

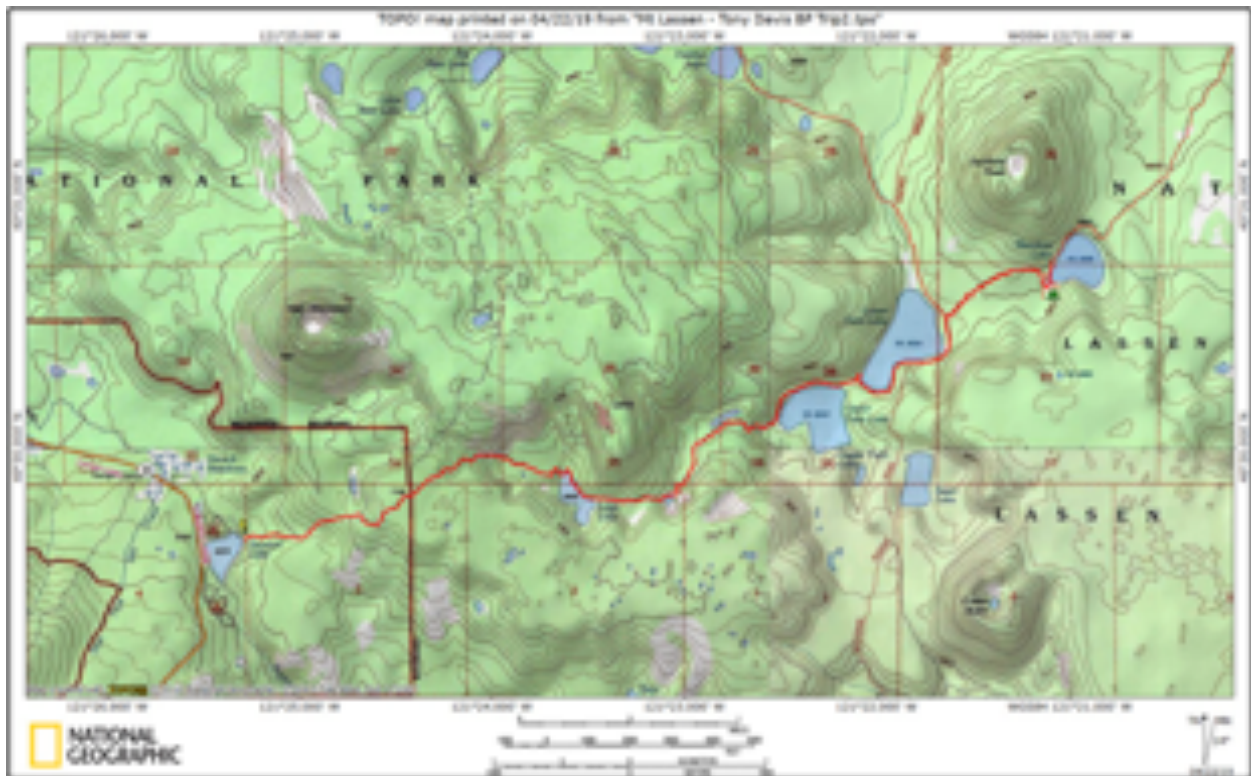
## **BIG backpacking trip to Lassen Volcanic National Park, 28 June - 1 July 2020**

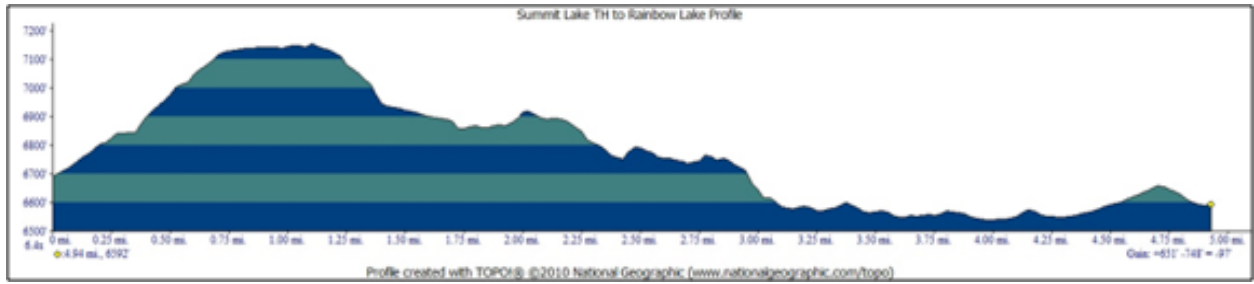
Ten of us – Jay Ach, Denise Fry, Esther Goldberg, Karen Grove, Lee Hagelshaw, Kim McAlear, Barb Settles, Dick Thomas, Linda Thomas, and Tony Davis (organizer) – explored Lassen Volcanic National Park for a few days.

### **Day 1: Summit Lake to Rainbow Lake (5.5 miles, a few hundred feet of net elevation loss)**

We departed Ashland at 8 am on Sunday, 28 June, arriving about three hours later at the Manzanita Lake entrance station in the northwest part of the park. As we discussed our backcountry camping plans with the rangers, they warned us about a “problem bear” hanging around campsites in the Rainbow Lake area, our destination for the day. Fortunately everyone came prepared with proper bear-resistant food storage containers. Also, a bit more surprisingly, we were told of an otter attack on a swimmer in Manzanita Lake. While this was a source of mirth throughout our trip, the victim apparently suffered some serious injuries, so it’s something to check on if you want to swim in a lake.

After driving 12 more miles to our trailhead at Summit Lake, we embarked on a 5 mile backpack (about 3.5 hours) to Rainbow Lake, where we found a nice, flat, shaded area for all of us to camp a couple of minutes off the trail on the south side of Rainbow Lake. This trail has a few steep sections, as you ascend and descend past a few lakes, but like all the trails in the park it is well maintained, and we all managed it in good time.







**Day 2: Rainbow Lake to Cinder Cone to Snag Lake and back to Rainbow Lake (about 10 miles, loop)**

Around 7 am the next day, Lee took a walk along the lakeshore, and spotted a bear ambling towards our camp. It was clearly interested in our food and reluctant to leave.



We threw some sticks at it and hollered, and eventually it wandered off over the ridge in back of the lake. We didn't see it again, and no one's food was broken into during our stay there.

Around 9:30 that morning, we set out on a day hike loop of almost 10 miles through varied terrain and fascinating volcanic geology. Heading northeast from Rainbow Lake, our first destination was the Cinder Cone, a bit over 3 miles away and an easy downhill stroll through progressively more open country, some of it burned (there was a large fire in 2012 in much of the northern area of the park) and then still more barren volcanic landscapes called the Fantastic Lava Beds and Painted Dunes. From the Cinder Cone we headed southeast to Snag Lake, south along the lakeshore, and finally west back to our campsite.





The Cinder Cone rises about 750 feet above the lava beds; it's a huge mound of volcanic material ranging from fine ash to boulder-size chunks (its last eruption is thought to have been around 1650).







Two trails spiral up to the crater rim and most of us climbed one of them. It's steep and strenuous but takes only a half hour or so.



Once on the very windy crater rim, we circled it, getting some excellent views of the crater itself and of surrounding lava beds, lakes, and Lassen Peak.







Descending the Cinder Cone can be lots of fun, as a portion of the trail is soft and forgiving, and you can take giant strides down the slope. Once back down, we continued another 1.5 miles (though some say it felt longer) around the Fantastic Lava Beds to the west shore of Snag Lake, which is contained by a natural dam of lava. We ate lunch at the shore.



Turning west at the south end of Snag Lake, the group was spurred on by Tony's assurance that "it's all downhill from here (except where it isn't)". In fact, it was mostly uphill in the strong afternoon sun, and after all the walking we'd done, a bit tiring. But we were back in camp around 4 pm, and the bear hadn't gotten our food. Some of us enjoyed the relatively warm waters of Rainbow Lake, while others enjoyed relatively warm beer.

**Day 3: Rainbow Lake; to Summit Lake South (5.5 miles, a few hundred feet of net elevation gain); Kings Creek Falls day hike loop (about 5 miles)**

The return trip to Summit Lake trailhead Tuesday morning went smoothly, taking a bit over 3 hours, with some good views of Lassen Peak along the way.



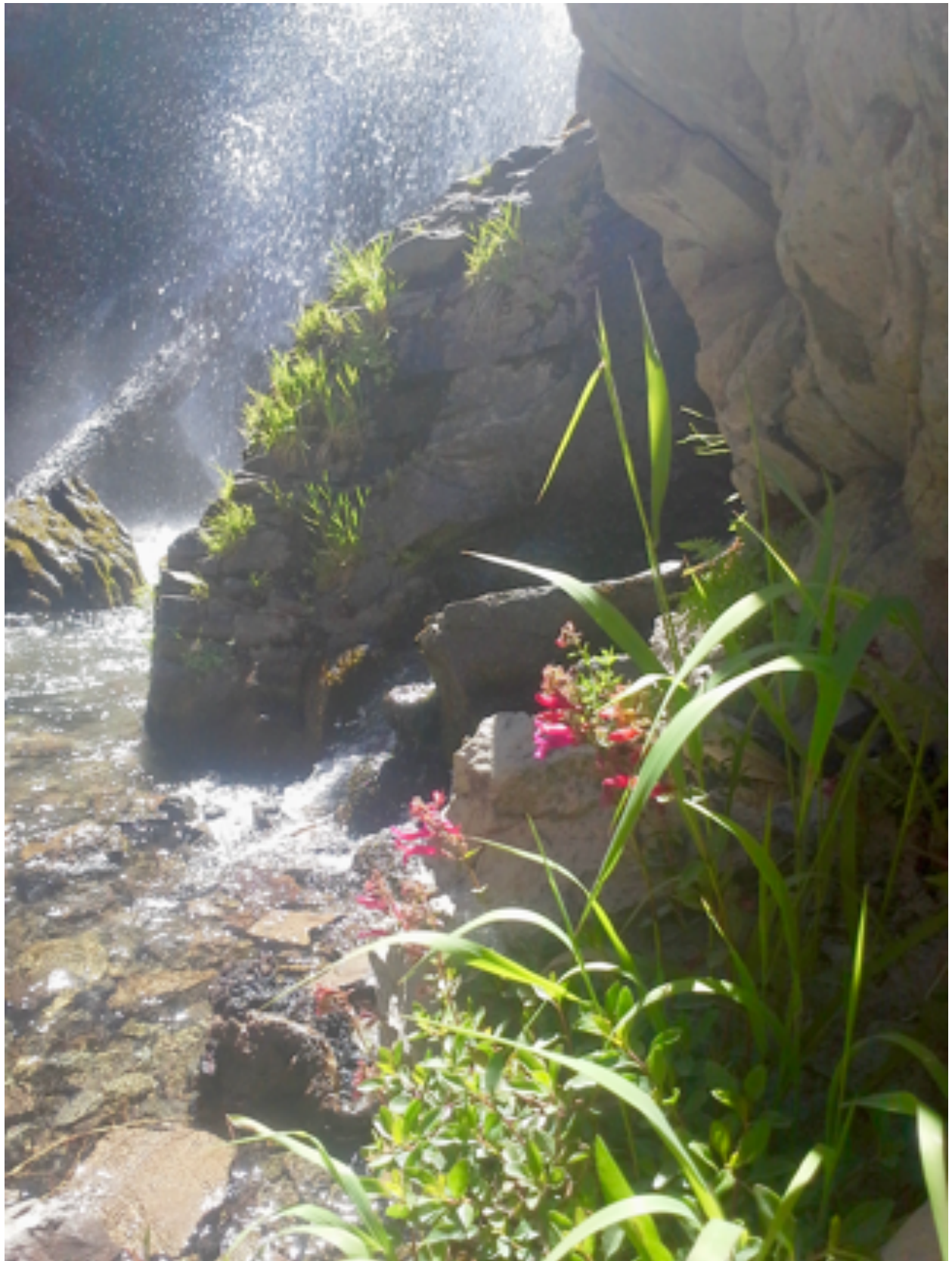
We had two drive-in campsites at nearby Summit Lake South campground reserved for our final night. They were right near Summit Lake and promised to be pleasant and convenient, but when we arrived we discovered that they were exposed, slopy, and, inexplicably, partly covered with coarse mulch that didn't make for a comfortable spot to sleep on. But the campground was full, so that's where we stayed. At least there was a fire ring where we made a campfire later that evening.



Earlier that afternoon, some of us (Dick, Linda, and Jay) swam in Summit Lake, while the others (except Denise, who needed to head home early) drove a few miles further along the main park road to Kings Creek trailhead. A lollipop trail of about 5 miles takes you above Kings Creek, then descends a few hundred feet to Kings Creek Falls.







The highlight, though, is the return part of the loop going back up along the creek. Here you see the creek dropping steeply for a couple of hundred feet – not quite a waterfall, but a long, impressive waterslide.



**Day 4: Kings Creek Picnic Area to Bumpass Hell, via Cold Boiling Lake, and back (5.5 miles); Lassen Peak trail (5 miles)**

Linda and Dick headed home Wednesday morning. The remaining seven of us drove a bit past the Kings Creek trailhead to another trail leading to some hydrothermal areas. The main trail to the Bumpass Hell geothermal area was ostensibly still closed due to snow (!), but a 2.5 mile hike from Kings Creek Picnic Area via Cold Boiling Lake, much of it a steady uphill climb through forests with some views of meadows and Crumbaugh Lake below, got us there.



Cold Boiling Lake wasn't much to look at, but Bumpass Hell is impressive. As you climb over the ridge, the smell of sulphur is evident, and the terrain changes dramatically to a volcanic landscape. Thudding bursts of hot mud spout from colorful boiling pools and a smelly stream flows by them. A boardwalk allows you to get close (not too close) to the action. Because of all the trail closure warnings, we had it to ourselves!





We returned the way we came, and said goodbye at the trailhead parking lot. Most people headed home, but Barb and Tony opted to climb Lassen Peak in the afternoon. The trail starts at 8500 feet, so it's just 2000 feet of climbing over 2.5 miles of well designed and maintained trail to the summit.





The round trip took us 3.5 hours. There was very little snow on the trail. There are helpful signs along the way describing the volcano's activity, including this one near the top.





Everyone made it home safe and sound.

A few final notes:

Although Lassen Volcanic National Park is not crowded to the extent places like Yosemite are, it is not a place for solitude. It was good we came during the week, rather than a weekend.

Trails and signage were excellent, and a lot of the walking is on soft volcanic ash or conifer needles.

Much of the park is moderately high altitude; we were mostly between 6000 and 7000 feet above sea level. The weather was beautiful (cool at night, though) and most of the snow had disappeared, though that's not always the case at this time of year. There were mosquitoes in a few spots, but they weren't a big problem.

The drive-in campsites at Summit Lake South were a bit disappointing, so try to inform yourself about the various campgrounds and specific sites in advance if you plan on using them.

Take the warnings about bears (and otters) seriously.