Hamilton Mountain, WA



Vicinity Location:
About 32.5 miles northeast of Portland, OR on the north shore of the Columbia River in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

Directions:
From Portland, OR, take I-205 North past the Portland Airport. Cross over the Columbia River, stay in the right lane and take exit 27 onto Hwy 14 east, towards Camas. Follow Hwy 14 to Beacon Rock State Park at Milepost 35.

From Seattle, WA, take I-5 south past Woodland and Richfield and make a right exit onto I-205. Follow I-205 south and take the exit 27 for Hwy 14 to Camas/Washougal. Follow Hwy 14 east for about 35 miles.

At the park, turn left off Hwy 14 and follow the road uphill for about .3 miles. Park in the paved parking lot on the right.

A State of Washington Discover Pass is required for parking. It is difficult finding parking on weekends.

Flush toilets are at the trailhead.

Note: The road is gated during the week in the winter season. The park is open weekends from 8am to dusk. There should be a portable toilet available when the campground is closed for the winter. Flush toilets are available year-round at Beacon Rock.

Length and Elevation:
8 Mile loop. Elevation gain and loss is 5,000 feet total. Elevation at the trailhead is 500 feet and is the low point. The high point is 2,488 feet.

Trail:
Hamilton Mountain Trail, Don’s Cutoff Trail, Hardy Creek Trail, Hadley Trail, Little Beacon Rock Trail

There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 45° 38.044 W 122° 01.338 Info at Geocaching.com

Dogs must be kept on a 6-foot or shorter leash. Bicycles and saddle/pack animals are only allowed on the equestrian trails.

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

History:

Beacon Rock is the core of an ancient volcano that has been exposed from the Missoula floods. The ice-age floods scoured the volcano away and left this 848 foot tall andesite plug.

Beacon Rock was named by Lewis and Clark on October 31, 1805. It was near Beacon Rock that Lewis and Clark first measured tidal influences on the Columbia River from the Pacific Ocean.

In 1811, Alexander Ross of the John Jacob Astor expedition called the rock Inoshoack Castle. The rock became known as Castle Rock until 1916, when the United States Board of Geographic Names restored the name back to Beacon Rock.
In the early 1900s, the Army Corps of Engineers planned to destroy Beacon Rock with dynamite. Railroad officials opposed the idea because they didn't want the blasting to drop boulders onto the train tracks. Their opposition was enough to get the demolition stopped. Another idea was to use Beacon Rock as a rock quarry.

In the late 1910s, Henry J. Biddle purchased Hamilton Mountain, Biddle Butte, and Beacon Rock to preserve it. The trail to the top of Beacon Rock was completed in 1918. Biddle died in 1928 and in 1932 his heirs turned over Beacon Rock and Hamilton Mountain to the state for use as a park.

Review: June 4, 2006, June 6, 2008, October 3, 2010
The first mile of the trail is wide and very well maintained. Just after crossing under the power lines there is a trail junction going on a gravel trail back to the upper parking lot. You will take this trail on your return leg of the hike.

At a mile, there are two junctions off to the right within about 20 feet of one another. The second junction has a sign for Hardy Falls viewpoint. Both of these trails connect to a sketchy trail that leads to a viewpoint of Rodney falls, and then further down a viewing platform that looks over the creek and some other small waterfalls. The sounds of white water cascading down the boulders, fills the air at the viewing platform.

Back on the trail you soon come to another junction. Take the short side trail to the left to the upper falls and the Pool of the Winds. Here the water surges through a narrow cleft and mist blows out of the opening when the creek is raging. Back at the junction, the trail drops down and crosses Hardy Creek on a log bridge with railings. The sound of the water at the bridge is wonderful to listen to. The spring snowmelt sends cascades of water rushing down the rocks. The trail climbs some stairs up out of the valley of Hardy creek. The main trail goes straight and shortly comes to a nice viewpoint of Beacon Rock and the Columbia River. From here, the trail gets steeper as it climbs towards the summit of Hamilton Mountain.

At 1.6 miles you come to the junction for the Hardy Creek Trail. which is part of your return route. Stay on the Hamilton mountain trail which is the trail on the right and continue on the Hamilton Mountain trail. This part of the trail is in the forest and the understory consists mostly of Oregon Grape, alders, and ferns. Like most trails in the gorge, area in the open and exposed to the sun, have poison oak. Be sure you know what it looks like to avoid getting the sap on you, your clothes, your equipment, or you pets. The sap can come off items that contact the poison oak and get on your skin.

At just under 2 miles you come to some eroded switchbacks. One switchback leads out to a point where the trail dead ends buy the trail is actually back behind you. Look for Wood steps leading up the trail.

At about 2.25 miles is a side-trail leading steeply uphill and to the right. This goes to a wonderful viewpoint of the gorge. Don't trip here or you'll roll over the edge.

Back on the main trail continue on switchbacks up the side of the mountain. There are incredible

sweeping views of the gorge to the west and to the south. Another side trail leads out to an overlook where you can enjoy the views, if it isn't too windy.

This part of the trail is open and the slopes are speckled with wildflowers in the spring. When you reach the summit of Hamilton Mountain, the side trails leading towards the gorge go steeply downhill and peter out without providing any views. These trails aren't worth exploring. Instead, take the trail to the left which drops down, leads to other viewpoints, and goes along "The Saddle" to a junction of old Forest Service roads.

Take a left at the junction at the old Forest Service Road and follow the road down to the first switchback and take the trail marked Foot Traffic Only. This trail is "Don's cutoff trail" and will lead back to a Forest Service road along Hardy Creek. At the bottom of Don's cut off trail turn left to follow the road downstream along Hardy Creek. There is a bathroom about 700 feet below the lower Junction to Don's cutoff Trail which is a little past the 5 mile mark. The road continues steadily downhill to a small picnic area and the Hardy Creek trail. The trail enters the forest at the left edge of the picnic area. If you cross Hardy Creek, you are going the wrong way.

The trail gently gains elevation above Hardy Creek. After about ½ mile the trail starts descending again down to the Hamilton Mountain trail junction. Turn right at the junction and follow the main trail back across Hardy Creek and perhaps take a last look at the Pool of the Winds.

After about a mile is a junction going uphill. Turn right here and walk along past a bench and into the woods. Soon the trail passes a plaque. Be sure to check out the stump the plaque is mounted on.

Turn left shortly after the plaque and take the .2 mile Little Beacon Rock Trail to Little Beacon Rock and a spectacular view of Beacon Rock framed by fir trees. At the end of the little Beacon rock Trail is a short scramble that goes up to a viewpoint on the right. Return back to the junction, turn left, and continue on the Hadley Trail downhill through the campground and return to the parking lot.

This hike is relatively safe for youngsters as long as they stay on the main trail. Be aware there are tall cliffs just off the trail.

Enjoy the photos!!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve