

Crater Lake Snow Camp, OR

Vicinity Location: The trailhead is 95 miles southeast of Eugene, OR in Crater Lake National Park.

Directions:

From the South (Year Round):

From Medford - Drive 63 miles on Route 62 north and east to the park's west entrance.

From Klamath Falls - Drive 44 miles on Route 97 north to Route 62 north and west to the park's south entrance.

From the North (Winter):

From Roseburg - Drive 113 miles on Route 138 east to Route 230 south to Route 62 east to the park's west entrance.

From Bend - Drive 132 miles on Route 97 south to Route 62 north and west to the park's south entrance.

From the south entrance road, drive about 4 miles on South Entrance Drive and Rim Drive to the parking area west of Crater Lake Lodge. The trailhead is on the west side of the parking lot near the lake.

There are bathrooms near the parking lot.

A National Park entry permit may be required to park at the trailhead, depending on the month.

Operating hours and seasons: [Link](#)

A free wilderness permit is required to camp overnight in the park.

Pets are not allowed on this trail.

Length and Elevation:

5.6 miles round trip Elevation gain 1,300 feet and loss of 1,300 feet. Total gain and loss is 2,600 feet. Elevation at the trailhead is about 7,050 feet. Highest point is 7,874 feet. From camp to The Watchman the gain is 1,100 feet and a loss of 400 feet.

Trail:

Crater Rim Drive.

There are no geocaches along this trail.

Trail Maps:

Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

History:

The Watchman Lookout Station sits 8,025 feet above sea level on Watchman Peak,

which is on the western edge of Crater Lake. The lookout was built in 1932 by the CCC and served the dual purpose of fire lookout and trail museum. The Watchman Lookout actually had flushing toilets from the early 1960's until the late 1970's. The water was pumped over 1,000 vertical feet from Lightning Spring.

Early fire detection and prompt suppression used to be a primary responsibility of the National Park Service. The Watchman Lookout Station was part of the fire detection network for Crater Lake National Park which included a number of National Park Service, United States Forest Service and Bureau of Indian Affairs lookouts. A trained observer, usually a park ranger, manned the lookout and kept in contact with the fire dispatcher at the park headquarters on short-wave radio. During the 1930s, the Civilian Conservation Corps also provided observers. The National Park Service manned the Watchman Lookout Station each fire season until 1974 and it has been manned intermittently afterwards.

Since the lookout was built, there has been a major change in how wildfires are dealt with. Today many fires in National Parks are left to burn unless the fire threatens life and property. The Watchman Lookout preserves the essential elements of 1930's era fire lookout. The 360 degree panoramic view and the use of native materials that blend the structure into the surrounding landscape combine make the Watchman Lookout Station a unique and historically significant structure. The lookout was listed on the National Register of Historic Places in 1988.

Review: April 13th, 2014.

Before beginning this hike, stop at the Steele visitor center and fill out a wilderness permit which contains the names, addresses, and contact information of all the hikers. The visitors center is about 2.5 miles before the crater rim parking lot. It is also required to turn in your copy of the permit when you finish your trip. The park service will search for overdue hikers.

Spring snow depths along the rim can vary from a few inches to tens of feet depending on how the snow had drifted. The hiking trail begins west of the parking area. Be sure to check out the views to the northwest of the parking area along the rim of the crater. These are some of the nicest views of Crater Lake and Wizard Island

Follow the snow-hidden road west as it drops gently down along and behind the rim. On a sunny day there are great views right at the start of the trip. Lloa Rock, a massive rock formation jutting up from the lake for almost 2,000 feet can be seen behind Wizard Island and the named peaks around Crater Lake ramp up into the blue sky.

The number of people soon diminishes after the next viewpoint of the lake. On the way in, we tried to stay close to the rim which means you follow the up and down contours of the rim. Trees grow right up to the edge of the rim but there are plenty of gaps in the tree cover which allow you to gaze at the azure blue of the lake. The wind can really blow at the edge of the rim and be calm just a few steps away. There are some small, steep slopes which can avalanche so be aware of changing conditions. Also be aware there can be cornices at any spot along the rim so exercise extreme care and forethought when approaching the

crater rim for a view. If you can't see a tree between you and the edge, there could be a cornice ahead.

As we snowshoed farther along the rim, we only saw one or two other people. After a couple of miles we didn't see anyone else. The views are wonderful at many spots along the way. We saw Mt. Shasta and Mt. McLaughlin to the south, Mt. Thielsen to the north, and other tall peaks.

We found a place to camp about 400 feet back from the rim with great view to the southeast. Jeremiah and Carissa set up their tent and Johnny set up his tent in the middle of a snow meadow. I made my snow trench near the edge of the meadow. It didn't take me too long to get the roof on the trench so I could sleep out of the wind. Johnny had a backpacking beer kit from Pat's Backcountry Beverages and Jeremiah helped read the instructions. The beer was okay but I think bringing some cans for a short trip would be easier. After the beer brewing, we felt pretty warm in the sun and decided there was time for us to climb The Watchman.

Johnny, Jeremiah, and I put out snowshoes back on and headed along the road towards The Watchman. We mostly stayed off the ski tracks but some places were along the narrow tops of snowdrifts that we had to snowshoe on the ski tracks. Some places had tall drifts and other places the wind had blown most of the snow away and spring weather had melted the snow down to the road.

We passed another viewpoint with unobstructed views of the lake and from there we snowshoed along the road up the south side of The Watchman. We climbed steadily for about .8 mile up to a point where we decided to leave the road and head up the ridge towards the lookout tower.

For about .3 mile we travelled up the ridge on a moderate slope where it was easy to pick our way among the trees. We headed towards the southern facing slope. The trees become sparse and we could see Mt. Shasta and all the nearer peaks too.

The last several hundred feet of the slope is pretty steep but the avalanche danger was very low because there hadn't been any snow for the week. Climbing is slow work at 7,500 feet and I needed a couple of breaks on the way up.

We got to fire lookout but the snow slope facing the lake looked too dangerous to climb. I walked around to the north side and there was an easy snow slope and climb over the railing. From there it was easy to walk to the overlook for fantastic views of the lake and from every side of the lookout.

After taking photos we headed back to camp. It took us about 90 minutes on the trip up and about 60 minutes for the trip back to camp. We got back well before dark but had taken our flashlights as a precaution.

Cooking dinner is always the coldest time of camping but my heavy mittens were really nice to have. I always use my white gas stove in the winter so I melted a lot of snow for dinner and breakfast.

It was getting pretty cold after we finished dinner so it wasn't long before we retired to our tents and shelters. Since I my snow shelter was open to the

weather, I dug a pit, put in my water, and put a lid on top. The full moon made the night bright and I was glad that my snow shelter kept the moon off of my face so I could get a good night's sleep.

The next morning was 20 degrees and everything outside was covered in frost. I checked on my water and there were some ice crystals but it was mostly unfrozen. I walked around on the hard crust and ventured to the rim for the sunrise. To the right I could see some cornices so I was careful not to venture too close to the edge. I walked around taking in the views until the others woke up.

Things warmed up quickly with the shining and a light breeze in camp and in a couple of hours it was close to freezing. Johnny used a few snow blocks from my snow shelter to make a windbreak for his stove. We had our breakfasts and Johnny made French Press coffee.

It was nice to hang around camp in the sun and after a while, we broke camp and headed back. We didn't see anyone else until 11:30 and we were pretty close to the parking lot. I stopped for some photos at the rim then joined the group at the car.

We stopped in at the Steele Visitor Center to turn in our permit, use the toilets, and congratulate ourselves on a great trip. From there, it was back on the road, stopping for pizza in Eugene.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve