

Crags Lake

3.3 km / 270 m

The Chaos Crags Trail trailhead is marked by a small sign, at a small parking area, on the left (east) side of the road to Manzanita Lake Campground, about a tenth of a mile after turning off the main road, CA89/44.

The Chaos Crags Trail starts off in a meadow dotted with fir trees. Almost immediately, the trail leaves the meadow and enters a beautiful old growth fir forest. It follows Manzanita Creek for about the first .4 miles, climbing gradually. The roar of the creek can be heard to the right, but the creek can not be seen, as it is down a steep embankment.

About .4 miles from its trailhead, Chaos Crags Trail veers left and leaves Manzanita Creek behind. It descends slightly, crosses a stream that flows into Manzanita Creek, and then climbs gradually again, as it continues through the fir forest. There are areas that have seen fires and avalanches, as well as untouched areas as the trail travels through the fir forest.

The trees become sparser and Chaos Crags comes into view ahead, as the Chaos Crags Trail reaches the Chaos Jumbles about a mile from its trailhead. Chaos Crags is a cluster of six dome volcanoes that last erupted about 1,000 years ago. The Chaos Jumbles are a huge barren rocky area. Trees were covered and all the rocks were deposited by a huge rock avalanche that broke loose off Chaos Crags about 350 years ago.

The trees thin and there is a lot of manzanita in the ground cover, as the trail goes along the edge of the Chaos Jumbles for almost a mile. There are great views to the left (north) of the trail. Especially interesting is nearby Table Mountain, a long mountain with heavily forested upper slopes. Table Mountain's lower slopes can be seen and are covered by a thinner forest, the Dwarf Forest. The Dwarf Forest is a rejuvenating forest in a very rocky area that was also covered by the rock avalanche that created Chaos Jumbles, and covered the original forest on the lower slopes of Table Mountain.

Chaos Crags Trail reaches its high point on the rocky rim of Chaos Crater, an eruption crater. From here one can see Crags Lake, a sparkling blue green "jewel", below in Chaos Crater. To the right, are the steep, rocky slopes of Chaos Crags. If one's timing is right, one may witness a rock slide on Chaos Crags - though keep in mind that it's a bad idea to leave the trail and try to climb up Chaos Crags.

The trail then goes down a short, rocky section to end on the shores of Crags Lake.