

Old Beetop : Not Easy, But Worth It

March 20, 2006

Beetop Mountain has been in our neighborhood for a very long time. Recently she saw settlers move in with their bustle and machines, preceded barely two hundred years by the moccasined foot of David Thompson. The Kalispell Indians were here before David, but a few thousands of years earlier, Beetop enjoyed one of the best seats in the house for repeat performances of the extravagant Glacial Lake Missoula Show, climaxed each time by the Big Flood.

Because of her longevity, her familiarity and proximity, her roadlessness, and her beauty, the Conservation Committee of the Kinnikinnick Chapter of the Idaho Native Plant Society (KCINPS) decided at the invitation of the Idaho Conservation League to “adopt” old Beetop. The “adoption” process is simply to ask Idahoans to visit one of their existing Inventoried Roadless Areas, and if appropriate, to ask the governor and others to help conserve these special places for future generations. As a bonus, we would be helping to safeguard our clean air and water, our healthy wildlife populations, our pristine forests and native plants, and all the time show our North Idaho values while promoting a sustainable form of economic growth for our region.

The 6,212 foot summit of Beetop can be reached on foot by several routes, but none are particularly short or easy. The most straightforward approach would be from the beginning of Forest Service Trail 120 just outside Clark Fork. Unfortunately, there is currently no public access to this trailhead which would launch you straight up 47 switchbacks towards Beetop. In late August, a group from the Conservation Committee chose another interesting route beginning at Porcupine Lake, which is about an 1 ½ hour drive on Forest Service Road 419 from Clark Fork. A 4WD vehicle is required to ford two creeks, and to make the final ascent up a rough and rocky road to the lake. From there, we

bushwhacked up an old, unmaintained Forest Service trail for about two hours while gaining a thousand feet in elevation up to Trail 120. Along the way, we passed through several habitats with a menagerie of native plants: pink monkey flower, Erigeron daisies, pearly everlasting, hellebores, devil's club, monk's hood, lovage, and thankfully, a few huckleberries. We were then rewarded with spectacular views of Lake Pend Oreille on the one side, and the Porcupine drainage on the other. It was then time to strike out eastward along the ridge trail for another two to three hours to Beetop.

The view from Beetop is spectacular in all directions. To the west, the Monarchs and the mountains of the Sagle Peninsula frame the arms of Lake Pend Oreille. Lurking in the distance, the Selkirks peer over Sandpoint's shoulder. Southward, at the finish of the much traveled Clark Fork River, the hamlet of Clark Fork strategically sits at the entrance to the Cabinet Gorge. Looking up the immense Lightning Creek drainage to the north towards Canada, the western spine of the Cabinet Range is laid out for viewing. Eastward towards Montana, across the cut carved by Lightning Creek some 3500 feet below, the Scotchman wilderness abruptly entrains your view with its powerful and rugged sweep into the horizon.

Beetop Mountain is an Inventoried Roadless Area in the Idaho Panhandle National Forest and, as always, is open for visitors – hunters, fishers, hikers, bikers, lookers, campers, birders, berrypickers, and photographers. Plants and animals are able to stay behind after these respectful visitors leave. We think Beetop should stay that way forever– a roadless area for all to savor and enjoy.

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