

BRISTLECONE LOOP AND ROCK GLACIER TRAIL, GREAT BASIN NATIONAL PARK, NEVADA

The Bristlecone Pine Grove located below Wheeler Peak and Jeff Davis Peak in the Great Basin National Park is the most easily accessible of the three main Bristlecone Pine groves in this park. The trail to this grove is a 2.8 mile "lollipop" loop, starting near the Wheeler Peak Campground, at the end of the Wheeler Peak Scenic Drive.

We had visited the White Mountains Bristlecone Pine Forest earlier this year. Although we did not visit the Patriarch Grove, and we did not explore the Methuselah Grove very much, I would think that the Wheeler Peak Bristlecone Pine Grove is more impressive than the groves in the White Mountains, because of the apparently harsher terrain. (However, this is just my opinion.)

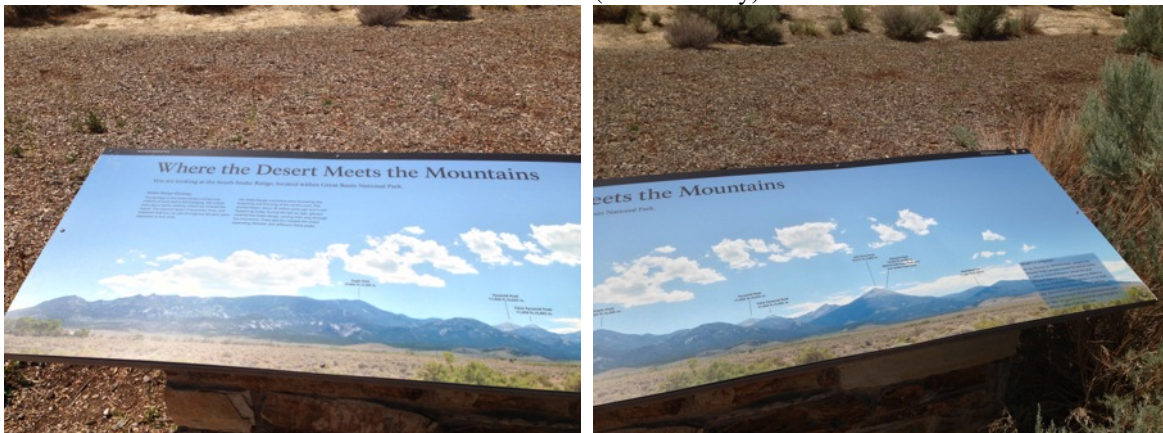
There were many low clouds near the park when we arrived (after having left Capitol Reef National Park that morning) and drove to the visitors center.



There are many informative signs around the Great Basin National Park Visitors Center. This one tells visitors about some things to see at some of the relatively nearby locations outside the park.



This sign shows some of the mountains which are visible from here (on a clear day).



Here we are driving up the main park road. Notice that Wheeler Peak is not visible due to all the clouds. The next morning, we were able to see the peak, but the weather forecast indicated clouds and rain would again return in the afternoon.



Looking southeast from early on along the Wheeler Peak Scenic Drive.



Looking northeast towards Mt. Moriah, in the Humboldt-Toiyabe National Forest.



Wheeler Peak is still hidden by clouds at this point.



Here we are approaching the parking area for the Wheeler Peak Trail. Bald Mountain can be seen through the clouds in the center of this photo.



Driving through a nice collection of aspen trees near the Wheeler Peak Trailhead. (We had hiked through a nice grove of these along the Wheeler Peak Trail back in June of 2012.)



We were able to get this brief glimpse of Wheeler Peak as we drove towards the parking area for the trail to the Bristlecone Pine grove.



Looking at the ridge leading to Wheeler Peak. I had attempted to hike to the top of Wheeler Peak back in June of 2012, but I had to turn around due to ferocious winds on this ridge, which had made standing, let alone walking, difficult.



Round trip, the Bristlecone Grove Trail is 2.8 miles, and the Rock Glacier Trail is 4.8 miles. Another hike in this area, the Alpine Lakes Loop, is 2.7 miles round trip. There is also a wheelchair-accessible nature trail which starts from this trailhead, the Island Forest Trail, which is a 0.4 mile loop. Note that much of this hike is over 10,000 feet, so altitude sickness is a real concern.



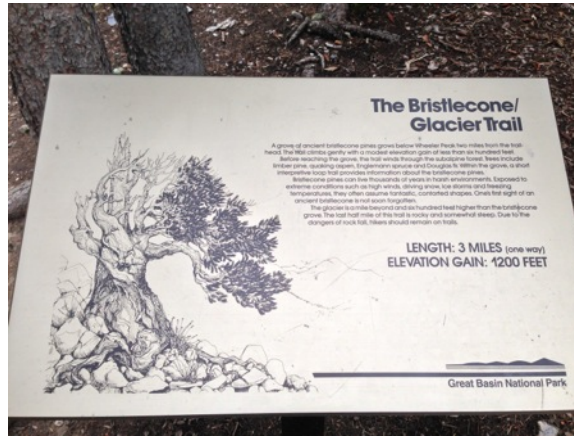
The Island Forest Trail is a nature trail which is wheelchair accessible and has many informative signs. We checked out this nice nature trail after hiking to the Bristlecone Pine grove.



The Alpine Lakes Loop Trail is another nice hike in this area, which we have not completed, although we had visited Stella Lake on our way back from the Wheeler Peak Trail and we visited the other lake, Teresa Lake, after doing the Bristlecone Pine Trail. This sign is located at the first turnoff for the lakes.



Note that the milages listed on some of the signs in this area, such as this one for the Bristlecone/Glacier Trail, are not the same as the mileages listed on the sign at the parking lot. (I am not sure which one(s) are the most accurate.) Also note that the Alpine Lakes Loop Trail overlaps with this trail for a short distance.



The trail starts out by going through a nice forested area, where views are scarce.



After some distance, the trail enters a rockier area and the trees begin to thin.



Here we have reached the second intersection with the Alpine Lakes Loop Trail. The Bristlecone/Glacier Trail goes to the left, and the Alpine Lakes Loop Trail goes to the right, reaching Teresa Lake in 0.1 mile (or so the sign claims). We visited this lake on our trip back. From here, this sign indicates it is 0.9 miles back to the trailhead, 0.7 miles to the Bristlecone Pine Grove, and 1.65 miles to the Rock Glacier. (Note that there appears to be errors somewhere in these signed mileages, as $2(0.9 + 0.7) = 3.2 > 2.8$ miles as claimed at the trailhead.)



The Bristlecone/Glacier Trail cuts across a hillside after the fork; this part of the trail reminded me very much of the early part of the Methuselah Trail in the White Mountains Bristlecone Pine Forest.



The clouds cleared a little to the north, and we were able to get some views looking across towards what I think (from looking at the park map) is called Buck Mountain.



Looking back out towards Hwy 50 and Baker. Notice how much darker it is here due to the cloud cover than it is out in the valley, where there probably isn't much cloud cover. (This made photography difficult.)



Panorama from here, with Bald Mountain to the left of center (slightly behind a tree) and Buck Mountain to the right of center.



The trail rounds a corner, and the terrain continues to be steep.



The colors in the bark of the tree in the center of this photo really stood out against the cloudy sky in this HDR photo.



Here we are finally getting some views to the east. The small lake in this photo is called Brown Lake.



We rounded another corner and could see some of the craggy outcroppings north of Jeff Davis Peak, which is northeast of Wheeler Peak.



At this point the off-and-on nuisance rain turned into steady rain, and we took shelter under some trees to decide if we wanted to continue. Here is the view looking out towards Hwy 50 again, which is in the sun.



Looking south to where the trail switchbacks up a small hillside. Since we determined that we must be close to the Bristlecone Pine Grove, we decided to continue on through the rain.



Looking north again, towards where the main road ascends in the distance.



This small hill is part of the ridge between where we are hiking and Teresa Lake.



Looking back down the switchback we had just ascended. Notice how incredible the trees look here. We knew we must be getting close to the Bristlecone Pine Grove now. Fortunately, the rain had lessened at this point in the hike.



Many impressively gnarled trees are visible on the sides of the trail through here.



The cloudy sky made HDR photographs of these trees turn out very well.



This tree is right next to the trail, and is very photogenic.



Notice the small amount of new growth on one of the branches of this tree.



Here is another photo of this tree, from the other side.



This is an HDR panorama of this tree, taken during a short period of time when the sun was shining.



Just past this photogenic tree, we reached the start of the Bristlecone Pine Interpretive Trail. According to this sign, some bristlecone pines are nearly 5,000 years old. "The great age attained by these trees is due to their unusual ability to adapt to their environment. They often live in isolation, where trees of other species cannot survive." Additionally, Bristlecone Pine wood is highly resistant to decay, and thus the dead trees may still remain standing for thousands of years.



Looking ahead up the main trail, towards where the Rock Glacier is (not visible due to the clouds).



There are many impressive trees along this trail.



Looking across the mountainside at more of this Bristlecone Pine grove.



This sign is placed at a tree which grew on a site with less nutrients than elsewhere, and hence it lived only about 1500 years.



More impressive Bristlecone Pine trees.



This sign is for the tree in the photo above. "It has two buttresses. The one on the left died about 1100 AD, [and] the other continued growing for six more centuries."



Notice the amazing coloring patterns on the wood of this tree.



Looking through this very nice Bristlecone Pine grove towards the crags above the Rock Glacier Trail.



This sign talks about the increment borer, which is used to collect a core sample from a tree. This core sample is then used to measure and count the growth rings on the tree.



Vertical panorama of another nice Bristlecone Pine tree.



This is the sign for the tree in the photo above, and it has some very interesting information about how the age of these trees is estimated. "A core was removed from this tree at a point four feet above the ground. The inner-most growth ring has been dated at 1126 B.C., therefore the tree was about four feet tall in that year. It may have taken as long as 200 years to reach that height; therefore the tree is between 3,100 and 3,300 years old."



Some of the trees here look similar to Bristlecone Pine trees, but they are not. They are probably Limber Pine trees.



Looking out across the trees from a high point on the loop trail. We were fortunate that it was not raining very hard at this time.



This sign is for a Bristlecone Pine tree which has rot in its center but is still living, at about 2,000 years old. According to this sign, more favorable conditions where this tree is growing caused it to grow fast, and the soft wood and coarse grain made it subject to decay.



Here we are looking at the uppermost branches of one of the Bristlecone Pine trees.



Looking out of the Bristlecone Pine Grove again, towards some of the crags near the Rock Glacier Trail.



This is the view east from near the end of the Bristlecone Pine Grove loop trail. Notice how much clearer the sky is away from the mountains.

