

Black Butte and Lookout Mountain to Polar Bear Gap

The High Country – Illinois, Smith, and Klamath Rivers Headwaters

Leaders: Lee Webb (Retired FS Wildlife Biologist) and Cecile Shohet (Calypso Botanical Consulting).

Difficulty: 5 mile roundtrip strenuous hike, with about half off trail, but in mostly open habitat.

Description: South of Takilma, just over the border into California, and mostly within the Siskiyou Wilderness. We will explore the varied habitats in this high elevation back country. First, a short stop at a roadside *Darlingtonia* Bog half way up. The hike starts off at the Black Butte Trailhead (4,800'); walk about one mile on the trail, and then off trail up the saddle between Black Butte and Lookout Mountain. Continue off trail up the mostly open ridge to Lookout Mountain, at almost 6,400' (the view is superb). Then off trail down to Polar Bear Gap, and back to our vehicles on a maintained trail (see map).

If 14 July turns out to be a very hot day, we have the option of not climbing to the saddle between Black Butte and Lookout Mountain – but rather staying on trail, and visiting a serene wet meadow in the SW corner of Section 35 (about 1/3 mile north of Polar Bear Mountain); this option would result in less elevation gain, and slightly less distance traveled. In either case, the hike begins at 4,800' elevation at the trailhead. As a rule, air temperature drops 3°f per 1,000' increase in elevation, so it should normally be approximately 17°f cooler at the trailhead (4,800') than at DCC (1,400').

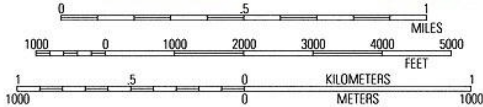
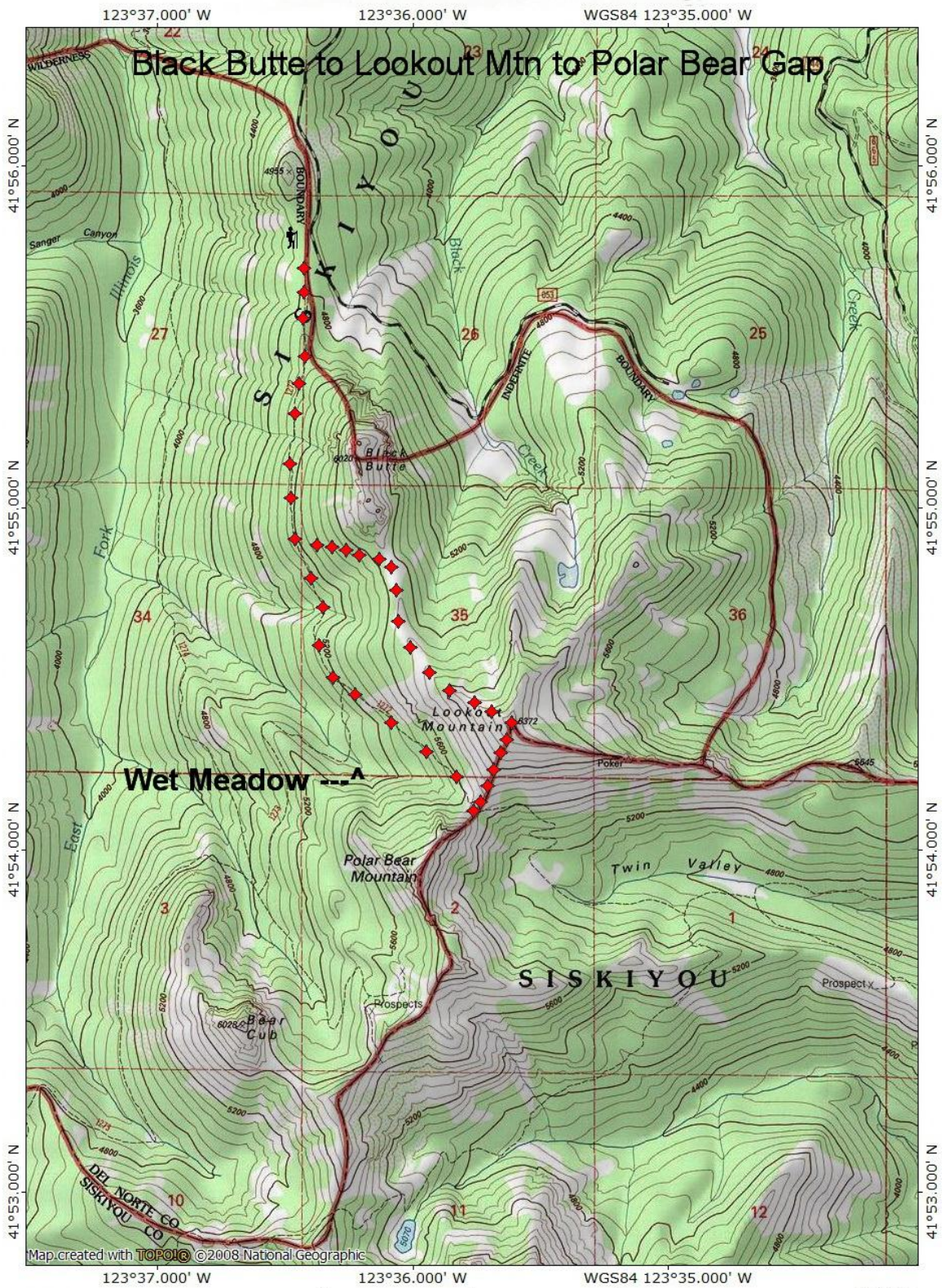
Floristic Highlights: Many interesting plants in serpentine and non-serpentine areas – including *Fritillaria glauca*, *Lewisia leana*, *Sarcodes sanguinia*, and *Picea breweriana*. A description of a 1986 field trip is attached, written by [Veva Stansell](#), as well as a 1965 hike written by [Al Hobart](#).

RT Mileage: 35 miles from DCC to the trailhead at Black Butte (70 miles RT)

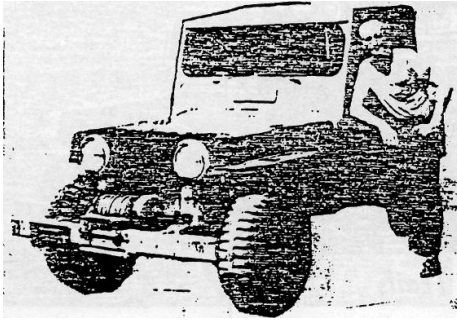
Start time: Leave the Deer Creek Center at 0800 (gather at 0745). The field trip will last 8 to 9 hours. Carpooling is encouraged.

Appropriate foot wear, Plus: Sturdy boots recommended. Bring lunch, water (at least 2 quarts), hat, windbreaker. Bring sunscreen; more than 50% of the hike will be under open skies. Trekking poles will be very useful on the rocky, uneven terrain.

Group Size Limit: 15 people.



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Winding Trails

by Al Hobart (Illinois Valley News 17 July 1967)

The life of an R. N. in a great hospital is a lively one. Pretty as a picture in her nurse's uniform, and universally loved for her untiring and invaluable service to suffering humanity, still her job is anything but 100% glamor, and she is on the go constantly, performing chores that would make any strong man toss in the sponge. And so, everything else being equal, we reasonably assume that her physique in general is grade A.

Of course the physical exercise a nurse performs in line of duty is essentially of the flatland type, the muscles of her-shapely limbs required, for the most part, to move her only on a horizontal plane. So you can well imagine my perplexity at the amazing outcome of a fascinating and delightful experiment I performed a couple of days ago that was intended to prove that the otherwise perfect—er—limbs of nurses, are not equipped with durable and efficient mountain-climbing holdbacker muscles like those of us big strong men. The unsuspecting guinea pigs for my experiment were a couple of swell specimens from Los Angeles' Good Samaritan Hospital who stopped over for a 4-day breather on a month-long vacation trip into Canada. They did some higher, deeper, and faster breathing than they had planned on—and darned near ran over their tough and experienced guide.

On one of our daily excursions I took them—Georgia and Jean—up on Crazy Ridge in my jeep. Beyond road's end we went for a "short" hike that took us on and on till we were in the high saddle between Black Butte and Lookout Mountains. While we were eating our lunch and resting after their rough climb we made the mistake of looking up to the top of Lookout Mountain; and sure enough, there they were, the ghostly band of Indians in full feather that are so often seen sending up smoke signals to faltering hikers below. The powder puff message plainly said, "Come on up, the view from here is out of this world. And so up we went to the very top of the 6,000. ft.-plus mountain, the dancing, waving, figures growing dimmer and dimmer and finally disappearing altogether as we neared the summit. But we saw the evidence of their having been there—the ashes of their signal fire, and the weathered stake that must have been their totem pole.

We went over the top and down the opposite side to the saddle between Lookout Mountain and Polar Bear Peak, when we hit the trail that took us back around Lookout and Black Butte to where our hike had begun, a distance of between 6 and 7 miles. The girls happily and frankly admitted they were tired. I, for my part, manfully—and dishonestly—denied any evidence of fatigue.

We enjoyed the trip through the Oregon Caves, which was a novelty to Jean, and our Jeep ride to Hell's Hole, and the time we spent slogging around among the wildplants in the Darlingtonia swamp up on the Happy Camp Road, not to mention our daily swims in the old "berl" hole down by the bridge; but the highlight of the girls' 4-

day residence in Packer's Gulch was the climbing of Lookout Mountain, the picture window of our immediate section of the Siskiyous.

The old cabin seems pretty quiet and empty since my nurses left, but with my roving tendencies and varied occupations I've not much time for loneliness. I enjoyed their company immensely, but of course they upset my household routine to some extent, which was to be expected. With a discriminating sister like Georgia, who is head nurse in surgery, my cabin's interior was bound to undergo a delicate operation or so to become socially habitable, which face-lifting, I'll admit, greatly improved the appearance and temporary livability of my humble abode. But though old deep ruts can be conveniently obscured, they're mighty hard to obliterate; and as soon as Sis is out of sight and down the road after one of her infrequent visits, I'm busily engaged undoing all her neat and orderly rearrangements and getting my stuff back in its accustomed place.

This time I foresightedly made the major drastic changes before my guests arrived, and if Georgia and Jean could suddenly pop in again after 2 days-absence they wouldn't recognize the joint; numerous cartons have been resurrected from their various hiding places and the contents handily redistributed. Everything is once again scattered conveniently under-foot where I can see what I own and where I can place a hand, even with my eyes shut, slapdab on the object sought.

But, after all, what do a few insignificant inconveniences amount to when a fellow has the joyful privilege of a nice long visit with a pair of gals like Georgia and Jean—top-flight big-city nurses deluxe.

TO BLACK BUTTE, LOOKOUT MOUNTAIN AND "LOST LAKE"
10 September 1986; revised 15 September 2007 by Veva Stansell

Mary Paetzel, Dennis Vroman, and I joined Lee Webb for a day in the Siskiyou. We left Highway 199 at O'Brien and headed in a southerly direction toward Black Butte. We parked at the trailhead north of Black Butte at about 4700' elevation. We were hiking by 10:15 A.M., following the trail past the base of Black Butte which towers above like a fortress. The trail climbs around the west side, not too steep, through peridotite and serpentine with *Pinus jeffreyi*, *Calocedrus decurrens*, *Phlox diffusa*, *Eriogonum* sp, (maybe *E. ternatum*), *Cordylanthus (viscidus?)*, *Arctostaphylos nevadensis*, *Quercus vaccinifolia*, and *Hieracium* sp.

The trail levels off in timber, *Abies* sp. We passed a dried-up cluster of *Allotropa virgata* as we went along the trail. Within about 1-1/2 miles or less we spotted an enamel sign above the trail, "Black Butte." A short distance beyond the sign we left the trail and headed for the ridge, aiming for the saddle south of the Butte. There were occasional game trails, but no established trail.

We watched an owl in a snag for a while but couldn't get a positive identification. Dennis and Lee agree that it was probably a pygmy owl. The way here is fairly open, steep, rocky, through scattered brush, *Quercus vaccinifolia*, *Arctostaphylos patula* and occasional *Ceanothus* similar to *C. cuneatus*. *Pinus jeffreyi* and *Pinus monticola* were well-spaced through the brush, giving us occasional shade.

We reached the saddle at noon, enjoying a cooling breeze while we took a lunch break. The band of serpentine rubble rises from the south side of Black Butte at 5600' elevation. The sky is clear here but a haze hangs over the valleys. Dennis found one plant of *Eriogonum hirtellum*, an uncommon buckwheat, not yet in flower. There must be more somewhere near. We have seen it on the trail between Poker Flat and Twin Valley. The flowers are yellow, held atop stems that are straw-like, quite yellow like the flowers but with tones of red. The plant sprawls its woody stems over the bluish serpentine rubble.

We followed the serpentine ridge toward Lookout Mountain uphill to the south. On the crest were scattered Jeffrey pines, with Port Orford-cedar below the ridge on the east. *Pyrola dentata*, *Eriophyllum lanatum* var. *monoense* (short stature and campanulate involucre), *Eriogonum (ternatum?)*, *E. umbellatum* ssp. *polyanthum*, *Lewisia leana*, and *Arenaria nuttallii* ssp. *gregaria*. There was a small depression with plants with Iris-like leaves. We saw an *Arabis* sp with reflexed fruits and serrate leaves. *Arctostaphylos nevadensis* was common.

Where we ran out of serpentine our way was blocked by a rocky outcrop like a wart on a witch's nose. Here the rock changes to a harder mass. We noticed a couple of ferns on the bigger boulders, *Cheilanthes gracillima*, *Cryptogramma acrostichoides*, and possibly

Polystichum scopulinum. We worked our way around the steep east side, the best way to go according to Lee. Again we had *Abies* sp plus *Luetkea pectinata*, *Quercus sadleriana*, *Sedum oregonense*, *Penstemon newberryi* ssp *berryi*(?) and *Haplopappus whitneyi* ssp *discoidea* (?).

Above the knob, the final pitch to the top of Lookout Mountain was a loose scree of sliding rock, not dangerous but hot and tiring. Here we saw *Monardella odoratissima* ssp *pallida*, *Hieracium greenei*, and a small slender *Arenaria*, maybe *A. howellii*.

The elevation and steepnicity (Al Hobart's word) caused a large number of rest stops. As we came to the rounded top, 6372' elevation, we admired the tough old Western white pine that stretched itself prone to survive the elements. *Prunus emarginata* (bitter cherry) shrubs bore a few bright red fruits. We did not eat them.

Someone had been there before us. There were five neatly peeled sticks, about 4' tall, an inch or so in diameter, the bases set in mounds of rocks. At the top of each stick was tied a small packet wrapped in bright-colored material. A scrap remained of a battered piece of paper which might have explained this display. We guessed perhaps a religious offering. We decided later that Lou Gold had placed them there.

Below us to the southwest we could see the saddle between Lookout Mountain and Polar Bear Peak. Farther out, El Capitan showed two patches of snow. After photographing the peaks around us and studying the map we started down a ridge to the northeast. The ridge splits; we stayed with the westerly finger. As we carefully descended we edged over onto the easterly side of our ridge and soon could look down into the lake basin nestled in the cirque between the fingers. Al Hobart called it "Blackout Lake," the name a hybrid between Black Butte and Lookout Mountain. In the past we had called this "Lost Lake," but some of us hoped to name it "Hobart Lake" in honor of Al. However, we found later that the name was already taken.

At this point we went straight down the headwall. It was steep but the footing was pretty good. The slanting rock faces had parallel grooves and striations, glacier tracks.

Here we saw *Vaccinium*, thought it was *V. membranaceum* but now think it may be *V. caespitosum*. Other plants we saw included *Phyllodoce empetrifomis*, *Saxifraga fragarioides*, *Penstemon (procerus?)*, *Polystichum lonchitis*, *Gentiana calycosa*, *Heuchera merriami*, *Rubus lasiococcus*, and near the base of the rock, *Trifolium howellii* with its very large leaves. We looked in vain for *Rubus nivalis*, which had been found by Al Hobart somewhere in this area.

At the foot of the headwall (on the south side?) of the little lake was a small gravel flat covered with knee-high vegetation. Shining patches of blue were clumps of *Gentiana calycosa*. A lavender aster, *A. paludicola* or *A. occidentalis* var *yosemitanus*, was scattered through the tangled sedges and weeds. We worked our way around the east

side of the lake, noting a water moss mostly submerged (*Fontinalis antipyretica*) and another totally submerged green plant. Pond lilies (*Nuphar polysepalum*) covered nearly half the water surface. A rock island, very small, bore a wee cedar, a young fir and a manzanita. Dennis saw a tennie footprint. Yep, probably Lou Gold. We had heard of Lou and the walking sticks he made. I think he presented them to people hiking past his camp on Bald Mountain before the camp was burnt in Silver Fire.

The lake outlet, 5500' elevation, was merely a seep now. We looked for lilies but saw none. West of the outlet the rocks mounded up again. We worked our way down to the rim of a precipice, crossed the creek to the east side in a grand grove of POC, and descended a steep wooded slope. We could see a logging road below in a cutover area.

As we came down to the road level we rejoined the outlet creek. We were rewarded with a *Darlingtonia* population, *Lilium vollmeri* in fruit, *Parnassia palustris*, *Trifolium howellii*, and a fruiting stalk of something liliaceous, looked like *Camassia* at first but the fruits are long-beaked. Maybe *Hastingsia*? We should check this one out.

We reached the road around 5:30 or 6:00 PM. The going was easier but we still had about a mile to the car. *Mimulus cardinalis* still showed a few brilliant red blooms. Some interesting *Salix* grew by a small roadside spring. We discussed an alternate route to the lake. Perhaps we can drive past the outlet creek where we joined the road, then gain elevation by going up past a clearcut, then contour over to the lake. (PS: We did this on a later trip, but the culvert crossing of the outlet stream is now washed out, so this is no longer an option.)

We came home with more questions than answers. It had been a fine day, with good weather, great views, beautiful wildflowers, and the feeling that it would take many trips at different times of the year to answer all the questions we had about this area.