Silver Star Mountain, WA



Vicinity Location: 26 miles northeast of Portland, Oregon in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

Directions:
Watch out for nails and glass in the parking lot because wood with nails gets burned in the parking lot from time to time.

For the Sunset Falls Campground Route: (Note this is not the preferred route. Beware if your road routing application sends you on this route.

From Portland, OR, take I-205 north to exit 30b to Battle Ground. Move over to the middle or left lane and proceed north on SR503 for about 10 miles to Battle Ground. Continue north on SR503 about 5 1/2 miles further and turn right on Rock Creek Road. Follow Rock Creek Road for about 8 1/2 miles just past Moulton Falls County Park, and turn right on Sunset Falls Road. Proceed 7.3 miles to Sunset Falls Campground.

Turn right just as you get into the campground and road 41 crosses Copper Creek. Turn left just after the bridge and drive 3.4 miles on FR 41. Forest Road 41 gets very rough near the junction of FR4109. Take a sharp right turn onto the narrow FR 4109 for 1.4 miles. Turn left at the junction and head uphill on FR 4109 for 2.6 miles to the parking lot. Low clearance vehicles will have challenges getting up this road with large erosion swales.

For the Dole Valley Rd and the L1100 Rd Route: (This is the preferred route.)
This option avoids the terrible road past Sunset Campground. Once off paved Dole Valley Rd, it's 6.75 miles on a good gravel road (L1100), but after that the last 2.6 miles on Rd 4109 (same as the last stretch in the 1st directions) which is very rutted and rough with deep potholes and trenches. This stretch is probably impossible in a standard passenger car and high clearance is strongly recommended. There's a requirement for Discover Pass on DNR land but it's not needed on Rd. 4109 or at the trailhead, so if you don't stop on L1100 or the Tarbell Picnic Area, you don't need a permit.

Drive North on I-5 from Vancouver and take exit 11 then turn right and take highway 502 5.8 miles to Battle Ground. You can also take I-205 to exit 30B and then highway 503 from north to Battle Ground.

From the main intersection at Battle Ground (Highway 502 and 503 near the Fred Meyer store)
Drive North on highway 503 for 5.6 miles and turn right onto Rock Creek Road. There should be a sign saying "Lucia Falls, Moulton Falls".
Drive east for 8.6 miles as Rock Creek Road becomes Lucia Falls Road.
Turn right on Sunset Falls Road. There's a sign saying "Sunset C. G." and drive for 2 miles.

Turn right on Dole Valley Rd, cross over the East Fork Lewis River on a narrow bridge, and follow the paved road generally uphill 2.4 miles.

At 18.6 miles from Battle Ground, turn left onto gravel road L1100. Stay on the main road for 6.7 miles and come to a 4-way junction.
Turn right onto Road 4109. The sign may be missing and the road number could spray-painted on a tree at the junction. Follow this very rocky, very rutted road 2.6 miles to the trailhead. The road is terrible and a high clearance vehicle with 4WD is needed. A passenger car will not make it to the parking lot and an SUV will have to creep about a walking pace in places and still bottom out a couple of times.

About an hour later and 27.7 miles from Battle Ground you reach the Silver Star Trailhead.

There are two ways to start, the jeep trail, or the footpath. Look for the footpath near bushes on the south side of the parking. This footpath will join the old jeep trail in about ¼ mile.

No permits are required as of 2004.

There is no outhouse at this trailhead.

Length and Elevation:
5 Miles, Elevation gain 1,000 Feet and loss 100 feet to the turn-around point. Total gain and loss is 2,200 Feet. Trailhead at 3,400 feet, summit is at 4,390 feet.

Trail:
Gifford Pinchot National Forest Trail 180 and 180A with connections to Trails 180C, 180E, and 172. There is a geocache at: **N 45° 45.145 W 122° 14.450** Info at Geocaching.com

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

History:
Few of the peaks in this area are forested even though they are all less than 5,000 feet high. This is because the area was burned in the Yacolt forest fire of 1902. The fire started on September 11, 1902, near the town of Carson, in Skamania County. The fire grew to be 12 miles wide and traveled 36 miles per hour as it raced through the forest. In less than two days, the fire burned 238,000 acres and killed 38 people. In one 2-day period, the fire burned 148,000 acres. A half-inch deep layer of cinders and ashes fell in Portland. The smoke from the fire turned the sky so dark in Seattle, which is 140 miles away, that the streetlights were turned on during the day.

The 1902 fire left a lot of snags and other debris. Because of that, there have been 24 more fires in the area since the 1902 fire. The Sunset fire of 1919 burned about 27,000 acres, the Rock Creek fire in 1927 consumed 48,000 acres of trees, and the Dole Valley fire in 1929 torched over 227,000 acres. The 1902 fire remains the largest ever recorded in Washington State. Some of the snags from the 1902 fire remain standing in the forests. Now the area is covered by acres of meadow, wildflowers, and huckleberries.

Review: June 5, September 10, 2005, August 28th, 2010, June 30th, 2016, June 17, 2018
The drive from Battle Ground takes about an hour to get to the trailhead. The trail I usually take begins from the south edge of the parking lot. The trail soon comes out of the trees and joins an old jeep trail.

The trail soon comes to the junction with Ed’s Trail and a fantastic view of Mt. Hood framed in a gap with a huge cliff on the right and green mountains on the left.

Follow the trail up the ridge and eventually back into the trees. In late June and early July this area

has one of the finest wildflower displays in the area. There are great views to the west and south to the Columbia River. When the trail starts climbing in the trees, look for a junction uphill to the left. That will lead to the summit. Just before you come out of the trees is a campsite without nearby water. There is a trail from here that leads to Bluff Mountain Trail (#172). You'll see this trail from the summit of Silver Star. Head on up the hill, out of the trees, and the trail splits again. Straight ahead is the lower summit of Silver Star. To the left about 1/10 mile are the remains of a fire lookout and the summit of Silver Star.

There is a side hike to Indian Pits on Trail 180E. You can access this trail two ways. One way is to go over the lower summit of Silver Star and join up with the trail. The other way is to go back down to the junction in the trees, turn left, and follow the old jeep trail about 2/10 mile to the wooden trail sign for 180E. Follow this footpath about 1 mile to the ridge where the Indian pits are located.

There are three theories for why the Native Americans made the pits. One theory is they were used for hunting blinds, another theory they were used to store food. I like the theory that Native Americans used them for spirit quests. Native Americans on a spirit quest would fast and sit isolated in the pits for days seeking a spiritual vision.

On a clear day look for Mt. Hood framed by the cliffs of Star Creek. From the summit of Silver Star you can see Mt. Rainier, Mt. St. Helens, Mt. Hood, Mt. Adams, and the Columbia River. Looking to the northwest there is a trail along a cliff. This is Trail 180A.

Adults can access this trail from the trail signpost in the trees about ½ mile from the summit along trail 180. Trail 180A is not a steady grade but goes up and down with views into Star Creek. This is a narrow trail with a couple of steep sections. This trail was created and is maintained by the Chinook Trail Association of Vancouver, WA.

Back on the main trail, follow the old jeep trail all the way back to the parking lot and enjoy the view of the Columbia River and Vancouver Lake in the distance.

On the way back you might want to stop at Sunset Falls or Moulton Falls County Park and enjoy the river and a waterfall.

Hiking to Silver Star is a great hike for a partly-cloudy or clear day. Trail 180 is a very safe trail for small children because it is so wide. You need to watch small children at the summit because there is a small drop-off on the east side of the summit. Portions of trail 180A are not a safe trail for small children or many pre-teens. Trail 180A has a couple of little rock scrambles.

Enjoy the Photos!
Gallery Pics
Switchback Steve