



Three Sisters from Diamond Peak

JAMES JOHNSTON

Peak Experience

Boot up, water up for Diamond climb.

The glittering shape of Diamond Peak dominates the view south from Willamette Pass. Although the mountain may look like a distant precious stone to skiers and other winter travelers on Highway 58, it's actually named for one John Diamond, an Irish immigrant and early Lane County pioneer who climbed to the top of the mountain in 1846 hoping to spot an easy settlers route over the Cascade Crest.

The 8,744 foot tall Diamond Peak is more than 1,000 feet shorter than the South Sister, and a much less popular destination. Like the South Sister it can be climbed in one day. And it offers unrivaled views — on exceptionally clear day you can see from Mount Hood to Mount Shasta in California.

The 52,000-acre wilderness that surrounds the mountain is also under-appreciated by backpackers and day hikers who flock to the Three Sisters Wilderness to the north. Like the Sisters, Diamond Peak was formed by intense volcanic activity that pushed a dozen cubic miles of rock skyward several million years ago. Glaciers have bulldozed the flanks of the mountain, leaving steep ridges and ravines. The base of the mountain is dotted with dozens of turquoise lakes and wildflower meadows. There are several multi-day back packing trips that can be built around the 14-mile section of the Pacific Crest trail that traverses the Diamond Peak Wilderness.

Directions: Take I-5 south from Eugene for approximately three miles. Take the Oakridge/Klamath Falls exit (Exit 188A). Stay to the left onto Hwy. 58. Take 58 for approximately 37 miles. Just past Dink's Market on the east side of Oakridge, take a right onto Kitson Springs Road. In .4 miles, take another right onto FS Road 21 (sign for Diamond Drive). Stay on 21 for approximately 29 miles, and then take a left on the gravel Pioneer Gulch Road (FS 2149). In 3.5 miles take a right onto Rockpile Road (FS 2160). Travel the 2160 road for 2.4 miles and park by the trailhead for the Rockpile Trail.

Unlike most of the hikes in this column, the Diamond Peak ascent should only be undertaken by people who are fit and have experience with off-trail travel on steep and rocky terrain. Weather can change suddenly at high elevations and stiff winds at the summit can quickly chill sweaty hikers, so pack a sweater or wind breaker. The mosquitoes in August can be a serious nuisance, so bring plenty of bug repellent, as well as sunglasses

and sunscreen. Stout boots are a must. On warm days, each member of your party will need an absolute minimum of two liters of water to make it to the top and back.

The major hazard of this climb, other than rapidly changing weather, is loose boulders. Travel in a group, examine your route carefully, and pay close attention to where you're putting your hands and feet.

You'll have close to four miles of hiking on a hot, dusty trail before you begin the climb. Head east at the Rockpile trailhead and stay straight in a mile at a four-way intersection. A mile or so from this intersection you'll break out of the forest for a moment and have nice views south to Summit Lake and Sawtooth and Cowhorn Mountain beyond. Then you'll drop down to Rockpile Lake and a trail junction that takes you to Marie Lake. Rockpile Lake is little more than a shallow puddle this time of year. Marie Lake is a great destination for people who don't want to climb the mountain — the water is warm and deep enough for swimming.

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The trail from the Marie Lake junction bends to then south and then east again. Stay straight at all trail intersections, following signs for the Pacific Crest Trail. About a half-mile past the junction with Marie Lake, turn north on the PCT. In a little less than a mile, the PCT will make a fairly sharp bend to the east across a short rocky bluff that offers more superb views of Summit Lake. At this point look to the left of the trail for orange ribbons leading towards Diamond Peak. Following the ribbons and small rock cairns, you'll climb steeply over a rocky forested slope before breaking out on the top of a long ridge leading to the summit.

From here, you'll follow a faint climbers trail past several snowfields to a false summit before a last steep scramble around a series of rock spires to the top. The views will make the hard trip worth it. **EW**

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