

Lunar Eclipse at Serene Lake

30Aug07, Wes Hayward

The month was almost over and I had not been out in the mountains since my trek in the Olympics with Ron's family. I was anxious to get out while the weather was good. Ron and I are talking about a hike in September, so I wanted to grab whatever conditioning I could from another walk. True or not, I have always believed that the only way to get ready for backpacking is to go backpacking.

I had looked at a number of possible trips, and had decided to go somewhere that I had never visited. Serene Lake fit the criterion. Indeed, I have done very little hiking in this part of Oregon known as the Clackamas Foothills. The driving distance is about the same as that to the Mt. Hood area, but over less familiar and slightly less crowded highways.

There was another reason to go the hills: A total lunar eclipse was to occur in the early hours on Tuesday morning, and the weather was clear with no hint of clouds predicted. What better place to go than to the mountains, well away from the lights of civilization? So I headed out on Monday morning, reaching the trailhead near Hideaway Lake around noon. (There is another trailhead that is closer, but involves travel on a road generally limited to back country vehicles more robust than my little Honda Civic.) A short walk through an old clear-cut brought me to Shellrock Lake, which was both scenic and devoid of visitors. This was such an easy destination that I made a mental note of it for later trips, such as easy trips with the grand kids. I spent some time exploring all sides before continuing the uphill route.



Shellrock Lake

The trail beyond the lake was now in the woods, a hint of what most of the rest of the hike would be like. After about a mile and a few hundred feet of elevation gain, I ended up on the perimeter of the loop with two choices. A turn to the right would take me downhill for just over a mile to the Rock Lakes chain and a comfortable camping spot. If I wanted to continue to Serene Lake, that would require another couple of miles. The turn to the left would take me along a ridge for a while, and then a descent to Cache Meadow, at about the same elevation as where I started the day. Another climb would then be required to reach a ridge with good viewpoints, followed by another descent to Serene Lake. The total would be about 5 miles. I figured that there would be more people at the closer Rock Lakes, and my interest was in the Serene Lake and the views, so I turned left.



Cache Meadow is so named because there was, at one time, a cache of supplies left in an abandoned Forest Service structure. I saw none of this.

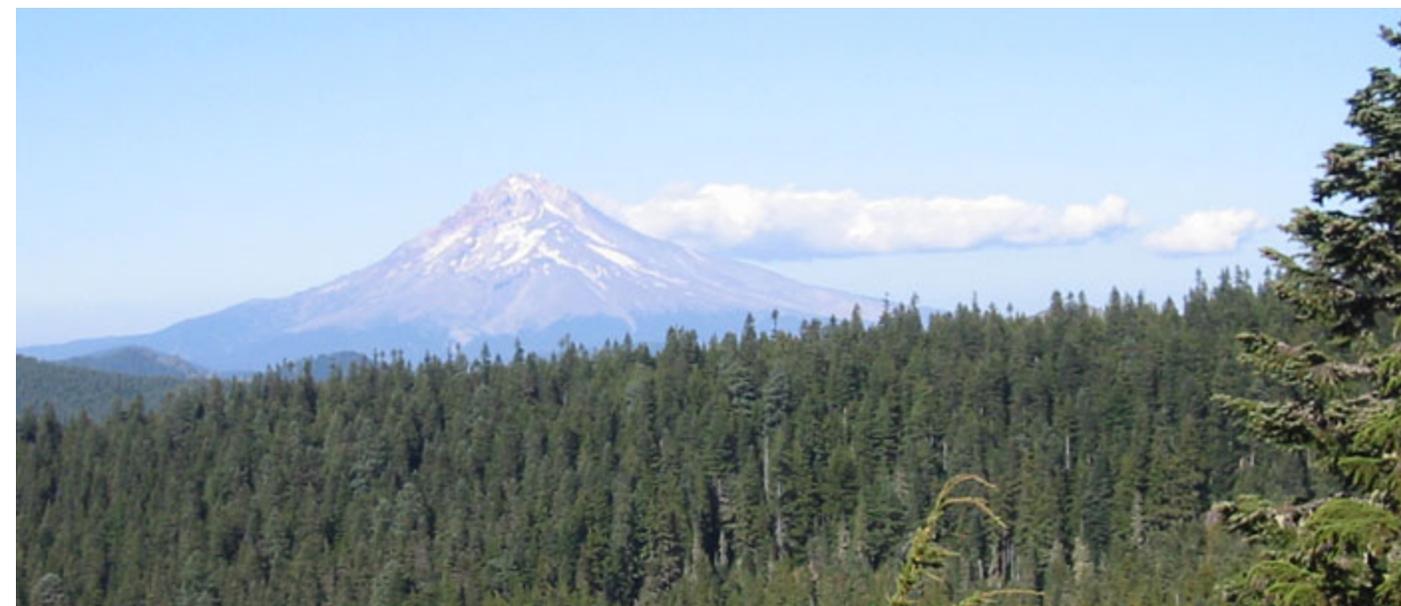
The walk down to Cache Meadow had the character of east facing slopes in the Oregon Cascades with open forests and bunch grass. The grass became more varied and longer down in the meadow. There were virtually no flowers left. Also, there were thankfully few misquotes left. I stopped in the meadow for a late lunch and then headed up the hill. This eventually yielded a clearing with views down to Serene Lake. The mountains to the north could be seen, including Mt. Hood, plus St. Helens, Rainier, and Adams in Washington.



Serene Lake with Mt. Hood.



Serene Lake. My camp was in the trees at the spot marked with red. I picked this place on the eastern shore, for it provided night time access to a clearing for moon photos.



Mt. Hood as seen from the ridge above Serene Lake

After taking in the views, I continued around the ridge and then down the trail, eventually reaching the lake. The country now changed to a damper ground cover. The rain of a week earlier was evident.



Looking across Serene Lake at the ridge where the earlier photos were taken. The clearing at the top is the photo site.

Upon reaching the lake and picking a camp site that would provide me with good views of the eclipse, I did what I usually do after a day of hiking: I made lemonade. It's always amazing how something as simple as a mix from a foil pouch can taste so good.

Wanting the best possible view in the night, I elected to sleep out in the open using a "bivy sack," short for *bivouac sack*. This is essentially a sleeping bag cover made predominantly with Gortex (tm, WL Gore and Associates) to be breathable, but largely water proof. In inclement weather, I often supplement this with a tarp. The bivy has mosquito netting to keep the bugs out, if needed. I didn't even zip it up on this trip. I met some other hikers (Mary and two delightful teenage daughters) who were camped not far from me; they couldn't seem to adjust to the idea of an old geezer sleeping out in the open.



My

bedroom.

I awoke a little after 2 AM after several hours of bright moonlight. By 2:30 I could see the lunar disc beginning to be nibbled away by the earth's shadow. I got up and went over to the adjacent clearing to take a couple of quick photos. I was pleasantly surprised to find it warm enough that I could walk about in my underwear without feeling cold. That's unusual, at least for me.



Moon as it appeared at 2:36 AM .

Alas, the photo quality suffers a great deal. This is a place where a higher end camera would produce much better photos than my little digital "point and shoot" model (Canon Powershot S110). I should have taken a lightweight tripod. I'm generally happy with the small size and ease of use of my little 2 Megapixel camera.

I crawled back in the sleeping bag and continued to watch the eclipse until it reached totality. By then, the stars were present in full force, having been overwhelmed by the earlier bright moon. I slept-in until nearly 9 AM the next morning after having lost some sleep.



My kitchen at Serene Lake. This was a breakfast shot, much later than I normally arise when in the mountains.

Serene Lake was such a delightful place to camp that I decided to stay there rather than to move to one of the Rock lakes. But I didn't want to stay in camp for the day. (I might have been tempted to stick around had I brought some fishing gear.) So after breakfast, I headed out with a light pack to explore the next few miles in the loop including the Rock Lake chain.



Middle Rock Lake



Upper Rock Lake



Lower Rock Lake

The middle lake was the largest and the one with several camping places. The upper lake was the smallest, but perhaps the most interesting. The lower lake was the least distinctive, but still attractive.

I saw fish rising in the top two, but none in the lower lake. Fish seemed more abundant at Serene Lake.

Although the lakes were interesting, the best part of the day was the trail between Serene and the Rock lakes. It was lush with occasional views across to adjacent ridges, frequent small meadow areas, and long sweeping scree slopes. The bushes next to the trail contained huckleberries.

I returned to Serene for dinner and a second night, now with a full moon. There were times when I pulled the flap up on my bivy sack to get more darkness. I arose early on Wednesday morning, cooked a quick breakfast, packed, and headed down the trail with the goal of beating the heat of the day. I had seen most of the trail to be hiked the previous day, so didn't linger. A brief lemonade stop at Shellrock Lake still got me to the car just after noon.



The trail just before reaching the car. I noted that the vine maple is just starting to turn red.

All in all, this was a good trip. It was a nice introduction to a neglected area; it was also fun to see a lunar eclipse from the mountains. I didn't see many people, and those I met were most enjoyable. Total hiking with the loop and the extra trip to explore the Rock lakes was 20 miles with about 2000 feet of elevation gain. Trail conditions were excellent.