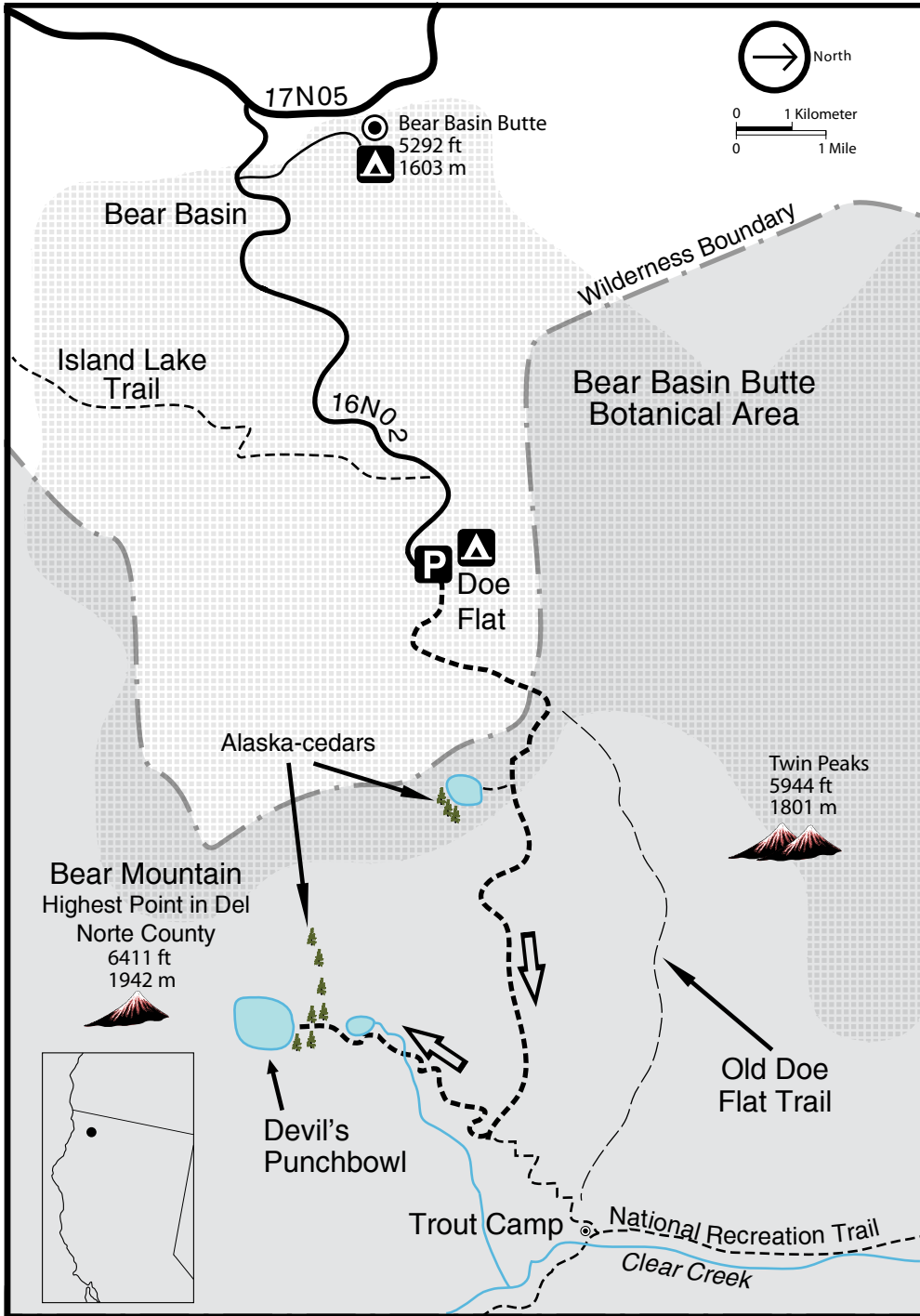


9 Devil's Punchbowl Siskiyou Wilderness

Conifer Count: **15**

Difficulty: **Moderately strenuous**

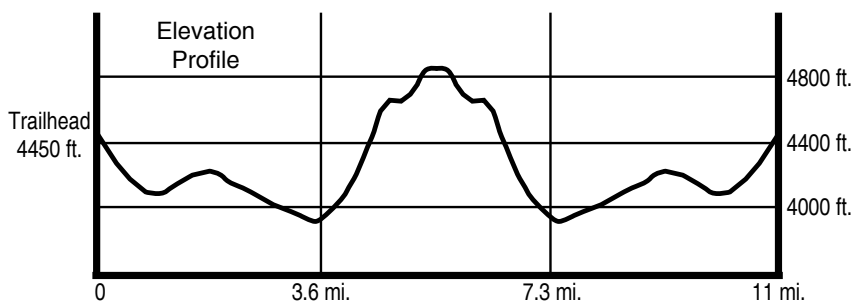


Getting there: From the town of Gasquet, continue north on 199 for 10.2 miles until you reach Little Jones Creek Road (17NO5) on the right. Travel up the road watching for interesting conifers along the way. Just before milepost 6 there is a large round-about. Here lodgepole pine, sugar pine, knobcone pine and common juniper can be found. After a short descent you will pass a small tarn. In the drainage Pacific yews thrive and just beyond, over the next ½ mile, a few Jeffrey pines grow—the only place to see them on the route. At mile 6.5 stay left (this is where the route from French Hill Road enters) and at 9.6 leave the pavement for the first time and travel road 16NO2 to Doe Flat Trailhead (4.3 miles). Along this final segment of road the white fir/noble fir/Douglas-fir forest is spectacularly confusing—take some time to study the trees here. The Doe Flat Trailhead, according to John Sawyer, used to hold a handful of Jeffrey pines but they were removed for the convenience of car placement and access to the wilderness.

Why go? 15 species of conifers on one walk is a good reason to start. This is also a premiere hike to see Brewer spruce—they can be enjoyed from the parking lot all the way to the lake in a wide array of habitats, including dense forest. The Devil's Punchbowl is also the most spectacular glacial cirques in the Klamath Mountains. The lake is almost entirely surrounded by granite that extends to 1500 feet above. Though the upper lake is only 4900 feet above sea level, it has the feel of a high, subalpine, Sierra-like lake. Because of its beauty, it is popular—one should not camp here—try it as a day hike or a destination as a side trip on an extended backpack trip deeper into the wilderness. If you do overnight here, minimize your impact as much as possible—camp 200 feet from water and **DO NOT** have a campfire.

Hike 9: Devil's Punchbowl

Distance: **10 miles round trip**



The Hike: moderately strenuous (10 miles round trip)

- 0.0 At the trailhead start by picking up Brewer spruce, Douglas-fir, white fir, sugar pine, and noble fir.
- 0.5 Just before a switchback across a wash, watch for Pacific yew. This is the thickest stand on the walk. Just beyond the wash, the trail is single track.
- 1.0 Reach the wilderness boundary and an under story soon dominated by the endemic Sadler oak (*Quercus sadleriana*) and vine maple (*Acer circinatum*). Though sign of the mountain beaver (*Aplodontia rufa*) is common in this habitat across the Klamath Mountains, this is the only place I have been lucky enough to glimpse this elusive critter—look for their elaborate labyrinth of tunnels along the trail.
- 1.1 Notice small Pacific yew under Brewer spruce, Port Orford-cedar and white fir on left of trail.
- 1.2 Mountain hemlocks grow next to the trail here—the only place along this route where they can be seen. There are a few on the right, up the hill and a young one on the left just off the trail. These trees are possibly the lowest elevation mountain hemlocks in the state. Continue walking through spectacular old-growth Douglas-fir, white fir, and Brewer spruce forest.
- 1.5 Begin to climb gently and passing beneath lodgepole pines. These trees are unusual for several reasons—including their propensity to grow in the “lodgepole” fashion and have closed cones at maturity, both of which are uncommon in northwest California. These Siskiyou populations could be var. *latifolia*—the Rocky Mountain subspecies.
- 1.6 Meet the trail junction to Buck Lake, notice more lodgepole pines on the left as well as young Port Orford-cedars. Continue along through old-growth, lichen covered, Douglas-fir, sugar pine, white fir, and Brewer spruce. There are Alaska-cedars at Buck Lake. Just beyond this junction cross Buck Creek.
- 1.8 Pass through a nice grove of Port Orford-cedars mixed with incense-cedars. These trees are hard to tell apart at this size because they grow so tall and have similar bark when mature.
- 2.0 Cross perennial stream.
- 3.3 Come to trail junction. Left will take you to Clear Creek in about 1 mile. Continue to the right to reach the Punch bowl, climbing steeply.
- 3.8 After some quick switch-backing, you are rewarded with fantastic views up Clear Creek, north to Preston Peak, and up into the bowl that contains the punch. At this overlook, ponderosa pines grow along the ridgeline and down into the valley. These trees are somewhat confusing if you only look at the cones, because many lack the prickly tip at the end of the scale, but the color and smell of the bark as well as size of the cone should verify *Pinus ponderosa*. At this point the trail begins to level with noble and white fir. Also, just below the ridge here are a few knobcone pines, they are not obvious so watch carefully.
- 4.0 Begin the descent into the valley with abundant huckleberry oak (*Quercus vacciniifolia*) and a few western white pines.
- 4.2 Cross Devil’s Creek, with enormous incense-cedars. Continue climbing over open rock following cairns.
- 4.5 Begin traverse around lower lake.
- 4.7 At the south end of the lower lake, climb away from the water and on to open rocks. Here, common juniper grows on the open rock just above the lake. Walk off the trail about 40 feet back toward the lake onto the prominent rock outcrop. The juniper plants are all small but prolific.
- 4.8 Continuing into the area between the two lakes, small Alaska-cedars begin to dominate the drainage. Watch for the droopy, tired look as well as the small, circular cones.
- 5.0 Reach the Devil’s Punchbowl. There is a beautiful stand of Alaska-cedar just to the left near the lake. Near the outlet, notice western white pines. Because of the white pine blister rust, they may not be there much longer. Around the lake you can also find Douglas-fir, Brewer spruce, incense-cedar, white fir, noble fir, sugar pine, and with a climb to the west one can find mountain hemlock.



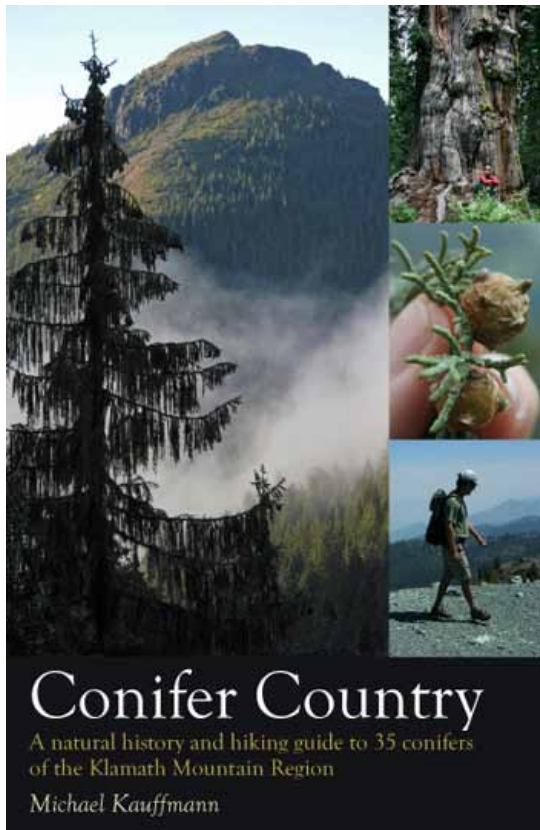
Autumn clouds whip over and around Twin Peaks.

Alternate route to or from Gasquet:

French Hill Road climbs into the Siskiyou Mountains from Highway 199, 2.2 miles west of the town of Gasquet. On this route several species occur that are either rare or out of place for this area.

After climbing for 4.5 miles you will come to the top of the French Hill Trail that will take you back to Gasquet. Just beyond this trailhead are the headwaters of the smaller and less famous Redwood Creek of the Siskiyou, and an isolated grove of redwoods. This is one of the highest elevations redwoods grow. It is also interesting because of the other trees they associate with here. In this stand one can also see sugar pine, ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir, knobcone pine, Port Orford-cedar and Pacific yew. Rare associates indeed.

After 12 miles on French Hill Road there is an unsigned left, which is 17N04. You have now entered the red rock forests formed by outcrops of serpentine rock—on this soil plants are stunted (see geology section). There is a rare form of lodgepole pine growing on these barrens, possibly a Rocky Mountain variety known as *Pinus contorta* var. *latifolia*. What makes these pines distinct is that their cones remain closed at maturity. Genetic studies need to be carried out on this variant. Also, watch for Jeffrey pine, western white pine, and common juniper as your elevation increases. The juniper is more common on these serpentine outcrops of the Smith River Recreation Area than in any other place in California. After 6 miles on 17N04, reach the junction with 17N05 and the route to Bear Basin Butte and the Doe Flat Trailhead.



Want to explore more natural history of the Klamath Mountain region? Check out Michael's book, Conifer Country.

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