

# Henline Mountain Trail hidden heaven for hikers



## INTO THE OUTDOORS

BY JAYSON JACOBY

The valley of the Little North Santiam River east of Salem is a remote area that recently has become more popular with every passing day because of the groves of old growth Douglas Fir and red cedar trees along Opal Creek.

Environmental groups are concerned about plans to harvest some of this timber and have aggressively publicized the area, resulting in a large increase in visitors in recent years.

Another attraction is the rustic little mining town at Jawbone Flats, which is the gateway to Opal Creek. Newly constructed trails have made access even easier.

It is rather ironic, then, that

one of the most interesting and worthwhile hiking trails in the valley still receives little attention.

The Henline Mountain Trail doesn't pass many old growth trees, and it doesn't follow any sparkling mountain streams either, but it does offer a lot missing from the Jawbone Flats-Opal Creek region — namely lichen and moss-encrusted rock pinnacles, slopes of bear grass and other alpine flowers, and most impressive views from the former fire lookout at the end of the trail extending from Mary's Peak in the Coast Range to Mt. Jefferson in the High Cascades.

In some respects, though, it isn't difficult to figure out why this excellent trail is ignored.

Probably the biggest reason is that the trailhead is so hard to find. It's right beside the road leading to Jawbone Flats and Opal Creek, but the sign barely

pokes out of a rocky cut bank and is almost impossible to see unless you know where to look.

Also, the trail can be discouraging to some, as it climbs in a series of switchbacks which seem to get progressively steeper, gaining 2,500 feet in only about three miles to the ruins of an old fire lookout.

Still, the trail is hard to beat for a good workout, and as I mentioned, the hiker is rewarded with excellent views most of the way up.

To reach the Henline Mountain Trail, follow the signs off Highway 22 east of Salem pointing to the Elkhorn Recreational Area.

About two miles after this road turns to gravel (18 miles from the highway junction) take the left (uphill) fork at a "Y" junction.

Watch your odometer carefully from this point. At 1.4 miles, start looking closely at

the slope on the left side of the road. If you drive slowly you should see the trailhead sign.

The trail heads up the slope at an angle, in the direction you just came on the road. After one-half mile of moderately steep switchbacking, the trail levels out for a short distance while crossing an impressive rockslide.

The trail then begins climbing again, this time winding back and forth up a steep south-facing slope, which is actually the easterly ridge of Henline Mountain.

At about two miles the trail contours north at the crest of the ridge, passing a short spur trail that leads just a few feet to a rocky promontory with views back down the valley to the Elkhorn Golf Course. Bring binoculars for the best view.

Just a bit farther is the only decent camping spot along the trail: a small, relatively flat grassy spot about 100 feet to the right of the trail, just at the point where the ridge begins to plunge steeply downhill.

The trail then flattens out for a quarter mile or so, as it clings to a steep cliff that features a view of the road past the trailhead and of Mt. Jefferson and Battle Axe Mountain to the east.

At the end of this flat stretch the trail switches back once before climbing through a large pile of rocks, which form the base of Henline Mountain's summit pinnacle.

You can see the top from this point, but the trail winds around to the other side before gaining the summit.

From the top the view is most impressive. To the north is the isolated Bull of the Woods Wilderness, also called the "Hidden Wilderness" because it is visited so infrequently.

There are also several rock pinnacles visible, including the western summits of Henline Mountain as well as Nasty Rock, which is the most prominent of the outcroppings to the north.

Usually by January at least the upper half of the trail is covered with snow. But as of last week the trip was virtually snow-free because of low snow conditions so far this winter, although there were a few drifts near the top. However, with the recent cooler weather there's probably some new snow along the trail.

But that's OK, too, because even in the snow this is an enjoyable trip. It is easy to follow, and the mountain shrouded in snow and ice looks ghostly.

Because of the steepness and the switchbacks, this trail isn't suitable for cross-country skiing.

An important item to remember: There is no water available along the Henline Mountain Trail, so make sure you carry plenty.

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