





## **Monday, August 5, Willow Campground**

The long drive to Bishop is a familiar routine. The friendly ranger at the Big Oak Flat entrance to Yosemite seems slightly relieved that I don't pepper her with questions, unlike the previous car who was at her window for at least five minutes. I show my entrance reservation and senior pass. She answers her own question with "you probably don't want a map" and wishes me a good trip with big smile. I am through and on my way in less than minute.

I stop for lunch at the Yosemite Creek picnic area. There is only one other family there. Tuolumne Meadows is its normal August busy with lots of traffic while many day hikers enjoy this place that has enthralled visitors for 150 years. Dana Meadows before Tioga Pass is as beautiful as always as viewed through a car window. No cars are in front or behind me heading down Tioga Pass so I can coast in the Prius "B" mode until the Poole Power Plant turn off where the road begins to level off.

Turning right onto 395, the sparse traffic allows me to relax and enjoy the magnificent views of the Sierra Crest to the west and the White Mountains to the east. Massive Mount Tom from Sherwin Summit is always a take-your-breath-away vista with Swall Meadows and Round Valley spread out below. Reaching Bishop, I know I should take one of the cross streets such as Brockman Lane that allows one to avoid the stop-and-go traffic at the center of town, but I enjoy passing by the long familiar businesses like the Vagabond Motel, Erick Schat's Bakery, Eastside Sports, and the White Mountain District Ranger Station where in the past I used to pick up a wilderness permit. It's comforting to know there is still some constancy in the modern world.

After turning right onto Line Street and Highway 168 and passing the Trees Motel, a truck whizzes by when the speed limit changes to 55 so I have the road to myself. The speeding truck is out of sight long before I reach the big curve that announces one is commencing the drive up to the trailheads and campgrounds of Bishop Creek. Turning left at South Lake Road, I pass Four Jeffrey Campground, Bishop Creek Lodge, and Mountain Glen

Campground before turning left onto the gravel road of Willow Campground. I've longed wondered about this first-come campground and decided to finally see what it's like. Only three campsites are occupied. I take campsite #6 on the creek. It's about 4:30.

After I put the Bearikade, dinner, and breakfast in the bear box, I erect the tent and toss the empty pack into the bear box. There's plenty of room and, as the expression says it seems simpler to "put all the eggs in one basket."

As I sit and write at the picnic table, I realize the sun will soon disappear behind the ridge. Right now the light on the trees is gorgeous. There's an invisible family fishing down the creek. From the overheard voices, it's at least parents, two children, and a whiney dog. They have a boom box, but unless I am standing in the right (or is it wrong?) place, I don't hear it. It has a tinny far away sound. I suspect a sound engineer could explain how sound traveling over distances is responsible for the distinctive tinny quality of drifting, far away music.

The sun disappears behind the ridge at 6:00. I suppose this campground is full in late September and early October with the fall colors brightening the aspens. However, the sun goes away early versus many of the other campgrounds along Bishop Creek. Since there is no trail going past, Willow is quieter than North Lake. But the creek at North Lake is livelier as it cascades and I prefer pines mixed in with aspens unlike here. In thinking about it, for car camping, I prefer Sabrina and North Lake for high altitude camping in the Bishop Creek watershed.

After dinner, I walk on the gravel entrance road to South Lake Road. When I reach the junction, two pickup trucks from up the road turn into the entrance road, obviously together. Considering the time of day and coming from up the road, my inner story scenario writer fantasizes they must be returning backpackers looking for a campsite. While I wander on the South Lake Road gazing at the sunset on the far peaks, the trucks must have found a campsite. Only one truck with passengers comes back down the entrance road and turns right to head into Bishop. My scenario imagines they are going for a celebratory feast in downtown Bishop.

After sunset concludes, I walk up the entrance road to my campsite, realizing in the back of my mind this could be my last Sierra backpacking trip. At this point, due to possible medical prohibition, every backpacking trip may be the last. Yet, a front country campground bordering wilderness fails to provide the same immersive experience as spending days exclusively in the real and true wilderness. While campgrounds bordering wilderness are more appreciated than in the past, tonight, at this moment, I want to hit the trail and be in the real and true wilderness. I want to be over Bishop Pass *now*.

Recalling my trip over Bishop Pass in 2004, I awoke at sea level at 4:00 a.m., drove to South Lake, hiked over Bishop Pass, and camped by a waterfall above the lakes in lower Dusy Basin. The next time over Bishop Pass in 2021, I stayed at Forks campground the first night since my doctor encouraged spending at least one night at altitude before any high country backpacking trip. The next morning, I hiked over Bishop Pass and camped at what I have named “Columbine Peak Lake” since it sits directly below that mountain. (USGS has not designated official names to any of the lakes in Dusy Basin.)

This year, on the first day, I’m only going as far as Bishop Lake. My climbing stamina has deteriorated to such an extent that last month the relatively easy 1,300 foot climb to Young Lakes nearly wiped me out. This trip came about due to the realization of the trip I had a permit for to Miter Basin was probably beyond my current stamina. My next choice was returning to Dusy Basin. By splitting the 2,100 foot climb to Bishop Pass into two days, I hope to manage the hike while spending as much time as possible in Dusy Basin. The SEKI wilderness rangers said that the Dusy Basin two-night camping limit was for consecutive days. If camped outside the basin one night, one could camp in Dusy for another two nights so I can revel in four nights in Dusy Basin. Getting old is no fun, but as my mother-in-law used to say, it beats the alternative.

Tomorrow, I will be up by 5:30 so I can grab a space in the too-small trailhead parking lot. In 2021, I arrived a little after 7:30 in the morning and was lucky enough to get the final empty space so I didn’t have to park far below beyond Parcher’s Resort. Inyo National Forest designated insufficient

overnight parking so many backpackers are forced to park at the dirt pull-offs beyond Parcher's over a mile down the road with an uphill hike to the trailhead. Why do day-use visitors receive preference over backpackers for available parking spaces? I've witnessed day-hikers parking in the overnight parking lot while backpackers are not permitted in the extensive day-use parking near the trailhead.

After dark, I write by Luci light while continuing to muse about past and possible future trips. The car camping the first night feels better and better with each trip. Is this a psychological preparation for a future when I can no longer backpack? I am surrounded by the still silence punctuated by the gurgling creek. It is one trip at a time; appreciate each and every moment.

## **Tuesday, August 6, South Lake to Bishop Lake**

I don't get much decent sleep after 11:00, tossing and turning until I finally get up a little after 5:00 when the dawn light allows me to see what I'm doing. I take down the tent, partially pack and eat breakfast, and leave Willow Campground around 6:00. There are a lot of cars parked on both sides of the road below Parcher's Resort. The South Lake trailhead overnight parking lot contains five open spaces. With a parking space secured, I finish breakfast while concluding stuffing my backpack. Two of the remaining parking spaces are taken before I begin hiking at around 7:00. In one of the cars, the couple relates they plan to camp at Bishop Lake and day-hike over the pass tomorrow.

The first part of the climb above South Lake is not as arduous as expected. Two young women day-hikers pass me with a friendly good-morning. In the gradual climb section of the trail (the section my memory always skips over between the Treasure Lakes Junction and the corkscrew switchbacks) I meet a fellow 70-something year old backpacker finishing the North Lake-South Lake loop. He remarks he was informed by rangers there are seven people over 70 years old at any time in the backcountry, but he's not been seeing them until meeting me.

The zig-zag climb of the tight switchbacks is as I remember. Climbing past the Chocolate Lakes junction, I arrive at Long Lake, stopping for a snack while sitting on the rocks overlooking the lake where my wife, Barbara, and I have enjoyed snacks or a day-hike lunch many times since our first trip in 1997. It's now a tradition to stop here after completing the first part of the climb to admire Long Lake and the peaks that form the skyline. Three day-hikers and two backpackers pass by as I sit and eat a bar.

The walk along Long Lake is lovely though the non-lakeside portion of the trail has been rerouted. I remember the old trail ran nearer the water without the same amount of uphill and downhill. Once the trail returns down to the lakeshore, two fisherman are at the far end. Beyond the lake, the current trail now switchbacks high above the creek. I recall how on the old trail, this was my favorite portion of the Bishop Pass Trail as one walked a little above the creek, Spearhead Lake, and lovely meadow. A tent is visible on the meadow.

At the top of the switchbacks, another couple of day-hikers pass me and deftly rock hop the creek crossing. I shakily try the rocks and realize my balance is too suspect so wade the rest of the creek. I am glad most of today's climb will soon be over as I make my way up by the beautiful trailside waterfall at Timberline Tarns. Three young women backpackers descend and offer exuberant greetings. After walking past Saddlerock Lake, I take the first side trail to Bishop Lake.

I arrive at Bishop Lake a little after 11:00 so a one mile an hour pace seems to be my current hiking speed. At the conglomeration of campsites among the whitebarks, I take off my pack to reconnoiter for other campsites in both directions. No one is here. There are a couple of other campsites near the overused conglomeration. I prefer a site with a little more privacy. Heading along the east shore, there is one site tucked beneath a whitebark. Further down by the rocks at a small lake point, I see another site that looks good. It is out of sight of the conglomeration with a small grove of whitebarks above.

I return for my pack, leave it at the preferred campsite, and wander the nearby area to make sure there is nothing else preferable. There is a bare ground tent area about 100 feet away and the peninsula sticking out on

Bishop Lake appears to have another. Closer inspection reveals a tent area strewn with lovely tiny flowers. I recall years ago the backcountry ranger in Evolution Valley explaining that one must put the tent on bare ground and not over any wildflowers. I return to my pack and put up the tent. By this time two other parties have arrived and claimed sites in the conglomeration. I hear their voices, but do not see them.

At first, Bishop Lake turns out to not be a great place to camp. There is no escaping the sun on this hot day. The whitebarks offer little respite unless one crawls under one. With its location below the final climb to Bishop Pass, there are too many other people doing what I am doing by using this as a convenient first night before going over the pass the next morning or camping here and day-hiking to the pass.

As I sit and write, I see two 20-something year-olds fishing along the shore. When they work their way down the lake this far, they are friendly and considerate, asking if they could cut through near my campsite since the rocky point makes following the shoreline difficult. By late afternoon, there seem to be at least a couple of other groups populating the area around the conglomeration.

Even at 7:00, I'm already ready for bed. I'm tired because of the hike and my lack of sleep last night due to being too worried about the limited parking at the trailhead. If I get a decent night's sleep, I'll be okay tomorrow. Right now, I'm too tired to think clearly and so too tired to write. This is probably my final time up this trail. Tomorrow I'll do Bishop Pass.

The alpenglow on the Inconsolable Range (what a strange name for such an intriguing and beautiful section of peaks) occurs at about 7:30. As I'm taking photos, two 20-something-year-old women come by, desperate for a campsite away from the conglomeration. I tell them about the one past my campsite, explaining that it's essentially a bare patch of ground the size of a tent by massive boulders. They take it, erecting their tent and having dinner on the rocks nearer to the lake. Meanwhile, as I photograph the incandescent light on the Inconsolable Range, I decide that Bishop Lake is an okay place to camp after all.

After sunset, I return to my campsite, write until darkness descends on Bishop Lake, crawl into the tent, and quickly fall asleep.

## **Wednesday, August 7, Bishop Lake to unnamed lake Dusy Basin**

I awake at 5:30 after a good night's sleep. Where the light will first strike the peaks to the south and west is predictable so I am able to compose a photo before the rising sun hits the peaks at about 6:15. The sunlight does not hit Bishop Lake and thus my campsite until after 7:30. The two women camped next door leave with a farewell wave while I make breakfast.

I enjoy coffee and writing while appreciating the view of the Inconsolable Range and Mount Goode. While Bishop Lake is interesting with the high peaks on three sides rising up, it's somehow lacking as an ideal campsite. Maybe it's simply too many people. Maybe also it's the layout so it feels like a much smaller lake than it actually is due to the peninsula; one essentially sees only half the lake when camped on this half. The other half is hidden on the other side of the peninsula. Also, there are lots and lots of rocks everywhere of every size and shape, making walking around and exploring difficult. Maybe it's the accumulation of all those things that make Bishop Lake not a disappointment as much as not as singularly spectacular as the map suggests.

Today is my last time over Bishop Pass from the north side after trips in 1997, 2000, 2004, and 2021. The trail was rerouted sometime between 2004 and 2021. With all my days and nights in Dusy Basin, I still don't know it as well as I should. I do know it has changed. Will the lower lakes be as before? It's twenty years since I was last there. It's striking the proper balance between known expectations and being open to the spontaneity of anything that occurs. One of the major aspects I love about backpacking is the constant discovery of something new and magical in the wilderness; enjoy the coming days.

I pack up and leave about 8:45. I carry my hiking shoes in one hand and the trekking pole in the other. No one is at the stepping stone crossing of the Bishop Lake outlet creek. I wade across and climb the trail until a rock formation to the left provides a place to change into hiking shoes



well-off the traffic-filled path. Several people pass by going both directions including day-hikers heading up to the pass, backpackers in clumps of two, three, and five plus a trail crew going into Bishop for resupply. The trail crew are talkative and friendly, informing me they are camped in lower Dusy Basin.

As I inch my way up the switchbacks, I'm passed by three parties of day-hikers. When the switchbacks finally conclude, signaling the worst of the climb is over, I stop at the side trail to the overlook of Bishop Lake to admire the panoramic view. After a snack, back on the trail, I meet two female backpackers who also remember that this is the last spot to best take in the view north and east. They head off to the viewpoint while I come to the final remnants of the short snowfield that lingers in the shady area before the top of the pass. I remember crossing a much larger version of this snowfield in 1997. Gordon had fun throwing snowballs at his parents.

At the top, there is a sign announcing that the bridge over Dusy Creek on the way to LeConte Canyon remains absent along with the bridge on the John Muir Trail (JMT) over the San Joaquin. It is 11:00 so my snail pace resulted in two-and-a-quarter hours to hike about a mile-and-a-half. I descend on the long, long switchback constructed for the newer Bishop Pass Trail. Below, I can make out remnants of the old trail. Further down, I meet three different parties of ascending backpackers. Two of the groups ask how far it is to the pass. Making my best guess at the distance, I add that when they reach the very long switchback the climb is nearly over; the pass is at the top of the switchback.

Above the first lake of Dusy Basin, I follow a use trail down towards the lake. It leads to a small creek with an occupied campsite perched to the right of the trail with unseen occupants. The use trail continues, dividing at where I have to make a decision as to which side of the lake I want to go around to reach the ridge that rises on the other side separating this lake from the lakes in upper Dusy Basin. One use trail heads right towards the camping complex at the west end of the lake, the other heads left towards

the east end. I decide to go left since that's what I did in 2021 coming from Lake 11388, my intended destination for today. The hiking is simple walking until I come to the rock wall rising over the lake. I now remember navigating through the rocks above the wall from the gully I descended from the ridge.

My approach to the ridge becomes one of those common instances when descending offers a lot better view of what's ahead. Now that I am ascending, the view is limited. I opt to follow one way up towards a large tree. The micro-route finding through and around the rocks becomes more complicated than remembered. I zig-zag up through the rocks to arrive about two-thirds up the gully.

At the top of the gully, I sit down and get out the GPS, hoping it will simplify where best to reach the marvelous campsite I stayed at in 2021 on Lake 11388. Straight below a use trail heads to the narrow west end of lake 11388. A gap to the east looks like it may lead to a more direct route down to my intended campsite, which is near the east end of the lake. Going through the gap, I come to the two mapped tarns above the larger Lake 11625. Cliffs block a simple descent to lake 11388. I sit down and admire the view of the larger upper lake with its two islands. After debating with myself about possibly camping at the larger lake, I decide the view of the entirety of Dusy Basin will be better at lake 11388.

I trudge back through the gap and follow the use trail down to the western end of Lake 11388. Once by the lake, I see red and orange tents congregated in the area of my intended campsite. Needing to find another campsite, I take off the pack to reconnoiter unencumbered. I discover campsites above Lake 11388 and on the east side of the smaller lake below. None are locations where I want to spend two nights. The other side of the outlet creek looks more promising even if the area is out in the open with only boulders to block the sun.

Retrieving the pack, I cross the outlet creek. After wandering around and not finding any sites at the west end of Lake 11388, once again I put my pack on a rock to reconnoiter further afield. Above the small lake the 11388

outlet creek empties into, I see a wonderful site perched above the lake. It's in the open, but with a grand view. There's a tarn with another obvious campsite beyond. I check out that area to satisfy my curiosity. A couple of weeks ago with the tarn filled with water, this offered excellent water access and spectacular views of Columbine Peak Lake from a vantage point a little beyond the campsite. Now the tarn is half-empty with the remaining water on the far end nearer to the campsite perched above the small lake, which also has a more all-encompassing view.

It's past 4:00 when I begin setting up the tent. From Bishop Pass, I spent five hours wandering the three or so miles to get here. I can't do this slog every day anymore. Tomorrow will be a layover day.

While sitting admiring the incomparable view, thunderheads swirl to the east on the other side of the crest. A few distant cracks of thunder rumble in the distance as I make dinner. By 6:30, the thunderheads dissolve. About 7:00, a couple come down from the ridge searching for a campsite. Since they behave as if they know what they are doing and are out of voice range, instead of telling them my earlier findings, I let them search for a campsite. They pick one of the places I rejected earlier. They are relatively quiet as they set up their tent and make dinner.

As I wander among the rocks in the relatively flat area at the west end of lake 11388, I realize this campsite is a great location for photos. The rocks, water, and awe-inspiring jagged ridge formed by Mount Agassiz, Mount Winchell, and Thunderbolt Peak, create an inspiring picturesque panoply. The numerous boulders and rocks create a marvelous foreground. Isosceles and Thunderbolt peaks are reflected in the tarn with magical changing light and alpenglow.

It is a gorgeous if not spectacular sunset. The crescent moon shines above the peaks extending along lower Dusy Basin. Another day ends. I've had two good sunsets even if not such great days. Tomorrow will be better. There's nothing to do all day except properly appreciate being in Dusy Basin.

## **Thursday, August 8, unnamed Lake Dusy Basin**

I am awake at dawn. It's a magical morning. To the east, Mount Winchell, Thunderbolt Peak, and Isosceles Peak rise above lake 11388. To the west, the two small lakes below my campsite form a reflective foreground for the boulders, trees, and ridge that runs from Columbine Peak to Mount Giraud and the unnamed summits above Dusy Basin to the distant peaks above LeConte Canyon and nearer peaks around Bishop Pass. I doubt there's a finer view anywhere. This is as good as it gets. I can sit and gaze at it all day long, which to a large extent is what will happen today.

When I finish my coffee, I am still frozen marveling at my surroundings. I need to be in the moment, not dwell on that this is my final time in Dusy Basin after so many days and nights here. At the end of this trip it will be fifteen nights at ten different locations, and actually twenty-four days if I count hiking in and out. In other words, next to Tuolumne Meadows/Lyell Canyon, Yosemite Valley, and Humphreys Basin, this is the location in the Sierra I've spent the most time.

Since I have so much history here, I appreciate being in this place even more. When I think of the High Sierra, Dusy Basin epitomizes it—a maze of lakes, tarns, and creeks interspersed with the green and brown of whitebark pines, the various shades of grey/white granite, and various shades of green and tan alpine grass. This is the timberline High Sierra, the location that most permeates my very being and calls forth those most intimate aspects of what humans characterize as the soul. This is the land that holds our primal past and our ever changing present that forecasts possible futures. This is the land that seems to hold the secrets of existence. The mystery reveals itself in moments of all-encompassing clarity.

After meandering through my contemplations, I decide to mosey around the area to get moving for a little while. Navigating Dusy Basin is an interesting challenge. While one always knows where one is due to the various peaks, micro-route finding leads to weaving over and around various rocks, slabs, boulders, and short cliffs. There is no straight path. If one seeks to reach



a particular place, one is forced to embark on a zig-zagging, up and down journey. At the same time, none of this is hazardous unless one fails to pay attention. It simply requires patience to reach any destination. The route may be circuitous, but one eventually gets where one's intends.

I first wander over towards the campsite beyond the tarn. I walk beyond to the overlook of Columbine Peak Lake. On the level areas on the cliffs are a couple of tent-sized dirt areas that provide campers a dramatic vantage point of the lake and surrounding peaks. It is surprising I don't see any tents anywhere around the lake. I attempt to pick out a possible campsite for a couple of days from now when I will spend two more nights in Dusy Basin. I hope for a location that provides easy access for overlooking the lakes of lower Dusy Basin and the distant peaks that rise above LeConte Canyon. That would be a fitting finale to Dusy Basin. I recall the trips in 1997 and 2000 when Barbara, Gordon, and I were camped at Columbine Peak Lake with that vista above our campsite, a campsite that no longer exists I discovered in 2021.

After taking in this area, I meander back and climb the small ridge above the tiny lake adjoining the one where I am camped. There is no destination to these wanderings. I merely take in the various near and far views that constantly change as I walk, becoming better acquainted to a particular place at a particular time. When the ridge reaches its end above the descent of the creek that goes down to become an inlet creek at the west end of Columbine Peak Lake, I turn around and eventually mosey back to my campsite.

After lunch, I take a quick dip in the creek, washing off the dirt and dust. Due to deteriorating poor eyesight, I no longer go swimming as in the past. Beyond a couple of feet away, everything is a fuzzy blur. I don't feel safe venturing out in deep water alone anymore. I know that's not rational, but not being able to see brings about a knee-jerk irrational response.

Once again, thunderheads appear to the east. As yesterday, at first, it seems questionable it will reach beyond the crest. As the afternoon progresses, it looks more and more as if there will be a thunderstorm. A little after 3:00, the initial drizzle is followed by wind and rain. The wind blasts for about twenty minutes than tapers off while the rain continues. There is a false

ending to the rain about 4:00. Before I can get out of the tent, the rain returns for another half hour or so.

After the rain finally stops, I sit gazing on the view and thinking about tomorrow, which will either be great or frustrating. Finding the trail is the first issue. Before the trip, Cal Topo indicated intersecting the Bishop Pass Trail at its far western curve. Finding a campsite is the other issue. I'll settle for any legal campsite that is outside Dusy Basin, which is anywhere beyond the last lake. A view would be great. My memory from 2000 and 2004 is there was a marvelous campsite just before the switchbacks begin their descent to LeConte Canyon, but that was twenty years ago.

As I sit, a smattering of misty rain occurs. I can't figure out what cloud is producing it. It's such a scattered smattering I remain outside. Drops on the lake are the major indicator rain is occurring. I look for a rainbow, but don't see one.

After the smattering drizzle ends, two young women appear on the small ridge across from my campsite, wave hello, and take selfies of each other against the backdrop of the peaks. I have no idea where they are camped, though I assume it's Columbine Peak Lake. Dusy Basin has quite a few people wandering around who seem to choose the off-trail lakes so they can have a semblance of solitude unattainable at the overused first lake by the trail.

After dinner, I wander as yesterday evening, following the light. First, I visit the narrow west end of Lake 11388 with its reflections of the peaks around Bishop Pass and mounts Agassiz and Winchell. From there, I wander over the rocks on the broad level rocky area next by the west end and over to the tarn for its reflections of Isosceles and Thunderbolt peaks. It's another gorgeous if not spectacular sunset.

This lovely day comes to a close. The rain added pizzazz, but also kept it from being perfect. Even here in the High Sierra no day is perfect; it's just as close to perfect as possible. I look at the moon one more time before adjourning to the tent. Tomorrow will be my fourth day so I will be in sync with the wilderness. There's a time on every trip when civilization's inhibitions dissolve and one inhabits a state of being at one with wilderness. Correct choices manifest themselves. As darkness ends another day, I know I'm doing things right.

## **Friday, August 9, Dusy Basin to Dusy Creek**

I awake at dawn to a lovely morning. It's nothing unusually spectacular. It's a normal morning in August in Dusy Basin, which means as good as one can get. The peaks above Dusy Basin and Bishop Pass reflect on the still water of the two small lakes.

I can't stop thinking about today. How easy will I find the trail? How about a campsite? I tell myself I don't need to hurry; resist the temptation to reach the trail and find a campsite as soon as possible. Instead I follow my leisurely morning routine of breakfast, writing, and packing up.

This is my last morning in this part of Dusy Basin. Columbine Peak Lake is by itself, on its own level below this upper portion and far above the lower lakes. To some extent Columbine Peak Lake is the best of both worlds, situated between upper and lower Dusy Basin. This section is its own little world of Lake 11388 and the two tiny unnamed lakes. The upper lake is separate, standing alone directly below Mount Winchell and Thunderbolt Peak.

One of the fascinating aspects of Dusy Basin is that everything seems close to each other, yet when walking around places don't feel so near since the rocky landscape means nothing is on a straight line. One has to walk around and over varying rocks, trees, and bushes to get from one place to the next. However, we humans imposed a grid thinking on the natural world. Roads and streets were constructed as straight lines imposed on the uneven landscape, following the most direct path up a hill, not around it, as anyone in San Francisco knows. Sometimes the hill got in the way so the hill was leveled or a tunnel blasted through it.

I am not sure how well I convey this concept. There are so many exceptions to humans imposing a grid on the natural world. Roads frequently curve, following the landscape. But if you fly over much of the country, one can look down and observe roads following a straight line for miles and miles. If one takes a train, one will pass through numerous tunnels blasted through hills and mountains.

Today I need to be in the wild world and not impose my grid human thinking on the landscape of Dusy Basin. Allow the landscape to make its own path; follow the land, not the straight line between two points gleaned from the map. I just need to maintain a clear sense of the distant destination. Let's see what I find today. It will be day of discovery.

It's time for a final farewell to this place in Dusy Basin I've loved. I've been camped by lake 11388 five nights now, two in 1997, one in 2021, and two on this trip. I can't help wondering how Barbara, Gordon, and I got to Knapsack Pass so easily from here in 1997. What stands out in my memory is zig-zagging through the bushes and rocks at the bottom of the pass, not the approach past Columbine Peak Lake. Well, we did it somehow. And today I will do it somehow. It's off to discover the secrets of this land.

I leave the campsite about 9:00. Crossing the outlet creek of lake 11388 proves a manageable stretch, hopping a couple of rocks. I climb a gradual hill up to the ridge and follow diagonally down in what I think is the general direction of the Bishop Pass Trail. The landscape sends me to a spot where I can either go left or right around a large stand of trees. I choose left, following a long gully that ends in a cliff out with a creek plunging down to the left. Following the creek down requires what looks like a nasty bushwhack.

I realize I should have gone right at the trees at the top of the gully. Reluctantly climbing back up the hundred vertical feet, I head right by the trees, zig-zagging down, taking a couple of sideways detours to avoid short talus stretches. Once past the talus, the way opens up. I enjoy walking diagonally down until I find myself standing on the bare dirt of the Bishop Pass Trail.

The trail heads down about a hundred yards towards the creek encountered above. When it reaches the creek, it takes a right turn, and then heads down and northeast toward the lakes in lower Dusy Basin. I find a place to stop for a bar and congratulate myself for hitting the trail almost exactly as I had drawn it on the Cal Topo map before this trip.

A little further on, I descend trail stairs. As I am about to place my right foot down the high step, my left slips on the sand covering the rocks.



I tumble down, falling on my face as my eyeglasses fly off. I get on my hands and knees and manage to find my glasses to the right of the trail. The left earpiece is bent sharply up. Blood drips on the dirt. Feeling my chin, I realize I whacked it when I fell. Readjusting the pack, with the trekking pole's assistance, I stand up.

Undoing the scarf around my neck, I press it on my chin. With my other hand, I bend the earpiece down far enough to put my glasses back on so I can see where I'm going. There's no pain except at the cut on the chin. I straighten my glasses more and head down beyond the stairs to a level area while maintaining the scarf pressure. Finding a rock to put the pack down, I check myself more closely. I wet the scarf from my water bottle and apply it. After a couple of minutes of direct pressure, the bleeding stops.

I further straighten the earpiece, lining it up with the other one. Now it's almost back to normal. Nothing else seems damaged from the fall. I put on my pack and head down the trail, realizing the trail has been rerouted in the last twenty years. The last lake in Dusy Basin is now far to the left of the trail. In 2000, the trail passed nearer to the lake. It was a short walk to a lovely campsite at the west end.

The trail continues far from the water until the lake ends where it heads slightly left with Dusy Creek appearing near the path. I begin looking for a campsite. About a quarter mile down there's one by the creek to the left of the trail. This will do. However, I want to check out other possibilities farther down that may be more distant from the trail.

I leave my pack to secure the campsite and walk down the trail to see what I will find in the next ten or fifteen minutes. I meet a backpacker hiking quickly up. We exchange hellos, me remarking on the Bearikade strapped over the top of his pack while he notices the Leica at the top of the camera case. We get talking. I mention I left my pack back up the trail to look for a campsite. He's going to try and make it out over Bishop Pass today. I recall my own long final days from Upper Mills Creek Lake to Mosquito Flat, the lakes below Pinchot Pass to Roads End, and Little Five Lakes to Mineral King.

While we're talking, he notices my bloody chin. Since I can't see it, it seems like a good idea to let him look more closely. He inspects it and says the cut isn't deep and seems fine. I wish him a good hike out and he wishes me good luck on a campsite and the rest of my trip.

Within a couple of minutes, I see one campsite and then a little further down, another. This will be fabulous. It's well off the trail where Dusy Creek makes a picturesque bend. I head back up and retrieve my pack.

I feel so fortunate to have found this place. It really is as grand as I could have wished for. This is so different from the previous three nights. Those campsites were surrounded by rock with the occasional scattered patches of whitebarks. Here, listening to Dusy Creek, feeling the occasional breeze, I'm in forest, but see peaks all around. The forest is fairly thick with trees about the same height. There are many slabs where the forest is encroaching. I don't remember the forest being anywhere near as dense in 2000 and 2004. I surmise this is climate change over the last twenty years, the same increasing forestation observed when I returned to upper Virginia Canyon in 2020 and last year in the area around Vogelsang, especially Fletcher Lake.

The Sierra wilderness I traveled during the late 1970s, 1980s, and even 1990s is no longer the same place. Would John Muir, Little Joe LeConte, Norman Clyde be able to navigate to locations they knew so well? The peaks are what has not changed. So while down below traveling has undergone both minor and major changes, the surrounding peaks remain essentially as they existed for hundreds of years. The major landmarks have not changed over the last century. The areas below are quite different with rerouted trails while cross country navigation has been transformed by trees and shrubs. In other words, the areas touched by human actions are where major changes occurred.

I walk along the creek to the open area just down from this campsite to the top of the switchbacks that plunge to LeConte Canyon. While there are still bare areas that would fit a fairly large tent, this is now too near the creek and trail to be a legal campsite. On the south side, the row of boulders are still there. In 2000, when we stopped for a rest and snack after surmounting the switchbacks, Gordon left his watch on the boulder he was sitting on. When

we reached the campsite at Columbine Peak Lake, he discovered it missing and remembered where he left it. When I went back to retrieve it, his watch was still sitting on the rock.

Now I look on the day's last light on the peaks above LeConte Canyon to the northwest and, in the other direction, the peaks of Dusy Basin, especially Columbine Peak. From this perspective, the peaks of Dusy Basin are fascinating with Knapsack Pass forming the low point of a long jagged ridge. The light on the pines while the mountains and ridges glow behind them creates indeterminable minutes of grace. When the sun finally sets, I return to the campsite. Barbara texted that the meteor shower is supposed to be good tonight. When it gets too dark to write, I find a place to lie down and look at the sky. I see one meteor and millions of stars.

Today has been a great day, exceeding even my best expectations. I fall asleep contented.

## **Saturday, August 10, Dusy Creek to unnamed lake Dusy Basin**

I awake at dawn to a magnificent morning. The string of summits rising above LeConte Canyon receive the day's first light. It's probably like this most mornings in July, August, and September. This morning is my morning to witness the magnificence so this is a singular magnificent morning. This magical morning typifies summer in the High Sierra. Nowhere else is quite like this.

We are all among the privileged, those of us who are willing to put in the miles and climb the heights to experience these magnificent moments. Yes, there seem to be quite a few among the privileged when hiking the JMT, Mono Pass, Bishop Pass, Kearsarge Pass, Rafferty Creek, Piute Pass trails, or Rae Lakes Loop. But if you wish to witness the High Sierra singularly you can discover the miracle of solitude in the High Sierra. You can hear the creeks, the songs of the birds, see the lakes, tarns, and jagged peaks while absorbing the totality of it all.

I say farewell to this marvelous location on Dusy Creek. It has been even better than I had ever hoped for. I remembered where the trail begins its switchbacking descent to LeConte Canyon, but I never really believed I'd be able to spend an afternoon, evening, and morning appreciating it all. People pass by, possibly pausing to admire the view of LeConte Canyon and its peaks or the ridges and mountains above Dusy Basin. They are on their way to LeConte Canyon and Muir Pass or Dusy Basin and Bishop Pass. They have miles to go before they sleep and stick to the assigned trailed itinerary. I chose to go to the places they pass by or don't have time to visit.

I depart the campsite and intersect the Bishop Pass Trail. So far, I have seen no one this morning. I head back up the trail and after Dusy Basin's first lake (or last depending on perspective) I cut off to the obvious use trail that heads towards the lower lakes. My memory from 2004 is that this trail took me slightly to the left of the other lakes in lower Dusy Basin to the base of Knapsack Pass. Now the trail heads further away from the lakes. When another, fainter trail branches off to the right towards the lakes, I follow it. A tent occupies what appears to be the best campsite overlooking the shimmering water.

At the next lake, the many scattered tents of the trail crew met on the climb to Bishop Pass are spread out over a wide area, each tent set in its own place for gazing on the water. In my memory this is the lake I camped at in 2004. To the left is the large tent of the crew's kitchen complex. I hear a female voice singing in an endearing off-key soprano, obviously contentedly alone as she cleans up after breakfast.

Except for the peak and lakes, this hike looks very different from when I was here in 1997 and 2004. I am able to determine the location between the last lake and this lake that we hiked in 1997 on our way from the far side of the last lake for the climb to Columbine Peak Lake. I remember seeing a group of at least six hiking past on their approach to Knapsack Pass. They walked in single file through open land. Now the use trail heading to the beginning of Knapsack Pass snakes through trees. It crosses an outlet creek



descending from Columbine Peak Lake. I walk a little farther than head up when the final lower Dusy Basin lake is to the right.

The climb follows a series of ledges. Someone must have gone up this same route because I keep coming across footprints. I see two small lakes to my right. Instead, I proceed to Columbine Peak Lake, reaching the lake where I planned by the whitebarks next to the outlet creek. Despite my expectations, within these trees there is not a campsite. I prowls above the west shore. The one location by whitebarks that looked promising when I overlooked the lake on Thursday turns out to not possess a tent-size patch of bare ground.

The trees further from the lake contain an excellent campsite, but there are two packs there. I call out, but receive no reply. Maybe they left their packs while also out reconnoitering? Further on, there is a bare tent area and not much else, a place for a quick one night stay. The large site I came across in 2021 is no more. I do not want to stay on the east side since it has no view of lower Dusy Basin. I decide to head back and settle for the known campsite in the whitebarks on the south side. It has no expansive view of lower Dusy Basin, but I've seen tents there on a couple of occasions and it's a short walk to a view.

I meander back to the outlet creek by the whitebarks. While contemplating where to cross, I gaze to the right toward the small lake formed in the outlet creek and what looks like a possible campsite. Making my way there, the bare ground is slanted and too close to the water. Nearby there's a large boulder on what would be a tent area.

I see another spot and head towards it. If there is nothing else, this might be sufficient. Heading up and around the rocks, I come to an open area with a view of the Winchell-Columbine crest. A walk of a few steps reveals the lakes and peaks of lower Dusy Basin—what I'd hoped for. This will be fabulous for the next two days.

The large tent area sits a few feet below a long low ridge that runs above the two smaller lakes below Columbine Peak Lake, the two lakes I'd passed by when climbing up from lower Dusy Basin. From this ridge one sees an expansive view of the area below Columbine Peak Lake, the string of lakes in lower Dusy Basin, and the peaks from Mount Winchell, Thunderbolt Peak,

Columbine Peak, Giraud Peak, the long ridge above Dusy Basin, the distant summits that rise above LeConte Canyon to the peaks surrounding Bishop Pass. It is not a “view to die for” so much as a view to live for. One feels the immensity of it all and one’s essential insignificance.

As I make dinner, I realize this will be my fourteenth night in Dusy Basin with campsites at seven different lakes. It’s an enthralling evening and sunset. The light on the expansive area extending to the peaks around Bishop Pass, the Winchell-Thunderbolt crest, and the landscape leading up to Columbine Peak Lake is iridescent. Reddish pink clouds hover over the peaks above LeConte Canyon. When it becomes too dark to write, I stay up looking up for meteors again and see one. It has been another great day.

## **Sunday, August 11, Unnamed Lake Dusy Basin**

Once more I awake at dawn to a magnificent morning. The panorama of sunrise on the peaks above LeConte Canyon is breathtaking. Because of clouds, the sunlight pattern keeps shifting. The light on the peaks around Bishop Pass is constantly changing with sun rays finding breaks in the clouds.

Dusy Basin now seems to be constantly changing. When I was here in 2004, it was essentially the same as in 1997 and 2000. By 2021 it was very different. Cross country travel now involves getting around whitebarks and bushes where one once walked without obstruction except scattered rocks and boulders. Campsites disappeared. The constancy one expects in the High Sierra is no longer there, if it ever was.

Telling people about a favorite campsite may lead them to a magnificent place or that exact place may no longer exist as remembered and experienced. Posting a route or favored campsite in the Sierra on the internet may not be accurate in a year or two. The cross-country route one took one year may not exist the next year. The campsite to die for in 2021 may not be there in 2024. I just hope that Picket Creek Lake is still the same incomparable place it was when I stayed there in 2012 and 2016 though I suspect that may even have changed. I do not want to know the answer

I need to maintain my memory of places. I also need to realize those places will not be the same when I return. Human actions and climate change effect the High Sierra wilderness just as they do in the so-called civilized world. In that so-called real world, we long for the magical beauty of the High Sierra wilderness and the feelings it engenders in our inner being. That feeling sustains us while attempting to endure the madcap change that often overwhelms us in the contemporary world. That contemporary world changes from one day to the next. There is no longer any stasis in the human world.

Yet humans long for stasis. Stability is home. For hundreds of years humans lived in places that saw little change. That stability also provided certainty. There was one true religion, though that true religion differed depending on where one resided. The creation myth varied, but the belief in its metaphorical truth remained and determined human actions.

With the attainment of knowledge gained by scientific discoveries and the subsequent innovations of the industrial and now technological revolutions, the old belief systems no longer held. Certainty dissolved. Rather than accept a universe that declared nothing is constant except particular laws of chemistry and physics (laws we are only beginning to understand) we clung to the old belief systems. Instead of accepting their view of the universe is factually incorrect, too many people maintain facts don't matter; only belief matters.

Here in the High Sierra, revel in the wisdom of wilderness. There is only the here-and-now. Feel the breeze, assimilate the wondrous landscape with its peaks, rocks, pines, creeks, and lakes. See it as far as eyes can see. Wish that this moment could continue into eternity. That is what one glimpses in these moments: eternity. Though this time-stopping moment is merely a magical realization, the perception will remain in memory. Meanwhile, time continues its relentless movement forward.

To pass that time, I decide to spend the rest of this morning circumnavigating Columbine Peak Lake. I've camped at the lake on three different occasions, but I've never actually explored all around it. I cross the Columbine Peak Lake outlet creek and head to the south end of the lake. After making my way through a small boulder field, I follow the shoreline to

the grove of whitebarks where the campsite I considered yesterday is situated. Now it is occupied by a man and his fifteen year old daughter. He is a fellow High Sierra Topix (HST) member. They are thinking of going to Ruwau Lake tomorrow. I mention that Wandering Daisy posted a trip report with an excellent description of the Ruwau/Chocolate lakes loop. He replies, yes, he read that, which was the impetus for their going tomorrow. I wish them a great trip before continuing my circumnavigation of Columbine Peak Lake.

Since I've never been along the entirety of the east and south side it's a fun and interesting exploration. I enjoy seeing the various perspectives, wandering the shoreline to the point of the peninsula on the south side. The place I camped at in 2021 is now a more established campsite instead of a tent area size bit of bare ground I stayed at. There's now also another campsite nearby. I'm glad I didn't reconnoiter this far yesterday because I might have been tempted to camp here. Where I currently am is far better—total privacy along with all-encompassing views.

As I make my way along the north shore back to my campsite, I come upon a group of five or six teenagers and their twenty-something leader near the outlet creek crossing. The leader behaves as if she knows where she's going. Perhaps it's the lovely small lake next to Columbine Peak Lake?

After lunch, I sit with a near front row view of Knapsack Pass. I look to see if there are any human figures ascending, descending, or standing at the top pausing to take in the views of Palisade Basin to one direction and Dusy Basin to the other.

I recall my Knapsack Pass visits, the first in 1997. Barbara, Gordon, and I were partway up the pass. I had just spotted the ramp that transforms the final hundred yards or so into a stroll to the top. Looking up at Gordon to tell him to follow the ramp, my eyes fixed on an immense ink-black cloud stretched above the top of the pass. The western view was blocked by peaks so we were unable to see weather coming from the west, and, besides it was still mid-morning. *There are not mid-morning thunderstorms in the Sierra so going over a pass will be fine.* From the black cloud, a lightning bolt emerged, striking Peak 12369 by the pass. The amazed horror in Barbara's wide eyes to

that nearby lightening strike is etched in memory. Going over Knapsack Pass was aborted. Being struck by lightening did not seem a good idea. During the storm's opening drizzle, lightening flashes, and cracks of thunder, we rushed down to the west end of the last Dusy Basin lake where we found a campsite on the south side, erected the tent in record time, and escaped to our dry refuge as the drizzle became a deluge.

The next time in 2004 on a cloudless morning I easily made it over Knapsack Pass. I climbed the same gully to the ramp and strolled over the pass. A well-traveled use trail on the south side guided me until I left the trail and went down to camp by the long thin lake formed by the outlet creek of Lake 11523. I spent a marvelous day and night in Palisade Basin, vowing to return, which I did in 2021. That time the ramp taking one up the north side of Knapsack Pass was still there, but there were avalanche boulders to walk around unlike the previous unobstructed stroll. The distinct trail on the other side was not particularly distinct, taking varying routes around avalanche debris before it fizzled out. Each day in Palisade Basin, I met one, two, or three people hiking Steve Roper's High Route. Today, I have seen no one going up or down the pass, which is surprising.

Tomorrow I leave this little bit of paradise. Today has been as good as it gets, maybe my best day ever in the Sierra. Well, maybe not the very best; there are too many memorable days to dwell on comparisons. Since it's my last layover day, I may never know this exact feeling again.

After dinner, I wander around the area hoping to capture the slanting evening light on the vast area surrounding Columbine Peak Lake and these two small lakes. The alpenglow radiates on Mount Winchell, Isosceles, Thunderbolt, and Columbine Peaks. At sunset, the clouds above Bishop Pass transform into swirling reddish pink along with a gossamer string of clouds above LeConte Canyon. It is an appropriate final sunset in Dusy Basin.

Once the sunset fades to dark, not wanting this day to end, I sit up for another hour or so to look for meteors among the billions of stars that cover the sky. I see one streak across the sky before adjourning to the tent and sound sleep.



## **Monday, August 12, unnamed lake Dusy Basin to Bishop Lake**

At dawn on my final morning in Dusy Basin, I watch the sunlight emerge on the peaks above LeConte Canyon and around Bishop Pass. One cloud near Mount Goode is especially distinctive. Maybe it's not that unusual in this place in August at sunrise. Each morning of the last five mornings felt like the ultimate sunrise, something unique even if they were not.

This is in many respects the ultimate Sierra landscape. When one gets off the Bishop Pass Trail, there are numerous lakes and tarns in every direction. Cross country travel is relatively easy since if one goes around the cliff-outs, it is all class 1 walking. In many respects Dusy Basin reminds me of the Upper Kern. The difference is this really is a basin with peaks surrounding on all sides. The Upper Kern view extends south down Kern River Canyon.

While my greatest love in the High Sierra is Picket Creek/Kaweah basins, Dusy is second. Now it's saying farewell forever to my second favorite High Sierra basin. I have way too many magical memories. I hope I can experience more in the places I can still manage to go. While I am not done with backpacking, it's likely that I am done with backpacking in Dusy Basin.

Saying farewell to a place that invokes so many memories fills me with immense joy along with tears in knowing I will never be here again. When I left Picket Creek and Kaweah Basins the second time, there was the inkling of a possibility of returning. Now I know for sure that inkling of possibility is absent. Age and personal health render it beyond possibility unless I repeat this trip. There are still places, new places, I have not visited that remain possible; those take precedence. I plan to continue backpacking in the Sierra as long as possible within my limitations. However, holding out false hope is a fool's dream.

I stand on the small ridge one last time and gaze over the all-encompassing vista attempting to absorb it all into memory. There it will remain as long as I can take a breath. With a deep, long sigh I turn to step down to my campsite, hang the camera case over my head, stick my arms into the pack straps, snap and tighten the belt, pick up the trekking pole, and round the rocks to begin the hike up to Bishop Pass.

I head to the north end of Columbine Peak Lake, aiming for the gully that heads up to the ridge that separates it from the large popular lake next to the Bishop Pass Trail. This is the route I used in 2004 to hike out on my last day when traveling from Palisade Basin to the South Lake Trailhead. I bisect two tiny unmapped lakes in an outlet creek far below lake 11388. Walking up, I veer to the right of the stretch of trees that have taken over the ridgetop since I was last here. There I make my first micro route finding mistake, following a way that takes me to a gigantic wedge of rocks. Going around one huge rock, I encounter two more, but it's possible to squeeze between them. More trees force me right to an overlook at the top of the ridge above the popular first lake.

The route down ends in a cliff-out. I start back up and realize there is a better way I should have seen before heading down to the cliff-out. After a short walk, looking for a direct way down, a use trail appears with a duck perched on one of its rocks. I follow that down and come to another use trail leading to an occupied campsite with no people present.

Going around the campsite, I come to another use trail that goes to the campsite complex above the west end of the lake. No one is here so I have a snack while congratulating myself on reaching the lake. A well-used trail leads around the lake to other campsites that connect with another trail that takes me up to the Bishop Pass Trail. Now all that's left is the climb to the pass. Once over the pass, I tell myself, it's all downhill.

I meet a couple of downhill parties who merely say hello. A portion of the trail crew is working on one section of the trail. I pass a woman with a friendly hello as she moves a massive rock with a crowbar. As I walk, I realize I should have thanked her for her backbreaking work maintaining the trails. I round a switchback and head up to where another woman is working. I stop and say I've been hiking these trails for over forty years and really appreciate the great job of the SEKI trail crews. To a large extent it is a thankless job and we the public should at least let them know how much their work is appreciated by hikers.

A little further up, I meet a friendly young couple who have no distinctive plans as to where they are going. I ask them if they are on HST due to their improvisational appreciation of the High Sierra. No, they're not. I suggest

they should check it out for the trip reports and cross country passes sections to get good ideas for places to possibly explore. We both continue our hikes, wishing each other great trips.

I realize I am further up the pass than I thought or expected, a little below the new switchbacks that lead up to the final long, long switchback. Soon I am at the Bishop Pass signs. From the top of the pass, I walk down over the further shrunk snowfield for one more gaze east from the overlook.

The excellence of the SEKI trail crews is appreciated even more when I descend the Bishop Pass switchbacks. Boulders in the middle of the trail and the steep long steps down tire me more than the uphill slog to the pass. More apparent going down than up, the sheer drop-offs at certain points cause me to wonder if anyone has fallen off. My knees scream by the time I get to the bottom at the stepping stone crossing. It might have been all downhill from the top of the pass, but in many respects the climb to the pass was easier than the switchbacking descent. The difference in the trails between the SEKI and Inyo sides is agonizingly obvious.

I wade the stepping stone crossing. The wind perpetually roars with interspersed gale-like gusts. Simply walking is difficult. I decide to stop of Bishop Lake. After exploring, I end up in the same campsite away from the camping complex as before.

Setting the tent up in the wind is a real challenge. I put rocks on the corners of the footprint, employing big rocks since little rocks won't keep the footprint in place. When the tent body is aligned. I pound in stakes and add those rocks to better secure the stakes. Attaching the tent to the poles is easier in part due to the wind behaving for about five minutes. The wind continues behaving while I attach the fly. I add more rocks on each corner and the fly stakes.

The rest of the afternoon is spent using the nearby whitebarks to provide a semblance of shelter from the wind. The wind is the worst I've ever experienced for such an extended period of time. Usually it is in conjunction with a thunderstorm or at the top of a pass and not so intense for so many hours. I hope the wind will die down around sunset, but it continues.

This is my final night and it is defined by the wind. There is alpenglow on the Inconsolable Range. Standing on the point, I need to hold the tripod to prevent it from blowing over. Maybe a photo is not worth this effort? I tell myself there will be other High Sierra sunsets. As darkness descends, the gale winds continue. It's too inhospitable to sit up and look for meteors. I hope the gales finally wind down at some point tonight. There will be less windy nights in the future. I crawl in the tent when it is too dark to write.

## **Tuesday, August 13, Bishop Lake to South Lake**

The wind howls all night. It lessens a little after sunrise, though it's still not normal Sierra breezes. However, the tripod stands on its own for capturing sunrise photos. While the morning is nothing spectacular, I do enjoy reveling in my last Sierra backcountry morning this season.

I can't get my head around that it's the final morning. After breakfast, the food is gone except for some pieces of dried fruit. Even if I don't want to hike out, I have to. But I don't want to go back to the so-called real world.

This has been a trip of a lifetime. Spending four nights in Dusy Basin and one night on Dusy Creek was as good as it gets. That is five days and nights of bliss. Even the cross-country hiking was fun even if Dusy Basin cliff-outs and recently appearing bushes and trees can be frustrating. But that's part of hiking cross-country in Dusy. There is always a way around the cliff-outs. Walking among the rocks is a zig-zag exercise of stepping a little up or a little down. I suspect for some people that is really annoying. I enjoy it since it's problem solving, but not too taxing. One can enjoy and take in all the magnificent surroundings while still getting to the intended destination.

I revel in this final morning and ignore the passing of time. In wilderness, the passing of time feels differently than in civilization. Out here, the only things affected by time passing are meals and light and dark. The transition from light to dark and dark to light is in itself a natural passage of time. The only concerns are finding a good place to sleep and food. There's nothing else one *must* do. No one else knows or cares what you do and how you do it.

One can simply BE, *be* in wilderness. Yes, there is a large bureaucratic structure that goes into making a wilderness area. People have to create rules and regulations and administer them in order to protect an area from being destroyed. One thing that history has taught us is that most humans cannot allow nature to simply exist without negative human interference.

Wilderness has no utilitarian commercial value except to the corporate overseers at recreation.gov. The communities that exist on the edge of wilderness areas would make more money and create more jobs if that wilderness was open to private development. This wilderness exists due to human interference. Who can surmise the many resorts and facilities that would have popped up to provide the comforts of civilization at Columbine Peak Lake or the string of lakes in Lower Dusy Basin? Donald Trump could transform Dusy Basin into the world's most spectacular golf course.

As much as I lament the changes that have occurred here, they pale compared to what would have happened if this had not been designated wilderness. Dusy Basin is too gorgeous to not impel someone to have made access easier. Go to Yosemite Valley to experience what humans will do to even the most spectacularly beautiful places on Earth. Simply compare the relative lack of development in Cedar Grove in Kings Canyon in comparison to Yosemite Valley. It's only the National Park Service and its rules that prevent Yosemite Valley from being further commercialized.

It is a constant struggle for the Park Service to maintain our National Parks from outside forces who want to fly drones, hang glide, mountain bike, and all the other ways humans desire to desecrate and exploit our public natural wonders for private gain and personal pleasure. "America's best idea" exists under perpetual threats.

I suppose I should be thinking of packing and going. I sit for another few moments and appreciate the High Sierra wilderness.

I depart the campsite at 9:10. One group is packing up as I follow the use trail to intersect the Bishop Pass Trail. Once on the Bishop Pass Trail, I meet a steady stream of dayhikers along with a few backpackers. I take in my surroundings knowing I probably will never see them again. I especially

appreciate the lovely waterfall at Timberline Tarns. I recall Barbara and I changing our shoes to wade the rock hop creek crossing at the end of Timberline Tarns while thirteen year old Gordon deftly did the rock hop.

At the top of the switchbacks below the crossing, I meet a woman wearing flip-flops who is obviously too stoned to be bothered by her flimsy footwear. Her male companion carrying the day pack seems equally oblivious, but looks more tired. A man about ten years younger passes me on the short climb around Long Lake with a comment on the lack of budgeting for trail maintenance. My earlier thoughts on SEKI versus Inyo trails echo in my head.

A family is gathered on the trail as I hike past them on the lakeshore section. The younger daughter stares at me with an expression of silent bewilderment when I say hello. I stop for a snack at the end of Long Lake at the off-trail rocks to acknowledge personal tradition one final time.

As I begin the downhill to the Chocolate Lakes junction, a family is conversing with another family. They see me, end the conversation, and head down the trail. On the zig-zagging switchbacks they are below before disappearing. At the Marie Lakes junction I wonder what those lakes are like and if they are a possible future trip. When I reach the Treasure Lakes junction, I know I am on my last mile. As I hike down past South Lake, I meet a group heading up and wish them a great trip. They look like a group still adjusting to backpacking as they make their first climb.

The overnight parking lot at the trailhead is full with a couple of cars completing their circular search for a parking space. I reach my car, unlock it, remove the garbage from the pack, put my pack in the car, and take the garbage to the dumpster.

Amid the bustle of people at the trailhead, I pause and try to absorb the last week. Yes, it really has been a trip of a lifetime. I start the car and hope I will have the same feeling at the end of next summer's sojourns in the High Sierra.