

McKenzie Pass-Santiam Pass Scenic Byway

Experience dramatic views of the snowcapped High Cascade Peaks. The panorama of lava fields and six Cascade peaks is made more striking by the contrast between the black lava and white snow. The mountains are mirrored in crystal-clear lakes, and the byway passes beautiful waterfalls, including Sahalie and Koosah Falls.



Length: 82 miles / 131.2 km

Time Take two hours to drive the to byway or five hours to stop

Allow: at places along the way.

Local Information

US Forest Service - McKenzie Ranger Station

541-822-3381

[Send E-mail](#)

Visitor Services

Fees



Parking passes can be purchased from the ranger station, allowing you to park and hike the trails along this byway.

Bicycle/Pedestrian Facilities



This byway is popular with bicyclists during the summer. While the Santiam Pass Highway (US 20) and Clear Lake Cutoff (Oregon 126) are well-traveled routes, they do accommodate bicycles with paved shoulders and good sight distances. The McKenzie Pass Highway is narrow and winding, but it accommodates bicycles because there is no commercial traffic, recreational traffic is light, and vehicle speeds are low. One section of the byway is accessible to pedestrians. This is the 26-mile McKenzie River National Recreational Trail, which follows the byway route along the Wild and Scenic McKenzie River from the West Portal at McKenzie Ranger Station to the river's source at Clear Lake. The McKenzie River Trail is also open to mountain bikes. The remainder of the byway is not suitable for pedestrian travel. For drivers that just want to get out and stretch their legs, there is a half-mile, paved interpretive trail at the Dee Wright Observatory. This trail can accommodate large groups of people and there are interpretive signs along the route. There is also a short trail connecting the two waterfall overlooks of the Sahalie Falls and the Koosah Falls. Please note: A parking pass is

required for the trail parking area in the McKenzie Pass area. Parking passes can be purchased from the ranger station.

Camping



To reserve a National Forest campground site, visit Recreation.gov: * [Cold Water Cove](http://www.recreation.gov/camping/Cold_Water_Cove_Or/r/campgroundDetails.do?contractCode=NRSO&parkId=70587&pstate=OR) * [Blue Bay](http://www.recreation.gov/camping/Blue_Bay_Or/r/campgroundDetails.do?contractCode=NRSO&parkId=71560&topTabIndex=CampingSpot) * [Link Creek](http://www.recreation.gov/camping/Link_Creek_Or/r/campgroundDetails.do?contractCode=NRSO&parkId=71561&topTabIndex=CampingSpot) * [Perry South Campground](http://www.recreation.gov/camping/Perry_South_Campground_Or/r/campgroundDetails.do?contractCode=NRSO&parkId=74168&topTabIndex=CampingSpot) * [Scout Lake](http://www.recreation.gov/camping/Scout_Lake_Or/r/campgroundDetails.do?contractCode=NRSO&parkId=71562&topTabIndex=CampingSpot) * [South Shore](http://www.recreation.gov/camping/South_Shore_Or/r/campgroundDetails.do?contractCode=NRSO&parkId=71564&topTabIndex=CampingSpot)

Food



Stop to grab a bite to eat or buy food for your trip in the town of Sisters.

Gasoline



Fill up on gas in the community of Sisters.

Information



Sisters provides information about driving the byway, what to do along the road, and the history of the surrounding areas.

Lodging



Overnight lodging is available in Sisters.

Restrooms



Restrooms are available at Sahalie Falls.

Retail



Buy supplies for the road or souvenirs of your trip in the town of Sisters.

Special Considerations

Regular services are available in McKenzie Bridge. The McKenzie Pass-Santiam Pass Scenic Byway is a paved highway that safely accommodates two-wheel drive automobiles with standard clearances.

Restrictions

Highway 242 is closed from mid-November to mid-June due to snow. Nearly the entire byway is in a snow zone, so chains are sometimes required during the winter, especially over the Santiam Pass. Also, due to extremely sharp curves and narrow road width, Highway 242 over McKenzie Pass is closed to vehicles (either single or combined) that are longer than 35 feet. Trailers are also discouraged.

Seasons

Best Time to Drive

Ideally, it is best to drive the byway during spring, summer, and fall months.

High Season

Spring, summer, and fall are the busiest seasons on the byway.

Map and Directions



Legend:

Point of Interest	Campground	Featured Byway	Water	State Border
Park	Picnic/Rest Area	America's Byways	Wildlife Refuge	Urban Area
Mountain	Interstate	Other Byway	Wilderness Area	Tribal Nation
City	U.S. Highway	Other Road	Other Federal Lands	Military Base
Capital	State Highway	Trail	Other State Lands	

Driving Directions

- This byway forms a complete loop.
- Start in Sisters and drive west along US Hwy 20.

- The road becomes SR 126 near Suttle Lake and continues west past the junction with SR 26. There it turns south past the junction with US Hwy 20.
- Continue until the junction with SR 242, then head east onto SR 242.
- Finish the byway along SR 242 through the Willamette and Deschutes National Forests and the Three Sisters Wilderness Area, until you reach Sisters and the end of the byway.

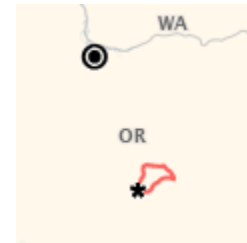
Getting to the Byway



Nearby cities

Portland, OR (161 miles / 259.10 km, 3 hours)

- Start:** ● Junction of I-5 & I-405 Portland, OR
N 45.504° W 122.675° [?]
- Directions:**
- Take I-5 south to Eugene.
 - Get on I-105 and go east to Highway 126. The byway begins near McKenzie Bridge.
- Junction with byway:** * Intersection of OR-126 and OR 242
N 44.184° W 122.074° [?]



Road Trip: Tour of McKenzie-Santiam Scenic Byway

Departure: Proxy Falls, Oregon

Destination: McKenzie Ranger Station and Information Portal - West, Oregon

Time to allow: 1 day

Full of beautiful forests and dazzling waterfalls, the McKenzie-Santiam Scenic Byway Tour will treat you will the stunning beauty of the Three Sisters Wilderness Area.

Day 1

- **Start: Proxy Falls**

Suggested time at this stop: 1 hour

The Upper Proxy Falls and the Lower Proxy Falls, referred to collectively as the Proxy Falls, can be accessed by hiking a loop trail in the Three Sisters Wilderness area. Upper Proxy Falls is interesting because there is no direct outlet for its circular basin's calm pool of water: its substantial volume of water (which originates from a group of small springs that originate about 600 feet above the valley floor) can only percolate into the lava subsurface. The water for Lower Proxy Falls, supplied by Proxy Creek and Shadow Creek, rushes over a steep, bulging rock for 200 feet before it free falls to the base.

- **Stop 2: Windy Point**



From previous stop: 40 minutes / 16.48 mi (26.4 km)

Directions: Drive northeast on McKenzie Hwy toward NF-1624 and after 16.4 miles, end at Winy Point.

Suggested time at this stop: 30 minutes

Geologic interpretive information is available here. At an elevation of 4,909 feet, Windy Point offers a picturesque view of the lava flows and volcanic peaks. Although there is little vegetation on the lava fields, as you make your descent down from the summit of the McKenzie Pass, a mixed conifer forest returns, eventually giving way to Ponderosa Pines at the lower elevation. It is the dramatic transition between these diverse natural environments that defines the uniqueness of this byway.

- **Stop 3: Sisters-Eastern Portal**

From previous stop: 9 minutes / 11.53 mi (18.4 km)

Directions: Drive east on McKenzie Hwy toward NF-1040 for 10.9 miles. Continue straight after road turns into W Cascade Ave, then make a right onto Santiam Hwy to end at Sisters.

Suggested time at this stop: 2 hours

A lively town chock-full of arts and crafts offerings and special events such as the annual quilt show and jazz festival, following an early western theme set back in time to the 1800s.

- **Stop 4: Sahalie Falls**



From previous stop: 37 minutes / 34.29 mi (54.9 km)

Directions:

Drive northwest on E Cascade Ave for 29.1 miles, then take a left onto OR-126. After 5.1 miles, end at Sahalie Falls.

Suggested time at this stop: 20 minutes

stop:

The McKenzie River surges over a 70-foot high basalt cliff. This waterfall derives its name from the Chinook jargon meaning "heaven" or "sky." Plan to spend a half hour here to take pictures and view the interpretive panels featuring geologic history. Or hike for an hour on the Waterfalls Loop trail that connects this site with Sahalie Falls.

- **Stop 5: Koosah Falls**



From previous stop: 1 minute / 0.47 mi (0.8 km)

Directions:

Drive south on OR-126 and turn right to end at Koosah Falls.

Sahalie and Koosah Falls are located on the old historic route locally known as the Clear Lake Cutoff.

- **End: McKenzie Ranger Station and Information Portal - West**



From previous stop: 18 minutes / 17.15 mi (27.4 km)

Directions:

Drive south and take a right onto OR-126. Drive for 16.8 miles to end at the McKenzie Ranger Station.

Suggested time at this stop: 30 minutes

stop:

Get McKenzie Pass-Santiam Pass Scenic Byway and area information here. You can get maps for and information on whitewater rafting, fishing, hiking, camping and other recreational activities in the Willamette National Forest.

Totals for Day 1

Total Distance Traveled: 79.92 miles / 127.9 km

Total Travel Time: 1 hour 45 minutes

Total Stopping Time: 4 hours 20 minutes