

# High Divide, Olympic National Park, July 2007

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The Bailey Range viewed from High Divide

This was a trip that differed from most I have ever done, loaded with both scenery and emotion. Ron and Tom (my son and oldest grandson) were about to embark on a long planned trip across the Bailey Range. This is a string of mountains in the center of the Olympic National Park, pictured above, that connect the northwest section of the park with the east end of the Mt. Olympus massif. Robert L. Wood describes the Bailey Range as "...the backbone of the wilderness Olympics, where from high vantage points the mountains appear to circle upon themselves in a confusion of peaks and ridges that extends for miles in every direction."\* Starting with my first trips into the Olympics in 1966 and 1970, it has been my dream to traverse the Bailey Range. But alas, my age caught up with me. It is an intense, physically demanding walk taking up to a week with several days of cross country travel, too much for this old mountain dreamer.

Ron inherited my dream of the Bailey and wisely concluded that he needed to do it while he was still young enough to pull it off. Tom is now a university sophomore, is very experienced with both mountain travel and search and rescue procedures, and is in prime condition for such a trek. Tom has also absorbed the enthusiasm that Ron and I share for the mountain, and especially the Olympics.

This was not our first look at this country. Ron, Roger, and I did the classic High Divide Loop hike in September of 1988. Then Ron and I were close to the edge of the Bailey Range when we hiked the Long Ridge trail in approximately 1992. Last year Ron and Tom hiked the Skyline trail after he and I were rained off of it in approximately 1995 after reaching Lake Beauty via Low Divide.

My original goal for this trip was to hike with Ron and Tom until the trails ran out at the Catwalk, a narrow ridge where the High Divide trail abruptly ends. This point is the official beginning of the Bailey Range traverse, the place where maintained trails end and the Bailey Range begins. Libby and Kevin (Ron's wife and youngest son) had originally planned on camping near the trail head for a day or so at the beginning of the trip. I managed at the last minute to talk them into joining me on my mini sojourn to the edge of the Bailey. We would walk from the trail head at Soleduck Hot Springs, about 8 miles and 3000 feet, to a camp at Heart Lake. On the following day we would then accompany Ron and Tom for a while until we departed somewhere on High Divide to go our separate ways.



Tom, Kevin, Libby, and Ron at the trail head.

Wednesday was spent mostly in driving to leave a car at an exit point for Ron and Tom. We stopped at the National Park Headquarters to get permits and to borrow bear canisters. We then stayed in the Soleduck campground that evening, never managing to understand just why folks go to such a place to sit around a camp fire reading or watching the other people. The forest was scenic, I guess.

The Thursday hike to Heart Lake was uneventful, but still a lot of work for me. This kind of walk is at the edge of what I'm comfortable doing, at least as the first backpack of a season. The hike was beautiful though, starting in the low land rain forest of the Soleduck River, passing innumerable spectacular falls and cascades, eventually passing through the meadows of Soleduck Park to reach Heart Lake.



**Heart Lake** is a small tarn, barely an acre or so in size. It's situated in an alpine meadow at 4700 ft elevation.

We set up camp in a Park Service designated location, close to a bear wire. We had three bear canisters for our food, two of them carried by Tom and Ron. This was my first experience with the large plastic jars that bears can't open.

Shortly after setting up camp, we had visitors, shown below.

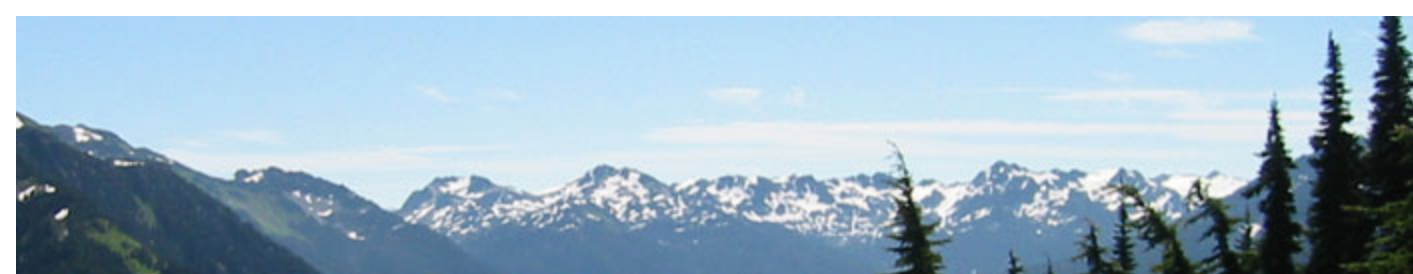




We saw this band of goats often in the three days we were in the mountains. This older shaggy gal, who had only one horn, was scratching at the trail where urine had been deposited. The stated policy presented by the Park Service is "Pee in the trail." The least damage is then done when the goats come seeking the salts.

The goat are always great fun to see. We also saw a herd of about two dozen elk, a few isolated deer, a marmot, and a couple of isolated black bear high in some high meadows. Some folks may recall the early Disney Wildlife Adventure "Olympic Elk."\*\* That was filmed in the Bailey Range. It seems reasonable that some of the elk we saw on this trip were direct descendants of those in that classic film.

We got up Friday morning to clear skies. We were eventually able to coax Tom out of his sleeping bag and we all managed to get moving by mid morning. We climbed just three hundred more feet to the ridge crest of High Divide to be greeted by meadows filled with avalanche lilies and views across the Hoh River valley to Mt. Olympus. We then headed east toward trail's end and the beginning of the Bailey Range.



This is the view of the Bailey Range that we soon saw.



[Mt. Olympus as seen from the eastern Bailey Range end of High Divide.](#)

We continued with Ron and Tom for a few miles until nearly reaching the Catwalk. We finally decided to turn around to send them on their way when we encountered an especially exposed and narrow, albeit straight forward section of trail. I remembered it from the trip in the area that Ron, Roger, and I did in 1988, but I had not remembered the extreme exposure. A fall would have ended hundreds of feet below, well out of sight. We bid the guys good-bye and hiked back to our camp, arriving in mid afternoon.

Our original plan had been to continue our hike by completing a loop along High Divide, around "Seven Lakes Basin," an isolated group of alpine lakes. We even had a reservation for camping at one of the lakes. Like many National Parks, they have instituted a reservation and restriction system in a few of the high pressure areas within Olympic NP. However, we were tired and noted that Heart Lake was not crowded. So we changed our plans, electing to remain at Heart Lake and to return along the route covered the previous day. We cooked an early dinner and relaxed for a while. (Note that it was Friday and things were not yet busy at Heart Lake. We would never have been so presumptuous had it been a July Saturday evening.)

The plan for the evening had been to return to the Divide and travel a short distance to the west to points where we could perhaps look down into Seven Lakes Basin. But our views from camp started to look very disappointing for what was to have been a casual evening stroll, for fog had formed in the Hoh Valley and was now spilling across the ridge into the basin containing our camp. Expecting little, we still headed up, reasoning that we would still see a few flowers in the fog and perhaps some wildlife. The first encountered high point on the ridge produced the following surprise:





While the fog was high enough to hide most of the Blue Glacier on Mt. Olympus, the higher parts of the peak were in the clear.



A few minutes later and a bit further down the trail yielded greater clarity.





Each view had a different character as the sun dropped.

We finally reached a trail summit of about 5300 ft that provided wonderful views of the sunset in the clouds over Vancouver Island and of Seven Lakes Basin. The better views were still to Mt. Olympus in the south:





Alpine Glow on Mt. Olympus. Just a few minutes later, the sun is down and we see:



The beginning of twilight after the sun has set.

As tempting as it was to stay longer, we decided that we should use the remaining light to return to camp. Just as we were about to drop down to the trail junction leading to Heart Lake, a lone goat appeared on the horizon, seeming to stop and pose just long enough for me to grab my camera from my pack.





As soon as I snapped a final photo, the goat continued up and over the ridge.

The next day brought a long, but extremely pleasant hike. It was great fun to have hiked with Libby and Kevin. I certainly want to thank them for going along with this ole goat, for he had a ball.



This old goat at a stream crossing.

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**Updates, August 4, August 8 2007.**

Ron and Tom got out of their hike on Wednesday evening, August 1. They took all of the time that they had allotted, and had a wonderful time. Ron has posted photos on his web site at <http://www.ronhayward.net/>. This is an extensive report with maps and detailed photos. Many photos include route information.





This is one of Ron's photos that captures what seems to be the quintessential character of the Bailey Range as mountains that circle back upon themselves. The high peak is Mt. Olympus, although it appears much different than my earlier views.

The trip seems to have been all that they expected, and more. They saw no people during their 5 days in the Bailey Range. I wish that I could have been with them, but appreciate the realities of geezerism. Clearly (I hope) I'm both proud of them and thrilled that they got to do the trip.

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\* Robert L. Wood, "**Trail Country: Olympic National Park**," The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1968, page 260. Also see a later paperback version, "**Olympic Mountains Trail Guide: National Park and National Forest**," The Mountaineers, Seattle, 1984. Bob wrote several other books, all related to the Olympics, and all great reads.



This is a photo of Bob Wood that I snapped when we had the pleasure of meeting him while on a 1975 hike to LaCross Basin. I was saddened to see a note in a Tacoma, WA, newspaper that Bob died a couple of years ago. We applaud his contributions!

\*\* **Olympic Elk** is now available as a DVD! Search on line for Walt Disney Legacy Collection -- True Life Adventures Vol. 3 (1955).