

The Pythagorean Hike

If one is observant while driving towards Pinecrest on Highway 108 from the west, one can't help but notice a very large rock outcrop on the left side of Pinecrest Peak. This outcrop is easily seen from the high point on the highway between the Camp Blue and Pinecrest turnoffs. This outcrop is called Pinecrest Rock; a picture of it is shown in Figure 1.



Figure 1: Pinecrest Rock.

In Figure 2, we show an aerial view of the most interesting (and difficult part) of this hike. Figure 3 shows the entire hike on a topographic map.

The reader will indulge the writer as he recounts a little history of the region near Pinecrest Rock. From 1934 until 1973, there was a fire lookout just above the top of Pinecrest Rock. It was also used as a National Defense Observation Tower during World War II. It was dismantled in the 1970's, when satellite observations made many fire lookouts obsolete. There is a trail from Pinecrest



Figure 2: Middle Section of Hike.

Lake to the location of the fire lookout. The present hike includes about two miles of this trail.

Figure 4 shows the roads one takes to get to the starting point of the hike. On this map, one can easily find the road 4N12. This is called the Herring Creek Road. Its west end is at Highway 108 about 2 miles past Strawberry going east on the highway. One should turn onto Herring Creek Road and drive about 2 miles to road 4N27. This road leaves Herring Creek Road on the right; there is a sign at the turnoff that says “Message Board”. There is also a “4N27” sign 100 feet along the road.

This road dead-ends in about 1 mile. One can park their car at the end of the road. The end of this road is visible in Figure 3. From the parking area, a bridge across Herring Creek is visible. The hike begins at the bridge. After crossing the bridge, one should walk about 100 feet and then turn left. There is a good trail that goes for about a mile along the south side of Herring Creek. The trail peters out at an opening in the forest; this is where the picture in Figure 1 was taken. This opening is also visible near the bottom of Figure 2.

At this point, the hike becomes very difficult. As one can see in Figure 2, the goal is to gain the ridge on Pinecrest Peak just below the site of the former lookout. On the map, the straight-line distance from the bottom to the top of the climb seen in Figure 2 is almost exactly .5 miles. However, on the topo map one can see that this section of the hike climbs about 1050 feet, or .2 miles. This means that one must use the Pythagorean Theorem to find out the straight-line distance along the ground of this section of the hike. This distance is given by the expression

$$\sqrt{.5^2 + .2^2},$$

which is about .54 miles. Enough silliness.

In Figure 2, one can see that the author went up the open section of terrain for a while, before veering right into the forest. There is a climber's trail in the forest that is marked with ducks. After climbing a few hundred feet in the forest, one emerges just below the bottom of Pinecrest Rock. Figure 5 is a photograph taken from this location.

One should hike (or rather, scramble) up to the bottom edge of Pinecrest Rock. Then one should skirt Pinecrest Rock to the right, as seen in Figure 6. In this picture, the high point on the horizon is the location of the Pinecrest Peak lookout. Our goal is the ridge just as it disappears behind the trees in the right foreground.

Figures 7 and 8 show the views looking back along the route in this section of the hike.

Once the top of the climb is reached, the topography completely changes. Figure 9 shows the view looking south from the top of the climb. In this picture, one sees a trail; this trail goes from Pinecrest Lake to the Pinecrest Peak lookout. If one wants to see the view from the lookout, one should turn left at this point and head a quarter-mile to the lookout. If one proceeds straight ahead on this trail, one will eventually get back to their car.

There is only one tricky turn in the remainder of the hike. One can see this turn in Figure 3; it is just above the peak labeled "6905". (This peak is Frankenstein's Bluff, and it is featured in several other hikes on the website). A photo of this turn is shown in Figure 10. One should make a 160° degree right-hand turn upon reaching the line of rocks. This will lead one back to their car. If instead, one continues on the trail along the right-hand set of rocks, one will eventually wind up at Pinecrest Lake or Strawberry, depending upon subsequent turns. In Figure 10, one can see the correct trail heading downward to the right on the right-hand side of the picture.

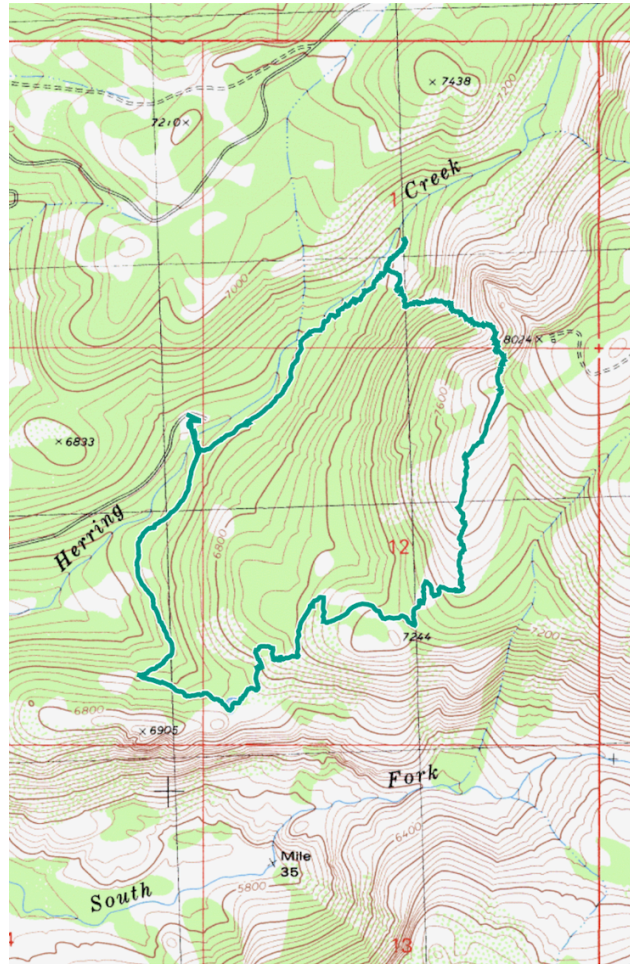


Figure 3: Topo Map of Hike.

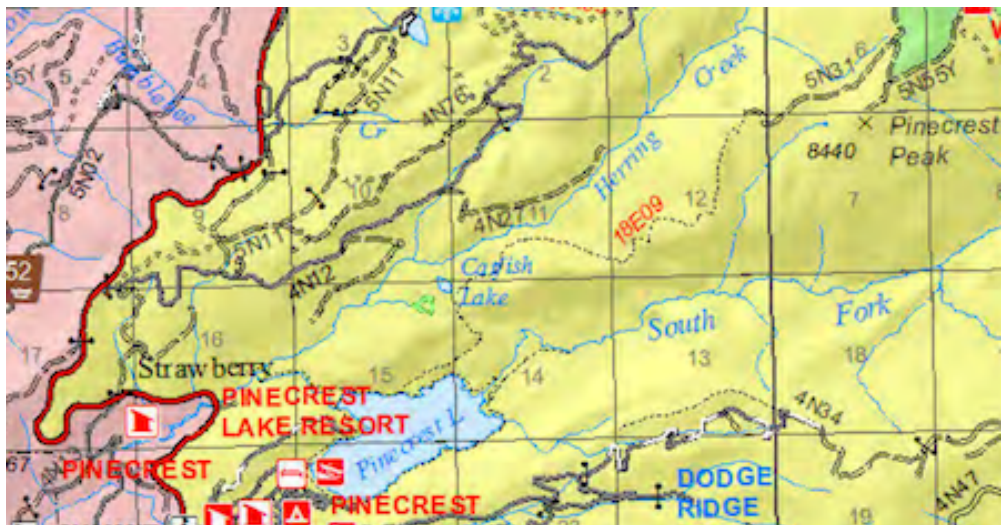


Figure 4: Driving to the Hike.



Figure 5: Below Pincrest Rock.



Figure 6: Skirting Pinecrest Rock.



Figure 7: Looking Back Down.



Figure 8: Looking Back Down.



Figure 9: At the Top.



Figure 10: The Turn.