

Mount Jefferson rises in the distance beyond the Green Ridge Lookout tower

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**VIEWS
HIGH & LOW**

Eagles and hawks soar above and dive down to Wizard Falls Fish Hatchery and the Metolius River below Green Ridge, a great place for birders, hikers and other nature lovers.

TOWERING ABOVE THE REST

When it comes to vacation rentals,
historic fire lookouts offer a unique way
to truly get away from it all.

STORY BY **DONNA B. ULRICH** | PHOTOS BY **LARRY ULRICH**

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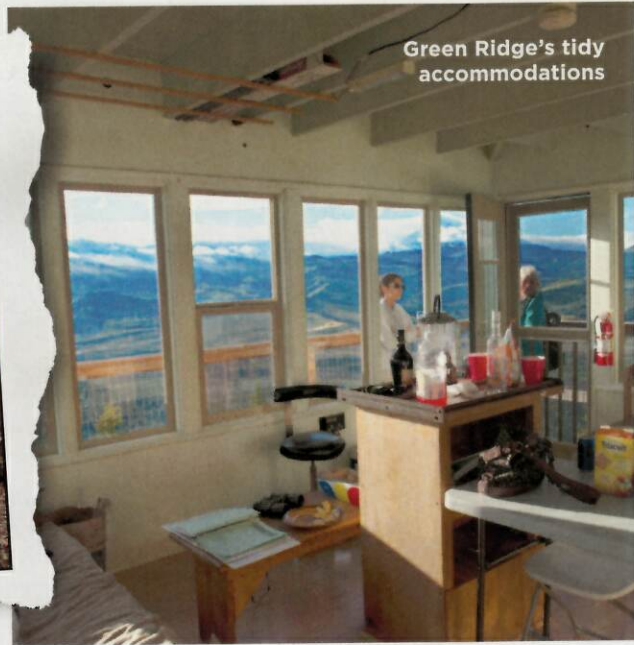
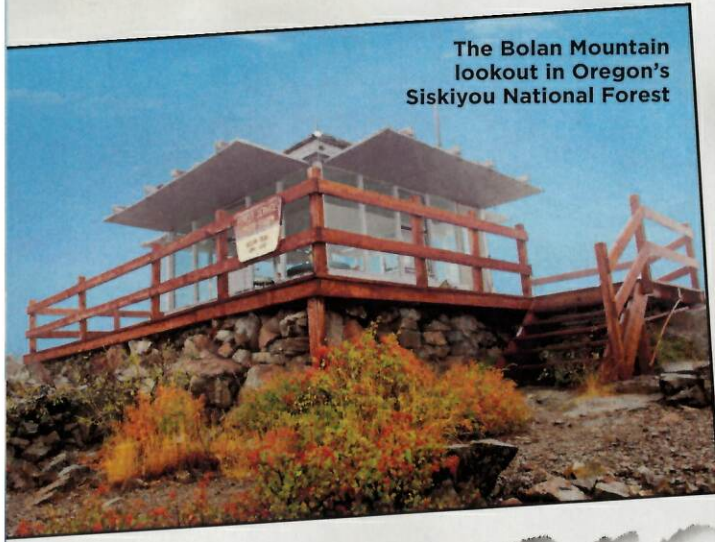
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The Bolan Mountain lookout in Oregon's Siskiyou National Forest

Green Ridge's tidy accommodations



Magnificent views, hiking, relaxation, photo ops—my husband, Larry, and I know what we want on vacation and don't care to fight crowds to find it. That's why we joined the many people who've stayed in U.S. Forest Service fire lookouts that are available to the public from coast to coast.

Accommodations range from bare bunks to places that boast full kitchens and solar electricity. What they all have in common is a roof over your head, fantastic views and a quiet place to study and enjoy nature.

Starting in the early 1900s, lookouts have been built and staffed by men and women dedicated to helping spot and prevent forest fires. Though some are available only before and after seasons in which fire potential is high, many are open all summer. Rental fees stay in the community to help maintain and preserve these historic buildings.

Before Larry and I decided to stay at Green Ridge Lookout in Oregon's Deschutes National Forest, we looked at others nearby. The 1953 cabin on Bolan Mountain, above the Rogue River in Siskiyou National Forest, was

unoccupied, so we peered through windows to discover a single bunk—no mattress—and a table with a wine bottle sporting multiple layers of candle wax. It looked too sparse for us. A late-September snow had begun, so we hiked back down to the warmth of our vehicle.

The next candidate was Gold Butte, built in 1934 at 4,618 feet in the Willamette National Forest. At least there were folding cots and a twin bed, but it still wasn't right. I was beginning to feel like Goldilocks.

We were in luck, though. Green Ridge Lookout, built in the 1960s more than 2,000 feet above the Metolius River, featured a futon mattress, clean vault toilets, cooking utensils, solar-powered lights and propane heat and kitchen appliances.

The morning dawned with sun rays peeking out from under the clouds, shining alpenglow on the flanks of 10,500-foot Mount Jefferson. Larry took his camera outside; I intended to write, but words escaped me.

I picked up the logbook from the cabin's desk and was captivated by the words of fellow travelers. Some wrote of the Metolius River, visible far below, crashing and splashing on its journey to the sea without a

sound reaching the lookout. Others described shadows playing on Mount Jefferson's glaciers and hawks flying by at eye level.

When sunset came my thoughts were still flying madly around our mountaintop perch, but none of them were written down; I gave up. We walked out onto the wraparound deck. Larry got some good photographs out of the day; I had a journal full of empty pages and a day full of watching hawks fly by. Looking out from our lookout was just right. 🌅

Things to consider if you rent a lookout

Cost: Prices generally run from \$40-\$65 a night. Vacancies fill up fast, so plan ahead by making a reservation at recreation.gov.

Tip: As most lookouts are remote and some provide very minimal services, do read the rental descriptions carefully before reserving.

Online: For a state-by-state listing, go to firelookout.org/lookout-rentals.html.