

KRAIG ADAMS

Timberline Trail Hiking Guide

A 40-mile loop around Mount Hood in 2 days

2027 season edition · updated October 2026

Contents

	Welcome
	At a glance
	Straight answers
	When to go
	Permits and rules
	Getting there
	The river crossings
Day 1	**Timberline Lodge to Cloud Cap**
Day 2	**Cloud Cap to Timberline Lodge**
	Other ways to do it
	Where I slept, food and water
	What I paid
	What I carried
	Weather and safety
	Using the GPX files
	Before you go, check these
	One-page trip sheet
	About this guide

Welcome

In July 2023 I hiked the Timberline Trail, the loop all the way around Mount Hood in Oregon, alone and in two days: about 40 miles clockwise from Timberline Lodge, past Zigzag Canyon, the Sandy River, Ramona Falls, Cairn Basin, Elk Cove and Cloud Cap, over the high point of the loop on the east side, through Mt. Hood Meadows and back across the White River to the lodge. It's the trip from my film Hiking 40 miles on the Timberline Loop in Oregon.

I'd been to Mount Hood a couple of times before, but I was really excited to finally do the loop all the way around. It's a loop, which is great if you're by yourself with one car. There are a bunch of entry and exit points, a few campsites, the falls and the stream crossings that make it interesting, and of course the lodge if you want an actual meal at the end.

What's inside

- Straight answers to the questions people ask about this loop
- When to go, the permit, camping and fire rules in 2026, and getting to Timberline Lodge
- The river crossings: which ones have no bridge, and how the Eliot Branch crossing works now
- Both days: my notes, the trail, where to get off, a map with an elevation profile, and links to that day in my film
- Other ways to do it, where I slept, food and water, what I paid and what I carried
- Weather and safety, one page of things to check before you go, and a printable trip sheet

How to use it offline

Save this PDF to your phone's Files or Books app before you leave home. Load the GPX files and download offline maps while you still have a signal in Portland or Government Camp: don't count on a phone signal on the trail. Each day starts on a new page. The film links need a connection; everything else works in airplane mode.

When I say "I," it's my own trip. Rules, closures and fees change, so they're dated, and the checks are collected on one page: Before you go, check these.

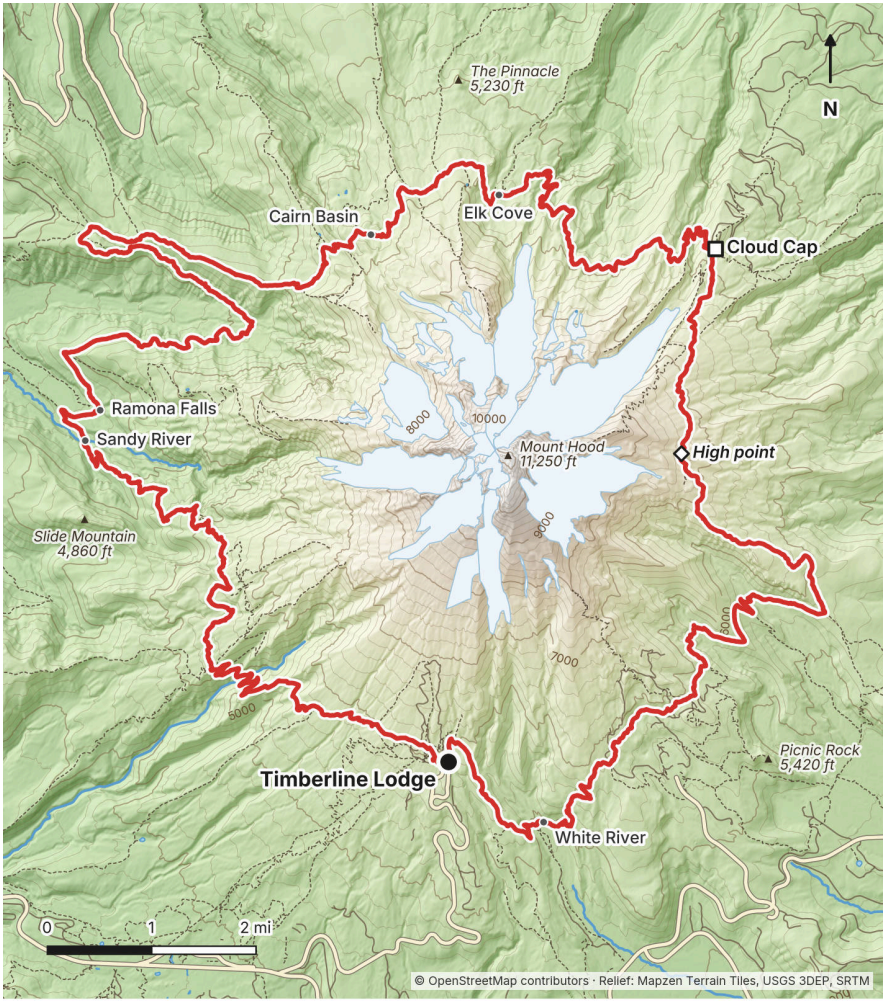
At a glance

QUICK FACTS

Distance	40.2 miles (64.7 km), a loop. The Forest Service calls it "approximately 40 miles"
Climbing	about 8,750 ft (2,670 m) up and 8,670 ft (2,640 m) down
Days	2 days, plus a short walk-in the evening before. Most people take 3 or 4
Start and finish	Timberline Lodge, about 6,000 ft, on the south side of the mountain, just over an hour's drive from Portland
High point	About 7,300 ft (2,227 m on my GPS), on the east side between Cooper Spur and Gnarl Ridge, Day 2
Low point	The Sandy River ford, about 3,300 ft (1,000 m), Day 1
When	July to October (Forest Service). I went July 21 to 23, 2023
Difficulty	Long days, steep canyon walls, sandy trail, and glacial rivers with no bridges
Permit	Free, filled out at the trailhead box (2026). Summer parking at the lodge is free

DAY	ROUTE	MILES (KM)	UP / DOWN (FT)	SLEEP
1	Timberline Lodge (1.1 miles the evening before), Zigzag Canyon, the Sandy River, Ramona Falls, Elk Cove and the Eliot Branch to Cloud Cap	26.9 (43.3)	5,327 / 5,350	My tent a mile in, then Cloud Cap Saddle Campground
2	Over the high point, Newton Creek, Mt. Hood Meadows and the White River to Timberline Lodge	13.3 (21.3)	3,438 / 3,378	Home

The numbers are from my own GPS, smoothed the same way every day (see Using the GPX files). Day 1 counts from Timberline Lodge, so it includes the 1.1-mile walk-in the evening before; I walked the other 25.8 miles on the Saturday.





My loop around Mount Hood, clockwise from Timberline Lodge: west across the Sandy River, north past Ramona Falls and Elk Cove to Cloud Cap, then south over the high point and back across the White River. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Straight answers

How many days do I need? I did it in a day and a half: a short walk-in the evening I arrived, a full day of almost 28 miles to Cloud Cap, and a morning of almost 15 miles back to the car. You could definitely take more days than I did and not completely speed run it. The Forest Service says most trips take 3 to 4 days. See Other ways to do it.

How hard is it? The trail itself is good, but it's sandy and dusty, it drops in and out of deep canyons, and the river crossings were pretty intense. Day 2 starts with the big climb to the high point of the loop, about 7,300 ft. The hardest part for most people is the fords.

Are there bridges over the rivers? Not over the big glacial ones. There's no bridge over the Sandy River, and the Forest Service says none will be installed. The Eliot Branch, the Coe Branch, the Muddy Fork, Newton Creek and the White River are fords too. There were one or two where you just had to go through the water: no way to jump on the rocks. See The river crossings.

Do I need a permit? A free one you fill out yourself at the trailhead box, between May 15 and October 15. There's no quota or reservation (2026). See Permits and rules.

Where do I park? At Timberline Lodge. Summer parking is free; from November 1 to April 30 you need an Oregon Sno-Park permit.

Is there water? Lots: stream crossings almost every other mile, as I put it at the time. Many are glacial and silty. There's no drinking water at Cloud Cap Saddle Campground. Treat everything. See Where I slept, food and water.

Can I have a campfire? Bring a stove. Fires are banned all year in Paradise Park, within 500 feet of Ramona Falls and McNeil Point, and in the tree islands at Elk Cove and Elk Meadows, and in summer a forest-wide ban usually covers everything else. In July 2023 the sign on the trail above the lodge said "Fires banned due to wildfire danger."

Will I see other people? Plenty. Part of the loop is the Pacific Crest Trail, and I probably saw two or three dozen PCT hikers that first morning. Cloud Cap was full when I got there.

Which way should I go? I went clockwise from Timberline Lodge. That puts the Sandy River early on Day 1, the Eliot Branch at the end of a long day, and the big climb first thing on Day 2, when it's cool.

When to go

The season. The Forest Service gives July to October. Snow lingers into July on the high east side, past Cooper Spur, and on the snow bridges over Clark Creek. 2026 was a low-snow year: in mid-June the trail looked like late July.

What I got. July 21 to 23, 2023: clear and hot. On Day 1 it was hot at high noon but there were zero bugs. Day 2 was very hot at noon again. The trail skirts the edge of the tree line, so a lot of it is in the open sun.



Beargrass beside the trail on the north side, Day 1.

Wildflowers. Late July was full of them: beargrass, lupine and paintbrush, and plenty in the old burns.

Rivers. Glacial rivers run highest on hot afternoons, when the snow and ice above them are melting. The Forest Service advises crossing in the morning, when flows are lower. Early summer, with more snowmelt, can mean higher water.

Smoke and fire. Late summer is fire season on Mount Hood. In 2026 the lightning-caused Grasshopper Fire, east of Highway 35, burned about 94,000 acres from July 23. It closed part of the east side of the Timberline Trail in August; the Forest Service reopened the trail on September 4, 2026, and from what was reported it did not burn. A forest-wide campfire ban ran from July 1 to September 23, 2026. Check the forest's alerts and the air quality before you go.

Permits and rules

All of this was checked on the Forest Service's own pages on October 1, 2026.

Wilderness permit. Free and self-issued. The Forest Service says it's required from May 15 to October 15 "when provided at a portal": fill one out at the trailhead box and carry your copy. In July 2023 the sign on the trail a mile west of the lodge said "All users require permit beyond this point (Day hikers and Overnight Backpackers) May 15 - Oct 15," with a $100 fine for not having one. A 2025 report says some boxes have been empty or gone; if there's a box, fill one out. There's no quota, reservation or limited-entry permit for the Mount Hood Wilderness (2026), and none announced for 2027. The limited-entry permits in Oregon are for the Central Cascades, not Mount Hood.



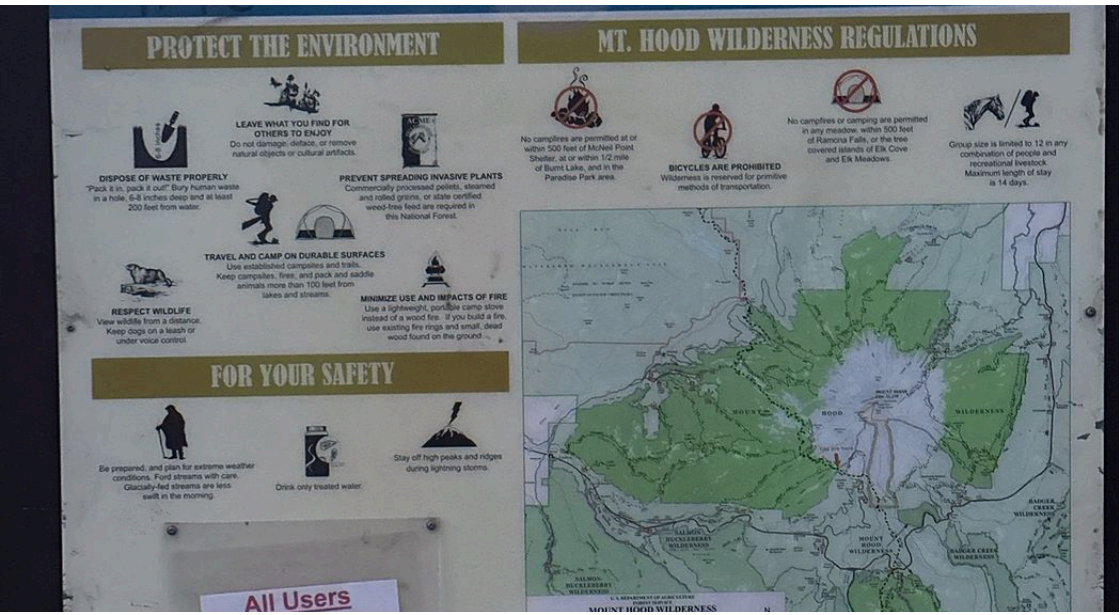
The permit box and fire signs on the trail a mile west of Timberline Lodge, the evening I started.

Climbing permit. Only above 9,500 ft. The trail tops out near 7,300 ft, so you don't need one.

Camping. No camping in any meadow, in the tree islands of Elk Cove and Elk Meadows, or within 500 feet of Ramona Falls. Camp at least 100 feet from streams, rivers and lakes. Stay at most 14 days in one spot and 28 days a year. There are no designated sites on the trail itself; Cloud Cap Saddle Campground is a small campground on a road.

Fires. Banned all year in Paradise Park, within 500 feet of Ramona Falls and McNeil Point, and in the tree islands at Elk Cove and Elk Meadows. In summer the forest usually bans campfires everywhere (July 1 to September 23 in 2026). Carry a stove.

Other rules. No bikes, carts, motors or drones in the wilderness. Bury waste 6 inches deep, at least 100 feet from water, and pack out toilet paper. The Forest Service's usual wilderness group limit is 12, people and animals together (I couldn't find it on a Mount Hood page, so check).



The Mt. Hood Wilderness board at the trail, the evening walk-in.

Getting there

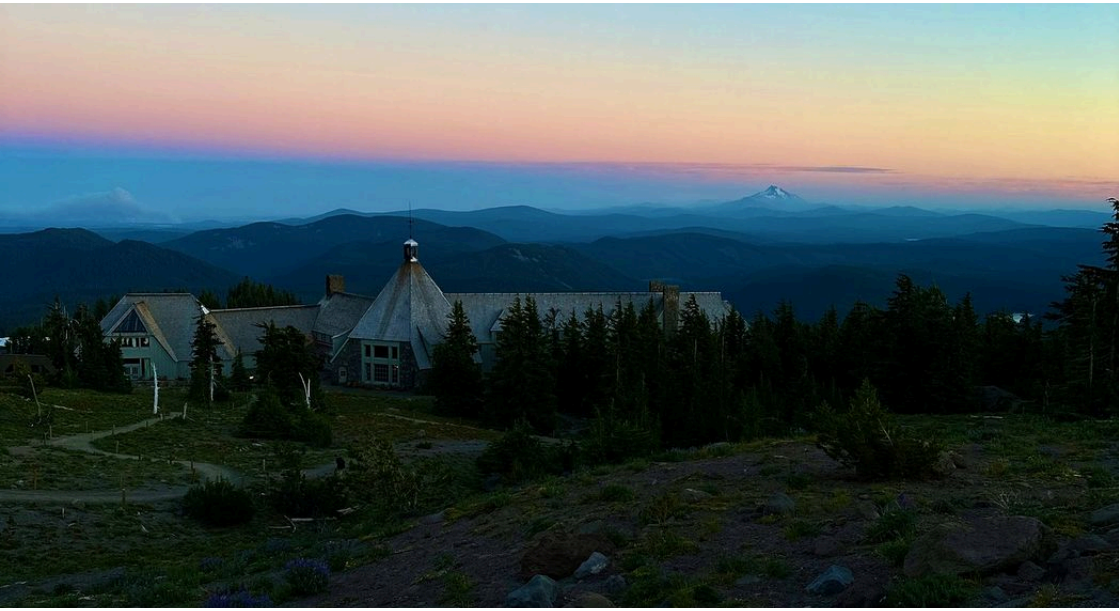
My way in. I'd just finished two hikes in British Columbia, the Howe Sound Crest Trail and Panorama Ridge. I immediately drove to the Vancouver airport, dropped off my rental car and jumped on a very quick flight down to Portland, Oregon: Air Canada, 5:05 p.m. to 6:19 p.m. on Friday, July 21. I was going boom, boom, boom with these hikes, so I needed to start the Timberline Loop that night. From the airport I got a new rental car, drove to REI and stocked up on some food and fuel, because you can't really fly with fuel: you have to get it at each new destination.

To Timberline Lodge. From Portland take US 26 east through Sandy, Welches and Government Camp, about 40 miles, then the Timberline Road 6 miles up to the lodge. The lodge calls it just over an hour from Portland; from the airport, plan on about an hour and a half. In winter, chains may be required.

Parking. Free in summer (2026), first come, first served, with separate areas for day use, overnight guests and buses. From November 1 to April 30 you need an Oregon Sno-Park permit ($4 a day, $9 for three days, $25 a year).

By bus. The Mt Hood Express runs every day between Sandy and Timberline Lodge, via Government Camp: $2 one way or $5 for a day pass (2026). Check the timetable on rideclackamas.org.

The night before. I parked at sunset and hiked in just enough to set up my tent to sleep. Once I felt like I was safe and quiet, out of the way, I set up my tent for the night. It's a lot cheaper than a hotel, and it meant I could start very early the next day. "Hiked in to camp for the night. Starting the Timberline Trail tomorrow," I posted. That walk was 1.1 miles from the parking lot, up past the lodge and west on the trail, from 8:41 to 9:35 p.m.



Sunset over Timberline Lodge, the evening I arrived.

The river crossings

These are the part of the Timberline Trail people worry about, and the part the Forest Service warns about most: "Most hikers find the fast moving river crossings to be the most challenging part of the trail. Newton, Coe, Muddy Fork, Sandy and White Rivers are typically the most challenging fords but are typically not more than knee deep."

For me the stream crossings were pretty intense on this hike, and that made it fun, to be honest. There were one or two where you just had to go through the water: no way to jump on the rocks or make a bridge.

CROSSING (CLOCKWISE)	MY MILE	WHAT IT IS
Zigzag River	Day 1, 3.5	Bottom of Zigzag Canyon. An easy crossing on rocks in June 2026
Sandy River	Day 1, 9.3	No bridge, and none planned. Calf-deep in June 2026. The low point of the loop
Muddy Fork	Day 1, 13.3	Several branches; the north one needed wading in June 2026
Coe Branch	Day 1, 22.4	Glacial, muddy, fast. A log lay across it in 2023
Eliot Branch	Day 1, 26.2	Glacial, in a deep canyon; rerouted in 2016. See below
Newton Creek	Day 2, 6.0	Glacial; low flow in June 2026
Clark Creek	Day 2, 7.4	Snow bridges early in the season can collapse
White River	Day 2, 11.3	Wide, sandy and braided; the banks are eroding

The 2026 notes are from trip reports, not the Forest Service; water changes by the day.

The Eliot Branch. A debris flow in 2006 washed out the Timberline Trail's crossing of the Eliot Branch, and for about ten years the loop was officially broken there. The Forest Service built a new 1.5-mile section across the Eliot Branch (decision signed January 2016) and the full loop reopened in fall 2016. It crosses lower down the canyon. There's still no bridge: it's a ford. When I crossed, about 6 p.m. at the end of my long day, it was a fast gray torrent between boulders. In late July 2026 hikers found it easy, with three ropes still in place. It's open in 2026, with no closure.



The Eliot Branch, about 6 p.m. on Day 1.

How to cross. The Forest Service advises crossing in the morning, when glacial rivers are lower than in the afternoon. Look up and down for the widest, shallowest place; unbuckle your hip belt; face upstream with poles; and if it looks too fast or deep, wait or turn back.



Mount Hood from the trail, Day 1.

DAY 1

Contents

Timberline Lodge to Cloud Cap

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT
26.9 mi (43.3 km)	**5,327 ft** (1,624 m)	**5,350 ft** (1,631 m)

TIME I TOOK

12.3 hours on the day (6:20 a.m. to 6:41 p.m.), almost 10 of them moving, plus 1.1 miles the evening before

HIGH POINT

about 6,080 ft (1,854 m), on the walk-in above the lodge

LOW POINT

3,277 ft (999 m), just past the Sandy River ford, mile 9.6

ON THE WAY

my first camp (mile 1.1), Zigzag Canyon (mile 3.5), the Sandy River (mile 9.3), Ramona Falls (mile 10.2), the Muddy Fork (mile 13.3), Cairn Basin (mile 19.2), Elk Cove (mile 21.5), the Coe Branch (mile 22.4), the Eliot Branch (mile 26.2)

SLEEP

Cloud Cap Saddle Campground, about 5,850 ft (1,784 m on my GPS)

FOOD AND WATER

All my own. Streams almost every other mile; treat or filter

My day

This really is day one of the hike: a full day, almost 28 miles, over 12 hours. I had nothing to do but walk. It was a good full day of hiking, hot at high noon but zero bugs. There were plenty of PCT hikers during the first section, which was nice to see, and a few dogs with hikers. I stayed hydrated and crushed some good miles.



Mount Hood above the canyons on the west side, early on Day 1.

The section had a few burn scars from old wildfires, but wherever that happens there's such vibrant growth. The stream crossings were almost every other mile.



Burn scars and wildflowers on the north side, Day 1.

Compared to most hikes, this is a sandy trail. It's very dirty. You kind of hike and skirt the edge of the tree line, and it gets a little dusty.



Ramona Falls, Day 1 mile 10.2.

I ended the day at Cloud Cap, which was pretty full. There were a lot of other people.



My camp at Cloud Cap Saddle Campground, the evening of Day 1.

The trail

Zigzag Canyon. From my camp the trail runs west across Sand Canyon and the Little Zigzag, past the Zigzag Canyon rim viewpoint (mile 2.5), then switchbacks down to the Zigzag River (mile 3.5, about 4,790 ft) and back up the other side. This part is the Timberline Trail and the PCT together.

Below Paradise Park. Past Zigzag Canyon the Paradise Park Loop Trail #757 climbs into Paradise Park above the main trail and rejoins it farther on. I stayed on the main trail, the PCT, across Lady Creek, Lost Creek and Rushing Water Creek (mile 5.7). No campfires in Paradise Park.



The canyon of Rushing Water Creek, Day 1 mile 5.8.

Down to the Sandy River. The trail drops about 2,200 ft along the ridge above the Sandy River canyon to the ford at mile 9.3 (about 3,380 ft). No bridge. Just past it, at mile 9.6, is the lowest point of the loop.



On the ridge above the Sandy River canyon, Day 1 mile 7.1.



The Sandy River, where I forded it, Day 1 mile 9.4.

Ramona Falls. The Timberline Trail #600 leaves the PCT after the ford and climbs a little to Ramona Falls (mile 10.2, about 3,470 ft), a wide cascade over columns of rock with a footbridge in front. I stopped there for half an hour. No camping or campfires within 500 feet of the falls.

Ramona Falls to the Muddy Fork. From the falls I took the Timberline Trail north and east, through big old trees and blowdown, to the Muddy Fork (mile 13.3, about 4,150 ft), where you ford several branches. The Forest Service's Timberline Trail page (2026) warns of "a substantial wash-out on the trail about 2 miles north of Ramona Falls" and "significant blowdown between Muddy Fork and Yocum Ridge," and suggests bypassing this section on the PCT from Ramona Falls to Top Spur. See Other ways to do it.



Blowdown on the trail north of Ramona Falls, Day 1 mile 11.2.



Forest on the Timberline Trail near the Muddy Fork, Day 1 mile 13.4.

Bald Mountain to Cairn Basin. The trail climbs through forest past Bald Mountain (around mile 15.5), where it meets the PCT and the Top Spur trail again and opens up to the big view of Mount Hood. Then it's a long climb east up the north side, across McGee Creek and Glisan Creek, to the stone shelter at Cairn Basin (mile 19.2, about 5,660 ft) and Ladd Creek.



Mount Hood from near Bald Mountain, Day 1 mile 15.1.



Mount Hood close up from the north side, Day 1 mile 17.5.

Elk Cove and the Coe Branch. Past Eden Park and the old burn (the 2011 Dollar Lake Fire), the trail crosses meadows to Elk Cove (mile 21.5, about 5,460 ft). No camping or fires in the tree island there. Then it drops to the Coe Branch (mile 22.4), a fast, muddy glacial stream, with a log across it when I was there.



The trail toward Mount Hood on the north side, Day 1 mile 21.1.



A log across the Coe Branch, Day 1 mile 22.4.

To the Eliot Branch and Cloud Cap. The trail climbs across Compass Creek and more glacial streams, with snow still lying in the gullies in late July, then drops into the Eliot Branch canyon (mile 26.2). After the ford it climbs to Cloud Cap Saddle Campground at mile 26.9, at the end of the Cloud Cap road.



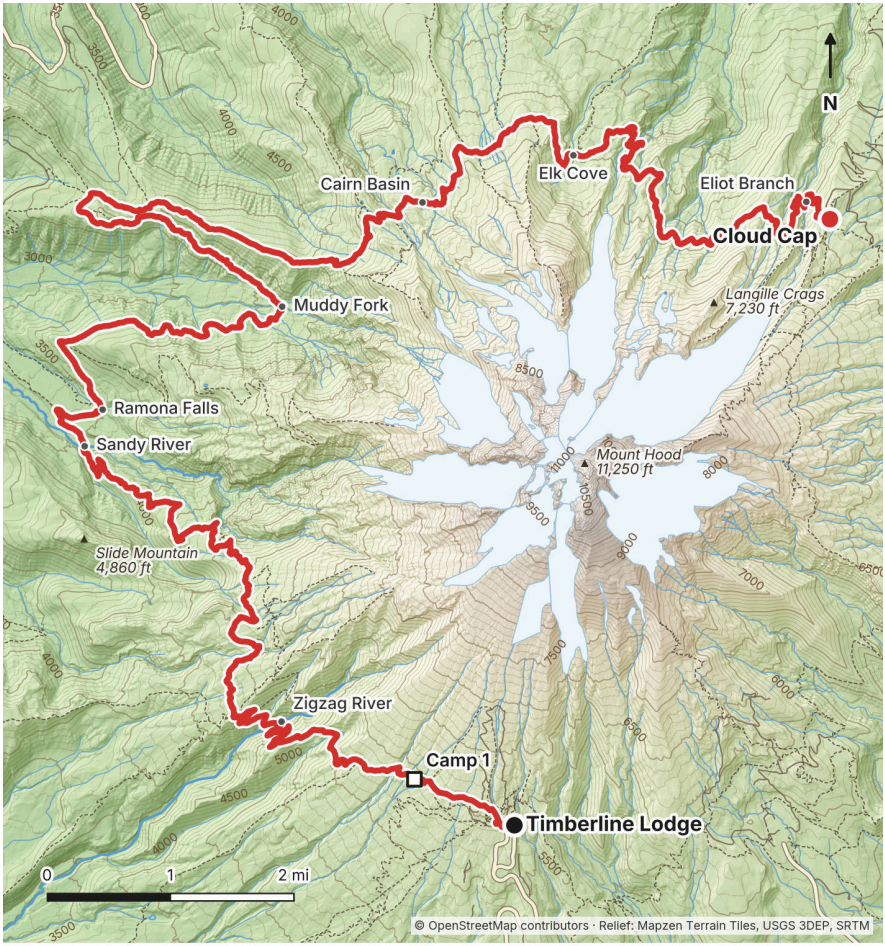
A glacial stream with snow on the north side, Day 1 mile 24.1.

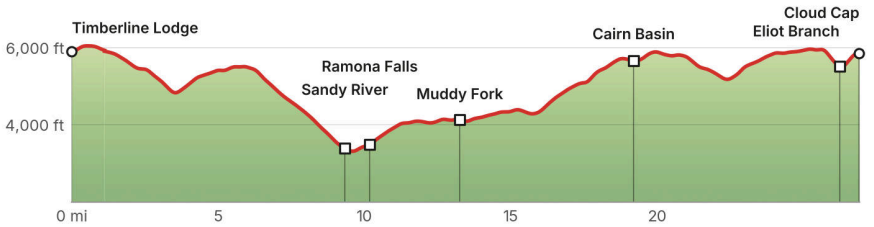
If you need to get off

The trail crosses other trails to trailheads all day. Near the start, Timberline Lodge is behind you. On the west side the PCT and the Ramona Falls Trail #797 lead down to the Ramona Falls trailhead (a rough road; high clearance recommended), and the Top Spur Trail #785 leaves near Bald Mountain for the Top Spur trailhead. On the north side, the Cairn Basin and Elk Cove areas have trails down to the Vista Ridge and Elk Cove trailheads. At the end of the day, Cloud Cap is on a road. All of these are long drives from Timberline Lodge.

Watch this day

Film, from Timberline Lodge · Film, Day 1 · How I did it (behind the scenes)





Day 1 map and elevation profile, including the walk-in from Timberline Lodge. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.



Mount Hood from the east side, an hour out of Cloud Cap, Day 2.

DAY 2

Contents

Cloud Cap to Timberline Lodge

DISTANCE	CLIMBING	DESCENT
13.3 mi (21.3 km)	**3,438 ft** (1,048 m)	**3,378 ft** (1,030 m)

TIME I TOOK

6.9 hours (6:14 a.m. to 1:09 p.m.), about 5.9 of them moving

HIGH POINT

7,306 ft (2,227 m) on my GPS, the high point of the loop, between Cooper Spur and Gnarl Ridge, mile 2.5

LOW POINT

4,891 ft (1,491 m), in the White River canyon just before the ford, mile 11.2

ON THE WAY

the high point (mile 2.5), Gnarl Ridge (mile 3.8), the Gnarl Ridge Trail (mile 5.2), Newton Creek (mile 6.0), Clark Creek (mile 7.4), Mt. Hood Meadows (mile 9.7), the White River (mile 11.3)

SLEEP

Home

FOOD AND WATER

Streams; nothing at Cloud Cap

My day

I camped at a full Cloud Cap. I started the cooler morning off with the big pass and listened to an audiobook for a few miles. There were lots of water crossings and, again, it was very hot at noon.



The sandy trail climbing south from Cloud Cap, Day 2 mile 0.6.

"One sandy dirty trail. Like walking on the beach," I posted from the east side that morning.

This final day was under seven hours, so technically a half day. I did almost 15 miles back to the car (13.3 on my GPS). It was pretty hot at the end, and I was a little dehydrated, and because I had the finish line coming up I just pushed it. I was definitely a bit tired when I got to the car. The last mile uphill to the lodge almost gave me heatstroke: I had to rest in my rental car with the air conditioning on, and I think I passed out for a moment. Happy at my pace, though.



A cairn at the high point of the loop, with Mount Hood behind, Day 2 mile 2.5.

The trail

Up to the high point. From the campground the Timberline Trail climbs south, past the Cooper Spur trail junction, across open sand and scree above the tree line, to the high point of the whole loop at mile 2.5: 7,306 ft (2,227 m) on my GPS, on the open slope above Gnarl Ridge. This is where snow lasts longest; early in the season it can cover the trail. There's no shade.



Looking east from the ridge near Gnarl Ridge, Day 2 mile 3.3.

Gnarl Ridge and Newton Creek. The trail drops along Gnarl Ridge past the remains of an old stone shelter (mile 3.8), down to the Gnarl Ridge Trail #652 (mile 5.2), then west into the canyon of Newton Creek, a glacial ford (mile 6.0, about 5,410 ft).

Clark Creek to Mt. Hood Meadows. Across Clark Creek (mile 7.4), Heather Creek and the West Fork of Clark Creek, the trail runs through the Mt. Hood Meadows ski area, past the Umbrella Falls Trail #667 junction (mile 9.7) and across Mitchell Creek.



The sandy trail on the southeast side, Mount Hood behind, Day 2 mile 7.2.



A waterfall where the trail crosses Heather Creek, Day 2 mile 7.6.

The White River. The trail drops to the White River (mile 11.3, about 4,920 ft), a wide, sandy glacial river in a canyon of gray rubble. Then it's the last climb: about 1,000 ft up the PCT, across the Salmon River's headwaters, back to Timberline Lodge at mile 13.3. It's open and sandy, and it's hot by midday.



The White River canyon, Day 2 mile 11.1.



Me at the White River, an hour before the finish, Day 2.

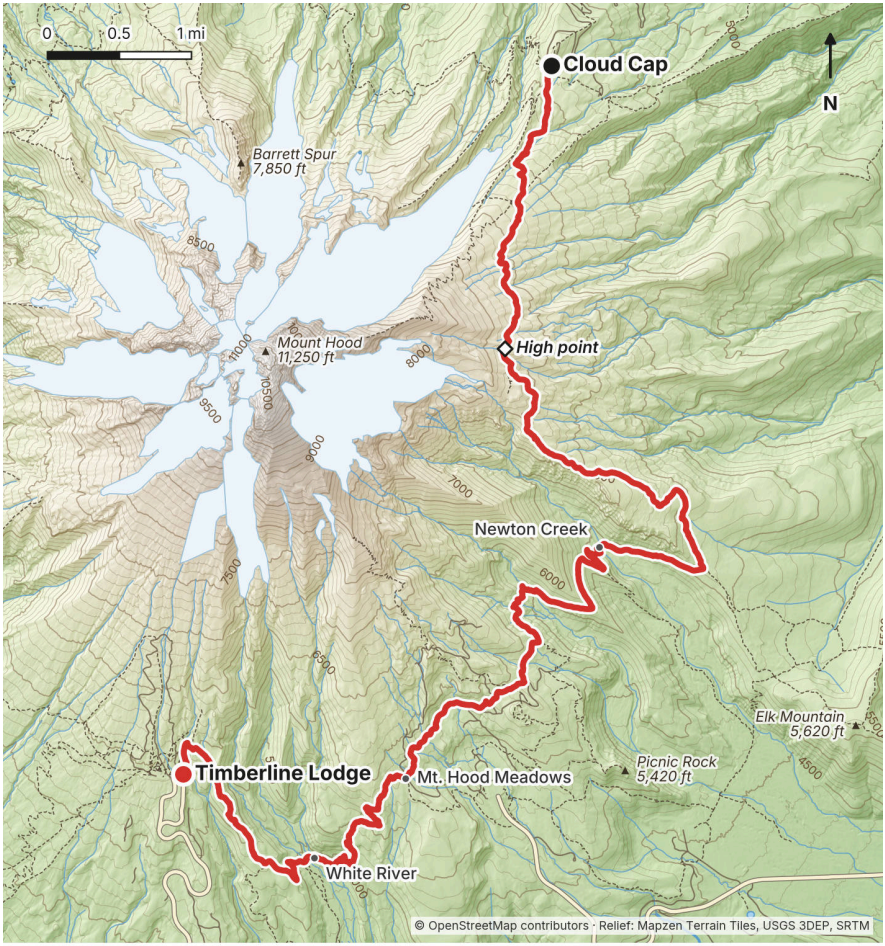
If you need to get off

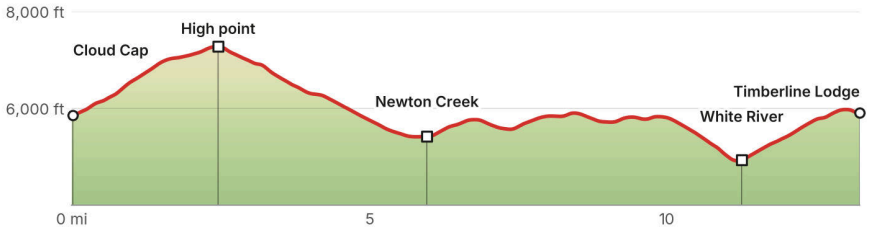
Cloud Cap and Cooper Spur are on the Cloud Cap road. Mt. Hood Meadows, at mile 9.7, is a ski area with roads to Highway 35. Otherwise keep going: the lodge is 3.6 miles past the Meadows.

Fire closures. In 2026 the Grasshopper Fire closure (order 06-06-01-26-18, to December 31, 2026) covers land east of Highway 35, not the Timberline Trail or the side trails here. The Timberline Trail reopened on September 4, 2026. Check the alerts.

Watch this day

Film, Day 2 · How I did it (behind the scenes)





Day 2 map and elevation profile. Map data © OpenStreetMap contributors.

Other ways to do it

Three or four days instead of two

I did a day and a half. The Forest Service says most people take 3 to 4 days, and that's the better way to see it. Remember the rules when you pick camps: not in meadows, not in the tree islands of Elk Cove or Elk Meadows, not within 500 feet of Ramona Falls, and at least 100 feet from water. To plan your own days, here are the miles between the main places, clockwise from the lodge, on my GPS:

STRETCH	MILES (MY GPS)
Timberline Lodge to the Sandy River	9.3
Sandy River to Ramona Falls	0.9
Ramona Falls to Cairn Basin	9.0
Cairn Basin to Elk Cove	2.3
Elk Cove to Cloud Cap	5.4
Cloud Cap to Mt. Hood Meadows	9.7
Mt. Hood Meadows to Timberline Lodge	3.6

Bypass the washout north of Ramona Falls

The Forest Service suggests the PCT from Ramona Falls to Top Spur instead of the Timberline Trail past the Muddy Fork, because of a washout about 2 miles north of the falls and blowdown up toward Yocum Ridge. I walked the Timberline Trail in 2023. Check the Forest Service's Timberline Trail page for the current state.

Start somewhere else

There are a bunch of entry and exit points. Cloud Cap, Ramona Falls and Top Spur are trailheads on the loop's roads. Unlike Timberline Lodge in summer, they need a Northwest Forest Pass ($5 a day or $30 a year in 2026) or an Interagency pass; without a pass, day use at Cloud Cap is $10 a vehicle. Their roads are rough.

Counterclockwise

Most of the loop is the same either way. Counterclockwise from the lodge you'd cross the White River first, climb to the high point from the south, and reach the Eliot Branch early on your second day.

Where I slept, food and water

Where I slept

NIGHT	WHERE	HEIGHT (MY GPS)
Before Day 1	My tent beside the trail, 1.1 miles west of the lodge	about 5,910 ft (1,803 m)
1	Cloud Cap Saddle Campground (Day 1 mile 26.9)	about 5,850 ft (1,784 m)

Cloud Cap Saddle Campground (2026): first come, first served, no reservations; $20 a night, $10 per extra vehicle, cash or check. Vault toilets, no drinking water. The road up, Forest Road 3512, is narrow and winding and may need high clearance or four-wheel drive. It was full when I got there. Whether I paid for a site isn't in my records.

Wild camps. There's no designated-site system on the trail. Camp off meadows, at least 100 feet from water, and away from the banned spots above.

Food

I bought food and fuel at REI in Portland on the way from the airport. What I carried isn't in my records. There's nothing to buy on the trail; Timberline Lodge is the only place, at the start and finish. The lodge's restaurants are open to the public (2026): the Cascade Dining Room for brunch and dinner, the Ram's Head Bar from 11 a.m., and the Wy'East Store in the Day Lodge.

Water

There's water almost every other mile, but much of it is glacial: gray with silt, which clogs filters fast. Clear side creeks are better for filling up. Treat or filter everything. There's no drinking water at Cloud Cap. The long, open, hot stretches are the high east side on Day 2 and the climb from the White River to the lodge; carry enough for those. I was a little dehydrated at the end.

Toilets and waste

Use the lodge before you start. On the trail, bury waste 6 inches deep, at least 100 feet from water, camps and trails, and pack out your toilet paper.

What I paid

ITEM	WHAT I PAID IN 2023
Flight, Vancouver to Portland (Air Canada, one way)	CA$374.04
Wilderness permit	Free
Parking at Timberline Lodge	Free in summer
Night before Day 1	Nothing: my tent beside the trail
Cloud Cap Saddle Campground	Not in my records
Rental car, food and fuel from REI	Not in my records

For your budget (2026). The permit and summer parking at the lodge are free. Cloud Cap Saddle Campground is $20 a night, cash or check. Other trailheads on the loop need a Northwest Forest Pass ($5 a day or $30 a year) or an Interagency pass ($80 a year for US residents, $250 for nonresidents from 2026). The Mt Hood Express bus is $2 each way.

What I carried

My records don't list my kit for this trip, so this is only what they show:

- **Shelter:** my tent, which I pitched both nights
- **Kitchen:** a stove and fuel bought at REI in Portland
- **Phone:** recording each day on Strava and AllTrails
- **Camera:** a Sony a7S III with a Rode shotgun microphone on top, with a dead cat, and a tripod

What this loop needs:

- Trekking poles and shoes you can ford rivers in, and a plan for wet feet
- Sun protection and enough water bottles for the open, hot stretches
- A stove (fires are banned in much of the area most summers) and all your food
- A filter or tablets that can handle silty glacial water
- Warm and rain layers: it's still a big mountain
- A satellite messenger, a headlamp, and the free permit from the box

Weather and safety

Emergencies. Call 911. Don't count on cell service on the loop. A satellite messenger is the real backup. Search and rescue on the west and south sides of the mountain is run by the Clackamas County Sheriff; on the north and east sides by the Hood River County Sheriff, with the Hood River Crag Rats.

River crossings. The biggest risk on this trail. Cross early in the day, unbuckle your pack, use poles, and turn back or wait if the water is too fast or deep. See The river crossings.

Heat. It was very hot at noon both days, and I came close to heatstroke on the last climb to the lodge. Much of the trail is open and sandy. Start early, carry more water than you think, and rest in the shade.

Snow. Snow lasts into July on the high east side between Cloud Cap and Gnarl Ridge, and snow bridges over creeks like Clark Creek can collapse. Early in the season, carry traction and know how to use it.

Thunderstorms. The high east side is exposed. If a storm builds, get off the ridges.

Fire and smoke. Check the Forest Service alerts for closures and the air quality before you go. Fires closed part of the trail in 2026.

Bears and cougars. Both live here, and attacks are rare. Oregon's wildlife department advises making noise and keeping dogs leashed with bears, and with a cougar standing your ground, making yourself look large, and fighting back if attacked. No canister rule on Mount Hood (2026), but store your food well.

Leave a plan with someone at home: your start, your route, your camps and when you'll be out.

Using the GPX files

My own GPS recordings from July 21 to 23, 2023, with all timestamps removed.

FILE	WHAT IT IS
timberline-trail-evening-walk-in.gpx	The evening before: Timberline Lodge to my first camp, 1.1 mi
timberline-trail-day-1.gpx	Day 1: my camp to Cloud Cap, 25.8 mi
timberline-trail-day-2.gpx	Day 2: Cloud Cap to Timberline Lodge, 13.3 mi
timberline-trail-full-loop.gpx	All three, with waypoints for the places and river crossings in this guide

The tracks show where I actually went. They're a record of my trip, not an official trail line. Phone GPS wanders in deep forest and canyons, so each track is thinned to a point every 15 m; that's why my total is 40.2 miles, not the 43.6 Strava showed for the raw recordings.

AllTrails: on alltrails.com, create a new map and use Import (offline maps need a paid plan). **Gaia GPS:** open the file on your phone and choose Gaia GPS, or Import on gaiagps.com. **Garmin:** Garmin Connect on the web, Training, Courses, Import, then send it to your watch. **Organic Maps** (free): download the offline map for Oregon, then open the GPX file with it.

Before you leave Portland, download offline maps for the whole mountain, turn on airplane mode, and check that each day and your location show up.

Before you go, check these

These change every year. Everything else in this guide stays the same.

Rules and closures

- The Mt. Hood National Forest alerts page: closures, fire restrictions, washouts (fs.usda.gov/r06/mthood/alerts)
- The Forest Service's Timberline Trail #600 page for trail alerts, like the washout north of Ramona Falls
- Whether a campfire ban is on (one ran July 1 to September 23 in 2026)
- That the wilderness permit is still free and self-issued, and no quota has started

Getting there

- Free summer parking at Timberline Lodge; a Sno-Park permit November 1 to April 30
- The Mt Hood Express timetable, if you're taking the bus
- Cloud Cap road (Forest Road 3512) open, if you plan to use Cloud Cap

Conditions

- River levels and crossings: recent trip reports (Oregon Hikers, WTA)
- Snow on the east side, between Cloud Cap and Gnarl Ridge
- The forecast for heat and thunderstorms (weather.gov/pqr)
- Smoke and air quality: fire.airnow.gov

Your stuff

- Poles and shoes for fording, a stove, a filter, sun protection and enough bottles
- A satellite messenger, offline maps and the GPX files on your phone

One-page trip sheet

DAY	MI (KM)	FROM, TO	SLEEP	NOTES
1	26.9 (43.3)	Timberline Lodge to Cloud Cap (1.1 mi the evening before)	Tent a mile in; Cloud Cap Saddle Campground	Fords: Zigzag 3.5, Sandy 9.3, Muddy Fork 13.3, Coe 22.4, Eliot 26.2
2	13.3 (21.3)	Cloud Cap to Timberline Lodge	Home	High point 7,306 ft, mile 2.5. Fords: Newton 6.0, White River 11.3
Total	**40.2 (64.7)**			**About 8,750 ft up, 8,670 ft down**

Trails: Timberline Trail #600 · PCT (shared on the south and west sides) · Ramona Falls Trail #797 (briefly)

Places: Timberline Lodge · Zigzag Canyon · Paradise Park (above the trail) · Sandy River · Ramona Falls · Muddy Fork · Bald Mountain · Cairn Basin · Elk Cove · Eliot Branch · Cloud Cap · Gnarl Ridge · Newton Creek · Mt. Hood Meadows · White River

Rules (2026): free self-issued permit, May 15 to October 15. No camping in meadows, in the Elk Cove and Elk Meadows tree islands, or within 500 ft of Ramona Falls. No fires in Paradise Park, near Ramona Falls and McNeil Point, or in the Elk Cove and Elk Meadows tree islands. Summer campfire bans.

Emergency: 911. No cell service on most of the loop.

About this guide

Timberline Trail Hiking Guide: a 40-mile loop around Mount Hood in 2 days, by Kraig Adams. 2027 season edition, updated October 2026.

I hiked this loop from July 21 to 23, 2023, and made a film about it: Hiking 40 miles on the Timberline Loop in Oregon. Everything in first person comes from that trip, the film and its description, my Strava notes and GPS recordings, my posts from the trail, my photos and my booking emails. Permit, rule, closure and safety facts were checked on October 1, 2026, and anything that changes yearly is dated.

Updates and contact. If something has changed, or you spot a mistake, email me at kraig@kraigadams.com.

No affiliate links. There are none in this guide, and nobody paid for a mention in it.

Safety. The Timberline Trail has real risks: glacial rivers without bridges, heat, snow on the high east side, storms, fire and remote trailheads. This guide describes my trip and what I found, not current conditions. Trails, rules and crossings change. Check with the Forest Service and the weather, and turn back when conditions aren't right. You're responsible for your own safety.

Copyright. © 2026 Kraig Adams. This guide, its photos and the GPX files are for your personal use. Please don't share or resell them.

Credits. Photos are mine, from my trip; the cover is my film's YouTube thumbnail. GPX files are my own recordings. Maps © OpenStreetMap contributors, openstreetmap.org/copyright (ODbL). Relief: Mapzen Terrain Tiles, from USGS 3DEP and SRTM. Rules and access from the USDA Forest Service, Mt. Hood National Forest.