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Photography

Saddle Mountain

At 3,283 feet, Saddle Mountain would not seem to be much of a mountain. Halfway up the steep, switchbacking $2\frac{3}{4}$ mile trail you may begin to change your mind. However, the visual rewards at the summit make the effort worth it. On a clear spring day the endless blue sky and panoramic views of the distant Cascades and Pacific Ocean contrasts with the many wildflowers along the trail.

Directions

From Portland travel east on US 26 65 miles and turn right at the Saddle Mountain State Park sign onto Saddle Mountain Road. Follow Saddle Mountain Road 7 miles to its end at the walk-in campground parking area where a sign marks the trailhead.

The Trail

Saddle Mountain has its origins 250 miles to the east and 15 million years in the past. Near the Idaho border large fissures in the earth's crust began a series of eruptions creating what is now known as the Columbia River Basalt Flows. Saddle Mountain is a remnant of some of the last of these flows as it met the Pacific Ocean.

When the lava encountered the cold water it cooled very rapidly and, in some instances, explosively creating cracks and fractures. The still fluid lava following was then forced into the cracks forming the patterns seen in the rock along the trail. As the land rose and the ocean receded, the elements eroded the surrounding softer sedimentary rock exposing the mountain.

The trail begins in second growth fir and alder, passing stumps from logging activities of the 1920's. After $\frac{1}{4}$ mile a trail spur to the right leads $\frac{1}{4}$ mile to a viewpoint of the mountain. Continuing along, the main trail becomes steeper and you begin to switchback up 1 mile to a basalt dike. Another $\frac{1}{2}$ mile brings you to the wildflower meadows on the upper slopes of the lower peak. Use the foot bridges when crossing this area in order to avoid damaging the fragile meadows.

During the spring and early summer months Saddle Mountain is home to a variety of rare wildflower species including the Saddle Mountain bittercress and chocolate lily. Other species you are likely to see along the trail include; Indian paintbrush, iris, larkspur, asters, and phlox.

Following the trail you soon come to the mountains saddle, a narrow section offering a vertigo view of the park, 1,500 feet below. Cables anchored into the rock provide you with a little assist as you make the final $\frac{1}{2}$ mile push to the summit. A railed viewpoint provides panoramic views of the Pacific Ocean to the west, the Columbia River to the north, and the snow tipped Cascade peaks to the east.

Photographing the Natural Pacific Northwest

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