

TRAVERSING *THE BAILEY RANGE*

Solitude and scenery on Olympic National Park's premier high route

BY KARL FORSGAARD

Deep in the northern wilderness of Olympic National Park, the Bailey Range Traverse crosses high, scenic country with grand views of surrounding river valleys and peaks—including 7,965-foot Mount Olympus. At each end of the traverse you'll find popular trails – the Sol Duc River, Seven Lakes Basin and High Divide in the west, the Elwha River in the east. Between those trails are several days of cross-country travel, requiring route-finding skills and mountaineering skills above and beyond basic backpacking. Good rock, snow and ice scrambling skills are essential.

When Bill and I started the trip in late July 2002, the upper Seven Lakes Basin was still mostly snow-covered, but east of Heart Lake the High Divide Trail and the Bailey route above the Hoh had almost entirely melted out, so we rarely needed to use our ice axes (except in a few snowfingers in creek gullies), and we never needed to use the crampons, rope or climbing hardware that we brought. However, it would have been a different story if the traverse above the Hoh had been covered by steep snow, so always remember to be prepared for roped snow travel, and make sure you're trained in self-arrest with an ice ax.

In addition to our mountaineering gear, we brought the backpacking gear and food we normally take on a week-long trip—tent, stove, books and camera. We had taken some friends to the top of Mount Olympus a few years earlier, so it was especially rewarding to have views of Mount Olympus for most of our trip in the Bailey Range.

The Park Service told us that a solo traveler had done the route a week



Sometimes you have to earn solitude: The Bailey Range Traverse in the Olympics is a rigorous combination of off-trail hiking, climbing, and snow-and-ice travel. But the views and loneliness are the payoffs.

earlier, so we were just the second party of the year. We did not see any people on the off-trail part of the route.

The traverse route is described in *Climber's Guide to the Olympic Mountains* by Olympic Mountain Rescue (Mountaineers, 1988) and in *75 Scrambles in Washington* by Peggy Goldman (Mountaineers, 2001). For the Seven Lakes, High Divide and Elwha River hikes at either end, see *100 Hikes in the South Cascades and Olympics* by Ira Spring and Harvey Manning (Mountaineers, 1998), and/or *Olympic Mountains Trail Guide* by Robert L. Wood (Mountaineers, 2000). At its Elwha end, you can take either the long version (exiting via Dodwell-Rixon Pass, then hiking many miles on the Elwha or Quinault) or the short version (exiting via Dodger Point, less than a day's hike along the Elwha). We opted for the short version. Because the route is in federally designated wilderness, all wilderness

regulations (including party size limits) apply.

Day One:

Sol Duc River, Deer Lake

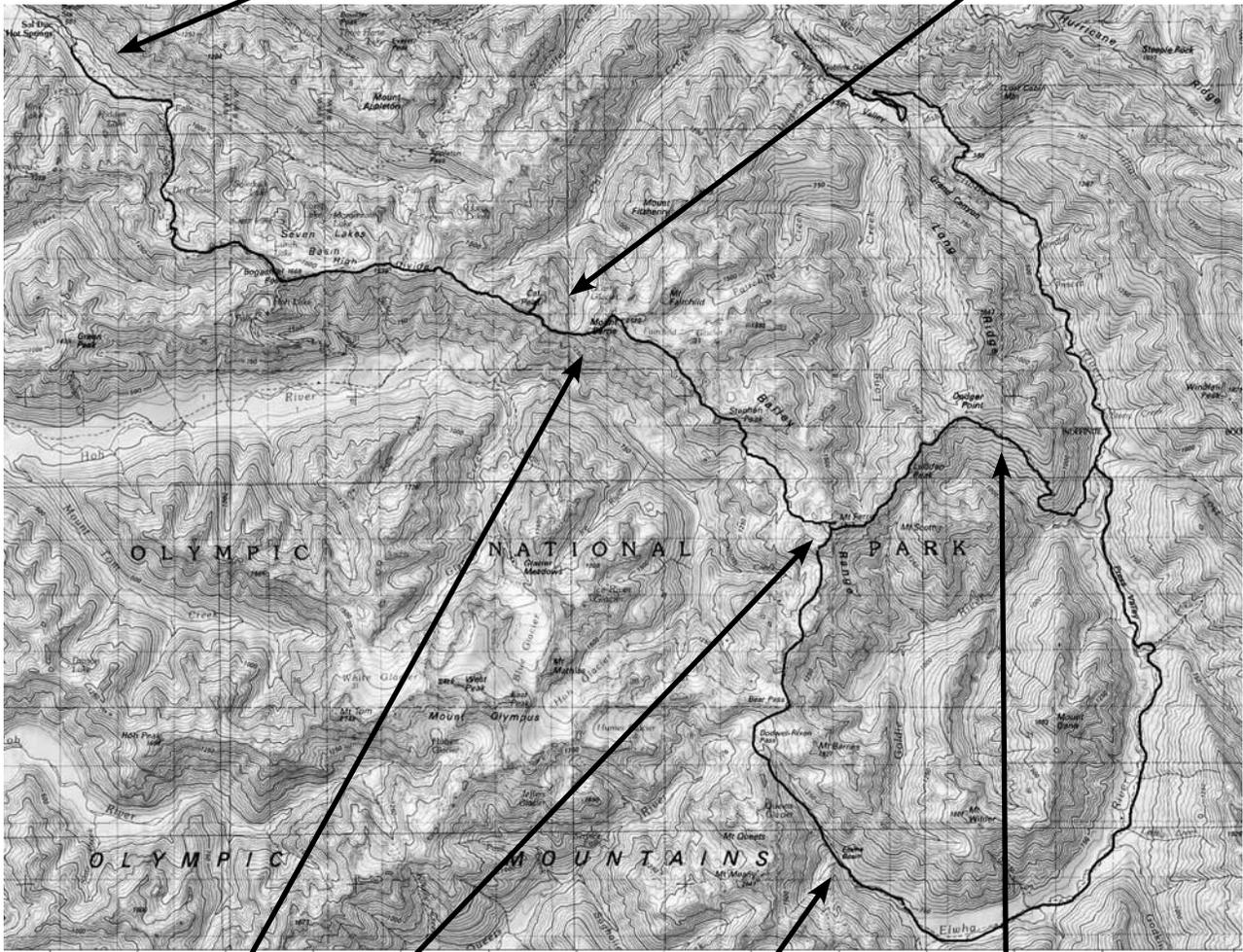
We left Seattle in two cars, took the Bainbridge Island ferry and drove to Port Angeles. We got our wilderness permit and rented bear canisters from the National Park Service at the Heart of the Hills visitor center (\$25 permit, plus \$6 donation for 2 canisters). We drove east on 101 to the Elwha River entrance to the Park, dropped one car at the Whiskey Bend trailhead, returned to 101 and continued east past Lake Crescent, then re-entered the Park on the Sol Duc Road. By mid-afternoon we started hiking up the Sol Duc River, quickly reaching Sol Duc Falls, then left the river and hiked uphill to Deer Lake. At Deer Lake there were deer grazing (of course), a fogbank floating overhead, and mosquitoes. Deer Lake has several campsites, and we picked a nice

THE BAILEY RANGE

BAILEY RANGE TRAVERSE, OLYMPIC NATIONAL PARK

Route begins at Sol Duc Hot Springs trailhead and ascends to Deer Lake and Seven Lakes Basin.

Maintained trail ends and adventure begins at the "Cat Walk" west of Cat Peak.



Summits of Mount Carrie and Mount Ferry provide 360-degree views to Mount Olympus, Strait of Juan de Fuca, and scores of peaks.

The route continues past Mount Pulitzer to headwaters of Elwha River. Or take shorter route via Ludden Peak and Dodger Point. Journey ends at Whiskey Bend.



one with some privacy. The flowers included beargrass, heather, shooting star, elephant's-head and lupine.

Day Two: High Divide to Catwalk

The sun poked through low clouds as we rose for breakfast. From Deer Lake the trail winds up through heather, tarns and flowers, and in about an hour reaches the ridge separating the Sol Duc and Bogachiel

Left: Skill with crampons, ice ax and roped snow travel are essential to complete the Bailey Range Traverse.

THE BAILEY RANGE



Unusual rock shard on the summit of Mount Ferry. On the Bailey, you'll have opportunities to reach the summits of numerous peaks.

watersheds. As we reached the High Divide between the Sol Duc and Hoh watersheds, the clouds melted away and we had close-up views of Mount Olympus almost continuously for the next few days. The High Divide Trail leads close to the summit of Bogachiel Peak (5,474 feet, Class 1), with a short side trail to the actual summit where we stopped for lunch, admiring the views down into Seven Lakes Basin. Avalanche lilies bloomed along the trail, which was still snow-covered in many places. In mid-afternoon we passed Heart Lake, and the last hikers we would see until the last day of the trip. We continued east a couple hours to the end of the trail, scrambling up a bit to a dry campsite on the west edge of the Catwalk.

Day Three: To Mount Carrie

We woke to a clear blue sky, made breakfast and took a side trip about an hour uphill to the summit of Cat Peak (5,940 feet, Class 1), with wide views. After returning to camp and donning full packs, we crossed the Catwalk, then past Boston Charlie's Camp,

MORE ALPINE TRAVERSES

Alpine traverses offer opportunities for solitude and mountaineering through some of the most remote reaches of the Cascades and Olympics. These routes offer a satisfying combination of hiking, orienteering and climbing.

One of the most important things to remember about traverses is that all of these routes require routefinding and mountaineering skills. Having experience in backpacking is **not** enough. Two of the routes below require extensive glacier routefinding skills – picking your route through crevasse fields – plus the training, skills and equipment (ice ax, rope, crampons, rescue gear etc.) to travel safely on glaciers and to rescue people from accidents. There are many unavoidable dangers such as avalanche and rockfall, and adverse weather can change the route and make escape difficult.

Classes can help prepare you for the rigors of alpine traverses. The Mountaineers' Basic Climbing course is a good start. The year-long course requires classes in climbing, mountaineering first aid (MOFA) and navigation—and you must participate in a number of guided climbs before earning your certificate. For more information, visit www.mountaineers.org or call (206) 284-6310.

Alpine Lakes High Route

This off-trail route in the Alpine Lakes Wilderness offers alpine basins with high lakes, reached by cross-country travel through heather, brush (i.e., bushwhacking) and forest, with unsigned anglers' paths in some sections. It's described in the trail approaches section of Cascade Alpine Guide, Vol. 1 by Fred Beckey (Mountaineers, 2000) as a route from Lake Dorothy south and then

east via Chetwoot, Azure and Tank Lakes, meeting the East Fork Foss Trail at Opal Lake in the Necklace Valley. Car shuttle required. Allow 4 or more days. For hikes at either end, see 100 Hikes in Washington's Alpine Lakes by Ira Spring, Vicky Spring and Harvey Manning (Mountaineers, 2000).

Inspiration

Glacier Traverse

A high route in Ross Lake National Recreation Area and North Cascades National Park. From Thunder Creek Trail, south to Primus, Austera, Klawatti and Eldorado Peaks (including some Class 5 rock routes), to North Fork Cascade River, with views of many other North Cascade peaks. Described as a 23-mile, 6-day route in Washington's Highest Mountains by Peggy Goldman (Wilderness Press, 2004). Begins with a "strenuous bushwhack" up 4,000 feet. Extensive glacier travel, requiring crevasse-rescue skills and equipment. Car shuttle required.

Ptarmigan Traverse

A classic high route in North Cascades National Park and Glacier Peak Wilderness. From Cascade Pass south to Downey Creek, with optional side trips to climb peaks including Magic, Mixup, Spider, Formidable, LeConte, Sentinel, Spire Point and Dome. Some of the side trips can take an entire day, and some peaks require Class 5 rock climbing. Extensive glacier travel, requiring crevasse-rescue skills and equipment. Car shuttle required. Fred Beckey warns in Cascade Alpine Guide, Vol. 2 (Mountaineers, 2003) "This is not a cross-country hikers' route. The traverse requires ice axes, crampons and rope; only experienced climbers should attempt it." —K.F.

THE BAILEY RANGE

site of a small pond. The boot-beaten climber's path rises onto the meadowed slopes of Mount Carrie, where marmots and grouse foraged amid the grass and paintbrush flowers. We soon found a level spot to camp at about 5,600 feet, taking care to stow the bear canisters in a depression so they wouldn't roll down the steep slope. We then spent the afternoon on a side trip to the summit of Mount Carrie (6,995 feet, a Class 2 walkup), with views of nearby Mount Fairchild, across the Carrie Glacier to Ruth Peak, north to the Strait of Juan de Fuca, northeast to Hurricane Ridge, and to Mount Olympus in the south. We returned to our camp overlooking the Hoh River valley for dinner. There was little wind, and it stayed warm as the sun set over the Pacific.

Day Four:

To Lake Billy Everett

After breakfast we began traversing eastward above the Hoh River, staying relatively level on a boot-beaten climbers' path and then eventually dropping to about 5,100 feet. Within an hour from our camp, we began crossing substantial streams, some with large waterfalls, and then entered a large basin with many streams and flowers. Later we crossed a snow-covered stream through a crevasse-like gap in the snow. We stopped for lunch at a creek in Eleven Bull Basin, just west of Stephen Peak, and admired some butterflies. The climber's boot-path then rose a few hundred feet before descending perhaps a thousand feet through trees into the wet meadows of Cream Lake Basin. We then bushwhacked and strolled through boggy meadows full of elk tracks, bear scat and a few mosquitoes, circling around the north side of Cream Lake, eventually reaching open heather and scrambling up a creek bed into Ferry Basin, on the west side of Mount Ferry. We moved a bit higher past tarns with views of Ferry and Pulitzer, camping at Lake Billy Everett (4,800 feet), surrounded by buttercups and

entertained by a dipper patrolling the creek and lakeshore.

Day Five:

To Ludden-Scott Saddle

We woke to a clear blue sky, with frost on the ground and ice crystals in our water bottles. We strolled uphill through open heather, then further up into more barren conditions, past a lake surrounded by rock and snow, then to another lake at the foot of a glacier (5,500 feet), and a short distance further to Pulitzer Pass (5,720 feet), also known as Lone Tree Pass. We dropped our packs here and walked up to the two summits of Mount Ferry (6,157 feet), about 20 minutes above the pass. Then Bill went over to the summit of Mount Pulitzer (6,283 feet) while I hung out on Ferry's west summit exploring



its unusual rock shards. The longer version of the Bailey Traverse extends south from here to Mount Barnes, Dodwell-Rixon Pass and the Elwha headwaters (with a long exit along the Elwha River). We took the shorter version, exiting eastward via Dodger Point. From Pulitzer Pass, we scoped out the route traversing northeast across cliffs toward Ludden Peak, and realized it would be easier to go back

uphill almost to the summit of Mount Ferry, then descend eastward onto the ridge leading toward Ludden. After descending a steep rocky section, we followed a winding path through open trees along the ridgetop (above headwaters of Long Creek), eventually getting views down to the grassy Ludden-Scott saddle. Near Ludden Peak, we heard, then saw a herd of elk below us as we dropped a few hundred feet southeast into the saddle (4,700 feet). In the Ludden-Scott saddle, we camped at a series of stream-fed meadows, with a mountain goat and its kid grazing in the trees nearby.

Day Six:

Exit along the Elwha

On our last day, the morning sky was cloudy but we had no complaints after all the blue sky we had experienced. To get to Dodger Point, we dropped about two hundred feet, then traversed or scrambled upward through trees to reach the end of the abandoned trail blasted into the rock (4,940 feet) on the east side of Ludden Peak. This is an easy, relatively level trail. As we approached Dodger Point we encountered our first trail signs, and the first people since the Catwalk. At the Dodger Point junction (13 miles from the road) we had views of Ferry, Stephen, Ruth and Olympus. We then took the aptly named Long Ridge Trail on a long gradual descent (more than 10 miles downhill) to the Elwha River, which is crossed on a footbridge.

Reaching one of our cars at the Whiskey Bend trailhead, we drove back to the Sol Duc trailhead to retrieve the other car. After six days of high country exploring, we were exhausted but exhilarated. For the adventurous hiker knowledgeable in off-trail navigation—plus the use of rope, ice ax and crampons—the Bailey Range Traverse offers solitude in wilderness, amid some of the most beautiful scenery found in Washington state. ♦

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