Mountaineer Trail, OR

Vicinity Location: 26 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon in the Mt. Hood National Forest.

Directions:
From Portland take I-84 East to the Wood Village, exit (16A). Head south and turn left onto NE Burnside Rd. Heading East, Burnside will merge into Highway 26. Follow Hwy 26 to Government Camp. Turn left onto the road to Timberline Lodge.

In winter, it is required to carry chains or have traction devices. The road to Timberline requires chains during much of the winter.

A wilderness permit is required. The free self-registration for a wilderness permit is at the Wy'East Day Lodge on the lower level.

Bathrooms are available at the Wy'East Day Lodge or at Timberline Lodge.

Permits are required to park here seasonally. No parking permit is needed during the summer. A Sno-Park permit is required to park in the winter (Nov. 1st -thru- Apr. 30th)

Length and Elevation:
4 miles roundtrip, Elevation gain and loss totals 6,000 Feet

Trail:
Mountaineer Trail #798, with connections to the Timberline Trail #600, and overlapping with the Pacific Crest Trail #2000

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Safety Advice:
This review is not meant for climbing Mt. Hood. It is meant for day-hiking in good weather to the top of the Palmer chair lift at 8,500' and up to 9,600'. White out conditions can rapidly create zero visibility from blowing snow or surface level clouds and snow can occur any day of the year. Complete disorientation can follow and it is easy to walk the wrong way, or over a dropoff. Be sure to have a working compass. The compass bearing back to Timberline Lodge from Illumination Rock is about 183 degrees from true north, 166 degrees from magnetic north. From the saddle at N45°21.945′ W121°42.051′ it is 193 degrees true north, 175 degrees magnetic north. Know the weather forecast for the day before you leave and look to the south, west, and north to check for incoming weather every 15 minutes or so.

Logistics:
Mt. Hood is a technical climb. There are no trails leading to the summit. Only climbers in good physical condition who have received technical training and with complete mountaineering gear should attempt this climb. Summer rockfall and avalanches greatly increase above 9,600'. If you later decide to climb Mt. Hood, it is best climbed between May and July. This avoids avalanche dangers early in the season and rockfall and the bergschrund in the summer and fall.

Review: October 24th, 2009
At 11,239 ft (3426 m) high, Mt Hood is the highest mountain in Oregon and it is the 4th highest volcano in the Cascade mountain range. It's visibility and beauty make make Mt. Hood a very

popular destination. This can lead to traffic jams on the Highway 26. When the ski resorts are at their peak, traffic back to Portland on Highway 26 can come to a near standstill between 4 and 5 pm. A vehicle crash can shutdown the highway at any time.

On a clear day you will enjoy the views of Mt. Hood towering above you and of Mt. Jefferson, to the south. Remember to keep an eye on the weather while enjoying the views, and descend if you see clouds rolling in.

Further up the mountain you will want to head north to get a good view of Illumination Rock, a jutting spire of rock. You can walk to the saddle of illumination rock for great views to the north. From there, walk south to another saddle at just under 9,600' in elevation. Take a break and enjoy the view of the Steel Cliffs directly east of the saddle. You will certainly see climbers going up or coming down from the summit. In the summer and fall, skiers are on the slopes of the Palmer Icefield until about 1 in the afternoon.

Walk up to Timberline Lodge and make a left, walking past the front of the lodge on the paved road. The road quickly turns into gravel just before Magic Mile chairlift. Continue walking along this road, and pass under a second chairlift. Soon you will come to the junction for the Mountaineer Trail #798 where you take a right, uphill.

About .1 mile after the trailhead, there is a switchback to the right and the trail continues uphill. Turn left at the junction with the Timberline Trail, waypoint JCTTR. After about .5 mile, you reach the junction for the Mountaineer Trail, #798. It is a smaller trail than the Timberline Trail. It isn't as popular as other trails because it goes straight up the mountainside.

Follow this narrow, sandy trail along a small gully to the right. The trees struggle to survive the harsh conditions get smaller and smaller as you continue to climb up the trail. As the trail continues to climb straight up the mountainside, it follows along the right side of a gully. The trail turns into the posted ski area just below the top of the Magic Mile Chairlift. The view here are just spectacular and the early fall snow is especially beautiful.

The trail becomes fainter as you approach the elevation of the chairlift building. Just stay be the gully on your left and follow the trail on uphill, passing the Magic Mile chairlift. Once you reach the top of the chairlift, you can turn around by walking right to the Silcox Hut, or continue upward for even more spectacular view of Mt. Hood.

The trail becomes fainter as you climb higher and finally goes off to the right and joins another climbing trail, which in turn, soon joins yet another climbing trail. Continue climbing, enjoying the increasingly panoramic views as you walk along the Palmer Chairlift. Below you, the Silcox Hut appear. The Silcox Hut was built for climbers of Mt. Hood but now it can be rented out for parties.

Looking out over the valley, you can see the White River, off to the left of the parking lot, Highway 26, and Timberline Lodge is directly below. On the left, you can see into the dry plateaus of Central Oregon.

Work your way down along the left side, or the east side, of the Palmer Chairlift. The Snowcat track is probably the easiest route to follow to descend. Once you get to the Silcox Hut, about 500 feet to the left, or south, of the top of the Magic Mile Chairlift. Walk over to the Silcox Hut and take a look at the craftsmanship that went into the construction of the hut, finished in 1939.

About 50 feet past the Silcox Hut is an old road that leads down to Timberline Lodge. After following the road for about .25 mile, there is a small trail junction off to the right that leads down to the Pacific Crest Trail. The trail soon passes several large clumps of creeping Juniper. You can see how

slowly these plants grow in alpine environments. These short little plants hug the ground for warmth because the cool summers pass so quickly. The trail comes to a junction at Waypoint 035, and continues downhill past a large concrete water tank.

Cross the Timberline Trail/PCT and you are less than .25 mile from Timberline Lodge. You can continue straight ahead, or follow any path towards Timberline Lodge. You've reached the end of your journey, but maybe not the adventure.

Spend a few minutes, or maybe longer, and wander through Timberline Lodge and see all the carvings and other hand-crafted items.

To return to your car, take the trail to the left, just as you come to Timberline Lodge. It goes around a small hill and descends via steps to the parking lot at the east end of the Wy'east lodge.

Enjoy the photos!!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve