

Kerby Peak, a haven of botanical intrigue

BY EVELYN ROETHER

Greetings, fellow hikers! There's still time to get up high before snow arrives. Kerby Peak will not disappoint. The views from there are stupendous, and the botanical diversity is superb. Go! Go! Go!

Kerby Peak

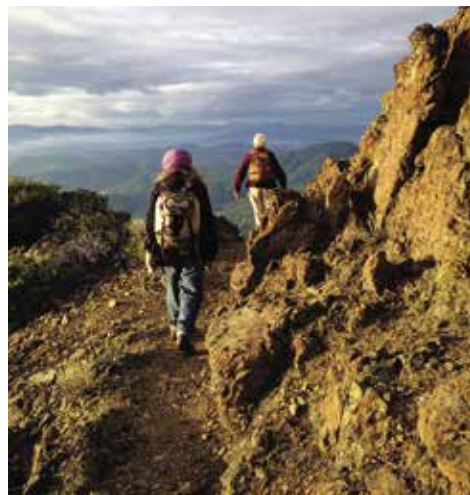
Difficulty: Difficult
Distance: 6.7 miles round trip
Elevation gain: 2,700 feet
Access: April - November
Map: Kerby Peak USGS quad

Directions

Seasonal access: From "downtown" Williams, follow (paved) Cedar Flat Road for 21.4 miles, down into the Deer Creek drainage. Turn left onto the partially paved White Creek Road (38-6-18). After 0.5 mile, take the second left on East White Creek Road (38-7-13.4). Follow this gravel road 2.7 miles to the signed trailhead, which is located at the junction of roads 38-7-13.4 and 39-7-25. (This route is generally not passable from November to late May, due to snow on the ridge.)

Year-round access: In Selma, turn left (east) at the traffic light onto Deer Creek Road. Follow this paved road east for about nine miles until you get to White Creek Road (38-6-18). Turn right. After a half mile, take the second left on East White Creek Road (38-7-13.4). Follow this gravel road 2.7 miles to the signed trailhead, which is located at the junction of roads 38-7-13.4 and 39-7-25.

The spectacular Kerby Peak ridgeline is in a de facto (unprotected) Roadless Area containing a lot of botanical intrigue. The trail is documented on maps dating back as far as 1915. For 44 years it provided access to a fire lookout on the top of Kerby Peak, which was decommissioned and destroyed in 1966. The old-growth fir forests and open ridgeline habitats provide

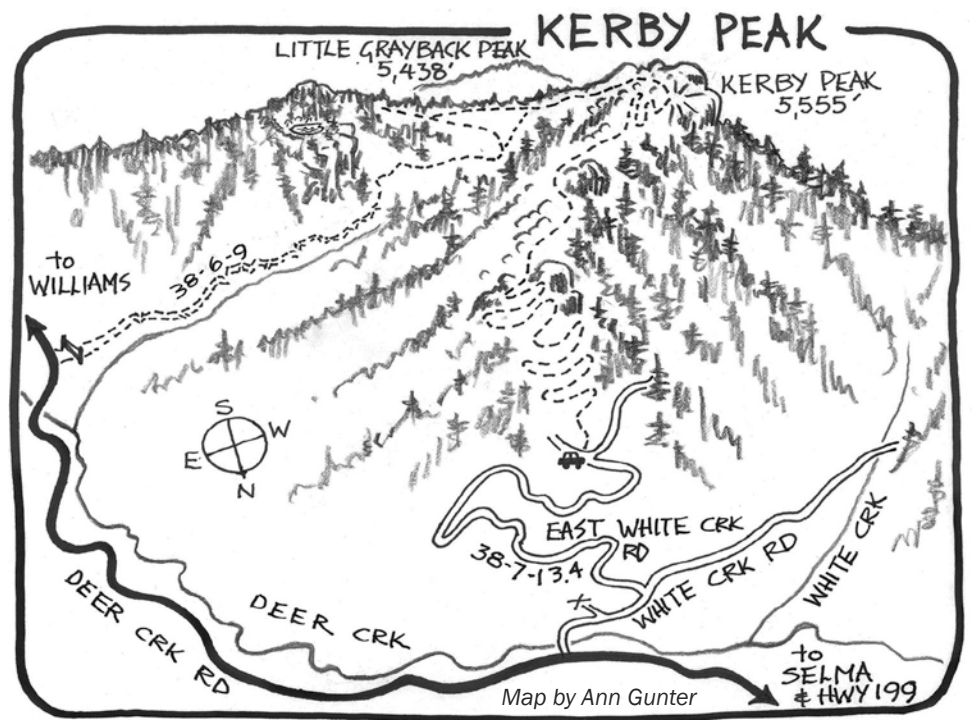


Hikers earn magnificent views on the Kerby Peak Trail. Photo: Evelyn Roether.

many different plant communities to study along the trail.

From the parking area the single-track trail begins its steep climb. It is generously switch-backed, however, and well shaded on a north-facing slope. The initial towering Douglas fir forest is lush and cool, with an understory of Oregon grape, vanilla leaf, deciduous huckleberry, twinflower, and some very photogenic rock outcrops. Farther up the trail, note the sugar pine and chinquapin trees and, later, the Brewer's weeping spruce and knobcone pine. Brewer's spruce is endemic to the Klamath Mountains and is found primarily on high, rugged ridgetops such as those around you here.

After about two miles the forest gives way to the sparsely vegetated rocky ridgeline, resplendent with wildflowers and vistas. In the rock gardens along the way look for the pink-striped lewisia, purple penstemon, yellow lupine, orange tiger lilies, pink Washington lilies, and many other colorful forbs.



Map by Ann Gunter

As the trail traverses and climbs the east flanks of the mountain, the dramatic red, iron-rich peridotite rock of the Kerby Peak ridge becomes visible. Peridotite is metavolcanic in origin and was formed as part of a 425-million-year-old baked seafloor. As it was uplifted and is continually weathered by the elements, it turns from its natural green (serpentine) color to bright red and orange.

Expansive views unfold, looking down into the Deer Creek drainage to the north and across to the Rabbit Lake area and the giant Moquandinar rock face to the south. The final ascent to the summit is lined with mats of low-growing manzanita, huckleberry oak, and kinnikinnick with just enough shade from the occasional Brewer's spruce or knobcone pine to keep you from overheating.

Finally, you reach Kerby Peak, towering mightily above the Illinois Valley to

the west. At the summit (5,555 feet), panoramic views open in all directions. To the north is the Deer Creek watershed and Lake Selmac, with the Kalmiopsis Wilderness looming on the horizon. To the northeast, Murphy and Grants Pass are visible. Towards the east, beyond the clear-cuts, the ridge in the foreground forms a divide between the Applegate and Illinois River watersheds, with pointy Mt. McLoughlin in the distance. On the southeastern horizon lie Grayback Mountain (farthest to the east), then Lake Mountain and Swan Mountain. To the south is Little Grayback Peak (elevation 5,638 feet), with a lookout tower on top, and, beyond that, the high peaks of the Siskiyou Wilderness above Takilma. What a sight to behold! Enjoy, and return the way you came.

Evelyn Roether
 evelynkr@gmail.com





Jesse McNamara
 Broker

Cell: (541) 659-8099

Email: roguevalleyhome@gmail.com
 www.pine-rok.com

P.O. Box 203 • 165 Tetherow Rd., Williams, OR 97544 • 541-846-7131



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Office: (541) 846-7131