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

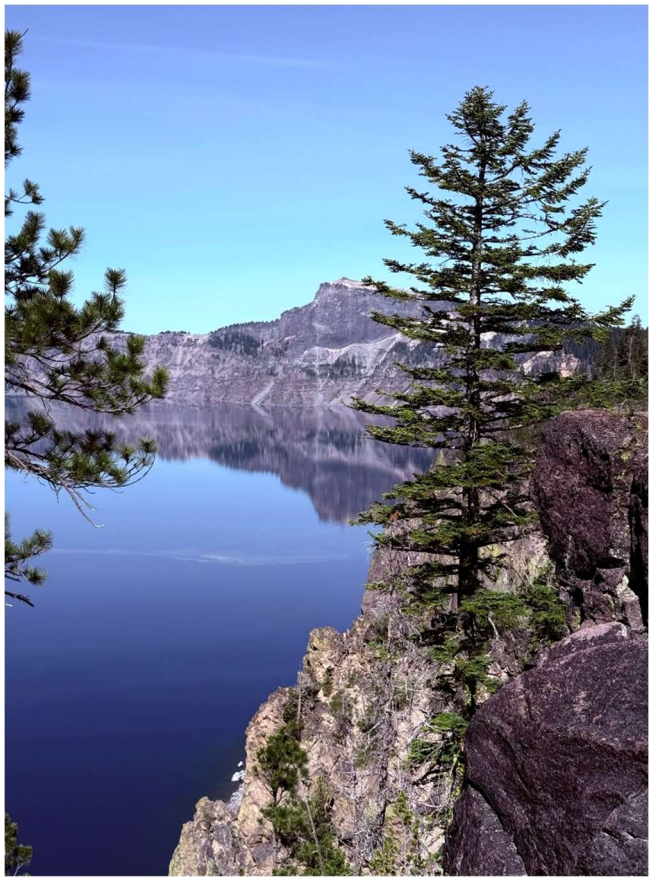
BLOG POST: 2026.06.24-30

Crater Lake National Park, Oregon



Yes, again. What can I say, I love this place! This was supposed to be a two-night stay, but it turned into a week. If you've been here, you might be thinking, how the heck to you spend a *full week* at Crater Lake? Unless you a crazy-mad hiker (which I'm not), what do you do?

Well, in my case, I plugged in and hid in my van. For my original two days -- Wednesday and Thursday -- the weather was beautiful. I was scheduled to check out on Friday morning and head up to Eugene. I had some reservations there, but they did not kick in till the following Thursday. My plan for the meantime was to boondock in "The McKenzie" in Willamette National Forest, an hour-plus to the east of the city.



But weather became a big issue. Ahh, yes, June turning into July. Major heat wave, like last year, when we skedaddled out to the coast to escape the week-long 107˚ furnace?

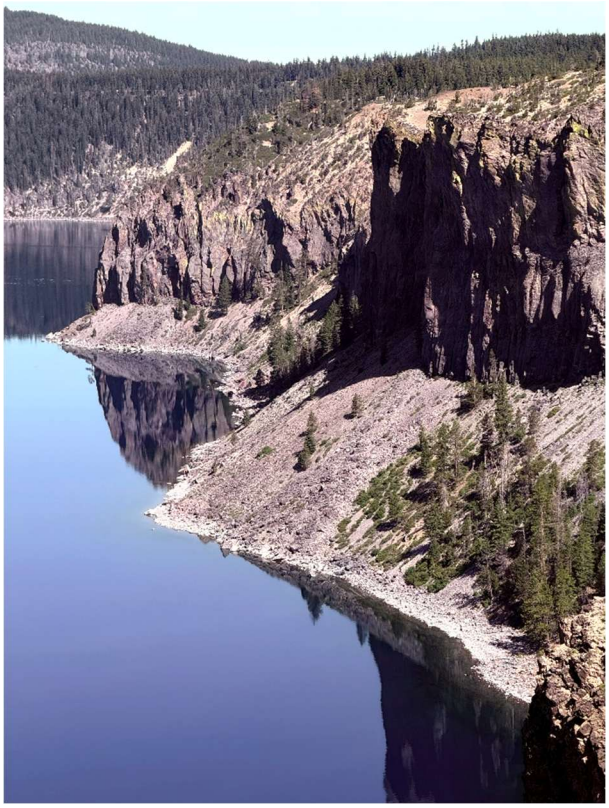
Not zackly. Friday into Monday would have daytime highs between 38˚ and 42˚, nighttime lows 35˚ down to 29˚ (!), blustery winds charging down from Canada, several periods of rain and the *possibility of **snow!*** Freaking summer snow. WT-effing-F?

This would not do, for multiple reasons:

First, almost four days without sun would tank my EcoFlows, which would suck. They still gather photons on cloudy days, true, but not through precipitation.

Second, I was not going to be spending my day outside in those conditions. Maxx has a built-in heater, true, but I was not to drive around aimlessly all day at $5.30 a gallon just to stay warm.

Third, boondocking would not be fun. I could bundle up and dive under covers for the nights, but being in a fridge all day is not my idea of a good time.



So, I hopped onto Recreation.gov to see if I could extend my current campsite. I had been surprised at the availability when I reserved this spot just a week earlier, so it was worth a shot. There were two things I especially liked about F15: it had electricity so I could run my space heater, and it had sufficient open sky among the tall trees that my Starlink Mini could find enough satellites to connect.

But, bah, F15 was reserved. F24, though, was available. The tree situation seemed unfavorable, but it did have electrics. Being warm and having power far out-weighed Internet access, so I grabbed



enough nights to ride out the cold spell. With my Lifetime Pass giving me 50% off, it was only $25 per night. Five nights in a beautiful camp site *with electricity* for $125 *total*, well, you can't beat that.



As it worked out, I could get a good Starlink connection if I parked in one particular spot of F24. As it also worked out, that spot was just about the only level spot in that camp site. I marked it carefully by carving thick lines in the ground with a sturdy stick so I'd know exactly where to pull back in.

It was one of the gloomiest weekends I can recall. I shut the blackout curtains to act as heat insulation and ran my 110V Lasko Ready Heat Portable Ceramic Heater non-stop for about 60 hours.

I bought Lasky at Walmart three winters ago for only $40. It was proved its worth ten times over.

When the sun returned on Monday, I ventured back out of Mazama Campground and up to the crater rim. As has been

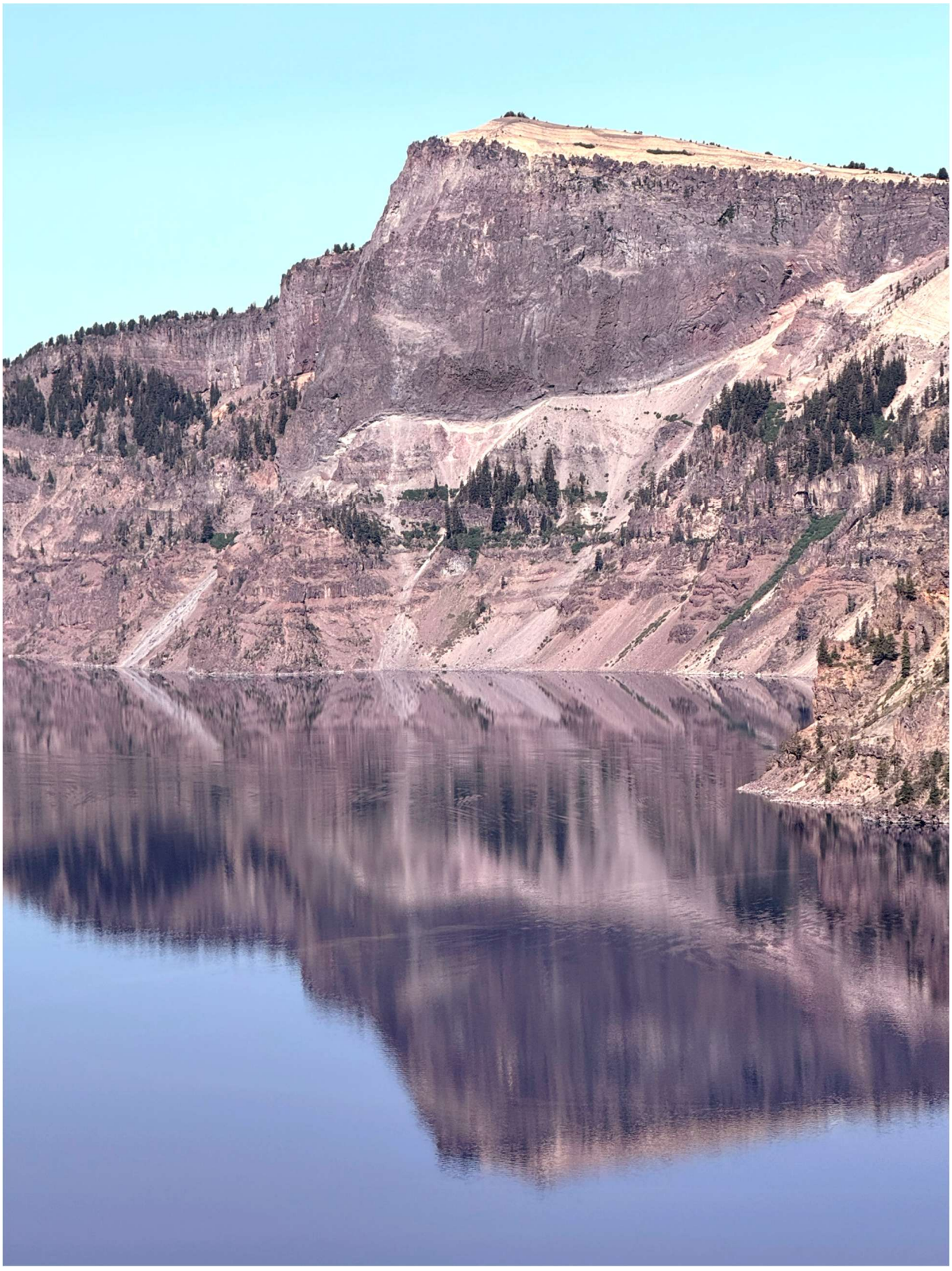
common over the years, East Rim Drive was closed off for construction. I knew about the closure for the Cleetwood Cove Trail project, which was just about 12 o'clock on the Crater Lake compass, but I figured I'd drive up at least that far and check out those few overlooks.

Morning views of the most popular spots on West Rim are not as inspiring as the late-day views; the sunshine is hitting the wrong side of everything. From the east, you get the best morning views, but with that unavailable, some north-ish looks would have to suffice.

Wizard Island is shy from these angles, though. It's a cinder cone and the small, dark rocks absorb most of the light they get and reflect little back. It never seems to stand out much unless it is fully front and center.



To my delight, though, the flagman position at Cleetwood had been taken down. I drove right on through onto East Rim Drive, delighted to get as far as Skell Head Overlook. The road was gated at that point, though, so I only got as far as three o'clock on the aftermentioned clockface.



Hillman Peak (West Rim), from Skell Head Overlook (East Rim)

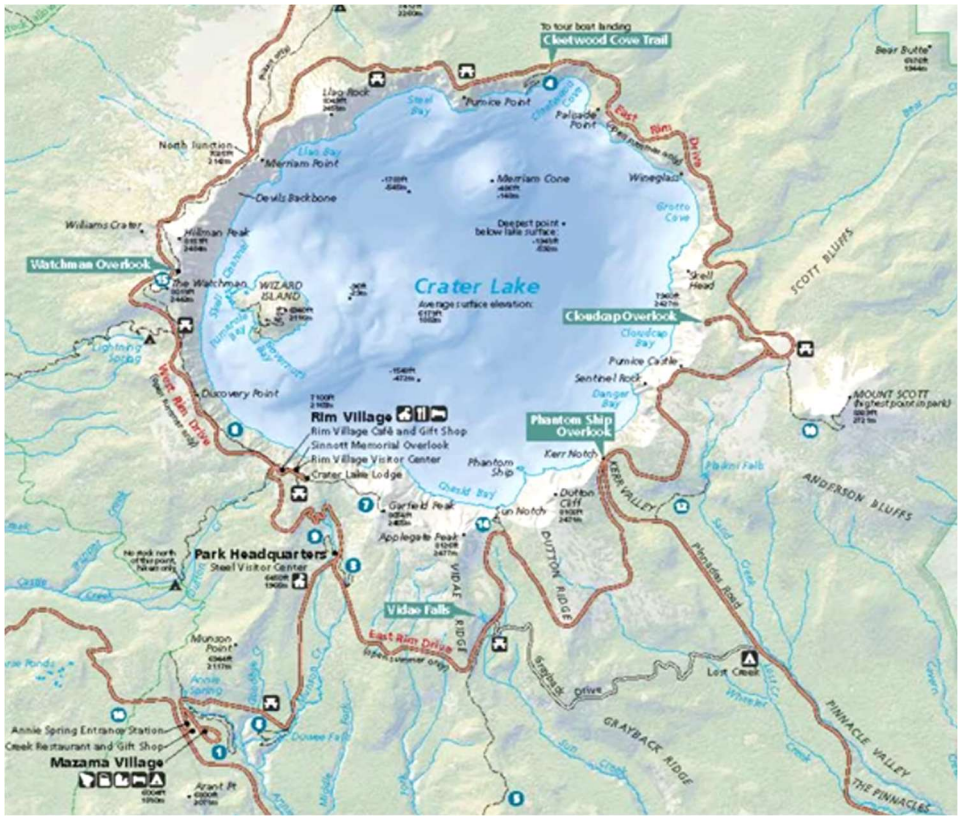


Looking south from Skell Head Overlook (East Rim)

I stayed at Skell Head for quite a while. The panoramic view was great there (see below), I had totally open sky for Starlink's enjoyment, and it was lunch time.

It was also freaking cold! Some passive solar heating through Maxx's windshield helped, but I had every window and vent closed tight against that wind, and my sweat pants and sweatshirt were on with my nylon jacket for good measure. Ahh, summer…





Content with my rare west-facing photos, I cruised on back, counter-clockwise, pausing, *of course*, at almost every overlook along the way. I tell ya, this lake drops a bomb on me. I cannot look away.

Laskie did yeoman's duty once again, late-afternoon through mid-morning. The skies were clear, but the temps dropped close to freezing again.

With nothing planned for Tuesday, I figured I'd roll on back out to Skell Head again and wallow in the view. As I reached it, though, I noticed that the gate that had been closed yesterday was now open! I eagerly continued onward to the highest paved point at Crater Lake: Cloudcap Overlook.



Looking east (above) and south (below) from Cloudcap Overlook



The view up here was more extreme and so was the wind! The chill factor had to be below freezing. I stepped outside to grab a few quick photos, trying to look like I was all fine and comfy, but I dashed back to the shelter of Blue Maxx as soon as my snap craving was satisfied.

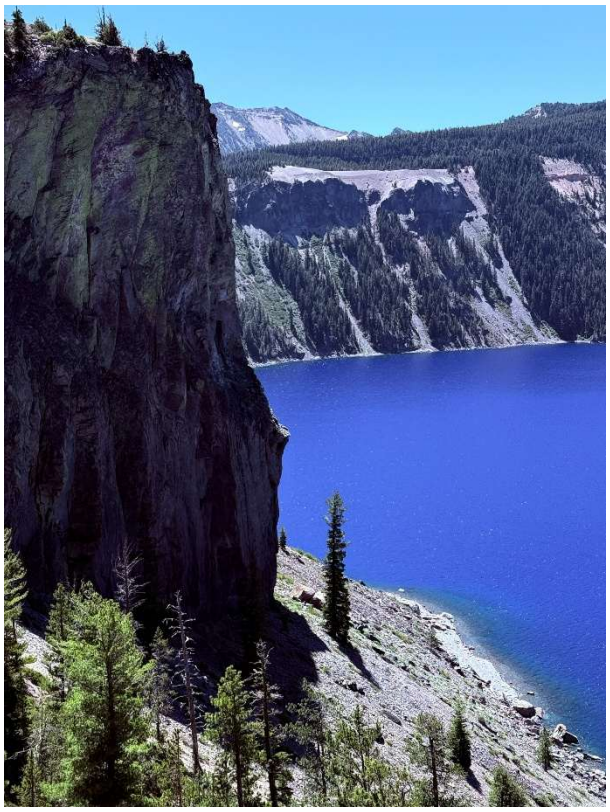
One thing I like a lot about Cloudcap is that you get the view of the southwest corner of the lake – around 4:30 on the clock – where the Phantom Ship is. It looks tiny from up here, but it's a 500-foot-long and 200-foot-tall upthrust of jagged rock. In the photo, the lake water, ruffled up by the wind, looks like a photoshopped carpet.



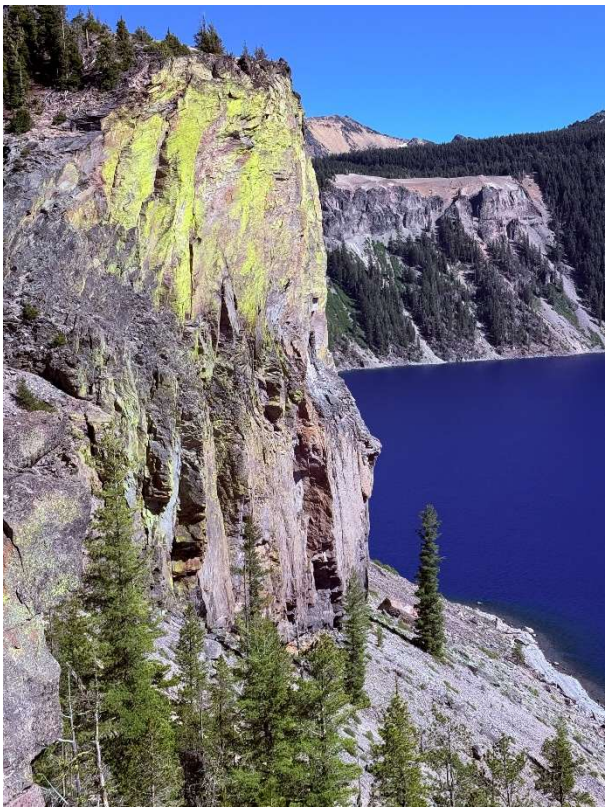


The road was open as far as the Phantom Ship Overlook, where I snapped this.

I'm always on about morning sun versus afternoon sun angles, so here is a great example of the same scene with two distinct looks, only due to time of day:



11:30 AM



4:30 PM

Quite a difference, yes? No edits whatsoever to either photo, just sunshine.

So, it was an odd week of summertime winter at one of my favorite National Parks, but it was time to head to Eugene.



