



Clark Fork

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President's Message - Wytold Lebing

Looking back at the Spring and Summer, NFA has hosted a series of fun outings where sometimes we caught a lot of fish and had a lot of fun, and sometimes we didn't catch so many fish, but we still had a lot of fun. Our outings went as far north as Rock Island Fish Camp in British Columbia and as far south as the Deshutes River in Oregon. I think it's safe to say that we all had a lot of fun even if the fish or the weather didn't cooperate.

Puget Sound was a pleasant surprise in recent weeks having good runs of Pink Salmon and Coho that were available for beach fishing in August and September.

As the fall approaches it is the time for selecting new officers. We want to have a slate of candidates to present to our general membership at the October 19 meeting, and then have the vote at the November 16 meeting. Both the Treasurer and Secretary will be staying in their respective positions for 2024. The positions which will need to be filled for 2024 are: President and Vice President.

Though the thought of being an officer might seem daunting, the other members of the Steering Committee and past officers are available to help and offer guidance. So, we are calling on you to step up and take a slightly more active role in the NFA. If you are interested in either position, please let me or any other officer know.

Finally, the Annual Awards Banquet will take place on Sunday December 10, 2023, at 5:30. It will be at the Haller Lake community center. There is no charge to attend since the dinner will be a potluck, again. We'll provide more details as we get closer to December.

Wytold



Membership – Susanne Staats

At our September meeting, three members were inducted into the club. Jerad Mccann is especially interested in fly fishing in saltwater and Scott Donahue enjoys fishing the ‘S’ rivers. Roger Young said his favorite area to fish is the still waters of the Okanogan, especially the Winthrop area. Roger fished the lakes as a child and has family in the area. He volunteered to potentially organize a trip for the club to the Okanogan in the future. Jim Oswald rejoined the club and I hope to induct him at a future meeting.



One of the best reasons to join the club is to find others with whom to fish. Fall has arrived and our club hosted outings for 2023 are ending. But that doesn't mean you

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can't continue to enjoy fishing with fellow club members. If you're looking for a partner to go fishing, take advantage of our "Fishing Forum" on the NFA website. A subcategory named "Find Member to Go Fishing" lets you post a notice to other club members about your upcoming fishing adventure. Check it out. If you need help posting a notice, feel free to contact me.

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Eglon Beach Saltwater Outing, Aug. 31, 2023

David Williams hosted the NFA outing at Eglon Beach on the Kitsap Peninsula north of Kingston for about 15 anglers. The goal was coho salmon, but many of the pink salmon were still around. We met a few hours before the minus low tide when the salmon pass by shore near the point south of Eglon boat launch. About half used pontoon boats and the rest cast from offshore as far as one could wade. The weather forecast was not good, but surprisingly there was no rain and the sound was calm (at first).

This was a first time for me, so it was critical for David to review the flies to use and advise where to go from shore (the point). My friend from Poulsbo met me and this is his home turf. He used a 6-weight floating line while I went with an 8 weight bonefish rod. I soon learned some fundamental differences. With bonefish, you often make long casts, but only 20 or 30 in a day. With salmon fishing, you make long casts, but fifty in an hour until your shoulder is ready to fall off. I neglected to wear fishing gloves because I knew my hands wouldn't get sunburned on this grey day, but soon repeatedly stripping the line over my forefinger cut a groove that was bleeding. No problem – I switched to the middle finger and soon it was chewed up, then the ring finger and it was chewed up. Lesson learned.

I finally hooked a coho, but it was smaller than a pink salmon. That's when I learned about resident coho that don't go out to the open ocean to grow up and get hefty. But I'll take it. There was no sign of baitfish or salmon feeding, so we moved further south. There were some baitfish, but seaweed made casting unrewarding. We talked to an angler on the beach who had a couple of nice coho, one of which was huge. We waded out (by now my waders were leaking) and promptly doubled up. I thought the bite was on. Both of us landed pink salmon and now the pinks were jumping within casting range. But no fish wanted our flies and things cooled off.

By now, I was no longer jealous of the pontoon boats. The calm sound turned pretty darn windy. Steve pointed out that the passing car carrier ship would throw up quite a bow wake, so we called it a day. Steve has an amazing beach for manila clams that we wanted to catch before mid-tide.

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For me, this outing opened a whole new range of possibilities. I now know where to go, what tide to catch, and what flies to use. I met people who caught very nice coho, including one who caught four by hiking well north from landing. Eglon is a nice beach without crowds, making for a pleasurable experience. Club members should share notes on when the fishing is hot so people can get out the next day on their own. Just wear fishing gloves and waders that don't leak! (Nick Sherman)



Trip leader David Williams with Maureen Sullivan. Note the calm flat water.



Eric Olson practicing macramé with an anchor line.



Dave Campbell rigging up.



Colene McKee ready for action.

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When you are prepared for wind and rain, this is fantastic.

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Resident hatchery coho.



Not one of our groups, but a nice fish.



We doubled up on pinks.

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Steve (guest) with a pink for the smoker.

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Kitsap has Manila clams and littlenecks that are superb.

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Manila clams cooked just right.



Clark Fork Outing, Sept. 8, 2023

Carl and Maura Johnson graciously hosted NFA members at their home on Clark Fork in Superior Montana. Once the early morning river fog burned off, the weather was delightful. Some people pitched tents on the lawn, others had an RV, and few stayed in a house nearby to facilitate launching their raft on the river. Maura went above and beyond the call to prepare sumptuous dinners and breakfasts for two days. The chicken, artichokes, capers, and pasta were outstanding and filling for a hungry crowd, as was the chili. Breakfasts of blueberry pancakes with bacon and eggs and unlimited coffee made it tough to leave to get out and fish. Carl and Maura could not have been better hosts.

Attendees were Carl and Maura Johnson, Nick and Kathy Sherman, Jean Heestand, Brett Schormann, Suzanne Staats, Colene McKee, Bill Denzel, Wes Fullerton, Wayne Balsiger, and Karen Gilbert. Several people took guided trips while others floated in their 14-foot raft or went with Carl in his drift boat.

From Wayne:

Some of my flies used were Purple Haze, PMD, Elk Hair Caddis, San Juan worm, Hopper (looked like a Chernobyl ant to me), Zug Bug, Prince Nymph, Pheasant Tail, and a number of others. We went from Dry creek to St. Regis. When we were at the pullout, we saw a NICE 20+ inch fish porpoise in front of us. Jean had seen a similar one working before we launched. The guides were talking and said it had been a slow day for most of the boats.

Jean caught the big fish on our boat. I caught two white fish and saw one nice fish head refuse my hopper. We had a guide the first day and Carl took us on Sunday.

We saw a deer swim the river, cows, and bulls grazing, many fry for the next few years, an Eagle and Mergansers and other birds. We saw signs a beaver had hauled something to the water.

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The night sky was the best I have seen in several years, and not restricted viewing as is often the case. There are one or two more stars in Montana than in Seattle. Excellent cooking by Carl and Maura Johnson, our gracious hosts for the weekend.

From Nick and Kathy:

We had an enjoyable guide through Clark Fork Trout, putting in upstream for a 13-mile run to Superior. We picked up a few trout, but nothing large (I set the hook firmly on one and threw it back over the boat). The biggest splash was when the anchor rope broke, but I employed my Boy Scout knot experience to tie up a river rock which worked quite well. The other big splashes were from beaver tails as they swam by.

Prior to Clark Fork, we backtracked from St. Regis to the upper St. Joe River in Idaho where we secured the campsite on the water that I've always envied. The crystal-clear water of "the Joe" is claimed by some to be the prettiest trout stream in America. We retraced the spots of my successful dry fly fishing of July 2022, including a 7-mile hike upstream to Timber Creek, but there were no takers this time. Kathy pointed out where she was getting some action and pulled out our sole cutthroat in our last ten minutes.

About Brett, Susanne, and Wes:

Fly fishing 101 – bring your shuttle vehicle keys on the river. You caught more fish than anyone, but due to key challenges, you were late for an amazing dinner.

Some proceeded on to Glacier National Park after our outing, but Jean was the most ambitious. She visited Yellowstone NP and then fished the famous Henry's Fork with her brother.

Thanks again to Carl and Maura for a wonderful weekend! (Wayne Balsiger)



Wayne, Nick, Kathy, Jean, Susanne, Brett, Colene, Bill, Wes, Maura, and Carl.



Jean's fish.

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Makeshift drift boat anchor.



Netting the big one.



Western Montana.



The lovely St. Joe River in Idaho.

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Skagit River Float, Marblemount to Rockport, Sept. 22, 2023

Russ Shropshire hosted the outing with fortuitous timing. The weather was sunny & mild with an epic run of pink salmon supplementing (more like overrunning) the cohos and kings. Russ set up the shuttle timing such that five participants met promptly at 8 am, shuffled vehicles, and were ready to float at 9:15. Our fleet consisted of Dave Campbell in a pontoon boat, Bill Gibson in an inflatable kayak, Russ in a one-man raft, and Nick & Kathy Sherman in a 16 foot canoe.

As advertised, the Skagit is a big, fast river - not for rafting newbies. With hydropower being generated on the day shift, water flow was 3930 cfs. Bill did the responsible thing and politely ascertained that Kathy and I had the experience to run the river in a canoe. I was reasonably confident having done this stretch before, but I'll now say that 4,000 cfs is the limit of what I ever want to do. When you look down through the gin clear water at the rocky bottom whizzing by, you realize the speed and power of that flow.

Dave was the mentor. He brought flies for Kathy and I to use set up our sink tip line with a fairly strong four foot 12 pound leader. He reviewed how to land salmon in the current without breaking a six-weight rod. Most importantly, Dave waited at the first cobble bar below where Cascade Creek enters and showed us how to present the fly. Ignore that deep eddy with salmon stacked up like cordwood since they won't take the fly (I proved him right). Wade into the bottom of the riffle and let the fly swing into the seam with the slow water. I watched Bill land a big pink with the spey rod, but we never caught up with again. Kathy hooked six and I hooked five pink salmon at the first spot. I thought, "We'll just find the next spot that looks like this."

We passed Russ landing a big one below a gravel bar riffle, but the water was too fast where we tried. Then we ran the constriction where all four thousand cfs pours through one narrow spot. There were no rocks to dodge, but uncomfortably large and irregular standing waves gave me the willies – it wasn't nearly that intimidating when we ran it a few years ago. We saw huge numbers of fish. I can tell the half dead ones which have already spawned from the fresh ones coming upstream, but the other guys clearly identified hatchery coho and some king



salmon. We enjoyed a picnic lunch with mountains for a backdrop behind a crystal-clear river. But all our fishing stops were either too fast and shallow or too slow and dead. We picked up one more pink salmon.

Finally, near the end, we caught up with Dave waiting on a sandbar. He said the hundred yards should all be good water. Russ pulled in shortly after. Seeing Dave hook several escalated our enthusiasm. Kathy hooked a few, so I abandoned my position to go up where Dave had been. Russ took my spot and proceeded to land one after another. We had already overstayed our 3 o'clock rendezvous at the pullout so we called it a day, but at that point Kathy and I had hooked 16 salmon fishing Dave's spots and one that we found on our own. You don't have to sell me on the advantage of going with NFA members who know what they're doing. Russ kept fishing knowing that Dave and I had to complete a 30-minute shuttle run, so he probably caught another dozen at the rate he was going.

We were nearly under the Rockport Bridge with one last logjam on the right with ominous current that we worked to avoid. What we didn't see until there were mere seconds to react was a stump directly in front of us. Kathy said "left" and drew left (I didn't hear her) while I yelled right and swept right. We collided semi-broadside, turned 180 degrees, and slid off backwards. Providently, we were kneeling, and Kathy is small with good balance because we kept the canoe upright and regained control. That could have been two fly rods gone and a "wet exit" in fast water. Moments later, we were with Dave at the pullout learning that he had been targeting coho, but the pinks kept butting in and grabbing his fly.

This was a thoroughly enjoyable outing. We appreciate the organization and sharing of how to make the most of the fishing. I look forward to 2025 when the pinks return to the Skagit. (Nick Sherman)



Russ Shropshire, Dave Campbell, Kathy Sherman, and Bill Gibson at the Marblemount put in.



Was this enough salmon to justify a float?



Bill Gibson with his inflatable.

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Skagit River looking at the North Cascades. Mad River Explorer canoe, vintage 1995.



Kathy Sherman with a pink salmon using Dave Campbell's fly.



Bill has one hooked while Dave shows Kathy how to present the fly into fast water entering some slow water. The near pool was stacked with salmon which would not take a fly. But the seam yielded more than a dozen.



Russ landing a male pink salmon. He is fishing where the fast water meets the slower current off that cobble point.



Dave Campbell tied these killer flies for us.



Gold in the Pan (Part 2)...Mark Conner

Part 1 of this essay appeared in the August 2023 Flypaper.

The Continental Divide traverses the spine of the Wind River Range, which runs northwest-southeast for about 100 miles from Dubois, east of Jackson, down to Atlantic City, Wyoming. Found there is 13,802-foot Gannet Peak, the highest summit in Wyoming. Grand Teton (Big Nipple) interrupts the list of the 15 highest mountains in the state, all the others from the Winds. The chain sports 30 summits over 13,000 feet. This geology is evidence of the considerable precipitation caught in the easterly flow of weather across the nation, critical to the preponderance of glaciers. (According to the Forest Service website, which I do not believe, the range is home to seven out of ten of the world's largest**.) Tarns, streams, and thirteen hundred named lakes proliferate, arguably the most outstanding alpine habitat for trout, certainly in the state if not the entire contiguous U.S. or even the world. The lakes lie in a ninety-mile-long bench; except for one gap, the watershed is above 9,500 feet, much over 10,500 feet in elevation. Glacier, trickle, tarn, creek, pond, stream, lake, torrent, big lake, river, and so forth. Some shallow stream cascades are hundreds of yards long and across, traversed by hopping from one alpine grass tussock to another, the tufts so thick as to make the stream disappear from view. But you could hear.

Mitchell Peak (Photo from summitpost)

When the last great ice age of the Pleistocene retreated some 11,000 years ago, the glaciers left no fish in the carved-out lakes, as the solid ice froze out any semblance of previous populations. With the glacial retreat, migrating fish could not navigate the tumult of stream falls to reach the wilderness mesa. It took the Great Depression to re-introduce them. An out-of-work railroad man named Finis Mitchell loved these mountains, and for a time to make a living, "my wife and I bought a tent, borrowed horses and saddles [from local ranchers] and started our Mitchell's Fishing Camp in the Big Sandy Openings ... on Mud Lake." Wealthy dudes from the east he took "fishing on the horses and was sure they caught their fish. Our guide service was for free. ... We charged a dollar and a half a day for

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horses. We kept the dollar and gave fifty cents to the people we borrowed the horses from. ... We also served meals [cooked by Emma] in the tent for fifty cents a meal.” The Fred Beckey*** of the Winds, Finis climbed all but 20 of the 300 mountains in the range, including eponymous 12,482-foot Mitchell Peak. But his emoluments were in trout. Ensuring that his clients caught fish, Mitchell and his father horse-packed fingerlings in milk cans, every one containing a thousand fingerlings, two per each of six pack animals. For oxygen for the fish to survive, they allowed the trout water to slosh about, with each can topped with porous burlap. Twelve thousand per trip, they stocked the lakes with over two and one-half million small fry. They aimed to stock each of the 1,314 named lakes, with the successive lakes having alternating species - brook trout here, rainbow there, cutthroat in another, Dolly Varden also, lake trout in the deepest waters, and in some of the higher lakes when available, California Golden. The achievement offered just about any fresh-water variety of trout within the radius of a short day hike and a sporting chance at the grandest of grand slams for the determined species-bagger, all within a week. The Bridger National Wilderness (and its neighbors, Popo Agie and the Fitzpatrick) proved a better habitat for the Golden than their Kern River, California original. (The world record for Golden Trout came in at eleven and a quarter pounds caught in none other than the Cooks Lakes, the site of our base camp.) Perfect habitat for trout, better yet, for homo piscari.





Bomber Lake and Basin from Bomber Lake Arete, 1st ascent by Fred Beckey at 74
(Photo by hikinginthelight)

Copious glacier snowfield melt provides the water to sustain the fish in lakes deep enough to survive freeze- out. The ecology? Neatly circular: you eat the fish, the fish devour the insects, and the insects consume you. We had gone native, primitive men in a primitive area seeking meat. The easiest catch was Brook Trout; some lakes were so infested with them that we snagged more than we caught on the hook, probably even then illegal. Could one claim that we seized fish by hook or by crook? Forgive me. We certainly caught more than enough fish to survive. Mostly Brook, but also Rainbow, Festy Cutthroat, and Bull Trout, and a few more of the rare Golden. After the high country harsh winter of the high country, the fish were ravenous and on the bite for anything at any time of day or night. We were certainly fed enough to explore the higher country above us. One day, we attempted to clamber up to the high cirque above the large lake that drained into the Cooks, thinking we could circumnavigate this “walled lake” in the process. At 10,450’ feet in elevation, the mountain impoundment is encased by massive thousand-foot granite slabs or ‘walls’ absent trees and any other substantial vegetation. Wall is appropriately named as it deceives accurate distance reckoning by the lack of visual referent. The high mountain impoundment is encased by massive thousand- foot granite slabs or ‘walls’ absent trees and any other vegetation. The lake circumference is much farther than the mile or two that we



had estimated. I remember enormous office-building-sized boulders lying around, shot off by the glacier overhanging the crest of the steepest precipice as if by playing marbles. We reached higher terrain above Wall that led to the amphitheater of an unnamed lake at 10,842', with the not-so-insignificant over-hanging Tiny Glacier threatening from above, just below the Continental Divide. To add to the aerie intimidation of the landscape, along came a thunderstorm with penetrating lightning bolts and thunder. Truly frightened, we retreated, but not before encountering mule deer bounding down the rocks below, overlorded by a many-pointed rackety buck. When the herd paused, blending into the scene and staring with each cupped ear flared into a foot-long ellipsoid, their image vanished with or even without a careless glance away. The tempest soon subsided to halcyon, and contentment born of serenity ensued. "When a pine needle falls in the woods, the eagle sees it; the deer hears it; and the bear smells it." ****

By the way, Dave had told us that the mosquitoes did not annoy him because after two weeks, the human body adapts, and their bite develops no welt or itch, and he just let them take his blood without any complaint. But Jim and I had to find at least three perches at the campfire to lose the swarms every few moments or so. As we had left the trailhead for the first day of our trip, Dave took me aside to say, "Mark, you are going into true wilderness for eight days, and since you have enough time, I challenge you to do something for me. Not in the first day or three, but gradually try to distill your experience, first into a sentence and then refine to a word. When you are certain of it, you will forget about it, and when you come out of the country, I will tell you the word." I thought, "Right, out of three hundred thousand words in the English language, you are going to guess one word, one single word that I come up with. Even if we had great minds, they never think that much alike. This place is too fantastic for that; one cannot even describe it in a paragraph." I forgot his challenge, but surprisingly, in a couple of days, I started to think of a

way to describe what was happening, meditating. (We did a lot of meditating without knowing it.) And it did indeed distill into one word. There was no other. Precisely, succinctly that one word. Then, as he had predicted, I forgot about it. When I emerged, Dave approached and asked if I had thought of the word, and I remembered that, yes, I had, asking him to tell me. He did. Desolate. Amazing. Why desolate? Why not awesome, grand, superlative, magnificent, or even otherworldly? Ultimately, we are social creatures who build, create, and make



culture. True wilderness is entirely devoid of human culture, i.e., desolate. That does not mean ugly. After all, one of the most cherished places on earth is Desolation Sound, just north of Georgian Strait, on the watery way to Alaska. To quote Finis Mitchell in his book *Wind River Trails*, mountains are “the best medicine for a troubled mind. Seldom does man ponder his own insignificance. He thinks he is master of all things. He thinks the world is his without bonds. Nothing could be farther from the truth. Only when he tramps the mountains...communing with nature, observing other insignificant creatures about him...does he awaken to his own short-lived presence on earth.”

The memories of the experience continue to sear, reverberate, haunt. Thirty years on, I contacted Jim and invited him to accompany me on an anniversary return trip. Not knowing any wilderness patrolman there, or anywhere for that matter, we contracted with an outfitter to help us travel on horseback up to the bench. Never having ridden a horse, I was a little concerned for my safety and, because of the time and expense, did not even consider riding lessons. This proved fortuitous because I consulted a slim volume titled *Some Horses* and found the writer Tom McGuane. The book taught me a lot and soothed nerves, removing doubt. It was very well written. Of course, I had not suspected that the author was the only man ever inducted into not only the National Cutting Horse Hall of Fame but the Flyfishing Hall of Fame and that he had written several nationally recognized novels, most notably *92 In The Shade*, nominated for the National Book Award. He also wrote screenplays, the best-known for the film *Missouri Breaks*. McGuane has published several collections of essays and currently writes fiction for the *New Yorker*. His best essays on fishing assembled in *The Longest Silence* are de rigeur reading for all literate fly fishermen.

On the return trip, Jim, his 14-year-old son, another friend of mine and I entered from the northwest via the New Fork Lakes, but not until the desiccation of late August when we expected the bugs to be gone. They were mostly absent, but so were the fish, fattened all summer on piscatorial fare. We caught a few, but the trout were hardly on the bite, never ravenous like before. Given climbing the trails in the mountains all summer, the horses were in terrific shape. Even though they afforded us exceptional mobility up high, we were tethered to them, having to be fed, watered, hobbled for the night, found in the morning, tacked out and saddled up to ride them. Still, we took advantage of the access we were afforded and rode up the Highline Trail from our base camp at Summit Lake into the Elbow Lake drainage



to fish and then scrambled up 12,978-foot Stroud Peak. An astonishing panorama unfolded,



From left, the author, Jim, friend Tom, and Jim's son Alex (Photo from 2000 by the author)

even for the Winds, with a view of Mt. Oeneis, intriguingly named for the genus of alpine butterflies found in the range. On the last morning of the trip, this high up in the mountains, of course it snowed. The horses shivered and there were not enough gloves to go around. Riding out we happened upon a herd of Elk, like ghosts in the misty woods. As we descended, the inclemency passed, and the weather warmed. Our steed were impatient to see their buddies back at Elkhart and challenging to restrain. We were soon back in the desert and besieged by civilization.

Elbow Lake with Elbow Peak beyond from the summit of Stroud Peak from a restored photo by the author

If you go now, the range is so popular that you must have a permit. Of course, we would not chance it today without better gear and probably would be too timid to go, at least the way we did, rather 'dirtbag' style, without highfalutin freeze-dried meals and Arc'teryx rain gear or GPS, all that makes adventure stale and

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unexciting. We could have benefited from Finis Mitchell's quaint, then yet-to-be-published "Wind River Trails." ***** We would have learned about the Golden Trout from the internet and seen them in cell phone selfies on Instagram, just like all the hordes who have practically fished them out. We cherish the innocence of our salad (rice) days, the wanderlust that comes from not knowing and unprepossessing, the grace bestowed by wilderness, and the dignity that comes without pretense. Strike that. Let's just say that we lived in the moment; frankly, that's about all there was.





Waterfall at Cirque of the Towers South of our Itinerary (Photo by Wilderness Excursions)

Notes:

* Dave spent most of his time running hippie clans off campsites where they had overstayed the 14-day limit (they would backpack in 40 lbs. of rice for the summer. If they caught fish, they had protein.) The Forest Service issued him a radio where he could respond to reports of trekkers, campers, and fishers in need being called in for help if he found any on his own. He had to report his whereabouts to the Service once a day, but they never knew if he was really there, so he could go where he chose and report otherwise. Nowadays, I am sure the radio has a chip that reports whereabouts via GPS.

** <https://www.fs.usda.gov/recarea/btnf/recarea/?recid=77360>

*** Seattle's Fred Beckey did climb extensively in the Winds, including Gannet Peak (the highest) and Warrior Peaks in the Cirque of the Towers, and accomplished several first ascents, including the north face of the 1000-foot Class III 5.7 North Face of all places Mitchell Peak with Patagonia founder Yvon Chouinard. Also, the first ascents of the west buttress of Musembeah Peak (a name of, what novelist Jim Harrison would say, ineluctable sonority) and Bomber Lake Arete at 74. In the 1998 American Alpine Journal, Cameron Burns wrote that "in his mid-70s, Fred looked pretty old while walking the trail," but "when he climbed, however, he had the grace and style of a 20-year old" and "led via 5.6 slabs right on the very crest of the arete (II 5.6).

**** In Canada, attributed to First Nations Peoples. ***** Still in print since 1975.



Island Lake with Fremont and Jackson Peaks Prominent Behind (Photo by DMR Evans)