

## Mount Moriah Wilderness Area

Mount Moriah is the northern part of the Snake Range, which also holds the relatively popular attraction, the Great Basin National Park in the south part of the range. Great Basin has better roads, services, and some say better features, such as the Lehman Caves and the Wheeler glacier, but Moriah has the same trees, and spectacular vistas - without the crowds. If you want to get away from it all – this might be the answer. I went with my cousins, Ann and Pat, and we didn't see another soul for the several days backpack trip.

The range includes the fifth highest peak in Nevada, at over 12,000 feet elevation. However, once up in the higher part of the range you happen upon a broad relatively flat area, making it easy to ramble around, called "The Table."

The trailhead is off of Highway 50 not far from Baker, Nevada. Turn north on county road 487, also known as Silver Creek Road. That road intersects with the Hendry's Creek Trailhead. The trailhead itself has a few shaded parking spots, but it's not really a great camping spot. The creek is fairly robust, and the trail follows it for several miles.

One of the first things we came across, which you wouldn't expect in these parts, was poison ivy. It fortunately stuck to the stream course and eventually died out as we moved up the trail. The lower part of the trail is relatively dry, but soon we came across ponderosa pines, then a few white firs, and then the cool shade of quaking aspen groves. Unfortunately there aren't many good campsites in this first part of the trail, so we found ourselves sticking our tents near the trail that night.



*The lower part of the trail, dry except near the stream*

The next morning the valley we were traversing opened up, and potential campsites abounded. The trail was fairly level up to this point and would be the same for several more miles. The night's campsite allowed us to spread out in a fine grove of quaking aspen.



*The next morning the valley opened up and the tree coverage expanded*



*The second night's camp was bathed in quaking aspen*

The next day we headed up to The Table. There was a fine forest of Engelmann spruce, punctuated here and there with white fir, Douglas-fir, limber pine, and at the higher ridges, bristlecone pine. Some guidebooks suggest that there is subalpine fir in the range, and for purposes of the conifer project I was assisting biogeographer David Charlet<sup>1</sup> with, I thought I'd have a look around for the tree. I scoured the area looking for the beautiful, slender tree, but I am very confident that the species does not exist in the area.



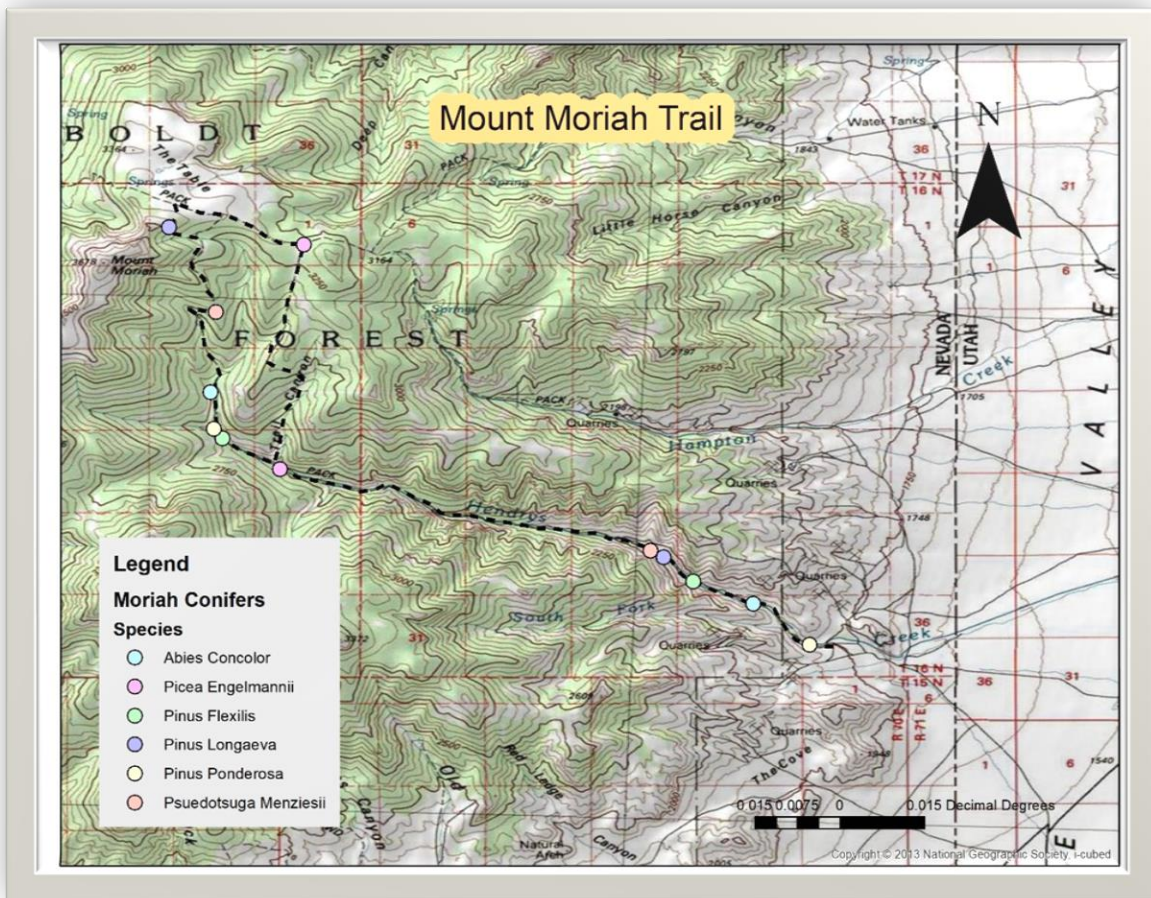
*On the edge of "The Table" where rambling is easy!*



*View from "The Table" of Mount Moriah ringed with mostly Engelmann spruce*

On the way out the next day, we chose to loop back on another trail. I spotted a Douglas-fir at a rather high elevation – over 10,000 feet. That is one of the highest ones ever recorded. We reached the Hendry's trail, and headed our way back to the trailhead. On the way Pat spotted a bristlecone pine, another tree out of its normal elevation range, like the Douglas-fir I had spotted earlier in the day. But this one was at a very low elevation – in fact it has now been verified to be the lowest one ever recorded. It is likely that its location in the bottom of a canyon, and the cold air that collects there, allowed the pine to flourish in a spot more like one at a higher elevation. This phenomenon has been suggested by many biologists.

As we drove out from the trailhead, we spotted several ponderosa pines that looked totally out of place in the shrub and dry landscape, but I suspect they benefitted from the same effects that the bristlecone pine took advantage of.



<sup>1</sup> David Charlet is compiling an exhaustive database of conifers in Nevada. He has written two books: *Conifers of Nevada* and *Mountains of Nevada*.