

## Get Out And Hike!

Living between the Swans and Missions and not hiking is like living in Anaheim, California and not visiting Disneyland. To help others and myself enjoy our unique surroundings, I asked four local hikers to describe a personal favorite hike. You will enjoy hearing what four of your neighbors said when asked, "Please describe a favorite hike."

### **From Bruce Rieman, scientist and retired fish guy:**

My favorite hike? That's not a simple question in a place like this where there are amazing places to explore all around us. Within an hour I can be at the trailhead for dozens.... maybe hundreds... of iconic mountain hikes. If I've got most of a day I can go to Turquoise Lake, or shuttle a car and hike the ridge from Morrell Lookout to Pyramid Pass. There are even some peaks to bag if energy is running high and I've got some friends to push me. If time is a little more limited I can go part way on the big hikes or out the back door to Old Baldy just to get recharged with a view of the valley. If there's snow up high, we have company, or I just need some exercise, a walk through the Larch Grove, around the Ski Trails, in to one of The Falls, or the down and back on the Canoe Trail might work. The alternatives are pretty much endless. But, if I really had to get down to it I suppose my favorite hike is the "Next One".

When I'm sitting up high somewhere I'll start looking around, seeing all the places I haven't been, and wondering if, or more likely how, I can get there. I can see a couple of peaks from the hill above my house and for four years I've been obsessed with getting to one. I've made no less than six-day trips exploring different routes. I've discovered some pretty cool places, but haven't gotten there yet. I know several people who have, and they've given me lots of tips... but for some reason I want to figure this one out on my own. I've also got a list of 5 or 10 new places to explore that someone brought up with..... "Did you know that you can get to x by going up y and then across z?" Most serious hikers will never write about the places they really cherish. But if you happen to be hanging out in a shop where they like to hike hang out (we have one now), or in a pub where hikers love to go (especially after a long walk on a summer day), and if you're really interested, they'll tell you a lot. And from there the possibilities just seem to explode.

**From Randi de Santa Anna, wildflower expert and nature advocate:**

I won't divulge my favorite day hike because it doesn't seem fair to the plants and critters to advertise their home. But I will say getting up into the high granite of the Missions is my preference if I only have a day to wander. Beginning my climb through the forest I make note of the abundance and location of the flowering huckleberries in anticipation of returning for the upcoming harvest. Scrambling out over the higher, rocky expanses I delight in re-experiencing spring. Melting snowfields offer moisture to the riot of wildflowers, grass, and sedge plants that fill every cranny in the rocky substrate creating stunning alpine gardens. Huge patches of yellow glacier lilies nestle in wet seeps just emerged from snow pack, purple penstemon hunkers on the leeward side of a boulder, bright pink moss campion carpets the talus slopes above. I could spend months exploring the world created by water, wind, and rock.

On a hot day my skin yearns for a high mountain baptism and I wrestle with my urge, knowing how cold the water will feel. The lake usually wins out. Dunking refreshes me, yes, but more than that, it draws me deeper into the pulse of the mountains which is what I yearn for more than anything; that way of being that exists beyond human construct, that just *is*.

**From Stan Nicholson, economist and community leader:**

Morrell Lookout to Holland Peak Hike

Grand mountains form the eastern and western edges of the Seeley Lake - Swan corridor: the Swan Front and the Bob Marshall Wilderness to the east and the Mission Mountains and Wilderness to the west. Many residents and visitors hike east or west between the sentinel peaks that define our valleys. Usually these excursions are to lower or mid-elevation lakes or wilderness destinations. The geological orientation of the mountains, make north-south exploration difficult. Consequently, some interesting potential hikes in our backcountry are rarely tried.

We frequently drive by these high shoulders of our valleys without much sense of what we are seeing. What would it be like to be up on those lofty ridges? In August 1990, a partner and I hiked from the Morrell Lookout above Seeley Lake almost to Holland Peak above Condon. We explored roughly 40 miles of this marvelous terrain. To tempt the adventurous, I offer a general description our nine-day, 40-mile walk.

Elevations of the trail-route start at 7,650 just below the Morrell Lookout, to 7,000 at several spots along the way, to 8,850 above Rumble Creek Lake and down to 4,600 at the Cooney Lookout. Some difficult terrain and orienting challenges provide interest for walkers. Over one half of the hike is on open ridges or trails, some a little difficult to find and follow. The rest of the trip is along sharp ridge tops, steep hillsides and precarious rock formations, hallmarks of these Alps-like mountains.

This is a hike for experienced hikers who wish to learn more about their front yard. Four topographical maps will be needed and should be followed religiously. Gear should be lightweight and meals must be planned to limit pack weight to 35 to 40 pounds; difficult parts of the route call for agility. Water is accessible along the route. The take off is from a saddle below the Morrell Lookout, which is 11 miles on a rough road from Cottonwood Lakes, east of Seeley Lake.

The first few days of the hike include an easy climb to Morrell Peak, a northeast turn to follow ridges above Blind Canyon, bushwhacking to join the Pyramid Mountain-Lake trail, over hill and dale, mostly hill to the lakes, east of Crescent Peak and on to George Lake. Navigating the ridges from Pyramid Lake to the lakes below Crescent Peak and on to George Lake requires some discipline to resist least-resistant instincts. Twice we wandered east with punishing down and up hikes to regain the hiking route. Mostly we used the maps and compass to override easy forward march urges. Even with mostly good route-selection discipline, there are some worthy challenges.

We spent day three getting from the lake east of Crescent Peak to a ridge campsite beyond Grizzly Basin high in the Babcock Creek drainage. For us day four was a two-mile ridge walk nearly straight west toward Sunday Mountain with Grizzly Basin to the south, then another two

miles mostly north down to the east end of George Lake. Day five was consumed by getting from George Lake to Koessler Lake, a four-mile cross country slog east of Ptarmigan Peak and Ptarmigan Mountain, high above Doctor Lake.

The route from Koessler Lake down to Upper Holland Lake is on trail as is the short ascent to Sapphire Lake. Day seven is a wonderful hike along both open and sharp ridges which provide marvelous views into the Bob and over to the high Missions. At an impassable break in the ridge, we dropped down the east side to camp near water.

For us day eight included a 1,000 foot scramble to regain the ridge from our camp at Terrace Lake. From the highest elevation on the route, at 8,850, we decided not to take a goat trail across a steep face above Rumble Creek Lake that would have brought us below Holland Peak. The one hiker that we encountered on the trip said the goat trail was safe to cross. We thought, perhaps for goats. Instead we negotiated a steep descent to the Lake. The campsite with a 1,000 foot rock face to the east and nearly a 4,000 foot drop into the Valley is a special place.

The final day was a punishing descent into the Swan Valley, which reminded us why we hiked from south to north.

### **From Guido Niederoest, engineer and volunteer lake monitor:**

#### Morrell Falls Trail

If you ever visit Seeley Lake and are the least bit interested in hiking, one of the easiest trails to take is the one to Morrell Falls. Morrell Falls can be readily reached even by non-hikers. The trail is accessed via Morrell Creek Road, which if one drives north on Highway 83 is a right hand turn a bit north of the main part of town. Once you make the turn off Highway 83 follow the signs. The trailhead is about 7 miles from the turn-off. The trail is mostly flat with only a few ups and downs unless you want to get to the top of the falls. The main trail leads you through first a lodgepole and then a mostly spruce and fir tree forest. There are two small lakes that you will come across, which I am told are good for fishing. The first will be off to the right and may not be very visible

through the forest underbrush. The second will again be to your right but a bit further along the trail. This lake though small makes a nice resting stop at about 1.8 miles from the trailhead. After crossing a well-built footbridge you will begin to hear the waterfalls, which is another 0.3 miles along the trail. The trail ends at the base of the falls where you can find several fallen trees that make a nice viewing area to take pictures. They also make a nice picnic area. The falls are most spectacular in spring with melt water run-off, though if you go too early you might encounter snow along the trail. Mid to end May is probably the best time to see the falls.

Rather than climbing the rocks, which is not recommended as they are loose and can get very slippery, and if you are a bit more energetic you can also go to the top of the falls. This short trail is a bit back from the end of the main trail and to the right. This side trail is very steep. The advantage is that you get to the top end of the falls which can also give you a nice view of the surrounding forest.

The total trail round trip distance is a bit less than 5 miles. The trail is used heavily during the summer months but since it is mostly in the trees, there is a lot of shade to help keep you cool. I prefer the quieter months so usually go in May or September.

## **Conclusion**

From a refreshing walk through Girard Grove to nine days of ridges and route finding, our neighbors have shown there are plenty of options for all. Take a hike. You'll smile more. You'll remind yourself how fortunate you are to live an amazing valley framed by the Missions and Swans.

However, if you want crowds, you still have to go to Disneyland.

Thank you to Bruce Rieman, Randi de Santa Anna, Stan Nicholson, and Guido Niederoest for sharing both information and inspiration.

Submitted by A. Lee Boman, Clearwater Resource Council board member.

## Photos for “Hiking” article

#1 Holland Lake from trail to Holland Falls

#2 Holland Lake and Clouds

#3 Glacier Lake in Missions

#4 Swan Range

#5 Rainy Lake and Swans

#6 Lake behind Crescent Peak

#7 Crescent Lake in Swans

#8 Shower over Seeley, from Mt Baldy









