



## **Cat Creek Way Trail, Loop, September, 2008**

### **Olympic National Park, Washington**

To get to Ron's pictures of this trip, click here on [www.ronhayward.net](http://www.ronhayward.net) and then navigate to his hiking treks and the trip description.

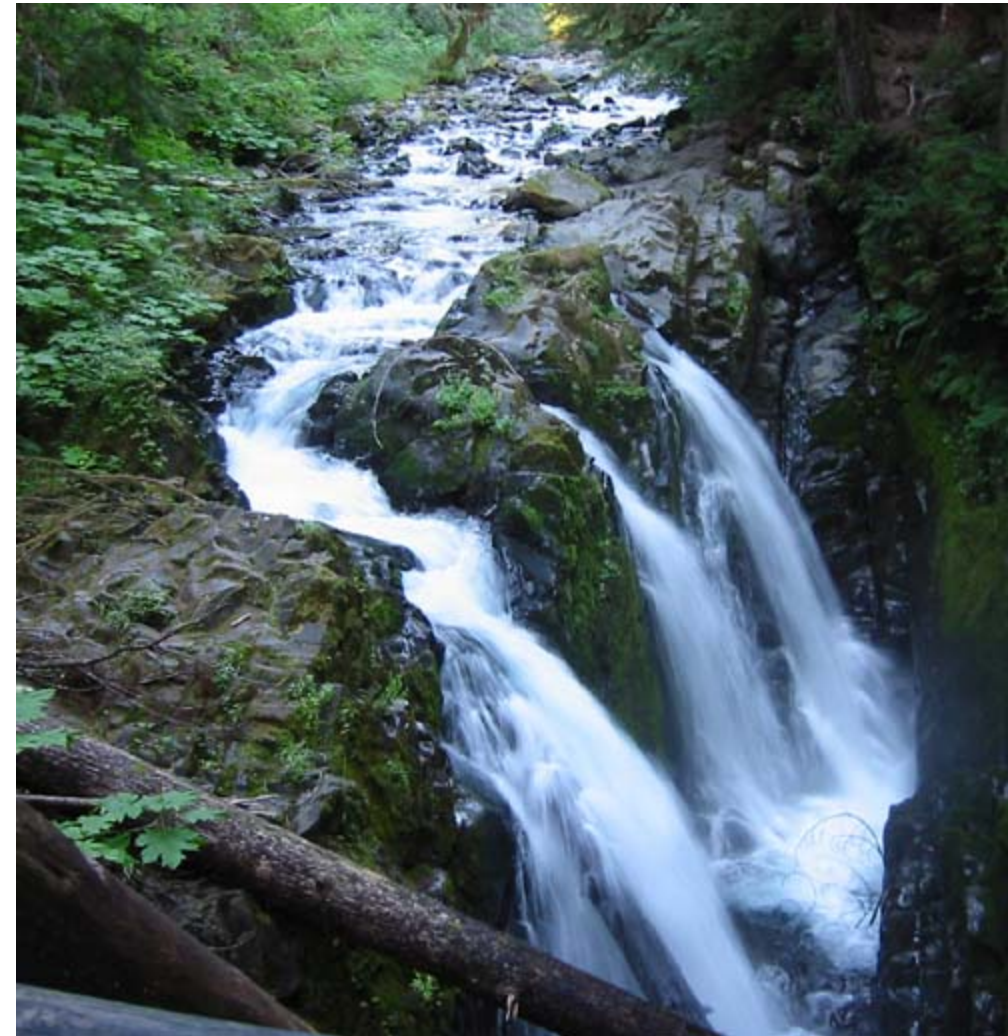
#### **Introduction**

2007 was a big hiking year for Ron, for he (and Tom) did the famous Bailey Range. But there was a piece that they missed. This is the northern most segment that extends from Appleton Pass to that part of High Divide close to Cat Peak. Some folks will include this segment with the Bailey while others won't. It is a section covered by no established trails. Nothing was ever put in by the Park Service or the CCC folks. A way trail, which is a route established only by use, exists in the area. It is not maintained and we hope that this will remain so. In the formal sense, it is an off trail route. On the other hand, it lacks the intensity and remoteness of the Bailey proper. Putting all of these minor details aside, it seemed like this would be a great hike for Ron and I to do. We both studied the route and concluded that it was probably something that I could still handle, even as a certified geezer. The variation planned would be a loop trip starting at the Soleduck trailhead. We would hike to Appleton Pass, which is the north end of Cat Creek Ridge. We would do the traverse, only about 5 miles, and then pick up the High Divide Trail. In a final long day we would hike most of the High Divide Trail, with a return to the car by way of Deer Lake.

This was not new country to me. Ron, Roger, and I had done the classic Loop in 1988. It had been a wonderful trip, although it was compromised by a fire in Deer Park, about 20 miles to the east, which made it difficult to see Mt. Olympus from High Divide in spite of otherwise cloudless skies. Then I returned to the area last year. In that trip, I merely hiked the trails with Ron and Tom, until they left the trails to the adventure of the Bailey Range. I was joined on that trail hike by Libby and Kevin, Ron's better half and his youngest son. That was a great hike, but it was just a trail walk and lacked the adventure I sought.

## Day 1

We started the trip on Monday, September 8th. After checking in with the Park Service in Port Angeles to pick up the back-country permit (or whatever they call it these days), and getting set up for most of the camp places we wanted, we drove to the Soleduck trailhead and started the hike. After about a mile, we came to Soleduck Falls, shown below.



Soleduck Falls

It was a short day with only a few miles and about 700 feet (elevation change) covered up to a camp place along the Soleduck Park Trail. We spent a rather warm night camped in the trees.

## Day 2.

The next day took us up the Soleduck trail for a short way until we encountered the fork heading for Appleton Pass and our destination. Although we had over 2000 feet of elevation to knock off, it was surprisingly easy. The Appleton Pass trail is well graded and lacks rocks, so made for smooth going. We reached the pass in time for lunch.



Mt. Appleton as seen from Appleton Pass near Oyster Lake.



Oyster Lake is very small, but seemed to have potable water. (We are still kicking at this writing.) The only life noticed were some frogs.

Close to Oyster Lake (ca 5000 ft) is a peak at about 5400. It's an easy meadow walk and was impossible to ignore that afternoon. The view from the top included the next photo.



Oyster Lake is seen in the meadow as well as the trail coming up from Boulder Creek, north and east of the pass.



Oyster Lake and Appleton Pass as seen from high meadows east of the pass.

After climbing the little ridge point at 5400 ft, we headed for the meadows. Although we had planned to camp at Oyster Lake that evening, we wanted to see our route for the next day.



We caught our first glimpse of Mt. Olympus near the top of the Appleton Pass trail. It would be "in our face" for most of the rest of the trip as it was here from some of the meadows above Appleton Pass.

### **Day 3.**

The next morning we arose with excitement, for this was to be the day for our trek along the way trail system. The next view shows the snow wings of the Spread Eagle Pass, the crux of this route. The name is evidently derived from the snow fields that we see below the pass.



A careful examination will show the trail angling up through the meadow on the left side of the pass. The trail hits the ridge above the lowest part of the ridge, avoiding steeper rock.



The trail can be seen angling down through the berry bushes. We nibbled our way through this slope. The meadows in the background were visited in the previous afternoon.

Once we got into the pass, we were presented with a completely new and ever more exciting set of

views.



Ron and I sat around for a while on the pass. There was a lot to see and lots of time.



The summit on the left, about 3 miles away, is Cat Peak, which Ron would go climb on Day 4. The views of Mt. Olympus keep on getting better, hard as that may be to comprehend.



After a while, our eyes ventured downward. The tarn show in this view is about 500 feet below the pass. Ron and I would split for a while at this time. I waited and enjoyed the views around the pass while he dropped into the valley to look for the Flapjack Shelter and Cabin built in the 1940s by Herb Crisler while filming the Disney Wildlife Adventure film, "Olympic Elk." Incidentally, that film is now available as a DVD after being hidden in vaults for decades. Ron gave me a copy when it became available! (We both watched it prior to this trip!) Many thanks, Ron.

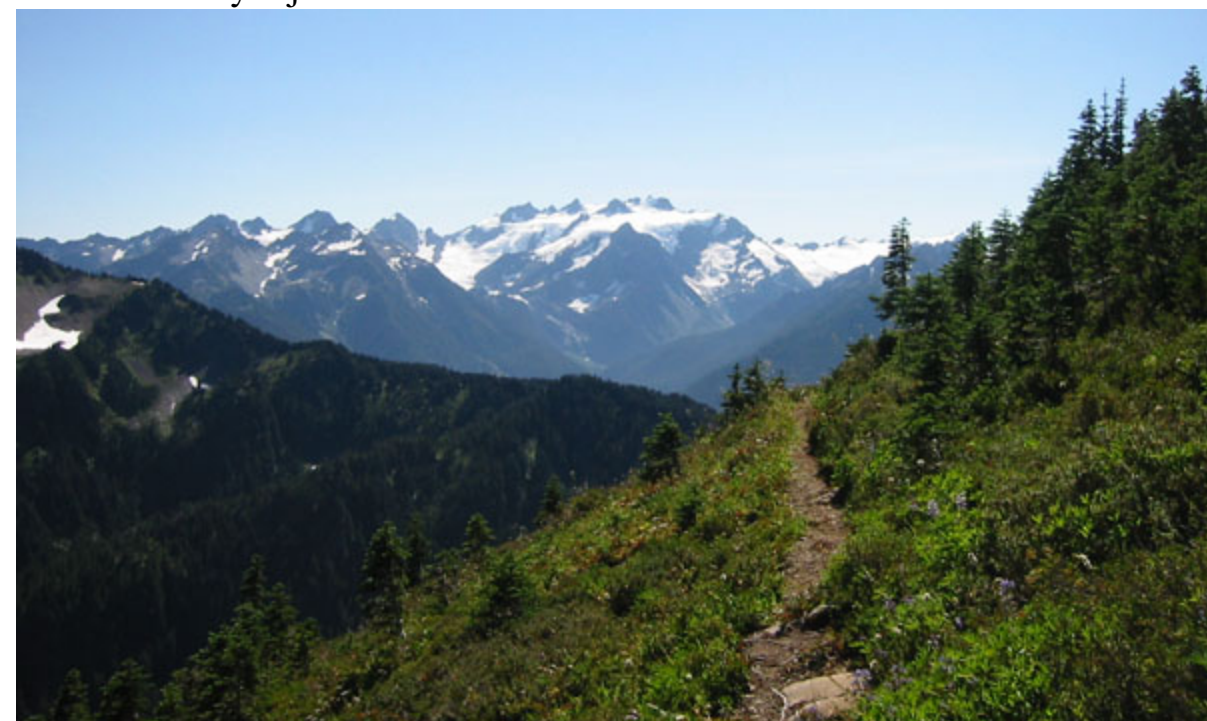
I found a lot to keep me going while Ron looked for the cabin, which he never did find.





The high way trail offered an endless variety of color.

Ron eventually rejoined me and we continued the traverse.



This is the view that greeted us shortly after leaving Spread Eagle Pass. The ridge in the near left leads toward the summit of Cat Peak. The High Divide trail is on the other side of the ridge.

The next hour or two required the expenditure of quite a bit of effort. At times we were on near perfect trails like that above, but at other times we crossed steep scree slopes where the trail was easily lost, only to be rediscovered. We then found ourselves in the trees where the trail sometime became very steep and occasionally exposed. This is not a place for the faint hearted flatlander. But we were amply rewarded. We eventually broke out of the trees onto a slope with a view to our camp place for

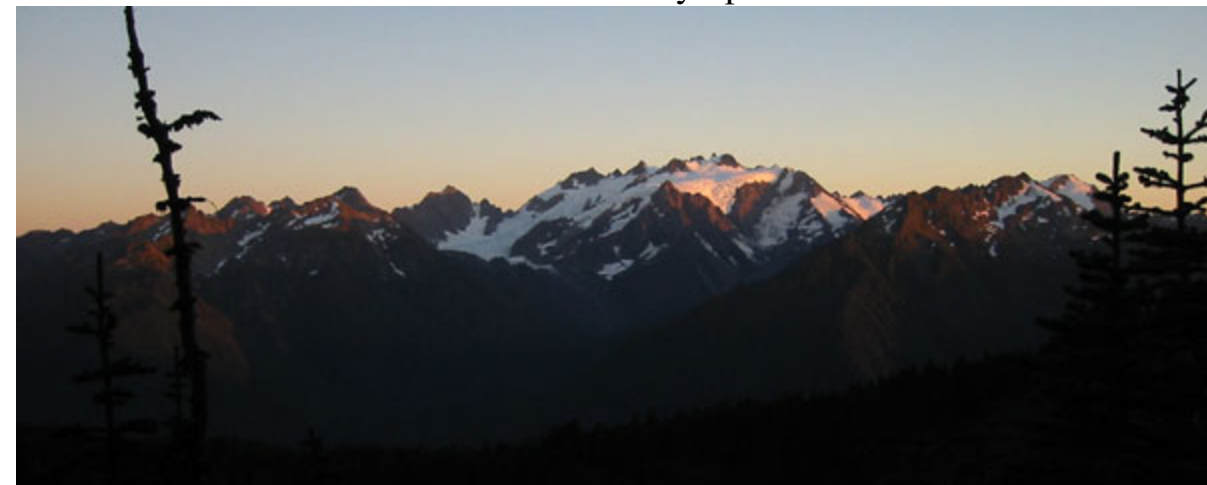
that evening, shown below.



This small tarn is named Cat Lake, or more popularly, "Swimming Bear Lake," and sits at about 5000 ft in the meadows above Cat Basin. Mt. Olympus and Mt. Tom (at the right of the massif) are now really "in your face." It's hard to take one's eye away from the peaks, but it is necessary to watch the way trail, for it continues through messy rock and less than ideal brush.

The lake derives its popular name from the Disney movie made by Herb Crisler where he filmed a bear swimming in these waters. The area of the pond is probably 0.2 acre, definitely larger and deeper than Oyster Lake. By all accounts it should be well documented, but it is not. It is not on the maps, which are all derived from the 1956 Mt. Olympus 15 minute quadrangle. It is also missing from the 1964 book "Lakes of Washington." That two volume set was published by the State and includes data on 7000 bodies of water. We met one incredulous hiker who thought this pond was Haigs Lake (a picture of that peak follows later) and he was less than pleased when we pulled out the maps and GPS to discuss the matter. He was ready to take on the USGS, on the spot.

We set up camp on a rise above the south end of the lake. It was only a few steps to an opening in the trees that let us check conditions on Mt. Olympus.



Here the sun is setting on Mt. Olympus at the end of our third day.

**Day 4.**



The sun is poking over the ridge to provide morning light on Mt. Olympus with the edge of Cat Basin below.

Ron and I would split up on this, our fourth day. He was going to continue on the way trail to its end at the main High Divide Trail. He would then head east until that trail abruptly ends, and then climb Cat Peak. I was going to stick around camp for awhile, and then head up the closer ridges. My goal would be to reach the ridge top and get a glimpse and a photograph of Haigs Lake.

As I moved upward and back to the north I went through some tree groves. One below provided a colorful view.

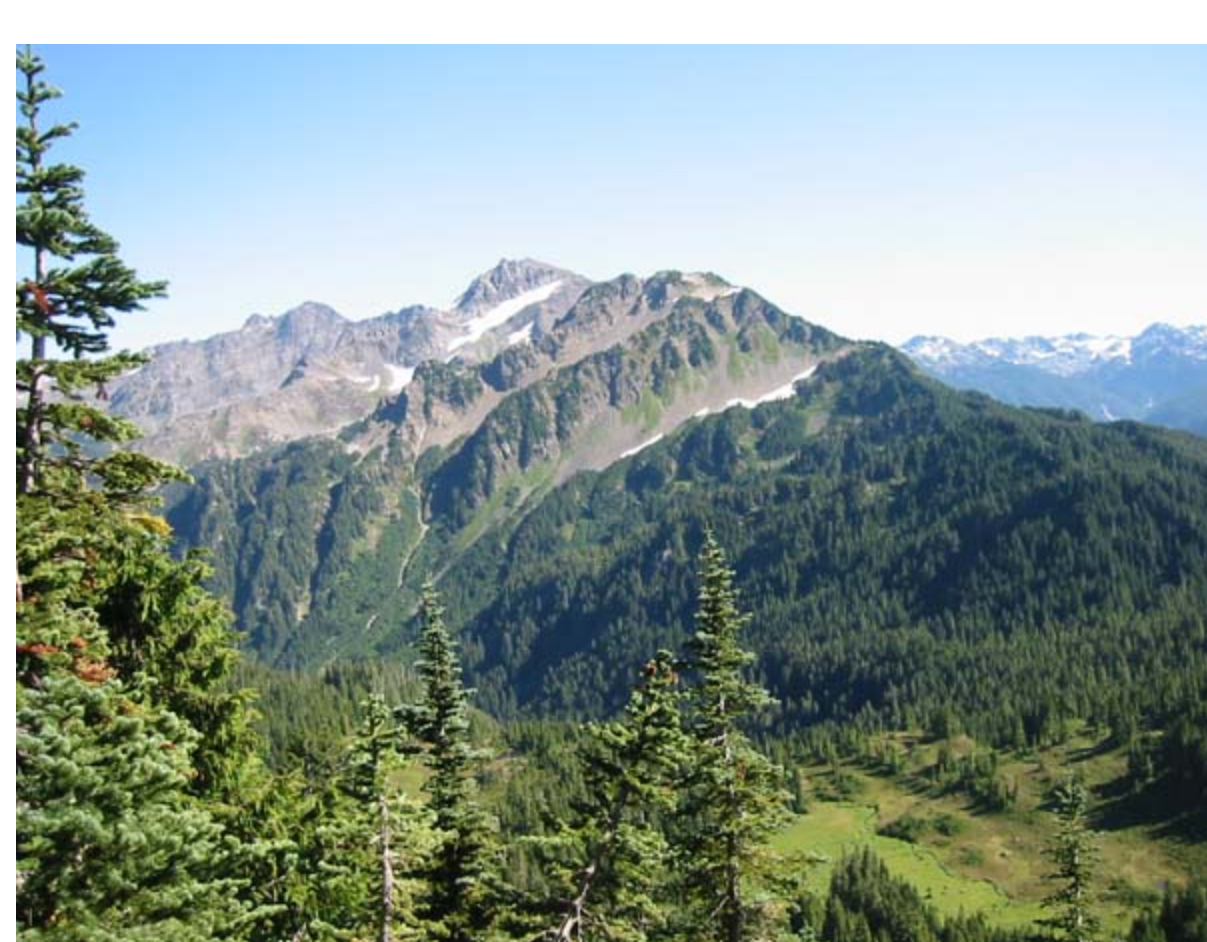


Mt. Olympus is enhanced in this view by huckleberry bushes turning color as autumn approaches.

Eventually I reached a pass, but could not see around the corner into Haigs Lake, as I had hoped. There were trees in the way. Moreover, the slope down the other side was steep gravel and silt in an area that is snow covered for most of the year. Only some lower snow fields remained on this September morning. Not seeing much in the basin, I decided to go up the small peak northeast of the pass. It was less than 100 feet above me. The slopes were a mixture of heather, huckleberry, and rock. A short, final scramble up a few feet of rock put me on top and viewing Haigs Lake.



Note that another smaller lake positioned in the trees north of the main lake. This one is also missing from the maps; imagine that. I pulled my GPS receiver from my pack and marked a waypoint with an elevation of 5556 ft. This is consistent with the map.



Cat Peak rises above Cat Basin with Mt. Carrie in back of that by a couple of miles. Mt. Fairchild is on the left while the Bailey Range extends to the right. Unknown to me at this time, Ron was on the summit of Cat Peak at this instant and was able with binoculars to see me in the pass. I looked for him, but saw nothing.

After some lunch on the summit, I headed down. The trip was delightful, meandering through the high meadows. When I got down to our camp I found a bear in the berry bushes immediately above Swimming Bear Lake.



Bear were all over the place in the meadows above the lake. We probably saw a couple of dozen bear on this trip. They presented no problems for us, but we were careful to hang the part of our food that was not in our bear proof container.



The lighting was interesting that evening at our camp, producing interesting colors reflected in the lake.

## Day 5

The last day of our trip would be a long, but scenic one. We got up to another morning of clear skies with the plan to hike out on the way trail to the High Divide Trail. We would then "run the ridge" to the west, eventually diverting on a trail to Deer Lake and then out to the trailhead.



We continued to see bear on the walk out. This one had tags on both ears. One was yellow while the other was orange. We had no idea what this means. We saw another near camp with similar tags. Perhaps they were one and the same. We saw a lot of wild life on this trip, including deer and a couple of elk high on a ridge above us. Ron saw goat on Cat Peak. The bear, most without tags, were the most common. Although we heard marmot, we never saw them.



Here we stopped for a short rest in the flowers while overlooking Heart Lake in the upper reaches of Soleduck Park.



One of the other hikers on the trail was kind enough to snap a photo of the two of us. This shot was taken above Seven Lakes Basin.



Part of Seven Lakes Basin, which contains 8 lakes of moderate size, but a lot more smaller tarns.

We ate lunch on the top of Bogachiel Peak. This point is just off the trail, up a mild way. While we did not expect to find the summit deserted, we did not expect to find the crowd that we encountered. Ron counted 10 other folks on the summit. They offered a sampling of the people we find in the hills these days. Many were there as well equipped young couples who probably did intense hikes on most weekends. Some others were middle aged. A few folks only had day packs, perhaps doing the loop



from the trailhead in one day. After a quick bite of lunch, Ron and I quickly dropped down the way trail to leave the masses behind. One overheard comment from one of the ladies on the peak would stick with us. She said, "Is this Wilderness?" Ron suspected that she was being facetious and I could only hope that he was right.



Shortly after our sojourn to the lunch room high atop Bogachiel Peak, we reached the trail junction that would take us north, away from Mt. Olympus. The view above shows the junction with Olympus in the background. We would catch glimpses of the mountain for a couple of more miles of delightful hiking, but would finally see our last as we dropped down to Deer Lake. The trail down from Deer Lake to Soleduck Falls was 3 miles of rocky, fatiguing trail and we were really pleased when the end arrived.

Considering the time, the miles covered were few. I did about 28 miles with about 7400 feet of elevation gain. Ron did more with his climb of Cat Peak, about 35 miles and 11,200 feet gain. But, as Ron commented, "What the trip lacked in quantity was made up by quality." This is certainly one of the more scenic areas to be found in the Olympics. There is good reason that the standard loop hike is considered a classic. Adding it with the Cat Creek Way Trail turns a wonderful but ordinary loop hike into a truly spectacular one. But alas, it was not a "Wilderness Experience." There were a lot of people there, even in the interesting traverse, much as popular climbs are heavily populated these days.

Ron and Tom had something of a wilderness experience last year in the Bailey Range, seeing nobody for 5 days. I've managed to experience that with early season treks into the Olympic high country.

For me, the best part of the trip was to be able to do a long hike with Ron. We used to do it often, but that era is coming to a conclusion. So this scenic trip, often away from the masses, was a real joy.

