

Mineral Peak, Rattlesnake Wilderness, October 2009



The Mineral Peak Lookout (gotten off of the web).

Two days after my day trip to Point 6 and Murphy Peak, with bad weather closing in for the weekend, I decided to cut off early from work again, this time to bag the summit of Mineral Peak. Mineral Peak is in the Rattlesnake Range, but isn't in the Rattlesnake Wilderness proper. On its summit sits an old lookout and an outstanding view of the main mass of the Rattlesnake Range: Sheep Mountain, Stuart Peak, Point 6, Mosquito Peak, Murphy Peak, and McCleod Peak. You can actually drive in to near the top of Mineral from the Blackfoot River to the east—I saw a hunter and his pick-up truck near the summit—but I chose the 12 mile route starting at the Rattlesnake Trailhead on the outskirts of Missoula.

The first eight miles of the route are along the Rattlesnake corridor and are quickly traveled on a mountain bike. Just past Franklin Bridge, at the 8 mile mark, the Sheep Mountain/Mineral Peak trail comes in from the right. Fifty minutes after I set out from the car, I began the four mile hike to Mineral Peak's summit.

The hike is strenuous, with roughly 2500-3000' of elevation gain, but not overly so. The trail is in great condition—it seems like some maintenance was recently done on it—and it is a very nice walk. In fact, given the outstanding views from the top, I'm surprised I haven't heard it talked about around Missoula. I guess that 8 mile ride to the trailhead is just enough to keep people away.

The main challenge of the outing was getting back to the car before dark. This turned it into something of an athletic event, but I made back at 8pm, 4.5 hours after starting, and with just a sliver of light left. It was another great high country day, with lots of changing leaves, looming stormy weather, snow on the ground, elk bugling, and a slightly scary ride out to the car in the semi-dark. The feeling that I had stole it out from under rapidly approaching winter made it all the better.

I took pictures on my trip, but Jen chucked them accidentally, so included are some that I got off of Google Images.



Looking west/northwest from Mineral Peak. That may be McLeod in the background.