

Sample hike from Trails of Western Idaho, by Margaret Fuller

SNAKE RIVER BIRDS OF PREY NATIONAL CONSERVATION AREA

61. HALVERSON LAKES

Loop trip: 3 miles

Elevation gain: 100 feet

Highest point: 2,360 feet

Maps: Walters Butte, Initial Point

Difficulty: easy

Time: 3 hours

Access: From the Nampa Boulevard--Marsing exit on I-84 go south, crossing 2nd and 3rd streets and continuing on Yale, which curves left and becomes 7th. Go 7 blocks to 12th Avenue. Turn right and follow 12th Avenue as it curves left and goes south past the high school and Mercy Medical Center. Continue south on this road, which becomes Idaho 45. At 15.2 miles, turn left (east) off this highway toward Melba. At 18.2 miles, turn right (south) on Can-Ada Road. At Baseline Road, turn left for half a block then right on a continuation of Can-Ada Road. At 22.3 miles, turn right (west) on Victory Road at a sign for Celebration Park. The road makes three sharp turns and then winds downhill toward the river and the end of the pavement at 24.7 miles. When it branches at 25.4 miles take the left branch that turns away from the Celebration Park Headquarters and goes south along the river. It goes through a campground at 26 miles and continues to a parking area at 26.5 miles. The road goes .2 mile more before it is gated to motor vehicles, but that section is very rough and there is no parking at the gate.

There is a system of trails around Halverson Lakes, two lakes set among big black boulders of "melon gravel", which is the name geologists have given to boulders torn from the canyon walls and rounded by the Bonneville flood. This flood occurred about 15,000 years ago when prehistoric Lake Bonneville overflowed at Red Rock Pass into the Snake River drainage. The overflow caused erosion of the pass and a flood 150 times as large as the highest water since then on the Snake. It lowered the lake 300 feet to its present level--Lake Bonneville is now known as the Great Salt Lake.

The first Halverson Lake, which is long and narrow, resembles lakes in the eastern United States because it is surrounded by shrubs and broad-leafed trees, such as cottonwood. Huge black boulders form peninsulas and islands in the lake's usually blue water. Outside the ring of trees is desert. The other lake is a desert lake surrounded by sagebrush, melon gravel boulders and distant lava cliffs. There are only a few shrubs, all at the upper end. Beyond it rises a little butte that looks like stacks of buttons. A strip of sloping white sand divides the lakes from the basaltic columns of the canyon wall. The first lake is named for Albert and Roy Halverson, who once owned property to the north of it. The other is unnamed, but is referred to as Little Halverson Lake. In pre-settlement times the lakes held water only in the spring. They were deepened by homesteaders and when irrigation arrived filled up from irrigation runoff. Now they dry up in the winter only occasionally. The trail system was created when the area around the lakes was closed to motorized vehicles in 1996.

From the trailhead for Halverson Lakes, the trail at first goes along the river. In 100 yards at a sign and map, it splits into three trails. This junction is just east of Sign Island. To reach the lakes, take the middle trail, which climbs a few feet onto a sloping plain covered with thousands of black melon gravel boulders. It winds through the boulders and approaches the side of the first lake at 1 mile. Continue on the trail along the side of the lake, past a junction with a trail that goes south to the river, and cross the little creek

between the lakes to the east side. As the trail starts downhill to the second lake, remnants of an old stone house are off to the left. The second lake is at 1.5 miles.

To make a loop along the river trail return .5 mile to the junction with the trail to the river and follow it. It rounds a headland at 2 miles and then goes along a narrow strip of land between riparian shrubs and a 40-foot high earthen bank to the trailhead at 3 miles. In the fall, the river trail is so sandy it is difficult to walk on it. You can return instead along a trail under the canyon wall that stays away from the river and then parallels the road high above it. This trail joins the road near where the river road turns off the road to Celebration Park. On this route the round trip distance is about 4 miles if you park at the road junction. You can make a longer loop by going around the north side of the second lake and continuing east along the base of the canyon wall to where the wall comes close to the river at 3.5 miles and then returning on a trail along the river. This loop is about 7 miles from the trailhead and goes completely around the button-like butte.

After seeing the lakes you will probably want to tour Celebration Park, which is a Canyon County park. It has a visitors center, usually open only in summer, a large parking area and a picnic area. Paths lead to petroglyphs and the Guffey Bridge. In 1899, a this bridge was built from Guffey, a former village on the north side of the river, across the river to extend a railroad to Murphy, then called Striker Springs, and to the mines at Silver City. However, the tracks never reached Silver City because of recessions in the early 1900s. The bridge still stands and is being preserved as a historical landmark. Murphy, named for an assistant engineer on the railroad project, served as a freight center for Silver City and the surrounding towns, but the railroad tracks have long since been removed. You can walk across the bridge and hike up the river on old roads and paths all the way to Swan Falls.