Catherine Creek Ramble, WA

Vicinity Location: 65 miles east of Portland, Oregon in the Columbia River National Scenic Area.**Directions:**
From Portland, OR, take I-84 East to Hood River. Cross over the Columbia River using the toll bridge and turn right on Hwy 14. From Bingen, WA, Follow Hwy 14 approximately 4.6 miles to mile post 71 and junction with County Road 1230 on the left. Turn left onto County Road 1230 (Hwy 8) at Rowland Lake and follow it 1.4 miles to the Catherine Creek parking lot on the north side of the road.

Heading westbound on SR-14 from Lyle, Washington, Follow Hwy 14 for about 1/4 mile and take a right onto Old Hwy 8 (County Road1230). It is an immediate right after crossing the Klickitat River. Follow Old Hwy 8 for about 4.8 miles to the Catherine Creek parking lot on the right side of the road.

Portable outhouse at trailhead at time the time of this review. Restrooms are not available during the off-peak season. Check
http://www.fs.fed.us/r6/columbia/forest/recreation/trails/trail-guide/trail_catherine.htm for updates.

Saddle/pack animals, cutting of switchbacks, and discharge of firearms are not allowed. No motorized vehicles. No fires except gas stoves.

Length and Elevation:
Variable Miles, Elevation gain and loss Variable

Trail:
There are no officially named trails
There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 45° 42.951 W 121° 21.838. Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map – Loops

History:
A century ago the hills above Catherine Creek were such a bright yellow in the spring with wildflowers that it was nicknamed Sunflower Hill. Decades of sheep and cattle grazing have greatly reduced the number of balsamroot plants. This area was made part of the Columbia Gorge National Scenic Area in 1987. Volunteers and the Forest Service have been working since then to maintain the trails and to restore native flowers to the area.

Review: March 26, 2006
Watch for ticks and Poison Oak on this hike. Pass through the gate and head towards the right, following an old road. Soon the trail drops down and you hear the sounds of Catherine Creek. A pleasant creek comes into view and the sounds of the highways and railroads fade away. Soon, you're walking along the shores of Catherine Creek among a mix of scrubby oaks with a few pine trees mixed in. Admiring the sounds and sights, you come to where the trail crosses Catherine Creek. Volunteers have built a new footbridge to replace the old bridge across the creek, which was washed away by high water. Soon you come to an old corral and just beyond that are the ruins of an old cabin. You can walk down to the creek and view a tiny waterfall.
At the corral, there is a trail that climbs up to the base of the basalt cliffs and leads underneath the rock arch. On the right hand side of the arch is a trail that leads up through the cliff to the top of the

arch. From the top of the arch, you can cross-country to the powerline tower on top of the ridge at 45 43.279N, 121 27.719W, or go back down to the creek into the valley.

Following the creek upstream you are completely away from any sounds from the road. All you hear now are the birds, the creek, and the sound of your own footsteps. Where the road forks, take the road to the right and go uphill underneath the powerlines. Just before the big power tower and utility pole on top of the hill, turn left and follow the ridge uphill.

This tower is what you aim for if you decided to cross-county from the top of the rock arch. After about 1,000 feet, the trail along the ridge becomes more distinct and is easy to follow. Stop and take a look at the gorge with a great view of Hood River, the Columbia River, and the surrounding countryside. Continue on up the trail and in the spring you'll cross over a couple of muddy areas where small springs come to the surface.

About ½ mile after you leave the powerline road, you leave the trees and you are on an open, exposed ridge. If you hike this trail in the summer be sure to bring plenty of water and wear a hat for shade because the trail climbs steadily for the next mile. Wildflowers dot the ground in the ridge. Be sure to wear gaiters in the summer and fall because the foxtail grass will be ripe will burrow into your socks and it takes forever to pick out all the seeds.

Just before the trail reaches a stand of oak trees you can see downed fence poles. If you follow the fence posts up the hill a bit, you'll see a couple of old rusty rolls of barbed wire that were once used to fence off this meadow for cattle. There is another trail junction to the right that skirts a stand of oak trees. Our path continues uphill into the trees.
Between JCT01-45 44.357N, 121 22.874W and JCT02-45 44.423N, 121 23.080W, you'll start passing through an area where the Friends of the Gorge are working to remove the Douglas fir and preserve the open oak trees. Just after JCT02 the trail starts to drop down a bit and you continue through the forest. After JCT03-45 44.467N, 121 23.190W, the trail turns onto a forest road. Following the road and turning to the left at JCT05-45 44.756N, 121 23.484W, the road shows more signs of use. Soon you come to a gate which is in place to protect the scenic area. A sign on the gate says this area is closed to motor vehicles all year long. The gate is at the end of Allen Oaks Road. I think you could park a few cars near the gate.

For a different route on the way back, make a left at the first junction and follow the road down along the creek past a spring coming out of a concrete cistern. After about 1/2 mile it will join back into the main trail at JCT01. This portion of the trail is unmaintained and there is some deadfall to walk around. It is a pleasant walk through the woods and you pass a meadow and a small pond along the way.

You can return to the parking lot the way you came or do some bushwhacking. To go bushwhacking, follow the trail down through the meadows and head for a small stream that runs into Catherine Creek. Route to 45 42.823N, 121 22.487W. From there you should route to the left side of the creek at 45 43.825N, 121 22.789W. Follow the left side of the creek down through the bushes to Catherine Creek and cross a fallen log at 45 43.744N, 121 22.878W. Once you cross the log, look for the animal trace that goes uphill and to the right. Follow that uphill until it begins to enter the trees. Stop and look towards the Columbia River and you should see another animal track going up the hill and to the left. Follow that trace back towards the Columbia. The trace will intersect another trace going to the right. Follow that trace uphill into the woods about 50 feet.

Look uphill and you should see a way to go uphill without much brush. Now leave the trail and head straight uphill until you reach a flat area about 100 feet uphill at 45 43.760N, 121 22.980W. Once you're on top of the first shelf, work your way through a patch of vine maple and you should see an

abandoned road that is to your left. Follow that road to a junction at 45 43.539N, 121 22.851W. From there you can follow the road to the right for about ¼ mile to where the forest changes to the meadows and powerline at 45 43.385N, 121 22.811W. From here you can follow the road downhill to the right, retrace your way past where you joined the road, or traverse the meadow to a path along the top of a cliff at 45 43.056N, 121 22.588W. Following any of these trails downhill will lead to the gate where you started from.

I would advise you to find a secluded place and examine all your clothes for ticks. I took off my pants and found a tick underneath my waistband and I had picked numerous ticks off my pants every time I walked through the brush.

Have a great time on this hike enjoying the scenery and the flowers whether you choose to stay on established paths and hike the two loops, or bushwhack across Catherine Creek.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

P.S. For an extra hike to try and find Indian pits, return to your car, drive half a mile west along the road, and park on the right near the “Road Closed” sign. Walk up the left arm of the road. I was not able to find these on this trip.

Switchback Steve