Shellrock Mountain, OR

Vicinity Location:
50 miles east of Portland, Oregon in the Columbia River National Scenic Area.

Directions:
From Portland, Oregon, take I-84 east to the Wyeth exit, turn right at the bottom of the off ramp, in about 50 feet turn right again onto Herman Creek Road. This is also the Historic Oregon US 30 route. Follow the road about 0.2 mile and make a left into the Wyeth Trailhead parking lot.

There is a bathroom at this trailhead and no permits are needed to park.

Length and Elevation: Total length is 2.6 miles out and back. Elevation gain half way is 1,225 feet and 0 foot loss. Elevation at the trailhead is 75 feet, the high point is 1,300 feet.

Trail:
Shellrock Mountain Trail

There is a geocache along this trail at: N 45° 41.148 W 121° 43.924 Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map

History: The slopes of Shellrock Mountain are covered in huge piles of talus. This rock is different that rocks in other parts of the Gorge. Much of the Gorge is basalt, but Wind Mountain on the Washington side of the Gorge and Shellrock Mountain are part of a quartz diorite intrusion that happened about 5 million years ago. (The Ore Bin – Vol 36, No 12, Dec 1974) This different rock composition is why the rocks are a lighter color than basalt and that they sometimes sound like walking on shells or big chunks of glass. You might also see small quartz crystals in the rocks. These unstable slopes swept nearly to the shore of the Columbia River and presented a challenge for land transport through the Gorge.

I think the unstable slopes are the reason for this trail because the formal trail ends at a survey marker that was constructed to monitor the sliding of the slope.

Review: April 8, 2008
From the Wyeth Trailhead, follow the Historic Columbia River Highway about 1 mile to a curving wire rock basket about 200 feet long. About 60 feet from the beginning you will notice a faint trail on the hillside. Follow this up through the trees where to an open rockfield where the trail switchbacks up to the old Columbia River Scenic Highway.

The first few hundred feet of the trail don’t really ascend much, but things soon change. There are different kinds of sedum plants and mosses growing among the rocks.

The trail crosses the rock rubble several times as it ascends to the abandoned roadbed of the Columbia River Scenic Highway. Walk east, uphill, on the old road until it begins to enter the forest. Look to the right for the trail which goes uphill. You can also follow the road a bit further, scramble across a gully, and reach a promontory with a fine view. Looking east, you can hear Summit Creek and maybe see a tiny bit of it. Return to the junction to face more switchbacks. The slopes here are draped with a layer of moss with patches of small white mushrooms that show up in the spring.

Between May and August the bottom half of this hike is in the full sun during most of the day but during the other months of the year, the hike is mostly shaded from Shellrock Mountain and the trees on the upper slopes.

Anywhere on this rockfield are great views. The traffic noise drops off pretty fast, but you always hear the freight trains as they rumble past. This area is a railroad passing siding so expect to see one train waiting for another on the tracks below.

The trail crosses from one rockfield to another, climbs a couple more switchbacks, The trail is cleared of deadfall up to the forest at the time of this review. Once in the forest, the trail is a little harder to follow. One switchback, when you are heading east, looks like a junction, or you might miss the switchback altogether. If you continue past this switchback, you'll soon reach a brushy view of the Gorge and the trail stops. Retrace your way and look for the switchback and continue uphill. There are a couple of large trees across the trail near the survey marker that you have to clamber over and the trail gets narrower, less used, and a little brushy near the survey marker.

On the final switchback is a bushwhack trail going straight up the mountain. Continue past it and come out to the viewpoint with the survey marker. Enjoy a slightly obscured view of the Gorge and don't fall off the cliff! If you want to attempt the summit, go uphill at the primitive trail. The summit is 2,090 feet high, or about 850 feet higher. Return by the same trail, being careful not to twist an ankle in the loose rocks that make up the lower section of the trail.

This trail offers an excellent opportunity to train for mountain climbing as well as a good workout. If you time the season, this is one of the few open trails in the Gorge that doesn't get blasted by sun in the late summer and fall.

This trail is safe for small children and dogs, except for the viewpoints, though most children would complain about the steepness. This is a switchback trail!

Watch out for ticks in the brushy areas. They are hungry and devious!

Enjoy the photos!!
Switchback Steve