

Wind River Mountain Range, Wyoming.

By Ken McCarthy



First, I have to say, just in case you don't get any farther then this first page, that I was so impressed with both Ria and Addison on this trip. They hiked like they had been doing this kind of thing all their lives. The bugs were terrible and they didn't complain any more then I did. They seemed to have fun and be excited most of the trip. It made it very fun for me and I want to thank them for going along and being so much fun.

July 24, 2010

GETTING OUT OF TOWN

The McCarthy household was packing packs all afternoon; weighing food, tents and clothes. It took much longer then I thought it would but doesn't everything. By 6:00 am the next morning we were up and finishing the last details. Taking care of all the farm details is the most challenging. There are so many things that need our care each day. Prescott was coming in the afternoon and would stay and take care of thing while we were gone

We were on our way to Wyoming by 7:00. The last 45 miles of the drive were on dirt roads. That somehow surprises me that any place in this country still has that many miles of dirt road left, almost 50 miles. It only took us five and a half hours to get to the trail head from our house. We were immediately greeted by a large number of mosquitoes. We made a few last minute clothing decisions, put our boots on and were on the trail by 1:30 PM.

MISTAKE NUMBER ONE

We had six miles of gradual uphill trail to Big Sandy Lake and then another 1.2 miles around the lake and up to our first planned camp at Rapid Lake. Being mid-afternoon it was pretty warm. The usual afternoon cloud build up hadn't happened but we were in high spirits so we had no trouble covering the first six miles. With only one mile left to go I stopped to go to the bathroom. I told the others to go on and I would catch them. Little did I know it wouldn't be so easy.

After my stop in the bushes I throw my pack on and trotted up the trail after the others. The trail at this point was very thin and hard to find. We were skirting the edge of a meadow/marsh at the base of a steep hill. I came to a point where an obvious trail turned and went up the hill. Without much thought I turned and followed it. I was climbing pretty fast and working hard. I was very impressed that those girls had gone up it so fast that I hadn't already caught them. Soon I was to wonder if something was a miss and started to question if we were on the same trail. I pulled out the map and found that it was I who was on the wrong trail.

I decided to do a long bushwacking traverse to the other trail that I was supposed to be on. It was pretty hard traveling and I was getting pretty tired carrying such a big pack. I finally made it to what seemed like the right trail. It was faint and not well used but it was in just the right place to match up with the location on the map. I thought about whether Jen and the girls would have already past here or if they were still coming up the trail. I decided I had been traveling pretty fast and they must be below me. I dropped my pack and started down the rather steep trail/path. I was yelling out for them but no answer. After a few minutes I came to the conclusion that they were not coming up, they must already be above me. I turned around again and started back up. It was much farther back up then it had been going down. Then I realized that there were many trails weaving back and forth up the hill. I was having a bit of trouble figuring out which I had come down on. It seemed I had climbed far enough to be near my backpack but I wasn't finding it. Great, I thought, now I've lost Jen, Ria, Addison and my pack.

I found my pack before too long and decided I would just go to the lake we had planned to camp and they would be there. As I came over the crest of the hill and the lake came into view I wasn't seeing anyone. I yelled some more but still no answers. I dropped my pack and sat down on it. The mosquitoes swarmed around me. I was feeling pretty tired and a little depressed but what if they were down there trying to find me. I could sit here and they would eventually make it here but perhaps I had a responsibility to go look for them. And maybe it wasn't so nice sitting there being eaten by mosquitoes. Once again I started down the hill.

I followed a trail down the gully this time yelling all the way. I had made it a ways below where I had left my pack when I heard someone yell back but I couldn't figure out which way it had come from. I was expecting it to come from below me. I finally figured out it was above me. They were on top of some cliffs on the ridge above the gully on the far side from where I had been. They were following another trail up over

there. They had gotten a little misplaced on that side and found a trail that seemed to be going to the lake and were following that. I couldn't get there from my gully because of cliffs so I huffed and puffed my way up the gully until I could get around the cliffs. I climbed up and found the path they were on and sat down to wait for them. But they didn't come. How far down could they have been? How long could it take to get this high? I walked down the trail yelling again. I didn't go very far this time. It was impossible for them to not be here yet. I turned around again and went back up. As I crested the hill and the lake came into view I could see them pulling things out of their packs and setting up camp.

All through this episode I was thinking about ways we could find each other and the same thought kept coming to me; if we only had our cell phones. We don't have to make plans in advance any more we just plan to call. I decided we would have to do better at not getting separated without a plan from now on.

The camp was beautiful; purple Lupine flowers grew everywhere, the lake was a dark blue reflecting the rocks and snow on the far side. The area had the feel of a manicured golf course and we were camped just above the lake beside a huge boulder, under some twisted, high altitude pine trees. To the north we could see the sharp peaks of the Circ of the Tower with Warbonnett sticking up in front. To the south were the twin Temple Peaks with Temple pass between them. The next day we would cross through that pass if all went as planned.

MISTAKE NUMBER TWO

It would have all been perfect except for the mosquitoes. They were driving us mad. We had our mosquito nets over our heads and our 30% deet bug repellent on and they were still getting us. We got water from the lake and put it on the stove to boil. It was at this time that I make my second big mistake of the day. I had just opened a package of rice with my Swiss Army knife and was going to set it down on the ground beside me when the blade, still open, bumped my leg knocking the knife out of my hand. I was sitting in my Crazy Creek camp chair with my Thermarest pad in it. The knife left my hand and dove straight into the Thermarest slicing a half inch hole into it. My chair instantly went flat and my spirits deflated right along with it.

Before going to bed I got out my repair kit and used duct tape and superglue to try to patch my Thermarest. It seemed to work pretty well. The pad seemed to still have some air in it in the morning.

The topic of how do you think the Cox's would have done today came up with the mosquitoes. They would have done fine with the 7.2 mile hike but how would they be doing with these bugs? How would they do with the beans and rice for dinner, or the signs in the parking lot that said protect you food from bears?

I had packed a very small retractable fishing pole and reel but we hadn't gotten a fishing license so we would be fishing illegally but I didn't think we would really be fishing that

much. The pole and reel were of such low quality that I could barely cast a steel lure thirty feet. It barely got the hook into deep water. But when I took the pole out to try my luck in the lake Addison and Ria got pretty excited. We didn't catch anything in Rapid Lake but we had a good time learning to use the pole.

The next morning we awoke to the sound of mosquitoes buzzing at the door of the tent. It was a beautiful clear warm morning and it only took us two hours to get breakfast, break camp and hit the trail. We would need to work on cutting some time off of that.



We were above tree line in no time walking through high grassy hills and meadows. The reflections on the glassy surface of the Temple Lakes showed us an upside down image of the peaks towering over us. As we crested a hill above the lake Ria suddenly took a 90 degree turn and started walking east instead of the south we had been going all morning. I said, "Ria, where are you going?" She said, "Look up there, the only place we can go if we go that way is up that mountain." I had to explain to her that that was the plan.

The headwall at the end of the canyon was about 1000 vertical feet. The top of the pass was 11,500 feet above sea level (fast). It did look a little forbidding. The map showed a trail to the top of the pass but it was already a faint trail where we were so it wasn't going to be much of a trail.

About this time we met a couple that had come onto our trail from a side canyon. They were just day hiking from their camp. They had no backpacks. We let them go past us just before we started up the headwall figuring they would be faster than us. But Ria and Addison surprised us as well as themselves. They marched up the hill as fast as the

couple with no packs, through the boulder fields, snow fields and steep sandy trail. We all reach the top of the pass at the same time.

We found some comfortable looking rocks and sat down for some lunch. The view was spectacular and the mosquitoes were minimal due to a good breeze blowing through the pass. I don't want to make anyone believe there weren't mosquitoes, there were, but they weren't so bad as to drive one crazy. Jen's new backpack was digging a hole in her hip/butt so she took it all apart and we bending the aluminum stays hoping to relieve some of the pain.

The couple headed back down the way we had come up and we headed down the other side into the unknown. There was no trail on this side of the pass.

We each started the trip with approximately one third of our body weight on our backs. Addison was carrying 23 lbs, Ria 30 lbs., and Jen was well over her weight at 50 lbs. I was only a little over at 65 lbs. but it still felt pretty heavy.

Without a trail the going is much slower. You have to stay on route, going in the right direction, but you also have to find the easiest way to go, changing directions around trees, rocks, bushes, creeks and anything else that gets in your way. It is slower going then on a trail. The first half of the day went pretty fast but this second have started to drag on and we were all getting tired.

We knew we were pretty close to the lake I had planned to camp at but the terrain was complicated and I was having trouble knowing exactly which way to go. Addison was on her last leg. She wasn't going to loose it pretty soon. At this point we crossed the continental divide and shortly after our lake came into view. We had made it but everyone was tired. It was mid afternoon and still quite warm out. We decided to take a dip in the lake before crawling into our tents to escape the mosquitoes and take naps.

Everyone had their book along but Addison. She forgot and left her book in the car. I brought the seventh and final book of the Harry Potter series. Jen gave me a hard time about bringing such a large book. She was reading and then tearing out each page of her book and burning it to reduce her weight. Addison and Ria said I couldn't do that to Harry Potter. Ria's book wasn't very big so she ended up just reading it over and over. After crawling into my tent to escape the mosquitoes I discovered that my Thermarest pad would not hold air anymore. The ground is pretty hard when your pad is late.



This lake, Coon Lake, was at 10,500 feet and the mosquitoes were still very bad. They swarmed anyone that got out of their tent. We had to keep our nets on our heads and the deet everywhere else. They were really cutting into the enjoyment of the trip. It would have been nice to lie on the rocks at the edge of the lake or go for a walk in the marshy

meadow that was filled with wild flower but it just wasn't any fun. The bugs just never let up. For dinner we went out on some rocks that stuck out into the lake. There was a pretty good wind blowing and it help to keep the bugs away.

It had been a tougher day today and we asked ourselves how would the Cox's have done? Would they have like jumping in the cold water of the lake? Would they have not like the lake of trail and uncertainty of direction? By now they would have had to go to the bathroom.



After studying the map I decided that it wouldn't make sense to hike down the canyon and then back up the next canyon just so we could be on a trail for a few miles. So we set out cross country once again. It really didn't matter where we went it was all incredibly beautiful. Everywhere green; green trees, scrubs, grass, little streams of water flowing everywhere with little waterfalls and deep, cool pools. The wildflowers grew in every color everywhere. I felt like

I was walking through some kind of Japanese garden most of the time. The whole place was dotted with lakes and little ponds reflecting the jagged peaks above us.

Addison was having a bit of trouble getting in the mood for hiking and she did a bit of complaining. Of course I needed to be out front finding the route so Jen was left to deal with Addison's attitude adjustments. Ria was pretty much happy but that is how it works. If Ria is having a mood and complaining Addison is the strong one, happy and cheerful. If Addison is the one with problems Ria is the up one. I guess its better then having them both down at the same time.

The traveling became more technical and challenging as the day went on, more snow, steeper and more up and down to get around cliffs and rock bands. It started to take it's toll. We were all getting tired and we still had a long way to go. I had planned to drop down and pick up the trail but it was a long way down and it would take a while. We decided to go up over the next pass before getting to the trail. It just meant more off trail, snow and rock. The stays in Jen's pack were still digging into her backside and causing a lot of pain.



I was starting to look at the map to see what other camping options we had.

We were supposed to climb Wind River Peak the next day. So we wouldn't move our camp. But if we didn't get to the camp what would happen? I could tell from the map that there would be other routes up the peak. After we made it to the pass I asked if anybody thought we should camp down at one of the lakes just below. It was a very popular idea. It took a while to find a place to camp. Ria and especially Addison were feeling pretty much done. The lakes in this little basin didn't have any names marked on the map. We called our lake 10,773 because that is what the map had it marked.



We set up camp on a little ridge just about Lake 10,773. The ground where we put up the tents wasn't very flat but the place was beautiful. The creek came into the lake over huge rock slab and poured in to it in a beautiful waterfall. There were very few signs of people here. Not many had camp at this lake.

Jen and Addison decided their swim the night before should become a nightly tradition and they prepared for another swim. Ria and I didn't think it was quite so necessary not being all that hot. But I took my Thermarest down to the lake to see if I could find the hole. I thought the problem would be my patch job on the knife hole but it seemed to be holding just fine. The only other leak I could find was another small leak a few inches over from the knife hole. I got out my superglue and duct tape and patched it up.

We spent the rest of the afternoon resting in our tents and reading. I was starting to get into Harry Potters "Deathly Hallows" and Jen was tearing through her book. But my Thermarest was still leaking and I was lying on the ground.

The mosquitoes were at least as bad as we had seen or maybe worse. They were driving me crazy when I made dinner. After we ate I decided I had to get away from them for a little while so I went for a walk up by the waterfall. Out on the rocks by the falls there was a good breeze and no vegetation. The bugs were much better so I sat down on the rock cliff just above the lake to enjoy the beauty of the lake and the mountains and the forested canyon far below us. After a while Jen came over. When she found it was relatively bug free she went back for the girls and we all took a slow walk around the rest of the lake and talked about the plans for the next day.

Seventeen years early, to the day, Jen and I were here in the Wind Rivers together with a bunch of kids, only some 20 miles farther to the north of where we were now. We knew each other before that but not all that well. We got to know each other much better on that trip and decided we really liked each other. It was the start of a long history for us. The reason I can remember the dates so well is it happened to be Jen's thirtieth birthday,

July, 28th. She and I had gone to climb a peak, just the two of us, on that day and here we were back again but this time with kids of our own.

JULY 28, 2010

Ria decided she needed a day of rest and was going to stay in camp. It really didn't sound all that appealing because of the mosquitoes. They would keep her in her tent all day long. The tent would get very warm inside by mid-morning and then what? Fortunately Addison made the choice ascend the peak with Jen and I. We planned to get up and get going by sunrise but when I went out at first dawn it was cloudy, cold and windy. It as looking like it would rain again so I crawled back into the tent and told Jen I thought we should wait an hour or two. We got up again around 7:00 set out at 8:00 am up the big rock slabs at the far end of the lake near the waterfall. There was one little place that seemed like it could have some cliffs we would have to negotiate but they turn out to be easy to get though. I on the peak we ran into some snow but it to was easy to get across.



We climbed 2,300 vertical feet in just over two hours and were on the summit just after 10:00 am. There were clouds but not looking very threatening. The best thing was there were no bugs. We decided we were in no rush to get back down to the bugs so we settle in to spend some time reading the summit register and enjoying the incredible view. Wind River Peak at 13,192 feet asl. is the highest point in the southern

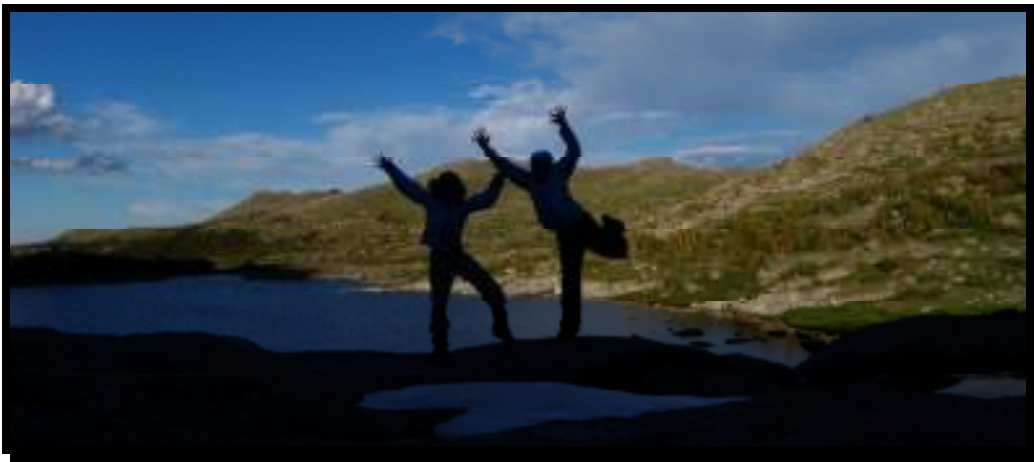
part of the Winds. We were sticking up higher then anything around us. We could see the highest mountain in Wyoming 50 miles to the north of us, Gannet Peak but there were a lot of mountain between us and it.

We found the peak register and started reading through it and found that most of the people to climb the peak were with NOLS groups (National Outdoor Leadership School). They seem to have climbed it a lot. We wrote our little story about birthdays and Addison climbing up there at age ten and only taking two hours and then had some lunch. We had been up there for well over an hour when we heard someone coming. We figured it was a NOLS group and it was about to get more crowded but it was just a couple from Logan, UT. It even turned out the Scott the Guy and I knew of each other from cross country skiing years before. We had several common friends.

After another hour or so of talking and hanging out with Scott and Jessie we started back down the hill. We took a different way down, 1) to stay on the snow as long as possible. The sliding was fun and easy. Addison thought it was the best. And 2) because it is always better to make a loop if you can instead of out and back. And 3) because I had spotted a snow fill couloirs on the way up that I thought we might be able to slide down just for fun and the speed of getting back down to the lakes.

Of course I didn't tell Jen I was thinking of dropping into this couloirs until we were there and she didn't think it looked all that inviting when she looked down it. I have to admit I thought it look better from across the canyon. I went down in and tried the snow and it seemed good but Jen and Addison didn't like the idea at all. Sense it was Jen's birthday she got to make the call so we continued on around the mountain until we had a better way down.

After another dip in the lake and more reading and resting in the tents we took the kitchen over to the rocks by the waterfall to make Jen's birthday dinner, alfrado sauce on noodles with cheese cake for desert.



I had thought of many different routes we could follow from 10,773 but most were high elevation and no trail. We decide a day on the trail would be nice so we found it and followed it for the day. We followed it through a lot of beautiful country past the Ice Lakes and Deep Creek Lakes and Baer Lakes and down into the North Fork of the Popo Agie River. We dropped from 10,773 feet, well above tree line to 9,200 and then started back up. At 9,200 it is completely forested with tall pine trees tall, lush grass and much bigger rivers.

Because we change our route back at lake 10,773 we no longer had anything set as to where we were going. There was a lake called Papoose that was just a little off the trail, tucked below the massive walls of Big Sandy Peak and the Monolith. It seemed like a good place to camp. We turned south



into the forest and crossed the river leaving the trail behind once again. We had cover almost ten miles this day but it was not as hard as the 5 miles we had done the day we got to Lake 10,773. As we picked our way through the down fall and up the little hill toward Papoose Lake Ria said something about starting to get a little tired. I said “You should be we’ve done ten miles today.” She could believe that was all we had done.



Papoose was an amazingly beautiful place with a tree lined shore, big boulders scattered along in the water and the massive cliffs of The Monolith and The Dogtooth reflecting off the still water of the lake. We set up camp on the north shore and of course Jen and Addison decided it was time for their daily plunge. We all went down to some big rocks on the shore where there was a deep pool right off the edge of the rocks and we all got wet this time. I had to show them all how to do it by swimming out to a big rock and back. Addison followed me.

Surprisingly the lake didn't have any fish in it, nothing rising and we couldn't see any in the clear water. That evening I got out our little fishing pole and had the girls follow me down to the Popo Agie River we had crossed on our way up to the lake. I was telling them about how this high mountain fishing was more like hunting because you have to sneak up on the fish. They can see you and hear you. They can even hear (or feel your) feet thumping on the river bank. You have to be very sneaky and quite or they won't bite. We crept up to the edge of the river and I cast out into a little pool as far as the little pole could cast and within three seconds I had a fish on the line.



It was very small but it was very exciting. Addison was especially psyched about the idea of catching fish. Unfortunately it was not an easy place to fish. It was very challenging to get the lure into the water where you wanted it and where

it wouldn't get hung up in the bushes or trees or rocks. I had to do most of the fishing because she couldn't hit the water. We caught a few more fish before taking them back to camp for the "how to clean a fish" lesson. After that lesson we moved to the cooking lesson. We salted the fish, rapped them in aluminum foil and put the in the fire to cook. We each got t little bit but not much more.

During the day as we drop lower we found we experienced fewer mosquitoes and at our camp at Papoose Lake there were mosquitoes but not so many as to immediately drive us into our tents. While we were fishing along the river they were pretty bad but in general things had improved in that department.

6/30/10 Day 6

In the morning we put on our day packs and started around the east side of the lake. I wanted to explore the little canyon above the lake and maybe get up on top of the peaks we were looking up at. There was another small lake farther up in the canyon that we named Molar Tooth because it looked like one from above. We climbed a steep gravelly, scree covered hillside and eventually made it to a pass that look over into the next canyon. It was the canyon we would have descended had we taken the high, no trail route out of Lake 10,773. Aside from having to travel through some boulder fields with some really big boulders it would have been very doable. We sat in the pass for a while and enjoyed the view before continuing on up the ridge that would lead us to an unnamed peak right above our camp.

Jen and I noticed a strange thing about Ria that day. She hadn't said anything about how hard or how far or how she wished she was back in her tent. She was happy and pleasant and she seemed to be enjoying herself on this little hike. Ria has a very good imagination and perhaps even better memory and she has a habit of always thinking about how hard it **will** be. She worries about how hard it **will** be long before it gets hard. Even though she is extremely strong and able to do most anything she still worries about how hard it **might** be. And if she thinks it is going to be hard she usually decides she doesn't want to do it. I was a little worried about her this day because she may have been losing her imagination and memory.



The top of the peak was a gently sloping grassy meadow with beautiful wildflowers but at it's edge it dropped straight off for fifteen hundred feet straight down. Papoose Lake and our little camp were almost 2,000 feet straight down.

We weren't rushing to get anywhere so we took our time and rested when we wanted to. Possibly a big part of that relaxed feeling came from the fact that there were few or no mosquitoes trying to eat us. We could sit and enjoy the scenery without being swarmed

by the little biting bug. It was so nice to not be swatting and scratching all the time. We were in no great hurry to get back to them.

That afternoon before dinner we set out on another hunting expedition. We were going to have fish for dinner. I was a little disappointed that I didn't get a fish on my first cast but it didn't take long before we had caught a few. We worked our way up the river until we came to a wide flat spot. It was more of a shallow lake. I turned the pole over to Addison so she could practice her casting. After about 10 casts she hooked a fish and got it into show. We were all pretty excited again but especially Addison. She took the four fish we had already caught back to camp and cleaned them all by herself. I fish for a little longer, until I caught a few more and then brought them back for the big fish feed.

It was 12 miles up over Jackass Pass and down the Big Sandy River to the car. I figured we could do 8 miles or so and camp somewhere along the Big Sandy River and then we would only have 4 miles to the car. We could run out in a couple ours and get home before it got too late. But somehow Ria and Addison got it into their heads that they could make it the 12 miles out in one day.



Ria set a good pace up to the Circ of the Towers and Lonesome Lake. I had purposely avoided camping too close to the Circ because it is such a popular place. I have been there a number of times but I had forgotten how nice it was. It is a very beautiful place.

Around Lonesome Lake there were a lot of trails going in all directions

and somehow we got on the wrong one. It really wasn't much of a mistake. Instead of taking us through Jackass pass it took us to a pass referred to as "the climber's shortcut". It might even be a little shorter than Jackass. It's just less well marked and had a little more technical terrain. Once we were on top those girls knew they were on their way home.

But then we came to a lake with cliffs coming down to the water. There was no way for the trail to get around except to go up and over. We started climbing. There wasn't supposed to be any more climbing. We were supposed to be dropping down the river all the way to the car. Ria and Addison were feeling like they had been tricked or double

crossed. But even so when Jen wanted them to stop and get their picture taken with so nice wildflowers they were happy and cheerful.

After 12 miles of fast hiking Addison and Ria had enough energy left to have a race the last couple hundred yard to the car.

Everyday we asked the question, “How would the Cox family be doing with this?” I guess we won’t know until they come out and do it with us.

