

Cascade lily on Olallie Mountain



JAMES JOHNSTON

Olallie Mountain

Mars, full moons and mosquitos are all on tap for the Three Sisters in August.

Terrific views, tons of wildflowers and endless blue skies are to be had every summer in the Three Sisters Wilderness. This August offers at least one unique attraction that can be enjoyed on a relatively easy 7-mile round trip to the top of Olallie Mountain — one of the classic day hikes to be had in the 300,000 acre wilderness area.

The drive requires a fair amount of time on gravel roads. To get there, take Hwy. 105 east from Springfield for approximately 45 miles. Between mileposts 45 and 46, turn right onto Forest Service Road 19 towards Cougar Reservoir. Take the sweeping right hand turn in a half-mile and follow the windy Road 19 another 2.5 miles to the reservoir. Turn left across Cougar dam and stay on FS Road 1993, staying on the main road at all junctions. In 15.5 miles you'll find the well-marked Pat Saddle Trailhead with plenty of parking on the right.

There are two trailheads in this parking lot. You want the Olallie Mountain trail at the far end, not the French Pete trail. The trail climbs gently through a forest of monstrous Douglas fir. In a half mile, you'll cross Mosquito Creek (there's a fine lake that can be reached with a quarter-mile bushwhack upstream). There are no mosquitoes here — they've followed the trail to the top of the mountain by August.

Two miles from the trailhead, the path splits. Continuing straight for a mile will take you to Olallie Meadows and an interesting

abandoned guard station. Unless you're highly motivated, you should take a right turn for Olallie Mountain, which has more scenic meadows and far better views. From the intersection you'll climb steeply for a mile and a half to the top of the 5,700-foot peak. Along the way you'll pass hundreds of waist-high bear grass flowers, along with pink Cascade lilies, columbine, paintbrush and lupine.

At the top is the Olallie Mountain Lookout, one of just two fire lookouts remaining in the Three Sisters Wilderness. This 14 x 14 ft. wooden structure, constructed 70 years ago, is run down, but makes a fine shelter in the unlikely event the weather turns bad. The door is unlocked, and will probably remain so as long as hikers refrain from vandalism and littering.

An overnight trip to Olallie Mountain is definitely in order this August, when Mars will be just 35 million miles from Earth, the closest it's come to Earth in almost 60,000 years. At its closest point Aug. 27, it will appear more than six times larger and 85 times brighter than normal. It will, in fact, rival the brightness of the moon.

There is, by the way, a full moon on Aug. 19.

Oh yeah, there's also spectacular views of the Three Sisters, Diamond Peak, Mount Jefferson and several other snow-capped peaks.

The scenery is spectacular enough that you probably won't even notice the mosquitoes. **EW**

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