

Climbing Four In One Cone

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

“Green, green, it’s green they say on the far side of the hill....” Go ahead, sing along if you want; it’s true! If you can bear to drive past yet more miles and miles of charred forest, it is green just over the hill — specifically, just over McKenzie Pass. So, that’s where this week’s hike takes us.

I’ve hiked on by the spur trail leading to Four In One Cone a number of times; but I’ve always been on my way to somewhere else, and there just didn’t seem to be time to take the side trip. The only way to make sure we hiked this trail, I decided, was to make a special trip dedicated just to Four In One Cone.

Four In One Cone is an interesting little volcano, which, as the name implies, is composed of four conjoined cinder cones creating a high ridge that runs roughly north-south about three miles north-northwest of the North Sister. This is a nine-mile round-trip hike on the Scott Trail, with an elevation gain of around 1,500 feet. The slope of the trail is not extremely steep, but it can feel like a rather long uphill slog.

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. A five-mile stretch of this historic trail leads from the trailhead to the present-day Pacific Crest Trail (PCT), where his route turned north toward Scott Pass.

When Scott pioneered this

trail, he was moving a thousand head of stock and nine big freight wagons from the Willamette Valley to east of the mountains. 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. Of interest, we saw about 30 people in the parking lot, along with a dozen or so Forest Service vehicles. As it turned out, we had stumbled upon a Forest Service training session for wilderness rangers. They were headed somewhere else, though, so we had the trail all to ourselves.

The trail crosses the road and heads due east toward the PCT. The (very green) 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. Shortly into the hike, there is a fork in the trail that is not marked. Take the left fork; the right fork is a connector trail that leads south to the Obsidian Trail, where a special entry permit is required.

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 entire region. Along the way, sweeping views of the mountains open up; and the trail also offers a good look at Collier Glacier on the western slopes

of the North Sister, 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 angle. 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 our destination, Four In One Cone, are other prominent features seen from this trail that are not in the usual visual spectrum for residents of Sisters. Many people, myself included, believe that this area has some of the best mountain scenery in all of Oregon.

Around four miles in, the trail crosses a wide lava and cinder-strewn open area; and the Cone and its spur trail are easily seen from a distance. A signpost has been erected at the trail junction showing that the Scott Trail continues straight ahead (east), and warns that the user trail to the left (north) is “not maintained.”

Regardless, turn left here onto the user trail; it is easily followed and not at all difficult — but it is uphill. Having started at an elevation of a little under 4,800 feet, this hike tops out at 6,258 feet



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Spectacular views of the North and Middle Sisters await the hiker at the summit of Four In One Cone.

on the aforementioned ridge, which is almost a knife-edge — especially on the steep west side. So, you might want to corral any pets or children before the trail tops out.

The view from the summit of Four In One Cone is jaw-dropping. The spectacular close-up views of the western slopes of the North and Middle Sisters are unique to this area. In the distance, Mt. Washington, Three Fingered Jack, and Mt. Jefferson line up to the north. Even the summit of Mt. Hood can be seen, appearing like a snowy tumor on the eastern flanks of Mt. Jefferson.

We did not see a single other person during this hike, which served to add to the grandeur of the occasion. We did, however, see some rather large cougar tracks in some

of the snow banks that persisted over the trail in heavily forested sections. The trail is generally declared to be snow-free by mid-July; but this was a poor snow year, and we made this trip during the last week of June.

If you have a hankering to experience a profusion of wildflowers, return to the Scott Trail and continue east for about three quarters of a mile. A very large, beautiful meadow is fed by a seasonal stream near the junction with the PCT. This side-trip will extend your hike by about a mile and a half.

To enjoy this hike, take the McKenzie Pass Highway (242) west from Sisters. From the pass summit, continue west for another 5.6

See HIKE on page 21

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