

A Loop Around the Strawberry Wilderness Area

Access to this fairly compact Oregon wilderness area is south of the town of Prairie City and Highway 26 in the northeast quarter of the state. The road from town is bordered by ponderosa pines and starts out as mostly gravel then climbs into a fairly bumpy, dirt road on its way to the Strawberry Trailhead. A surprising treat at the trailhead were some huckleberries that my hiking partner cousin Ann pointed out.

The trail starts out a little over 5700 feet elevation and aims toward Strawberry Lake, but before we got to the lake, we veered northeast up a moderately steep trail and routed around a spur. The trail levels out as far as your gain, but is on the side of a very steep slope, with many rain-eroded spots. It then descends a little to Slide Lake. On the way I identified Douglas-fir, Engelmann spruce, lodgepole pine, and grand fir. I have read that white pine and western larch are in the area, but didn't see any. The southeast view from Slide Lake showed a classic example of layered volcanic extrusions.



Those delicious huckleberries Ann found!



Steeper trail on the ridge leaving the trailhead, but look at the flowers!



My campsite among lodgepole pine at Slide Lake



Volcanic layering above Slide Lake

After a relaxing night among a ponderance of lodgepole pine, we headed up and over the ridge towards High Lake. On this section of the trail we came across one of the many burn areas that have sprouted up over the last several years.



Midway between Slide and High Lakes



Cousin Ann peering over a burn area. Mud Lake is in distance.

High lake sat in a beautiful southern-facing cirque. As we hiked around the lake, we found a fairly generous spring that may be the main source of the lake's water. The lake was teeming with small to medium sized trout. The lake was ringed with Engelmann spruce. I also came across a few common junipers.

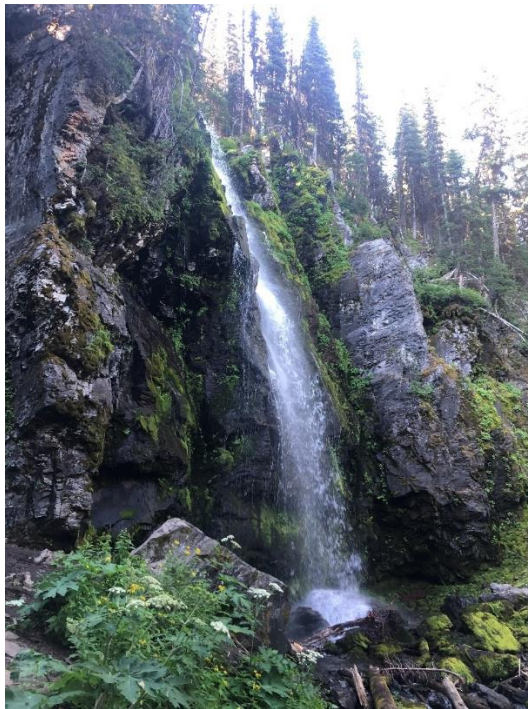


High Lake in a partial burn area



Common juniper

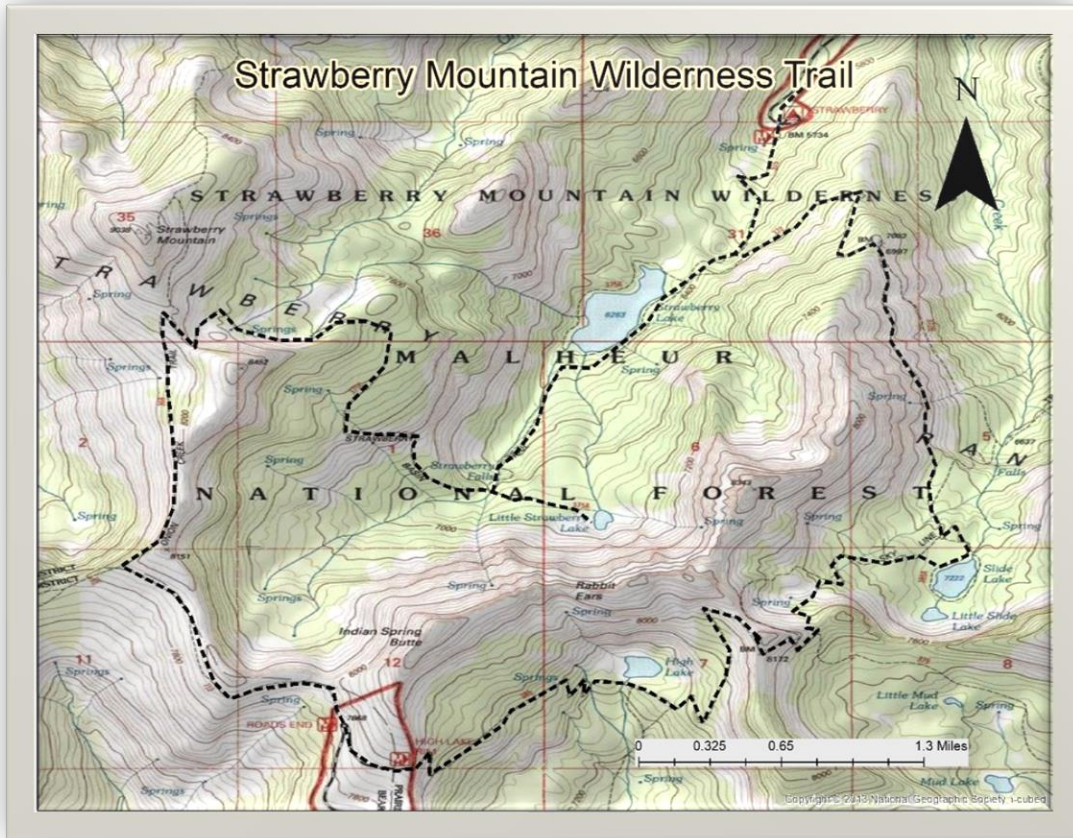
The next morning we hiked up the slope to the High Lakes Trailhead, which can also be reached by a decent dirt road from the south. We hiked along this access road for a few hundred meters before a trail turned toward a ridgeline that headed towards Strawberry Peak. I chose to forgo that ascent, due to my old legs, and instead headed east through a very pleasant and well-watered basin, and then descended down a moderate slope to the south. Strawberry Falls was a nice picture break (see below) before we headed off the main trail towards Upper Strawberry Lake. This lake was fairly busy with backpackers and day hikers, so if you want solitude, you might skip this one. The next day we had a short hike past Strawberry Lake, and to the trailhead.



Strawberry Falls



Strawberry Lake on our way out



All photos and maps by Bob Earle