

A Short Trip to Pine Mountain and the Observatory

I wouldn't characterize this trip as my normal hiking destination, although there was certainly a lot of tramping around involved. I had seen incense cedar maps showing their location in this general area. This would be about as far north as they grow, and I love finding these disjunct tree populations – it's a hobby of mine. So, I headed for the tallest mountain in the area, knowing that if these conifers grew there, it would be in the wetter part of the High Desert. Spoiler alert – I didn't find them here after a good amount of looking in all the right places – the higher parts, the northern slopes, and the valley bottoms. I did find some lodgepole pine outside of their documented range. So all was not lost. The area was awash with ponderosa pine, per the mountain's namesake. I also ran into a guy, or rather he and his girlfriend ran into me, as they were jogging up the windy, icy road! And he happened to be a forester. He hadn't heard of incense cedar being up in these mountains, but he thought he spotted some whitebark pine up higher. That would be quite a find as well. But my legs told me it was time to go, as they had taken me up and over many ridges on the mountain. Maybe another time to find that pine.

The road up was very icy and snowbound, which would be normal for this time of year. But it was passable with all-wheel drive. The end of the road also sported an observatory and a campground. They were both closed due to the COVID pandemic. I think that when the observatory opens, it will be quite a great destination for central Oregon stargazers. And, it would also provide a solitary get-away in the spring if you just want to mosey around. The observatory website: <https://pmo.uoregon.edu/>



The Observatory buildings on a snowy day



The observatory is in the snowy bald spot on the top. The actual top of Pine Mountain is to the left.



The ubiquitous ponderosa pine



The less common lodgepole pine



And two young ones side-by-side

On the way back on Highway 20, about 20 miles east of Bend, Oregon, there is an interesting geology landmark – a “prehistoric river”. Ages ago, perhaps about 10,000 years ago, a river flowed through this canyon that drained a large ice age lake. When the lake rose, it cut through this loosely consolidated lava flow and created this impressive gorge in which now “flows” an appropriately named “Dry River”. Native American sites were found near the banks of the prehistoric lake.



The prehistoric river looking east



The prehistoric river looking west



A Google Earth perspective of the Dry River gorge

Pine Mountain

