



Hank the Rock Gnome: Adventures from the register on Sacajawea Peak by Anna Bjorklund

Last year I took my final Sacagawea climb of the season at sunset on a full-moon night. My friends and I watched the deepening colors and then huddled under my emergency blanket waiting for moonrise. During the twilight in-between time, we entertained ourselves reading the register entries.

The fact that Sacagawea Peak did not have a register prior to that season had been bothering me for some years. It seemed an odd fact because at 9,665 feet, Sac is the tallest peak in the Bridgers and certainly one of the

premier peak hikes in the area. Baldy (a mere foothill!) had a register; why didn't Sacagawea?

And so I had made the hike earlier in the summer toting up a small Rubbermaid box and register supplies. I returned several times during the season to read the entries and add new notebooks and pens, sometimes noticing that others had also tended it. Every visit added to my sense of connection to other hikers in the area as well as visitors from all over the nation.

My moonlight hiking buddies and I laughed as we read by dusk and then flashlight. Typical comments about the fabulous weather and the gorgeous view were interspersed with more memorable paragraphs. One was a playful conversation by a newlywed couple who had made the hike after driving almost all night to get home from a road trip. It was his idea, he admitted. She claimed she still loved him. At the end of the entry we recognized the signatures as friends of ours.

I read aloud another page that contained award-winning and possibly drug-induced prose: "I came to Sacagawea with a glass jar full of ladybugs to bring to Hank the Rock Gnome. I cannot find him though. He is gone. Gone. And the ladybugs spilled out at the top. I have lost them all." It rambled on, a melodramatic little lament, ending with a desperate plea, "If you see any of the ladybugs, please bring them to Hank the Rock Gnome for me."

The moon rose as the wind buffeted the foil blanket. It came up looking not unlike the sun, big and bright orange in lingering forest-fire haze. The temperature was dropping fast, but the view was, as the register's many daytime visitors attested, absolutely glorious. Only even more so. As soon as the moon was high enough to light our path down, we began to make our return, marveling at the lights in the valley and our moon shadows cast upon the trail.

I left the register up there, covered by a neat stack of rocks. I've never tended a register before. I didn't know just how violent the wind could get in a few more months. Or that the simple cycles of snow and thaw would, of course, shift things around. I didn't know that the register would simply be gone when I returned the following July. Gone. Just like Hank's ladybugs.

I brought a new register up, along with a bottle of champagne. Another summer, another group of friends. We drank a toast to life and career accomplishments within our group, and we jotted our ritual comments about the view and the champagne in the new notebook.

This autumn, the register journals will come back down with me on that final late-season climb. The Bozeman Public Library has offered to archive the notebooks, which afford a pleasant and often colorful account of the region's visitors and the current events and musings of hundreds of locals in love with this hike. Enjoy the pages. And if you ever come across last year's journals—or Hank the Rock Gnome—do let me know.

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