

# Summits in the Gorge

Four hikes in the Columbia Gorge to get you out on the trails this fall and winter



Photo by Sean Patrick Hill

**The view from Silver Star Mountain includes Mount Adams, above, as well as Mount Hood and Mount Jefferson. Many trails such as this one in the Columbia Gorge are open nearly year-round.**

## Sean Patrick Hill

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As winter approaches with its attendant snowpack, opportunities for hiking in the high country of the Cascades are quickly slipping away. For many avid hikers, the Columbia Gorge makes for excellent year-round hiking and a way to stay in shape until spring. The same goes for mountaineers, who make use of the Gorge as a way to train and stay fit. That's because the Gorge has a number of day hikes

that can ascend as much as 4,800 feet above the Columbia River. Here are four trails that offer great late-autumn hikes before the snow comes—or even in spring, after it melts off. Two hikes are on the Washington side, and the other two are easily accessible on the shadier, cooler Oregon side.

### Silver Star Mountain

Though accessed from the Gorge, Silver Star lies back a ways from it. The view, however, extends far into the Oregon Cascades, from Mount Hood to Mount Jefferson, and encompasses the high peaks of the Washington Cascades, including St. Helens, Adams and Rainier.

Starting from a pass called Grouse Creek Vista, an old road climbs a forested ridge through springtime avalanche lilies before rising to views of Pyramid Rock. From here, the trail follows the ridge over the deep canyon of Rock Creek, passing summer meadows lush with wildflowers, including explorer's gentian.

After 2.9 miles, a side trail to the right follows another ridge through late-summer huckleberry 0.9 miles to a series of "Indian pits." Though clouded in mystery, it is believed these pits dug from the rockslides were used by young men as vision-quest sites. The views from the ridge are fantastic.

Returning to the junction and continuing 0.4 mile up the road brings you to the peak of 4,390-foot Silver Star, the site of a former fire watchtower. Here the Washington peaks seem breathtakingly close.

Though it is tempting to return the way you came, there is another option. Go back down the peak to the junction, where another old road descends 1.4 miles, passing Sturgeon Rock's columnar basalt to the Tarbell Trail, a 3.2-mile woody descent back to your car. The trail crosses the creek near a small waterfall—a fine place to cool off on a hot day.

### Dog Mountain

In springtime, the meadows on the peak of Dog Mountain are a veritable wildflower garden. The trail, unless seriously snowed in, is open year-round. A 6.9-mile loop is an excellent way to explore the mountain.

From the parking area on Highway 14 between mileposts 53 and 54, the scenic trail climbs steeply up switchbacks for 0.5 mile to a junction with the "Old Trail." Go right up the Dog Mountain Trail for another 2.5-miles to stunning cliff-edge viewpoints and wildflower meadows to the top of the 2,920-foot peak.

To go down an easier way, follow signs for Augspur Mountain, which connects with the trail of the same name, descending gradually down the mountain through woods full of birdsong for 3.8 miles to the highway.

## Nesmith Point

An amazingly quiet trail, free of hikers, the trail from Oregon's Yeon Park offers old-growth woods, salmonberries, and a view over the Gorge through a natural amphitheater in the cliffs. The view comes at a cost, but it's worth it.

The trail from Yeon switchbacks steeply, following a gully nearly 3,000 feet to a saddle in the course of 3.3 miles. From the crest, the trail meanders an easier 1.3 miles to Nesmith Point, the site of an old watchtower and a collapsed outhouse at 3,872 feet. There's even a spring near the trail with cold, clear water spouting from a pipe. Pileated woodpeckers drum in the woods, and blue grouse sneak among the undergrowth near the peak. Return the way you came.

## Larch Mountain

One of the best hikes in the Gorge passes three big waterfalls—including Multnomah Falls, highest in Oregon—on its way to a volcanic crater and a stunning view at 4,055-foot Sherrard Point.

There are many ways to get to Larch Mountain, as long as the trails are snow free. Day trippers simply drive to the top, park the car, and walk about half a mile to the overlook.

Photo by Jennifer S.



Some park lower down at a trailhead on Larch Mountain Road, where they can accomplish a fairly easy 6-mile loop around the crater rim and through the crater itself and the headwaters of Multnomah Creek.

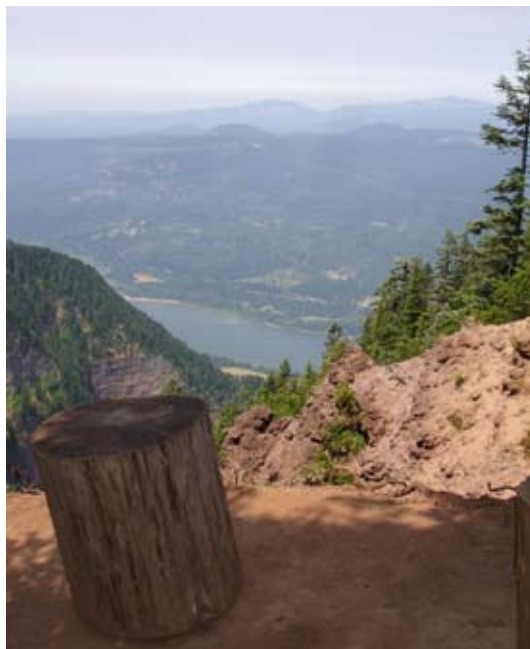
But for the more ambitious hiker—and there are many—climbing Larch Mountain from the base of Multnomah Falls offers up to 15.6 miles of some of the best hiking in the Columbia Gorge.

Following the Multnomah Falls Trail to the Larch Mountain Trail, you pass three big waterfalls along lush Multnomah Creek before setting off on trails over sliding shale where pikas peep from their dens. After the junction with the Wahkeena Trail, follow the Larch Mountain Trail 5 miles to Sherrard Point, a knoll atop volcanic rock with views to Mount Hood and Mount Jefferson.

It's worth it to do the loop by returning to the parking lot and following the Larch Mountain Road a short ways to the Oneonta Trail, which follows the crater rim 0.9 mile to the Multnomah Creek Way Trail, which follows an old road 2.5 miles down to the marshy headwaters, where bog orchids bloom in summer and stunning views open to Sherrard's massive cliffs. A connecting trail going left 0.2 mile returns you to the Larch Mountain Trail that leads to the base of Multnomah Falls.

Even if Larch Mountain is snowed in, there is another great loop open year-round by following the Wahkeena Trail across the ridge and down Wahkeena Creek, passing Wahkeena and Fairy Falls and tiger lilies in summer. The Gorge Trail follows the Historic Columbia Gorge Highway back to Multnomah Lodge. ♦

Photo by Sean Patrick Hill



**A hiker on Dog Mountain, left, and the view from Nesmith Point, right. Trails on both sides of the Columbia provide wide-open views and good off-season hiking.**

## Hike Details

### Silver Star Mountain

9.7-mile loop

Elevation gain:  
2,400 feet

Trails: Grouse Vista Trail #180 F, Silver Star #180, Tarbell Trail/Sturgeon Trail #180 C (Indian Pit side trail #180 E)

Map: Larch Mountain, Bobs Mountain (Washington USGS)

### Dog Mountain Loop

6.9-mile loop

Elevation gain:  
2,820 feet

Trails: Dog Mountain #147, Augspur Mountain Trail #4407

Map: USFS Trails of the Columbia Gorge

### Nesmith Point

9.8 miles round trip

Elevation gain:  
3,810 feet

Trails: Nesmith Point Trail #428

Map: Trails of the Columbia Gorge (Geo-Graphics)

### Larch Mountain

15.6-mile loop

Elevation gain:  
3,256 feet

Trails: Larch Mountain Trail #441, Oneonta Trail #424, Multnomah Spur Trail #446, Multnomah Way Trail #444

Map: Trails of the Columbia Gorge (Geo-Graphics)