



A winter wonderland

By EDWARD STRATTON
The Daily Astorian

About a two-hour drive south from Astoria are Elk and Kings mountains, two neighboring peaks on a single, crescent-shaped massif in the middle of the Tillamook State Forest.

The mountains and surrounding waterways are crisscrossed with trails, some maintained with support from mountaineering education nonprofit Mazamas. Trailheads are located along state Highway 6 about halfway between Tillamook and Forest Grove. A state-run campground on Elk Creek Road provides creekside camping, bathrooms and a hand-pumped water supply.

A hike up either mountain involves a steep ascent — 1,900 feet in 1 1/2 miles on Elk Mountain, and 2,500 feet in 2 1/2 miles on Kings Mountain. Although still often covered by snow into early summer, the mountains are a common primer to hikers preparing for the Cascades, still socked in long after the Coast Range.

An up-and-down trail follows the ridge between the two mountains. A junction in the middle gives hikers the choice between heading toward either peak, or down Elk Creek, a quickly descending mountain stream feeding south into the Wilson River that heads west toward Tillamook Bay.

For more information on the area, visit the state Department of Forestry's Forest Grove office at 801 Gales Creek Road, or visit tinyurl.com/ElkKingsMountains



The Elk and Kings mountain trails meet on a flat expanse along a ridge, still socked in with snow earlier this month.

Photos by Edward Stratton/The Daily Astorian

The ridge between Elk and Kings mountains turned into a winter wonderland with snowfields covering the ground, dustings on the trees and flurries of snowflakes in the air.



The trail down to Elk Creek was still packed with snow earlier this month.



Early morning hikes up Elk Mountain can often be foggy.



Below the melting snow, the runoff creates a series of waterfalls along the Elk Creek Trail.



Animal tracks mingle with boots on the ridge between Elk and Kings mountains.



A light dusting of snow on top of Elk Mountain, along with patches of fog in the hills of the Tillamook State Forest, created a magical scene.