

Grayback Mountain Trail traverses important wildlife corridor

BY EVELYN ROETHER

The Grayback Mountain Trail is a pleasure any time of year, but the upper reaches generally remain snow-covered from November through May. For the winter months, the loop trail is a better option.

The whole of the trail passes through diverse evergreen forests, much of which is comprised of large old-growth trees. These semi-intact wildlands provide an important wildlife corridor link between the lowlands of the Applegate Valley and the high Siskiyou Mountains. This area is habitat for the federally threatened Northern spotted owl, red tree voles, Del Norte salamanders, goshawks, and at least five species of bats.

A long-term cooperative project between the Bureau of Land Management and the Williams community, the Grayback Mountain Trail was finally completed in 2006 after 17 years of construction. The end of this long, steep trail is atop Big Sugarloaf Peak, the northern terminus of the Boundary Trail. There is no water along this long, steep trail, so come prepared!

Grayback Mountain Trail

Difficulty: Loop - Moderately difficult
To Boundary Trail - Difficult

Distance: Loop - 3.5 miles
To Boundary Trail - 8 miles

Elevation gain: 2,055 feet (trailhead to Boundary Trail)

Access: Loop - year-round
To Boundary Trail - June-October

Map: Williams USGS quad

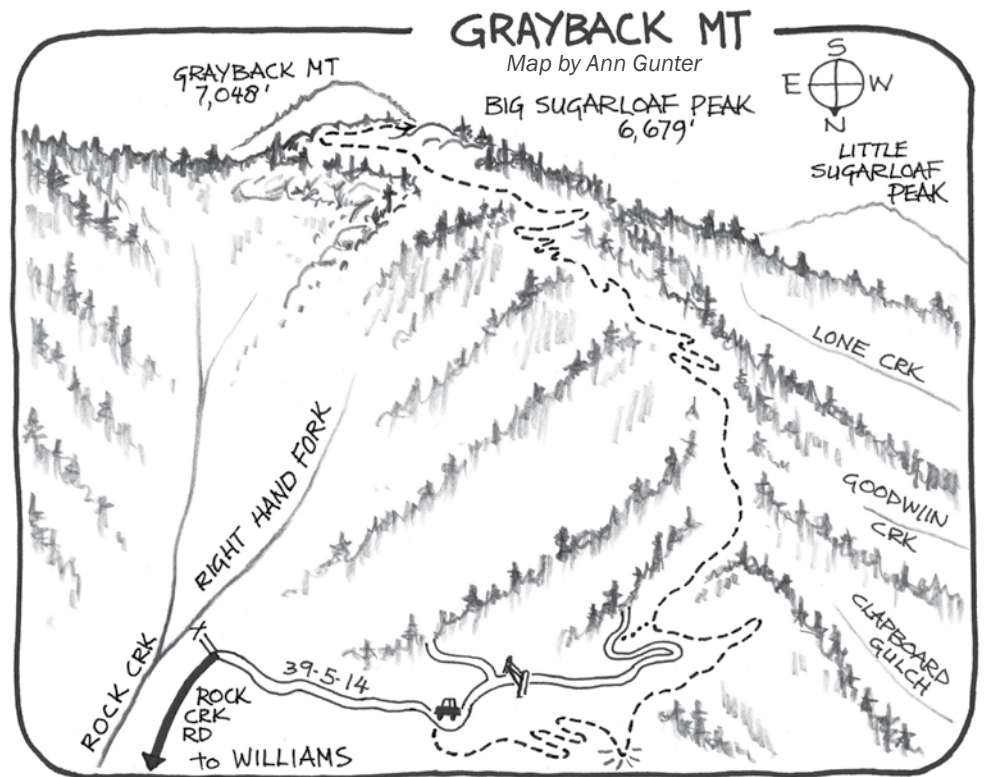
Directions

In Williams, turn left at the Williams Elementary School onto East Fork Road. Continue for three miles. Turn right onto Rock Creek Road (39-5-14). Proceed two miles to the parking area and signed trailhead on the right.

The trail starts at the lower end of the parking area, following an old roadbed for the first half mile. Shortly before the roadbed ends, a single-track trail heads uphill to the left, into mixed evergreen forest including Douglas fir, incense cedar, sugar pine, ponderosa pine, white fir, golden chinquapin, canyon live oak, and madrone. The shrub layer is predominantly dwarf Oregon grape, salal, and an occasional baldhip or wood rose.

About a mile and a half from the trailhead, the trail makes a jaunt east and comes within yards of the upper part of Rock Creek Road (39-5-14). At the signed trail junction, a short spur to the left will take you to the road. To complete the shorter 3.5 mile loop, turn left and continue down the road about a mile, past the yellow gate, back to the trailhead parking area.

To continue on the main trail stay right at the junction and traverse the southeastern slope through solid stands



The Grayback Mountain Trail passes through diverse evergreen forests. Photo: Evelyn Roether.



of chinquapin and madrone, past some immense ponderosa and sugar pine trees. After a steady climb you'll reach the ridge between Little and Big Sugarloaf peaks, which separates the east and west forks of Williams Creek. The ascent then steepens once again, with switchbacks and views of the Williams Valley to distract you.

At these higher elevations, true fir and hemlock forests emerge, interspersed with mini sub-alpine meadows carpeted with arnica and other wild forbs. The trail skirts the edge of the Grayback Glades (which form the snowy "7" seen on the mountain above Williams) then finally pops over the east ridge onto Big Sugarloaf Peak, where stunning views of distant snow-covered peaks await you. The Grayback Mountain

out-and-back-trail ends at a simple rock cairn, where the northern end of the Boundary Trail begins. Head back the way you came.

Hiking Trails of the Lower Applegate, a trail guide describing 20 trails in the Lower Applegate area, is available at the Williams General Store and Takubeh Natural Market in Williams, Provolt Store and Whistling Duck Farm and Store in Provolt, Rebel Heart Books in Jacksonville, Oregon Books and Games in Grants Pass, and Northwest Nature Shop and Bloomsbury Books in Ashland. Trail guides can also be purchased directly from the author at lowerapplegatetrails@gmail.com. Happy hiking!

Evelyn Roether
evelynkr@gmail.com

Southern Oregon Rural Specialists!

Farms, Ranches All Rural Properties Your Town and Country Realtors

Serving Josephine & Jackson Counties

Paula Sepolpo
Principal Broker/
Notary

Jesse McNamara
Broker

Ann James
Broker

Not pictured: Josephine Harrison, Owner, and Wensdae Davis, Broker.

PINE-ROK REALTY

P.O. Box 203 • 165 Tetherow RD
Williams, OR 97544

Office: (541) 846-7131

Fire Safe Landscapes LLC

Ecological, Fire Safe, Affordable

Licensed, Bonded, Insured
CB# 227777

Tree Removal • Brush Clearing • Defensible Space
Ecological Forestry • Fireline Construction
Firewise Consulting • General Contracting

541-708-1072

firesafelandscapes@gmail.com

www.firesafelandscapes.com