

Cha-paa-qn Peak, September 2008

This weekend (Sep. 13), we hiked up to Cha-paa-qn (formerly known as Squaw) Peak with two of my fellow math professors and their families. Emily Stone, who is one of the other applied mathematicians in our department, is married and has a boy and a girl. Nikolaus Vonesson is an algebraist and is married with three girls. So there was quite a crew of us.

The day was perfect for hiking. On the way up it was cool and partly sunny, then at the peak the clouds began disappearing until, on the hike down, the weather was perfect. And as it was evening time and fall, the temperature was ideal and the light beautiful.

This time of year is a great time for getting out. All of the leaves are still on the bushes, but they are changing color. Also, in the Missoula area, the huckleberries can still be picked, though I think we were a week or two past prime picking time. As a group, we spent at least 30 minutes (and perhaps more) picking, and last night the kids and I had vanilla ice cream with huckleberries on top. This added an enjoyable, and unexpected, twist to the hike.

The trailhead for this hike is a one hour drive from Missoula, making it one of the most accessible hikes around. Also, though the peak is not one of the highest in the area (7994 ft), it sits on its own, like one of the peaks in the Oregon Cascades, and so is visually prominent from the Missoula. Along with Lolo Peak and Stuart Peak, it is one of those landmark mountains that a Missoulian can point to from just about anywhere in the valley and, if they are lucky, point and say, I've been up there. And it has outstanding views from the top—we could see the Rattlesnake, the Bitterroot, the Sapphire, the Swan, the Mission ranges and more.

To get to the trailhead, drive west from Missoula on I-90, passed Frenchtown, to the Ninemile Exit and then on to the historic Ninemile Ranger Station. Here, keep going straight and follow the dirt road 10 miles (always following the signs that say Edith Peak Road) to a pass and the trailhead, which comes a mile or two after you begin asking yourself if the drive will ever end. The pull-out is well-signed and obvious.

Unfortunately I have no pictures of this trip, as Jen took the camera to California, where she is visiting her friend Josie. I found a couple of photos on the web, which I've included below. Next trip I'll fill this in with pictures of my own.



At the top looking northwest toward the Mission Mountains (taken by David Dupuis).



Cha-paa-qn with snow from the Frenchtown area. We had no snow on our hike.