

Boundary Trail to Truman Trail Junction (Mt. St. Helens area)

Type of hike: Easy out and back

Total distance: 5 miles

Elevation variation: About 200 feet

Maps: MSHNVM, Spirit Lake West and Elk Rock USGS quads cover the area

Starting point: Johnston Ridge Observatory parking area

Directions:

To reach Johnston Ridge Observatory from Portland or Seattle take Exit 49 from Interstate 5 (49 miles north of the Columbia River Bridge or 120 miles south of Seattle) Drive east on Washington 504 for 52 miles to the highway's end at the observatory. GPS coordinates are 46 16.SOSN 122 13-040W.

Key points:

2.5 miles – Junction with Truman Trail GPS 46 16.458N 122 11.014W

3.6 miles – Junction with Harry's Ridge Trail GPS 46 16.900N 122 10.370W

4.2 miles – Viewpoints on Harry's Ridge

The hike (8/12/05):

Boundary Trail heads east from the east corner of the parking area. For the first 250 yards, Boundary Trail and Eruption Trail follow the same paved route. The path then bears left off the Eruption Trail at a switchback to continue southeast. Here Mount St Helens and the Pumice Plain come into full view to the south. There are also wildflowers and small trees amongst the rocks, broken off tree stumps, and logs in spots all along the trail.

The Boundary Trail descends gently along the ridge for a short distance. After losing about 150 feet in elevation, the path flattens out and even climbs in a few spots. The trail will generally follow the ridgeline for the next 0.8 mile. Then the route makes right turn to head south across a steep hillside. This traverse crosses a very steep and loose slope and a slip off the right side of the route could result in disaster. The traverse lasts for 0.3 mile then the tread turns left to cross a spur ridge. This ridge has a splendid view of Mt. St. Helens and provides a peek of the south end of Spirit Lake. At this point, the trail is as close to the volcano as you can get on open trails.

As it crosses the spur ridge, the route turns to the northeast. The trail traverses a gentler slope for 0.5 mile to the junction with the (closed) Truman Trail. Mount Adams and Spirit Lake are in view to the right along this traverse. The junction with the Truman Trail, at 4,150 feet elevation, is 2.5 miles from the Johnston Ridge Observatory. With lots of stops for photo ops and a few visits with other hikers, I reached this point in just under two hours. The return hike to Johnston Ridge took about an hour.

Although I turned around at this point, the trail continues to the east across Spillover Saddle where the Debris Avalanche crossed over the top of Johnston Ridge and descended into South Coldwater Canyon. The hummocks on both sides of the trail were once part of the pre-1980 Mt. St. Helens. Just past Spillover Saddle is the junction with Harry's Ridge Trail where you will find spectacular views of Mt. Adams, Spirit Lake, and the Mt. Margaret Backcountry.

Summer hours at Johnston Ridge Observatory are daily 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. and daily passes may be

purchased there (\$3 per person). The facilities include nice restrooms and water. There is also an outdoor concession trailer for food and beverages. I highly recommend taking in the movie shown every 15 minutes and the displays on the 1980 eruptions with photos and material on the most recent activity.

Photos coming soon! bd