Johnston Ridge – Coldwater Peak, WA



Notice: 6/1/2023 – This trail is closed due to a landslide and road washout on SR504 – Spirit Lake Memorial Highway remains *closed* to all travelers at milepost 43 near the Science and Learning Center.

Vicinity Location:
The trailhead is about 57 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon in the Mt. St. Helens National Monument.

Directions:
From Portland take I-5 North to exit 49 for Castle Rock. Turn right towards Mt. St. Helens and drive about 52 miles on Highway 504 to the Johnston Ridge Observatory.

There are restrooms at the trailhead.

When you park in the Johnston Ridge Observatory Center Parking lot or the Loowit viewpoint on Johnston Ridge then the Northwest Forest pass does not work. You need to go into the observatory and pay the fee for a wrist band that is required to be on foot in the area or the trails accessed from the Observatory. Passes are $8 per day or free with the America the Beautiful pass.

No dogs are allowed in large portions of the monument, including this trail.

Length and Elevation:
13.3 miles roundtrip. Total gain is 3,500 feet and total loss is 3,500 feet. Trailhead elevation is 4,160 feet. Coldwater Peak elevation is 5,727 feet.

Trail:
Boundary Trail #1, Coldwater Peak Trail #1E with connections to Eruption Trail, Truman Trail #207, Harry's Ridge Trail #208, Coldwater Peak Trail #230.

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Trail Races:
Early September – Backcountry Rise 50K – Daybreak Racing

Review: August 27th, 2015
Start from the northeast corner of the large parking lot and take the trail through a bunch of alders to reach a junction just below the Visitor's Center, take the Boundary Trail #1 and enter the Mt. Margaret Backcountry. The paved trail soon ends and you start down a dusty trail with fantastic views into the crater and across the valley. The first part of this trail is crowded on weekends but weekdays are reasonable. The trail goes gently downhill on the top of a steep slope. Later in the season you will see Penstemon, Goldenrod, Pearly Everlasting, and Lupines blooming along the trail.

The trail makes a curve to the left after about 1.6 miles and heads towards Mt. St. Helens. This next .3 mile of the trail is cut out of the steep mountainside. This area is called Devil's Elbow and there is not a bypass. If you go this way be extra careful with children and less experienced hikers. A fall here could be fatal.

Soon the trail turns left to a much gentler slope and nice views of the valley and into the crater. The next junction appears after walking about 2.5 miles from the trailhead. It is for the Truman Trail #207, which goes downhill. Continue straight ahead on Boundary Trail #1, and begin climbing uphill towards the Coldwater Trail. The view of Mt. St. Helens from here is fantastic. There are alders and a few other trees starting to grow in the blast zone, but for the most part there are unobstructed views of the multi-hued hillsides, Spirit Lake, Mt. Adams, and into the crater.

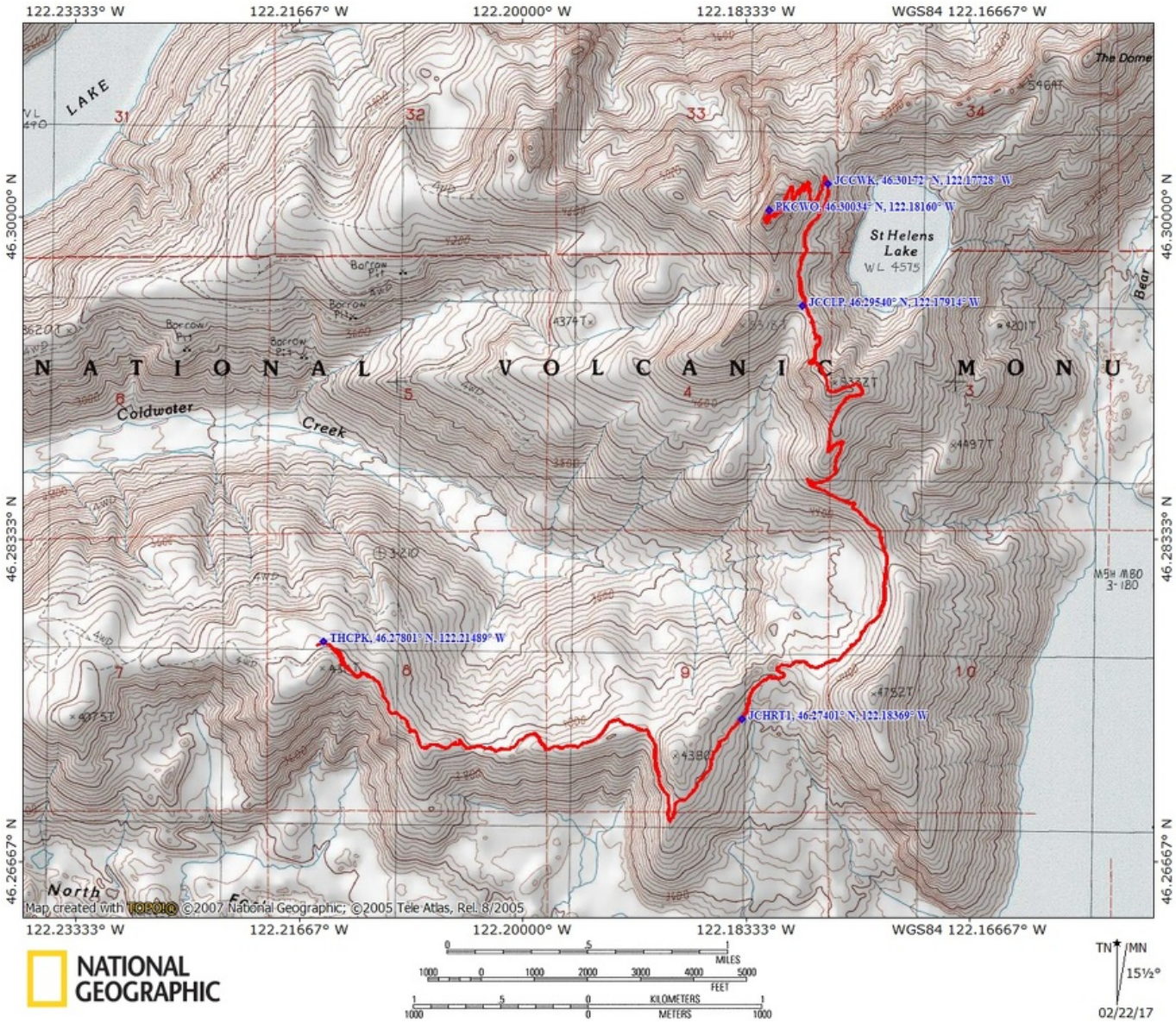
Climb uphill fairly steeply along Harry's Ridge, seeing the old monitoring station on top, to the junction for Harry's Ridge Trail. I skipped this side trail to have time for Coldwater Peak. Just before the junction, you pass about 1,000 feet above the tunnel dug to keep Spirit Lake at its current lake level though there is no sign of a tunnel beneath you.

After the junction for Harry's Ridge, start ascending a very steep hillside on several switchbacks. From there, continue up, up, up, over the rim of a hill. You see a small lake on the right, and just when you think all is well, the trail suddenly drops steeply down of the other side of the hill, then climbs a bit to go through a window in the rock. You can ponder how much effort was spent to route the trail through this feature. This short section of trail is a bit precarious as it skirts giant boulders with Lake St. Helens far below.

Mt. Rainier appears behind the lake and views of the blast zone become more dramatic as you continue to climb along the jagged rocks. At the next saddle is the junction for Coldwater Lake. Keep to the the right for Coldwater Trail #230, South Coldwater Trail #230A, and Lakes Trail #211. The unsigned trail to the left is the wrong way. Skirt above St. Helens Lake for about .3 mile then the trail drops down, levels out, and comes to the junction for Coldwater Peak.
Take the obvious trail on the left and climb up the mountain slopes. The .75 mile long trail climbs up along a few switchbacks and an exciting little section where you pass beneath tall cliffs. In the fall the leaves on the bushes turn bright red and yellow as frosts come early to the high country. The views from Coldwater Peak the view include four lakes, four mountains and a bird's eye view of the land as it slowly recovers after the 1980 blast.

Once you've wandered around the spine at the top of the peak, head down, taking the trail to Harry's Ridge if you have the time and energy to get there.

Enjoy the photos!!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve


122.23333° W
122.21667° W
122.20000° W
122.18333° W
WGS84 122.16667° W
46.30000° N
46.28333° N
46.26667° N
LAKE
The Dome
JCCWK, 46.30172° N, 122.17728° W
RKCWO, 46.30034° N, 122.18160° W
St Helens Lake
WL 4575
JCCLP, 46.29540° N, 122.17914° W
Bear
Borrow Pit
Coldwater Creek
NATIONAL VOLCANIC MONU
THCPK, 46.27801° N, 122.21489° W
JCHRT1, 46.27401° N, 122.18369° W
North
Map created with TOPO! ©2007 National Geographic; ©2005 Tele Atlas, Rel. 8/2005
MILES
FEET
KILOMETERS
METERS
TN
MN
15½°
02/22/17