

## **BACKPACKING WITH BUTCH**

Few people know (or care) that Emile A. Biendara Jr. (Butch), is a life member of "The Purple Toe Light Mountaineering, Heavy Fishing, and Atrocious Tennis Club." Membership in the Purple Toe is a curse; there are no benefits, and if you go on just one trip, you are a member for life. Butch became a member nearly forty-five years ago, when he was working in the Surveys Office of District 1, in Eureka.

At a coffee break in September of 1975, I was in the District 1 cafeteria complaining that it was perfect backpacking weather, but that my backpacking buddy was on vacation. Jim Siebert, who worked in the office of Right-of-way Engineering and was also a Purple Toe member usually went backpacking with me. Butch was listening, and foolishly expressed an interest in backpacking.

With a fish on the hook, I talked up a trip to Caribou Lake in the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area. I assured Butch it would be an easy trip, and helped him with a list of things he would need. We planned to go that weekend. About Thursday of that week, Butch informed me that he had other pressing matters, and would not be able to make the trip. No problem.

Next week Jim Siebert was back at work, and we were looking at the next trip on our backpacking itinerary, Grizzly Lake, also in the Trinity Alps Wilderness Area. Butch expressed an interest in going, and I stressed to him that this trip would not be a cakewalk like the Caribou Lake trip. The hike wasn't much longer, but the total gain in elevation would be much greater. Carrying a pack is hard, carrying a pack uphill is much harder. Butch was still game, as was my brother, Dexter Luther, later a Caltrans Electrician in Districts 8, 10, and 1, in that order.

That Friday night, the four of us jammed our packs in the back of my 1965 Mustang, and drove to a campground near the trailhead, where we spent the night. We were up early, and the first six or seven miles went well. Then we got to the end of the main trail, at a waterfall coming from the outlet to Grizzly Lake. We still needed to scramble several hundred feet up a steep hill to the lake. My brother had a cramp, and Butch had run out of zip, so Jim and I made two trips up the hill with packs.

After we got to Grizzly Lake, Jim and I took a side trip to take pictures of Emerald, Sapphire, and Mirror Lakes. By the time we got back, I was so tired I almost fell asleep while fishing. Jim and Dexter fixed dinner; Butch and I helped them eat it.

The next morning, everyone but Butch was eager to climb Thompson Peak, the highest peak in the Trinity Alps, at just over 9,000 feet. Butch felt a little under the weather and asked us if we would mind if he just stayed in camp, and we said we wouldn't. The three of us climbed Thompson Peak and started down the ridge on the other side, before an impending rainstorm sent us scurrying back to camp in the mid-afternoon. It rained hard down in the canyons, but fortunately it only sprinkled on us.

The hike out was uneventful. The thing I can remember best is that my brother sure

went faster downhill than he went uphill. When Butch got back to the car, he took off his pack and sat down in the dirt. Then, he said: "If I ever talk about going backpacking with you guys again, would you please kick me right square between the legs so I'll remember what it felt like." That may not be a completely accurate quote, but it expresses the thought.

It was June of 1977, nearly two full years since Butch had hiked with us to Grizzly Lake. Two years had been enough to dull the pain, and Butch was primed for another trip.

We left Eureka Saturday morning, headed for the eastern Marble Mountains Wilderness Area. We had trouble finding the Big Meadows trailhead, since they were logging in the area. Thunderheads were blowing around, and it rained a little on our hike to Upper Wright Lake.

We fished Upper and Lower Wright Lakes with minimal success. Butch didn't fish, so he concentrated on our campsite. We would need wood to cook dinner and poles for our shelters, but the nearby limbs were all long, and Butch didn't have an axe. Not a problem, he just broke the limbs over a sharp rock. It became a problem when part of a limb bounced back and hit Butch, raising a sizeable goose egg on his forehead. Fortunately, the evening thunder showers found other places to dump their moisture, and our campsite got only a few sprinkles.

Sunday morning, Butch had covered the knot on his head with a red bandana that he folded into a headband. The headband and his dark glasses made him look more like a biker than a backpacker.

We scrambled along near the top of the ridge from Big Meadows to Red Mountain. The west end of this ridge offers spectacular views of the ABCD Lakes (Aspen, Buckhorn, Chinquapin, and Dogwood), Deep Lake, Calf Lake, and Long High Lake. The Marble Mountains and other Lakes are also visible in the distance. Views like this (and the chance to give mountain trout waterskiing lessons) make backpacking worthwhile!

We worked our way down to a good camping spot beside Calf Lake. Butch made camp improvements, while we scrambled across the broken rock at the base of Red Mountain to the ABCD Lakes for a little fishing. We saw several Ospreys around the Lakes, and I suspect their fishing party did better than ours. It wouldn't have taken much!

The threat of rain was persistent, so Butch outdid himself in shelter construction. It seemed like the eight-inch diameter poles at both ends of the shelter were a little overkill, but I tried not to be too critical. I was afraid that someone would leave the shelter to relieve themselves during the night, trip over one of the lines, and bring the shelter down on the rest of us. As it was, the shelter worked exactly per Butch's plan.

It was only about four miles from Calf Lake to the trailhead. The access road was a mess from logging activities, the loggers cleared a way out for us. It was a great trip, despite the threatening weather. The eastern Marble Mountains have some spectacular scenery, and Butch's "entertainment" made the trip a "Purple Toe" classic.