

Adventure in Pistol Creek Canyon

Volunteer work project with the Idaho Trails Association (ITA), Squaw Butte BCH, and the Selway- Bitterroot Frank Church Foundation

(July 7th through July 10th for me)

I really love getting out into the wilderness! I like to think my volunteer efforts will somehow make a difference. So, I pack my gear and head off into a world without cell phones, roads or.... plumbing.

I left on Saturday morning heading for a place called Snowshoe Cabin in the Frank Church Wilderness of Idaho. I had never been in that area and was curious about the land. My first night was spent in a little clearing, my tent was several feet from a small creek I could hear as I gazed out my tent's window at the purple shooting stars (lovely flower) as the sun was setting. Yep....it was very, very nice.

The next morning was quite warm, especially for the 8,000 ft. elevation. We broke camp and headed down, way down, into the valley of Pistol Creek, working as we went. Lucky for us we had the support of a group of the Backcountry Horseman of Idaho. The group carried our food, kitchen, tools and our camping gear. The trail we worked on is used by packers and their horses and hikers, so it makes sense that these horseman would be willing to come out and help in this way. We started out ahead of them and began clearing the trail of fallen trees, cut back brush, restore drainage; just trying to open up the trail. Hard work, and it was HOT.

So, that's the background.

What got to me was the HEAT. The Pistol Creek area was burned to a crisp several years ago. There are very few pines large enough to provide shade and though there is water, the lack of places to take shelter from the sun was something I found threatening and disheartening. I failed to drink enough water to counter the effect of these conditions and began to dehydrate. Of course I KNEW that I should be drinking all the time, thought I was drinking enough...but I didn't. So, I got sick. Sickness was progressive. I managed to work that first day and worked half of the following day. The next morning I awoke unable work; I stayed at our camp and later found I was unable to retain food or fluids. I tried to cool myself down by using the creek's icy waters and sheltering in the scant shady spots at our camp. This did help initially, as the sun was still low in the sky. But as the day went on the sun grew higher and the shade disappeared, leaving only the dark interior of the old cabin at our camp and its narrow shadow. I sat inside that cabin until it too become too hot. I did use the creek to sponge myself but should have gone into the creek and sat there. I might have stayed under the few living trees by our camp, but when I tried that, I encountered a tick within 10 seconds. I HATE TICKS! Choices! I didn't make the best choices. (Being dehydrated causes fuzzy thinking!)

The horsemen had left the camp that morning and returned a few hours later. I believe they had taken lunch to our volunteer group and an ITA crew that was working to clean several miles of trail farther on. I don't know exactly when they returned to camp I only know that I was in rough shape by then. It was determined that I needed medical help and must attempt to leave. I would like to commend Rob Adams for his excellent judgment and kind consideration in making sure that I reached much needed medical help on Tuesday, 7/10/2012. I didn't really want to bail on the project and I didn't want a helicopter ride, so I asked for alternatives. He said if I could manage the long ride he would take me. That's what happened. He gave me a fine, gentle horse and we rode 4 hours to Sand Creek where we "changed rides" and drove to Landmark airstrip where we were met with both an ambulance and a helicopter. Mr. Adams remained close by until my departure in the ambulance. Fortunately, I am now nearly recovered and will no doubt be 100% tomorrow.

Hanging around camp being sick gave me a better chance to talk with all of the horsemen. Good guys all!

Rob Adams (he owned the horses) and though he and the horses had already had several hours of riding he offered to take me by horseback out of the wilderness and make sure that I got the help I needed. It took us four hours to reach his truck at Sand Creek. I was tired and my bum was sore but I knew I would be fine. (I later learned that the project was considered complete and everyone came out the following day.)

Now my trips into the beautiful wild will be even more valuable to me. The wilderness is special, and as I read in a Stephen King novel, nature has teeth and it can bite you any time it wants. I learned so much on this trip that I know I will be processing all of it for years to come. There is a bond between these wild places and the people who enjoy being in them. I've found wonderful friends there. If I am well and strong enough, I will go again in just a couple of weeks.

So that's my story!

Mary Kay Netolick

p.s.

I want to thank Kestrel, the teddy bear mustang I rode, for being the strong and gentle soul he is. That was a long and steep climb out of Pistol Creek and he never complained even though it was hot and he must have been tired before we started.