



GRAND TETON NATIONAL PARK

August, 2015

EDITOR'S NOTE: Large sections of this account were provided by Joy Farquhar and Annette Mascia. Other participants' comments have been spliced in.

The fabulous cover photo was from Bernie Dahlen. Almost everyone sent in some of their favorite pictures and I'm sorry that I've neglected to credit them.

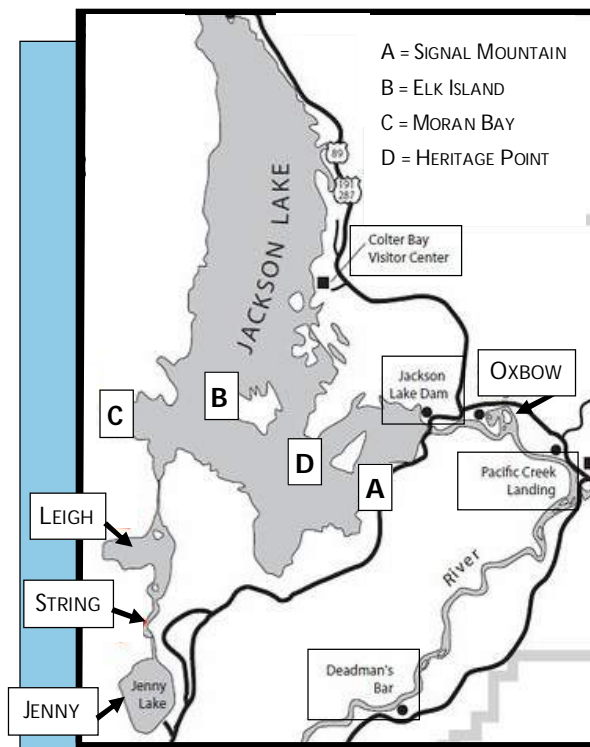
Most of the dozen club members had been to this area before, but everyone said the views of the Tetons from the water were even more amazing than they imagined.

Annette dubbed the August trip "The GTNP Sampler" because each of the four paddling days had its own personality, its own location, its own surprises and its own scenic splendor. There was something for everyone; people got to pick and choose their day's activity from what had been planned the night before. Usually, because the group was large and had different paddling speeds, strengths and interests, they split into smaller groups.



DAY ONE: Brian, Jud, Bernie and Tim put in at Signal Point [A, on the map on the next page] and paddled about 13 miles out across to Elk I land [B] and then on to Moran Bay [C] and Grassy I land. After lunch, they paddled around the other side of Elk I land and back to their starting point.

The rest of the group went to Jenny Lake. Joy said, "There was dazzling scenery with nine peaks higher than 12,000 feet towering sometimes more than 5,000 feet above us. We crossed crystal clear water from the south shore to the west where we waded



ashore and secured our boats on a beautiful yellow, shiny mica sand beach. We hiked about three-quarters of a mile on a trail to Hidden Waterfall. The trail was crowded because the water taxi brings so many walkers from across the lake.



Hiking in mukluks, a wet suit and a pfd, in style for the next Great Flood



Joy, Anna, Gregg and Annette on the sandbar

"After the hike and lunch on the sandbar we spent the afternoon paddling the rest of the way around the lake, awed by the high sculpted slabs of towering rock, snow fields and crevices full of snow on the west side. There were tree-lined shores and in some places evidence of fire which left stumps and charred wood. On shore we saw ground squirrels, townsend warblers, nuthatches, towhees, and great blue herons; it was good to have binoculars and our birding members, Gregg Goodrich and Anna Troth. The afternoon winds made for an exhilarating return."



Day One on Jenny Lake: blue skies and smooth paddling

DAY TWO: This was the only day the whole group paddled together. Marsha was the day's leader on the six-mile stretch of the Snake River from just below the Jackson Lake dam through the oxbow section to the first take-out at Pacific Creek. There was a 3.5 knot current, which was a fun change of pace.



The put-in below Jackson Dam

They saw hundreds of good-sized trout swimming in the shallows; it's a favorite fishermen's haunt. Some of the group needed to walk their boats through one of the shallowest spots.

Lunch was on a bank with a species of wild mint. When the group was getting back into their boats Sandy discovered leeches in the water.

They were the only unpleasant bit of the whole trip and definitely Sandy's least favorite part! She appreciated Brian's cool-headed doctoring but was probably less thrilled about the group's relentless jokes that came after the experience.



Everyone brought painters for this section of the trip



As they came to the section of the river under the Oxbow Overlook, Bernie volunteered to paddle ahead and climb up the bank to take a group picture.



Take-out at Pacific Creek





Looking toward Elk Island

DAY THREE: The weather was overcast and a little rainy, and the forecast was ominous so the group elected to paddle out of the marina at nearby Coulter Bay. Actually, the cloudy skies and cooler temperatures were nice; they meant they had Jackson Lake to themselves and they got a perspective of the mountains in a different light.

The group put in at the marina together, but after consulting mid-lake they split into two groups. A group paddled out to Elk Island again and found a great group campsite.



Group campsite on Elk Island, with three bear boxes



The others paddled more or less directly down to Hermitage Point [D], putting on and taking off rain gear several times. The separate groups met and had lunch there together.



Lunchtime discussion: Marsha, Brian, Tim and Joy



Marsha

After lunch, some paddled farther taking a long way back to the marina while others, at Anna's suggestion, pulled out to have a fun time making rock cairns, adding to ones that were already there. Balancing rock towers was an artsy, creative project that delighted several of them; a few just napped.



Riffles on the Snake River

DAY FOUR: Tim Fletcher and Bernie Dahlen paddled ten more miles of the Snake River, the slightly more difficult section from Day Two's take-out at Pacific Creek to Deadman's Bar.

Tim said every bend of the river gave them a different view of the Grand Tetons and they saw eagles, pelicans, cormorants and lots of ducks.

The rest of the group got an early start to String Lake planning to do the portage from there to Leigh Lake if it wasn't too tricky.

Annette Mascia wrote, "Although I dreaded the thought of portaging, String Lake→portage→Leigh Lake→portage→String Lake became the part of the trip that blew me away.



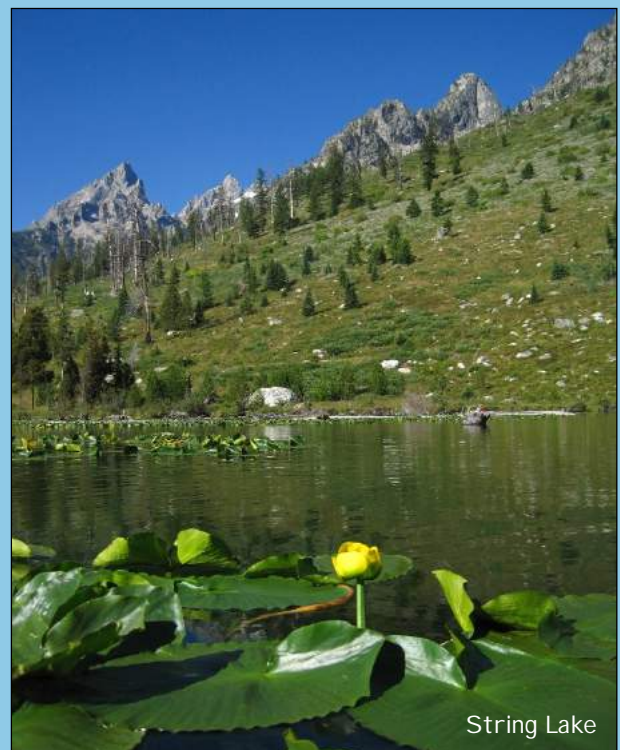
On the section between Pacific Creek and Deadman's Bar



At 8:00 they had the String Lake put-in to themselves

"Entering String Lake in early morning was like discovering a hidden gem; it was mirror calm with the crystal clear water reflecting the jagged peaks above." Sandy agreed, "I loved putting in at String Lake in the early morning. It was misty and the lily pads were in bloom. It was so beautiful and peaceful, spiritual really."

The group poked around slowly, photographing everything in sight, absorbing the peace and beauty that surrounded them.



String Lake



Jud wheeling another boat up the trail



Brian, Gregg, Annette, Sandy and Joy on the 28 steps to Leigh

They gradually made their way to the portage take-out at the end of the lake and then, sharing sets of wheels and helping each other, rolled their boats up 100 feet of trail and then down the wooden stairs to Leigh Lake.

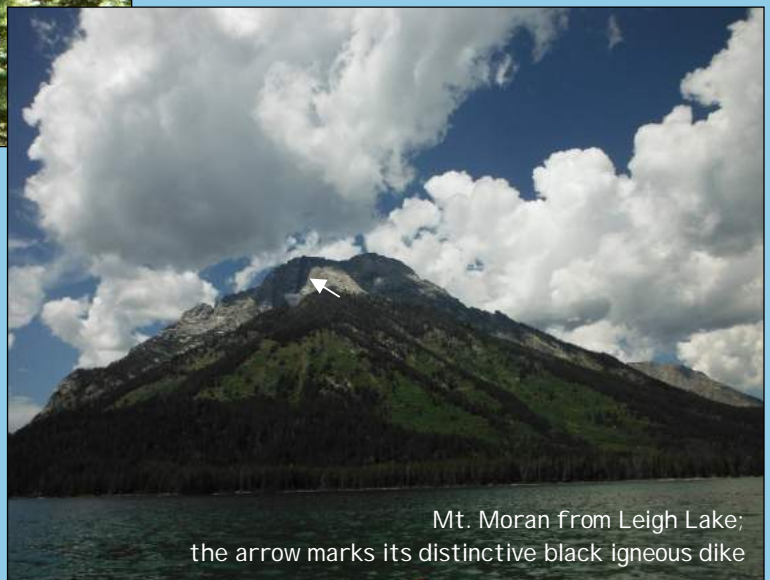


Annette remembers, "As I waited for my turn, a young man on a paddle board shouted, 'Three bears just ran across the bridge!' Rats! I left my bear spray back at camp. Moments later, Brian returned from the portage path exclaiming, 'A sow and two cubs just crossed behind us on the portage path!' Double rats!

"I was thankful that Brian and Jud made the dreaded portage quite painless for me, including the Stairs of Terror.

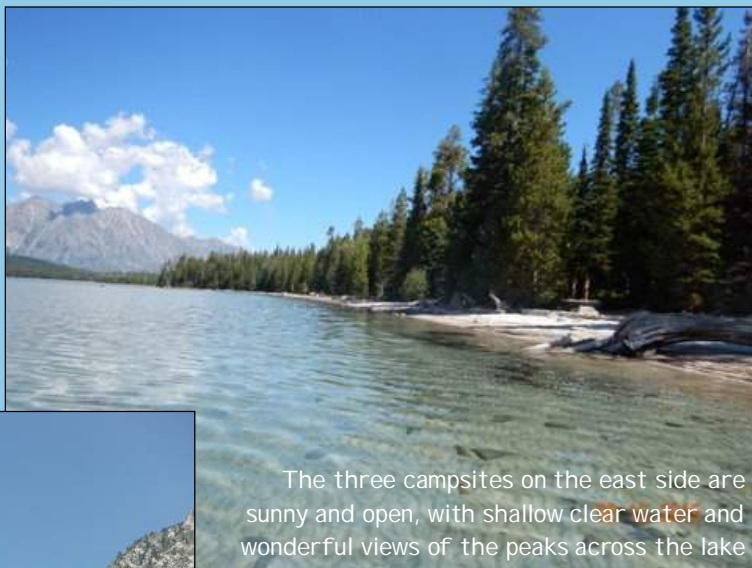
"With that behind us, we put into Leigh Lake, paddling counter-clockwise around its shoreline. The splendor of this lake, at the base of Mt. Moran, was unimaginable.

'When we beached for lunch, I sat mesmerized in disbelief that I was actually there, with the sound of the tiny waves lapping at the shore, blue skies, sunshine, and the majestic Mt. Moran staring me in my face; this was paradise! It just couldn't get any better.



Mt. Moran from Leigh Lake; the arrow marks its distinctive black igneous dike

"After lunch we proceeded around the lake on a scouting mission to locate more back country campsites for a future trip. We managed to find three or so. Here again geology smacked us in the face with more enchanting high rock mountain sides with waterfalls. To while away the day paddling in so magnificent a setting was for me a dream come true. The possibility of afternoon high winds never developed and we reached the take-out without stress.



The three campsites on the east side are sunny and open, with shallow clear water and wonderful views of the peaks across the lake



"While waiting my turn to portage back to String Lake some other folks reported that a mother and daughter hiking pair who had removed their backpacks to wade in the lake watched from the water as that rascal Mama Bear ran out of the woods, snatched their packs and took off with them! Wow! So that's why there was a bear box at the portage site and the rangers warn, 'Never leave food unattended.'"



Campsite 16, private and hidden on the far west side of the lake where the water is deep



Campsite 13, in the southwest corner of the lake closest to the put-in

Back at String Lake they were greeted with another surprise. The lake was filled with hundreds of people swimming, paddle boarding, rock jumping, screaming, playing, and picnicking. It was a veritable carnival of folks having other types of fun in the out-of-doors. It was hard to believe it was the same lake they had launched from in the early morning. What a day, what a day!

String and Leigh lakes and the portage between them was also the highlight of the trip for many of the others. New club member Gregg Goodrich wrote, "One of my favorite aspects of our Tetons paddle trip was the day we portaged from String Lake to Leigh Lake. Portage? To be feared? Hard and difficult to accomplish? Not so. In fact it was fun! Why do I say that?

"First, I got to learn how to use my wheels. The wheels were a great asset in making the portage. And Brian once again gave me a great lesson: how to mount them on the kayak. In addition, with the "2 + 2 + wheels" maneuver you can move two kayaks with two people and only one set of wheels.



Brian and Gregg hauling two kayaks with one set of wheels



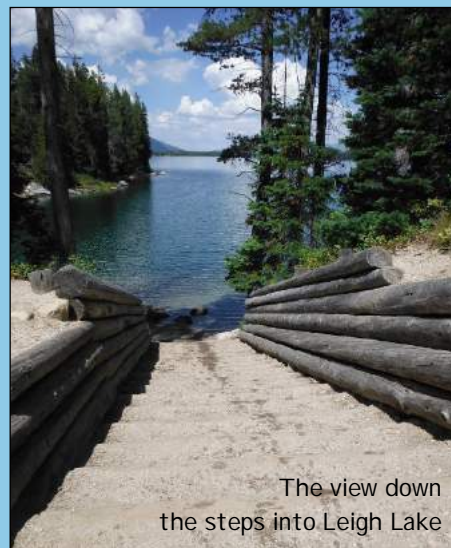
"Next, it felt really good to stretch the legs after the first lake, and when we were done I was ready to get back into the cockpit.

"The portage allowed us to get to a much more remote and beautiful lake, Leigh, which has no road access so all boats and people have to get there under their own power. Therefore, it's much less used, more pristine and just plain beautiful.

"And of course you cannot forget the bear and her cubs. They definitely added a lot of excitement to the portage and spurred us to get it done in a hurry and with great caution and a lot of noise.

"But, the main theme I got from the portage was team work. I was really impressed with the way we moved through the portage so quickly and smoothly. Sets of wheels were used several times to move multiple kayakers. Folks went back more than once to help other members move their boats to the next lake. The group can be proud of how they successfully accomplished the portages as a team effort!"

EDITOR'S NOTE: The group knew they should bring their wheels because they had read Mike Anson's and the Webbers' account of an earlier trip. RMSKC reports are a good resource for trip planning.



The view down the steps into Leigh Lake

ONSHORE DETAILS: Because there were twelve participants (Sandy Carlsen, Harold Christopher, Bernie Dahlen, Marsha Dougherty, Gregg Goodrich, Joy Farquhar, Tim Fletcher, Sue Hughes, Brian Hunter, Jud Hurd, Annette Mascia and Anna Troth) they could reserve a group site. This worked well since reservations were not offered for individual sites, and the park was busy and the individual sites were all taken by mid-afternoon a couple of the days they were there.

The group site also meant they were grouped to coordinate their activities. They gathered in the afternoons for Happy Hour to tell old RMSKC stories, tease each other and hash out plans for the following day. After dark some of the group went on walks to see the alpenglow sunsets and to watch the Perseid Meteor showers. They also enjoyed park movies and ranger talks and, of course, ice cream.



Come on, you guys, I know
a bear didn't scratch
up this jar of nuts



Clockwise from the upper left: Gregg, Anna, Sue, Joy, Bernie, Tim, Harold, and Marsha



ABOUT THE CAMARADERIE: In addition to exclamations about the beauty of the mountain views and the good paddling, everyone mentioned how much they'd enjoyed the people on the trip. Here are some of their comments:

"Many of us had never met before this trip. What I noted was how helpful everyone was: sharing space, food, cooking and loading kayaks on cars for each other. Without being tedious, always looking out for each other's welfare. Lots of smiles and positive comments. Good jokes and stories. Loved Marsha and Jud's sharing of their summer trip to the San Juans."



Jud, Sue, Brian, Harold, Sandy, Bernie, Gregg and Marsha

ABOUT THE CAMARADERIE, CONTINUED:

"My favorite part of the trip was getting to know the other club members. We really had a good time with you all. Can't wait to paddle with you again! Thanks for a wonderful time!"

"My experience paddling in the Tetons with the club was very memorable. It was a really fun week spent with wonderful people. The happy hour planning sessions in the afternoons were enjoyable also. I am ready to do it again!"

"I had always wanted to kayak Grand Tetons National Park and Yellowstone. This trip was great as it allowed me to explore the park with a great group of people. The best part of the trip however was not the amazing views and peace all throughout but the great bunch of people I shared the adventure with. I am looking forward to many more trips."

"Of course, the people are what make any trip and we had a great group on this one. I think everybody enjoyed this trip to the max and we got to meet and paddle with three new members—Gregg Goodrich, Sandy Carlsen and Harold Christopher. They are all strong paddlers and a pleasure to visit with."

"Maybe it was the drinks and wonderful munchies that were forced upon me at every happy hour after the day's paddle. Those times of fellowship are my best memories even if they did cost me five pounds."



Harold and Sandy

THOUGHTS FOR THE NEXT GTNP TRIP:

Marsha said, "Annette and I have pictures and notes about the campsites to help plan another trip. I think we should camp two nights on Elk Island and two nights at one of the sites on Leigh Lake."

Sue's hints for the next trip leader: Talk to lots of different people while making arrangements at GTNP and keep notes about their answers. Their workers may not have enough training: we got handfuls of different versions of campsite prices and steps for reserving our group site. Trip members will also need information on getting the needed Wyoming boat check and purchasing their invasive species decal, and on the GTNP boat sticker procedure. *Paddling Yellowstone and Grand Teton National Park* is an invaluable book.

BIRDS RECORDED AT GTNP, BY GREGG AND ANNA

Canada Goose, Mallard, Common Merganser, Ruddy Duck, Pied-billed Grebe, Double-crested Cormorant, American White Pelican, Great Blue Heron, Osprey, Bald Eagle, American Coot, Sandhill Crane, Killdeer, Spotted Sandpiper, Broad-tailed Hummingbird, Belted Kingfisher, American Kestrel, Barn Swallow, Western Wood-Pewee, Gray Jay, Black-billed Magpie, Clark's Nutcracker, Common Raven, Tree Swallow, Cliff Swallow, Mountain Chickadee, White-breasted Nuthatch, Mountain Bluebird, Cedar Waxwing, Yellow Warbler, Yellow-rumped Warbler, Chipping Sparrow, Dark-eyed Junco, White-crowned Sparrow