

Walupt Lake Horse Camp Experience



We steadily climbed the Cascades with our Dodge dually, camper and horse trailer until we finally reached the Walupt Lake Horse Camp located in the Washington State Goat Rocks Wilderness Area. It was October and nearly dark when Mike and I and our friends Matt and Amy pulled into the empty camping area where we chose a big, double camp site. We tied the blanketed horses to a sturdy highline with their feed and water handy and readied ourselves for a nice long weekend of riding for us girls and fishing for the guys. Two days later Amy and I went on an all day, 15 mile trail ride that climbs high above the lake and travels along the upper sides of the mountains that encircle the lake, making a loop. The morning was refreshingly cool, excellent weather for our conditioned horses who had much climbing to do for the first part of our trek. After a good breakfast we packed the necessary gear, saddled up and headed out, watering our horses in the sparkling, clear Walupt Lake. Because it is a designated Wilderness Area, we filled out the required forms at the bottom of the trailhead and poked them into the wooden box. If we didn't return, people would know where to look for us. My horse buddy, R-Two Kooter Kat, a 7 year old stout, gaited Buckskin Morgan gelding and I were well prepared with food, water, appropriate clothing and some survival gear in case we unexpectedly had to spend the night in the wilderness. Kooter and I headed out behind Amy on her big buckskin Mustang, as she had been here the year before and knew the tricky spots on the trail to



watch for. The trail led us upward through the dark lush forest of large fir and cedar trees, ferns and bear grass. The climb was steep enough that we rested the horses often and eventually the trees became shorter, scrubbier, opening up the mountain views. We experienced so much but I will only bring out a few interesting things for now. Amy took us up a tricky trail to a viewpoint, part of which was solid rock and rock ledge. Since we do the natural barefoot method, the horses hooves were tough and while giving good traction the horses can also feel their footing, better than when we had used shoes.

Amy and her buckskin Mustang Dakot

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The horses were a little bit leery of the steep drop offs but we didn't get them close enough for danger as we snapped pictures of the rugged Goat Rocks Mountains. On the other end of our vantage point, we had a good view of the snowcapped Mt Adams where we have horse camped numerous times in the past and enjoyed the alpine forests, meadows and glacial lakes, just below the snowline.



Amy & Kooter with Mt Adams...what a view!

As we continued on our journey, the trails were sometimes a challenge, narrow with steep sides above and below us where we navigated over roots and even around a blind hillside but I had confidence in Kooter since I have specifically trained him for all types of trails and terrain. He has numerous camping, packing and high country trips "under his cinch". Kooter is my proven, steady, mountain horse that I can feel safe on in this rugged country while still enjoying his spirit, spunk and good nature. Now, I had decided long ago that if I deemed a trail too dangerous for the experience or temperament of my mount or myself, I would backtrack rather than risk injury or death to either one of us. It simply would not be worth it. I learned some years ago the hard way, to go with my gut feeling and not to ignore it.

Back to our journey, when the trail widened and leveled out we met a small group of riders who had been hunting Elk and had their pack animals with them. We were at a nice flat spot where Amy and I could move off the trail into a little round area that separated us from the main trail by some large boulders. As the packers moved past us, the last rider turned and said, "Oh, by the way, my husband is somewhere back up the trail with a rack." Huh? No sooner had she spoken, then here come these Elk horns bobbing speedily along toward us, with nothing else visible due to the large boulders between us and the trail. The horses danced a bit and we quickly said our greetings as a running man suddenly came into view and slowed to a fast walk. The Elk antlers were perched high on the top of his tall backpack. Kooter stood at attention on high alert not quite sure what this man/Elk thing was and waited for any further instruction from me (probably hoping I would tell him to run and take us away from this creature)! away. We continued on our way. Narrow trails opened up to some alpine meadows with small lakes and rolling terrain. It was here that we changed directions and picked up the Pacific Crest Trail that stretches from Mexico to Canada. Soon we came to the adrenaline pumping, curving, shale, narrow trail on the steep hillside that I briefly mentioned earlier. You could not see around the bend to know if anyone else was coming on this "one way trail" so we led the horses and it was actually dizzying to look anywhere else other than the trail at my feet. Look up to the left or down to the right or out across the vast open air between the mountains and I would nearly fall off the trail. After reaching the far side we were relieved that we did not meet anyone but our adrenaline still flowed for a few more minutes. We decided that this would be a good time to take a coffee break before mounting back up. No place to go but in the middle of the trail. After we mounted, we headed off. Riding for about 10 feet we noticed a hiker who looked to be in his late 60's, early 70's coming up in front of us about 20 feet. We stopped and visited with him a bit and learned he had been hiking this trail all the way from Mexico and would take the next two weeks to make his way into Canada. He told us that the Pacific Crest trail was the most difficult right here in Washington State, far more difficult than the other states it ran through. He went on his way and Amy and I pondered at the fact that he seemed quite tense and in a hurry to leave, turning away every few seconds only to stop and politely answer another question we had. Usually when we come across a hiker who has been at it for any length of time, they like to stop and visit for more than 5 minutes. Well, it dawned on us that he was not far from us at all when we took our coffee break and the poor man may have seen more than he wanted to. We were so embarrassed that we just had to laugh at ourselves. Even the horses were snickering!

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We took many pictures as we made our way along. There was SO much to see and I felt that this would be

a neat place to bring my experienced friends but

no novice riders or green horses. A fall was a long ways down and very steep in places.

Since it was getting to be later than we thought, we decided to pick up our pace since we were traveling on the level or slightly downhill now. We picked up speed to make it back to camp before dark.

The trail came down to the outside far edge of Walupt lake where we did some cantering, trotting, gaiting, walking. Suddenly we were back to the beginning of the trailhead! We watered our horses by the same bridge where we had started our trail ride that morning and shortly were back in camp just as it was getting dark. Mike and Matt had a nice campfire going with good food cooking.

I took the time to care for Kooter's needs and told him what a good trail buddy he was. He smiled and sighed and closed his eyes while I rubbed him and blanketed him, bedded him down and later fed and watered him well. Next morning he told me he had a dream of a huge Jackalope bearing down on him with monstrous antlers but he stood his ground and I was the one that ran away in fright! Funny boy, that beautiful, gaited Morgan friend of mine with the big liquid amber eyes and good heart, brave heart, all heart, my best buddy.



Amy & Dakota on that dizzying, blind, narrow trail. Yikes!!