GRAY WOLF / BCH-PENINSULA TRAIL CREW NOTES

10/18-10/20/2024
Location:
Upper Lena, Olympic National Park
(Stock okay to Lower Lena – impossible to Upper Lena)

Crew members:

Rebecca Wanagel
Martin Knowles
Paul Kamps
Bernt Ericsen
Ted Spoon
Randy Kraxberger
Dan Saul
Eric Nagle

Packers:

Rachael Taylor-Tuller and Matthew Tuller

- Woody (leader, certified Search and Rescue Horse)
- Blue (horse)
- Possi (Haflinger)
- Biskit (Haflinger)
- Maizey (Haflinger Mule)
- Noomi (28-year-old miniature horse)

Estimated On-Trail Volunteer Hours: 188

Report written by Rebecca.

Objectives met:

- Maintained the trail from Lower Lena Lake to Upper Lena. (approximately 4 miles). Logout (a couple dozen logs, some of them extremely problematic for hikers), drainage, brushing and tread work.

We camped at Lower Lena Lake and worked the trail from there. The trail to get to Lower Lena is in great shape and a nice, steady grade the whole way. Very stock friendly except for one bridge that is too narrow, so the packers have to unload and reload there every time. In fact, this trail makes the lower lake so accessible that it's normally mobbed with people during the summer months. Because we chose to do this in late October – and an extremely rainy weekend at that – it was very quiet. We saw no-one on the Upper Lena trail.

For those of you who don't know, the Upper Lena trail is nothing like lower. It is rough, steep and then steeper and has spots that would more accurately be described as a scramble rather than a hike. For this reason, and the fact that we were working in a two-day deluge, we had to stop at about 3 miles. However, the trees that were causing hikers real problems were all below that point, and we cleared them all.

We broke into three teams: two saw teams (Rebecca and Randy, Bernt, Paul and Martin) and one tread team (Eric, Dan, and Ted). The tread team dealt with whatever drainage problems they could fix, brushing some encroaching bushes, and making the tread more walkable in many places. The saw teams had some complex problems that made us scramble up on the wet hillside in the pouring rain to better analyze what we were dealing with. But we got it done safely.

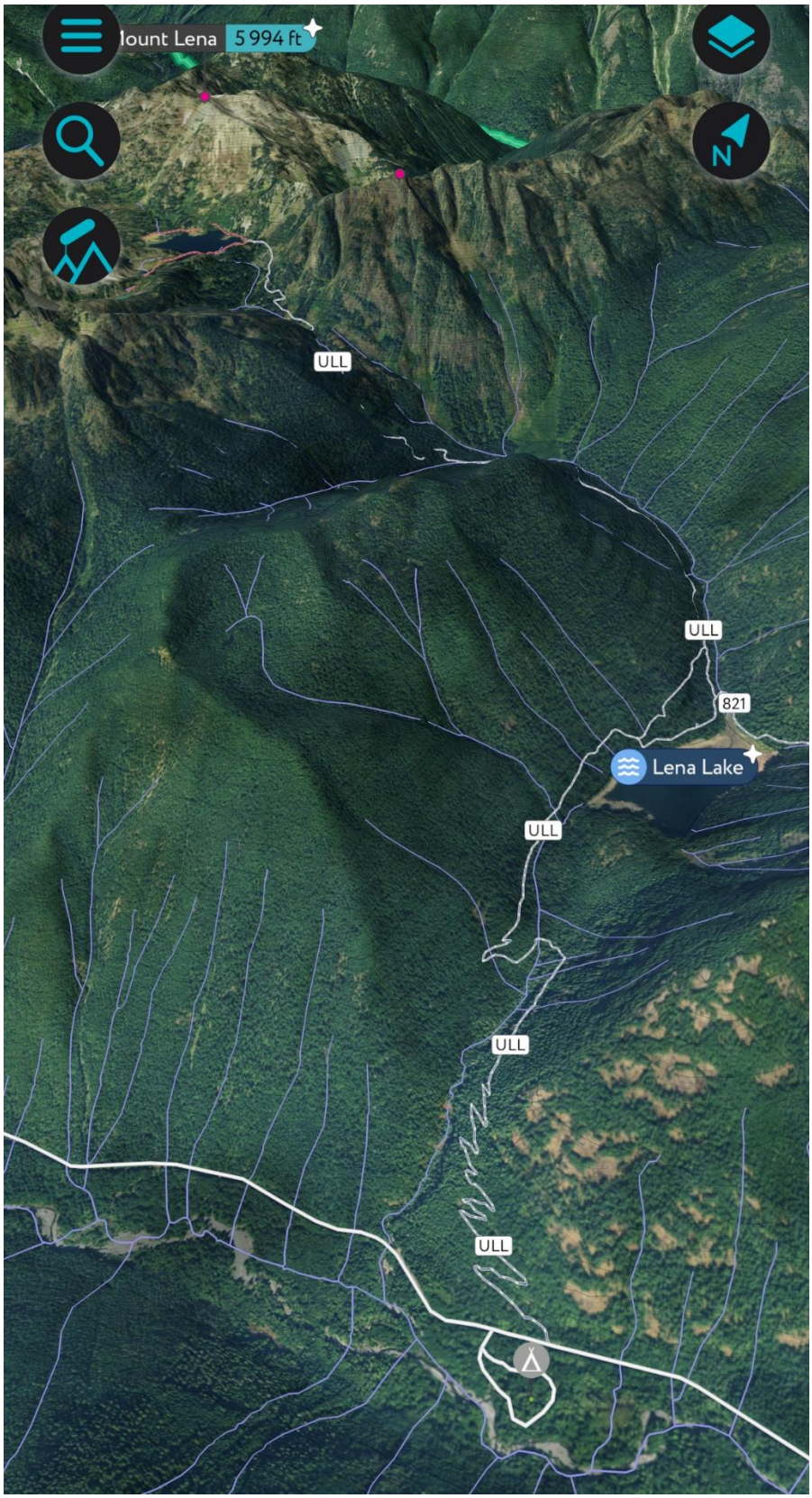
Lower Lena has a fascinating history! Dan alerted us to this history and Eric found this link for us:

https://wa100.dnr.wa.gov/olympicpeninsula/lena-lake

It has a great animation showing how Lena Lake was formed by a ginormous landslide about 1300 years ago which dammed Lena Creek. That explains why we could see tree stumps in the lake with its water level down low, a site you wouldn't normally see in a natural lake.

A moody picture of Lower Lena Lake, caught by Ted. It shows all the curious tree stumps that make you wonder how this lake was formed.
It also shows the water line of the normal lake level, to which it will rise again over the winter.
It rained enough while we were there that the lake level started to rise again ever so slightly.

Here is a map to help you visualize. The trailhead is at the lower right. Upper Lena Lake is in the upper left. Lower Lena, where we camped, is in the middle. For interest and orientation, that green line behind Mt. Lena is the Duckabush trail.



(Musings from Rebecca …)

I thought of a deeply ironic fact this weekend:

Back in the days of the Press Expedition and O'Neil Expeditions, how did they stay warm? The answer was wool which, we all know, can keep you warm even when it's wet. So today, with all our modern technology, we have this fabulous rain gear and high-tech gaiters and waterproof boots … yet when all that gortex wets entirely through – which it did – what do we end up relying on to keep us warm? Of course - our wet wool base layers.

Anyhow, many thanks again to our packers, Rachael and Matthew Tuller. Without them and their trusty team, we would not have been able to do this trip. They packed to our tools and equipment to and from Lower Lena lake.

Rachael, Biskit and Noomi arriving at the drop off point.

Getting everyone settled for unloading

Our trusty packers, Rachael and Matthew

One of the first messes we came across.

I'll bet you didn't know that we keep track of everything we cut. When we do work for the ONP, we actually have to keep track of the diameter and number of cuts for every single tree, which I report to the trails supervisor, Nathan Forrest. We know our individual hand spans, which is how we measure the diameter.

This one had an overhanging rootball that the team had to analyze. After the cut, the rootball settled but, as predicted correctly by the team, did not fall or roll. With experience we can usually read whether or not a rootball is going to move much. It usually depends on whether the tree tipped over in its spot or got ripped out and slid there from further up. This one must have simply tipped over, so it still had roots anchored.

This project looks deceptively simple. It was relatively simple to cut, other that the fact that the cedar split and slabbed when it hit. That makes it more likely it will bind the saw. What made this complex was what you can't see because we didn't get a before picture. There was another tree, a 12" fir, suspended over our heads. The cedar we were cutting had two parts: one that would cut and remain stable, and one that would drop when cut, causing movement. There were a few other trees resting on top of them on the messy hillside. Before we got to the point that you see in this picture, Randy and I were scrambling on the wet hillside to analyze exactly what was going on with the whole picture. That was how we figured out there was no possible way for the overhead tree to drop on us (it was connected to a tipped over rootball that had solid embedded roots), and how the movement of the cedar would affect the whole picture.

In the end, after all that analyzing and consideration, the cut was anti-climactic, just the way we like it.

Another simple-looking cut, and this one was not complex. The hard part is actually getting down into a squat to cut it wearing protective chaps or saw pants (depending on each sawyer's choice) and all our many layers of clothing. This is Bernt in the picture, but I kept thinking the whole time that I was moving like the Pillsbury Dough Boy. 😊

It does factor into our safety that we not only can't be as agile due to our clothing and wetness, but everything we're walking on is extremely slippery.

We pay attention to whether or not a trail we're working on is a stock trail.
This one to Upper Lena is in no way, shape or form intended or fit for stock, so we cut to hiker standard widths.

This 42" log had a reputation. It was impossible to get over or around, and extremely difficult to squeeze under. But it's wide open now.

Nature never takes a break. This picture was taken just 600 feet from the trailhead. The packers had arrived at Lower Lena to pick up our equipment on Sunday morning. Martin and I headed down to meet them at the trailhead. Just as we're about to arrive at the cars, we discover this that had fallen sometime in the previous hour or less, after the packers had gone through on their way up.

All of our tools and PPE were on the stock animals who were about 45 minutes behind us. Fortunately, we had two hand saws in the car, and the tree was a multi-stemmed maple with the largest stem being only about 10". I took this picture after we had already cleared a couple of the stems. We got this opened back up literally just as the pack string arrived. Great timing!

Lesson learned: put gear on the mules, but hang on to one good sized hand saw and maybe a pair of gloves. 😉