

Camp Lake Trail, Three Sisters Wilderness Area

This seven mile trail allows fairly easy access to the heart of the Three Sisters Wilderness Area, and gives you good approaches to both South Sister and Middle Sister Mountains, if you are inclined to scale those rugged peaks. It also gives you access to the Pacific Crest Trail over the crest. The Lake has spectacular views of several glaciers, as well as much of the high desert to the east. There is plenty of open territory as you are near timberline, although it can be rather steep in some spots. The downside is that it is a very popular destination for both day hikers and backpackers. With the permit system implemented in 2021, visitors are limited, and when my cousin and I visited in July of that year, there were only a few other campers. Another downside is that the mosquitoes can be brutal in July, so a visit later in the summer might be warranted.

To access the trail, drive 1.5 miles west on Highway 242 (aka McKenzie Highway) to Pole Creek Road (aka National Forest Road 1524, turn left and drive a little over 10 miles to the Pole Creek Trailhead. The lake can be a day hike destination if you are up for a 14 mile roundtrip. We chose to stay two nights so we could explore the many lakes, glaciers, and vistas of the area. There are several good campsites around the lake – some nestled in small groves of mountain hemlock, whitebark pine, or subalpine fir, but be sure to camp away from the lake to avoid spoiling its alluring waters.



Camp Lake, with South Sister in the background



Chambers Lakes above Camp Lake



A view of Camp Lake from the crest of the Cascades



The meadow above Camp Lake



Lake on the west side of the crest, showing a tarn and terminal moraine



My cousin peering into a mass of ice about to calve into the lakelet



A little creek above Camp Lake

