

Many hiking options in Canyon Creek Meadows

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At one time or another, most Central Oregon hikers have taken the opportunity to enjoy Canyon Creek Meadows and witness the rich and varied displays of wildflowers. Because of our warm and dry year, wildflowers peaked early this year; but that doesn't mean that all the flowers are completely gone. Regardless, there are still plenty of other good reasons to hike into this unique and scenic area.

This hike explores the eastern base of Three Fingered Jack, and there are a number of options to extend or minimize the length and difficulty of the trip. The "basic" version of the hike consists of a 4.5-mile loop to the lower meadow that is relatively easy. For those wanting more of a challenge, an additional 3-mile round-trip can be tacked on that leads to the upper meadow and a spectacular viewpoint of a beautiful turquoise-colored glacial tarn and views of neighboring Cascade mountains.

Adding all of that portion of the trail brings the hike to 7.5 miles. But, here again, variations are possible. For

example, simply continuing on only part way for the easy saunter to the upper meadow adds only an additional mile each way, for a 6.5-mile shorter option. And, there is yet another option that can be added on the return trip. For more mountain variety, and perhaps a refreshing swim, a mile-and-a-half round-trip to Wasco Lake is always fun. Adding the lake would bring the entire excursion to six, eight, or nine miles, depending on which of the earlier options are selected.

It is always nice to have a hike that can be customized to meet the evolving interests of individual hikers. Plus, in this case, each potential addition offers something entirely different, rather than just more-of-the-same miles.

The hike starts from a trail that wraps around the east and north shores of Jack Lake. The area near Jack Lake was badly burned in the B & B fire of 2003; but some pockets of green survived, particularly on the north shore, which was in the lee of the fire. The Forest Service has done a good job of cutting the trail through the deadfalls resulting from the fire. This portion of the hike clearly illustrates the reforestation process that

takes place in the wake of a forest fire. Young lodgepole pine trees are the principal colonizing species in this area of recovery.

At a trail junction less than a half-mile from the parking lot, a sign marks the beginning of a trail loop at the edge of the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness Area. To minimize human encounters and facilitate travel, the Forest Service encourages clockwise travel around the loop; so take the well-marked fork to the left. We encountered a few counterclockwise hikers who either aren't very good at following instructions or simply failed to notice the other leg of the return trail that directly follows Canyon Creek down the mountainside.

The two-mile climb to the lower meadow takes the hiker from the burned, predominantly pine forest into an unburned forest of fir and hemlock but has an elevation gain of only about 400 feet. Another reason to adhere to the clockwise travel pattern is that there is a fairly steep descent as the trail approaches the lower meadow. Taking the suggested return route means not having to climb back up that steep hill!

The first meadow, the



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

The upper meadow on the Canyon Creek Meadows Trail offers mountain streams and meadows at their natural best, as well as close-up views of Three Fingered Jack.

lower one, is always a beautiful place; but, this year, some of the little side streams have already dried up. In other years, I have seen these little

creeks still flowing even in October. From here, the quick return (the 4.5-mile hike)

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