

## Boise Foothills Hiking Adventure

My family was out of town so I decided to take advantage of the opportunity and go on a long hike when I got off work. I was conditioning for a week long backpacking trip to the White Cloud Peaks in central Idaho.

This hike followed a jeep trail that would get me about halfway and the rest of the hike was cross-country up and across a steep ridge. This ridge would take me up out of the Sage Brush and into Pine Trees. Boise is well known for many good hiking and biking trails in its foothills.

The hike was about 13 miles roundtrip and about a 2600' elevation gain. I left at 5:30 pm and figured if I got to my destination in 2 ½ hrs I would get back to the car just about dark. 2 ½ hrs was a lofty goal considering route finding, elevation gain and temperatures in the 90's when I started out.

As I started hiking the sun was taking its toll and zapping my energy. I normally didn't start hiking until around 8:00 pm earlier in the summer which gave me two hours of hiking in the foothills. I reached the ridge and halfway point by 6:30 with nonstop hiking. The next 1 ½ hrs was pure torcher and heat stroke crossed my mind a time or two but I made it to my destination at the ridge top by 8:00 pm.

After resting at my final destination I noticed the sun and realized I was losing light quicker than I thought. I picked up the pace and started back across the ridge enjoying the scenery and cool evening. As I came up over a little bluff and a bend in the trail, I froze! Foraging on berries less than 30 yards away was a mid-size Black Bear. A sense of panic quickly ran through my veins but by some miracle it never detected me. As I watched it for the minute that seemed like eternity my startled panic feeling turned into nervousness as I calmed down.

I remained motionless looking around for sticks and rocks to defend myself if needed. The only thing I had was a small backpack with water, flashlight and toilet paper. I didn't think I would need the toilet paper. Ha! Ha! I felt dumb for not making more noise like I usually do when hiking alone in bear country but I wasn't expecting a bear.

I knew the odds of a black bear attacking me were very rare and I wasn't expecting a confrontation but decided to stand my ground if it did. A Grizzly would have been a different story but I don't have to worry about that in these parts. I figured I would try taking several steps backward to try to get out of view and walk around the other side of the ridge where I would walk off into the sunset. He was slowly moving in my direction.

I took one step back and then another and then came the day of reckoning. He had me pegged! He was staring me down! I remained motionless just looking at him thinking I probably shouldn't be staring back.

After 15 seconds he began foraging again. Sweet! It didn't see me. I decided to try another step. He instantly looked up and stared me down again. I could have nailed him with a baseball it was so close. I just kept thinking, OK, what's your move going to be. It started foraging!

I couldn't tell if I was undetected or if it wasn't bothered by my presence since a ski resort was nearby. I decided I would try something different so I tried a soft whistle. It was time for the third stare down and again back to foraging!



I thought the third time was a charm but making a louder noise the fourth time got the bear to make a decision. Since I'm writing this story you know that it didn't eat me. It slowly turned around and walked off into the brush. That was a relief and my attention instantly turned to the daylight I was losing.



Further down the ridge something else caught my attention. Ten yards off the side of the trail was a Skunk. It didn't see me either. I guess I never learned my lesson about making more noise while hiking.

I had a decision to make. I could quickly walk by since his tail was pointed away or I could lose more precious time and bushwhack through the thick brush in the immediate area. I decided to go for it.

I began walking and the skunk sensed my presence. It just ducked into the grass and I was on my way. I've had a few encounters with skunks. When I was a Boy Scout I actually had a skunk stick its nose into my sleeping bag. Thankfully, I was asleep and it was my dad that woke me up and showed me the skunk wandering off while relating what had just happened.

As I got to the edge of the ridge and out of the Pines to begin my steep decent I didn't like what I saw heading my direction. A lightning storm was brewing and I still had 5 miles of ridges to walk to get back to my car.



The beautiful sunset was long gone and my goal now was to descend off this mountain and get back to the jeep trail before it was pitch dark. I realized it got dark around 9:30 instead of 10:00 like I was thinking. I knew I would be walking in the dark for the last 1/2 hour to 45 minutes.

I couldn't go very fast down the mountain because of the nature of the walk. The last thing I wanted was a fall or sprained ankle. The walk in the dark didn't bother me as long as I was following a jeep trail or so I thought.

I finally made it down the mountain and partway down the jeep trail when it was dark. As I walked I smelled a few more skunks between the smell of rain and feared getting sprayed by a skunk that I couldn't see. The Coyotes were out as well but they don't worry me. Hearing their howls and seeing them was a common occurrence on my hikes in the foothills. The cover of the clouds from the storm blocking the moonlight and starlight made it very dark.

As I thought about retrieving the flashlight, I was startled again. I heard a sound that was familiar to me from my boyhood. It was at the base of my feet as I walked by. An irritated Rattlesnake!



I took a few more steps and got out my flashlight. Worthless! It's the kind you shake to generate energy. I walked back a few more steps and shined the light in the direction of the snake. It began to rattle again. I couldn't see it and with the wind starting to blow I had a hard time sensing its location by sound. I decided to leave without getting to see it. I figured it was better than getting bit. By this time I was thinking what next, a Mountain Lion! That is a whole different story!

Needless to say, the last 1/2 hour was eerie walking down the trail with little sight and sound. I got back to the car without getting wet and in one piece. I thought this only happened in dreams. Who wants to go on a nature walk with me tomorrow night?