Sedum Ridge Trail, WA

Vicinity Location:
Sedum Ridge Trail is about 35 miles Northeast of Portland, Oregon.
This trail is also know as Rock Creek and Mowich Butte Loop Trail.

Directions:
From Portland, Oregon, there are two ways to drive to the trailhead. If you have an extra 30 minutes then make your trip a loop drive. For the loop drive, take I-205 north across the Columbia River. Exit I-205 on HWY 14 east for about 35 miles to junction of Hwy 14 and Bridge of the Gods. Drive 1.5 miles farther east and turn left onto Rock Creek Road and follow the rest of the directions from Rock Creek Drive.

For the non-loop option, take I-84 east from Portland and take exit #44 for Cascade Locks. Take the first right turn, just after you go under the Bridge of the Gods. The toll for cars is $3.00 going either way across the bridge. Cross the bridge, and turn right onto Hwy 14 and drive 1.5 miles east and turn left onto Rock Creek Drive.

Drive on Rock Creek Drive about .3 miles and turn left on Foster Creek Road, which is the first county road on the left after Skamania Lodge. Drive .8 mile up a hill on the paved road until you see the power towers. The road turns into SW Ryan Allen Road. Turn left on Red Bluff Road and drive under the powerlines. Continue .3 mile on the paved Red Bluff Road, crossing on a one-lane bridge over a creek. Just past the one-lane bridge, turn right where it says Marantha Road Private and drive off the pavement and onto CG2000 for .3 mile.

At the next junction you should see a sign for CG2020 and CG2000. Take the right fork on CG2000. Continue left past the next main junction, CG2030, and continue another 5.1 miles to a bridge over Rock Creek. The road gets narrower and bumpier as you drive along. A view of Steep Creek Falls spilling into Rock Creek is across the road at the bridge. Continue just .9 mile past the bridge to an unsigned parking area, which is a dirt/grass spot just off the left side of the road.

To return, take Hwy 14 east and cross the Columbia River at the Bridge of the Gods. The toll for cars is $3.00 going either way across the bridge. After the bridge, the road loops around and intersects Hwy 30, Cascade Locks Hwy, near the base of the bridge. Turn left here and you will merge onto I-84 west in about ½ mile. Follow I-84 west, back to Portland.

No permits are required to park at this trailhead.

Pets allowed. No bikes are allowed on the Pacific Crest Trail.

No bathrooms are available at the trailhead.

Length and Elevation:
10.5 miles roundtrip for Rock Creek and Pacific Crest Trails. Elevation gain for Rock Creek and Pacific Crest Trail loop totals 2,429 feet and loss totals 2,429 feet. Roundtrip miles from Pacific Crest Trail to Mowich Butte is 2.4 miles, elevation gain is 468 feet and 468 feet loss. High point on Pacific Crest Trail is 2,956 feet. Total trip is 12.9 miles and elevation gain is 2,897 feet. Elevation at the trailhead at 6,400 feet, highest point is Mowich Butte at 3,513 feet. Lowest elevation is the trailhead at 1,042 feet.

Trail:

Rock Creek Trail, Pacific Crest Trail #2000, and Forest Road41.

Trail Maps, Routes and Waypoints:
Topo Map, Download Garmin .gpx file

Review: September 27, 2009, February 7, 2010.
This is a loop trail that uses a lightly travelled Forest Service Road on part of the return leg.

Look across the road for an old unmarked trail cut into the gentle slope and follow that uphill. There my be a lot of deadfall in the trail and you will have to use your routefinding skills to discern the trail. Use the GPS waypoints to help find the trail.

After you have followed the trail for about 200 feet, you will come to a large collapsed wood bridge. From there, the trail is much easier to follow as it ascends the mountain. The trail starts swichbacking up the slope just past the bridge and becomes much easier to follow. After the fist set of switchback, the trail goes up the side of a forested valley and begins several more switchbacks as it climbs to a forested ridge. The trail follows the ridge upwards at a gentler grade than what the switchbacks were. Through the trees there are some views of the surrounding ridges, but the views are mostly obscured by the second growth Douglas fir trees. There is plenty of bushwhacking along this section of the trail.

After about a mile, the trail starts to drop down, crosses over a small saddle and starts climbing again. Some portions of the trail are easy to follow but there are other sections where you have to pick your way cautiously because the deadfall has obscured the trail for 50 or 60 feet at a time. The trail continues to climb gently for about another mile past multiple deadfalls and crosses over another saddle into another valley at waypoint 026.
The trail makes a pretty sharp right and continues north. In about .2 mile after the saddle is the border between the Gifford Pinchot National Forest and the Washington State Land Trust. The trail passes by an old wooden sign that is off to the left side.

At the 4-way junction, turn left and go down the PCT. If you look to the right you can see a PCT trail marker on a nearby tree. If you take a side-trip and go straight at the junction, the trail goes up to the abandoned Forest Road 41. The PCT parallels this abandoned road as it goes downhill. On the PCT you finally start getting some views of the hills to the east. The well maintained PCT skirts along a ridge and you can enjoy the breezes and the woodsy smells of the forest.

After you pass a set of rock cliffs, look for a scramble route up to flat areas and great views of Mt. Hood from above the cliffs. Return to the trail and proceed to waypoint BWHK at N45° 47.654’ W122° 00.964’. Look for a small draw or gulley going uphill from the trail where the trail curves to the left with a large boulder about 50’ uphill North by Northwest. Follow along the draw uphill about 150’ to the old Forest Road 41. Once you are on the road, turn left and Mowich Butte is about 1.2 miles away. Walk past the large boulder that could be seen from the trail. In about .4 mile is a seasonal stream that crosses the road, then the road curves to the right, then a sharp turn to the left and intersects the road to the old fire lookout. Follow the road to the right up to Mowich Butte.

Returning from the Butte on Forest Road 41, look for the large boulder on your left, then cut back down the draw to the Pacific Crest Trail.

The PCT continues for the next few miles gently downhill, steadily losing elevation. It travels through mostly Hemlock forest with an understory of Vine Maples, Huckleberries, Bracken fern, Salal, and Beargrass.

At waypoint 029, the trail starts switchbacking down a gully and crosses over a tiny trickle of water.

In the fall, this is the first water along the trail, but it is only enough to get your handkerchief wet. Continuing down the switchbacks the trail crosses another trickling stream and continues down the other side of the little valley, then turns back to the south. This stream looks like it can turn into a large torrent of water in the spring.

After another mile or so in the woods, the trail passes above a couple of waterfalls and a small stream. This section of the Pacific Crest Trail descends a little more steeply past some rock cliffs as it follows the valley down to the road.

The character of the forest begins to change as the trail continues downstream above the tributary to Rock Creek. Plants that like more water replace the plants that thrive in drier soils.

The trail rounds a bend, goes up a small valley, and crosses another tiny trickle of water. Now Maidenhair ferns, Ducksfoot, Apple Clover appear on the forest floor and the trail parallels Rock Creek. Pleasant sounds of Rock Creekc an be heard and the creek can be glimpsed through the trees. There is a small campsite along the trail about .3 mile from where the PCT intersects Red Bluff Road, CG2000.

When the trail comes out to the road, turn left, and head down the road for about 1.75 miles back to your car. Make a left at the next road junction, continuing downhill along Rock Creek. At the junction with CG2000 and CG2002, turn left, cross the bridge, then turn right.

The Rock Creek Trail needs maintenance but has some nice views. The trail is fairly steep and brushy which makes for a drenching hike on a wet day.

This descending section of the Pacific Crest Trail is a gem as it parallels the tributary to Rock Creek. In late winter and spring there is almost always the sounds of the stream to accompany you.

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