

A North Coast Landmark

Early 20th-century park explorers described Saddle Mountain as a “strikingly picturesque pile of cliffed and chasmed rock.” Lewis and Clark mention the mountain in their Dec. 17, 1805 journal entries, depicting it as “rugged and uneavin.” The peak is a feature in Native American tribal legends. The Clatsop Tribe called the mountain “Swallalahoost.”

Today, Saddle Mountain is cherished for its hiking, colorful wildflowers and rare plants. The site is an officially dedicated State Natural Area, the highest level of protection and recognition of natural habitat given under the Oregon Natural Areas Plan and Oregon Natural Heritage Act. Botanists and wildflower enthusiasts find the trail hike one of the most interesting in northwestern Oregon. The diversity and abundance of flowers, lichens and mosses is remarkable.

Saddle Mountain State Park is a rare living example of the northern Oregon Coast Range’s ice age past. Grasslands were once much more common in this area. Since the last ice age, much of the grassland of the coastal mountains has given way to forest. Over time, plant species became isolated in fewer and fewer grassland pockets. Some of the plants on Saddle Mountain’s grassy slopes are rare because of the habitat loss. Only a few coastal grassy “balds” remain that host the rarest species found on Saddle Mountain.

Amateur geologists also find Saddle Mountain intriguing. The mountain formed when a large lava flow of Columbia River basalt touched the ancient sea. Steam explosions caused by the hot rock hitting the cold water broke the rock into a giant pile of basalt fragments.

U.S. Navy Lt. Charles Wilkes named Saddle Mountain in 1841 for the low, saddle-like curve between two peaks.



For more information:
Nehalem Bay Management Unit
9500 Sandpiper Lane (PO Box 366)
Nehalem, OR 97131
Telephone: (503) 368-5154
State Park Information Center
1-800-551-6949



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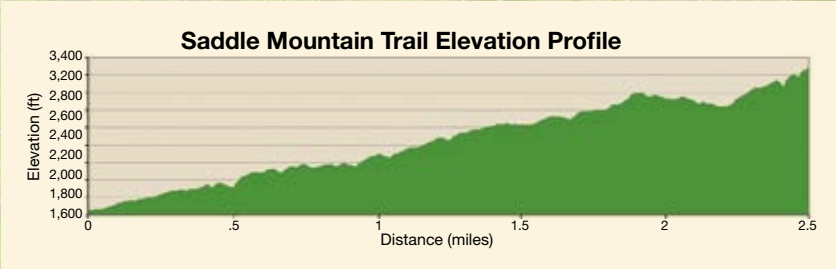
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Saddle Mountain State Natural Area

Trail Guide





Chocolate lilies surrounded by paintbrush and Martindale's desert parsley. The spring and summer wildflower display on Saddle Mountain intrigues wildflower enthusiasts all season long. Flowers bloom May-July, sometimes into August depending on the weather. Please don't pick them so others can enjoy the show.

Camping

Saddle Mountain has a small, seasonal campground, usually open March-October. Ten primitive campsites are available first-come, first-served. Recreational vehicles must park in the parking area. Visit www.oregonstateparks.org for rate information.

Friendly Reminders

- Please do not pick or dig plants or flowers.
- Stay on the trail. Shortcuts cause erosion and harm plants and wildlife.
- If you pack it in, pack it out.
- Dogs are permitted on leashes. Please dispose waste properly.
- Campfires are allowed in the campground only.
- Restrooms are located at the trailhead only.

The Trail

If the lure of spring wildflowers isn't enough to entice you to the top, the panoramic view from the 3,283-foot summit will. Fog and clouds often shroud the peak, but on a clear day you can see the sweep of the Columbia River as it enters the sea, miles of Pacific shoreline—and on the eastern horizon, the Cascade Mountains in Oregon and Washington.

Built by Civilian Conservation Corps workers in the 1930s, the trail zigzags through Douglas-fir, Sitka spruce, western hemlock and noble fir stands. The forest gives way to grassy slopes as the trail ascends the peak.

Hiking

The main trail is recommended for experienced hikers wearing proper footwear and clothing. Weather conditions can change rapidly, bringing wind and rain year round and snow in the winter. Portions of the trail can be slick in wet conditions. The trail climbs 1,603 feet over 2.5 miles, and is steep and difficult in spots. The challenge is well worth the breathtaking reward.

If you don't feel up to the main hike, try the short, 10-minute Humbug Mountain viewpoint trail that shoots off from the main trail a quarter mile from the trailhead. The spur trail gradually climbs to the top of a small peak and has views of Saddle Mountain.

Tough-leaf iris.

Wildflower photos courtesy of Kathleen Sayce.

