

# Mt Jefferson Wilderness Backpack Trip Summary

July 21 – 25, 2019

Tysen, Steve, Maria, Denise & Terry



Mt Jefferson with Russell Lake (View South)

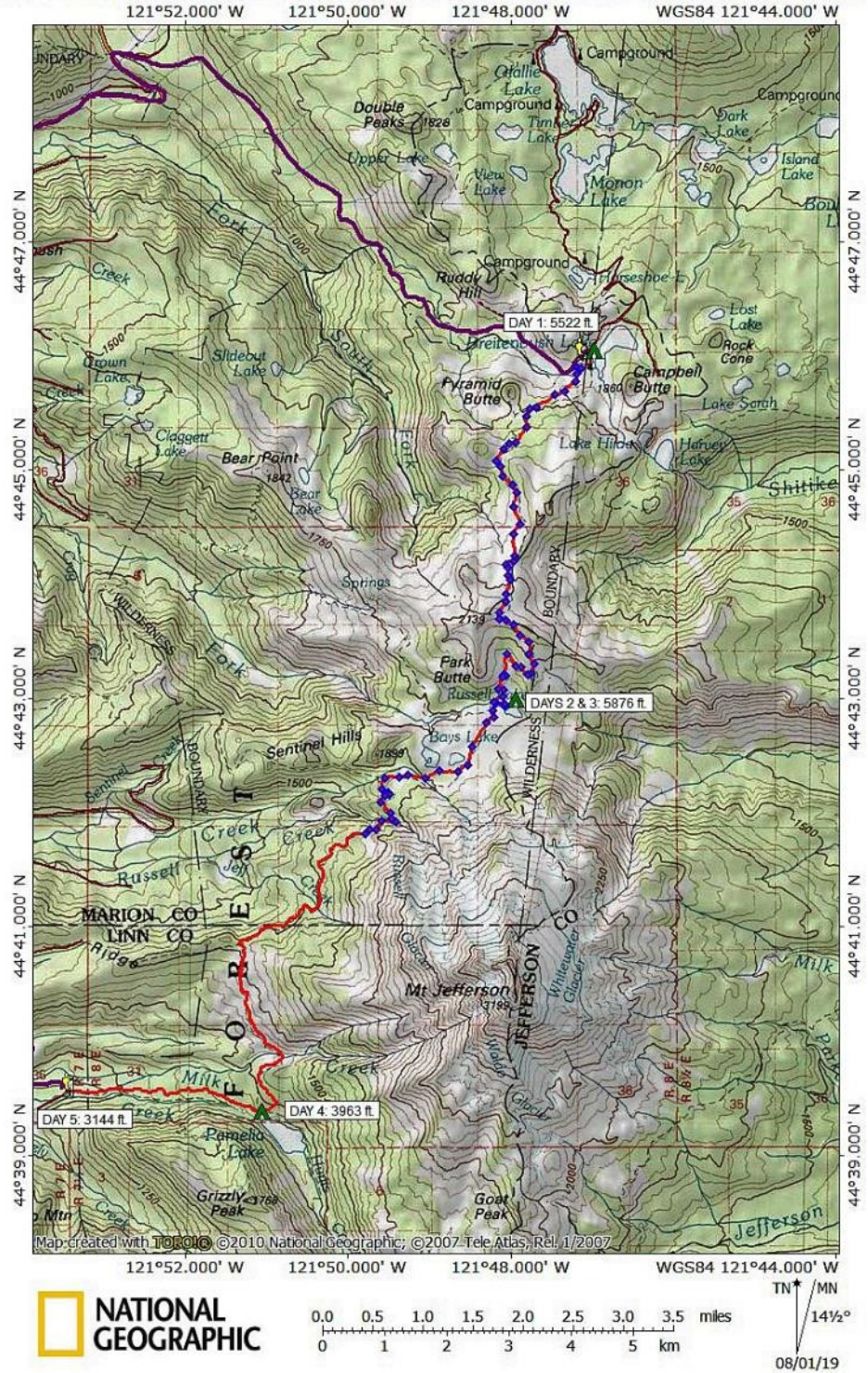
Steve, Maria, Terry, Denise and Tysen drove with two cars to the Pamela Lake TH and left Steve's car there. We continued on northeast through Detroit for another 1.5 hours to the Breitenbush Lake TH where we camped for the night. The last half hour was spent driving over a single lane gravel and rock road that required us to have adequate road clearance on the car and also required us to periodically slow down to 5 mph over stretches of this primitive road that had some steep drop offs.

At the Breitenbush Lake campsite (5,500 ft elevation), we found sufficient campsites as well as a pit toilet but no running water. We had, however, brought extra bottled water. The lake was scenic and partially surrounded by bear grass.

The next morning, we parked the car in the PCT parking lot nearby and headed south on the PCT. The trail climbed up and passed through a long stretch of burned forest. As we continued to climb, we were able to see Mt Hood to the north and started to encounter patches of snow near the trail. The trail finally left the tree line behind and we had to hike through the snow-covered trail as we reached the highest point of our trail (6,900 ft) that day.



TOPO! map printed on 08/01/19 from "Mt Jefferson Wilderness 5-Day Trip FINALgps2.tpo"



Trip Overview Topo (GPS waypoints in blue)

We took our lunch break while enjoying views of Mt Hood to the north and Mt Jefferson to the south. Below Mt Jefferson was Russell Lake in Jefferson Park, our destination for that night (Figure 1).

After lunch, and many pictures, we descended down into Jefferson Park. We made it down to Russell Lake (5,900 ft elevation) and selected Site 29 to camp. There was someone else camped in Site 28 while Site 27 was too small. Since our site, located near the shore of Russell Lake could accommodate only two tents, Denise and Terry chose separate tent sites nearby. While the views were outstanding, the mosquitos required us to lather up or don mosquito netting. Though there must have been thousands of mosquitos, there were many more thousand wildflowers on the trip, especially heather, asters, and bear grass

The next morning, we went on a loop day hike to visit the local lakes that are part of Jefferson Park. We were surprised to find most of the sites empty. Our concern had been to find any site based on the popularity of Jefferson Park. Reasons why there weren't too many campers there included the mosquitos and the lack of easy access to this location. The popular trail access, Whitewater Trail, was still closed from a fire the previous year (It was reopened in August).

In late afternoon, clouds started blowing north over Mt Jefferson and finally reached down to our campsite. At one point, as the cloud layer descended, a gust of wind brushed the surface of Russell Lake, producing a wisp of steam from the lake – the lake was warmer than the wind. Anticipating a rain storm, Terry and Tysen relocated their tents to avoid getting them flooded. Tysen and Steve also dug trenches around their tents.

The periodic wind gusts, that tried to blow our tents down, persisted till about 3 am. Needless, to say, we did not know what we would find in the morning. I didn't rule out a dusting of snow.

The next morning, we found that the clouds had cleared and we were treated to a cool (30's) clear view of Mt Jefferson. No rain and no snow!

We packed up and headed south on the PCT passing some of the local lakes as we started our descent. Our destination was Pamela Lake. However, our challenge would be to safely cross Russell Creek. We queried the various PCT thru hikers that we encountered about crossing this creek and got different pieces of advice. We knew that the water would be cold since the creek originated from a glacier on Mt Jefferson. And we knew that we would have to wade through it. The question was whether we would have to link arms to make it across safely.

As we reached the ravine through which Russell Creek flowed, Terry pointed out an elk carcass that lay downstream from our crossing point. Not a good sign! We changed into our water booties and with the help of Steve made it safely across.

We continued our descent and again found ourselves in stretches of burned out forest. Near a small stream, Jeff Creek, we had lunch before continuing our descent. We had to make another creek crossing over Milk Creek. However, since there was a snow bridge across it, it was an easy crossing.

Continuing our descent, we finally reached the northern shore of Pamela Lake (3,900 ft). While the Jefferson Park campsites did not require any reservations, we needed a permit to camp at Pamela Lake, which we had obtained 3 months earlier. Surprisingly, most of the sites were available and there were no mosquitos. We selected Site 4 on the northern shore, not far from the trail fork that would lead us back to the Pamela Lake TH. The lake and a lot of the way back to the TH was through a rhododendron forest. What a sight this must be in the spring.

Steve, Maria and Tysen took advantage of the lake and Tysen went for a swim. The next morning, we reached the Pamela Lake TH within a couple of hours. Our concern was whether we would be able to get all five backpacks and hikers into Steve and Maria's Subaru Outback. We were able to accomplish this without having to strap anything to the top of the car.

Since we needed to recover Tysen's car from the other TH, we dropped Maria, Denise and Terry off at the small town of Detroit located next to Detroit Lake. Steve and Tysen returned a couple of hours later with both cars. We had a great lunch there and then took a group picture. Steve and Maria would stay at Breitenbush Hot Springs for another night while Tysen would take Denise and Terry back home.

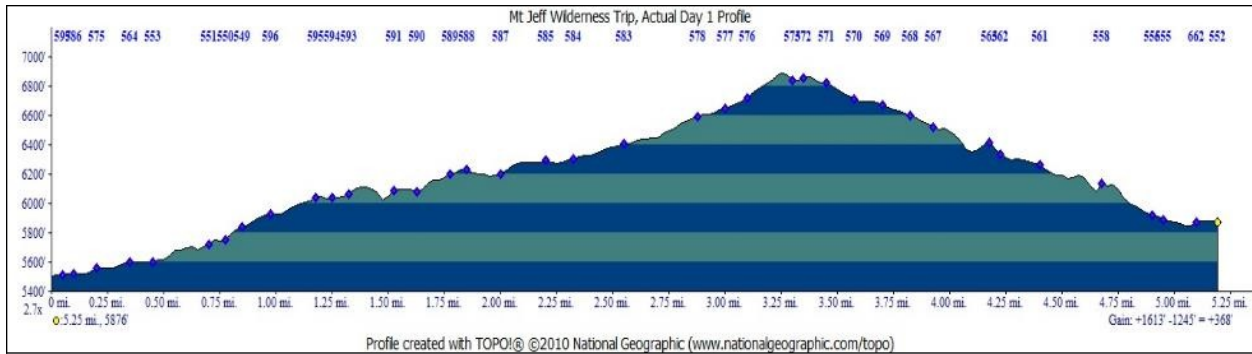
**Postscript:** An hour after lunch, while driving west on a lonely two-lane country road (Highway 226), the Lexus drifted into a ditch and crashed into a culvert deploying all airbags. Unfortunately, Denise received two broken wrists, while Terry and Tysen escaped with only minor scratches and pain. The Lexus was totaled.





Days 1-3 Topo





Day 1 Elevation Profile: 5.2 miles (1,600 ft ascent, 1,200 ft descent)



Breitenbush Lake & Campground







At Breitenbush PCT TH







View north toward Mt Hood (middle right)







View south toward Mt Hood (middle left)



Lunch Break





Mt Jefferson with Russell Lake

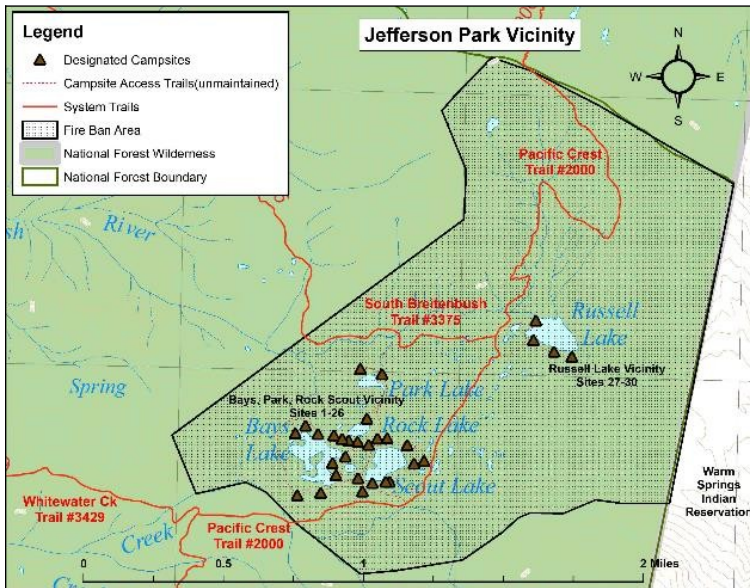






Getting ready for day hike the next morning





Scout Lake









Bays Lake





Rock Lake











Enjoying an Intimate Moment despite the Mosquito Netting



Steve & Maria's tent near Russell Lake



Campsite in trees (left) with view of Park Butte (View North)



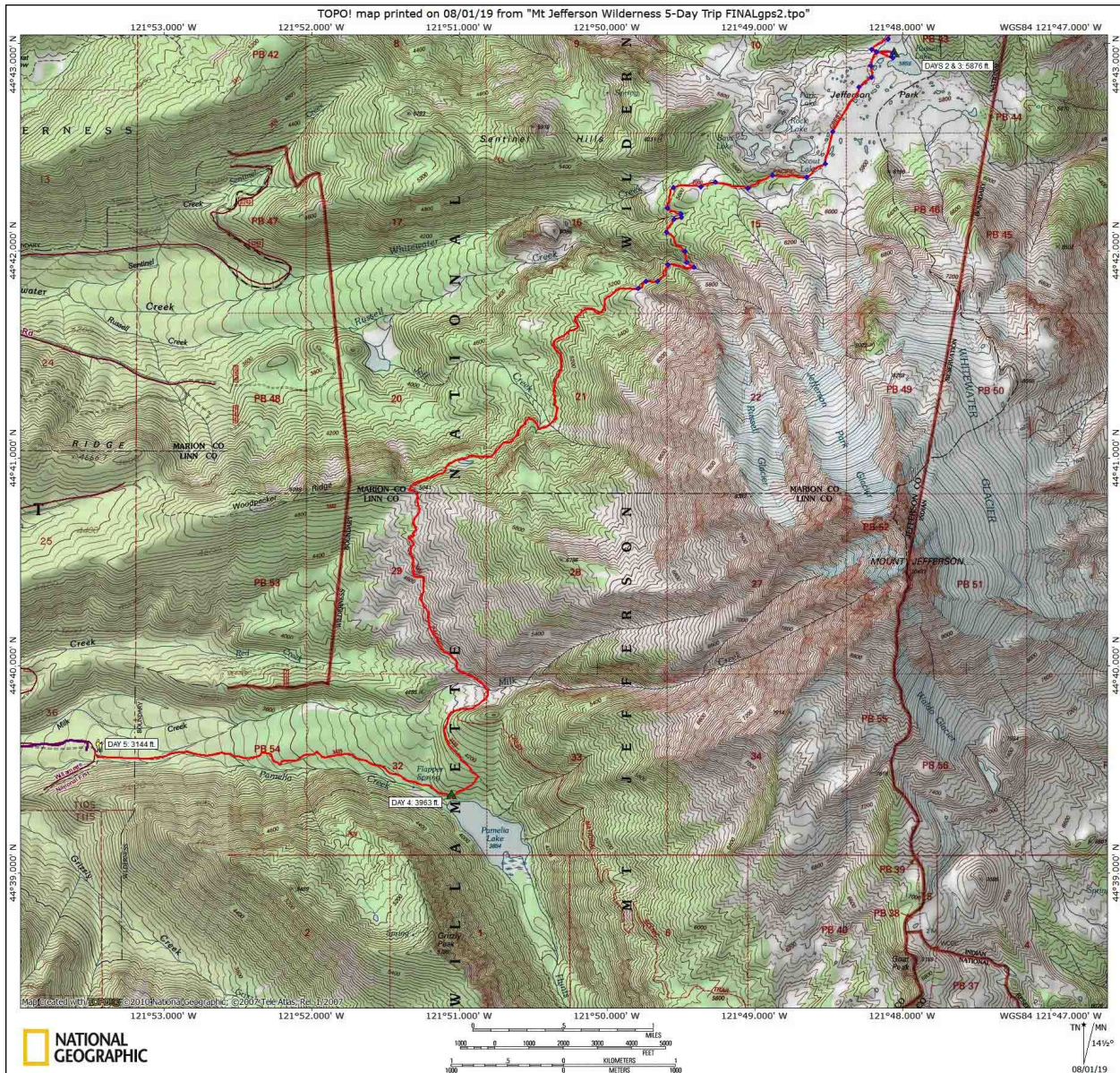


Russell Lake (View South)

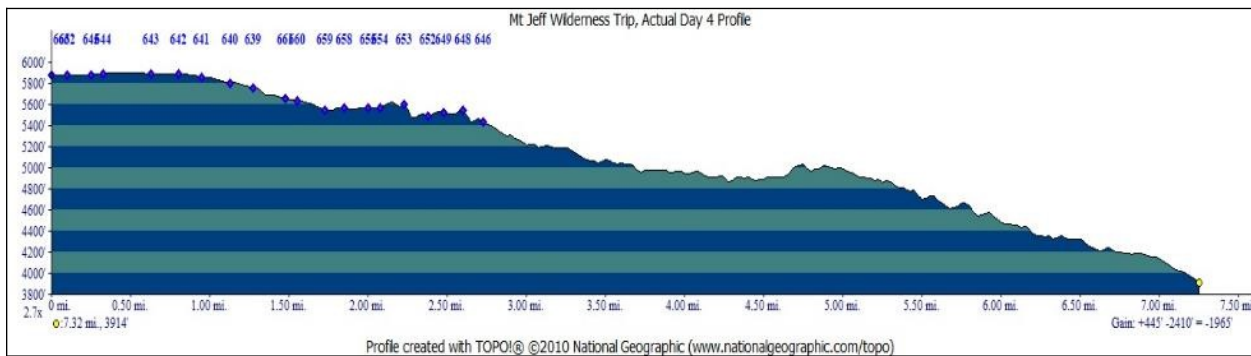


Campsite in trees (notice Tysen's yellow tent)





Day 4-5 Topo



Day 4 Profile: 7.3 miles (2,400 ft descent)

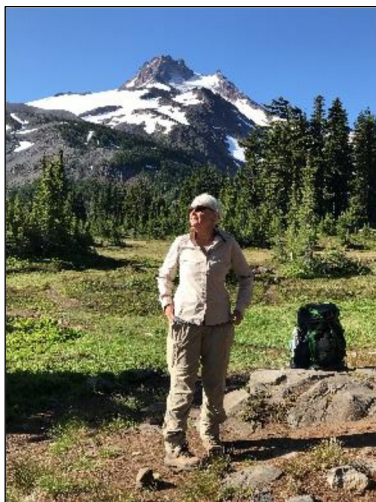




Cool Morning view of Mt Jefferson, following windy night



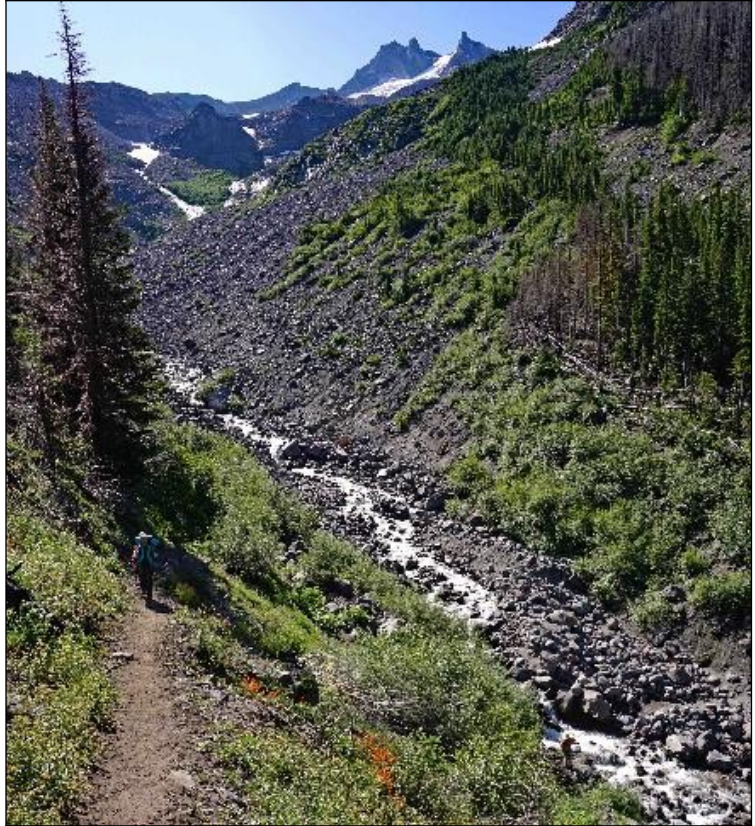
“Yeah, the Sun is out. It didn’t Rain.”











Approaching Russell Creek



Steve crossing Russell Creek





Maria crossing with Steve's help







Lunch Break next to Jeff Creek



Passing Unnamed Lake





BIG Backpacker Pose







Ice Bridge across Milk Creek





Pamelia Lake (View South)







Lunch in Detroit



Group Shot in Detroit