

## TRAIL CREW NOTES

8/12 – 8/19/23

Location: Duckabush Trail, ONP

Crew members:

Rebecca Wanagel  
Martin Knowles  
Paul Kamps  
Randy Kraxberger

Packer:

Harold Wiese with Sugar (lead), Magic, Katie and Archie

Estimated Volunteer Hours:

Crew: 300

Human Packers: 18

TOTAL LOGS CLEARED = ABOUT 170

(Hours do not include driving time, admin, organization and prep time, stock care and prep time, camping time, etc. Only active working time.)

Report written by Rebecca.

Objective:

1. Clear the logs on the Duckabush trail from the ONP boundary (mile 6.5) to Lacrosse Pass trail junction (mile 15.5).
2. If time, clear the lower half-mile of Lacrosse Pass trail due to the deteriorated condition.

We've done this many times before ... clear the Duckabush from the ONP boundary onward (previously it was leading WTA crews). This time, however, we wanted to keep going past the Ten Mile Camp stopping point we've always done before. The Duckabush, as you likely know, has suffered from two forest fires in relatively recent years. The Big Hump fire in September 2011 was human-campfire-caused and devastated the forest and trail from Five Mile Camp outward in both directions in the Brothers Wilderness of the Forest Service. This section had already been cleared (as it is every single year, sometimes twice, by Al Mashburn's WTA crews with crosscut saws), so we were able to get Harold's animals through at least to the Five Mile Camp region (with the exception of one tree we had to take out with a Katanaboy on the way in). You might remember the story of the two huge trees we took out above 5 Mile Camp with a Forest Service chain saw waiver, follow up tread work done by Al's WTA crew. That allowed the animals through.

The 2009 fire was lightning and heat-caused and was up more towards the Ten Mile area. That has left its mark as well. In both areas, trees continue to drop by the dozens every single year. We had two years in a row where we cleared approximately 80 trees from the ONP boundary to Ten Mile Camp (4.25 miles). This year was no exception. However, we didn't clear it last year, so in that same stretch there were 97 downed logs across the trail of all sizes. Past that there were another 59 logs to get to Lacrosse Pass junction (which is 9 miles from the boundary).

The Duckabush seems to have a mind and an evil sense of humor. It knows when we're about to work hard and it adjusts its weather accordingly. Both Martin and Rebecca have done dozens of work trips on this trail ever since 2012, and the weather always seems to be either insanely rainy and cold, or beastly hot. Guess which one it was this time? Not only that, the Duckabush even knows WHERE we're going to be working on which day and adjusts its weather accordingly. Not only was the thermostat cranked way up, but it happened to be at its highest during the two days we were cutting through shadeless burn zones. Go figure.

Yet, I keep thinking the Duckabush will change. One of these days the scarred and damaged or dead trees will run out and there will be no more to fall. One of these days the Duckabush Valley will have moderate, lovely and perfect weather. The first is likely to happen sometime after my lifetime. The second happens all the time, just not when we are sawing there.

The rugged beauty of the Duckabush, like most of the wild river drainages of the Olympics, is a treasure to behold.

Enjoy the story.

SATURDAY, AUGUST 12



Rebecca had gone ahead to find a suitable drop off spot somewhere closer to Claire's Rock, a point that the animals cannot safely pass through. We knew we were going to have to schlep camp and tools from here.



It wasn't a perfect spot – a small campsite off the trail by the river. It was a bit tight and the duff was quite loose. Not ideal but Harold made it work.



Right next to the river, though. That's always pretty.



Harold and Rebecca walked the 150 yards to the long-standing trouble spot directly before the infamous "Clair's Rock." As horses / mules go around this corner and navigate that big step from either direction, their boxes will hit the rock and they will get pushed into the river below. After this trip I found out that this spot has been a concern by packers for many, many years. Nothing has ever been done. This spot is the reason we couldn't have the gear packed any farther.

After this we schlepped our camp gear to 7 Mile Camp (about 1.75 miles from the drop off point). Set up camp, snacked and lapped back to get the tools to move them forward to the first logs to cut tomorrow morning, inside the ONP boundary.

Today's hiking mileage: about 11. Today's temps: climbing

SUNDAY, AUGUST 13



Sunday morning, bright and early, we're at it. Martin and Paul teamed up and started in with this 38" log that was closer to 7 Mile Camp than to the boundary.



Randy and Rebecca teamed up to cut out all the rest of the logs from the boundary to camp. We ended up finishing our 16 logs in nearly the same time it took them to do the big one, which was what we figured.



The big one went according to plan, which is always a good thing when the log is large and exceedingly heavy.



Randy and Rebecca also had no issues, bouncing along cutting out all the small and medium sized logs littering the trail.



Cool picture of Paul with the sawdust flying.



Paul and Martin climbing on the jungle gym to analyze an overhead tree. Randy and Rebecca had already cut out a log underneath it.



Plan made. Martin started the release cut.



All went to plan and we cut out the rotten one too.



Pretty views from 7 Mile Camp.

Today's hiking mileage: 3.25 Today's temps: Very Hot.

## MONDAY, AUGUST 14



The bars we had with us were 20" and 28". So when a log is larger than that (this log was 38"), we simply cut from both sides. This is where we really team up. Rather than one person climbing over the log to do both cuts, we have one person do the offside cut and then the other person does the finish cut. Here Randy is giving the pretense that he's bored, but he's actually primed and ready to do the finish cut as soon as I saw through the bottom of my side.



Randy doing a finish cut while I was digging out for the next cut. We need to make sure we have at least a little space under the log so as not to drive the chain into the dirt.



Another job well done.



The brush was a constant. First it was bad and then it got worse.



Cedar trees oftentimes take more time to limb than they do to cut the actual tree.



This was a fun project except for the fact that the heat was really cranking up high by now and this project was in the sun.



But we persevered. We kept taking turns with the cuts letting the other person stand in what shade we could find (head-high salmonberry bushes would have to do). This project ended up being maybe an hour and a half or so – lots of rounds.



While Randy and Rebecca were working on that last log, Martin and Paul made progress through the heart of the burn zone. Zero shade. Burning temps. Our shirts were literally dripping. Paul got this action-filled shot of two projects going on at once. After this we were happy to come across a nearby cool, stream-side shady spot that felt like an oasis.

After a good long shady break to recover, we moved on to what would be the last project we could stand in the heat. I don't have good pictures of that one, for some reason even though it was about an hour-long project, but we cut to what I call "River Camp" which is a small camp spot right at river level at about 3 miles from the boundary. Back to our camp for a hot night.

Today's mileage: 4.5 Today's temps: Unbearable.

## TUESDAY, AUGUST 15



We started today with packing up camp and moving it from 7 Mile Camp to Ten Mile Camp (3.5 miles). Set up camp, snacked and then hiked 1.25 miles back to where we left our tools. So by the time we started sawing, it was already too hot.

Paul and Martin ended up with this project that was in the SHADE when we first went through. But things changed before they got there. At least it was directly over a stream. This log was super obnoxious for hikers to get over and took a lot of cutting because it ran in the trail for a ways.



Making great progress. The rounds were heavy. No doubt they had soaked up some of that water.



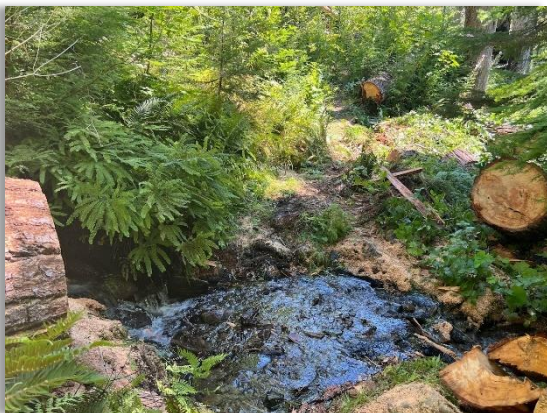
Meanwhile Randy and Rebecca found a mess. Hikers had created a whole new side trail to get around this.



We had quite a bit of steep sidehill work to deal with in order to clean this mess up.



We drank liter after liter of water, making sure to put electrolyte powder in every single one to avoid cramping and other problems associated with excessive sweating and extremely hot temps.



Really hard work. Amazing job.





Randy was the master billet remover. He could wrestle and toss even the heaviest of them. I was happy to let him have the fun.



I did some tread clean up and this mess was completely cleared. We tossed all the debris, of which there was a lot, onto the side trail to "decommission" it. We all had to stop. The heat was killing us.

Today's hiking mileage: 6. Today's temps: Extremely, miserably unbearable.



AAAAAHHHHHHH ..... the beauty and coolness of the Duckabush River to the rescue. This is where we spent the evening because it was too hot to hang out up by the tents.

WEDNESDAY, AUGUST 16



This cedar has been my nemesis (picture taken the evening before as this tree was on the climb out of camp so we went to go look at it). I have hiked the Duckabush too many times to count and for a decade I have crawled under this thing with a full pack, swearing at it.



Paul and Martin have plans for this thing.



And it's gone! I'll never crawl under this again! Smelled good.



Meanwhile, Randy and Rebecca backtracked to finish the trail coming in to Ten Mile Camp. We worked through this slide section (picture taken on the 2<sup>nd</sup> to last day, thus the clouds which were not actually there when we worked on this but we did it at about 6:30 am to avoid the worst of the heat). This is a problematic area. We've cut here at least a few times before and, as you can see, they slide down again.

Randy and I cleaned this up pretty well and roughed in better tread. However, we opted to leave those two trees you can see sticking in the trail. We would have had to push them and the rootball off, which will bring down a torrent of logs and big rocks from up above. We opted out. Stock isn't using this trail now anyway, due to a host of other problems. So when the ONP goes in to give this trail a bunch of backlogged work, they can take care of this.



Finally! We are now cutting along the trail west of Ten Mile Camp. Done With The Burn Zone!! We were so happy to be back in the shady forest, and also this stretch of trail offers some delightful views of the river as a work backdrop, as you can see behind Randy in this picture.

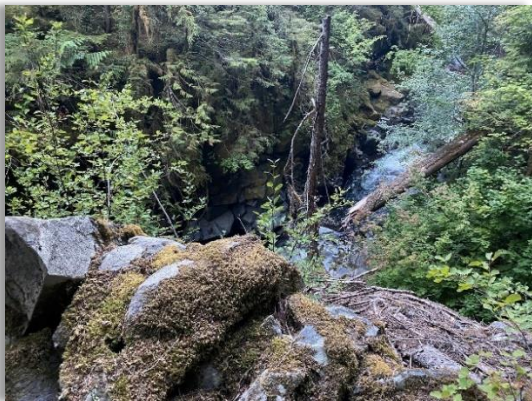


For a decade, this tree has been the one I slip myself and my pack over and say, "About a mile from camp!" I'll probably still say that as I breeze through the now wide open gap.

If you look carefully, you can see that I don't have a kerf on the top yet but I'm obviously sawing. What we do a lot is bore straight in the log in a few inches below the top, and saw up to get the kerf started. This avoids dulling the chain on the debris that has come down on top of the log and in the bark. Toothpick taught me that trick.



This tree is a stock blocker and has been there for as long as I can remember. It's about 5.5-6 feet diameter and the top of it is consistently about 10 feet off the ground. ONP will either have to reroute around it, blast it or figure out a creative way to saw something so high. We ducked under it and kept going.



The views were relentless. 😊



Aromatherapy! Paul and Martin cut this cedar that looked normal on the outside but turned out to be an extremely pungent Alaskan Yellow Cedar. The earthy, grounding aroma was so strong we could tell we were approaching the tree long before we reached it. Lovely.



We sawed until we got to the Crazy Creek confluence and took a snack break there. This is a really special spot. It's where Crazy Creek, which tumbles off the back side of Mt. Skok, slams into the Duckabush normally with amazing power and 3 waterfalls (only one here due to the extremely low water levels). The rocks have been sculpted to extraordinary and interesting shapes.



For comparison, I took this in June of 2019. The water level is hugely different!

We got back to it after lounging at Crazy Creek for a while, and sawed for about another ½ mile. Then back to camp.

Today's hiking mileage: 6.5. Today's temps: still hot, we still struggled but not nearly as bad. Partly because the heat was starting to abate, and mostly because we were in the shady forest.

## THURSDAY, AUGUST 17



Today was our longest day. We had a goal of sawing to the Lacrosse Pass trail junction. And then if we got there and had time and energy to spare, I wanted to clear the first ½ mile of Lacrosse Pass trail, because it was the worst of the whole trail by far. There was a tree at the half-mile mark that was a struggle for hikers to get by, and the trail had been destroyed from people crawling under the tree. That became our goal if we felt like we could do it.

So here we are, we made it to Lacrosse Pass junction, about 160 total tree projects under our belts. It was only about noon, so we decided to go ahead with the Lacrosse Pass goal itself.

We had to hike 2.75 miles just to start today's work.



This is the problem tree on Lacrosse Pass trail. Tread completely torn up because there was no way to go around or over this tree – only a pack-off scramble under.



Paul and Martin got this tree – the last one of the trip – because it was high to get it started.



Almost done!



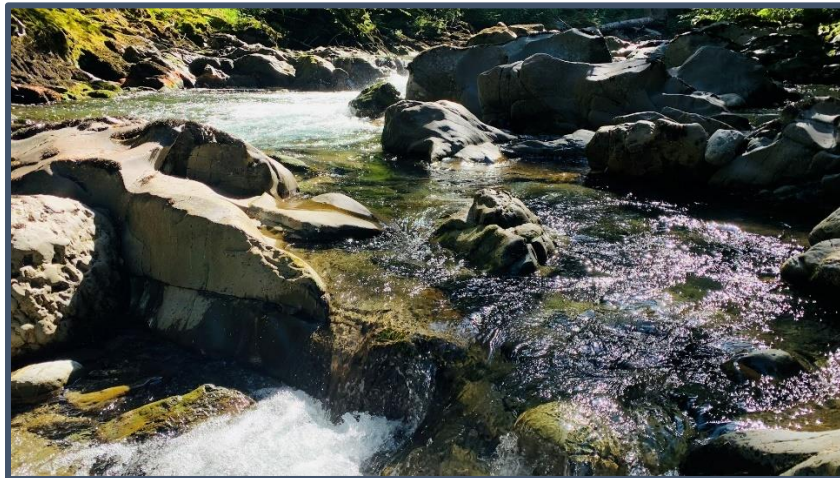
DONE! Randy thought of that extra touch of using a wedge they cut out as a step for hikers since the trail was so badly outsloped.

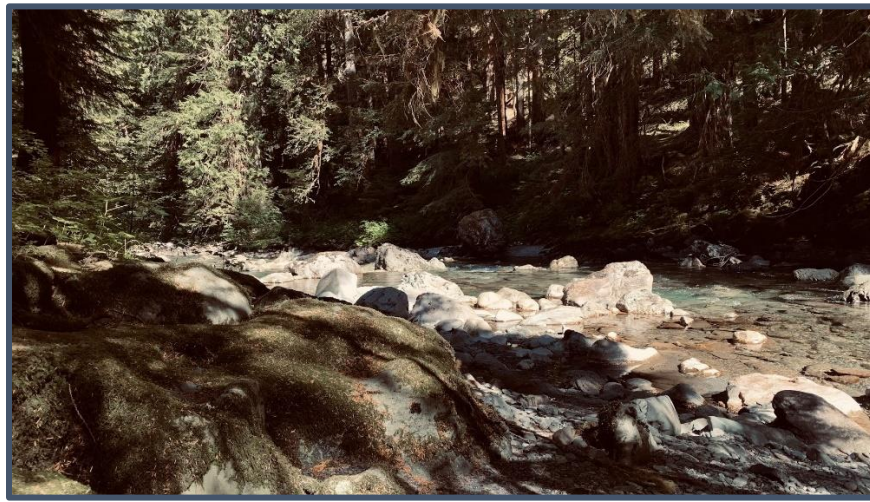
Then we had a long 5.2 mile hike back to camp with tools this time. It was hot and we were tired.

Today's hiking mileage about 10.5. Today's temps: workable in the shade but the hike back seemed hot because we were carrying tools back to camp and it was a long day. We left camp at 6:00 am and got back around 7:00 pm.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 18

Today we had to hike the tools from Ten Mile Camp to about ¼ mile east of 5 Mile Camp, and then go back to Ten Mile for the night. It was a 12 mile round trip hike – heavy going there and light as a feather coming back. Our legs were tired from ... well ... the entire week leading up to this. We got back to camp in the early afternoon and spent the rest of the day happily resting. Some pretty pictures were taken:





SATURDAY, AUGUST 19:



So! All the tools are back at 5 Mile. We get up and get going early from Ten Mile because we have a 6 mile hike and don't want to be late meeting Harold. Not far out of Ten Mile I was looking at my feet for a bit, to not trip on some rocks and roots. I look back up and what do I see? Yep. This 28" snag came down during the night while we slept.

And us without so much as a nail file for a tool.

Poetic.



We got back to the tools and we were thrilled to hear Harold on the radio, telling us he was already at the top of Big Hump. He showed up not long after that.

Randy was playing with the filters on his phone camera.



Of course we had to get a picture of the 3 sawyers from the big tree project of April and May.

It's amazing to watch a skilled packer and well-trained animals at work.



**Harold on Sugar**



**Magic**



**Katie**



**Archie**



We loaded up and hiked out, passing many dozens of hikers who were enthralled at seeing the animals and Harold at work! Our total hiking mileage for today was 11. That brought us to a grand total of about 67 miles for the trip, much of it loaded with heavy tools. No incidents on the way out. We got back to the parking lot, unloaded the animals and headed out for a burger and beer at the Geoduck, for which we had been lusting for a couple of days. 😊

And that's a wrap for this season's backcountry crews.

