowles

Paul Kamps

Bernt Ericson

Randy Kraxberger

David Graves

Packers:

Rachael Tuller

Matthew Tuller

Animals:

Woody

Possie

Noomie

Maize

Biscuit

Blue

Hours: 446 (crew) + 60 (packers) = 506

The crew members' hours are camp to camp or camp to trailhead (or reversed). This trip required us to hike an average of approximately 100 miles, many of them loaded with either camp, tools plus gas / oil, or some of both. The packers put in approx. 55 miles over 3 days.

This backcountry trip up the Elwha was 9, 8 or 6 days long depending on the crew member. Rebecca made the decision early on to allow flexibility – no one crew member had to commit to all or nothing.

Our goal was to clear the Elwha trail – a stock trail – from Elkhorn to Low Divide. The ONP crew had cleared to Elkhorn including some amazing tread and drainage work and bridge repair. They are doing a major roof restoration project at Elkhorn all summer, so they needed the trail in good, clear, repaired condition to Elkhorn.

This trip was preceded by umpteen dozens of hours of prep and organization ... including coordinating with the Trails Supervisor, Larry Lack, and the ONP packers who hauled our gear in to Elkhorn before the start of our trip, and the BCH volunteer packers who hauled our gear out from Wilder at the end of the trip. Rebecca did all the communication, emailing, planning, scheduling, and coordination. Various crew members drove to Port Angeles to bring their gear for mule packing. Martin ran all the gear over in two different trips to the ONP packer mule corral. Many folks, including the packers, drove long miles to get to the trailhead. The packers came the day before to Sequim to spend the night to get closer to the entry point of Madison Falls. Every single one of us spent untold number of hours packing and prepping to get the gear right. Everything the crew brought had to be carried on our backs past Elkhorn. Then there are the untold number of hours post-trip for Rebecca to write up this summary, report the work and hours to ONP, get the picture album complete, retrieve the gear from the packers, etc.

Just know that these many dozens of hours are NOT included in the actual work hours listed above. I think sometimes folks might not realize just how many extra hours are behind every hour listed as actual work hours of volunteering.

Some backstory: Martin and Rebecca did a major log clear from 1.5 miles north of Hayes to just before the first Elwha crossing (approx. 9.5 miles) last summer. The logs were dense but we cleared those, and an ONP crew cleared over Low Divide and down to Chicago Camp from the other direction (The North Fork Quinault side). That left about 2 miles between the first ford and Chicago Camp that hadn't been touched in many years. Last year we cleared 120 logs (and I'm sure the ONP crew cleared a lot too). This year, with the larger crew, we cleared approx. 85 logs. But that cleared more miles and used more gas, meaning there were more larger logs than last year. But this explains why we had sections where it was far more hiking than cutting.

Here is how it went:

Friday 6/23

5 hiked from Whiskey Bend trailhead to Elkhorn (Cascade, ONP employee, gave us a ride from the far side of the washout bypass trail up the Whiskey Bend road), with the last couple of miles getting drenched in a surprise thunderstorm, the only precip of the entire trip. (mileage approx. 12). We set up camp and then met to coordinate the tools, gas and oil transport for our first day of work on Saturday.

Saturday 6/24

5 worked clearing logs from Elkhorn to Hayes. Our first project out of the gate was 2 large trees that had great potential for sliding. We feel like we handled it safely and well – the project was left clear and stable. But it did eat up most of the morning. We continued clearing to Hayes, put our tools and gear in either the tool shed or the cabin, and headed back to Elkhorn for the evening. (mileage: almost 11 round trip).



OUR FIRST PROJECT, 20 YARDS PAST SOUTH HORSE GATE OUT OF ELKHORN.



DETACHED ROOTBALL MEANS GREAT SLIDING POTENTIAL





**THE TOP (BIGGER) TREE SLID A BIT INTO THE LOWER TREE,
(WE EXPECTED THAT FROM THE LAY OF THE TREE)
WHICH POKED THE LOWER TREE INTO THE GROUND AND
STOPPED ANY MORE MOVEMENT FROM EITHER TREE.
TRIMMED IT UP AND IT'S GOOD TO GO.**

Sunday 6/25

Packed up camp and moved it to Hayes, set up. Started working from Hayes toward Wilder. This involved 3 members clearing out some big projects with the big saw, and 2 members mostly just schlepping tools / gas forward. We dropped the gear at a 5-log jumble about 3 miles south of Hayes. The 2-member crew started limbing the project, but that was all that could be done without the big saw and extra bar present. Eventually we all moved back to Hayes for the evening, caching the big saw and kit and gas about halfway between.



THIS WAS JUST PAST THE HAYES BRIDGE.







THIS WAS THE 5-LOG MESS ABOUT 3 MILES SOUTH OF HAYES.

Monday 6/26

Broke camp. Coordinated on how we were going to get all the camp and big saw tools moved to the project. Hiked to and got started on the project and had all 5 logs cleared and lunch eaten by 1:00ish.

Moved camp to Wilder (1 more mile; some of which was a lot of miserable, swampy salmonberry and wild rose brush). Set up camp. Went back to get the tools and moved them to Wilder (there were no more logs between the large project and Wilder due to the clearing Martin and Rebecca had done last year). Stayed at Wilder for the evening.

Meanwhile, David was doing an epic 24-mile hike to Hayes. He was super light to Elkhorn, where his gear was stored, then heavy for the last 5.3 miles to Hayes.



WE USED TWO SAWS ON THIS 5-LOG PROJECT. THE 462 WITH A 36" BAR. THE 261 WITH A 28" BAR. THEN WE SWAPPED THE BARS BACK TO 28" AND 20" FOR PROPER TRANSPORT IN THE SHEATHS.



LOOKING NORTH BACK AT THE CLEARED PROJECT.

Tuesday 6/27

5 crew members cleared from Wilder to the Elwha ford and then for another half mile or so (total = about 3.8 miles). This included clearing the project near the ford that Martin and Rebecca left off on last year due to running low on saw gas. It was time consuming due to a lot of limbs to clear and rounds to cut, but we were done with that by noonish and could take on the ford, and continue clearing until we were done for the day.

The ford turned out to be not at all bad. The Elwha is wide there and it was running max height at Rebecca's knees but mostly at mid-calf (being the shortest, Rebecca is the best barometer for the safety of the ford).

Once we had enough for the day, we cached tools and hiked 3.8 miles back to Wilder for the evening (redoing the ford in the opposite direction).

Meanwhile, David was fixing spots on the tread between Hayes and Wilder that were unsafe for stock. He also worked on the realignment about $\frac{1}{2}$ mile south of Hayes where a severe washout had taken out the trail some number of years ago. He made that much more accessible and very safe for stock. He then met us and we joined together as a team of 6.



WORDS CANNOT DESCRIBE HOW MUCH I LOVE THE POWER AND IMMENSITY OF THE GODKIN CREEK. (1/2 MILE SOUTH OF WILDER).



THIS IS THE LAST PROJECT WE SAW LAST SUMMER, WE HAD TO LEAVE THIS UNTOUCHED DUE TO NEEDING THE REMAINDER OF OUR SAW GAS FOR A LARGE PROJECT THAT FELL DOWN BEHIND US AS WE CLEARED UP THE TRAIL (WE HEARD ABOUT THAT FROM HIKERS). REBECCA WAS EAGER TO GET BACK TO THIS MESS THIS YEAR. THIS IS RIGHT BEFORE THE FORD ACROSS THE ELWHA. LOOKING SOUTH.



LOOKING NORTH.



BERNT DID THE RELEASE CUT. THE SAW IS *NOT RUNNING* IN THIS PICTURE. WE ARE STILL IN THE STAGE OF LOOKING FOR HAZARDS AND MAKING OUR CUT PLAN. ONCE BERNT STARTED THE SAW WE WERE NOT RIGHT THERE IN FRONT OF HIM OR LEANING ON THE LOG.



THE TEAM STARTED TAKING TURNS CUTTING OFF THE MULTIPLE ROUNDS. THEY WERE HEAVY SO MARTIN MADE A "RULE": YOU CUT IT, YOU MOVE IT. 😊



MORE ROUNDS.



FINALLY, THE LAST CLEAR OF THE TREE UNDERNEATH.



CLEARED! LOOKING SOUTH.



LOOKING NORTH.



THE FORD TURNED OUT TO BE EASY.

Wednesday 6/28

4 of us broke camp, 2 left their camp at Wilder. 6 of us went back to the cache (redoing the ford). 4 of us moved through all 40ish projects awaiting us to set up camp at Chicago while 2 started work through this dense patch of downed trees. Once we set up camp, we went back to pick up the other saw and start clearing. By 3:00 we had all moved through the 1.2 miles of 40ish projects and landed at Chicago Camp. 4 of us were done for the day. 2 picked up the small saw plus kit, and the empty gas cans and headed back to Wilder to begin their exit the next day.

Some of the 40 projects we cut out this day:







OUR CREW DOES NICE THINGS LIKE CUTTING STEPS INTO FOOTLOGS THAT ARE HARD TO GET UP ON WITH A BACKPACK.



THE BUNCHBERRIES (DWARF DOGWOOD) WERE CARPETING THE WHOLE TRAIL NEAR AND AROUND CHICAGO CAMP. IT WAS REMARKABLY LOVELY.

Thursday 6/29

Bernt and Randy started their exit from Wilder.

Paul, Martin, David and Rebecca cleared up to Low Divide and then went back to Chicago Camp. This trail is in terrible condition. In no way is this trail safe for stock. We cleared all the trees except one 5-foot diameter one. We left this one because it is large and high enough that if we had started it and then run out of saw gas (we would have), that would leave this in a dangerous condition. In its current condition, hikers can easily duck under and stock cannot use this trail anyway until some major work is done on it going up towards Low Divide.



THIS IS THE 5-FOOT DIAMETER TREE WE HAD TO LEAVE FOR NOW DUE TO NOT HAVING ENOUGH SAW GAS TO FINISH IT ONCE STARTED.



FIRST PROJECT RIGHT AFTER THE CROSSING AT CHICAGO. NO AFTER PICTURE, SORRY, BUT IT'S CLEARED. THIS HAS BEEN THERE A LONG TIME.



THIS PROJECT WAS TIME-CONSUMING. IT WAS AFTER THE FIRST SWITCHBACK AS THE TRAIL BEGINS TO CLIMB. THE TOP OF THE LOWER TREE HAD THE POTENTIAL TO SLIDE, SO WE DID THINGS TO PREVENT THAT FROM HAPPENING (CUT UNDERNEATH LIMBS SO THE TOP COULD DROP INSTEAD OF SLIDING).



REBECCA HAD DONE THE RELEASE CUT AND AS MANY ROUNDS AS COULD BE REACHED AT THE TIME OFF THE LOWER LOG. PAUL STARTED WORKING ON THE UPPER LOG. THE UPPER ONE DIDN'T TURN OUT TO BE QUITE AS IMMENSE AS IT LOOKS. IT WAS SO ROTTEN THAT IT WAS MORE LIKE A CANOE THAN A SOLID LOG. THIS PROJECT HAS BEEN THERE A LONG TIME, I REMEMBER HIKING UNDER THIS BEFORE, YEARS AGO.



MARTIN CONTINUING THE DISMANTLING OF THE LARGE CANOE.



BACK TO THE LOWER LOG, THAT IS NO LONGER THE LOWER BECAUSE THE UPPER ONE IS DOWN ON THE GROUND.



AFTER MANY YEARS, THIS IS CLEAR!



LOW DIVIDE NEVER DISAPPOINTS. THERE IS MAGIC IN THE AIR UP THERE.



**MARY AND MARGARET (MARGARET SHOWN HERE) WERE GORGEOUS.
3 HIKERS WERE SWIMMING IN MARGARET – THEIR LAUGHS FILLED THE AIR.**

David and Paul did a little safety work on the log crossing taking people over the river from Chicago Camp. It used to be one large log but it got split in two and now there is a gap that is filled with branches and small log debris. They shored it up a bit making it safer to solidly step on the debris to get across the gap.



I'M NOT EXACTLY SURE WHERE STOCK ARE SUPPOSED TO CROSS HERE AT CHICAGO CAMP. BUT SOMEONE TOLD ME THERE WAS DEFINITELY A WAY FOR THEM TO GET ACROSS. HOWEVER, AT A CREEK 1.2 MILES BACK, THERE DOES NOT APPEAR TO BE A WAY FOR STOCK TO CURRENTLY CROSS. AND STOCK CURRENTLY SHOULD NOT DO THE TRAIL UP TO LOW DIVIDE RIGHT NOW ANYWAY. IT NEEDS WORK.

After arriving back at Chicago Camp, David decided to take more than his fair share of the tools and left over gas on top of his camp and head back to Wilder.

Meanwhile, Bernt and Randy headed from Wilder to Lillian.

Friday 6/30

David hiked light from Wilder all the way out to Madison Falls parking lot (28-29 miles). He apparently regretted that the next day but was happy to see his wife, Joanne, who is another avid volunteer trail worker with the Graywolf Crew.

We were extremely fortunate that our volunteer packers had happily agreed to retrieve our gear from Wilder rather than Hayes or Elkhorn. Everyone was more than happy to dump the weight in a hidden cache at Wilder. Paul, Martin and Rebecca hiked heavily-loaded (like David the day before) from Chicago to Wilder (5 miles) and put the weight into the cache.

Martin and Rebecca took a little extra time to explore Botten Cabin, which is off the trail. We then organized all the gear, took a video so the packers could find the gear, and made a list for the packers of what was in the cache. At a different time from Paul, we headed to Elkhorn, visited with volunteer ranger, Nancy, for a good long while and then continued to Lillian. 21 miles for Martin and Rebecca (5 fully loaded) and another mile past that for Paul due to where he camped.



BOTTEN CABIN. THIS IS RIGHT NEAR WILDER. IT'S DEFINITELY STOCK ACCESSIBLE TO WILDER DUE TO THE WORK WE DID.

Meanwhile, Bernt and Randy exited from Lillian to Madison Falls parking lot.

Saturday 7/1

Martin and Rebecca hit the trail from Lillian by 5:00 am and ran, unexpectedly, into Paul on our climb out of Lillian. We all hiked to the Madison Falls parking lot together.



Then
7/2-7/4

Rachael and Matthew Tuller, volunteer BCH packers, retrieved our gear from Wilder and Elkhorn. These folks are amazing. Their animals are strong and well-behaved. They went to Elkhorn on the 2nd. Elkhorn to Wilder back to Elkhorn on the 3rd. Exited on the 4th. It was hot but the humans and animals all looked no worse for the wear.

Pictures credited to Rachael except for the ones taken on the Olympic Hot Springs Road, which I took.





THIS PICTURE BEAUTIFULLY EVOKES THE ICONIC NATURE OF THIS HISTORIC TRAIL.







CROSSING THE NEWLY REPAIRED EVERGREEN CREEK BRIDGE. THE ONP CREW FIXED THIS AFTER A TREE NAILED AND RUINED IT. THAT'S MATTHEW ON WOODY FOLLOWED BY BLUE, MAIZE, AND BISCUIT.





**IT'S HARD NOT TO BE INFATUATED WITH THIS LITTLE ONE.
(THAT'S MICHAEL'S CABIN IN THE BACKGROUND)**



I WAS TRYING TO GET A PICTURE OF ADORABLE LITTLE NOOMIE BUT HE KEPT HIDING HIS 26(!) YEAR OLD CUTE FACE. GOT A GOOD ONE OF RACHAEL INSTEAD. 😊



MATTHEW ON WOODY, THE LEADER. BLUE ALONGSIDE TO HIS LEFT. BLUE IS THE CHIEF BUT USUALLY TOLERATES LETTING WOODY LEAD. WOODY IS A MORE TRUSTWORTHY LEADER BECAUSE SOMETIMES BLUE WILL BE TOO TIMID AND CAUTIOUS AS A LEADER. RACHAEL ON POSSIE (POSSUM) WITH NOOMIE HIDING HIS TINY SELF BEHIND HER.



THIS WAS THE REACTION OF THE ONP MULES WHEN THE TULLERS' ANIMALS CAME TO THE CORRAL TO BE UNLOADED. I CANNOT TELL YOU HOW FUNNY I FOUND THIS! THEY STOOD THERE DURING THE WHOLE UNLOADING OF GEAR AND LOADING OF THE ANIMALS INTO THE TRAILER.

Notes to stock riders:

So you see the evidence that it's stock safe at least to Wilder (just don't use the last puncheon before Wilder, go around it). It is fine past there too, until about 1.2 miles north of Chicago Camp. At that point there is a creek for which we couldn't see a stock ford. We think there used to be one and could certainly be one again with some work. After that it's fine to Chicago camp and then part way up the trail to Low Divide. However, I really don't recommend stock on the trail all the way to Low Divide until it gets some tread repair done to it.