

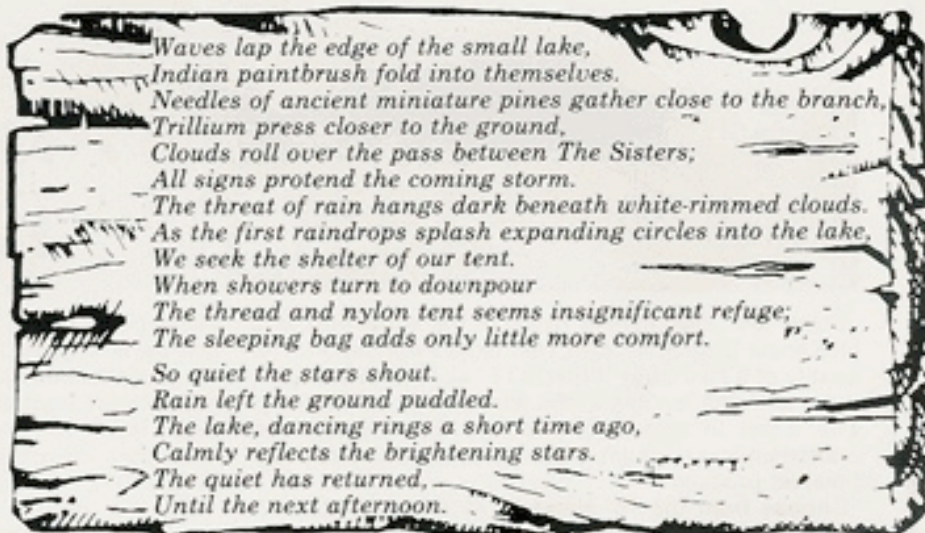
# Hike to a High Camp

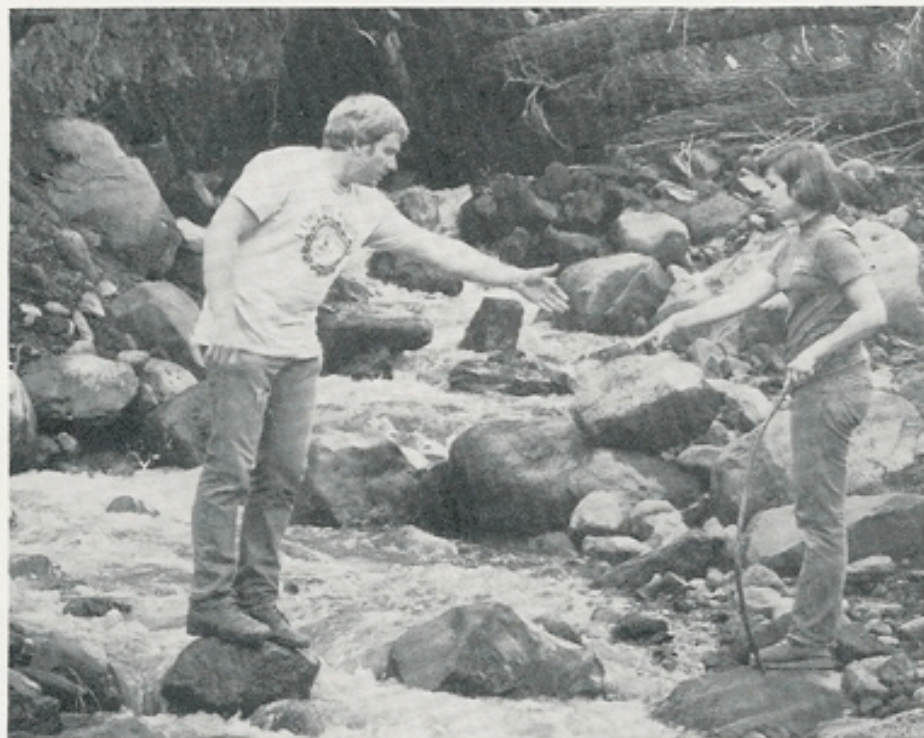
Text And Photos By Bob Jones

The trip to Camp Lake (one of the Chamber Lakes) should not be considered a beginner's hike. Nor should any backpacker ignore this beautiful setting.

Camp Lake is nestled just a linear mile from the eastern bases of North and Middle Sister. The trail to the lake travels through heavy forest as well as treeless, above-timberline slopes. All of eastern Oregon seems visible at various viewpoints along the trail.

Diane and Darrell and Anne and I wanted to go someplace new to us on a summer weekend. So the four of us visited this alpine lake in August — a beautiful time of year in the high Cascades. We chose Camp Lake by descriptions we'd heard and because





Darrell helps Diane across the North Fork of Squaw Creek.

we wanted to see the east side of The Sisters close up.

Trailhead to Oregon Trail No. 96D can be reached by driving nine miles east of McKenzie Pass on Oregon 242. Turn south at a sign reading "Trout Creek Butte Lookout." Proceed 8.3 miles to a stop and a sign pointing to the head of Pole Creek. From here follow Road 1536 four miles to a parking area across from a marker identifying the route to Chamber Lakes and Green Lakes.

It was about 9 a.m. when we arrived at the parking area. The day was one

of those fine summer days destined to attract the multitudes to Oregon — the sun kept playing peek-a-boo behind fluffy cumulous clouds.

We loaded a pack and strapped it to our eight year old Siberian Husky, Myko. Diane and Darrell had brought a husky also, but she didn't have a pack to carry. We hefted our packs, pulled the waist belts tight, and started down the trail.

Actually we started up the trail. From trailhead to Camp Lake is an 1800 foot climb with numerous downhill stretches that have to be

made up.

The path climbs at a gentle grade for the first mile and a half. Even at this 5300 foot elevation the dense forest provided relief from the sun as it slid from cloud to cloud. Very quickly short sleeves replaced long, and hiking shorts took the place of jeans.

A half mile after we passed the junction of Trail 96 (which connects with the Pacific Crest Trail) we rested at Soap Creek. A swift flowing, but broad stream, Soap Creek was a perfect place for a break. Myko and Buffy (the two huskies) enjoyed cooling their feet in the glacial silt laden water that gives Soap Creek its name. The dogs also made short work of whatever we pulled out of our packs for snacks.

After a short rest we shouldered our packs and resumed the hike. Immediately after crossing Soap Creek on a flat log the trail junctions. The left trail goes to Green Lakes, but we stayed right on 96B (the sign points to Chamber Lakes). From here the trail steepens with long switchbacks.

We stopped at a small side stream about three and a half miles from trailhead. Here two horsemen, intrigued by Myko's pack, stopped to chat with us. Although we'd seen evidence of horsepacking along the trail, it wasn't near the detriment to footpacking as it can be in the Wallowa's or even other Three Sister's Wilderness hikes. Later, at the lake, the same horsemen pointed out an excellent campsite. Regardless of your mode of travel the wilderness promotes comradery. Either that or it's typically friendly Oregonian's who enjoy the outdoors.

A mile further up the trail we encountered what would be a major obstacle to a late spring hike — the North Fork of Squaw Creek. There is no bridge crossing this boulder strewn stream. Even in the late summer the ford was a tricky rock-hopping exercise, especially with ungainly packs. Darrell and I ferried all five packs across the creek — I wasn't about to let Myko jump in with his pack on. Even though I try to make sure to water-proof everything I put in his pack, I really didn't want to test my handiwork.

Just past the Squaw Creek crossing a side trail heads to Demaris Lake, about a mile off trail 96B. Be sure to follow the signs directing the way to Chamber Lakes. There is a very steep section of trail not far from Squaw creek. And though it is very steep, it is also very short.

It's here that the trail breaks out of heavy forest and traverses the mountainsides with exciting vistas at every turn. Darrell and I burned up a

FACING PAGE TOP:  
Our tent site at Camp Lake.

FACING PAGE LOWER RIGHT:  
The Huskies were always on the lookout for  
a handout.



LEFT: Anne with Myko high on the trail.

BELOW: The North Sister with afternoon clouds  
boiling over the top.





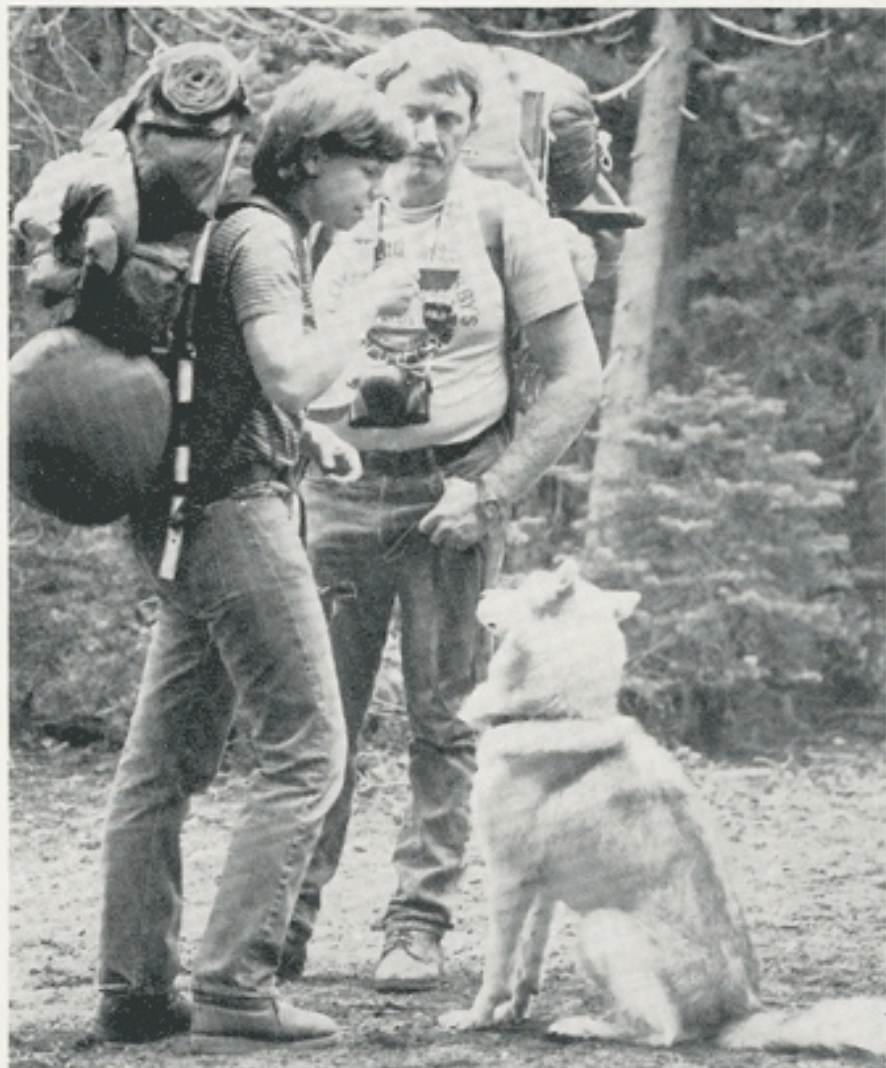
lot of film looking out into miles of eastern Oregon. We were all excited by near views of the eastern slopes of the Sisters — a sight we Valley people aren't accustomed to.

We reached the lake about 2 o'clock in the afternoon. We set camp in a well worn site about half way around the lake. Although I usually prefer more pristine camping, I also knew the four of us would want a campfire that night (a luxury Anne and I usually don't indulge). The scars from a campfire can leave a mark on fragile alpine environs; a blight that can last for decades. By using the semi-improved site recommended by the horsemen we'd met earlier, we evaded the wrecking of any more havoc on this beautiful setting.

Establishing camp is always an enjoyable time of the trip. Besides the creation of a home away from home (albeit just tarp and sleeping bag), there's an intimate discovery of a new place. This is also a good time to get pictures of people in some interesting photogenic actions.

We spent the last couple of hours of the afternoon gathering firewood and hiking around the lake. A trail circles the lake except for a broad moraine spilling off the mountain. A hiker needs to be careful when crossing some of the permanent snow fields adjacent to the lake. In several spots the lake undercuts the snow, and although a fall through one of these thin spots might not be particularly dangerous, it could be heartily

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uncomfortable.

The afternoon storm, typical for August in the Cascades, swept in about 4 o'clock. Enough rain fell to dampen the dust and force us to start a pinochle game in our tent. For the most part the storm centered on clouds whipping over the pass between the Sisters in magnificent, sweeping series. So swiftly were the clouds moving that the sun seemed to flicker on and off.

By dusk the wind had abated and the clouds dissipated. Darrell's gas stove and my butane stove roared in syncopation as we began dinner. We had brought a traditional backpacker's stew — rice, cup of soup, meat bar, freeze-dried vegetables, and anything else that might fit. Diane and Darrell contributed sour-dough rolls, the kind you buy in packages of a dozen in any grocery store. They work out great for packing — it doesn't hurt them to get pinched, squashed, or squeezed. You can eat them as a snack, with dinner, or slice them for mini-sandwiches.

After a quiet night, the morning greeted us with a stillness which was astounding. Nothing disturbed the glass-smoothness of the lake except imposing reflections.

During the morning we hiked some of the ridges surrounding Camp Lake. The Chamber Lakes contain many small lakes with tremendous potential for very private camping. It was now we discovered our main regret of the trip — we didn't have enough time. The long seven mile hike to Camp Lake would have been much more enjoyable with more time to spend exploring.

The little scrambling we did get to do helped make how we would do the trip over again the major topic on the hike out. We thought about hiking in part way on a Friday, or about making the trip three days or more. But we always came back to the basic premise that any way we could, we'd do it again.

The varied terrain, the mountain splendor, even the trail difficulties had worked together to form memories now always cherished.

### **Camp Lake Trail Information**

#### **Distance:**

7 miles one way, 14 miles round trip.

#### **Topographical Maps:**

U.S.G.S. Broken Top, Oregon  
U.S.G.S. Three Sisters, Oregon

#### **Other Maps:**

Deschutes National Forest (West Half)  
U.S. Dept. of Agriculture  
Forest Service

#### **Trail Guides:**

"60 Hiking Trails of Central Oregon Cascades", by Don and Roberta Lowe,  
The Touchstone Press, 1978.