Multnomah Falls – Horsetail Falls, OR

Notice: 1/5/2022: During the spring, summer, and fall months a reservation system will be in effect. Search Recreation.gov for tickets. The parking lot at Multnomah Falls has a new to limit access to the eastbound parking lot. The lot will automatically close when the parking lot is full. This can happen as early as 9:30 am on weekends. A shuttle may be available during summer.

The shuttle leaves Gateway Transit Center and stops at Rooster Rock State Park then Multnomah Falls. The cost this year is $5 per round trip – Link.

During icy periods the trail may be gated just past the Multnomah Falls Lodge.

Vicinity Location:
27 miles east of Portland in the Columbia River Scenic Area.

Directions:
Make sure you won't be leaving anything in your car that would lead to a break-in. We saw shattered automotive glass in the parking lot.

From Portland, OR, take I-84 East to past Troutdale to exit 31, Multnomah Falls. Please note this is a left-lane exit from I-84.

If you arrive early in the day then you could also exit I-84 at exit 28 or exit 35. Be aware parking fills up fast at the parking areas for Multnomah Falls.

Follow the masses of people to the lodge and have a look around. It is obvious the trail starts to the East of the lodge.

No parking permits are needed.

Flush toilets are available at the trailhead.

Length and Elevation:
7.5 miles, Elevation gain about 500 feet and elevation loss is about 500 feet.

Trail:
Larch Mountain Trail #441, Columbia Gorge Trail #400, Oneonta Trail #424, and Horsetail Falls Trail #438.

There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 45° 35.418 W 122° 04.469 Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, National Forest Service map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Review: November 14, 2010
Multnomah Falls cascades hundreds of feet down a sheer cliff into a plunge pool, then over another waterfall into Multnomah Creek. Walk underneath the freeway and railroad track. Walk to the left of the lodge and mix with the crowds enjoying view. At the overlook of the lower falls turn right, walk up the trail, and cross over the pedestrian arch bridge crossing Multnomah Creek between the upper and lower falls. Mist from the falls frequently reaches the bridge and can be drenching at

times.

Continue up the trail about .1 mile and turn left at the junction with Trail 400. Follow this trail .9 mile past a rocky slope which provides some views of the Gorge, to where the trail drops down to the road. Walk across the small parking lot and rejoin the trail. Look up to see a high cliff and a trickle of a waterfall coming off the cliff in the rainy season. Continue east, climbing up above the highway to the Onenonta Trail in .9 mile.

Take the junction to the right and walk .7 mile going first uphill, then down to the junction for trail #424. Turn left here and head downhill walking down a couple of switchbacks to the bridge crossing Oneonta Creek.

Just upstream from the creek is a picturesque little waterfall. Looking downstream from the bridge you can see into the Oneonta Gorge, which is a narrow slot canyon leading out to the Columbia River Gorge. After crossing the creek the trail climbs fairly steeply up several switchbacks, then drops down and goes into the small box canyon for Horsetail Creek and then behind Ponytail Falls. The waterfall shoots out over the cliff into a large plunge pool. This waterfall is one of the few in the Gorge where the trail goes on a wide shelf behind the waterfall.

From the falls, the trail climbs a bit then descends down to the trailhead for Horsetail Falls, Trail #438. Enjoy the third waterfall on this hike right along the road. There is a trail leading down to the edge of the plunge pool and in the summer people wade in the pool. Walk back up to the road and head west past Horsetail Falls. After .2 mile walking along the narrow shoulder of the road you will come to a small portion of the old Columbia River Highway.

This short section of road is for pedestrians and bicycles only. The path goes underneath a cliff that overhangs the road a bit, passes through the restored Oneonta Tunnel, then crosses Oneonta Creek. The tunnel was restored a few years ago with beautiful timbers. You can still smell the cedar from the timbers that line the tunnel. Walk about .2 mile past the tunnel. There is just about 200 feet where you have to walk along the road. At the next parking area, which is on the right, take the Oneontra Trail #424 on your left, up to the junction for Trail 400. Turn right at the junction and retrace your steps back to the parking lot at Multnomah Falls.

This is a great winter trail due to the low elevation though it is quite noisy due to the proximity of the freeway. Caution with children and pets needs to be taken when walking along the narrow shoulder of the Columbia River Scenic Highway. Do not stray from the trail because of the sheer cliffs and steep slopes in the area.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve