Eagle-Benson, OR

Notice: 7/8/2021 – Ruckel Creek Trail (#405) and Ruckel Ridge Trail are closed.

Vicinity Location:
37 miles east of Portland, Oregon in the Columbia River National Scenic Area.

Directions:
From Portland, Oregon, take I-84 east for about 40 miles and take exit #41 for the Eagle Creek Recreation Area. The exit is just after the highway tunnel. Follow the road to the right about 50 feet and park in the parking lot on the left.

From Hood River, Oregon, take I-84 west to exit #41 and return to the freeway eastbound. The exit is just after the tunnel. There is no westbound exit at Eagle Creek.

To return to Portland, follow the signs to merge onto I-84 East. Exit at Cascade Locks, go under the freeway and make a sharp left in about 50 feet. Merge onto I-84 West towards Portland.

Overnight parking is available at the main parking lot, near the campground host.

The bathroom is in a stone building near the trailhead and water is available at the trailhead in the summer months. Only portable toilets near the trailhead are available during the winter at the trailhead for Eagle Creek.

A Northwest Forest Park permit is required to park at the trailhead.

Length and Elevation:
15.2 miles roundtrip. Trailhead elevation: 120 feet. 4500 feet gain, 4,500 feet loss. Highest point 4,100 feet

Ruckel Ridge Trail: 4 miles one-way to Ruckel Creek Trail, 2.3 more miles to Eagle-Benson Trail. Elevation gain is 3,900 feet. and the loss is 300 feet one way. Elevation at Ruckel Creek Trail Junction is 3,725 feet.

Eagle-Benson Trail: 2.8 miles one-way to Eagle Creek Trail. Elevation gain is 60 feet. and the loss is 3,170 feet one way. Elevation at Eagle-Benson Trail Junction is 3,725 feet.

Eagle Creek Trail: 6 miles one-way to the parking lot. Elevation gain is 30 feet. and the loss is about 850 feet one way. Elevation at the lower Eagle/Benson Trail Junction is 1,200 feet.

Trail:
Ruckel Ridge Trail, Benson Way Trail #405B, Pacific Crest Trail #2000, Eagle-Benson Trail #434, Eagle Creek Trail #440 with connections to Ruckel Creek Trail #405, Benson-Ruckel Trail #405A, Benson Spur Trail #405C, Gorge Trail #400.

There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 45° 38.263 W 121° 53.204. Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map

Review: April 13, 2009
From the parking lot near the hatchery, walk up the road about .1 mile towards the campground and look for the Gorge trail #400 on the left side of the road. Follow the trail as it winds towards the freeway and then turns to the east. In a short time you walk along a metal fence. Right at the end of the fence, make a right that goes on a footpath into campsite 11. The footpath is just before Trail #400 goes sharply downhill to a paved path.

Walk uphill past campsite 6 and take a left on the Buck Point Trail #439. The trail switchbacks up the side of Eagle Creek valley and comes to a viewpoint under the powerline. Follow the trail up to a junction about 150 feet away and take a right at the fork. If you take the left fork, there are some good views of the gorge but the trail soon dies out. The right fork of the trail drops down, crosses some moss-covered rocks, then switchbacks up a slope of basalt scree to the base of a rock cliff. The trail goes around the cliff to the left, then climbs steeply up through poison oak to the top of the cliff. Once on top of the cliff, there are fine views of the ships plying the Columbia River and Beacon Rock in the distance.

Climbing up the ridge the trail grade varies between gentle and very steep. There are several viewpoints along the ridge. At one point there is a user trail junction to the left. The side trail goes about 150 feet up to the top of the ridge with views to the east of the Bridge of the Gods and White Salmon.

At waypoint JC1, N45° 38.085', W121° 53.048', you can drop down and go around the narrowest and steepest part of the Ruckel Ridge Trail. Look down to the right and you can see where the trail drops steeply down then skirts the ridge. If you choose to climb over this portion of the ridge, you will have to turn around and use your hands on the rocks.

From here, the trail continues to climb up the ridge. There are several places where the trail drops down and you may think you are near the top, but then the trail climbs again. At about the 3,000 foot level is a small clearing on top of some rocks which gives a good viewpoint of Bonneville Dam. After this viewpoint the trail climbs very steeply up the rocky ridge for a while.

The trail enters into the Mark Hatfield Wilderness just as it begins to level out and turns to the left slightly. The trail is a bit indistinct on the top, but it generally heads off to the east and downhill a bit, heading towards Ruckel Creek. In 2008, there were one-way orange blazes about head-high marking the trail. In the winter these blazes would probably be covered with snow and not of much use in marking the trail. There are a few deadfalls to negotiate but in about 5 minutes you should be able to hear Ruckel Creek. The trail drops down, crosses the creek, then climbs gently and curves to the left to join Ruckel Creek Trail in about .2 mile.

In the winter and early spring, bear at 135 degrees true north across the snow to near Smokey Springs Camp. From there, head downhill northwest, cross-slope and you will encounter the ridge that the Eagle/Benson trail follows.

The trail is fairly easy to follow but there is some deadfall to negotiate. The trail goes along the ridge and has great views of the Gorge and the mountains in Washington. As the trail descends, it passes through an area burned in 1994 and there are good views of Mt. Hood when the weather is clear. Once in the forest, the trail switchbacks fairly steeply down the ridge to the top of basalt cliffs. There is an especially nice view of Wy'East Falls flowing over the precipice.

The trail drops into the hanging valley above Wy'East Falls and crosses the Wy'East Creek. The best crossing is using the rocks and small logs in the stream. Using large mossy logs to cross streams can lead to nasty surprises when the moss slips off the trunk as you step on it. As always, treat wet rocks

as moss-slick rocks.

Once across the stream, the trail switchbacks down the steep hillside to the Eagle Creek Trail. From here it is an easy walk over 4 ½ mile bridge and back across at High Bridge. Look downstream at High Bridge for Loowit Falls on the west side of Eagle Creek.

The trail continues, along the basalt cliffs to an overlook of Punchbowl Falls where you can take a breather and enjoy the view. If there is time, there is a side trail that leads down to Eagle Creek and another view of Punchbowl Falls.

Back on the trail, it is a gentle downhill walk back to the parking lot. Be careful when passing people along the cliffs. Several people have fallen off the trail in the area with cable handrails. Some people and dogs have died from the fall.

This is a long hike with plenty of elevation gain and some spectacular views. It is not recommended for children or dogs. If you want to bring your dog, hike up Ruckel Creek instead of Ruckel Ridge.

Enjoy the photos!!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve