



The Herald - Everett, Wash. - www.HeraldNet.com

Published: Saturday, July 16, 2005

Take a hike

Surprise Lake

What: A deep forest environment shades you from the sun as you travel through old growth trees on Surprise Creek Trail (No. 1060) that finishes off at a true alpine lake setting with an option to take a dip.

Where: Take U.S. 2 east. Turn right after milepost 58 (about 6 miles east of Skykomish and just before a railroad underpass). Go over the railroad tracks and turn right onto an unmarked road to the service center for Burlington Northern Santa Fe Railway. The road ends in 0.2 miles at the trailhead parking lot.

Length: 9.4 miles round trip

Difficulty: Mildly strenuous

Beginning elevation: 2,200 feet

Highest elevation: 4,508 feet

Maps: Green Trails No. 176; USGS Scenic

Notes: Although the beginning of this hike is less than beautiful, you will head up the trail underneath power lines until the trail ducks back into the forest. After one mile of gradual switchbacks you will cross the bridge over Surprise Creek. The trail will travel next to the creek for the next few miles and waterfalls surround you as you begin a steeper ascent up the valley and gain almost 1,000 feet in one mile. Once you reach the highpoint at the gap and make your way towards the lake you will pass some beautiful tarns that are very fragile. At the lake, there are plenty of awesome spots to have lunch, or even camp overnight.

Other opportunities: Glacier Lake (4,806 feet) is another close-by lake as well as Sparkplug Mountain (6,311 feet), which is a climber's objective.

Permits: Northwest Pass is required for parking at the trailhead.

More information: Contact the Skykomish Ranger Station at 360-677-2414 or consult the "Fresh Reports" section on the Washington Trails Association Web site at www.wta.org. A photo gallery from previous trips can be viewed at www.questalb.com under "Gallery."

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