

# Trail Advocates

of the Clackamas River Ranger District of the Mount Hood National Forest

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## Bull of the Woods Trails Report

**Topic:** Bull of the Woods Trails Report

**Author:** Rob Williams

**Topic Started:** 7/9/2006; 4:45:49 PM

**Last Posted:** 8/28/2006; 9:50:08 AM

### Bull of the Woods Trails Report

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**Rob Williams** : 7/9/2006; 3:45:49 PM

Reads: 143, Responses: 15 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

My daughter and I took a weekend backpacking trip to the Bull of the Woods Wilderness (Big Slide Lake) and hiked a few of the trails and had a great weekend:

- 553 - Dickey Creek Trail - The beginning portion of this trail continues to deteriorate, and is pretty difficult to navigate with a full pack due to its steepness and looseness of the tread. It is difficult, but not impossible. The rest of the trail, for the most part is in relatively good shape, but we counted approximately 30 trees accross the trail, most of them after the creek crossing about halfway to Big Slide Lake. Some (one in particular, which blocks the trail in two places on a switchback) make going around them very difficult. The rock slide areas are challenging as well, especially with the weight of a full pack. We did our best to remove some of the loose branches and rocks from the trail, but since we didn't have a saw, we couldn't do a whole lot more than that.
- 555 - Schreiner Peak Trail - A good portion of this trail is in very poor shape. There are a lot of areas where vegetation has almost hidden the trail tread, and other areas where the trail has washed out. Worst of all is where both things happen at the same place, which makes for interesting foot placement! A very pretty trail, with some spectacular viewpoints with several meadows of flowers on the trip. Also during part of the trail it almost looks more like Central Oregon, with lots of rocks and scrub plants (juniper, scrub pine, etc). The trail down to Lake Lenore is one of the steepest I've seen, and also has lots of blowdown accross the trail. It looks like that side of the hill gets hit pretty hard in the winter. The lake is very pretty, with some small fish in it. The

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water level looked pretty low, but I'm not sure what a "normal" level is supposed to be. **One interesting item we found:** What appears to be an old helicopter landing site at the top of the hill above Lake Lenore. It is a big yellow triangle (which has seen better days) in a clearing above the lake.

- 554 - Welcome Lakes Trail - We did a small portion of this trail, from where 553/555 meets it, up to the lookout. Most of this trail is in pretty good shape, but there were a couple of spots in the sun where vegetation is encroaching on the trail pretty severely. We did not have enough time to make the trip to Welcome Lakes, but based on the map, it looks like that would have been an easier trip than the one to Lake Lenore.

A question: Does anyone know what is going on at the lookout? It looks pretty much the same as it did last year when I hiked the 550 trail with my son, but it has a bunch of tools, etc in it that make it look like it is undergoing some sort of renovation/restoration. There were also some signs on the walls (visible through the windows) talking of restoration work occurring there. Anyone know details? That would be a cool lookout to be able to rent.....

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#### **Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**

**Robert Kosciak** : 7/10/2006; 6:38:32 AM

Reads: 120, Responses: 6 ( [view responses to this item](#))

Thanks! Hopefully the FS can get some volunteers with crosscut saw experience out there to clear some of those trees. That's a lot of down wood for such a popular area. When I was down in the Middle Santiam last summer, it was the same situation. At least the tread is in good shape and the trails are easy to follow.

Did you make it all the way to Schriener Peak? I'd like to hear more about that trail, it's been somewhat of a mystery.

Sounds like you had a lot of fun. That's a lot of ground you covered.

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**[Edit this Page](#)**Rob Williams** : 7/10/2006; 8:53:05 PMReads: 119, Responses: 5 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

We had a blast, saw a lot of very beautiful scenery and figured we covered about 18 miles over the weekend (3 days). But there was a LOT of up and down in those 18 miles! 2300' to Big Slide Lake, 1200'+ from the lake to the lookout, and then back down about 1000', then back up about 1200' to Lake Lenore (and then down and back up). Up and down, up and down, all weekend. My legs and feet are feeling it today!

I'd love to help with trail maintenance, but I don't have enough spare time to enjoy the trails, let alone help with maintenance (other than kicking branches/rocks, etc off the trail tread when I'm hiking). I buy the forest permit every year, even though I usually don't visit places that require it. I hope that small contribution helps a little bit toward the maintenance. I'd like to know how the rules can be changed to use chainsaws for wilderness trail maintenance.....

As far as Schreiner Peak, according to the info sheet, it isn't maintained to Schreiner peak anymore, and I didn't see any indication of it continuing much beyond the trail down to Lake Lenore. I hiked up the trail a bit, found what looked like the helicopter landing pad, but it seemed to stop there. If there is a trail, it is VERY rough. The trail to the lake was rough enough.....

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report****Robert Koscik** : 7/11/2006; 8:40:08 AMReads: 115, Responses: 4 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

From what Mr. D told me, the Schreiner Peak Trail was primarily used by a scientist (Dr. Schriener) who spent the summers doing studies up there many years back, so I'm sure the route wasn't up to Forest Service standards. So many ghosts hiding out there!

As far a trail maintenance, every little bit helps. You'd be surprised the number of people I run across that don't even bother to kick branches off the tread! It is much appreciated, and it also helps keep these trails alive. Every winter, so much blowdown occurs, and it really stacks up over the years if not dealt with. If you feel ambitious, bring a pair of shears or loppers on your hike to deal with encroaching brush. It will help keep it at bay for a year or 2 at least, and it gives your upper body a bit of a workout too, for that Whole Body Experience!

Thanks for your comments, it's very interesting to see what folks are up to out there...

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**

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**Rob Williams** : 7/11/2006; 10:18:00 AM

Reads: 117, Responses: 2 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

Funny about the trail maintenance.....Until I read it here, it didn't really cross my mind to even kick branches off the trail. I don't know why, but it didn't. If everyone did that, it would help a lot. It doesn't address blow down, or places where the tread has given way, but it would help a lot.

I think I'll try and get a smaller set of loppers (do I can throw them in my day pack) to deal with vegetation overgrowing the trails, especially since I tend to like the "lesser travelled" trails.....

I'd love to hear more about the history of this area, and also what other people have been up to!

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report****Milan Homola** : 7/12/2006; 10:29:52 AMReads: 117, Responses: 2 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

I've been reading both of your reports Mr. Koscik and Mr. Williams. Thank you so much for the information. I've been really interested in getting down to the Bull of the Woods since last november. Now I'm trying to put together a trip with some friends. I would love to ask some first hand experts if this is a good idea considering the trail conditions. I'm planning on going early in August, probably the first week. FS website says work is planned for mid-August. I'm an experienced backpacker but I will be with unexperienced trekkers, and I'm responsible for them. If I'm looking for a nice three day loop is this the right place for us. Are the trails marked clearly enough to get around? What do you think? Any suggestions. my email is [live4camping@hotmail.com](mailto:live4camping@hotmail.com) if you have time to shoot me an email. Thanks a bunch.- Milan

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**[Edit this Page](#)**Rob Williams** : 7/13/2006; 7:54:36 AMReads: 109, Responses: 0 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

I'm no "expert" at backpacking, but I've done enough to know that this might not be the best trail for beginners. It is (according to Sullivan) 2300' vertical elevation gain, and some of that is pretty tough (steep) trail. I think there are other, better trails in the area for beginners. I know the Serene Lake/Rock Lakes trail (#512) is relatively easy and much shorter with less elevation gain. Last time I travelled the trail, it was in better shape as well. The only bad point is the road to the trailhead, which is pretty rough. The trail to middle rock lake is even shorter, with less elevation gain, so that might be easier.....The only bad thing with this place is that the mosquitoes might be pretty thick, but by mid August, hopefully they will have died down a bit.

As far as trails being well marked, I've never had trouble finding/keeping on the trail as long as you keep your eyes open.

Good luck!

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report****Robert Kosciak** : 7/13/2006; 8:58:45 AMReads: 114, Responses: 1 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

I spend a lot of time down there during the year. It's really enjoyable working on the trails, as well as exploring. There's always somewhere new, year round. We're very lucky to have such an incredible place on our doorsteps...

History of the area is hard to come by. It's typical of many National Forests - first it was all wilderness, then in the early 1900s after the FS was created, trails and lookouts and guard stations were constructed. Then came more intense logging and road building, starting in the 40s and really picking up steam. The logging/road building/destruction seemed to peak in the 80s, until the wilderness and endangered species controversies put a quick halt to "rip and run". Things are sort of in limbo right now, lots of thinning projects, but no huge clearcuts or road building occurring at present. A lot of the abandoned trails out there were built 80 years ago for purely administrative purposes. Most of em' are still out there, hiding in the brush, ducking in and out of a zillion clearcuts...and in spite of it all, it's still a miraculous place.

I've been working recently on the Rho Creek trail. It's still quite rough, but is now followable for the first mile or so. Check it out, I hope to clear the whole route eventually. Wild country...

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report****Robert Koscik** : 7/13/2006; 9:03:06 AMReads: 109, Responses: 0 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

Bull of the Woods is a popular place, with easy to follow trails more or less...you may have to climb over a few down trees, but you won't get lost.

Get yourself a good Bull wilderness map. There are many options. Welcome Lakes are a nice destination for example.

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report****Milan Homola** : 7/13/2006; 9:34:11 AMReads: 111, Responses: 1 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

I've been looking at some topo maps and they don't show much by way of campsites at all. Does this mean that you can camp wherever within the wilderness area? Also, if I were to do a loop turning south from welcome lakes trail are there any major issues with water, long stretches without some kind of water? Thanks guys for all the help, I'm really getting excited to finally get down to Bull of the Woods.

[Discuss this message.](#)**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report****Rob Williams** : 7/13/2006; 11:45:00 AMReads: 116, Responses: 0 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)[Edit this Page](#)

Where is the Rho Creek trail? I've done the Rho Ridge trail (part of it, up to Hawk Mtn), but not heard of the Rho Creek trail....I'm always interested in a new place, or a new challenge!

Wild country....The reason I like it! That, and you won't run into 100 people on a day hike, like you can on many of the Mt Hood trails....

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**

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**Rob Williams** : 7/13/2006; 11:50:16 AM

Reads: 109, Responses: 0 ( [view responses to this item](#))

Most any lake will have some sort of campsites near it. If you want some good info on trails in Oregon, I'd look into the William L Sullivan books ([www.oregonhiking.com](http://www.oregonhiking.com)). The best way that I've found, though, is to take a day hike to the area you are thinking about, and scout it out. That works as long as it isn't too far from a trailhead.

In the summer (especially in August), I wouldn't count on any source of water other than a good, established creek or a lake. I haven't explored welcome lakes too much yet, so I can't answer the question in detail.

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Ghosts**

**Tom Kloster** : 7/16/2006; 4:42:55 PM

Reads: 116, Responses: 0 ( [view responses to this item](#))



I'm catching up on recent posts here, and couldn't resist responding to this comment:

"I'm sure the route wasn't up to Forest Service standards. So many ghosts hiding out there!"

An old friend and I had a unique experience many years ago while backpacking in Bull of the Woods. We were hiking from Big Slide Lake to Upper Twin Lake (via the dreaded Geronimo Trail) and set up camp next to the inlet creek on Upper Twin. At about 3:00 AM, we were BOTH awakened abruptly by wild crashing, thumping and snarling right behind our tent, followed by splashing in the lake or creek - not sure at that point. To make matters worse, once the ruckus died down, we heard heavy, deep breathing near the front of the tent that continued for about five minutes. I think you could accurately describe us as "paralyzed with fear". Our best guess was that we had just heard a cougar taking out a deer or...?

Anyway, after a few hours of sleeplessness, it was light enough to go out and investigate. There wasn't much in the way of physical sign - some torn up brush near the creek, but no carcass or other signs of a kill. It was September and dry as a bone, so no tracks to be found. But we were lucky to have each other as "earwitness" to the event, and didn't have to chalk it up as hallucinations brought on by the rigors of the Geronimo Trail..!

Tom Kloster

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**

**Milan Homola** : 7/18/2006; 2:29:24 PM

Reads: 118, Responses: 1 ( [↩](#) view responses to this item)

I'm in need of some honest advice. I've looked at the map and read some of the reports. Please let me know what you think of this itinerary: trail550 then over to welcome lakes to camp first night, Then south either on Geronimo or Elk Lake 559 for second night (is there a decent camp spot down by where 559 meets 558?) Then we would hike 558 out back to 550 to finish the loop. I'm looking at a group of 5 or 6 and in OK shape. Please tell me if this is a good idea or what you think in general. I'm responsible for the friends I'm taking out and I don't want to have the most amount of information possible going into this. Thank you

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**

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**Rob Williams** : 7/18/2006; 7:45:06 PM

Reads: 130, Responses: 0 ( [view responses to this item](#))

I'm not familiar with the Elk Lakes area (still need to explore that way a bit), but it sounds a little too aggressive for a group in "OK" shape. I guess it depends on how much of a challenge you are up to. It does sound like an interesting trip, though! Let us know how it works out.....And if you see any cougars....

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**Re: Bull of the Woods Trails Report**

**Richard L'Esperance** : 8/28/2006; 8:50:08 AM

Reads: 106, Responses: 0 ( [view responses to this item](#))

This last weekend we did a loop starting from Elk Lake, following the creek down to the Welcome lakes trail, then up to the Bull of the Woods peak, down to the Mother Load, over to the Twin Lakes and then out to Elk Lake via the Bagby trail. My wife and I are die hard hikers. The walk is what we love, and I wouldn't necessarily recommend the two day trip we did this loop in. Take 3. Spend some time at the Twin lakes swimming and enjoying the air. We did. Spend some time on the Bull. I'm sure the views will be better when the fires are all put out.

All the trails are pretty clear. There wasn't anywhere I had to step back and wonder where I was supposed to go next. However, there are many places that could use some work clearing away brush and sawing through fallen logs. The worst of this was on the 544 from the 573 junction to Elk Lake. There were several logs, one that was so large and long that navigating around it would have been really difficult and so wide that going over it wasn't an option. There was just enough room under it that we could crawl through only after taking our packs off. Also on that trail there's a section in a clearing with the Salmon berry so thick that we couldn't see the trail under our feet for a few hundred meters. There's rocks under foot, so ankle twisting is a danger there.

From Elk Lake: Trail 559.

Possibly the most beautiful of walks, the first mile from Elk Lake is level, soft tread and lined with mountain blueberry and giant conifers. Opal Creek got a lot of fuss a few years ago as some "last bastion of old growth", butt there's tons of old growth in this wilderness.

After you get to where Battle Creek joins Elk Lake Creek, the trail gets kind of choppy and over-grown. It's obvious that there have been slides and other trail disturbances, and the trail goes up and down unpredictably. Never lost the trail, but it could use some work here.

Further on there's a really cool looking campsite across the river with a deep swimming hole. No obvious crossing or trail to get there, must be a local's thing.

Trail 554, Welcome Lakes.

Good trail. Not incredibly steep, but constant uphill for 3 miles. Trail was well cleared and visible. The side trail down to the lower Welcome Lake is not well marked and before we knew it we were at the campsite at the junction with 556. Upper Welcome Lake is surrounded by vegetation and not very welcome.

Trail 554, On the ridge.

Another good trail. Occasional tree to cross. Great views. There is a spot just beyond the junction with the slide mountain trail where it is flat enough to put up a tent, and you have a view of the Bull, and the sunrise and sunset are visible through the trees.

The trail to the Bull of the Woods peak and fire lookout was mostly clear, couple of logs down. Not as steep as I thought it would be. The fire lookout seems pretty beat up, no one has used it in a while it seems.

#### Trail 558, the Mother Load

Another good trail. Very clear. Lots of Rhodadendron, which the spiders love, so you'll be eating cross webbing. Mother Load creek is dry now, so don't count on it for water.

#### Trail 573, Twin Lakes.

Easily my favorite trail overall. Easy climbs and descents. Big trees and easy tread. Elk lake was beautiful and definitely swimmable from a couple of small beaches on the west side.

#### Trail 544, Bagby trail

Took this trail back to Elk Lake. See my notes above. Goes back and forth between nice forest and tread to overgrown. Lots of trail across talus slopes too (rock slopes) which was hard on the feet. Except for some nice views of Jefferson, probably my least favorite trail of the trip.





























Also, the mountain Blueberry (or blue huckleberry) was almost ubiquitous on the 25 mile loop we were on. Every 15 or 20 minutes was a blueberry break! Yum.

The road into Elk Lake is still pretty rough, although I got a Nissan Altima in there without bottoming out, so not too bad. I'll definitely either bring a 4x4 or try another route next time.

Overall we loved the wilderness. We'll probably be back to do the Elk Lake Creek trail again, or possibly spend a quick night at the Twin Lakes sometime soon.

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