



Fallen giants along the King Castle trail

JAMES JOHNSTON

King Castle Trail

Bike or hike this fabulous climb.

Dozens of different biking and hiking trips can happen on and around Castle Rock and the King Castle trail. And they all end with a steep uphill climb and stunning views of the Three Sisters and the McKenzie River Valley. Even if we end up with a lot of weather this spring, the King Castle trailhead is usually free of snow year round.

Directions: Drive Hwy. 126 east from Springfield for 45 miles. Between mileposts 45 and 46, take a right at the sign for Cougar Reservoir. Cross a bridge over the McKenzie River and in .4 miles proceed straight at the fork in the road onto Forest Service Road 410. In another .4 miles take a left on FS 2639. Drive another 1.8 miles and turn right at the small brown sign for the King Castle Trailhead.

The trail begins at 1,200 feet and winds around the eastern side of Castle Rock through absolutely spectacular old growth forest until an intersection with FS 480 in 4 miles. Cross the road and pick up the trail 20 yards uphill. From here it's another three-quarters of a mile climb through boring tree plantations to a trail intersection. Head uphill at this junction (a sharp left).

The trail switchbacks through a pleasant high elevation forest with some interesting rock outcropping for a mile to the Castle Rock summit at 3,800 feet. The best views of Sisters are from a rocky ridge just before

the actual summit. The top of Castle Rock itself looks north and west over the glacier carved McKenzie River Valley.

This is a fairly strenuous climb that gains 2,500 feet in a 12-mile round trip. If you want a more relaxed hike, walk a couple miles up the trail to see the best of the lush forest, and then drive back down the 2639 road for 1.3 miles and hang a left on FS 2639-480. This gravel road dead-ends at a trailhead in 4 miles. From here you'll hit the trail junction for the mile hike to the top.

King Castle is great for hikers, but it's fabulous for mountain bikers.

ride the pavement back to the 480 road and bike the four punishing miles uphill and head to the top.

The next part reminds me of the speeder scene in *Return of the Jedi*: Almost 6 miles of very fast downhill slalom, most of it through moss draped tree branches, hulking tree trunks, giant rotting logs and luxurious ferns.

If the trail is wet and muddy, please do your part to control erosion by walking your bike around the ruts and mud puddles. And try not to kill any pedestrians. **EW**

King Castle is great for hikers, but it's fabulous for mountain bikers. Here's my recommendation: Park at the King Castle trailhead,

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