

Backpack Mt. St. Helens May Trip

About the Location:

The iconic Mt. St. Helens, Loowit, Lavelatla, Loowitlatkla, or Louwala-Clough is the object of many names and legends, and it's no wonder, given its impressive stature and recent history of eruptions. Mt. St. Helens is the Northwest's most active volcano. Here, you can see up close the aftermath and natural recovery of the 1980 eruption, which blew the top off of this once cone-shaped mountain. You'll be on the traditional lands of the Cowlitz people, who know the mountain as the lady Lavelatla, which means "smoking mountain," who blew her top off in anger and jealousy at her husband Tahoma (which we know as Mt. Rainier), and knocked his head off as well.



This National Monument is spectacular in May, when snow still lingers at the mid and upper elevations, while the lower elevations burst with purple lupine flowers, wild rhododendron blooms, and a cacophony of emerald green. You'll see waterfalls, bubbling springs, and sweeping views of the mountain. 40 years after the eruption, you can still see the blast zone and bear witness to nature reclaiming the landscape. Keep an eye out for Roosevelt elk, black-tailed deer, and mountain goats as you hike through open meadows and islands of old growth.

What to Expect:

On the first day of your trip, you'll drive about 2.5 hours to the trailhead and head down the trail for your first night camping in the backcountry. For five days you will backpack through forests, take in striking views of the seemingly endless Cascade Mountains, and refresh yourself in cool mountain streams. You will be carrying a backpack that will weigh somewhere between 30 and 55 lbs., depending on your equipment and your physical condition. The trails are rated easy to moderate, with elevations ranging from ~2,000 to 4,500 ft. On the average, the group expects to hike about 4-8 miles per day carrying full backpacks, with a possible layover day in the middle. Once we set up a basecamp, people interested in logging more miles can go on day hikes to explore other parts of the wilderness, or if you're in a more meditative mood, chill by the stream or lake at camp. Not everyone in the group will want to hike at the same speed, so we'll do what is best for the group when it comes to routes, campsites, and day hikes. On the last night of the trip we'll camp close to the trailhead so that we can be back in Portland on Wednesday morning, leaving you time to travel home that same day.

We'll work together to prepare meals, carry group equipment, and perform camp tasks. For sleeping accommodations, we provide your choice of either single person tents, or shared tent space (tent sharing is available if you're signing up with your "pod"). You can even choose one of College Outdoors' single person bivy sacks, which, when paired with our overhead tarps, allow you to stay cozy and dry while sleeping out under the stars. We practice minimum-impact camping techniques such as packing out all litter and food waste, not using soap directly in streams or lakes, and not camping on fragile meadows. There are no restroom facilities in the wilderness, but you can [check out this video about pooping in the woods](#). We'll go over all these practices.

New to Backpacking or Camping?

No problem! This trip is designed for beginners and perfect for any adventurous spirit who wants to explore, bond with a small-group of peers, and see some of the Pacific Northwest's most spectacular trails.

What will we eat?

We eat well in the backcountry! Some examples of typical meals include: curry, burritos, mac & cheese, and we love our snacks! This trip can accommodate most dietary restrictions and allergies, as long as you let us know about them ahead of time in the online Health & Diet Questionnaire.

We will resupply water from streams and lakes throughout the trip. Our treatment methods (filters and tablets) neutralize Giardia, bacteria, and viruses so we can stay hydrated and healthy.

What if I don't have outdoor clothing or equipment?

No problem! Check out our packing lists (located on your trip page) for a description of the essential and optional gear for your trip. We provide all the group gear such as tents, stoves, and water filters. If you don't have your own outdoor clothing or personal equipment, we provide what you'll need for free, as long as you *request the equipment ahead of time* using the online form found on our website.

What are the policies?

Participants on College Outdoors trips are expected to follow all [Lewis & Clark College conduct policies](#). All trips are tobacco, drug, and alcohol free, including vaping, medical cannabis, and tobacco products. Nicotine patches and gum are permitted. College Outdoors has specific policies and procedures to mitigate risks on trips, which are outlined in the [policy brochure](#) and will be explained by your trip leaders. These policies include: Respecting others, food sanitation practices, requiring the use of Personal Floatation Devices (PFDs, sometimes referred to as lifejackets), requiring close-toed shoes, staying 6ft away from cliff edges, and practicing "leave no trace" in the outdoors. Policy violations may result in disciplinary action and/or removal from trips.

You are welcome to join a trip with your best friends or significant other, we just ask that you refrain from "cliques" or other social behavior that may make others feel excluded. This will help us build a fun, inclusive community for everyone on the trip, and you might even make some new best friends!

What are the risks?

The most common injuries which could occur on this trip are blisters on feet (don't forget to break in your boots), and burns from not applying enough sunscreen. *These are all preventable with a little caution and common sense.* If you plan to borrow boots from College Outdoors, you can check them out a couple weeks early and wear them on campus to make sure they fit you well. Stinging insects and other allergens can be present this time of the year, and *people with the potential for severe reactions to allergens must plan to bring their own anaphylaxis kits (EpiPen).* [Learn more about possible risks here.](#) Please note that our trips will often visit remote areas and medical help could be hours away. Our trip leaders generally carry cell phones, and in some cases, satellite phones, but service is not always available in rural or rugged, remote areas. Trip leaders are trained as Wilderness First Responders.

What about Covid-19?

We expect that we will still be managing the Covid-19 situation in May 2021, so we are planning all May Trips to follow Oregon's guidelines for Phase 1 of reopening. Visit our website for up to date plans, protocols, and expectations: https://www.lclark.edu/programs/college_outdoors/covid-19-mitigation-for-may-trips/

More questions? Just ask! We LOVE to talk about trips!