Opal Creek Trail, OR

Notice: 8/15/2021 – This trail is closed due to the Beachie Creek Fire in 2020. USFS Closure Map Link.

Directions:
From Portland, OR, take I-5 south. Exit I-5 at exit 253 and take Highway 22 east, towards Stayton. Drive east for about 23 miles and turn left at the Swiss Village Restaurant. Drive 21 miles on paved roads North Fork Road SE and Road 2209. After 21 miles of pavement the road turns to gravel. After 1.5 miles, stay on Forest Service Road #2209 by taking the left fork in the road at the junction with Forest Service Road 2207. Continue another 4 miles to the parking area at the gate. Travel time is about 1 hour from Salem.

A Northwest Forest Pass is required at this location.

Outhouses are available at the trailhead.

Length and Elevation:
Short loop – 7 Miles, Total trail one way – 5 Miles. Elevation gain 360 Feet and loss 0 feet for the short loop. Elevation gain 600 Feet and loss 0 to the turn-around point. Total gain and loss is 1300 Feet. Elevation at the trailhead is 1,840 feet, the turn-around elevation is 2,440 feet.

Trail:
Opal Creek Trail, #4187 with connections to Trails 3369, 3339 and Stony Creek Trail.

There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 44° 50.799 W 122° 12.552 Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map

History:
The forests around Opal Creek were inhabited by Native Americans at least 2,000 years ago. The site of Jawbone Flats is thought to have been a summer camp used by the Kalapuya Indians. Whetstone Mountain Trail 3369, probably was a trading route frequented by area tribes. In 1859 miners discovered gold in the valley. The Jawbone Flats mining camp dates back to 1930. In addition to gold, silver, copper, lead, and zinc were found. The mining operations ceased in 1992 and the Shiny Rock Mining Company donated the land to the Friends Of Opal Creek, which had been established in 1989. The donation consisted of 151 acres of land containing Jawbone Flats and a stand of old-growth forest.

On November 13, 1996, Congress passed the Opal Creek Act and protected the Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area, Opal Creek Wilderness, and Elkhorn Creek as a Wild and Scenic River. In 2005, Friends Of Opal Creek changed their name to Opal Creek Ancient Forest Center and administers Jawbone Flats for educational purposes.

Review: July 10, 2005
The first portion of Opal Creek Trail is on a Forest Service Road that goes to Jawbone Flats. Follow the road for two miles. Take a peek into an abandoned mine then stop to look around at Merten Mill. Merten Mill was a lumber camp last used in the 1940’s. Take the short unmarked spur trail to an overlook of 30 foot tall Sawmill Falls, also named Cascada de los Ninos. After lingering at the falls, continue .2 miles to the junction of Mike Kopetski Trail, turn right, and cross the bridge over the

Little North Santiam River. The trail follows the river upstream past Slide Falls, past several more pools in the stream. Stop to admire Opal Pool, which is a large pool of cold green water, and the falls that feed it.

Just above Opal Pool is a bridge that crosses the river and takes you to Jawbone Flats. The trail from this point gets narrower and rockier as it goes up and down to skirt cliffs along the river. In .6 miles, the trail crosses Opal Creek on a log bridge and then goes .9 miles farther to Cedar Flats. At Cedar Flats you will find three huge old-growth cedar trees along with some old-growth Douglas Fir. The trail goes a bit farther but most people turn around at Cedar Flats. Head back down the trail for 1.5 miles and cross the wood bridge over Opal Creek. Enjoy the falls just upstream and walk .2 miles to Jawbone Flats. Jawbone Flats is an outpost that generates its own electricity. The residents ask for hikers and mountain bikers to stay on the road, leash their dogs, and walk their bikes.

On summer weekends there is a small “Company Store” that sells drinks, snacks, and souvenirs. Walk through the town, to the Forest Service road, and bear left. This will take you down the road back to the junction of the Mike Kopetski Trail. Retrace your route back down the road to the trailhead parking lot. There are restrooms at the parking lot but no water. You could easily get water from the Little North Santiam River or Opal Creek. Mountain bikes are only allowed on the road from the gate to Jawbone Flats. This is a great hike for a cloudy, misty day or hike the trail on a hot day if you plan to take a dip in the ice-cold water.

Enjoy the pics!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve