

Blue Lake - Loowit, WA



Vicinity Location: The trailhead is about 49 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon in the Mt. St. Helens National Monument.

Directions:

From Seattle take I-5 south and exit I-5 at exit 21 to State Route 503 at Woodland, WA. Drive 26.5 miles, passing through Cougar, Washington, to Forest Road 81.

From Portland, OR, take I-205 north to exit 30b to Battle Ground. Move over to the middle or left lane and proceed north on SR503 for about 10 miles to Battle Ground. Continue north on SR503 past Chelatchie Prairie and Amboy. At the junction of Lewis River Road and SR503, turn right and continue on SR503 past Cougar. Make a left turn on to FR 81.

Once on FR 81, from Seattle or Portland, drive 11.3 miles and turn left onto FR 8123. The road ends in 1.7 miles at a washout and the Blue Lake

Trailhead:

In the summer you need a Northwest Forest Pass permit for parking at the trailhead.

There are seasonal outhouses available at the trailhead.

Trail:

Toutle Trail #238, Loowit Trail #216, Butte Camp Trail #238A with connections to Blue Horse Trail #237, and Sheep Canyon Trail #240.

Trail Maps:

Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 46° 11.180 W 122° 13.656 **Info at Geocaching.com**

Length and Elevation:

23 Miles Roundtrip. Elevation at trailhead is 3,210 Feet. Highest elevation is 4,920 feet and the lowest elevation is 3,210 feet. Total elevation gain is 4,000 feet and total elevation loss is 4,000 feet.

Review: June 2, 2016

Make your way past the washout to find the trail heading north to Blue Lake. Travel about .3 mile to a cutoff for Blue Lake. Blue lake is very cold and was formed when a lahar dammed Coldspring Creek. The lake looked green at the time of this review. Small lahar flows have killed the trees in the area which makes for a hot hike in the summer. Shortly after the cutoff to Blue Lake cross the stream which usually has small downed trees to help cross the stream.

Enter back into the trees and walk above the lakeshore past the lake and into the forest. Climb modestly on a winding forested trail. After walking about a mile there is a view of Mt. St. Helens and

in about .7 mile is the junction with Blue Horse Trail. From the junction the trail drops down a bit and enters Sheep Canyon and meets Sheep Canyon Trail. Continue along the Toutle Trail which crosses Sheep Canyon Creek on a medium-sized log. There is a nice campsite here near the stream which has red and yellow Monkey Flowers blooming in the summer.

Stay left and continue on the Toutle Trail north towards the Toutle River. Climb up from the campsite and continue on a brushy trail and cross a lovely little stream deep in the woods about 1.1 miles from Sheep Creek. This is your last really clear water until the spring along the Loowit Trail. Get your water here for the night's camping.

Continue along this fairly level stretch to the banks of the Toutle River. You will have to find the ropes if you want to go to the Toutle. Turn right here and walk up the Loowit Trail on the pumice soil and begin climbing up Crescent Ridge. The ascent is fairly steep and the first half of the ridge is a mix of brush, forests, and clearings. There are some views down the ridge where you can see the Loowit Trail dropping down on the north side of the Toutle River. Some days the wind brings dust out of the canyon to make the air look almost smoky.

The second half of the ridge is also fairly steep and passes through a pristine forest and then the blast zone. On this section of trail there were bands of black flies which make resting unrestful. The trees shade the trail and the forest floor is carpeted in green sprinkled with wildflowers. Fortunately climbing higher brings the lava landscape and no more flies.

Soon you are traversing the nearly open slopes of the mountain. Nature is reclaiming the blasted landscape and there are many patches of wildflowers and heather dotting the slopes.

We went above the Loowit Trail about 0.2 miles after the trail leveled out. It was pretty east to find a flat spot for our tents where we could enjoy the panoramas. I walked about .5 mile uphill and along the hillside to get snow to cool our beers. This year the snow melted fast and there were only small patches of snow in shaded areas at our elevation. The views were fantastic as we watched mountain goats above us, the setting sun, and distant city lights blink on.

The next day we walked about 0.6 mile to a good spring for water. The spring is about 50 feet lower than the trail in a patch of trees and brush. We walked down a dry streambed and then cut into the bushes to find the springs. Some spines of the mountain still have trees and these treed ridges make a good place for a break to enjoy views of Mt. Hood.

About 0.4 mile after Later you come to a huge washout. What was once about 350 feet of level trail is now a .8 mile detour which loses 500 feet in elevation and then regains it again. Even more interesting is now you have to lower yourself down the last 50 feet into the gully, walk downhill and find the other rope that you have to use to help climb out of the gully. If that rope is missing, you would have to walk down the gully quite a bit farther to find a place to climb out. Early in the season you should check to make sure these ropes are in place. On the other side of the gully the uphill reroute is very faint in places but always stays within about 150 feet of the edge of the ravine.

Back on the regular trail there are a couple more washouts that require a bit of scouting to find the other side. Of course the views along this section are fantastic on a sunny day and you might even see some mountain goats. About 1.5 miles from the big washout is the junction to Butte Camp which you can see in the distance to the west. Turn right and drop down through a barren landscape.

Head into the forest of sub-alpine fir and then larger trees. After about 0.6 mile you come to a harrowing section of trail where the hillside is eroding and a narrow trail crosses a slide area. Once past this, enjoy the lovely forest and drop down into Butte Camp, a lovely area with tiny meadows and

a tiny stream gurgling along the trail. Stop here and soak your feet for a while and enjoy a place that seems far from the crowds.

Leaving the meadow there are old-growth Noble Fir, Pacific Silver Fir, and Douglas Fir trees. About 1.5 miles from Butte Camp, turn left back onto the Toutle Trail. Though the forest soils look dry, there are still thick stands of large trees.

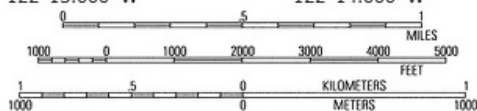
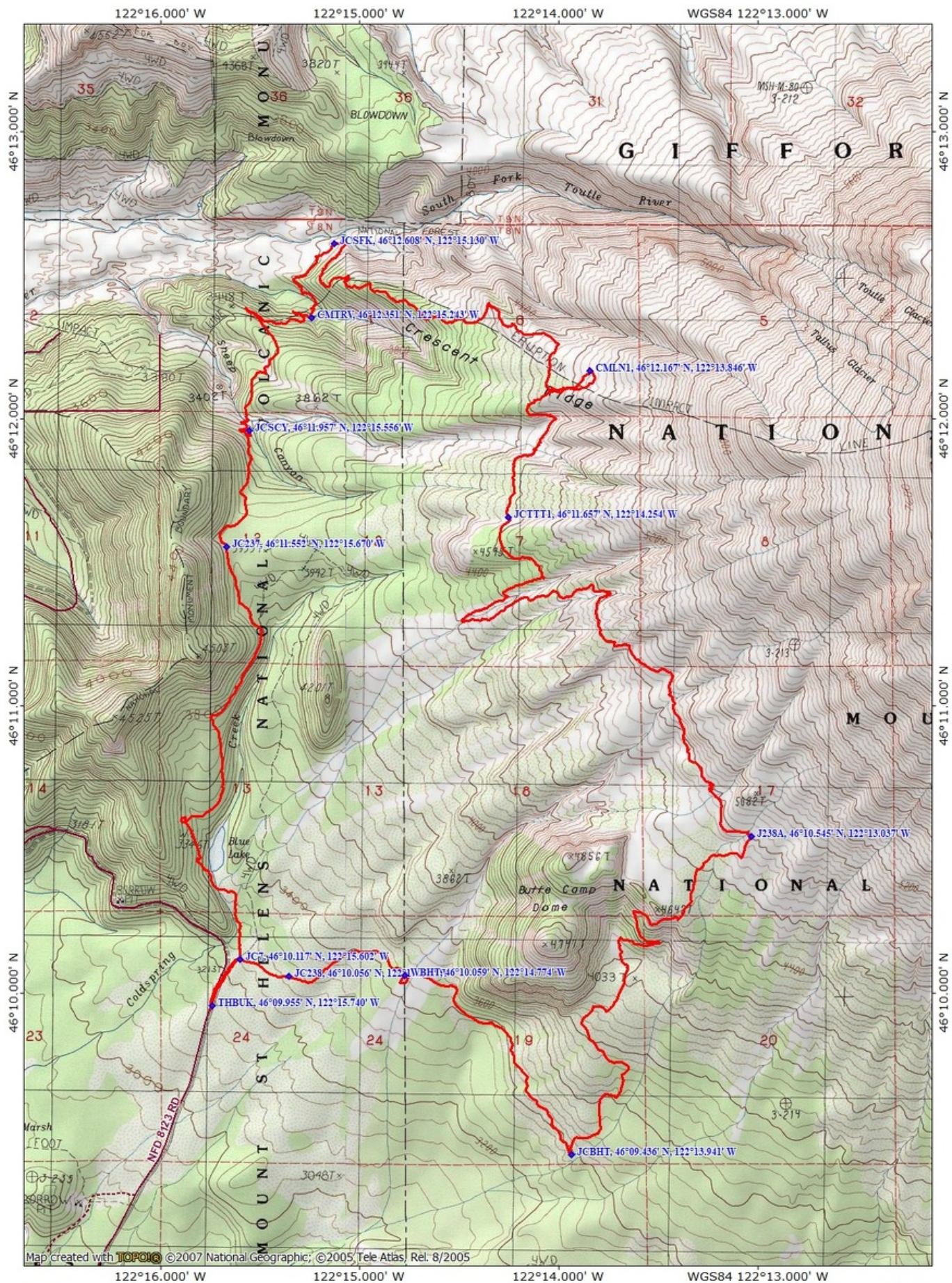
About 1 mile from the junction are a couple more substantial gullies to cross. Scout out where others hikers have gone to find the other side.

Continue through on a winding path through a mixed forest dropping a couple hundred feet in elevation as you cross the Blue Horse Trail and then in 0.2 mile turn left at the junction walk the final 0.25 mile back to the Blue Lake Trailhead.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve



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