

# TRAILS & TALES NEWSLETTER

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[www.cubeironcataract.org](http://www.cubeironcataract.org)



The CICC is a local group working to build community awareness and support for a special backcountry area in NW Montana, located between the Vermillion and Thompson rivers, including three Roadless Areas – Cataract, Cube Iron and Sundance. We seek support for keeping this mostly wild area the way it is today, a haven for wildlife, quiet recreation, hunting, berry picking and family adventures.

## Inaugural Newsletter

This is the first edition of a newsletter we plan to produce two or three times a year. It will be distributed electronically, free to all interested people, featuring stories and information about the CICC area. We also invite you to visit our website for more info about our organization, our mission, activities, and a copy of our brochure and area map. [www.cubeironcataract.org](http://www.cubeironcataract.org)

## Trails & Tales Kickoff Event



On June 30, 2018 the Cube Iron-Cataract Coalition held our first annual Trails & Tales event at the Elk's Club in Thompson Falls. Some 90 people showed up to enjoy dinner and hear speakers Wayne Kayworm, Kylie Paul and Bruce Sterling talk about the wildlife and wonders of the CICC. Another highlight was a slide show prepared by Andrew Klaus. We are planning a similar event for this upcoming June. Thanks to all who attended.



## Trail Clearing

During the summer of 2018, volunteers from CICC teamed up with volunteers from the Wildhorse Plains Back Country Horsemen, and Montana Hunters and Anglers to clear over 12 miles of Forest Service Trails, to improve public access to the wild and beautiful CICC area.

Over 2 days in June, volunteers cleared the popular **Cabin Lake - Four Lakes** loop trail. The horsemen packed tools and equipment for the trail workers. The first day featured on and off light rain, but the second day brought welcome warm sunshine. The group cleared about 8 miles, including some BIG blowdown, before encountering deep snow. On Aug 8<sup>th</sup> the group returned and finished clearing the loop trail. Come check it out!!





## Leading a Walk in the Woods

By Mark Sheets

This past July, my wife Karen and I led a loop hike from the Goat Lakes Trailhead to Goat Lakes, Mount Silcox, Honeymoon Creek, Deer Lake and then back to the trailhead via the cut-off trail from Honeymoon Creek to Goat Lakes. The hike was about 8 miles and has a variety of ups and downs. The wildflowers were out and there are great views of the several mountain lakes, much of the the Cube-Iron Silcox Road-less area and also a big chunk of the Clark Fork valley. Other hikers included a couple from Sandpoint, a gentleman from Bigfork on his way to Spokane and a gentleman from Havre.

Leading a hike gives a person the ability to share our local special spots to someone who might not do so otherwise. This helps to gain some advocates to protect and maintain our unique places. Many times going to a new area it is hard to find trailheads, trail junctions, and leading someone helps them to become acquainted with an area. You also have the pleasure of meeting some very nice people. Many folks just don't like to hike by themselves.

Leading a hike is easy to do. Go to an area you have hiked before, scout out the road to the trailhead to make sure it is passable, limit the group size to something you are comfortable with, and make sure the description of the hike truly is what it is. You do not want to advertise it as a stroll when in reality it is a death march! Talk to everyone signed up to make sure they have the needed supplies and know where and

when to meet for the hike. CICC is working to get a hiking program going in 2019. We are looking for additional hike leaders, and will be coordinating with the Clark Fork Valley Hospital hiking program.

For those simply interested in exploring our local backcountry, check our website this spring for hikes you can join.

See you on the trail!

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## A Peak a Week!

By Jen Kreiner and Bonnie Haun

We ascended Cube Iron into a light layer of mist. As we sailed, Van Morrison's Into the Mystic played over and over in my head. These wildflowers, valleys, mountain breezes and views for miles were ours. I am reminded at moments like these that I need to keep my head in the clouds – ironically it is where I find clarity.

We were bound to revel in that clarity this summer, we were going to get after it! That was the basis of a plan formulated in early spring 2018. We both needed the solitude, the escape, the mutual motivation...the summits. We set a plan to summit one peak per week.

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Jen Kreiner

## A Peak a Week, continued

Life has a funny way of making it difficult (or impossible) to put ourselves first as women. We have responsibilities to our families, our livelihoods, our community and they all tend to take precedence over “me time.” We decided that this summer we would gift ourselves the opportunity to explore wild places in order to fulfill a neglected need. It was time to prioritize. We were both avid hikers, but we needed to find that confidence buried inside ourselves.



Bonnie Haun

Summer brings crazy schedules and conflicts. It was unrealistic to expect that we could hike every week together. We decided to coordinate on a week to week basis and confirm our peak plans regardless of them being the same. Our main focus was the Cube Iron – Silcox RA, but our adventures took us beyond our backyard to Glacier, Joshua Tree and Banff National Parks and the Scotchman Peak Wilderness. We hiked with each other, our kids, husbands, extended families and friends. Our Peak A Week challenge cultivated a shared experience.

From April through September we collectively summited 10 peaks, alpine lakes, mountain

passes, and rocky ridges. We finished the season feeling strong - not only in our bodies but in the knowledge that we achieved what we set out to do. We accomplished something that was just for us. Peak a Week really put life into perspective. We are resilient, we are blessed, we are strong...sometimes we have to get up on top of the world to remember that.

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## Priscilla Peak Lookout

By John Errecart

Priscilla Peak Lookout is a shake-walled, gable roof L-2 cupola cabin built in 1929. It is one of only three remaining of this style in the North Region. Priscilla Peak is located about 10 air miles NE of Thompson Falls, in the Sundance Ridge Inventoried Roadless Area, within the CICC area. From its 7005' perch the lookout scans the Thompson River drainage, and has views of the Cabinets, Missions, Swans, and Glacier Park on a clear day.

The peak is accessed by the Sundance Ridge Trailhead #455, off the Thompson River road. The lookout was restored and placed on the lookout rental program in 1994, but was later withdrawn because of lack of use. This trail is not for the faint hearted – it climbs some 4400 gut wrenching feet from the trailhead and probably discourages many would be renters, though for hikers who have made the climb this is surely a very special place.

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### **Lookout continued**

For the past decade there has been some interest by the FS and members of the public to once again place Priscilla Peak lookout on the cabin rental program

One question concerns what kind of shape the lookout structure is in. This past August volunteers from the CICC, Wild Horse Plains Backcountry Horsemen, Mule Deer Foundation and Montana Hunters and Anglers visited the lookout to begin an assessment of access and stabilization/restoration needs.

Considering the twenty-five years since the last restoration, the volunteers found it in reasonably good shape, with the exception of a desperate need of paint, shutters, shutter fasteners, a deep interior cleaning and siding repairs where some knucklehead(s) peeled off some of the cedar shake siding for a warming fire. So it appears the structure could survive for many years with limited maintenance.

The possibility of developing alternative easier trail access was been considered also, but practical options there are quite limited.

Another idea would be to move the structure to Driveway Peak, which is outside of the CICC and accessible by vehicle. A previous cabin on Driveway burned in the early 1990's and there is no structure there now. Input from the community is very welcome in considering these various options.

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### **Blue Weed Work Project**



Volunteers from the CICC gridded and popped out Blueweed rosettes in this hayfield in the Spring of 2018. For a few hours of work one spring morning CICC received a \$500 donation

through the Pleiades Foundation and Citizens for a Weed Free Future for our help to curtail the spread of Blueweed in Sanders County. This project was organized by CICC co-chairman John Errecart, and the money is used to help fund our programs.

Blueweed is an invasive noxious weed that germinates and grows into a ground rosette during its first year. During its second year it is capable of growing over 3 feet in height and several feet in diameter. Blueweed is unpalatable to grazing and is potentially poisonous due to toxic alkaloids it contains. Left untreated blueweed quickly increases in density displacing desirable vegetation resulting in economic loss to ranchers, farmers and the citizen owners of our national forests.



Blueweed invades roadsides, riparian areas, pastures, hay fields and forested areas.

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### **Big Trees Skipped by Fire**

By Doug Ferrell

The large Deep Creek Fire of September 2017 started near the mouth of the creek, then ran uphill, spilled over into the upper west side of Graves Creek, and burned over the upper ridge and many miles to the north. It also burned around the Cougar Peak Lookout, but the lookout was saved by firefighters who got the building wrapped and vegetation cleared just in time.

When I saw the fire maps, I wondered about a scattered group of huge Old Growth trees, including some monster spruce, that I had seen on the upper ridge some years earlier.

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## Big Trees, continued

I am inspired by big old trees so decided to hike up there to check them out. The stand was clearly within the fire perimeter, but there was a chance that at least some of the old trees survived the fire.

So early last summer my wife Mindy and I drove up the Graves Creek road to the top at Vermillion Pass. It was a lovely day with only a few clouds scudding along over the tops of the peaks. From the pass we could see extensive areas of burned timber stretching down to the south and west, and also off to the north on the other side of the ridge. We set off NW along the ridge on Trail #529 towards where the big trees were, about 3 miles farther up the trail. Within a half mile of the road we were walking through the burn. The fire skipped some areas



and burned others so intensely that there were only holes in the ground where stumps had been.

I remember hiking along and trying to focus more on the glorious experience of being up in the high country, and less on feeling worried about what we might find.

When I saw the first old tree, we were in a section that was totally unburned. Other scattered big trees appeared on our left and right as we walked along through the green forest, with hope and jubilation rising. In another half mile or so the big trees petered out and a large burned area stretched ahead. The entire stand of old trees was skipped.

We went back along the trail a ways, sat on a log and contemplated a few of the gnarly monsters, serenely waving their upper branches in the breeze. We were soaking in something uplifting and reassuring in their presence. Being human, we were also wondering why they were spared – coincidence, divine intervention...?

Looking around at the landscape, it was notable that the ridge is fairly wide and rounded over in that area, and almost flat on top. It seemed that maybe the contours of the rounded upper ridge served to channel the heat and embers from fire on the steep lower slopes, upwards and over the ridge. Perhaps this was what had saved the stand in 1910 and again in 2017. Maybe, maybe not. But it is nice to know the big old trees are up there right now, waving their tops and branches in the breeze.

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## Project Ascent

CICC is proud to support this inspiring local program that takes kids outside and connects them to nature. Some of their outings use the CICC area, further demonstrating the value of maintaining some precious wild country near our communities. [www.projectascent.org](http://www.projectascent.org)

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## Looking Forward

\* CICC board members are planning a second annual Trails & Tales banquet and speaker event for May or June. We are also planning hikes and stewardship projects for 2019. Check our website for info.

[www.cubeironcataract.org](http://www.cubeironcataract.org)

\* Our map and brochure show trail and trailhead info plus hike suggestions and descriptions, also on our website. Reprinted versions of the map and brochure are available at libraries in Plains and TF.

\* In the upcoming forest planning process, we will be working with the FS to protect this special backcountry area the way it is today, for future generations to use and enjoy. We recommend no closures of existing open roads.

**There is no cost for this electronic newsletter. Please help us recruit interested people to receive the newsletter, and get involved in any way they choose to. Write to:** [cubeironcataract@gmail.com](mailto:cubeironcataract@gmail.com).