

Starway, WA

Vicinity Location:

About 28.5 miles northeast of Portland, OR. in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest.

Directions:

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 4 miles on FR 41. Forest Road 41 gets very rough in places. Wide spots in the road mean big potholes.

Look for a green gate at the junction of road 41 and 4107. The green gate for road 4107 is open and broken as of this review. At the gate is room to park a few vehicles. As long as the gate is broken, drive .4 mile downhill and park at the bridge but do not park on the adjacent mining claim. There is room to park 2 or 3 cars.

No permits are required.

There is no outhouse at this trailhead.

Length and Elevation:

11 miles from the gate, 10.2 miles from the bridge, Elevation gain 3,310 feet and loss 778 feet to the summit of Silver Star mountain. Total gain and loss is 9,600 feet. Trailhead at 1,550 feet, summit elevation is 4,390 feet.

Trail:

Gifford Pinchot National Forest Starway Trail 175, Bluff Mountain Trail 172 and Silver Star Trail 180D with connections to Trail 180.

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.

In World War II, a couple staffed Silver Star Lookout for 18 months. The lookout served not only as a fire lookout but as an enemy plane spotting site. The couple were to report any planes from Bonneville to Longview. They identified the aircraft, reported its position, the number of engines and the direction of flight.

The couple needed to have someone awake at all times. If both of them happened to fall asleep their dog, Dody served as a third spotter.

Dody would bark whenever an aircraft were near, night or day.

Review: September 23, 2011

The trail starts off at a gentle grade for the first .2 mile, then becomes steep to extra steep for the next 2 miles. The trail is well flagged and brushed out to the junction with Bluff Mountain Trail. Turn right onto the Bluff Mountain Trail. Once back into the forest, take the next two lefts to the summit of Silver Star Mountain.

When you first look at the name of this trail you might think it is Stairway trail, and you wouldn't be far from wrong.

The first couple of miles of this hike is all uphill. After crossing the wood-decked metal bridge, turn right and walk upstream along Copper Creek about .2 mile and take the first right, uphill, following a rocky old ATV trail which climbs fairly steeply. The trail passes through a forest of second growth Douglas Fir. Looking up you can see cliffs looming above, which no doubt the trail will soon be climbing above.

The rocky trail climbs steeply for over a mile, using several steep switchbacks. You would think the switchbacks would make an easier trail but it feels like you're going straight up the mountainside. The trees provide nice shade and there are a few red huckleberries to snack on in the fall. The pace is slow and even though the summit of Silver Star Mountain is less than 2 miles away, it is not a direct, nor easy 2 miles. It is like a giant stairway.

After an especially steep climb, the trail comes out to the top of the ridge, about 1.7 miles from the trailhead. What a relief to be walking on fairly level ground. The second growth trees are about 80 to 100 feet tall and obscure any views of the surrounding ridges. Continue along the trail, generally south, along the ridge. The Bluff Mountain Trail is still a couple of ridges away.

About 2.3 miles from the trailhead, the trail passes another small junction. Turn right and head up into the woods where the trail becomes fainter. Follow the trail up the ridge, looking for flagging, cut ends of logs, and other signs of where the trail goes. The trail is generally on the left side of the ridge for this part of the trail.

The trail climbs steeply through the forest and splits into two routes. Climb uphill and continue looking for flagging. After about .5 mile further along, the trail comes into meadows of beargrass and huckleberries. The trail follows the descending ridgeline and comes out on a tabletop rock with great views into Star Canyon and farther west.

Drop down off the rock to the left, switchbacking down farther along the ridge and across a saddle.

From here, the trail climbs fairly steeply past a seasonal pond and up through the forest to the junction with Bluff Mountain Trail, 3.8 miles from the trailhead. Turn right and follow Bluff Mountain Trail up and down about .7 mile, up a couple of switchbacks below Silver Star and back into the forest.

At the next junction, take the left-hand uphill junction and after about 500 feet, pass a campsite on the right, and turn left at the rocky junction with the old jeep trail. From here it is a short walk up to a flat area where going straight ahead leads to the false summit and turning right leads up to Silver Star and the foundation of an old Forest Service lookout.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

Switchback Steve