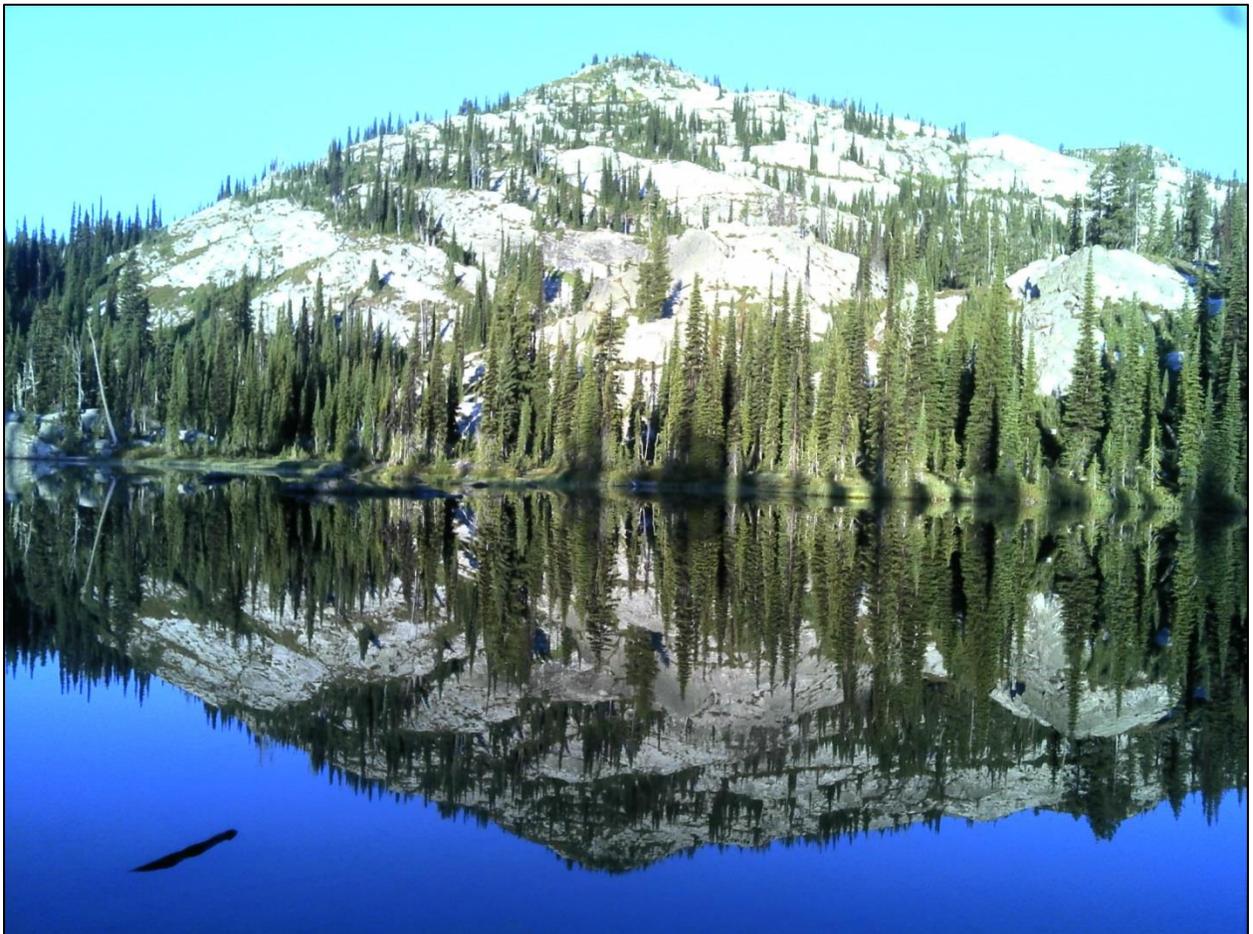


Idaho Centennial Trail

Hiking Tips

by Dan Styer, August 2015



Stanley Butte reflected in Shasta Lake, morning light

copyright © 25 August 2015 by Dan Styer

This document is free: you can redistribute it and/or modify it under the terms of the GNU General Public License, version 3, as published by the Free Software Foundation. (In summary, you may copy or alter this document, but you cannot then sell the resulting document.)

This document is distributed in the hope that it will be useful, but WITHOUT ANY WARRANTY; without even the implied warranty of MERCHANTABILITY or FITNESS FOR A PARTICULAR PURPOSE.

See the GNU General Public License at <http://www.gnu.org/licenses> for details.

The Idaho Centennial Trail is a long-distance footpath leading about 900 miles from the Idaho-Nevada border in the south to Upper Priest Falls, half a mile from the Canadian border, in the north. Canyons, mountains, lakes, rivers, waterfalls; sagebrush desert, forests, wildflower meadows, tundra; pronghorn, wolf, elk, pika: the trail passes through some of the wildest, most remote, and most scenic territory in the United States outside Alaska. It is not well-marked or well-groomed or manicured – parts are subject to washouts and blowdowns that will severely test your dedication. If you like a challenge and like the outdoors, and especially if you like solitude, then this is a great trail for you.

There are companion trails (ICT East and ICT West) for wheeled vehicles (mountain bikes, motorized dirt bikes, ATVs) but as the title implies, these *Hiking Tips* are oriented toward walkers.

Personal Note

Dan Styer hiked the ICT from the Nevada line to Interstate-90 in May, June, and July of 2013. I am no stranger to hiking: I started backpacking in August 1969, when I was fourteen years old, and I've backpacked at least once every year since then. As of August 2015 I have taken 77 backpacking trips: with my kids (I started Colin at age 5 years), with my parents, with my kids *and* my parents, with my niece and my grandniece, with my 4-H club, by myself – overnights, long trips with resupply, trips to maintain the section of Pennsylvania's Mid State Trail that I oversee – Maine, Georgia, Nevada, Colorado – well-maintained trail, poorly maintained trail, cross-country off-trail – winter, spring, summer, fall. Every one of those 77 trips was memorable. But my ICT trip was not just the longest, the wildest, the driest, the snowiest, and the most diverse in landscape: it was also the most memorable. The trail is challenging, without doubt. But if you are up to the challenge you will love it as much as I did, and you will be rewarded as much as I was.

Maintenance

Maintenance of the Appalachian Trail is coordinated and enforced by the Appalachian Trail Conservancy. Maintenance of the Colorado Trail is coordinated and enforced by the Colorado Trail Foundation. But no one enforces maintenance of the Idaho Centennial Trail. The route was laid out in 1990 by the Idaho Trails Council, which seems to no longer exist. Leo Hennessy (leo.hennessy@idpr.idaho.gov; 208-541-2419) is Non-Motorized Trails Coordinator at the Idaho Department of Parks and Recreation and in this role he attempts to coordinate ICT issues, but he has many other responsibilities as well and no power to enforce any decision. Sometimes you'll be walking the ICT and it will vanish in a maze of blowdowns. Sometimes the published ICT route has been officially abandoned by the US Forest Service. Once I came to a trail intersection where the map showed the ICT heading due west. There was no trail heading due west and no trace indicating that there ever had been. This is what happens when you hike the ICT. I've

already said it was challenging. (It makes sense to telephone each National Forest and inquire about trail status.)

Information

<http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/activities/hiking#js-tab-1>

The guidebook *Discover ... Idaho's Centennial Trail* by Stephen Stuebner (1998) is out-of-date, and the maps have always been illegible. The background information still applies but I don't recommend it.

Fording Streams

There are very few footbridges on the ICT. If you're used to the Appalachian Trail or the Colorado Trail, you will be surprised.

1. Wear woolen socks, which stay warm and fluffy even when wet.
2. Avoid fording in the afternoon, when snowpack is melting rapidly and streams are high. Consider camping along a big stream and fording it first thing the next morning.
3. Use a fording stick as a third leg: either a trekking pole or a thick stick that can bear your weight. Face upstream and *lean on your pole upstream*. (There is a natural tendency to lean downstream, in the direction you're being pushed. Following this natural tendency will make it more likely that you'll topple into the stream.) At any one time, at least two of your three "legs" should be firmly planted on the streambed.

Lost or injured

The best way to deal with loss or injury is prevention. Do not go out if you are unprepared for conditions. Inform a loved one or friend of your expected itinerary. Carry an emergency satellite messenger and locator (such as SPOT brand). This has advantages beyond its role in an emergency: When I was tired or discouraged or bug-bitten, too hot or too cold, I would cradle my satellite messenger in my hand and know that at the other end there was someone who loved me and supported me, even if she thought I was crazy for undertaking such a trek.

If prevention doesn't work and you become lost or injured, attempt to telephone 911. With near certainty, this will not work: cell phone coverage on the ICT is almost nonexistent. Have your home support person contact the relevant county sheriff:

<http://www.idahosheriffs.org/map%20of%20idaho.htm>

and that sheriff will organize search and rescue operations.

Maps

1. Overview maps, purchase from <http://plicmapcenter.org/ID/>

These maps don't always show the trail route, but they are invaluable for getting a feel for the territory. You cannot rely on the published ICT route being open: the route might be inaccessible through snow cover, through drought, through lack of maintenance, through landowner closings. These overview maps will enable you to find a workaround when the published route is blocked.

BLM 1:100,000 scale:

Sheep Creek; Glens Ferry (to Hammett); Mountain Home (to Sawtooth National Forest)

National Forest Maps:

Sawtooth National Forest Ketchum (North); Frank Church Wilderness South; Frank Church Wilderness North; Nez Perce; Clearwater; St. Joe; Coeur d'Alene; Kaniksu National Forests

Supplement to National Forest Maps:

You may also wish to use the Cairn Cartographics maps Selway-Bitterroot (north and south halves). See <http://cairncarto.com/maps/>

2. Detail maps

The 79 maps at

<http://parksandrecreation.idaho.gov/centennial-trail-map>

show the "published ICT route". These maps have sufficient detail for backcountry navigation, but they are not always correct. Sometimes they show the ICT going down trails that have long been abandoned or that never existed in the first place. There are significant errors, detailed below, on maps 41, 46, 50, 53, 54, and 59.

During my long 2013 hike, I met only one other long-distance hiker, Stephan Taroli of Kelly, Wyoming. After he got home, Stephan devoted a lot of effort to producing a new set of maps, which are still in draft. I encourage you to seek him out [twodogyurt@msn.com] and inquire after his maps.

3. GPS

I hiked with a rudimentary GPS, and it was inadequate. I've since purchased a Garmin Montana 650t, with the TOPO US 24K series maps for Idaho. I recommend these.

Direction

I walked from south to north, so I'm writing these *Tips* for that direction.

Resupply

In addition to sending yourself food, toilet paper, maps, and so forth, be sure to *send yourself new socks*. This trip is so long you'll need them.

This is where I resupplied. (I actually quit the trail at Mullan, so I never did the Clark Fork resupply.)

site	mile	difference
Nevada border	0.0	
Hammett (post office)	91.0	91.0
Stanley (post office)	239.9	148.9
Magruder Corridor	421.9	182.0
Wilderness Gateway Campground	521.1	99.2
Mullan (post office)	676.8	155.7
Clark Fork (post office)	754.9	78.1
Upper Priest Falls	887.0	132.1

Hammett, Stanley, and Mullan are such small towns that they have no grocery stores adequate for resupply. You have to mail yourself food. (Stanley does have several outdoor stores. I bought myself socks and gloves there.)

My brother was living in Idaho at the time, and he brought me food at Magruder Corridor (between the Frank Church Wilderness and the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness) and at Wilderness Gateway Campground (north of the Selway-Bitterroot on US 12).

Stephan didn't have a helpful brother in Idaho, and he mailed his resupply to Whitewater Ranch on the Salmon River. The ranch owners, Steve and Kathy Shotwell, are very nice people (she gave me cookies and ice-cold lemonade!) and I suspect they'd hold a package for you, too. (Whitewater Ranch is south of the Magruder Corridor, so you'd have less to carry from Stanley. I admit without shame that it was brutal carrying 182 miles worth of food.)

From Wilderness Gateway I believe you could hitchhike to Three Rivers Resort & Rafting in Lowell, Idaho, and I believe they would hold a package for you. (They did for Stephan.)

In addition to these scheduled resupplies, I ran out of food and hitchhiked from Hoodoo Pass into Superior, Montana, where there's a nice grocery store. Never have grapes been more delicious.

Post Offices

This information comes from <http://www.usps.com>

click under "Locate Post Offices", then "Find Post Office" then type in zip code.

This information was correct in the summer of 2013, but you should make sure it still applies.

Resupply at Hammett

YOUR NAME; GENERAL DELIVERY; HAMMETT, ID 83627-9999

Post Office: 9344 W KOCH CIRCLE

Phone 208-366-2919

Mon-Fri 8:00am - 12:00pm; 1:00pm - 4:15pm; Sat 8:00am - 9:15am

Resupply at Stanley

YOUR NAME; GENERAL DELIVERY; STANLEY, ID 83278-9999

Post Office: 36 ACE OF DIAMONDS BOULEVARD

Phone 208-774-2230

Mon-Fri 8:30am - 11:00am; 11:30am - 4:30pm

Resupply at Mullan

YOUR NAME; GENERAL DELIVERY; MULLAN, ID 83846-9999

Post Office: 237 EARLE AVENUE

Phone 208-744-1315

Mon-Fri 9:30am - 1:30pm; 2:00pm - 4:00pm

Resupply at Clark Fork

YOUR NAME; GENERAL DELIVERY; CLARK FORK, ID 83811-9999

Post Office: 302 MAIN STREET

Phone 208-266-1145

Mon-Fri 7:30am - 12:00pm; 12:30pm - 4:00pm; Sat 7:30am - 12:00pm

Timing

In using this section, take into account that I averaged 10.4 miles a day.

I started on 21 May. My walk through the sagebrush desert was splendid. (It was hot, so I walked from dawn to 1 pm, found a shady spot to eat and nap, got up at 4 pm and hiked until sundown. But with that concession to heat it was splendid.) Stephan started two weeks later on 4 June. He got so dehydrated he had to call for assistance, and a friend drove him around the end of the desert section.

On the other hand, I had to bypass the beautiful Sawtooths because they were too snowy for me. (I walked the valley to the east, which was also beautiful.) Enough snow had melted that Stephan got through the Sawtooths fine. (Stephan, however, had a lot of snow hiking experience in the Wind River Range. I don't think I would have gotten through the Sawtooths fine even if I had started two weeks later than I did.)

The Colorado Trail guidebook says something like "If you don't want to encounter snow, leave from Denver after 4 July." The ICT is not as high as the Colorado Trail, but it's longer and further north. I don't think there's any timing schedule that would allow you to avoid snow on the whole ICT.

Coordinates

Coordinates for points in these *Tips* are presented as

[42.0099, -115.3375] (0637662,4652214)

The first pair of numbers, in square brackets, are the latitude and longitude in degrees. The second pair of numbers, in parentheses, are the UTM coordinates in meters. All parts of the ICT are within UTM zone 11.

Coordinates are presented in the WGS84/NAD83 datum.

Section A – Owyhee Desert: Nevada/Idaho border to Interstate-84 at Hammett



Character of this section

This section is sagebrush desert. It is hot and dry, yes. But I found it, in May 2013, to be a magical and lyrical place: aromatic with sage, flat but carved with the stunning canyons of the Jarbidge and Bruneau rivers, alive with falcons and pronghorn and, yes, rattlesnakes, spangled with wildflowers, and always, on the southern horizon, the snow-covered Jarbidge Mountains of Nevada.

Water is scarce. The only reliable sources are the Jarbidge and Bruneau Rivers and Clover Creek, which are usually inaccessible in their canyons. Despite their name, the “Inside Lakes” are not lakes but sand dunes. Poison Creek, Sheepeater Draw, Big Draw, Browns Creek ... all are usually dry. I carried a six-liter water bag (12 pounds when full) in May, and even so I once ran dry.

Hikers with sufficient routefinding skills and environmental conscientiousness can (at their own risk) walk from the Nevada border to the Bruneau Overlook off-trail along the east rim of the canyon. This walk is highly scenic, but hikers must weigh the risks of off-trail hiking in one of the most remote areas of the US outside Alaska. Because this alternative passes through the Bruneau-Jarbidge Rivers Wilderness, the use of wheeled vehicles on this route is illegal as well as ill-advised.

Reaching the southern terminus

From Twin Falls, Idaho, drive south on US 93 about 20 miles to Rogerson. Turn right (west); take Three-Creek Road west out of town. Pass over the Salmon Dam. About 46 miles from Rogerson the pavement ends, and about 100 yards beyond the end of pavement is a large sign concerning the Bruneau-Jarbidge Rivers Wilderness. The Idaho Centennial Trail crosses Three-Creek Road at this sign. Coordinates: [42.0099, -115.3375] (0637662,4652214).

If you fly into Twin Falls, use the “Twin Falls Taxi” (telephone 208-732-8946). The fare will be about \$140. They would prefer that you reserve a taxi the day ahead of your trip through <http://www.twinfallstaxi.com/>. Your taxi driver will probably not know how to reach the trailhead, so bring the above directions.

Caution

The road called “Pothole Road” on Idaho Parks map #9 and on Stef’s map ICT13 is called “Browns Creek Road” on road signs.

Section B – Foothills: Interstate-84 at Hammett to South Fork Boise River

Character of this section

South of Hunter Creek Trailhead, this section is almost all along roads. You must plan camping sites carefully. I slept in a beautiful place each night: once in a windmill farm, once in the tiny bird-filled valley of Little Canyon Creek. But I was able to do so only because I had planned.

Water is again scarce. I found only three reliable sources south of Hunter Creek Trailhead:

- the post office in Hammett
- Stout Crossing of Little Canyon Creek: [43.1538, -115.3097] (0637431,4779281)
- Moores Creek: [43.3923, -115.2023] (0645592,4805952)

Cautions

The road called “Rye Grass Cut Off Road” on Idaho Parks map #11 and on Stef’s map ICT15 is called “Ross Road” on road signs.

The road called “Steen Road” on Idaho Parks map #11 and on Stef’s map ICT16 is called “Ross Road” on road signs.

Section C – Sawtooth Mountains: South Fork Boise River to Lola Trailhead

This section contains the most impressive, classic mountain scenery I have ever encountered.

North of the Sawtooth Wilderness the ICT follows the dirt Cape Horn Road (FR 203). I wasn't expecting much, since I was just following a road. But I got there on 14 June, near the peak of Camas bloom, and this is what I found.



Section D – Frank Church—River of No Return Wilderness

The Frank Church—River of No Return Wilderness is the largest Wilderness Area in the 48 contiguous states, twice the size of the state of Delaware.

Junction near Thunder Mountain (Easy to miss! Stephan missed it.)

[Idaho Parks map #30 and Stef's map ICT42.] Northbound: make sharp right from old road onto unmaintained (but good condition) trail at coordinates [44.9626, -115.1142] (0648728,4980523)

Descent into Salmon River. [Idaho Parks map #35 or 36 and Stef's map ICT49.] Water source at [45.48550, -115.27203] (0635035,5038338) is last water before long hot dry descent.

Climb out of Salmon River. [Idaho Parks map #37 and Stef's maps ICT50 and 51.] When I was 21 years old, I hiked out of the Grand Canyon on the Bright Angel Trail from the Colorado River to the South Rim. A few months ago, I wondered: Am I still fit enough to pull off something like that? So I compared my Grand Canyon hike to the climb out of the Salmon River Valley on the ICT, a climb I had completed at age 58 years.

Climb south out of Grand Canyon on Bright Angel Trail

- Colorado River elevation: 2480 feet
- South Rim trailhead elevation: 5729 feet
- Elevation gain: 3250 feet
- Distance: 8 miles (per NPS)

Climb north out of Salmon River on Idaho Centennial Trail

- Rattlesnake Bar elevation: 2555 feet
 - Sheep Hill elevation: 8405 feet
 - Elevation gain: 5850 feet
 - Distance: 5.5 miles (from "gmap-pedometer" ... actually slightly more due to switchbacks)
-
-

Yes! I'm not yet a couch potato!

I present these data not to show off (well, maybe a little) but to illustrate that the ICT presents a lot of challenges.

Section E – Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness: Magruder Corridor Road to Wilderness Gateway Campground on US-12

North of Warm Springs Bar on Running Creek [Idaho Parks map #40 and Stef’s map ICT55], south of the Selway-Bitterroot Wilderness proper, the ICT passes through outfitter parking lot.

Northbound: trail enters lot: [45.851260, -114.924948] (0661105,5079615)

Northbound: trail exits lot: [45.851789, -114.924603] (0661130,5079675)

For Northbounders: enter the parking lot, walk about halfway to the Yates and Sons outfitter buildings ahead, the trail leaves to the left.

Concerning Idaho Park map #41 or Stef’s map ICT57:

First: In 2013, there was a monstrous stack of blowdowns (three or four acres, perhaps from a tornado touchdown) near the intersection of Long Prairie Creek and Goat Creek. There’s nothing to do but bushwhack around it.

Second: In fact, the ICT follows FS Trail 562, “Moose Ridge Trail” for the entirety of map #41. The Idaho Park map shows a turn onto Trail 602 and then a turn off 602 onto a ridge-line trail. This ridge-line trail doesn’t exist.

Concerning Idaho Park map #43 or Stef’s map ICT62:

The published ICT route follows FS Trail 606 up Sixtytwo Ridge, then connects through FS Trail 423 to FS Trail 620 along Rhoda Creek. I hiked this vicinity in the summer of 2013 and again in the summer of 2015. This route is *not passable* due to washouts and massive blowdown fields from an old burn on the upper reaches of Rhoda Creek. This is no joke. I recommend this route instead:

For Northbounders: From the intersection of FS Trail 562, “Moose Ridge Trail” and FS Trail 4, “Selway River Trail” *do not* turn left (west) and walk down the Selway River. Instead turn right (east) on FS Trail 4 to Moose Creek Ranger Station and then north on FS Trail 421, “East Moose Trail” for about 4.5 miles. Take FS Trail 620, “North Moose Trail” and follow it for about 10 miles to the junction of FS Trail 465, “Wounded Doe Creek Trail”, take FS Trail 465 and then 263 to the divide with the Lochsa Ranger District. From here drop down to Fish Lake and go out on FS Trail 211, “Boulder Creek Trail”. At Fish Lake Saddle you may pick up the high and scenic FS Trail 206, “Eagle Mountain Trail” past End Butte, Two Lakes, the stunning Shasta Lake (see cover of these *Tips*), then on to Stanley Butte, Seven Lakes, and Huckleberry Butte and hence to Wilderness Gateway Trailhead and US-12. Alternatively, at Fish Lake Saddle continue along FS Trail 211 along Boulder Creek to the Wilderness Gateway Trailhead.

The only point on this route likely to cause difficulty is the connection between two trails at Fish Lake. Northbounders: Your arrival trail ends half-way down the Fish Lake airstrip. Turn left and walk to the Guard Station Cabin. On the Cabin porch, face the airstrip and lake. The departure trail you want (FS Trail 211, “Boulder Creek Trail”) starts immediately to your left. It goes into the woods and starts switchbacking. There is no trail sign. (The very first switchback turns east, and since you want to go west you might think you’re on the wrong path – I did. But just stick with the trail and it will switchback you up to Fish Lake Saddle.) Southbounders: Your arrival trail ends at the Guard Station Cabin. Walk down the airstrip toward the lake. Halfway down there is a sign to trail 39 on the right. That’s your departure trail.

Section F1 – Kelly Creek Area: Wilderness Gateway Campground on US-12 to Kid Lake

Idaho Parks map #46 is in deep error. [See Stef’s map ICT66.] The ICT takes the Lolo Motorway (Forest Road 500), then turns off north onto Liz Butte Road (FR 560). But it does not take Liz Butte Road all the way to the top of Liz Butte. It follows that road to the sag at point [46.43994, -115.33013] (0628272,5144285)

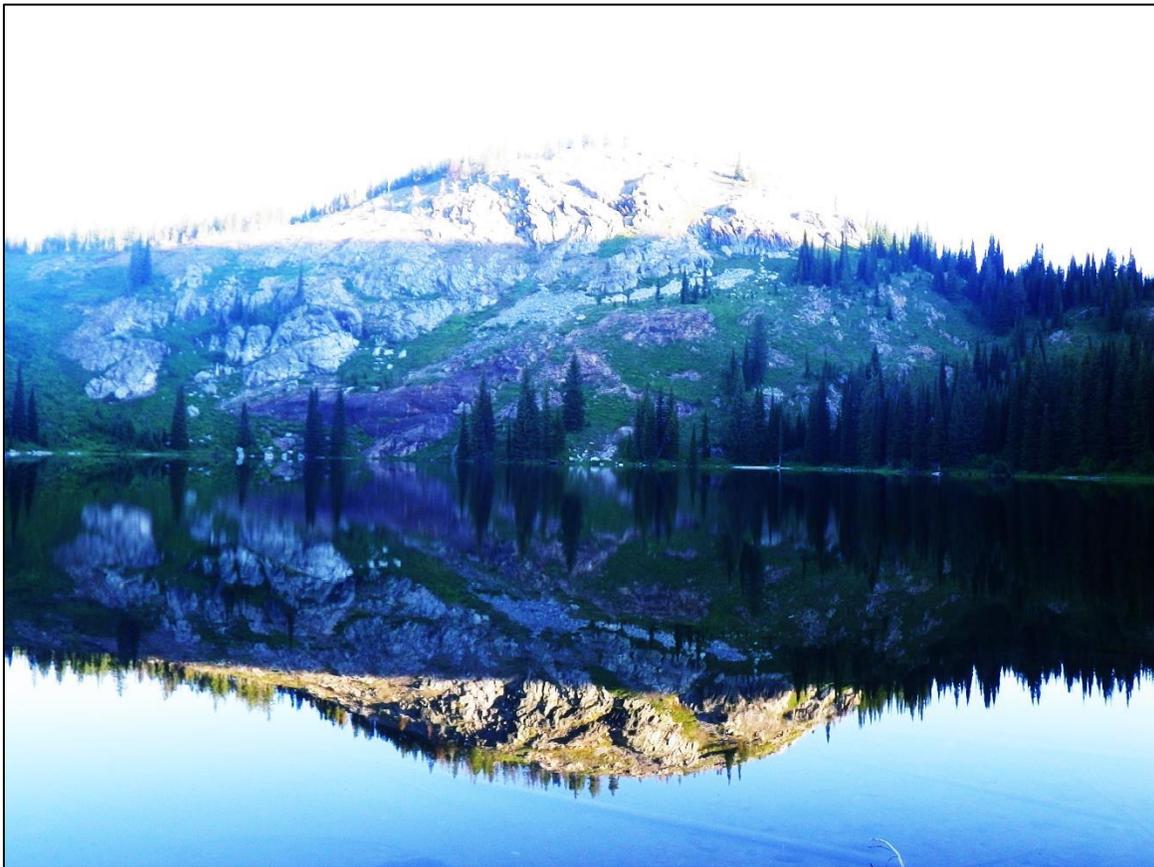
and then heads off to the right on FS Trail 649, “Liz Butte Trail”. Trail follows a more-or-less level contour until it reaches the track of the trail shown on the Idaho Parks map. (USGS topo has same error. Clearwater Forest Service map is correct.)

Idaho Parks map #50 [Stef's map ICT71] sends the ICT up FS Trail 490, "Hanson Ridge Trail". This trail does not exist. (And it does not appear on the Clearwater Forest Service map.) There are two alternatives:

A. Go up FS Trail 490, "Bruin Hill Trail" (wrong name on map #50) until it terminates on Stateline Trail (FS Trail 738)

B. Continue on FS Trail 567 until it terminates on Stateline Trail (FS Trail 738) at Kid Lake. Then take Stateline Trail north.

I *highly* recommend alternative B. It contains wildflower meadows, beautiful streams, stunning lakes and peaks. (Including Kid Lake, below.)



Section F2 – Stateline Trail: Kid Lake to Interstate-90 at Mullan

This section has lots of mountains, lakes, wildflower meadows, and huckleberries.

Hoodoo Pass area, Idaho Parks map #53, Stef’s map ICT75:

The trail ends at FS Road 250. Turn right on FS Road 250 and walk along it until FS Road 5428 “Rawhide Road” comes in from the left. Turn left up FS Road 5428, walk up, walk over a barrier. Switchback once to the right, then just when you're going to switchback left, take FS Trail 738-A to the right.

Missoula Lake area, Idaho Parks map #54, Stef’s map ICT76:

FS Trail 738 comes to FS Road 320. Straight ahead, an ATV track continues on ridgeline to the top of a peak, where it peters out. DO NOT take this ATV track! Instead, walk left on FS Road 320 for about 100 yards, then turn right onto FS Trail 616.

Allen Spring [Idaho Parks map #57, Stef’s map ICT80]:

Water supply very near trail in the middle of a high dry section:

[47.32462, -115.54201] (0610170,5242270)

Approach to Mullan, Idaho Parks map #59, Stef’s map ICT82:

West of point [47.42513, -115.72123] (596445, 5253202), the published ICT route along FS Trail 16 doesn't exist on the ground. I took an unmapped ATV trail north, then turn right, then come out on Road 4203 just north of the foot of Copper Lake Trail. Turn left and follow this road (the bed of the old Northern Pacific Railroad) west to Willow Creek. Pick up the published ICT route there, and go downhill toward Mullan.