

## ALL Mt. Hood Hiking Collection, 2006-2016

We've Been A Long Way, Baby Sistah's... and Baby Brother-In-Law



Left to Right: (top) Elk Cove trail, McNeil Point trail – early summer, McNeil Point trail - fall; (middle) Wyeast Basin, Cooper Spur shelter, Bald Mountain; (bottom) near Zigzag canyon, me and my sexy gaiters - McNeil Point, Gnarl Ridge and upper Newton Creek

### Introduction

After 10 years in Oregon, I visited Mt. Hood for the first time in 2006. Like Mt. Baker, Hood is not a national park; some sections are recreational, others wilderness. The most rewarding trail access points (e.g. Cooper Spur and Lolo area) look close on a map, but are less so when you try to drive them because they are rough and confusing roads. Consequently, hiking Hood is not as crowded as I thought it would be based on its proximity to Portland. Also challenging, there are no developed backcountry camps, there are few bridges (which means lots of FORDING, and people have drowned fording big rivers like the Sandy in high water), and the Timberline is still officially closed at Eliot Creek, owing to mudslides. Thankfully, I am not obsessed with hiking the Timberline (40 miles, 8000 feet up/down) because most is at the tree-line - with FAR better views available via any number of unofficial scrambles above the main trail/woods. The following collection represents nearly everything I've done at or near Hood – working forward in time. In 2015, I did remove a few “poor” hikes – those are listed at the very end of this report.



Left to Right: Allison (OMG – LOOK AT THAT HAIR!) at PCT sign near Timberline Lodge, Sand Canyon, fording Zigzag Creek

### August, 2006 - Plans Go Up In Smoke

Up until the night before, our goal was to backpack the Timberline over 4 days (including 1 night en route at the Timberline Lodge). A week before our planned trip, the forecast was awesome and all plans looked great for the backpack and booked lodge date to merge. But, alas, other forces were at work against us: namely, fires. Indeed, half the Timberline shut down (major sections on fire) the day before we left - all trailheads along the north and east were inaccessible. Oh well – we still had Timberline Lodge booked and we decided to enjoy a couple days doing reconnaissance daytrips. I don't remember when we left Salem but I know that when we arrived at Timberline that it was cold, with clouds rapidly dispersing from around the mountain. We also were sufficiently late that I reduced

expectations about doing all of Paradise Park - particularly given that we had 7:30 p.m. dinner reservations. But the trail - at least initially - was gentle and scenic, dropping for most of the first 4 miles. The terrain on this side of Hood reminded me of the climbers' route up St. Helens: sandy, rocky gully after sandy, rocky gully. After 3.5 miles, the 500-foot drop into Zigzag Canyon was impressive. At the bottom, our only bona fide bridgeless river crossing was encountered across Zigzag Creek. While Allison was taken aback (for no good reason, she admitted later), I found the swift little channel of water unthreatening. Even so, it was above-the-ankle cold water. Given good progress, we decided to take the first spur trail (relative to the main Timberline) to Paradise Park: a 1-mile climb about 1000 feet up from the bottom of Zigzag Canyon. Sufficed to say, this climb - in conjunction with that out of Zigzag on the way back - made us reduce our time in Paradise Park. After reaching the first meadows - bursting with blooms that almost rivaled Rainier/Paradise - we decided to take the next spur trail back down to the Timberline (vs. traversing all the meadows and taking another spur). The mileage difference was 0.7 miles (our shortcut loop) vs. 3.8 (the official longer loop).



Left to Right: various shots of the Zigzag Canyon area - above from south, descending, creek, Allison in Paradise Park, returning

We made it back to Timberline Lodge with 90 minutes to spare - so it's hard to say whether we could have made the complete loop. While our climb out of Zigzag Canyon seemed fast and efficient, the meandering trail back to the lodge was painfully SLOW - even though, like I said, we had plenty of time to check in to our room and clean up. Although our room was overall nice (luxurious beds with great quilts and pillows and a generally good bathroom), it was small and the walls were paper-thin. We also enjoyed a nice view south to Mt. Jefferson; rooms with views of Mt. Hood cost more and were booked a couple months before. Even after unpacking, showering, and changing, we still had an hour to kill before dinner. Famished, we headed up to the casual bar/lounge and ordered some wine and bruschetta. Remarkably, we also landed the most scenic sofa/table booth: Hood in full alpenglow view. In surprising contrast, the main Cascade dining room offers no mountain views, all tables facing more or less southwest. What they lack in views, though, was made up for in food. Timberline Lodge gets my top all-around award for best meal and wine selection (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT 2015 - they have, alas, NOT consistently lived up to this reputation!). Allison and I enjoyed everything about our meal, which - not surprisingly - cost more than the room. The next day, we debated about hiking down to the White River; upon examining the obvious moraine (not to mention all kinds of ski-related crap), we decided that hauling our asses over that ornery pile of rubble wasn't going to be scenic (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT 2015 - we did this hike FINALLY and it is actually really scenic and interesting!). Instead, we explored Trillium Lake, hoping to rent a canoe (no dice) and then considered Mirror Lake but were highly put off by its highway-side trailhead, notably covered with safety-questioning-levels of broken glass (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT 2015 - we have since done this hike several times... it's fine but not enough to warrant a full-scale write-up!).



Left to Right: views of Hood from road, Ellen and LONG forest hike, Ellen and flowers near Timberline junction, first Hood view

#### August, 2007 - Ellen Turns 35

Two months before, Ellen (at the time, still living in Japan) asked to "do something" for her birthday. At the time, I had not hiked with Ellen in many years - mostly because our last big trip together was challenging and she is hopelessly noncommittal. Although I was busy with work, I decided that a 3-day weekend at Hood would be a decent venue for a get-together with her and Allison (who would join us on Ellen's actual birthday). Not surprisingly, Timberline Lodge was booked solid. Thus, I settled on a hotel down in Government Camp (notably MORE per night than Timberline). Its contrasting amenities included a continental breakfast (sucked), larger rooms (appreciated), a small refrigerator and microwave (very appreciated), and a hot tub/Jacuzzi (only appreciated by Allison and I). Although I did reserve dinner at the Timberline for Ellen's birthday, I prepared and carried all other dinner and lunch items from home. Ellen and I met at my house and proceeded to Hood, arriving late on Friday the 3rd. The entire week prior, the weather forecast changed and changed. Every morning, we left Government Camp (3800 feet) under cold, low gray clouds. But every day, it was clear and sunny above 5000 feet... albeit not stable as such all day. Saturday's planned hike (Vista Ridge) involved the longest and most confusing drive. First, we headed back down highway 26 to the Lolo Pass Road. Things were OK until we arrived at Lolo Pass proper - when the 2-lane paved road ended. Despite guidebook directions and our high-resolution map of Hood, signage once the pavement ended did not align with things in print. After finding and navigating the washboard-y McGee Creek Road, we somehow rejoined the Lolo Pass Highway (now paved but only 1-lane with occasional wide spots) and eventually found the obvious "Vista Ridge" sign - taking said right. In contrast with the guidebook, however, future signs were not obvious (1 key spot had a sign but it was slightly up from the

junction point, around a sharp bend, and concealed by trees). Consequently, we missed that turn and proceeded 9 miles before turning around when the topography did not match our expectations. Fortunately - and, again, in contrast with the guidebook - the last few miles of dirt road were NOT bad (but VERY scenic) and we reached the trailhead (which had about 10 cars) around 11 a.m.



Left to Right: view from near Dollar Lake (Barrett in foreground), Cairn Basin, upper Ladd crossing, shelter, Eden

For a trail called "Vista Ridge," there sure were NOT a lot of views. Indeed, we saw little more than moderately dense forest for 3 miles. The trail was gentle, though, and the time passed quickly. We joined the Timberline just west of Wyeast (the Native American name for Hood) Basin and decided to head east first. Distances that looked like more on our map passed in minutes... and soon, we were out of Wyeast and traversing forest again - our goal being off-trail Dollar Lake. Here, we met a group of Timberline deathmarchers (i.e. people who hike the ENTIRE Timberline in 1 day): 4 men and 4 women, the latter sporting inflatable pink flamingoes. We briefly inquired about how they managed Eliot Creek; their answer - using a rope for belaying. After we again broke out of the forest, we ran into a couple sane women (i.e. dayhiking the Timberline in sections... today - Elk Cove). When we met them, they were correctly speculating that this faint, unsigned trail up a rocky ravine to the right was the Dollar Lake spur trail. As they continued to Elk, we proceeded up. A father and daughter were camped by Dollar Lake, the views to Hood's austere north face farther away than I would have liked (and eclipsed by Barrett Spur). Were I to go back to this area, I would climb the spur - as there seems to be a climbers' path all the way up to around 8500 feet. Here, we enjoyed lunch snack number 1. Although I'd hoped to peer into Elk Cove from Dollar Lake, my sense of the Timberline was that it descended into heavy forest... Elk Cove far down and around the bend. In fact, it was only 0.8 mile away and we REALLY should have done it. Instead, we backtracked through Wyeast and then headed over to Cairn Basin and Eden Park. To explore this area, a loop can be done - with Cairn Basin reached by a side-trail up from the Timberline. Halfway there, upper Ladd Creek must be forded. For whatever reason, Cairn Basin gets a lot of hype; while it was pretty, it was small to the point that I think it took, at best, 2-3 minutes to traverse (seriously). The mountain also seemed far away, separated and/or eclipsed by many undulating ridges of green meadows and rocky debris. A lot of people are also drawn to the historic stone shelter in the basin; in fact, it is sort of trashy and completely in the woods (i.e. no views). Nonetheless, the forest below the meadows was busy with campers using many woody sites. We then proceeded down a hillside that was a mixture of meadow and thin forest - below: Eden Park, a meadow with a meandering creek. Temptingly in the distance to the west (1.2 miles/1000 feet up/away), McNeil Point beckoned. Indeed, our original plan had been to hike all the way up there - but all the time we lost while driving and getting lost had us concerned about making it out by daylight... and so we enjoyed snack number 2 while sitting in Eden Park. And then, around 3:30, we began heading back to the Vista Ridge junction. Unfortunately, the lower crossing of Ladd Creek proved FAR more treacherous than expected. Basically, the river had flash-flooded earlier in the year, cutting huge sections away from both edges (i.e. making the trail entry/exit points undecipherable). Eventually, I took off my socks and waded 2 shallow sections (which took me 10 minutes just to find). I then held Ellen's hand as she balanced on and/or jumped between partly submerged rocks (still wearing her boots). After we located the trail on the other side, we did note a sketchy, makeshift log/rock crossing 200 feet upriver. Personally, I preferred my way. Given that Ellen is slower heading downhill than me, we made what I felt was slow progress hiking back. Although we reached the car just before 5, the drive back to highway 26 was easily accomplished in under an hour. Bored with the food I'd brought, we stopped at this crazy grocery store called something like Hood Food (attempts to rhyme these visually similar words became a repeated joke). Unfortunately, little good food was found at Hood Food. We returned to Government Camp by 7, Allison arriving around 9. Most of the remaining evening was spent watching Ellen try to master basic math for her pending GRE's.



Left to Right: Cooper Spur Shelter, heading up from shelter, ascending Cooper Spur

The next day, Ellen's birthday, the three sisters all headed to the Cooper Spur area - first east, then north. Devastation from fall storms was more obvious here - the White River wash-out being particularly dramatic. For such a prominent high feature on the mountain, road signs for Cooper Spur seemed a little light. Although we were less confused than yesterday, navigating the first 10 minutes up from the main highway felt sketchy as there were several unclear turn-offs and/or junctions. But eventually, we were on the Cloud Cap Road. This dirt road was FAR worse than yesterday's... and MUCH longer (10 miles of 50% decent, 50% indecent - hardpan, ratty hummocks, fishtailing sand, tree branches partly in the road, and washboard). Driving this crazy road, it was hard to imagine so many search parties had amassed here, trying to locate 3 climbers who died on this side of the peak last winter. We parked at the busy

Cloud Cap campground. Here, a near brawl erupted between 2 dayhiking parties over a couple of unleashed dogs (indeed, MANY hikers we met - both yesterday and today - were out with unleashed dogs). In contrast with Vista, little forest (less than 20 minutes) was encountered today. Heading pretty much immediately up the Timberline, we climbed through thin forest and then began ascending this sandy, rocky gully - Hood in FULL view. After crossing said gully, we climbed through thin, gnarly low pines and scrub, arriving at the highly satisfying shelter where Ellen attempted to take funny pictures with our dad's old ice axe. Although the views were spectacular, the weather completely promising, and the goal (the "summit" of Cooper Spur) was in view, we were all a bit lackluster in our motivation to continue UP to 8500 feet. Part was likely the altitude but part was the fact that - as usual - the 3 of us had managed to set off each other's periods (with Ellen the likely alpha). But trudge on we did.



Left to Right: Eliot Glacier and VAST moraine (WA peaks in distance), shots from the top of Cooper Spur - Newton Glacier, me

Pretty much at the shelter, we left the Timberline, taking a marked spur trail straight up Cooper. Zigzagging, each zig (or would that be zag?) kissed the moraine, offering STUNNING views onto the Eliot Glacier and its impressive moraine. Although I knew this hike was famous for in-your-face glacier scenery, being there for-real FAR surpassed my expectations. While Ellen and I were finding our second wind (probably because we were both farther along with our cramps etc.), Allison was losing her steam. Eventually, she decided to stop and wait for us at a viewpoint behind a big rock. Sadly, where she stopped was right before the switchback that FINALLY crossed far enough over such that full views onto Hood's south face (a whole new scene of glaciers and terrain) came into view. At over 8000 feet, though, I couldn't blame Allison for electing to stop; even I was huffing, uncertain whether I'd make it to the rocky crest still above me. Before leaving Allison, we agreed that we needed to be regrouped at 1:30. Given that it was 12:30 and we still hadn't eaten lunch, this left Ellen and I pushing hard. After a LONG ramping switchback, the path curved slightly around the south side of the spur - revealing Newton Glacier and vast lowlands below (although it was too hazy to see Mt. Jefferson and the Sisters, which I'm told are visibly impressive). After another 10 minutes, I was on the rubble ridge summit, looking down the rocky arm to tie-in rock (the point where climbers rope up for subsequent ice/snow). Although obviously easy from here, the time and encroaching clouds provided strong motivational factors for skipping that final jaunt. Ellen, in the distance, eventually followed me down. My only regret: not finding some inscribed rock near the summit that commemorates a 1910 Japanese climbing party. Within 10 minutes, I was back with Allison. Ironically, she had just received a phone call (unaware her cell phone was functional) from her roommate: she made Law Review (quite an honor). I think Allison will always remember receiving this phone call at 8000 feet on Hood, while sitting amongst the rocks - Rainier, Adams, and St. Helens in the distance. Shortly thereafter, Ellen arrived and we all briefly stuffed our faces (ironically, a first-year-to-be law student from Eugene then strolled by and Allison and he chatted for awhile). With the wind picking up and clouds enveloping the top of Hood, we proceeded down quickly - interrupted only by a dire bathroom stop wherein Ellen and Allison tried to find cover among the boulders. Of course, the major reason we were under a time crunch was Ellen's birthday dinner reservation at Timberline Lodge. But we easily made it to the car by 4 and I was told I drove down the Cloud Cap Road like a maniac (I averaged 25-30 miles per hour all the way down - which was jarring but great fun for me). We were showered and primped by 6:30, leaving us time to look around the lodge, which Ellen had never seen before. Dinner was as equally great and expensive as Allison and my previous impression: in my case, morel-stuffed breast of pheasant and a red velvet cake with fabulous late-harvest Riesling. With some prodding, our server did find a candle for Ellen's dessert - although there was no rambunctious singing.



Left to Right: Allison and encroaching clouds, Timberline Lodge, Ellen's birthday meal (yes, it's out of focus)

The next day, Allison left. I'd been fretting about what Ellen and my final Hood hike would be: the full loop trip around Paradise (i.e. what Allison and I cut short last time) or a thru-hike between Timberline and Lolo (which would have required moving my car to Lolo Pass and then having Allison drop us back up at Timberline)? After our experiences with the confusing Lolo Pass area, I opted for the loop idea. We set out driving in thick clouds that seemed more tenacious than on any previous morning. Even at Timberline, the level of the lapping clouds seemed thicker. But we hit the trail anyway, our descent taking us frustratingly into the soupy gray. When we arrived at this Zigzag Canyon overlook, there was this giant family studying their map. Dad had this crazy idea they were going to hike down to Hidden Lake (a spur trail that heads away from Hood) and, from there, readily thumb a ride back. That said lake was accessed via an obscure, dirt forest service road hadn't occurred to him (i.e. few cars/people would be there - especially on a Monday). Mind you: this was not some out-there family; they struck me as fairly clean Utah/Mormon types with no clue in the world about the area. I

strongly suggested they consider our loop, which they liked immediately. And so we all dropped down into Zigzag Canyon, crossed the creek (same size as last year, more rocks to jump) and began climbing. Initially, the swirling clouds looked like they were opening and we proceeded with excitement. However, once we reached the first meadow, everything went thick, gray, and cold. I could tell "mom" was not looking forward to several more miles of this. Not interested in being integrated into the "family" for the rest of the day, Ellen and I decided to sit down for lunch near the spur trail Allison and I had used for our escape last year. While eating and discussing the merits of finishing the whole Paradise loop with no likely views, a lone male hiker passed us, heading straight up the meadows to where Hood should be. Watching him vanish into the dynamic mist. I decided we REALLY should climb higher because I felt there was a good chance we'd break out quickly. Stupidly, though, we left all our things (except cameras) lying in the meadow and headed up, finding and following a faint social trail. Within 5 minutes, there was Hood - ALL of her. It was amazing. We couldn't help ourselves from going on and on, up and up. But then I got nervous about leaving my dad's ice axe down low... and hauled us back down after we crested this giant green knoll covered with flowers - a COMMANDING view of Hood that was thoroughly enjoyed.



Left to Right: into Paradise mist, Paradise meadows and views, Ellen above Zigzag, Sand Canyon

Given everything (the weather, the time blown during our off-trail jaunt, the fact that we'd done a LOT of great hiking the last couple of days), we decided it would be most prudent and satisfying to skip the full loop and take the shortcut trail like Allison and I had done before. Our greatest concern, though, was making sure we didn't run into the family because we were embarrassed for leading them on this big long hike and then changing our plans - not to mention finding sunny views. Thus, we made a concerted effort to keep as fast a pace as we could all the way back. As we raced up the other side of Zigzag canyon, we actually caught a glimpse of them descending to the creek. But given that we were actually in decent shape, we made it fully back to Timberline before intersecting. Starving, we stopped at DQ for a late lunch before making the long drive home (complete with a rush-hour traffic jam). Happy 35, Ellen!



Left to Right: confusing signage, Allison and off-trail creek, very sloppy mud, where we gave up, best/parting shot of Hood

#### August 5, 2009 - How McNeil Point Confused and/or Kicked our Asses

The idea to hike to Mt. Hood's McNeil Point was planted last summer when Ellen and I hiked Vista/Cairn Basin. Given weather issues, Allison and I were indecisive until Tuesday morning - but ultimately went for it, driving to Sandy late that night to get an early start the next day. Compared with Gov-Camp and Timberline basecamp hotels, the Sandy Best Western was the cheapest and provided the best continental breakfast. Plans to hit the road at 7 a.m. were postponed until 9 - half because it was socked in, half because I felt shitty. From the Lolo Pass turn-off (where the clouds vanished), we drove 8 miles of forest service roads to the Top Spur trailhead. Only the last mile was gravel (albeit good), meaning that we were only an hour behind in terms of our original plan. Relative to the Vista trailhead, Top Spur was closer and FAR easier to find. Despite it being a Wednesday, there were people, cars, and dogs at the trailhead. After using the stinky pit toilet, we started up the trail. Although we had enjoyed a few Hood views from the road, the trailhead offered NOTHING... and the trail remained view-less for the first 2 miles. Indeed, it felt like Vista(-less) Ridge all over again. The first 0.5 trail miles were the steepest of the day - but there were still many times both Allison and I cursed LONG and relentlessly steep sections. After linking up with the Timberline/PCT, we headed left around Bald Mountain, traversing a LONG ridge via the Timberline (now separate from the PCT) - sometimes on one side, sometimes on the other, and sometimes on top (but still in trees). After 2 miles, we came to this open patch of meadow and beargrass that FINALLY offered a BIG view. Allison insists that this view was worth the entire hike (I do not agree). What made this view interesting was that it was the first time I'd seen this part of Hood: its biggest gorge, its tallest face (if you factored the height difference between the green valley floor - the Muddy Fork of the Sandy River - and the summit). Alas, however, the skies heavily streaked with wisps of low marine clouds constantly rising around the mountain. Even so, we could clearly see McNeil towering in the distance. After enjoying a brief snack, we continued but were passed by a pair of women, the daughters of this older couple (with 3 dogs) we'd met in the parking lot. Within 10 minutes, we caught up to them because they were confused about where the fastest path up McNeil was (mind you - they were working with a 3X5" sketch-map their father had made). We showed them our actual map and I said they were still a good 10 minutes from their target: the "short way up," a steep scrambling route that goes 0.5 miles straight up to the point via its front face (RETROSPECTIVE COMMENT - see 2010 report, when we FINALLY did this route). We, however, were aiming for the "long way up," a gentler approach that went 1 mile up to the point via this backdoor side-ridge. When I explained these different routes, the women seemed taken aback - insisting their father told them the "short way up"

was the main trail (and not a scrambling route). Ultimately, it remains unclear which of what are MANY social trails and routes are legal, open, or accurate (e.g. our guidebook claims the "short way up" is officially closed). In any event and as predicted, we passed a pretty obvious climbers' path in 10 minutes - and the women headed up/left (we never saw them again). We continued along the Timberline, passing a solo female hiker and a giant work-crew of teenagers doing trail repair (having been camped out here the last 2 weeks). After another 10 minutes (and 3 creek crossings, none of which had bridges), we arrived at several ponds/tarns that we had defined as our minimal goal for the day. Unfortunately, there were ZERO views of Hood - the whole place reminding me of nearby Cairn Basin/Eden Park (i.e. small, nice meadows but no big sexy views). And so we pressed on, climbing 10 minutes to another landmark: incoming Cathedral/Mazama trail. Here, we knew the "long way up" path was close. With only 30 minutes left (based on our necessary turnaround time), we headed up a faint path... decent views of Hood against a pretty meadow and the likely ridgeline leading to McNeil. After we slogged across a marshy creek, the route grew UGLY: brushy plants obscuring ankle-twisting holes everywhere, sloppy mud all over... and no sign of improvement or clear progress towards anything obvious. But the most disconcerting thing: all views of Hood vanished behind the ridge. By around 1 p.m., we were back on the Timberline and heading down. Near the path the aforementioned women had taken (hopefully, the correct "short way up"), we ran into their father and mentioned our chat with his daughters. Ironically, he only laughed about how they would definitely be climbing hand-over-hand but then he continued up the Timberline, having no interest in following them up THAT route. We met many more people on the way down, including a father and daughter on their last day backpacking the Timberline; they expressed a sentiment I have grown to feel about that endeavor: a lot of it sucks - namely, the ski-developed sections between Cooper and Timberline Lodge. Despite tripping several times (as there were many rocks and roots), Allison and I made it back to the car by our target: 2:30 p.m. This gave us ample time to make it back to Salem - our only trouble being BAD traffic between 205 and I-5.



Left to Right: then the snow starts, and then the snow starts getting deeper, tarn en route, Timberline heading east

October 10, 2009 – A LITTLE Closer to McNeil Point... and A Little Scrambling around Bald Mountain

Given Allison and my unsuccessful McNeil Point attempt in August, I was determined to go back up there ASAP. This time, we knew it was our last shot of the season... and already there had been major snow dumping. An on-line report from 10 days before described 20+ inches during the final slog, requiring crampons and 2-hours of kicking steps to accomplish the final 1 mile ascent. Given that, it is a miracle we chose to proceed. Allison and I left Salem Friday night bound for our Sandy basecamp. Arriving around 8:30, we discovered this amazing little Thai place that served some of the best vegetarian/tofu we've had in Oregon. The next morning, Ellen (driving in from Portland) met us a little after 9. Being that the skies were questionable, freezing winds were blasting from the east, and Ellen had arrived late, I began cracking the whip. During the latter parts of the drive to the Top Spur trailhead, it was more than clear there was a TON of snow (and ice) MUCH lower than we were hoping for. In retrospect, though, our ultimate hike was not nearly as bad as I figured it would be based on impressions during the drive. At the trailhead, there were 3 other cars, including one with freshly pumped breastmilk set out next to the tires; needless to say, we reasoned that if someone who was breastfeeding (or who had the nerve to carry a breastfeeding infant up here) was hiking this trail, we should be safe. Nevertheless, it was FUCKING cold as we geared up. Cussing and shivering, we took off UP the Top Spur trail... the ground frozen in many places, patches of ice and snow visible in most directions. Within half a mile, we reached the junction with the Timberline and PCT; following the Timberline as before, we encountered no snow or ice for a good 2 miles, including the first big opening/viewpoint where we briefly stopped for a snack. However, it was clear that we would be hitting snow shortly (which we did). At the time, though, McNeil point looked doable, as though it was just lightly dusted (in fact, much of it was plastered). Continuing, we hit BIG snow (20+ inches) where the trail starts contouring/circling the mountain at around 5000 feet. Prior to the snow, we were not sure whether we would ascend McNeil from the short steep face or the longer/gentler path; when we hit deep snow, I KNEW (a) we would attempt the longer path, and (b) it was unlikely we'd make it. Even so, the Timberline was well-stamped out - to the point we could readily walk it with summer hiking boots.



Left to Right: where Allison and I stopped last time, "real" sign and route to McNeil, rock where we stopped this time

Heading east on the Timberline, we found the snow remained consistent – with melted out and/or icy places surrounding the several small creeks we crossed (mostly via stepping stones). Climbing slightly, we reached the flat area featuring several tarns, half of which were thawed. After a few stops for pictures, we climbed again slightly and came to the junction with the incoming Cathedral/Mazama

trail – after which was the meadow where Allison and I had given up during our August attempt. In snow, the views of Hood were more impressive; while Ellen took some “jumping pictures” (her latest thing), I studied the map – convinced that the crazy route Allison and I briefly tried to slog up before was NOT the “official” longer route to McNeil. Indeed, in re-examining the map, I saw that the actual route lay about 5 minutes east – basically climbing the ridgeline in the distance but approaching from a little higher. And so we proceeded – finding the REAL sign OFFICIALLY indicating McNeil Point. Initially, the way was dicey with deep snow drifts to negotiate, and some foliage to fight (probably because we lost the route). Eventually, we broke into fine views – the route, in many places, snow-free. A giant rock provided an obvious lunch stop – and the end for Allison (and, mostly, me). Ahead, the route left the ridgeline and started side-hilling deep and sketchy snow-slopes... snowy and treacherous McNeil towering in the distance. It was then that the owners of the breastmilk passed us: this couple clad completely in denim – mom in a full-length jean skirt. Eating, we watched them SLOWLY make their way (no ice axes) across the immediate slope and beyond (but never saw them again). After lunch, Ellen seemed disappointed that neither Allison nor I were interested in going higher. We said she could do whatever – just be back in 45 minutes because it was getting cold and none of us wanted to push the shortening daylight hours. I actually did follow Ellen 5 minutes up the ridge; here, Ellen donned her funny strap-on 4-point crampons, descending this icy slope down into McGee Creek basin (a trail-less area). Originally, she hoped to climb this little knoll nearer to Hood – but, in the end, she barely made it across the creek. We then all met back up with Allison and headed back down. By this point, it was definitely colder and we had to thoroughly gear up.



Left to Right: (top) lunch rock, looking into McGee Creek basin, back down ridge, crazy Ellen and her crampons; (bottom) meeting back up with now-cold Allison, heading back down ridge, heading back to Timberline, tarn reflection

Our hike back to the snowline went quickly. Although we’d seen few people during our hike up, there were SHOCKING numbers of people hiking UP – including several backpacking parties with dogs. We chatted a bit with one of the groups who intended to off-trail camp in McGee Creek Basin. One the way back, I hoped to hike on the far/west side of Bald Mountain (purportedly the side with more views). Supposedly, there was an unofficial connecting trail somewhere near the north side of the mountain – effectively allowing one to circle Bald completely (carefully studying a Hood map will reveal this pseudo-loop). However, at no point during Allison and my previous hike or today had I seen any side-trail or signage. Studying the map, I had a general idea of where the route SHOULD be and so when the terrain started flattening out a bit, I started looking, trying to make a good decision about where to cut over. To make a long story short: I didn’t exactly find the real trail... BUT I came to a point where I could SEE the other side of the Timberline WAY down this steep forested slope. I decided it was safe enough to descend and called Ellen and Allison over; they were not amused. But we made it down – partly on our asses. A couple minutes down the Timberline, we found the REAL, unofficial connector. Oh well.



Left to Right: big viewpoint again, bald sections of Bald Mountain, Hood close-up, Ellen jumping (again)

From this point, we hiked awhile through forest (but no snow!) – growing skeptical there were any Hood views. Above, some crazy teenage guys had scrambled up a high rock outcrop and were now trying to convince us to join them; only Ellen partook, causing Allison and I (continuing) to joke about how these guys were flirting – clearly unable to judge ages from afar. Five minutes later, Bald Mountain earned its name: this skinny trail that was out in the wide-open, hugging meadows and bare rock with ALL of Hood in the distance. Eventually, we regrouped up at this scenic, extra-bald viewpoint – and Ellen took some more jumping pictures. From here, it

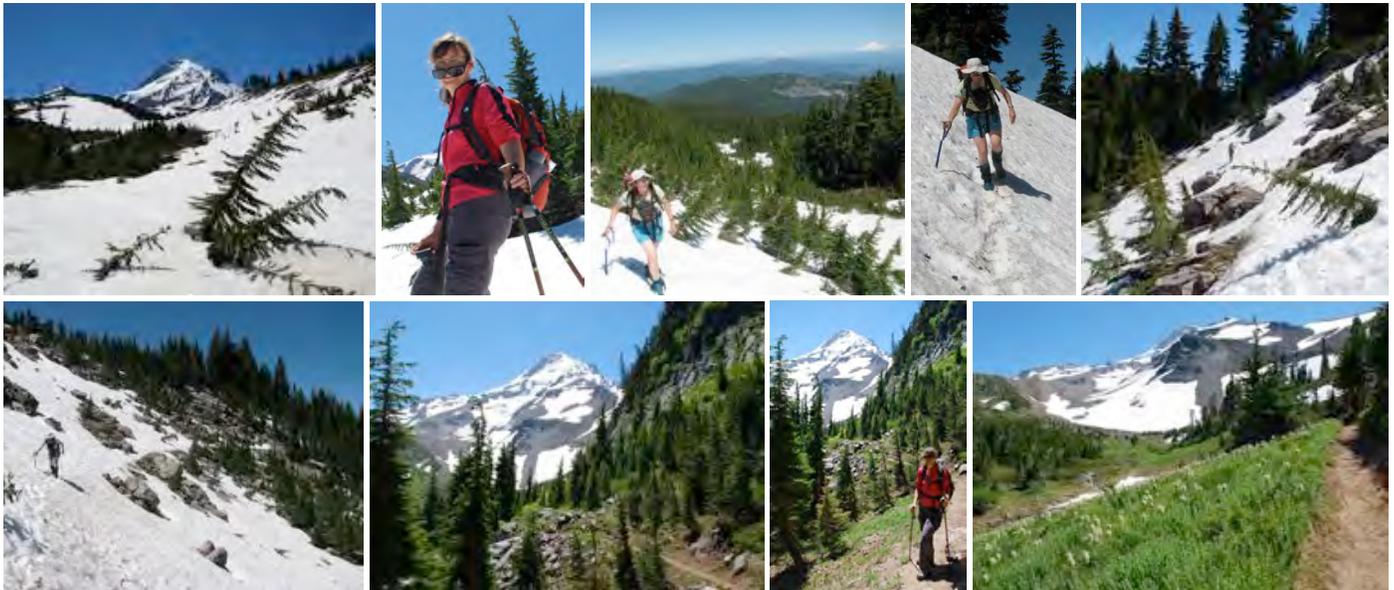
was 10 minutes before we came to the big Timberline/PCT junction – half a mile from the car. Although Ellen ALWAYS seems to want to do more than Allison/I, she was very satisfied with the day given the Bald Mountain side-trip. Within an hour, we were dropping Ellen back at her car (parked for free at the Best Western) and Allison and I were heading home.



Left to Right: Mt. Hood and rhododendrons from road, AVALANCHE LILIES, woody trail, crooked sign and crooked-backed Sarah

July 23-25, 2010 – Last Hike Before Ellen Moves to the Netherlands

Originally, this hike was not supposed to be a “last” anything – but then Ellen accepted her current teaching position in The Hague after getting no local employment bites following a 2-month search. But I think we all knew that she would never stay in the US after living over a decade in Japan. And so we had to make the most of her pending departure (August 1). Given insane snow lingering in the Cascades, we played it safe and organized a three-day, Government Camp hotel-basecamp trip to places we loved on Mt. Hood. Although on-line reports indicated that people had been hiking to these destinations (albeit in some snow), Hood rangers insisted the Timberline was inaccessible and dangerous. Anyway – I was dropped off in Portland/at Ellen’s place by my mother, who’d just brought me back after a big trip to Iceland. Given Ellen’s move, her place was in COMPLETE disarray. The next morning, we headed up the Lolo Pass road. In contrast with our 2007 trip to Vista Ridge, Ellen and I did not get lost at all – although it felt just as long. As usual, the views of Hood were fantastic – with several pockets of pink-purple wild rhododendrons. Given that it was a weekday, there were only 2 cars at the trailhead when we set out at 9 (though we ran into 4 parties by the end). Because we knew the snow could be serious – we discussed our priorities, the choices being: Elk Cove (along the Timberline) vs. Barrett Spur (a scrambling route). On our previous trip, we emphasized Dollar Lake (jump-off for tantalizing Barrett) and then this regrettably uninteresting loop involving Cairn Basin and Eden Park. Like I said to Ellen early on: if things get challenging, remind me how much I want to see Elk Cove first. But I am getting ahead of myself: Vista Ridge (in contrast with its name) is a viewless hike up a LONG ridge (2.5 miles!). This time, it was more palatable because the forest was especially beautiful: first with rhododendrons and then with thousands of avalanche lilies (which seemed to go on for a solid 1.5 miles). We also hiked it faster than before – and so the time seemed to pass more quickly.



Left to Right: (top) LOTS of snow Timberline between Vista and drop to Elk; third picture –St. Helens, Rainier, & Adams in distance! (bottom) the slope I almost turned back on, first view of Elk Cove area, Ellen and my favorite view, in Elk Cove – anemones

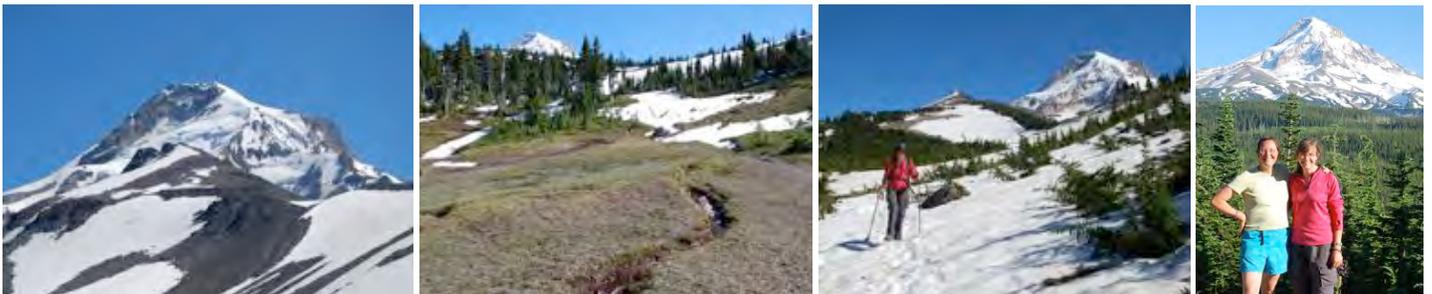
Half a mile from the Timberline junction, we started hitting increasingly larger patches of snow – so much so that, for awhile, I figured that hopes for reaching ANYTHING were about to be dashed. Concerned, we hung neon flagging tape in a few trees but continued to follow a set of footprints. Proceeding east at the Timberline junction, we were met with a 60:40 mix of clear trail and occasionally-freaky snow – the worst being moderately angled stuff that lasted a couple hundred feet and didn’t have a lot of safety run-out in the event of a fall. But the footprints were still there and seemed more pronounced in terms of being fairly bucketed (i.e. you really wouldn’t fall unless you were insanely uncoordinated). Where Ellen just used ski-poles, I carried a full-on ice axe – and bothered to dig it in with every step. I also dug out my gaiters, having just used and enjoyed them immensely in Iceland. They also look sort of sexy – don’t you think? Of course, any gaiter sexiness on my part was negated by Ellen’s beyond-ugly drugstore over-glasses sunglasses (i.e. the things that look like what eye doctors give you following dire procedures). Ah – that’s Ellen being cheap. But the real stars were Hood (right there), Adams, Rainier, and St. Helens – which were largely visible during much of today’s hike (not to mention tomorrow’s and the next day).

Given the snow, we had a harder time figuring out where the Dollar Lake side-trail junction was (as it was, in fact, in a big snow section). At that point, we had to make a critical decision – because, despite fantasies to the contrary, I knew it was going to be one or the other: Elk OR Barrett. Prioritizing Elk, we continued along the Timberline, NEW trail section for us because we'd never gone this far before. I, for one, almost called it quits when we came to this LONG, high-angle slope – several rocky melt-out spots where falling would be BAD. But there were still good tracks and Ellen wanted to try it. So I let her stamp out some even deeper buckets, waiting nervously for her to make it ALL the way across. And then she met this couple who said it was clear from that point on all the way to Elk. Well THAT was miraculous... and so I pussy-footed my way across the crazy slope and then Ellen and I continued – basically on a flat and then descending trail initially in thick forest. Then came the glorious views – one of my favorites along the Timberline (albeit mostly for the circumstance and history): Hood and Barrett framed against this perfect hillside of rock, meadow, trees... against completely blue skies. Such was our view for 15 minutes of descent – with Elk Cove proper coming more and more into view with every step. My only complaint: with every step, we lost more and more of Hood because it was eclipsed by Barrett towering in the foreground. Oh well – the Elk Cove proper meadows were lusciously green and floral... definitely at the height of their season.



Left to Right: (top) where we left the trail, Ellen portraying an Elk, Hood close-up, Ellen's selfie from top of moraine; (bottom) view over Elk Cove (Rainier, St. Helens, Adams) where Ellen stopped, Dollar Lake, me just above Dollar Lake with Barrett

In a sea of anemones, we left the Timberline and made our way up Elk Cove towards this moraine that seemed like it might offer better views of Hood. Although there was a faint path at the beginning, it vanished after we crossed multiple braids of this unnamed creek (possible the Coe). After 15 minutes, we decided to stop for lunch and decide what to do next. It was about noon and we had settled on this mini-moraine (notably the picture of Ellen doing her Elk impression above). After eating for about 20 minutes, we decided that the original moraine heap/ridge (still in the distance – but closer now) was still doable. But this is where our route-finding failed us, to a large extent. First, we tried climbing open moraine but found this unsatisfactory; then, we tried a more direct up route through some brush – but that was a nightmare. Starting up this very rocky moraine cirque, I gave up after 50 vertical feet (with 150 more to go) – mostly because the footing was terrifying and I did not believe I could get down without falling or being beyond my tolerance level of fear. Ellen, meanwhile, would not give it up – and so I sat and waited 30 minutes for her to climb it, take some pictures, and then downclimb it (VERY SLOWLY). We then continued back to the Timberline and climbed up to the snow. En route, we passed a couple guys who seemed awfully pokey. Even though it was nearly 2, I insisted we had a shot to do Barrett (it didn't get dark, after all, until at least 8:30). And so we made our clumsy way up to Dollar Lake – ALL in snow, but still following tracks. At Dollar (pretty much all melted out), we may have surprised a solo male camper in a state of half-dress. Indeed, BOTH Dollar Lake campsites were occupied.



Left to Right: Hood and Barrett from Dollar, returning – Wyeast Basin, major snow near Vista-Timberline junction, back at the trailhead

Sitting at this pretty viewpoint where we enjoyed lunch last time, Ellen and I downed all remaining snacks. By this point, Ellen had run out of gas... but I was getting excited about Barrett. And so I headed up the obvious scramblers path up from the lake; there was some snow, but it looked like easy going until the final, technical pitch. Mostly, though, the shadows were starting to feel long and the thought of that BIG drive out heavy... so I returned after 15 minutes. With Ellen running on fumes, I remained ahead during the entire LONG descent. Our 5 p.m. arrival time may not sound late – but it felt late based on the history of the day, and knowing how complicated the

road was back to the main highway. Dreaming about the Thai place in Sandy (which required extra driving given our Government Camp hotel), we promptly hit the road... only to be flagged down by this friendly British couple who seemed a little lost. At first, we were concerned we weren't going to make it to Sandy in time – but we did. That we finished 2 appetizers (including Ellen's sudden need for cream cheese/crab-filled wontons) and 2 full entrees tells you how hungry we were. From Sandy, we drove back to Government Camp – where we checked into at the same place we did in 2007. Fortunately (given the excessive price), the rooms were greatly improved, the breakfasts mildly improved. Mostly amusing, though, was that the grunge-philic man-boy manning the front desk was deemed cute by BOTH Ellen and I (Ellen seldom being one to make such proclamations).



Left to Right: Hood from White River, MASSIVE fire evidence along Cooper Spur, heading up trail, reenacting 2007 shelter picture

Today's hike (which we'd also done in 2007) produced diametrically-opposed feelings for me relative to Vista impressions: namely, I LOVED Cooper WAY MORE before, but this time, it was great but more of a tedious slog. In contrast, I had fewer expectations of Vista and so this time, THAT hike was more stupendous. Anyway – Ellen and I got up early and were on the road by just before 8 a.m. There was not a cloud in the sky – seriously. Today's weather was supposed to be the warmest of all three days – with Portland in the 90's. Driving around Hood, we stopped briefly at the White River pull-out and photographed the mountain in all her glory. From there, we took highway 35 north – and only screwed up once getting on the correct Cooper Spur road. Since 2007, there have been incredibly serious fires high on Cooper Spur – and these were painfully evident during the drive. Indeed, last summer, Cooper Spur road never opened because of the fire damage. Ironically, much of the dirt road seemed somewhat improved relative to 2007, although there were all these new run-off trenches – meaning that every 500 feet we had to drive over these deep ditches. Going over at least 3 of these too fast bottomed out Ellen's Corolla. At the top/trailhead, it was a madhouse – ALL main parking spots taken. Parking along the side of the road to Cloud Cap Inn, we did our best to get ready in the already sweltering sun. Unfortunately, the restrooms were locked – meaning we both had to excrete (me a giant #2) in the adjacent woods... LOVELY to do first thing before a nasty-hot hike.



Left to Right: (top) heading up to the spur, down the Eliot, Ellen and her goofy sunglasses; (bottom) on the final spur ridgeline, Mt. Jefferson, goofy Ellen, Japanese group rock, Ellen jumping during our descent

Hitting the trail, Ellen and I immediately managed to get lost – somehow getting on the southbound Timberline for 5 minutes. During our last hike here, Ellen and I were FULL of energy while Allison was not – ultimately bailing at around 7800 feet (700 short of the "top"). Unfortunately, I felt like Allison today. Slogging up the first/lower part of the hike, I was well behind Ellen – definitely feeling the heat and the elevation (having begun at nearly 6000 feet – higher than anything we'd done yesterday). Meeting at the stone shelter, we stopped for a snack and to shoot some goofy pictures. From here, we left the Timberline and continued up the scrambling path – Ellen significantly ahead of me. At around 7000 feet, I developed this one-sided headache that I was concerned was altitude-related. Eventually – at the same place Allison stopped – I decided to call it quits. The other factor that influenced my decision was the fact that the usual route to the top of Cooper (which zigzagged gently up the broad east-facing side of the ridge) was COVERED in snow - NO tracks. Instead, folks were taking this head-on approach STRAIGHT up the nose of the spur (to 8500 feet) – using a steeper, more exposed, and unstable-rock route. Not my cup of tea. And so I waited while Ellen had her fun. As predicted, she made it to the top in exactly 45 minutes. Given that we agreed to regroup at 1:30, she had a reasonable amount of time to enjoy the top. Meanwhile, my

main source of fun consisted of taking a leak on some other climbers' path down the moraine edge. I think it's safe to say that several groups of climber-dudes noticed my wet ground during their manly descent. My other sources of fun: listening to the foul-mouthed ramblings of this rednecky pair of guys as they made their way up the spur... AND BUGS – trying to keep the ants out of my stuff, while enjoying the plethora of ladybugs EVERYWHERE. Ellen reported the latter as well up on top of the spur – in addition to finding the aforementioned inscribed rock that commemorates a 1910 Japanese climbing party. Given that I was getting bored (not to mention - concerned about ants making their way up my shorts), I was glad Ellen returned on time. Given dinner reservations at 6:30, we decided not to dilly-dally... despite gorgeous weather. I do not recall anything eventful about our hike down or our drive back – except that it was long, hot, and dusty. We made it back to the car by 3:30, back to the hotel by 4:30 - leaving left plenty of time for relaxing, watching the news, and taking long showers. Despite previously excellent dining experiences at Timberline, Ellen and I were both disappointed with many aspects of our dinner. First, they misrepresented a few things on the menu (e.g. the salad did not have stated candied pecans or watermelon). Second, the waiter did not know what some items were on the menu and frankly seemed a little disrespectful. Third, the service was schizophrenic: FAST in terms of shoveling the first two courses at us (getting us out as quickly as possible) but then SLOW in terms of dessert and the bill – which they insisted (so as to clear our table) could be enjoyed in the lounge with the big view of Hood. Said service was so bad, in fact, that Ellen and I seriously considered leaving without paying. In the end, our dessert was free – as was Ellen's glass of Muscat wine. So alas, it will be awhile before I return to Timberline. After our meal, we took a short walk up from the lodge (mostly to escape this teeny-bopper-esque wedding) – but then retreated because it got damn cold!



Left to Right: (top) Timberline Lodge, as much as I EVER dress up, Hood; (bottom) sunset shots... Jefferson AND the Sisters

For our third and final hike, Ellen and I got up early again – overestimating how little time it takes to drive to the Top Spur. Being a Sunday (with, yet again, not a cloud in the sky), the trailhead was crowded. In any event, we were on the trail hiking at 7:45 (SHOCKING!) – heading up the all-too-familiar LONG ridgeline that comprises Bald Mountain. Even though we kept a strong pace and took minimal breaks, I felt occasionally winded because Bald Mountain is DEFINITELY a steeper trail than Vista. We reached the first big viewpoint by around 8:45, the reflection tarn by 9:30. Key things motivating our pace included determination to FINALLY make it to the McNeil shelter, and getting me on an earlier shuttle back to Salem. At around 10, we left the Timberline for the longer, official path up McNeil. Already, you could see there was snow to be crossed up there. Where Ellen was intimidated by it, I initially thought it looked alright (ha ha). We did encounter some small patches of snow on the sylvan ridgeline leading up to the lunch rock where we largely stopped during our last/fall attempt in 2009. Here, we had to make an emergency bathroom break because the looming snowfields kicked in some GI fear factor (hence the phrase: “scared the shit out of me”).



Left to Right: (top) through the woods, first big viewpoint – close-up, reflection tarn (bottom) on the early part of the official path to McNeil, first big snow and run-out, high meadow views

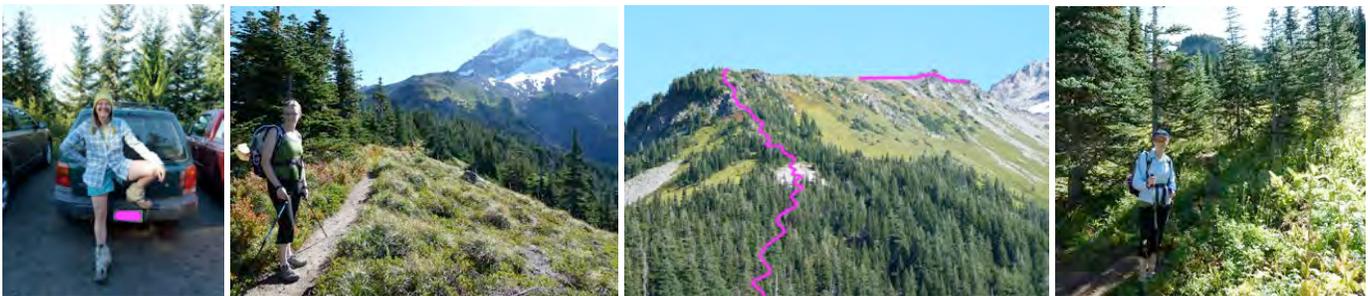
The first big snowfield corresponded to where Ellen cramponed into McGee Creek last time. Not surprisingly, we had to side-hill on snow that looked intimidating head-on but, once you got out there, was reasonably safe... the footprints on a moderately level spot and well-bucketed. Thus, I had ZERO problems with it; Ellen decided it was fine but it took her walking out there to accept that for real. After this snowfield, we hiked through SPECTACULAR meadows flaming with red paintbrush; we could not see Hood but the views

north were vast. And then – unfortunately – we arrived at the SNOWFIELD OF DOOM!!!!!! The SNOWFIELD OF DOOM nearly cost me making it to McNeil this time. It was HORRIFYING: steep, no safe run-out (i.e. if you fell – there was a greater possibility than on ANYTHING we did all weekend that you would be maimed or killed), hideous entrance and exit (loose rock, no trail, slick...), and messy (dirty, unclear tracks – no buckets). And yet it was SOOOOOO short – not to mention SOOOOOO close to the shelter (less than a quarter mile beyond... and no more snow). I took 15 solid minutes to commit to crossing it – including letting at least 2 other parties do it first and starting it twice, only to be overcome by such shaking fear that I had to back off.



Left to Right: (top) SNOWFIELD OF DOOM; (bottom) anemones and hood near McNeil shelter, shelter with Hood and Rainier, Lewis & Clarke pose where we stopped above shelter, DQ - need I say more?

After the HORRIBLE SNOWFIELD OF DOOM, the short walk to the McNeil Point shelter was almost a cakewalk... I say ALMOST because we were definitely UP there, not to mention RIGHT along some seriously cliffy drops. Given how shaky I was after the snowfield, I had intractable vertigo that didn't leave until I knew I was completely done with snow for the day. Of course, now I have to confess: much as I LOVED making it this far, it was clear that the ACTUAL McNeil Point (the highpoint of the spur/ridgeline we were on) was still a good hour above us. Given that neither Ellen or I had the energy or interest in climbing it today, I now know I will have to come back here again to make the REAL point. But we did decide to climb for 15 minutes – making our way through GLORIOUS meadows, all of Hood blazing against the cloudless blue. We spent 20 minutes eating and taking pictures before heading down in earnest. I was anxious until we were across the SNOWFIELD OF DOOM – and NO, it was no less terrifying the second time. I was physically shaking entering it, and for a good 5 minutes thereafter. In terms of the hike back, my only mistake was deciding to run down the final 0.5 mile – which left me with shin splints and hip/glut issues for the next week (thankfully, I have a Jacuzzi for that). Given that we were still running early when we arrived back at the trailhead, we stopped at DQ for a REAL lunch; although the place was insanely crowded, most folks were just getting ice cream. To avoid driving me back home, Ellen dropped me off at the en-route Portland Airport where I had booked a seat on the long-distance shuttle back to Salem. Fortunately, I also had the foresight to pack a change of clothes so I could clean up for the 90-minute ride. It was the last time I saw Ellen before she moved away.

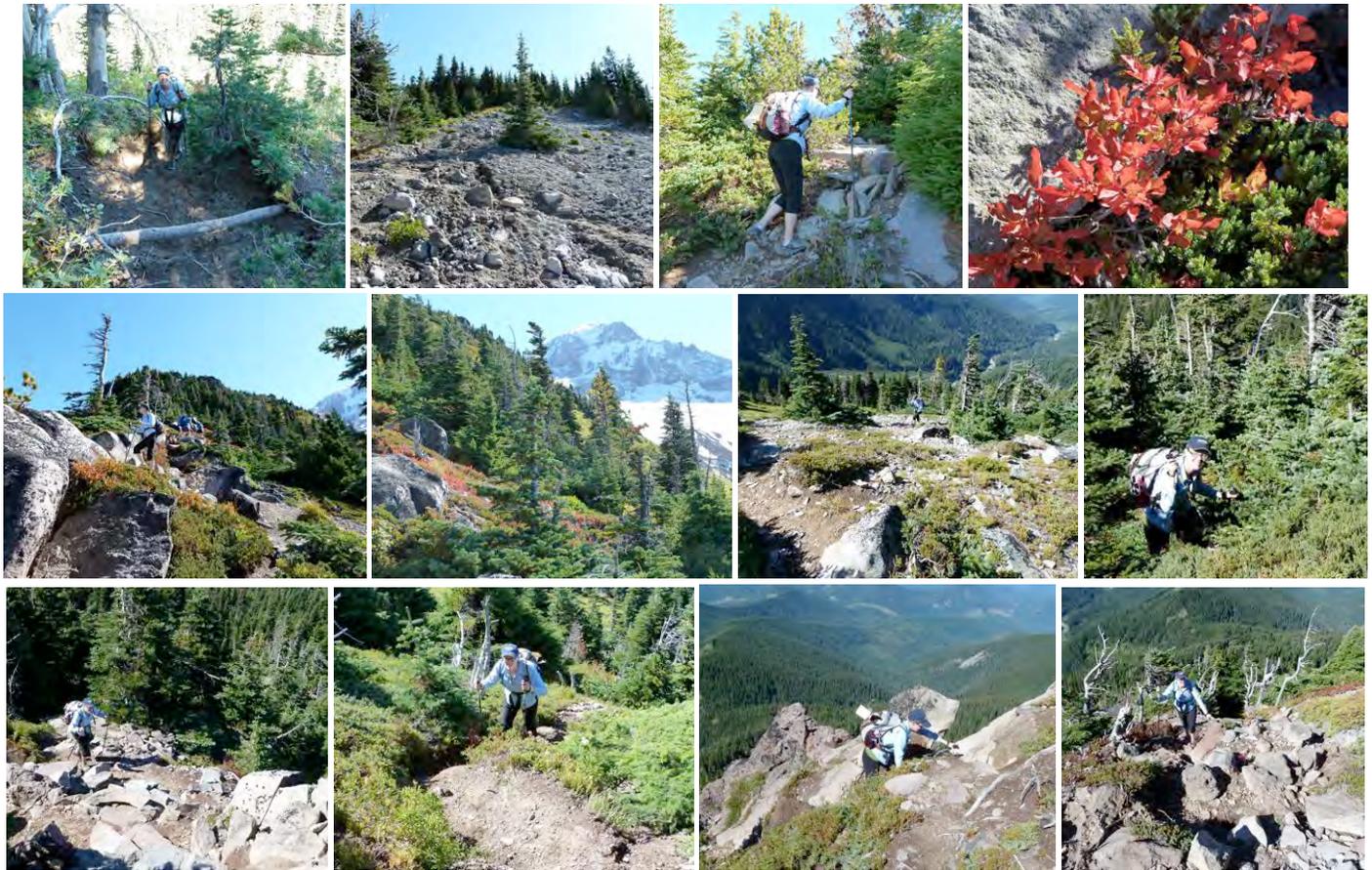


Left to Right: me and NEW sexy mini-gaiters, Allison at first overlook, scrambling route approximation, Allison at scrambling turn-off

September 25, 2010 – The REAL McNeil Point, Our Piece de Resistance

Given a miraculous break in the weather, Allison and I hit Hood again – under the assumption this would be our last hurrah of the mountain hiking season. This time, we were determined to do two things that Ellen and I never did: (a) give the scrambling shortcut a shot; and (b) summit the REAL McNeil Point – which lies about 0.75 mile and 700 feet higher than the shelter. Although I am pleased to report we did both (and LOVED them), the scrambling grade above the shelter was such that my ITB/knee were highly challenged during the last mile. Because Hood is a LONG drive (especially given this long hike – 9 miles, 3000 feet up/down), Allison and I enjoyed our trusty Sandy Best Western the night before. We awoke 7:30, left the hotel 8:30, and were at the nearly FULL trailhead around 9:30 – after getting lost twice: once because we were embroiled in a discussion about public education and missed the Lolo Pass turnoff, and the second because the first turnoff from the Lolo Pass road is not well marked and yet-again stymied me. Although the forecast called for 80's in Portland, it was cool (but not chilly) at the trailhead and I would say it never felt hot all day... just perfectly warm with a

great breeze. From the trailhead, we hiked through the forest 2.5 miles to the first big viewpoint – which we arrived at within the hour. About 45 minutes later, we were at the scrambling turn-off (unmarked because, again, it is my impression the rangers consider it “closed” – but still obvious to anyone with any interest... and a map).



Left to Right: all in order as we scrambled... bottom row/shot 3 = MAJOR exposure on overhanging cliff ridgeline (TERRIFYING!)

Although I continued to second-guess whether we should go for the scrambling route, we decided to play it by ear: every 5 minutes, we asked ourselves, “can we get down from this?” The scrambling shortcut, by my map estimation, climbs 800 feet in 0.6 mile... which is not Aasgard Pass (my gold-standard for “steep”) – but it’s steep enough. I would say that 95% was civil: there was an obvious path and most of the time, one was upright. I was surprised how direct the route was (basically UP the ridgeline nose right to the shelter) – particularly because map depictions of the route show it veering to east via some longer zigzags that try to avoid the exposed nose area. The most terrifying section was on this rock outcrop where there was an overhanging cliff drop-off – all a foot from the route. One major earthquake and that area is going to vanish. But by then we were SOOOOO close to the shelter that there was no way we were not going to finish. At the shelter, I made two brilliant decisions: first, I walked (5 minutes) to the SNOWFIELD OF DOOM area to see what it looked like (NO SNOW – so I didn’t have to stew about that!) and, second, I insisted we eat most of our food so that we were not bonking up the McNeil Point climb (something Ellen and I suffered from). At 12:20, we set out for our target – with my prediction being that it would take us 45 minutes to climb (and, much to Allison’s surprise, I was DEAD ON RIGHT).



Left to Right: all in order as we scrambled to near the final viewpoint... St. Helens, Adams, Rainier in a couple shots

After dare-I-say enjoying the scrambling route, Allison and I were surprised at how GRUELING the next climb was – even though it looked SOOO placid from the shelter. Indeed, it was a MAJOR BITCH – at times as steep as the scramble. But we persevered, climbing first to the flat area where Ellen and I stopped, then committing to this steep rocky section to a higher plateau, then making SLOW progress up this straight-up/switchback-free ridge-crest dotted with a fence-line of dead white trees. The final 20 minutes were along this at-times exposed knife-edge of weird lava formations with full views onto this massive moraine field that forms the upper reaches of McGee Creek – Barrett Spur in full view across the desolate bowl of rock. Near the end, there was this interesting tent-site

in a partial lava cave – currently occupied by three teenage guys who were either worshipping or doing mild drugs. Miraculously, we had the final “summit” all to ourselves – and we enjoyed it for a good 20 minutes: taking pictures and sending them to Marshall (who just passed the bar and was home sick today). But then it was time to head back – because we intended to take the LONG, official way out... which meant 4-5 miles. Although we THOUGHT the descent would be SOOOO much easier, the initial route down to the shelter took pretty much as long as it did to climb because the footing was so bad and I knew then that my knee was NOT in good shape.



Left to Right: (top) rocky view of Barrett Spur, Hood, final lava ridge and BIG Hood view; rare Sarah jumping picture, Yocum Ridge, looking down from top; (bottom) heading down, looking down steep route – note shelter in last shot!

Near where Ellen and I had previously stopped, Allison and I spied a cut-off trail that took us to the official McNeil Point trail, thus bypassing the shelter. We then followed the same trail (minus ANY snow) that Ellen and I had pioneered back in July. After all the unofficial scrambling craziness, Allison and I greatly enjoyed having a real trail at the end of the day. Indeed, it was almost shameful how pleasant and easy the real trail was. Indeed, I would say that the long talus field under Ellen and my first snowfield was the only mildly tricky part of the long route. Aside from the HORDES of people in the lower meadows once we hit the Timberline (including multiple groups with dogs splashing noisily in the tarns), our hike back was uneventful. We made it to the car by around 4:15 – and were eating Thai food in Sandy an hour later. Over dinner, we agreed that this loop was the BEST way to visit everything McNeil Point has to offer... and that the scrambling trail was great, particularly because it did cut out a good 2 miles, allowing us to get to the shelter early enough such that we were fully motivated and energized to hit the McNeil Point summit.



Left to Right: (top) official McNeil Point trail, SNOWFIELD OF DOOM area with NO SNOW, midway through long route, close-up of Hood; (bottom) talus where there was snow last time, nearing Timberline, first viewpoint, Allison and her Tom Ka Kai soup

October 16, 2010 – Whoops, I Spoke Too Soon... Elk Meadows and Newton Creek Loop

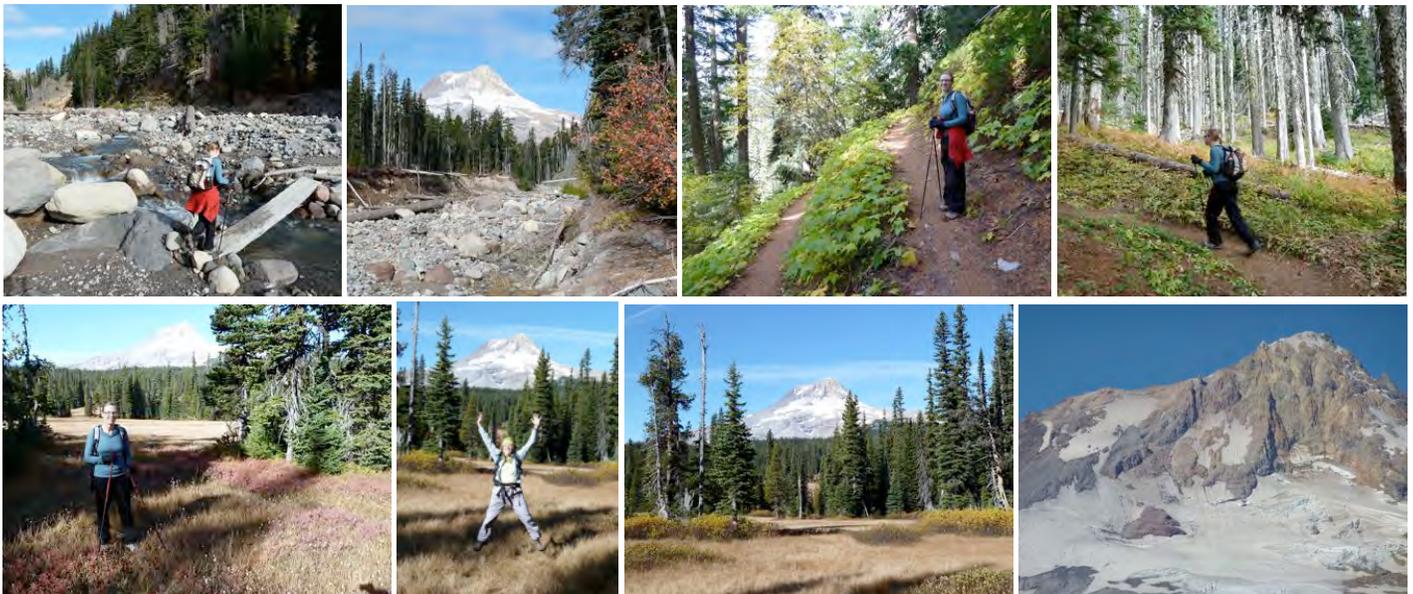
Well – the knee felt better within the week and the weekend forecast was GREAT, meaning another hike to Elk Meadows and Newton Creek (it should be noted that we had made a slap-dash trip here back in August – but the views were limited by clouds to the point we didn't bother with pictures/write-up given that we knew we'd soon be back!). Given now-short days, we went to our trusty Sandy Best

Western the night before, enjoying Thai food before an even more delicious 9 hours of sleep. Because we knew the overnight temperatures were extremely cold and there might be some morning clouds (that would burn off), we did not force an extremely early start – although we were on the road by 8:45 given that the skies were more clear than even the forecasters had predicted. Even from Sandy, the drive to this trailhead took a SOLID hour: driving beyond Government Camp and heading towards Hood River (but not as far as Cooper Spur). Near White River, there were a few cloud bands hovering midway up Hood – but these vanished within the hour.



Left to Right: trailhead, wilderness boundary/permit, Clark Creek and just beyond

At the trailhead, we were the fourth car (by the end of the day, there were a dozen) and it seemed colder (despite very sunny skies). Indeed, I wore at least 2 upper layers all day – plus long pants. Heading up the trail, Allison and I were impressed with the hollow thump our hiking poles made against the frozen earth (although we passed little visible frost or ice). I spent the first mile convincing Allison that I was – in no way - concerned about bears... which she somehow had decided must be extra hungry. At the wilderness boundary, we filled out our permit – amused that someone had left a pair of stylish reading glasses in the box... and then we crossed the substantial bridge over Clark Creek. Meandering mostly flat terrain for another 15 minutes, we then came to impressive lower Newton Creek canyon – which has clearly suffered many interesting washouts. Crossing on a thick, halved log, we enjoyed our first views of Hood – before starting the somewhat LONG climb to Elk Meadows (about 1000 feet in 1 mile).



Left to Right: (top) lower Newton Creek and Hood view, climbing; (bottom) Elk Meadows proper – Hood views/detail

In contrast with our first trip here, the climb was not as heinous – probably because it was COLD. In what seemed like no time, we were on the flat stretch leading to Elk Meadows. As before, we entered the Elk Meadows loop (if pictured as a clock) at the 8 position and hiked around to the 11 position. This time – given startlingly clear skies and full-on views of Hood – we made more of an effort to hike out into the meadows and take pretty pictures. Even this late in the season, the meadows were very beautiful: golden grass dotted with red bushes. Passing a couple tents with an actively smoking fire, we found some stumps to sit on (at the 4 position); there, we donned our jackets and ate snack number one in the sun. Allison coveted the cream cheese-slathered bagel I'd thought to steal from the hotel. We then continued, crossing a creek and making our way to the Gnarl Ridge trail junction (at the 11 position). We hiked just under a mile up Gnarl Ridge – the grade more frustrating than that up to Elk (largely because it doesn't LOOK steep... but it is – and there are ZERO switchbacks). We briefly were confused by the first trail sign – which simply leads back to Elk via a different forest route. At the second trail sign, we correctly headed left: ON the Timberline (right being the way to Cooper Spur – via upper Gnarl Ridge). Left heads down into upper Newton Canyon – the way descending thin forest and fragrant manzanita. For me, the highpoint (and the moment of truth) on this GREAT hike is the crossing of the upper Newton Creek canyon area. As with the lower Newton Creek area, devastation is obvious – and makes for some exciting moments if you don't know what you are in for. Last time, Allison and I spent 10 minutes hiking around this wide, boulder-filled canyon looking for the way across RAGING Newton Creek. Indeed, the "bridge" seemed almost as challenging to find this time around: hidden slightly in a hummock of rubble and indicated by a small piece of red tape on a wire poked in gravel. Social trails ABOUND; indeed, a couple (hiking with a funny little pug) had NO idea they needed to cross the river and then scramble up the cutbank. Once Allison and I found the bridge, the crossing was slightly easier, the log situation slightly improved from the last time. Before, there were 3 narrow waterlogged logs placed AT the water line (whitewater

lapping over the point where we stepped). Today, 2 more new logs had been laid down – and the water was lower (8-10 inches BELOW the logs). Even so, the lower branches did have scary-looking icicles dangling from them, making for an interesting experience. In the end, I felt the same level of anxiety about the crossing – but Allison felt MUCH better. Whooping and almost high-fiving, our next obstacle was scrambling up the chewed-out cutbank – again, indicated by a tiny red ribbon that beginners might EASILY miss as it is downstream from the logs. As usual, Allison provided several action ass pictures of her exciting ascent up the cutbank.



Left to Right: (top) lower Gnarl Ridge, Newton; (bottom) more Newton - crossing INSANE bridge, scrambling up eroded cutbank

After scrambling the cutbank, the Timberline was obvious. Passing a cool little spring and spring-fed creek, we zigzagged up a couple switchbacks – the views across the canyon and up at Gnarl Ridge VERY impressive. Within 10 minutes, we came to a ridgeline lateral moraine. Here, the Timberline continued right/up towards Hood – but the Newton Creek trail heading left/down the sometimes-edgy moraine top. Feeling more than home-free, Allison and I enjoyed hiking down the scenic trail very much – occasionally scrambling up to more eroding points along the ridgeline to find spectacular views over the entirety of the Newton Creek canyon (including Hood and Gnarl). Eventually, we descended into more sustained forest (losing commanding views and the alpine feel of the moraine) – and dropped fully to the lower reaches of Newton Creek. Even in the forest, though, there was evidence of glacial boulders, washouts – signs Newton Creek had changed paths a lot. After 2 miles, we arrived back near the lower bridge – and then hiked just under a mile out. Unfortunately, we were running a little late – and hopes to enjoy some Ikea cafeteria food were dashed when we BARELY made it to PDX in time (i.e. me to get on the Salem-bound shuttle, Allison to continue on to Portland for a ballet). Nonetheless, there was no disappointment given that we knew – all day – that the chance to enjoy this hike this late in the year was an incredible treat.



Left to Right: (top) Gnarl Ridge, heading down Newton Creek trail; (bottom) more Newton Creek trail

**September 11-12, 2015 – Dayhiking Two Timberline Thru-Sections... Timberline to Ramona Falls, Timberline to Meadows!**  
 After YEARS talking about doing this style of car-to-car trip, we FINALLY committed. Plan A had been to tackle the Timberline trail between Timberline Lodge and Ramona on Saturday, followed by attempting the Timberline trail between Cooper to Elk Meadows on Sunday. But Timberline to Ramona proved PLENTY challenging and longer than expected, causing us to back off Sunday, executing a

shorter – but no less exciting – traverse between Timberline and Meadows. As should hopefully be obvious, hiking these thru-sections requires driving and placing vehicles at each trailhead, meaning Marshall/Allison and I each drove our respective Subaru's up to the mountain on Friday. For this trip, we basecamped at the Government Camp Best Western – which is ideally situated for placing cars up at Timberline Lodge (20 minutes up)... the central trailhead for both hikes we ultimately accomplished.



Left to Right: heading out from Timberline Lodge, first little ford at Little Zigzag canyon, undulating terrain and fall colors

Meeting at Government Camp on Friday, we got a reasonable night sleep and woke early to position cars the next morning. Our first task was to drive back down highway 26 to the Lolo Pass Road, and then head 7 miles to the Ramona Falls trailhead. While this was a new trailhead for me, Allison/Marshall had hiked the ~4 mile Ramona loop once before and were familiar with the area. After using the pit-toilet, we left Marshall's car at the busy trailhead and jumped into my car – driving BACK through Government Camp and then up to Timberline Lodge. Our total exchange time was 75 minutes – 15 minutes less than expected. Hitting the trail around 9:30, we set out on a cloudless day that was fall-like but warm. Anticipating a 12-ish mile hike (an UNDERestimation, for the record!), our only concern was one of the big Sandy River crossings, one of four bridge-free ford-o-rama's. But we were prepared, carrying poles, sandals, and a length of rope. Heading out from the lodge, we hiked the familiar dusty, dry Timberline trail through thin forest and under ski lifts.



Left to Right: BIG view of Big Zigzag, bigger ford at Big Zigzag, climb to Paradise, official Paradise sign, into Lost Creek canyon

Descending gently to sandy Little Zigzag canyon, we easily crossed a muddy streambed before making our way over undulating terrain – culminating on the scenic south moraine defining Big Zigzag. Descending steeply, we were surprised and pleased to pass lots of spring-fed walls and greenery – having watched Oregon suffer quite the drought this summer! The Big Zigzag ford was more sporting than Little Zigzag – but accomplished via a straightforward rock-hop. Above said ford, the official Timberline trail stays low in the trees while the Paradise Park loop climbs high above, before then dropping to rejoin the Timberline down-trail. Given that our goal was the latter, we proceeded UP 1000 feet to Paradise – made palatable by beautiful fall colors and my being in great shape post-Switzerland. Going into this hike – having hiked some of Paradise before – I honestly thought I'd seen everything there was to see in terms of this area. I was pleased to see that I was quite wrong! At the first official Paradise sign above (the farthest I'd hiked before), we enthusiastically proceeded north. At first, it seemed like the views of Hood were going away as we descended into more woods away from the mountain. Even so, the shallow draw of Lost Creek was a magical spot with a lovely stream and LOTS of nearby campsites. By this point, it was outright HOT and Allison and I fully dipped our heads/hair into the creekbed while Marshall filtered water.



Left to Right: more Paradise Park, end of Paradise Park/back to Timberline – MASSIVE view of Sandy topography

Beyond the campsites, the trail entered this meandering HIGH meadow that was more open and scenic than the southern Paradise Park area we had oh-so-briefly visited before. Although the total mileage across Paradise was only around 2, it felt – in a good way – longer and more satisfyingly scenic. Just another fine example of how the Timberline proper is often IN the trees, while the more interesting higher/side-trails – e.g. Paradise Park - represent the real gems of Hood hiking. Half-way back to the Timberline, we found an open area with a benchy log and ate lunch – enthusiastic about the HUGE views, captivated by Yocum Ridge, but perplexed by the

LONG and uncertain route down... particularly given that there was a lot of cliffy drama in the Sandy drainage. From our lunch spot, we dropped into thin woods and, with one exception, were in trees until we hit the northern Timberline junction. Said exception – half-way to the junction – was this HUGE overlook above the MASSIVE Sandy River; it was SO big that it almost put the Big Zigzag to shame in terms of wild geology and devastation. While not as austere, the Sandy overlook featured two huge river drainages cutting the side of Hood into deep chasms, many MASSIVE sheer cliff faces or wedges of rock. Farthest away, Yocum Ridge appeared as this emerald park atop this wall of cliffs; closer up, this raging waterfall cut a circuit in deep rock and gravel, all below this sharkfin-like wall of rock. In the middle, a nunatak-like island of greenery seemed like it would disintegrate in the next earthquake or eruption. Continuing, we arrived at the Timberline junction; heading right, we dropped through cool and welcome woods for a couple miles before breaking out into the Sandy River drainage. The BIG Sandy ford was the hardest on the hike – half a dozen people in various stages of crossing, pondering crossing, or resting after crossing. The river today was about 15 feet wide – brown but churning with whitewater. Allison and I traded boots for sandals and made our way through the calf-deep water at the least-scary section most people were using. I was not afraid of the crossing – but I respected it a lot: the rushing water was pushy, and the rocky bottom was invisible, variable, and mobile. Meanwhile, Marshall followed some others upstream – where a scary, skinny log was used; Marshall said neither Allison nor I could have managed it. Today, the river occupied maybe 20% of the total gravel bed; in flood-stage, the Sandy grows to over 40 feet across; this is where hikers have drowned/been swept away in flood-stage conditions. It was easy to see why as we surveyed the whole scene... views up the soaring canyon to Hood, the nunatak-like island of trees, many impressive cliffs and rocks. Definitely one of my favorite and most memorable views hiking Hood – as impressive as my first impression of Cooper/Eliot, but TOTALLY different.



Left to Right: SPORTING Sandy crossing, impressive view up Sandy crossing, Ramona Falls, cliffs near Ramona, MORE bad Sandy!

After our successful but exciting Sandy ford, I think that we assumed we were done and attitudinally checked out – which is always a bad idea, particularly given that Allison thought everything else was obvious. Although getting to Ramona Falls was straightforward and short, the rest of the trip was long, and at-times confusing and nerve-wracking. For all the hype I've heard about Ramona Falls, I did think it was pretty good – even for a dry September afternoon. Unfortunately, the lighting was bad and some hikers were NOT obeying the rules – jumping the fence to stand in the pool, obstructing photographs. After the falls, we continued around the loop – at first in lush woods along a pretty creek, all under wavy cliffs that reminded us of the Dolomites. But then the way entered thin dry woods that grew dusty, dry, and LONG. When we passed a young couple with a toddler and infant hiking in the opposite direction, we ASSUMED the parking lot must be SUPER-close. But it was not. Allison grew concerned that we'd missed a turn when we came to another Sandy crossing with no good bridge – insisting there had been a well-constructed footbridge before (in fact, that had washed away years since they'd been up here before). But there was a thick log-crossing which, while fine, begged the question: WOW, that family hauled those kids over THIS? On the other side, we walked along this torn-up edge in thin woods 20 minutes before running into some parties who confirmed the parking lot was imminent. Arriving at the car by 4:30, we did not dally because we had Timberline dinner reservations for 6:15. In the end, our GPS spec's were 14.4 miles, with 1500 up and 5020 DOWN. Although we were tired, I'm not sure it felt like a 5000 foot down day. Following showers, we headed back up the mountain. Unfortunately, our dinner review was eerily similar to the experience Ellen/Allison/I had back in 2010: First, they misrepresented a few things on the menu (e.g. the salad was missing goat cheese but had WAY too many raw walnuts). Second, the waiter did not know what some items were on the menu and seemed disrespectful. Third, the service was HORRIBLY slow – with a strong emphasis on just our table. In contrast with 2010, we did NOT receive any free dessert; by the time we were turning down desserts, it was FREEZING and dark. I picked up my car and thankfully the hotel had a few chocolate chip cookies in the lobby when we arrived.



Left to Right: Hood from Meadows parking lot, heading up from Timberline, what's left of the Palmer, first dry mini-canyon

On Sunday, we tackled the shorter Timberline to Meadows section – the only objective challenge being the White River ford/crossing. Back in January, Allison and I had done a snowshoeing trip from the highway up White River (I included some pictures at the end of this report); although impressive, it was a VERY short trip and so I had very low expectations of today's hike... say nothing of the fact that there looked to be way too much ski-junk on each end. But I digress. After packing up, we headed to just below the gated Meadows area parking lot – leaving Marshall's car there. The views of Hood from the parking lot were beautiful. And then we headed back up to Timberline – a drive that seemed longer than expected. Although we were technically following the PCT for the first mile or so, we were

a little confused about how to actually get on the trail from the parking lot. After some goofiness, we huffed straight up from the parking lot and soon reached an obvious sign-post within 10 minutes – heading right and down into a dry mini-canyon of rubble. Winding into and then out of the gravel, we headed across a scrubby plateau of rolling rock interspersed with stands of trees. To the south, we enjoyed on of the clearest views of Jefferson and the Sisters. Traversing, it was soon obvious we were heading towards the White River moraine... and QUITE the blasting sandstorm blasting down the canyon (given away by this dynamic white cloud in the distance).



Left to Right: (top) FABULOUS views of Jefferson and the Sisters, back up at Hood, nearing the White River sandstorm moraine (bottom) reaching the moraine at the upper White River canyon, sand dunes, PCT junction and view before dropping INTO canyon

Indeed, the trail hit the moraine at an effective sand dune – and continued along a sandy ridgeline for about a quarter of a mile, the winds howling down multiple channels of upper White River. Given the drama IN the canyon, I was surprised we weren't continuously pounded along the moraine... although we were sandblasted a few times. Eventually, we arrived at this more forested area where the PCT headed south, but the Timberline headed east/down into White River. Although the trail had, up to this point, been wide and obvious, it got a little narrow and brushy as it zigzagged down into White River proper through a surprising amount of foliage. Where the trail bottomed out in the canyon was near where Allison and I snowshoed, the terrain quite familiar even without snow. Shockingly, it was very calm and quiet at the point where we crossed – most of the winds and sand-action in the higher and more open upper reaches of the canyon. Although not as sporting as the Big Sandy, the White River ford was made challenging by multiple braids. And also: while the sides of the Timberline along the canyon walls were well-marked with stone edging, the middle section with the river braids was an unmarked free-for-all; indeed, my crossing route was fairly different from Allison/Marshall's – 10 minutes behind me.



Left to Right: (top) near the bottom of the White River canyon, view up, Allison and Marshall crossing the MANY river braids (bottom) heading across the meadow, detail of stark Hood summit, more meadows, impressive Umbrella Falls

In the first shot above (top row, leftmost), you can see a lateral moraine that tapers down and then continues. Between those points, I knew from the snowshoe, was a little notch where I suspected the Timberline would be – notably in more trees and less subject to the open gravel of the full-on moraine areas. And sure enough... we found that to be the case. That said, the first 200 vertical feet of

climbing OUT of the canyon were shockingly steep! We continued to climb nearly 1000 feet – all in forest, the way reminiscent of the climb up to Elk Meadows. Eventually, we entered a more open meadow and began to contour through golden grass interspersed regularly with trees. I was pleasantly surprised that you could not see a lot of ski junk given that the map definitely indicated some of what we were looking at represented the upper runs above Meadows. Eventually, we found an acceptable place to eat lunch – the challenging wishlist including: shade, view of Hood, and some kind of log for sitting. Following lunch, there was less than 15 minutes of high meadow/view hiking to be had before we reached the forested Umbrella Falls trail, which took us right to the Meadows parking lot. The Timberline, in contrast, stays high – contouring right across the Meadows ski area before dropping into Heather Canyon and then climbing to Newton Creek and moraine. It should be noted that, had we more time, we would have wanted to do that full traverse, joining Newton – which we had obviously hiked before. Something for another day. We were all expecting to actually pass Umbrella Falls before arriving at the parking lot – and were thus surprised when we hit pavement with no water. Across the road, the trail continued to the falls. En route, we passed some excited 20-something guys running/screaming about some kind of trailside wasp nest (which we never found). After a tedious walk, we reached the rather impressive falls – but were disappointed to find that you can basically walk to the falls in 5 minutes by bushwhacking down some kind of unofficial trail from the upper parking area. Needless to say, we used that route to hike out and back to our car. In the end, our GPS spec's were 5.8 miles, with 1200 up and 500 DOWN. Although relatively short, this hike was perfect for enabling us to drive back home by daylight! Lastly,



Left to Right: White River snowshoe, Allison and I from January 2015

Hikes We Are LESS Enthusiastic About – And/Or Removed From Collection, 2015

June 13, 2009 – East Zigzag Mountain, TOO MUCH SNOW, ANNOYING ROAD!

June 5, 2010 – Hunchback Mountain, SUCKY TRAIL AND VIEWS!

May 24, 2015 – Tilly Jane Trail to Lower Cooper Spur, LONG, STEEP, BURN WITH FEW VIEWS UNTIL THE END!