



JAMES JOHNSTON

## Hut on the Summit

Snooze with furry friends at Little Cowhorn Lookout.

The Willamette National Forest has seen a lot of change since it was established as the Cascade Forest Reserve in 1893. Before the forest began a massive industrial forestry program in the 1950s and '60s, the major mission of the Forest Service was custodial: preventing timber theft, building trails and fighting fire. For a good part of the year, the only humans to be found amidst a vast unbroken forest were perched on lonely lookouts scattered across dozens of panoramic vistas along the spine of the Cascades. The Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps built most of these structures, and by 1936 there were approximately 65 lookouts. One of the best maintained is found atop Little Cowhorn Mountain, east of Lowell.

This is a very complicated drive. Trust me, you'll want a Lowell or Middle Fork District Map from the Forest Service headquarters on 7th and Pearl, or at the Lowell Service Station in Lowell.

Directions: Take I-5 south from Eugene for approximately 3 miles. Take the Oakridge/Klamath Falls exit (Exit 188A). Stay to the left onto Hwy. 58. Drive 58 for approximately 13 miles and take the left onto the Jasper-Lowell Road (next to the white covered bridge). Drive through the town of Lowell, following the signs for Fall Creek (a left on West Boundary and a right on Moss Street). A mile outside of Lowell, you'll come to a four-way intersection with another covered bridge ahead. Take the right onto Fall Creek Road. In a half-mile stay left

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on North Shore Road (stay to the left at the intersection in seven miles). This paved road follows Fall Creek and turns into Forest Service Road 18.

Do you have your map? OK. One mile past the boundary of the Willamette National Forest, just past the Dolly Varden Campground, take a left onto FS 1817. In 4.5 miles take a left on FS 1818. In 1.5 miles, take a right on FS 424. In 2.3 miles take a left at the unsigned FS 1806. In less than a quarter of a mile, take a right on FS 1817. Travel about 1.5 more miles and find the trailhead on the left-hand side of the road.

The Little Cowhorn trail is a moderate climb of about a mile, first through a 30-year-old tree plantation, and then through a gorgeous forest of hulking Douglas fir and hemlock. Towards the top you'll encounter a number of dramatic rock spires, where the trail winds across a narrow ledge to Little Cowhorn's rocky summit at 4,200 feet.

The flat-roofed lookout hut at the summit has been abandoned since the late '60s, and it's not a four-star hotel (a ragged notebook perched on a square column that used to house a sighting scope for fires provides extensive documentation of campers late-night run ins with the lookout's rodent population). But it'll keep you and a few friends warm and dry, and on clear days you'll wake up to a gorgeous sunrise with good views of the Three Sisters and the Willamette Valley.

The days of free board on Little Cowhorn, like so much else on the forest, are about to change. The deteriorating age of the lookout, compounded by frequent vandalism, has obliged the Forest Service to plan an ambitious restoration project. Upon completion, the renovated lookout will be placed in the Willamette's lookout rental program, which will charge you \$40 a night to stay. The Middle Fork Ranger District is still accepting comments on this proposal, which can be directed to recreation planner Tim Bailey at 782-2283.

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