

SPORTS

Pacific Crest Trail hike is worthwhile challenge



INTO THE OUTDOORS
BY JAYSON JACOBY

When I made the decision to write about the Pacific Crest Trail north of Santiam Pass for this week's column, the unusually dry and warm fall in Oregon was still holding strong.

If you decide to take this week's hike anytime soon, be prepared for several inches of snow — at least. But more on that later.

The Pacific Crest Trail is one of only two National Scenic Trails in the country, the other being the Appalachian Trail.

One of the closest trailheads to the Eugene area is at Santiam Pass, along Highway 20 east of town.

To reach the trailhead, drive east on Highway 126, past McKenzie Bridge and along the McKenzie River to the junction with Highway 20 three miles north of Clear Lake, which is about 75 miles from Eugene. Follow Highway 20-126 (they are combined for this stretch) three miles further north to Santiam Junction, where they are joined by Highway 22. Keep to the right at the junction and drive seven more miles east to Santiam Pass.

The Pacific Crest trailhead is marked by a forest service sign on the left (north) side of the highway about one-half mile past the entrance to Hoodoo Ski Bowl. Wilderness permits, available at any area ranger station or at the trailhead, are required for all visitors.

The trail heads north from Santiam Pass through mixed lodgepole pine and western hemlock forests carpeted with beargrass, a large, bushy plant that resembles beach grass. At one-quarter mile, the trail enters the Mt. Jefferson Wilderness area at a junction with the mile-long Square Lake trail.

From this junction, the Pacific Crest Trail climbs gradually but steadily, passing several small ponds on the right side of the trail, and past beautiful old-growth hemlock trees. At 1.5 miles, you reach a small open area at the base of an interesting rock formation and another trail junction, this time with the Santiam Lake trail, which leads northwest to a cluster of lakes at the base of Three Fingers Jack. Keep right at this trail junction, staying on the Pacific Crest Trail.

From this junction the trail gets steeper, gaining the crest of a ridge at the 3.5-mile point. This is a good place to stop for a rest, but a better reason is the first glimpse of the real goal of

this trip — 7,841-foot Three Fingers Jack. From the ridgetop, you can see the very tip of this old, eroded volcano.

The Pacific Crest Trail continues along a steep cliff, with views south to the pristine blue waters of Martin Lake. There is no trail to this jewel-like body of water, but an easy cross-country hike will get you there.

After leaving the cliff, the trail continues climbing with switchbacks through deep, cool forest. Although the trees here are large and closely spaced, there is much less undergrowth than is found at lower elevations, making short cross-country excursions to hidden meadows and small crevices in the volcanic rock easy and tempting.

At about 4.5 miles, the trail gains the top of another ridge, and continues north on a mostly level grade. Views to the south begin opening up, and the high peaks of the central Cascades — Mt. Washington, the Three Sisters, and Broken Top — begin poking their icy slopes above the horizon.

But the real views are just a little bit farther. At about the 5.5 mile point, the unaware hiker may stumble when suddenly there is a huge volcano at his or her very feet. For more than two miles, the trail has been following the southern spur of Three Fingers Jack, which hides the mountain from the hiker's view.

By now, the entire southwest face of this rugged, craggy mountain comes into view. It is an awesome spectacle and well worth the 1,600 feet of elevation gain from Santiam Pass. Climbing the mountain is not recommended for inexperienced or unprepared hikers. The safe ascent requires rope and an experienced leader.

Back to the weather. With the last two days of cool rain, the hiking season at the 6,400-foot level of the Pacific Crest Trail near Three Fingers Jack is probably over. However, hikers prepared for the weather and experienced in winter travel in the mountains can make this trip, and so can snowshoers or cross-country skiers. Remember to bring food, water, and a map and compass, though.

IDEA

Continued from Page 4

low incomes after school," Petri said. "Those who expect to make high incomes would still be attracted to the program by its still-reasonable terms and by its flexibility.

"Under IDEA, every student would be able to take out loans for his or her education with complete confidence that repayment would be affordable, no matter what income the student ends up earning after leaving school," Petri said. "If you lose your job, get sick, or take time off to raise kids, your loan is automatically rescheduled."

Petri noted that any loan amounts left unpaid after 25 years would be wiped off the

books. The degree of subsidy provided in this way would depend on a borrower's total income over the 26 years.

"The only way to avoid significant loan repayments is to have a very low income for much of your working life," Petri said. "You would have to be very unfortunate to qualify for substantial amounts of loan forgiveness. But if you are unfortunate, there's a way out for you."

The push for the program stems from Congress' growing realization that the present system is in bad shape, Petri said.

In the past 25 years, federal financial aid has shifted from predominantly grants to private loans, Conant said.

Under the existing system, a

student now typically borrows from a bank or financial institution, with loan repayment guaranteed by the relevant state agency, which in turn is reinsured by the federal government.

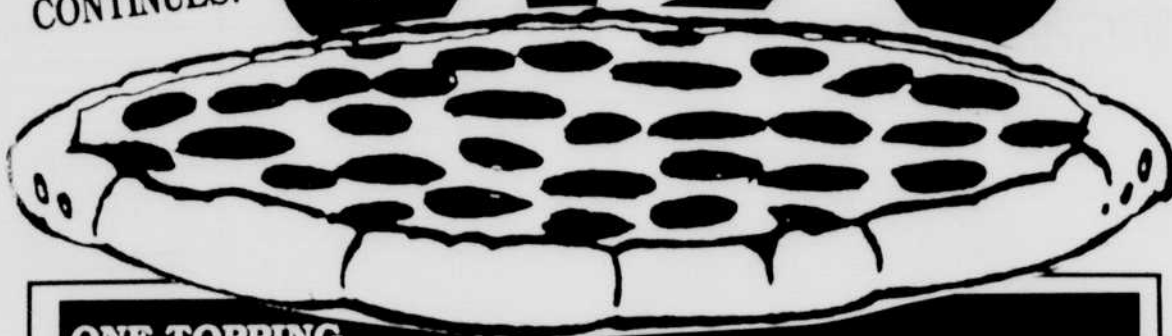
The banks are subsidized with \$1 billion a year as a financial incentive for banks to make low-interest loans for students. The government pays a special allowance so the annual rate of return on new loans is 3.25 percent above the interest rate for three-month Treasury bills.

The government also pays the lender all interest and capital on loans where the student defaults, if the lender followed the due process, Conant said.

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