Elk Mountain – Kings Mountain Loop, OR

Vicinity Location: About
40 miles west of Portland, OR.

Directions: From Portland, take Highway 26 west for about 20 miles. Take the left exit for Hwy 6 towards Banks, Tillamook, and Forest Grove. This road is also known as the Wilson River Highway.

For the Elk Mountain trailhead:
Continue on Highway 6 for 23.5 miles from the junction Hwy 26 and Hwy 6 and make a right just after milepost 28 and drive on a dirt road about .3 mile and pull into the first or second parking lot at Elk Creek Campground.

For the King's Mountain trailhead: Continue on Highway 6 for 26.5 miles from the junction Hwy 26 and Hwy 6 to about milepost 25 and make a right into the parking lot for King's Mountain Trail.

No permits are required.

There is an outhouse at both Elk Mountain and Kings Mountain trailheads.

Trail:
Elk Mountain Trail, King's Mountain Trail, and Wilson River Trail.

There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 45° 36.653 W 123° 31.040 Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, State of Oregon Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Length and Elevation:
11 miles round trip. Elevation gain of 3,471 feet and loss of 1,400 feet to the summit of King's Mountain. Elevation gain of 4,100 feet and loss of 4,100 feet roundtrip. Elevation at the trailhead is 1,000 feet, highest point is at 3,226 feet. Lowest elevation is 830 feet.

Review: June 5, 2011.
Walk along the trail on an steady uphill grade for the first .1 mile to a junction in a small saddle. Look for the trail to the right that heads fairly steeply uphill. If you pass the saddle and start descending, you have missed the junction. There are some viewpoints just within the first mile as the trail climbs and climbs with short sections where the trail loses elevation. The trail becomes rougher and rockier underfoot. About 1.5 miles from the trailhead the trail passes through a nice open forest There are lovely patches of violets and trillium on the trail in the spring.

After 1.7 miles the trail drops down off the summit of Elk Mountain then starts climbing again. About 3 miles from the trailhead is a little ridge the trail traverses. About this time you may be wondering if you're lost but a little farther is the trail junction for the loop back to Elk Creek Campground. You'll know when you get to this trail junction; you can't miss it. Turn left at the junction to continue to King's Mountain.

The hike comes out to a nice viewpoint. From here the trail drops down on the left and goes underneath the viewpoint to pass beneath the base of the cliffs with the trail rapidly going up and down 50 to 100 feet at a time. Finally you reach a series of several switchbacks leading to a ridge just below King's Mountain. From the ridge the trail drops down, crosses a small saddle and passes through sloping meadows and trees to the summit of King's Mountain.

The top of King's Mountain has spectacular views of the surrounding peaks and valleys. From the mostly forested summit the trail drops fairly steeply for about a mile and enters a relatively flat area. This is a beautiful forest with and emerald carpet of Sour Apple and other wildflowers. Off to the right you can hear a creek flowing down to the Wilson
River.

Near the highway is a 4-way trail junction. Turn left onto the Wilson River Trail and walk through the low elevation forest. Because of the plentiful fall and winter rains, moss adorns the older trees and the leaves of Vine Maple provide a colorful attraction in spring and fall. If you need a restroom, walk out to the Kings Mountain Trailhead which is about .2 mile from the junction.

The trail gently gains elevation which makes the trail popular for mountain bikes. The trail comes into a large meadow. Driving down the highway, you would never know there is a large meadow like this in the valley because of the steep mountainsides and nearby river. The alders growing around the edges make a pleasant setting for the meadow and the trail skirts the meadow's edge. The meadow drains at the east end and the trail crosses a log over the outlet stream. It is interesting how the stream is wearing away the dirt and makes a small waterfall, like a micro-Niagara.

The trail steadily gains elevation then drops down a bit and crosses on a single log bridge over a Dog Creek. From the creek, the trail switchbacks fairly steeply up the hillside back to the saddle at the first trail junction. From here drop back down the steady grade back to the trailhead.

This is a hard hike with steep ascents and descents. Don't take small children on this loop hike. This loop hike is definitely not for dogs. Consider other hikes in rainy weather because this trail has steep sections and sections where the tread slopes steeply to the side and is quite slippery when wet.

Enjoy the photos!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve