

Dennis Frates

THE
Steens Loop
 TOUR ROUTE

This 59-mile loop departs from Frenchglen and climbs to the very top of Steens Mountain, which rests in the clouds at nearly 10,000 feet.

Along the way, you'll have ample opportunities to view wildlife and take in the grandeur of a national treasure.

Remarkable Rocks

Steens Mountain is an example of a fault-block mountain, formed when massive internal pressure forced the east edge upward along a fault line. From the valley floor of the Alvord Desert to the east rim of the fault-block, Steens Mountain rises 5,500 feet in less than 3 miles! From the east rim overlook, the Steens Mountain drops over a vertical mile to the Alvord Desert floor. Four distinct notches in the Mountain—including oft-photographed Kiger Gorge—were formed when glaciers punched through the ridgetops. From the mountaintop, you can see hundreds of miles. There are five major glaciated canyons on the Steens. The Kiger Gorge overlook offers the visitor a breathtaking opportunity to stand at the headwall of a classic textbook example of a massive “U” shaped canyon.

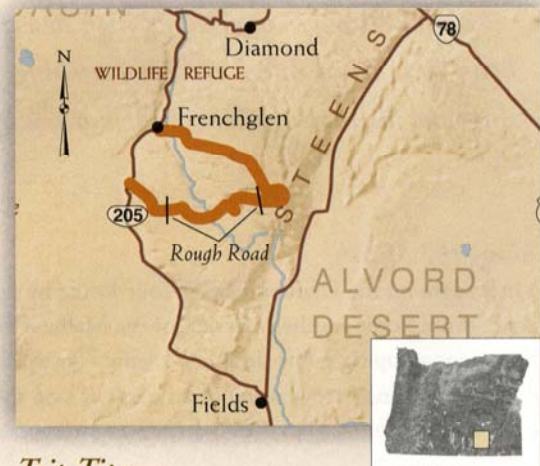
The Dry and the Moist

Steens Mountain acts as a great moisture collector, creating vastly different ecosystems from the valley floor to the mountaintop. While the upper west slope of the

mountain may receive as much as 25 inches of precipitation, the Alvord Desert in its shadow receives less than six inches per year. Making your way to the summit, take note of changing plant life. Sagebrush dominates in the lower, drier environs, giving way to dense stands of juniper, then quaking aspen and mountain mahogany as the moisture levels increase. Cattlemen, as well as Irish and Basque sheepherders, were once drawn to the upper mountain in the summer to graze their stock on the lush meadows that thrive there.

Abundant Wildlife

Many animals are drawn to Steens' unique “sky-island” habitats. Bighorn sheep can sometimes be spotted negotiating rocky escarpments; pronghorn antelope, mule deer and elk also call the mountain home. Raptors, including golden eagles, the largest raptor on Steens Mountain, can often be seen riding the updrafts in search of prey. The end of the tour loop winds through wild horse country. The South Steens Wild Horse Herd descended from mustangs that escaped from early explorers, Indians, settlers, miners, and ranchers. The herd of nearly 300 animals is managed by the Bureau of Land Management to preserve their wild, free-roaming nature. Spotting one of these wild mustangs is an exclamation point on a remarkable drive.



Trip Tips

- Distance: 59 miles. Best Time: July through October—the road is closed in winter months.*
- Minimum Driving Time: 3-5 hours.*
- Medical Services/Hospitals: Burns. Rest Areas: There are several campgrounds along the route.*
- Gas: The only gas stations will be in Burns and Fields.*

Photo: an angler prepares to descend to Wildhorse Lake.