

Lolo and Sweeney Peaks, Bitterroot Wilderness, September 2008

I had a double privilege this weekend (September 26, 27, & 28). My good friend Al Parker visited from Bozeman, and we took a two-night trip into the Bitterroot Wilderness near Lolo Peak.

Lolo Peak is a Missoula area landmark—its north (and lower) peak is visible from town—and it serves as the northernmost sentinel of the awesome Bitterroot Range.

My friendship with Al Parker is a landmark of my PhD grad school years in Bozeman (2000-02). He returned in August from a 14 month stay in New Zealand, where he was doing mathematical research in Dunedin on the south island. Friendship is a wonder to me, in particular that the good ones just keep getting better.

I was reluctant to take an overnight trip to the Lolo Peak area due to the fact that it sees heavy traffic from Missoula area hikers wanting to bag the peak. But on a recommendation from a friend, we decided to explore the One Horse drainage just to the south of the ridge that the standard route to the peak follows. From the faintness of the trail leading to the cluster of lakes in the upper reaches of One Horse Canyon, it's clear that it is very lightly visited. My guess is that the “serious” backpacker type tends to avoid the Lolo Peak trailhead because it is so busy.

Because we got a late start on Friday, we only made it in to Carlton Lake for our first night's stay. On Saturday, we walked the three additional miles in to the lake we stayed at (North One Horse). From there, we made for the ridge joining Sweeney and Lolo Peaks and spent the next six hours bagging the two summits. It was a long and rugged excursion, and by the time we made it back to camp, we were so spent that it was off to bed before 9pm. On Sunday, we hiked out and met Kadin for a burger and beer at the Old Post before Al hit the road for Bozeman.

The trip was a magical one. The sub-alpine larch trees were golden and blanketed many of the mountainsides that were in view along our route. That, together with the fall light, made the already amazing scenery even more spectacular. The trip was perfect—the place, the company, the weather, the season—and since perfection comes so rarely in life, a fellow ought to be grateful when it does come. I am. Gratitude fills me.



On Lolo Peak near the end of a long day.



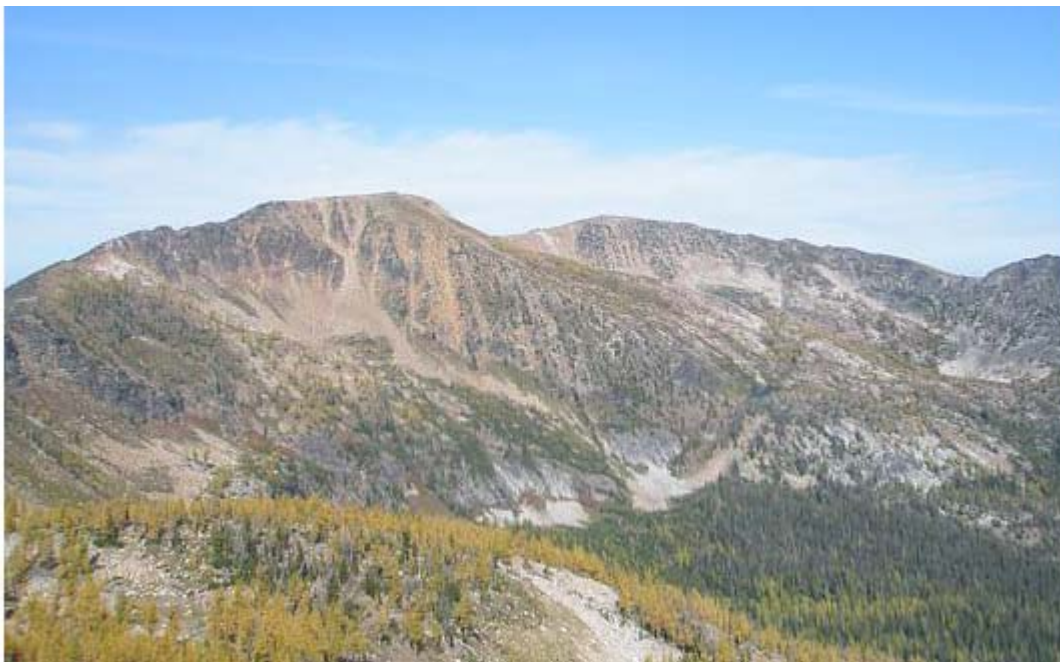
Sweeney Peak on the left and the meandering ridge from Lolo Peak.



Al on the ridge near Lolo Peak. Sweeney is just to the left of his head.



Al at North One Horse Lake. Sweeney Peak and the ridge to Lolo Peak in the background.



Lolo Peak from Sweeney Peak.