

# Scott and Obsidian Trails combine for challenging loop

By Craig F. Eisenbeis  
Correspondent

It's always a treat to try new adventures, especially one as scenic and close to home as this one. Lately, my column has focused on short and middle-distance hikes. At 13.3 miles, however, today's hike offers the serious hiker more of a challenge.

This little adventure starts at the Scott Trail Trailhead on the McKenzie Highway, just a few miles west of McKenzie Pass. This route combines with the popular Obsidian Trail, to make one of the most scenic hikes imaginable. At a distance like this, however — with an option to extend it to 16.3 miles — this is not a hike for the casual hiker. Also, since it involves the Obsidian Trail, an advance special-use permit is required.

Scott Lake, Scott Mountain, Scott Pass, and the Scott Trail are all named for Felix Scott, Jr., who was instrumental in pioneering an east-west route through this area in 1862. At the end of this five-mile stretch of this historic trail, his route turned north along what is now part of the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) toward Scott Pass.

When Scott pioneered this trail, he traveled with a thousand head of stock and nine big freight wagons. Existing roads at that time extended only as far east as Vida, about 20 miles east of Eugene. As a result, Scott's party had to hack their way through the dense forest on the western slopes of the Cascades, and it took them several weeks to do so.

The hike begins at a trailhead on the west (or north)

side of Highway 242. The trail crosses the road and heads due east toward the PCT. The forest, at the beginning of this hike, is principally lodgepole pine but turns to mostly hemlock at higher elevations. Some firs also appear as the elevation increases.

About 2.5 miles east of the highway, the trail crosses in and out of lava flows and cinder deposits, and the hike becomes a window to the volcanic history of our region. Along the way, sweeping views of the mountains open up, and the trail also offers a good look at Collier Glacier, which has been rapidly retreating up its glacial valley over the last century. I remember that, fifty years ago, it looked more than twice as big from this spot. The trail also provides a rare perspective from which 7,810-foot high Little Brother is not totally overshadowed by his much taller Three Sisters.

Collier Cone, Yapoah Crater, and Four In One Cone are other prominent features seen from this trail that are not in the usual visual spectrum for residents of Sisters. My hiking companion, who has backpacked all of Oregon's PCT (and more), remarked that this area has the best scenery of all.

Having started at an elevation of about 4,800 feet, this hike tops out at 6,320 feet before descending into a huge, gorgeous meadow, where the trail joins up with the PCT. This area is a real wildflower hot spot in the early summer.

A small seasonal stream in the meadow dries up late in the season, but is still a

nice place for a lunch break. Although the total elevation gain to this point is a little over 1,500 feet, the grade has been reasonable, giving the hiker a break for what is yet to come. The scenery here is unsurpassed. Close-up views of the western slopes of the North and Middle Sisters are unique to this trail.

This trail junction is where Scott turned north for the pass that now bears his name. However, today's hike turns south on the PCT and heads for the very steep Opie Dilldocket Pass, named for an obscure cartoon character of the early 1900s. It was named by Forest Service packer Dee Wright and McKenzie Bridge District Ranger Ralph Engels in 1932.

The pair was having a tough time crossing through this area until they found this difficult route, and they thought of the cartoon character who was renowned for always finding a way out of ridiculously difficult situations. Feeling that they had found a solution reminiscent of one of Opie's escapades, they named the pass they found after the cartoon character.

Wright, of course, supervised the Civilian Conservation Corps construction of the rock observatory atop McKenzie Pass that bears his name. The lava-rock landmark was named in his honor after he died in 1934, prior to completion of the structure in 1935.

From the PCT junction, it is 3.7 miles over Opie Dilldocket Pass to the next trail junction. The north side of Opie is steep, but the switchbacks descending the south



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

At the PCT's junction with the Scott Trail, PCT hikers check their intended route.

side are even steeper, making a clockwise circuit of this loop a smart decision. Traditional south-to-north PCT hikers have to ascend this monster from the steep side!

Continuing south, the PCT meets up with the upper end of Glacier Way Cut Off, which is your cue to take this steep westbound trail 0.8 mile downhill to a wildflower-laced meadow. However, if a 13.3 mile hike is not enough, you have the option of adding three more miles by continuing south 1.1 miles to the junction of the Obsidian Trail.

With mountain streams and plentiful wildflower meadows, I have long

considered the Obsidian Trail to be one of the premiere hikes into the Three Sisters Wilderness. The first time I hiked this route was in 1966 on the way to the summits of the North and Middle Sisters.

Another memorable excursion was in 1987, when one of my sons and I hiked from the McKenzie Highway to Century Drive. We hiked, on the west side, south as far as the saddle between the Middle and South Sisters. Then we crossed over to the east side through the Chambers Lakes and continued cross-country south into the Green Lakes Basin.


See **HIKE** on page 23


**YEAR-ROUND  
FIREWOOD  
SALES  
— KINDLING —  
SISTERS  
FOREST PRODUCTS  
541-410-4509  
SistersForestProducts.com**

**SISTERS DENTURE**  
Smile in Comfort  
Dentures starting  
at \$850  
Free consultations!  
541-549-0929  
— 35 years experience —  
LOCALLY OWNED

**SHOULDER &  
NECK PAIN?**  
Quick and  
affordable  
relief.  
Auto accidents, workman's  
comp. accepted.  
**Three Sisters Chiropractic  
& Pain Management**  
Dr. Inice Gough, DC | 541.549.3583  
— Since 1997 —

**NEW FALL MENU**  
Let us delight and  
surprise your tastebuds  
**THE PORCH**  
541-549-EATS (3287)  
243 N. Elm St. Sisters  
5-9 p.m. Tu-Su • Reservations Recommended

**Two authors this weekend!**  
  
**Pamela Royes**  
*Temperance Creek*  
**Friday • 9/23 • 6:30**  
This runaway hit title has been hard to get ever since it released in June. The publisher can't keep up with this memoir, telling the tale of two young people who venture into the wilderness for four years. Great book!

**Barbara Roberts**  
*Death Without Denial*  
*Grief Without Apology*  
**Saturday • 9/24 • 6:30**  
  
Former Governor of Oregon, Barbara Roberts is coming to discuss the second edition of her important book. Newly updated to reflect changes in our culture and laws. This very special evening is being co-hosted by Partners in Care, Central Oregon's preeminent hospice.

**Paulina Springs Books**  
252 W Hood Ave • Sisters OR • 541-549-0866

**Customized Echo 3-in-1 Utility Trailer**  
10 x 7.5 ft. multi-use trailer with removable sides, ramps for loading from side or back, and steel halo bars.

- 1 or 2 ATV Hauler
- Multiple Kayak Hauler
- 4-sided Wood Hauler
- Attached Spare Tire
- Secure Tie-down Storage
- Storage for 2 Large Gas Cans

**\$2,700**  
**Call 480-773-1255**