



The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America

**RICK'S ROADS**

Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What



BLOG POST: 2022.08.22  
Crater Lake National Park, Oregon – Visit #3



I like that photo (above) a lot. You can really see the full caldera. It does not just look like a lake at the bottom of a cliff, like many of the CLNP pics do (although it's a beautiful lake at the bottom of awesome cliffs). It is clearly a huge bowl of unbelievably blue water.

The one thing that is really out of whack, though, is Wizard Island. It appears to dominate the landscape (lakescape?), when, in reality, it is very small relative to the surface of the lake. The Google Earth shows you how off that panoramic perspective is. The yellow star is where I was standing to take that photo, atop Watchman Peak.



And, yes, I *know* I was just here two weeks ago. But I had a good reason for coming back. (Like I needed one...)

For years, I had been trying to get onto the Crater Lake Boat Tour. When I was here in 2006 – on a mirror-smooth day – I saw the wake spreading out behind a motor boat as it sped across the lake. The boat itself looked like just a speck, but the wake looked amazing, especially against the perfect reflection of the snowy cliffs behind it.



Apparently, that was a park ranger's boat, skimming across the lake on some park ranger duty. But I was *envious!* My God, what a cool cruise that would be! Since that visit was just a drive-through, there was no point in pursuing it, but the seed was planted.

As I laid out the skeleton of RoadMode '22, Oregon featured prominently, with Crater Lake very specifically targeted. I kept going back to [www.explorecraterlake.com](http://www.explorecraterlake.com) again and again and again to seek info about the Boat Tours. I knew they had been doing them since about 2015, but then COVID snuffed them out.

The Cleetwood Cove Trail, which is the only way down to the lake surface (without falling and killing yourself) fell into terrible disrepair due to the neglect. Every winter, CLNP gets buried under more than 40 **feet** of snow. The weight of all that frozen fluff breaks branches, topples the weaker trees, and drags debris across trails, sometimes burying them under landslides. All that has to be cleaned up before the trails can open up for each tourist season. Now, factor in a whole season where there was no staff on site to get any of that done. Yah, horror show.

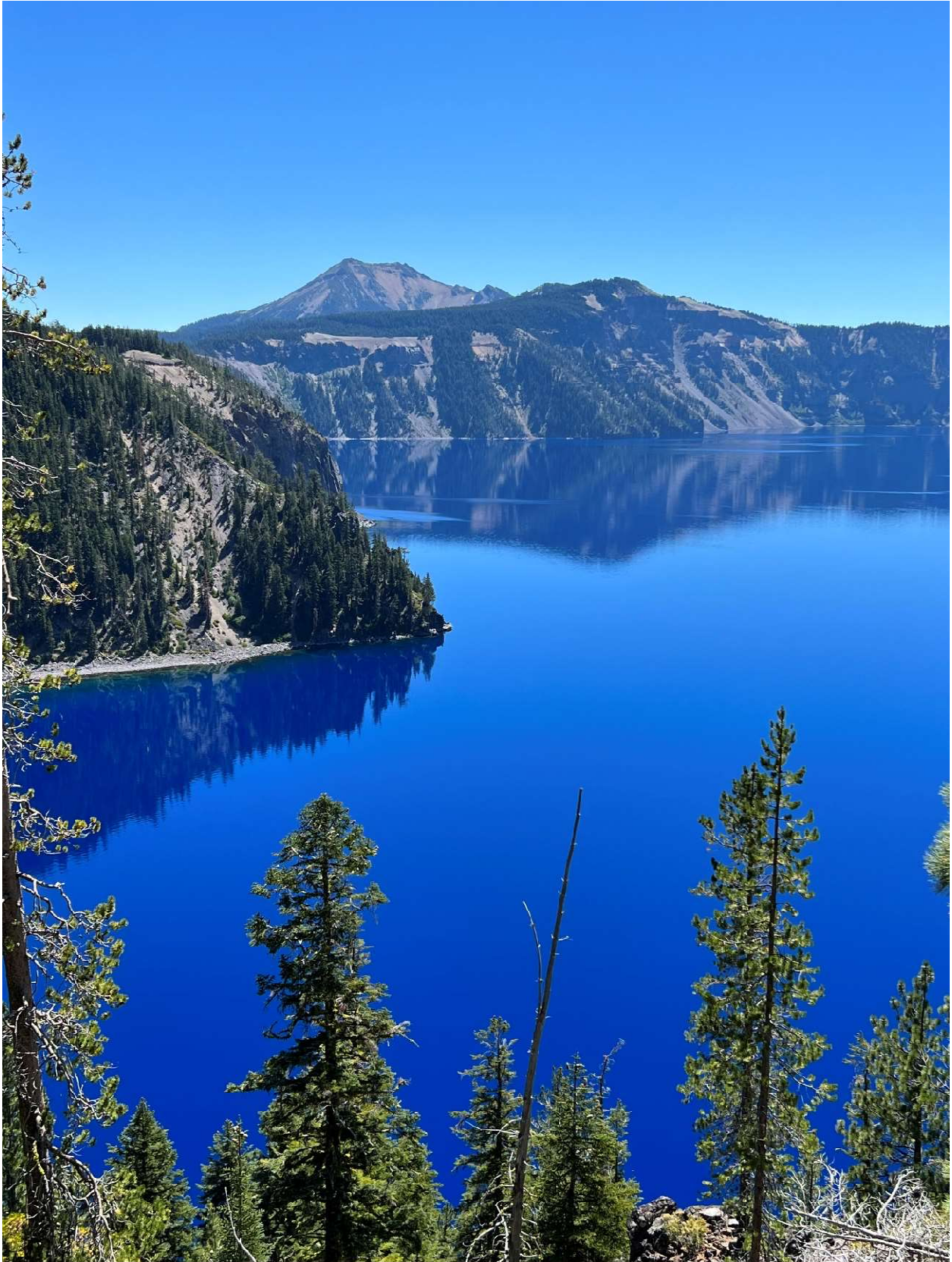
Also, the whole Boat Tour apparatus fell apart. The aging boats deteriorated, and with the National Parks all closed, the boat captains and guides all went off in search of a new source of income.

I had hoped that 2022 would be the year that the CLBT would rise from the ashes. The woman that I spoke with at the reservations number had given me hope that they would. But the option never ungrayed on the site. Click, click, click like a demented monkey, but the arrowhead never turned to a finger. It was like it was giving me the other finger.

But I did find out that the Cleetwood Cove Trail, the **only** trail that leads to the lake itself, had *finally* reopened, and that was my primary reason for coming back today. I wanted to touch the lake, and to see it from water level.

I parked Blue Maxx in the free lot across from the trailhead, grabbed the Luckless Log (my trusty hiking stick of almost 40 years), and set off eagerly.





*View of the East Rim and Mount Scott from high up on the Cleetwood Cove Trail*



*Looking south from halfway down the Cleetwood Cove Trail – Wizard Island is right of center*

The hike down was more than a mile long and the trail lost 700 feet of elevation, but it was clear, had many switchbacks, was wide enough for two-way hiking traffic and, well, downhill. It was not steep, so there were no uh-oh-slow-down points of peril. It was simply a beautiful walk on a gorgeous day: mid-70's, breezy but not windy, and not a cloud in the sky. Perrrrfecto.

I could see a small boat anchored well offshore, but it was clearly not going anywhere today.

When I got to the base of the trail, at the lake shore, I was surprised to see so many people. I don't know why; I couldn't have been the only person to decide to take Crater



Lake's most popular trail on such a beautiful day. And just where did I think the other people on the trail were going?

I'd say about two dozen people were down there. A few were out on the rocky shore to the left. That took some awkward clambering, I'd guess, to get where some of them were. The majority of the folks were on the right, beyond the boat docks. There is a good-sized rock formation there. The western side of it was about 20 feet straight up above the water, and some bold people were using it as a diving platform.

Several more were just lounging around on the top, many in swimsuits. Others had picked their way down a steep and snaky footpath to the stony bank and were sitting in the sunshine or wading in the shallow water. Freaking Cleetwood *Beach!*

I was never tempted to take a plunge. The temp was fine for hiking, so I was not overheated, and a couple of the divers emerged gasping from the lake, stammering the word, "coooooooooo!" I did not need a heart-stopping experience, thank you.

One young woman in a bikini, maybe 18-19, just kept taking dive after dive, climbing out with a big grin, and striding right back up to go again. She was a bit blue.



*Looking southwest from "Cleetman Beach" toward The Watchman and Hillman Peak*

There was also an odd, skinny, wooden shack there, poised precariously on the very edge of the rocks. My first thought was “outhouse,” but that would be one messed-up place to plant such a facility, for a **lot** of reasons.

Man, it was nice down there. It was easy to tell myself to stay longer and longer, but I had to fess up to the fact that I was just delaying the inevitable: the hike back up the Cleetwood Cove Trail. All those friendly downhill numbers were gonna get flipped over, and I had me a 1.1-mile, 700-foot-elevation-gain (average 15% slope) “stroll” ahead of me.

Wah-freaking-wahhhh. Getting walking, you wuss. A decade ago, you would’ve run up this thing just to show off. OK, maybe two decades ago. What? Three? Four?? Yeah, that’s fair, I reckon. Either way, this hill is not gonna climb itself, so get steppin’, hike boy.

My alter ego can get downright bossy sometimes. So off I went.

It took about a half-hour. I paced myself, knowing the overall elevation would do some lung-squeezing anyway, but the 12% average grade would ramp that up significantly (pun intended). The sign (pic, 2 pages hence) says it is “equal to walking up 65 flights of stairs.”

I took a few rest breaks. I didn’t even my usual *This is a nice spot, think I’ll take some pictures* ploy. I just plunked myself down on the log bench and inhaled for a while. Some people I had strode past came sauntering on by, nixing my arrogant gains, but I quietly vowed to beat them all to the top.

Silly, I know, but I did it! It took some good striding to catch the woman in the Yankees shirt, but I had to do it. You fellow Bostonians know the feeling. And I can hear ya cheering for me.

It is a really nice trail, actually, despite being arduous. The tall evergreens that line most of it are classic Oregon. Breaks in the trees allow for tremendous views of this amazing landscape.

The oddest part, by far, though, was seeing a family of five – dad, mom, and 3 elementary school kids – downbound in just bathing suits and carrying an array of beach toys, like inflated hoops and floaties and noodles. Yeah, that kind of stuff. Everyone was just in flipflops, and I swear one boy was barefoot. WTF?? I hope they were not expecting soft sand and warm water...







# Cleetwood Cove Trail

Due to the extreme instability of the steep walls of the caldera surrounding Crater Lake, Cleetwood Cove Trail is the only access to the lake shore. The route is strenuous, with a steep grade made even more difficult by the high altitude. Because of the difficulty of this hike, it is

recommended only for those in good physical condition. It is not recommended for people with heart, breathing or walking problems. The switchbacks wind through a forest of lodgepole pine, mountain hemlock and Shasta red fir, with lake views along the route.



## CAUTION - STEEP TRAIL

**Length**  
2.2 miles (1.7 km) roundtrip

**Difficulty**  
Strenuous—trail loses and then gains 700 ft (213 m) in elevation

**Surface**  
Loose, abrasive volcanic rock—closed toe shoes recommended

- No Pets
- No Bikes
- No Feeding Wildlife

**CARRY WATER** with you. It is not available on the trail.

**RESTROOMS AVAILABLE** at the bottom of the trail.

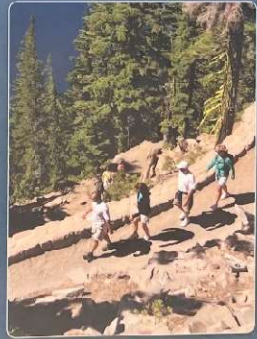
**CLOSED TOE SHOES** are recommended. The trail surface is loose, abrasive volcanic soil.

**BRING A JACKET** for the boat ride. Wind and spray are chilling on the lake.

**NO PETS** allowed on park trails.



**The high elevation** makes the return hike very strenuous: equal to walking up 65 flights of stairs. It should not be attempted by anyone with heart, breathing or walking problems.



Crater Lake National Park  
Cleetwood Cove Trail

No Pets

No Bikes

No Feeding Wildlife

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is available to

The next destination was Site F22 at Mazama Campground on the southeast side of CLNP. Once again, I had gotten lucky as hell on Recreation.gov and found the one and only site available for this night.

Hours of daylight remained, and I pulled in at Watchman Overlook to let my brain have a nice long soak in the soothing blue of this beautiful scene, let it lie back and go *ahhhhhhhh* for a few.

As I looked around, my eyes climbed the tall slope to my right, all the way up to the lookout post on top. There was a smooth and gradual-looking trail angling off and out of sight. "I should climb up there some day," I said to myself.



My self overheard that, though, and chimed in, *Why not now? Too tired???*

Damn you, self. I had no comeback, so with a *If-not-now-when?* shrug, I walked over to the Watchman Trail and started upwards. It's 0.8-mile-long, with a 420-foot gain in elevation, making for a tidy 10% average grade. Not killer, but the bottom section is not steep at all, so there are 12%-15% sections along the way to make up for it.

This hike will definitely suck the wind out of your chest. It tops out at 8,025 feet. That is 1.5 *miles* above sea level. If you think Denver (5280') has thin air, you need to try breathing this skinny stuff.

And the nice day was that tweener kind of temperature: too warm for a jacket in sunshine or when the wind stops, but too cool for a t-shirt in windy shade. You know the

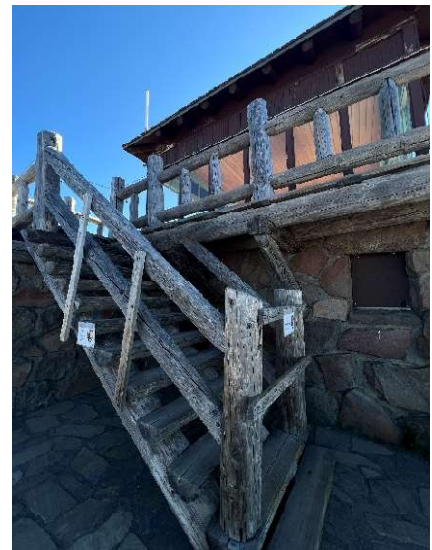
kind. You work up a sweat hiking in the sunny and leeward side of a hill, so you peel off your jacket and put it in your bag. Then you round the bend into the hill's shadow and the north wind starts licking that moisture off your skin and you find yourself shivering.



So, it took 20 minutes or so to get up to the watchman's house. What a view! A 360° panorama of the entire region. The best, of course, was the overview of the lake.

Watchman Overlook looks tiny from up here, but it's the largest overlook in CLNP. You can see Blue Maxx parked on the road, facing this way, with big white motorhomes flanking him.

I must admit, though, the life of the watchman, sitting up here every day, watching for whatever he was watching for – I'm sure that fires were high on the list – would be pretty nice. But the commute up to the office would get a little old, The same goes for those Boat Tour people who would have to hike up Cleetman at the end of every damn workday.







Returning to BM after being sated at this destination was nowhere near as daunting. It's nice getting the hard stuff done on the way there so you can cruise home afterwards, instead of the other way around.

There was still daylight in abundance, and East Rim Road was open, so thither I went to see the crater from the other side.

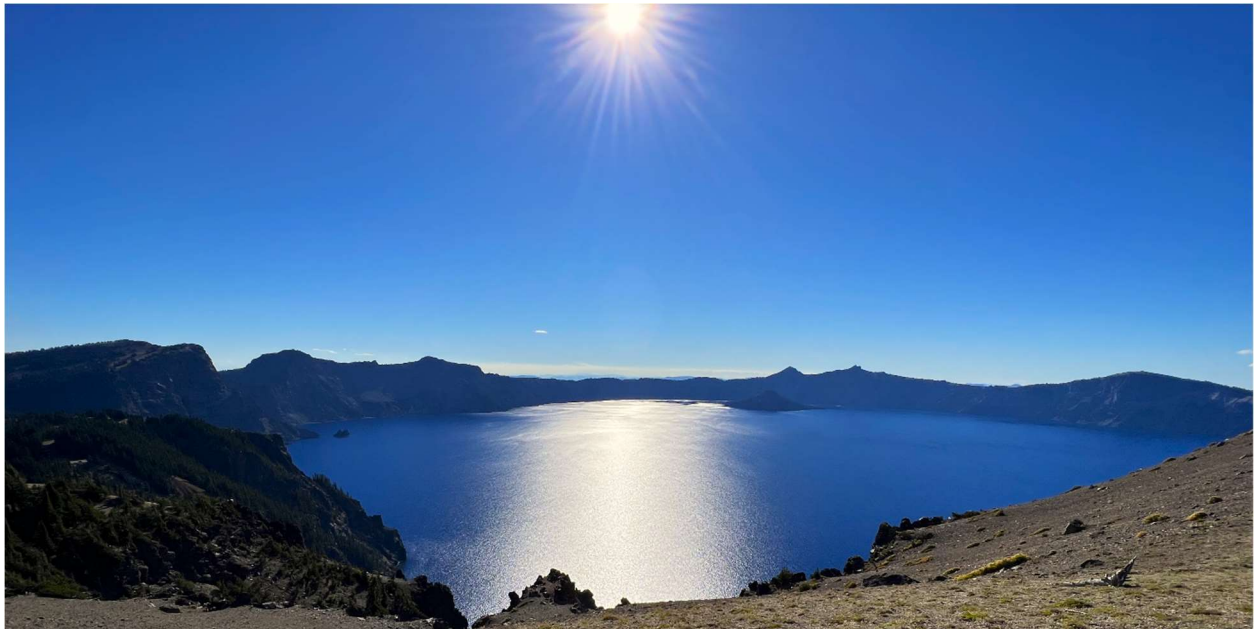
The late-day sun angle turned the wind-ruffled lake surface from a textured blue to a shimmering silver. The rugged points of the Phantom Ship formation stood out in dark silhouette against it.



Picture that shape shrouded in early morning fog and it's easy to see how it got its name.

Afternoon pix acquired, now it was time to find my site for the night. I knew I'd be back to see this side again in the morning.

It'll look like a whole new place.









Next Morning: 23 August 2022



