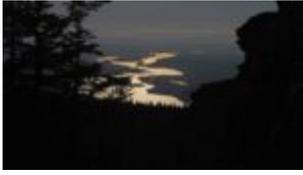


Larch - Bell - Loop, OR



Note: Larch Mountain Road up to the Larch Mountain day use area and trailhead at MP 14.5 typically closes at mile 10 sometime in November and reopens sometime in May. Check the Multnomah County website to near those dates to find the current status of Larch Mountain Road.

Vicinity Location:

About 20 miles east of Portland, OR in the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area.

Directions:

Drive east on I-84 from Portland and take exit 22, At the stop sign, turn right and drive for 1.3 miles on NE Corbett Hill Road. Turn left at the 3-way junction onto Hwy 30 East, the Historic Columbia River Hwy. Drive 1.9 miles and make a slight right onto E Larch Mountain Road then drive about 14 miles to the parking lot.

The road up to Larch Mountain typically closes at mile 10 sometime in November and reopens sometime in May. Check the Multnomah County website to near those dates to find the current status of Larch Mountain Road.

There is a bathroom at the trailhead.

A Northwest Forest permit or America the Beautiful is required to park here.

Fill out a Wilderness permit at the box at mile two.

Length and Elevation:

14 miles round trip. Elevation at the trailhead is 3,883 feet, elevation gain of 3,900 feet and loss of 3,900 feet. Highest point is 4,055 feet.

Trails:

Larch Mountain Trail #441, Multnomah Creek Way Trail #444, Multnomah Spur Trail #446, Oneonta Trail #444, Horsetail Creek Trail #425, Bell Creek Trail #459 with connections to various trails.

Trail Maps:

Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file, Open Garmin .gpx file

Review: June 30, 2024.

From the parking lot walk towards the bathrooms on the left side of the parking lot and go past them to the start of this trail. Enter into second growth forest with a mostly level first section of the trail. There is sparse sparse undergrowth of bear grass and huckleberries. Most of the second growth trees here appear to be hemlock. You can see a few stumps from when the area was logged, which appears to be 60 to 70 years ago.

After walking for less than a quarter mile, you come to a trail junction that leads back up to Sharrad Point. Walk past this junction and then gradually start from Larch Mountain.

There will probably be a few logs across the trail and there could be plenty more logs to cross on this hike.

After descending for 1.5 miles you come to a complicated looking junction. This actually is just where a Forest Road crosses the trail. Just on the other side of the forest road turn right and continue down the Larch Mountain Trail #441.

After 2 miles you come to the Mark O Hatfield wilderness and another trail junction. Turn right at this junction with Multnomah Creek Way Trail #444 .

At 2.2 miles you cross a small stream then turn left to take the Multnomah Spur Trail #446.

Continue through a lovely forest of mixed old growth and second growth trees. At 2.8 miles you come to a creek crossing with stepping stones available to hop across on. The trail past here is a bit weathered so expect plenty of roots, rocks, and puddles along the way.

At 3 miles you come to the junction for the Oneonta Trail where you turn left and continue downhill under the tall forest canopy.

The trail comes out into another burned area where you switchback down the Oneonta Creek Valley. After 6 miles come to the junction for Horsetail Creek Trail, where you take a right and cross over on Creek. There is a nice campsite here near the junction. This is the end of your descent and from here you start climbing.

As of this review, the Forest Service has not taken down the Trail closed sign for Horsetail Creek. You can walk past it because on the website the trail is officially open.

Early to midyear there is a somewhat harrowing crossing on Oneonta Creek because the water flows swiftly over large rounded boulders. If you pick the right spot to ford the creek it is less than knee deep.

From the creek, it is a steep climb passing through a very wet and lush with green undergrowth hillside until you come to somewhat rockier and drier trail.

Climb beside Horsetail Creek up the steep trail and many switchbacks. Eventually, you'll reach the top of the plateau and the trail levels out for a bit. You will also be in the burn area for most of the switchbacks so there were always be fallen logs across the trail to contend with no matter how often the saw crews clear them out.

On the plateau, you begin to leave the burn behind and get back into green forest. Soon you reach the junction of the Horsetail Creek Trail and Belle Creek Trail. Horsetail Creek Trail is closed beyond this point and has not been maintained in several years.

Turn right onto the Bell Creek Trail, walk on a seldom used path into a lovely second growth forest. Here the understory has a lot of the shorter Oregon grape and huckleberries. The forest is dense enough that the undergrowth is limited. The forest floor also has a carpet of moss through here because the canopy and thick layer of organic matter helps to keep the soil from drying out quickly.

Right at 9 miles you pass through a small clearing of the basalt boulders and then you re-enter the forest. This is where the huge old growth trees begin. Look all around and you will see some really big trees.

The trail starts climbing and a little after 10 miles you come into the burn section of Belle Creek

Trail. This burn section only lasts a quarter mile or so and gives you views down to the Columbia River through the skeleton forest.

Just out of the burn area, you cross a nice little stream which tumbles down the hillside. Leave the large old growth trees, and walk through an older second growth trees that appear to be 70 to 80 years old.

The remainder of the Bell Creek Trail goes through a very moist area. There are a lot of little mud holes, seeps, and streams along this final section of Bell Creek Trail.

After about 11 miles you come to the junction of Oneonta Trail #424 and the Bell Creek Trail #459. From here it's a fairly steep climb to where the trail ends at the road. This section of trail is along the northern boundary of the Bull Run Watershed and is closed to the public. You may see no trespassing signs on the left side of the trail,

The trail ends at the paved road to Larch Mountain where you turn right and walk about 0.25 mile up to the parking lot.

For this review, the short hike to Sherrad Point is at the end because the weather was better in the afternoon. Take this short hike at the beginning or end of this trip, depending on the weather.

The hike up to Sherrad Point is paved with decaying railroad ties for steps. This leads to a final set of concrete stairs to a fenced viewing platform with plaques set in stone at the bottom of the fence naming the 5 mountain peaks that can be seen on a clear day. You'll probably avoid the crowds because you'll be at the viewing platform either early or late in the day.

This hike is not recommended for young children or dogs because Oneonta Creek is a swift flowing mountain stream plunging over boulders and fording the stream involves stepping around slippery boulders. Rock hopping may be possible but the smooth, rounded boulders looked slippery.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve

