Ancient Lakes, WA

Note: There is an organized trail run here annually on the first or second weekend in April.

Vicinity Location: Central Washington

Location: The trailhead is 115 miles southeast of Seattle and 170 miles northeast of Portland.

Directions: From Ellensburg, WA, follow I-90 E for about 40 miles to exit 149 for WA-281 N.

Turn left onto WA-281 N and drive for 5.6 miles.

Turn left onto Rd 5 NW/White Trail Road and drive 7.8 miles as it curves and turns north.

Turn left onto Road 9 NW and drive 5.8 miles as Road 9 NW curves onto Ancient Lake Road. Arrive at the dusty parking are for the Ancient Lakes and Dusty Lake Trailhead.

A Discover Pass is required to park here.

There is a bathroom at the trailhead.

Length and Elevation: Total distance is 8.5 miles. Trailhead elevation is 1,141 feet. Highest point is 1,307 feet. Lowest point is 997 feet.
Total elevation change is 1,500 feet up and 1,500 feet down.

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

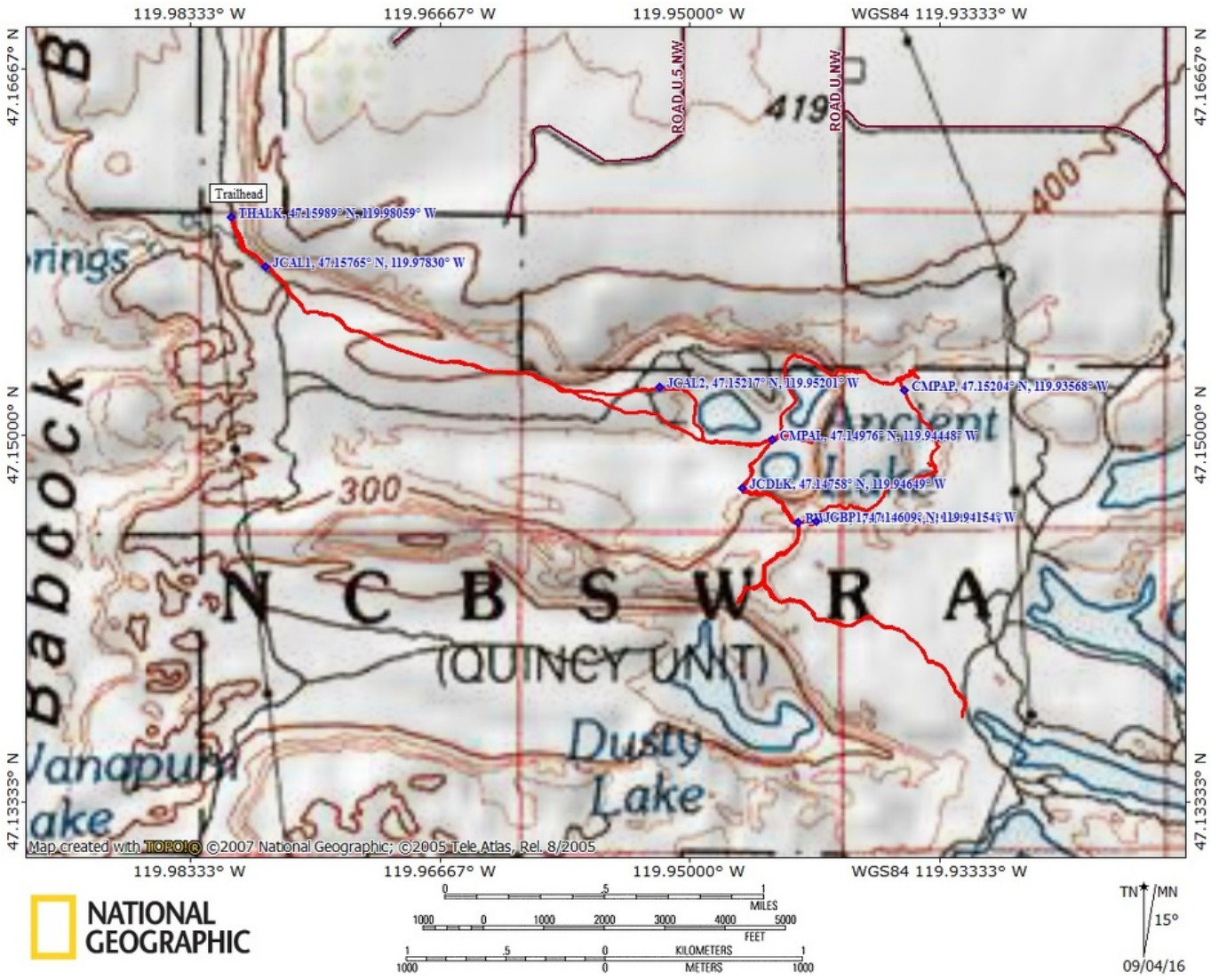
Review: 4/18/2015
The trail starts near the head of Potholes Coulee, where the Missoula floods from the last Ice Age scoured out these coulees and lakes.
From the Ancient Lakes trailhead take the obvious path past the gate and after about .25 mile reach the first junction which is for the Ancient Lakes Trail and the Dusty Lake Trail. Turn left and follow the Ancient Lakes Trail along a mostly level trail. Pass a nice waterfall after one mile then take the junction on the right to go through the middle of the lakes. There are many places to camp and many campers. We set up camp between 3 of the lakes.
After setting up camp, there are plenty of places to take short walks. There is a stream and waterfall that feeds one of the lakes and it doesn't have an outlet stream. Ancient Lake is the lake just west of this one.

The next morning, take a loop hike hiking up past the top of the waterfall then along a meadow up to Judith Pool. There is a nice little waterfall that cascades over basalt cliffs from the lake. From there, retrace your steps about 250 feet to a user trail that heads south. Follow this past an unnamed lake nestled below a basalt cliff. From here, climb up above the lake and walk about .5 mile to a junction that leads to a nice overlook of Dusty Lake. From the overlook, walk about .6 mile back down to the

lakes.

To return to the trailhead follow any of the trails back to the Dusty Lake Trail and then head north back to the trailhead.

The Ancient Lakes don’t have outlet streams. Water passes through so much farmland there are chemicals in the water. Plan to carry all the water you need for the whole trip because a water filter won’t remove these chemicals.

This is a great early season backpacking trip as this area is so dry and a short backpack trip. It is also a good first backpacking trip for kids but the loop hike is somewhat dangerous as it climbs next to the stream and waterfall.

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