A Valley Recovers from ATV Abuse

By Dan Schroeder

The upper Box Elder Creek valley is a lovely but little-known corner of the northern Wasatch Mountains, just south of Mantua. It is managed by the Forest Service, but adjoins the Brigham Face Wildlife Management Area and provides important wildlife habitat on the cooler and wetter east side of Perry Peak. The valley is easily accessed from the lower portion of the Willard Basin road, and is traversed by a network of trails that provide for outstanding hiking, horseback riding, and snowshoeing.

Unfortunately, this valley was overrun by illegal motorized recreation until late 2003. That's when, partly due to pressure from the Sierra Club, the Forest Service finally built fences to keep motor vehicles on the main road and off of the trails around Box Elder Creek. Forest Service crews also did some erosion control and reseeding of a few of the most badly abused spots.

This fall, eleven years after the fences went up, I returned to the Box Elder Creek valley and was delighted to see how well it has recovered. Several miles of trails that used to be five to ten feet wide have narrowed down to single-tracks, as grass and small plants have grown inward from the margins. Most of the reseeding has been successful. The mosaic of maple, aspen, and fir was as beautiful as ever in October, and the sound of trickling streams wasn't drowned out by the roar of two-stroke engines.

This recovery will probably be temporary, because the Forest Service has intended all along to reopen this area to ATVs and motorcycles after it conducts the requisite environmental analysis. The Sierra Club and our partners have fought this process at every stage, culminating in a major victory in federal court in 2012. But our victory merely forces the Forest Service to conduct more analysis—not to change its ultimate decision. The pressure on the Forest Service from the ATV lobby and from local elected officials is intense. Their perception is that demand for motorized recreation in this area far exceeds demand for quiet uses.

Whether or not you wish to prove that this perception is wrong, a visit to the Box Elder Creek area during the coming months would be well worth your while. The trails are mapped and described in our Sierra Club Outings Guide booklet: additional information is available at utah.sierraclub.org/ogden.

Upper Box Elder Creek Valley
Photo by Dan Schroeder
Two signed up for the backpack to Ben Lomond Peak: Joanie Aponte and Dan Harrison. Although most Club members probably have climbed this iconic mountain, adding an overnight to it made it special.

Our modest objective the first day was Cutler basin via Cutler Ridge. The camp site was neat and naturally faced the spectacular east face of Ben Lomond. Slightly below us lay the only water source for miles, a small but rather murky pond.

Not to worry. Dan found the spring feeding the pond and from this we gathered all the pristine water we needed. A leisurely supper and an evening stroll around the Basin concluded our day. It was a perfect alpine silence as I watched the stars gradually appear above my tent. Then the full moon rose washing the quartzite slabs in its pale light. Just as I was about to fall asleep I heard and felt a bump on my tent. I unzipped it expecting to see the towering hind legs of a snorting moose astride me. But by then, whatever it was, was gone.

By 0800 we were on our way to the summit passing through what seemed to be a deep, old growth pine forest. Then we broke out on to the summit ridge. There the fresh smells and peace ended. Gangs of trail bike riders came blatting and roaring by all padded for battle. It was a promise fulfilled of “multiple use” available to all freedom-loving Americans by the U. S. Forest Service. Surely such a noble mountain could have been spared this kind of use.

We shared the summit with two other climbers enjoying the hazy views in all directions. One was from Wisconsin and was wearing engineering boots. Already he had a big blister. I gave him a clutch of moleskin and wished him luck.

The hike down was longer than I ever remembered. I think that this perception had something to do with advancing age. The mountain had not changed, just me. That’s as it should be.

Would you like to see Ogden become a safer and more pleasant city for bicyclists? If so, there’s good news: The city has begun the process of developing a Bicycle Master Plan, which will provide guidance for improving cycling opportunities in the coming years.

Specific aspects of the plan could include bike lanes, bike paths, working to eliminate road hazards, routes connecting Ogden to surrounding areas, bike parking, educating cyclists and motorists, a bike sharing program, events and incentives to encourage bicycling, and land-use planning to put more destinations within easy cycling distance.

The study is being coordinated by Fehr and Peers Transportation Consultants, and an initial stakeholders workshop was held in early December. A public open house is planned for a still-undetermined date, probably in February. Watch for announcements on the internet and in the Standard-Examiner.
Upcoming Ogden Group Outings

To see outing descriptions as well as the activities of other groups in the Utah Chapter, go to http://utah.sierraclub.org/content/calendar

Saturday December 20, 2014. Snowshoe* Ogden Overlook Moderate Call Larry at 801-690-4335
Saturday December 28, North Arm of Pineview Dam Snowshoe*/ hike Easy Call Joanie at 801-399-0034
Saturday January 10, 2015. Snowshoe Lower Green Pond Trail Call Larry at 801-690-4335
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Saturday January 10, 2015. Snowshoe Lower Green Pond Trail Call Larry at 801-690-4335
Saturday February 7, 2015. X Ski on North Fork Ogden River Car Pat at 802-735-7866
Saturday February 7, 2015. X Ski on North Fork Ogden River Call Pat at 802-735-7866
Saturday February 14, 2015. Snowshoe* Mill Creek Canyon area Moderate Call Larry at 801-690-4335
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Saturday February 14, 2015. Snowshoe* Mill Creek Canyon area Moderate Call Larry at 801-690-4335
Saturday March 7, 2015. X Ski on North Fork Ogden River Call Pat at 802-735-7866
Saturday March 7, 2015. “LETS BUILD AN IGLOO.” Call Jock Glidden at 801-394-0457
Sunday March 15, 2015: Hike Antelope Island Split Rock Loop Trail Call Joanie at 801-399-0034
Saturday March 28, 2015. Hike Sentry Peak on Antelope Island Moderate. Call Larry at 801-690-4335
Saturday April 25, 2015. Hike the Indian Trail Moderate. For more information call Larry at 801-690-4335

*Snowshoes can be rented at Weber State Rec Center for a minimal cost, call to reserve: 801-626-6373.

Beauty or Beast?
Recognizing the Weeds Around Us
By Pat Jaquith

As a newcomer to the West, I spent my first summer in awe of the beautiful flowering plants that manage to live in this arid land. Before long, I realized I was seeing the same plants in great numbers over and over. Already familiar with invasive plants in other areas, I set about learning about them here. According to the Utah Noxious Weed Act Section 4-17-3, everyone who owns land is responsible for the control of such weeds growing on their land. For a noxious weed list see http://www.rules.utah.gov/publicat/code/r068/r068-009.htm

To identify the plants, I recommend: Weeds of the West, a 600-page publication by the Western Society of Weed Science. An Internet search for Utah Noxious Weeds has many good sources of information. As a starting place, I recommend http://www.utahweed.org/weeds.htm for its color illustrations of the plants.

The Ogden Chapter of the Sierra Club has been working on the control of Dyers Woad (Isatis tinctoria) in the area of the 22nd Street trailhead for some 10 years with notable success. Please join the effort in the spring! A weed-pulling event will be published in the spring Outings listings.
YOU ARE INVITED TO ATTEND
THE SIERRA CLUB EXECUTIVE
COMMITTEE MEETING

The Ogden Sierra Club Executive Committee will hold its January Meeting at 6:30 p.m., Monday, January 12, 2015 at the Pleasant Valley Branch Library, 5568 Adams Avenue, Ogden. Please join us to discuss local conservation issues and plan upcoming activities.

For questions and further information call Larry Woolsey at 801-690-4335.

OGDEN GROUP SIERRA CLUB EXECUTIVE COMMITTEE

- Acting Chair & Volunteer Coordinator: Larry Woolsey, landcrun@hotmail.com 801-690-4335
- Outings Chair & Alternate Chapter Delegate: Joanie Aponte, aponte_83@hotmail.com 801-399-0034
- Conservation Chair & Webmaster: Dan Schroeder, dvs1444@gmail.com 801-393-4603
- Treasurer: Ranee Johnson, Raneejohnson_27@msn.com
- Newsletter: Catherine Sharpsteen, csharpsteen@gmail.com
- Secretary: Pat Jaquith, pjaquith07@gmail.com

Hike Commemorates 50 years of Wilderness
By Catherine Sharpsteen

Wildflowers were still blooming and maples already turning as Joanie Aponte led our party of four up the Rattlesnake Canyon Trail into the Wellsville Mountain Wilderness. We hiked through the maple bench, along treeless areas dense with shrubbery, through some patches of stinging nettles, and up the trail to a place close enough to the ridge for a lunch break; having not seen another human the entire distance. We won’t soon forget the 3,000-foot gain in something like 3.5 miles, most of it under full sun.

Joanie chose this trail because it was September 4, the 50th anniversary of the Wilderness Act. During our descent I was reminded of a public hearing some 30 summers ago, when enthusiastic members of the Cache Group Sierra Club joined with other environmental organizations to pack the chambers of the Cache County courthouse. We read our speeches, and displayed our tag board placards. Eventually, despite our expectation of opposition from members of the county commission, Congress designated the Wellsville Mountain Wilderness in 1984.

On this recent September Sunday it felt satisfying to enjoy a hike through an area protected by our successful citizen activism.