

Queens River Loop 8/17 - 8/23

D = Day
N = Night

TH = Trail Head = Queen's River TH outside of Atlanta, Elmore County, Idaho

Driving route:

Hwy 21 north from Boise to FS road 268 (at High Bridge at Moore's Creek and Lucky Peak reservoir).

Drive 67 miles, turn left on FS road 206, drive 2 miles to TH.

Itinerary:

8/17 D0, N0	Home to TH
8/18 D1, N1	TH to Nanny Cr 6.9 miles 5200' to 6500'
8/19 D2, N2	Nanny Cr to Unnamed Lake off Blue Jay Lake Trail 4.8 6500' to 8200'
8/20 D3, N3	Blue Jay Lake Trail to Pat's Lake 6.0 8200' to 9250' to 8770' to 8350'
8/21 D4, N4	Pat's Lake to Johnson Lake 5.1 8350' to 6960' to 8180' to 7998'
8/22 D5, N5	Johnson Lake to Scenic Creek via Brown's Lake 4.9 Brown's Lake side trip lunch = 1.6 m 7998' to 8500' to 7800' to 6600'
8/23 D6, Out	Scenic Creek to TH 6.7 6600' to 5200'
TOTAL	34.4 miles

Stanley Ranger Station, HC 64, Box 9900, Stanley, ID 83278, 208-774-3000

Stanley Police: 208-774-3711

Custer County Sheriff: 208-774-3327

Elmore County Sheriff: 208-587-2121

Sawtooth National Forest, 2647 Kimberly Rd. E., Twin Falls, ID. 83301,
208-737-3200

Queens River Loop Sawtooth Pack Trip 8/18-23, 2007

We had family from Wisconsin coming for a visit and we wanted to show them the beauty of the Sawtooths. For years, Charles and I had wanted to do the Queens River loop and, after a bit of research, I was able to put together a trip that would be doable for our 5 backpacking visitors, the youngest of whom is 9. Since we only have a 4 horse trailer, and 2 of those horses – Amber and Warrior – were to be pack horses, they would have to walk. We would pack all the food, kitchen gear, tents and pads. They would have to carry their clothes and a few sleeping bags. The plan was to pack more of their gear each day as our food supply decreased. Another plan was that we would surely pass them on the trail so we would drop the panniers at the campsite and come back for them and pick up their backpacks.

Day 0: Friday 8/17 We - 4 adults, 3 grandkids, 1 dog and 4 horses - were on the road from home by noon. We drove from home to trailhead via the Middle Fork Boise River Road, FR 268. This road goes past Lucky Peak reservoir and Arrowrock reservoir. It's not a bad road and is quite scenic. However, since I was driving, I missed most of the scenery. It was just very winding and hence required a lot of attention to drive it. It was 63 miles of dirt road to the trailhead and the campground. FS 268 goes directly to Atlanta, but the trailhead is west of Atlanta. We turned off FS 268 at 61 miles onto FS 206 and continued 2 miles more to the trailhead. This is a good trailhead for horse camping with hitch rails and feed bunks. In addition there is a latrine and tables and fire pits for each site. There is no fee for camping or parking. As we settled in, 2 Forest Service guys, with 2 pack mules and a pack horse, came off the trail. One was Charlie from the Idaho City Ranger District. They had ridden the loop in the same direction we planned, so we grilled them for grazing and trail condition details. They told us there was some large downfall, but that there were workarounds. We said we were BCH and carried a saw. They asked if it were a cross cut saw. We then got a slight sense of the downfall we might face, but only slight.

Day 1, Saturday 8/18. Our backpacker contingent was on the trail by 9:30 AM, we were loaded and ready by 10:30 AM. That was the earliest we hit the trail during the entire trip. Just before we left, one of the camp hosts said there has been a grizzly bear in the area for the last 2 summers and suggested we have a bell on our pack horse while on the trail. We thought that sage advice and followed it. I think Charles is still hearing that bell ring in his head. There is a clearly a reason to spend money for those Swiss bells with their 'pure' tones. Hours of cow bell is not sweet sounding. We were headed up the Queens River Trail to Nanny Creek, 6.9 miles up the trail with an elevation gain from 5200' to 6500'. The Sawtooth Wilderness begins on the other side of the bridge over Queens River just past the campground and trailhead parking. We passed 2 folks early on that were headed out after doing the Little Queens to Queens River loop. I believe we found the correct camp area, but most of the creeks were dry so I'm not sure. But where we camped had great grazing, great access to

Queens River and fabulous views of cliffs both east and west. That eve we saw a deer on the hillside on the other side of the river.

Day 2, Sunday 8/19. The weather started out cloudy and got downright rainy by the end of the day. Once we had the pannier and top pack loads partitioned and weighed, we sent our backpackers down the trail. Charles and I then saddled the horses, put up and tied down the loads. That usually took about an hour and we were usually on the trail 1 ½ hours after the backpackers. We were supposed to camp at the unnamed lake on the Blue Jay Lake trail, but we could not find the trail. I found something that looked like the trail and some old blazes, but it was steep and not maintained. The trail is not on the map any longer either. So I made an executive decision to continue up the Queens River trail and camp at the next likely spot. As we climbed the switchbacks away from the river, it started to drizzle on us. The switchbacks topped out into the river canyon. The trail ran along the canyon wall and the river was far below. No likely camping spots here. We continued up the canyon, knowing it would open up into a meadow at the Pats Lake Trail junction. Here we found grazing and access to water. We dropped the panniers and headed back down the trail to pick up the back packs for our foot travelers. We caught them about a mile from the campsite. We slung the 3 heaviest packs on Warrior and tied them up. The 2 kids packs we hung from Amber's sawbuck. Warrior looked pretty cool with water bottles and back packer bear barrels swinging below his belly. He, however, was fairly unimpressed and simply wanted to be done with work so that he could go graze. We traveled 4.3 miles that day and went from 6500 feet to 8280 feet. Just as we got camp set up, it rained. We all scurried to our tents. The rain passed, we ate dinner and just as we got the dishes washed, it started raining again. Again, we all scurried to our tents. About 8:30 PM the rain stopped and I popped my head out of the tent. It had cleared and the setting sun was turning the top of Mount Everly to gold.

Day 3, Monday 8/20. The day dawned chilly, at 38 degrees, and overcast. An overcast day kept the temperatures comfortable for our backpackers. Turns out we had placed our toilet site not far from the Pats Lake trail and in clear view from the trail. Fortunately, we were the only folks on the trail and had packed up the toilet by then. The trail to Pats Lake starts out almost immediately with steep, rocky switch backs. On one, Warrior fell to his knees. Amazingly, for all his scrambling to regain his footing, he received no cuts or scrapes. Once we topped out at the unnamed lake I noticed Amber had received many scrapes, yet she had no problem with the trail. The trail and views from the junction to Pats Lake are simply spectacular. We passed unnamed lakes and continued to climb to the pass at 9250 feet. I was taking pictures as well as leading a pack horse. The trail switched back up granite ledges and was rocky and steep. I decided that I needed to focus on the trail and not on the photography. We paused at the pass to soak up the beauty. To the east we saw the upper basin of Queens River and rows after rows of mountain ranges. To the west again rows after rows of mountain ranges. We were surrounded by spectacular beauty. It is once we

cross the pass that I feel I am truly in the Sawtooths. Simply magnificent. At this point we began the descent to Arrowhead Lake and onto Pats Lake. The trail hairpins steeply down slabs and talus with some big step downs. We decided it was safer to get off and lead the horses through these. There was a large deadfall angled across the talus switchback that was almost to Amber's belly. While there was a small trail, on the downhill side, around it, she chose, instead to launch herself over it. We camped at the outflow end of Pats Lake at 8350 feet. We had traveled 3.3 miles that day. Shortly after retiring, it rained. While it was a steady rain, the ground under the trees remained dry.

Day 4, Tuesday 8/21. The day dawned beautifully clear. We spread our gear out to dry as we had coffee and breakfast. The trailhead and camper began to look more and more inviting. We all were tiring of packing up, moving, and unpacking each day. So we decided to try for Browns Lake this day so we could walk out the next day. The trail from Pats Lake to Johnson Lake Junction went through a 5 year old or so burn area and contained lots of large downfall. We switch backed down the trail following the outflow from Pats Lake. The fireweed was prolific but was coming to the end of its bloom time. At one point, the trail stopped abruptly due to all the downfall. I finally discerned the slightly trampled vegetation of the makeshift trail around the 'pick up sticks' of downfall. The trail continued with long switch backs down a long, wide canyon to the junction with Johnson Creek trail. The trail was very brushy and overgrown with tall buckbrush and many times we saw bear scat; a point not missed by our backpackers. The trail crossed the creek and climbed back up the hillside. All along this trail we stepped over lots of large deadfall. It was very tough on the stock. Mid afternoon we caught up with the backpackers at the Johnson Lake trail. We had planned to camp at Johnson Lake, but that allure of the trailhead remained. However, we warned them that if we went on and over High Pass, we would have to continue until we either found good grazing and access to water or got to Browns Lake. All agreed to continue. We rode on and up a long, gradual switchback to High Pass at 8500 feet. Again, I was taking pictures as well as leading a pack horse. Near the top I decided that I needed to focus on the trail and not on the photography. We paused at the pass to soak up the beauty. The views back across the valley towards Pats Lake were gorgeous. The trail hair pinned down switchbacks to the junction with the Browns Lake trail. Almost there. Little did we realize that the trail to Brown's Lake is very steep and rocky. One stretch was almost vertical and we got off and led the horses. It would be a tough final stretch for our backpackers that had already had a long day on the trail. We passed a dried pond and wondered if that were the 'lake'. If so, what a disappointment. We rode on and topped out by at Browns Lake (8278 feet) at its outflow. What we saw was well worth the ride. We saw a stunning lake, tucked below towering peaks. However, being a typical high mountain lake surrounded by peaks, there was no grazing and no place to highline. It looked green at the other end of the lake, but we could not tell if it were due to grass or other vegetation. There was a faint trail along the side of the lake winding its way through the rock and brush. Charles stayed back and held the pack animals, while Chet and I checked it out. It was a rugged trail that went

over deadfall and between narrowly spaced trees. I decided it was not a trail suitable for pack stock. We dropped the panniers at the hardened camp site and headed back down the trail to gather the back packs. At this point we met the only person we saw the entire trip. He had come up Little Queens River trail and was planning on traveling cross country from Brown Lake to Queens River Trail. He apparently was seeking solitude, which he would not have near us with 4 adults, 3 kids, a dog, 4 horses, and a cow bell. We told him of the potential camp site at the other end of the lake and we never saw him again. Moments later, our backpackers appeared on the trail and declined help with their packs since they were 'almost there'. Little did they know the steepness of the trail. We traveled 6.9 miles down, up, down, and up again that day. We grazed and highlined the horses down near the dried pond. We placed our tent down there as well to monitor the horses throughout the night.

Day 5, Wednesday 8/22. It promised to be another clear and beautiful day. We watched the sun dance yellow on Browns Peak while we enjoyed our morning coffee. The lake was perfectly calm and the peaks were perfectly mirrored on it. A curious deer checked us, the horses, and the camp out from various angles until it was satisfied we were no threat. We decided to try to hike out today. It was a 9.6 mile walk, but was all downhill. However, we did have camping and grazing options should we decide to stop. The trail out was easy with a gradual descent. About 4 miles from the trailhead we caught up with our backpackers. They were making fabulous time. We passed them and continued down the trail. Finally we saw the bridge and the trail head. We dropped the panniers, had a beer (and a can of peaches for Charles) and headed back up the trail to once again intercept our backpackers to pick up packs. We intercepted them 2 minutes from the trailhead. They were cooking coming down the trail. Our young grandson, all of 9 years old, had been setting the blistering pace. While it had been too cold to unload the solar shower on the trail, we had 40 gallons of water in the tank on top of the horse trailer, warming all week, with which to remove some of the dust and grime of the trip. We did not hesitate to queue up, of course we women were first and second. We camped that evening at the trailhead, in the parking lot. 2 unattended rigs from Washington state were parked in one of the near, desirable campsites. We decided that was somewhat rude to park in a campsite instead of the trailer parking site while on the trail. We had moved our rig from that campsite to the parking area the morning we hit the trail.

Day 6, Thursday 8/23. We had breakfast and loaded up to travel to Atlanta. I had never been to Atlanta and the family wanted to see it as well. We encountered a small black bear cub beside the road as we drove to the town. We are sure Momma and another cub were nearby though we never saw them. Atlanta is a vibrant mountain town. If you have been to Silver City, Atlanta is nothing like that. Atlanta is alive. Folks live there; year round. We talked to a few folks passionate about the preservation of the town. We learned a lot about its history and the difficulties of the preservation. One gentleman I talked with knew many former HP folks. As he tossed names I could say that I had worked for that person or

knew that person. That created an instant familiarity. But that familiarity is not needed with the folks in Atlanta as they are so welcoming, so open and so helpful. They are passionate about preserving their history and we learned that many historic buildings were being moved from Rocky Bar, other environs and even Eagle. While the framing and footings were allowed to be new to support the 'old' buildings', the rest of the exterior of the buildings need to be, if possible, original. We wandered around, investigating the historical buildings. They were unlocked, very well appointed, and open to the public. Trust abounds in Atlanta. We also learned that the power generation from the dam was down and that they had back up diesel power generation for 6 hours a day. They were matter of fact when they said it was sufficient to keep the refrigerated and frozen foods safe. After a bit, we headed down the road in search of hot springs. Many are purported to be in the area via both map and word, but we had a 4 horse trailer following us and turnarounds appeared very few and far between in and past Atlanta. We gave up and headed down the road, aiming for the Kirkham Hot Springs, via FR 327 and FR 384. This route, to Edna Creek and Highway 21, went over a few summits, but was only about 34 miles on dirt road. We stopped at Kirkham Hot Springs to remove the knots in our bodies as well as to remove the next layer of trail grime. We learned previously that we cannot remove our horses at this stop. We had removed them from the trailer and had tied them to the trailer out of the way of traffic and out of any impact to the surrounding land. And we removed and packed up any expelled manure. Even though we thoroughly cleaned up after our horses, the ranger said we can not remove them at all from the trailer at the Kirkham Hot Springs. This time, we didn't even attempt it. Note, dogs are not allowed either. We kept horses and dog at the trailer and relaxed and unwound tight muscles in the heat of the hot springs. We then headed for Emmett and home.

It was a great trip full of beautiful scenery. It was a great way to spend time with our family. We traveled 31 miles, but I'm sure Bindi – the dog – traveled more. It was also a lot of work, both in preparation, the daily packing, moving, unpacking, and finally the unpacking, cleaning and stowing at home. But well worth it. I am already making plans for next year's trip into the White Clouds.