

Finley Lake Basin, October 2008



The peak we climbed is the pointy one in the sunlight above Heikki's head.

I promised the visiting Finns (Heikki and Otto Haario and Antti Solonen) to take them on a hike in some local wilderness this past Sunday (10/19). I have been many places this fall, including all of the obvious day trips from town, and didn't want to go to the same place twice. So in a desire to explore in some regions in which I hadn't been in the last two months, I decided to take the three Finns and Alex into the Finley Lake Basin, which butts up against the north end of the Rattlesnake Wilderness, and which has at its end Murphy Peak, one of the tallest in the wilderness area.

The one other time I had been up this drainage was on a trip with Matt Roscoe and Eric Leithe in the summer of 2007 (see "Finley Creek to Missoula" journal entry). In my memory, the Finley Lakes Basin leg of this trip had seemed relatively short and not overly strenuous. This was due to the fact, I think, that we had such a long trip ahead of us and so were making fast time and looking ahead to the many remaining miles. Yesterday, however, I realized that the hike to the upper lake (approximately 4 miles) is strenuous and the trail is not an easy one, as it is used relatively lightly.

It took us 2½ hours to reach the upper lake. From there the group agreed to continue. Our goal was Murphy Peak, but I think that we were all skeptical about getting there, as it still looked to be far away. Nonetheless we hiked very difficult terrain, to the west of the upper lake, up to a still-higher lake, had lunch, and then decided to climb a peak that was near to our lunch sight. Getting to this no-name peak was quite strenuous, but the views from the top were excellent, with Murphy Peak just to the south, Stuart Peak in the distance, and McLeod Peak to the northeast. When we reached the upper lake again on our descent, we had traveled less than 2 additional miles, and had taken us 5 hours. Needless to say, we were all both physically and mentally exhausted. Yet we still had 4 miles of hiking ahead of us.

On our way down to the car, we could see the peak we had climbed, and it was very rugged (see above picture), with a shear cliff to the north 100's of feet high. Heikki joked, "A nice place for a Sunday walk." In fact, climbing it was quite an accomplishment in itself, even if the great stone abutment had no name.

By the time we reached the car, we were all both mentally and physically exhausted. Otto and Alex, in particular, were at their limit. It was a tough day, and I was filled with a mix of excitement at our accomplishment, guilt at submitting my group to such a brutal day, fear that they (and Alex in particular) would never want to hike with me again, and happiness that everyone's spirits seemed to be relatively high in spite of it all, and also that I had grabbed yet another high country day from the year, with winter so rapidly approaching.



Otto and Heikki with Stuart Peak far in the back and Murphy Peak above Heikki's shoulder.



Alex on top with lakes below, McCleod Peak on the upper right, the Flathead Valley in the upper left, and the Mission Mountains in the clouds beyond.



Antti at the upper lake and Antti, Otto and Heikki on top with the upper lake down below.



Alex and I with Murphy Peak behind.