Climbing - Outside and In

And exploring the East Fort Rock OHV area, if you like - it’s right on the way. Take a picnic lunch or pick one up at the Fort Rock Restaurant & Pub, stop for drinks and snacks at the General Store, or sit down for a bite at The Waterin’ Hole Tavern all in Fort Rock. Make your way to Fort Rock and the South Ice Caves with a stop along the way to explore the Cabin Lake Guard Station which is listed on the National Register of Historic Places...a popular place for bird watching and nature photography.

Enjoy birding, the geological features and beautiful vistas at Fort Rock early in the day. When it gets hot, head for the South Ice Caves. The cave’s cool breezes will refresh you and listening to the birds near the caves is a relaxing way to spend the afternoon. These are rustic unimproved caves so be sure to have sturdy shoes and sufficient lighting before venturing too deep into the caves, though you can go into the main entrance cavern very easily.

Getting there:
Distance: 120 miles round trip; driving time 2.5 hours, paved & gravel roads

To Fort Rock State Park
From La Pine Chamber of Commerce: South on Huntington Road to Hwy 97, turn right onto Hwy 97 S for 1.7 miles; Left on Hwy 31 (to Reno) for 29 miles; Left on County Rd 5-10 to Fort Rock for 6.4 miles Left on Cabin Lake Rd for 1 mile Left on Fort Rock Road/County Rd 5-11A for .8 miles Arrive at Fort Rock State Park

To OHV Staging area
Left out of parking lot, and left on Cabin Lake Road/NF18 for 15 miles on gravel road (open to all vehicles) Arrive at OHV staging area

To South Ice Caves
Left on NF22 for 1.2 miles on paved road Arrive at South Ice Caves

To La Pine
Right on NF22/Finley Butte Road for 25 mi. Arrive in La Pine
Before You Go
Beware of using a maps app for driving directions; they may route you onto unmaintained/OHV forest roads, and you also may not get a signal. There’s no gas after Fort Rock.

There is about 15 miles of good gravel road that isn’t maintained in winter. Check the weather and road conditions in spring and fall.

Fort Rock Views
Lovely vistas, intriguing rock formations, and spring flowers can all be found at Fort Rock State Park. Amenities include restrooms, water and picnic tables. The nearby town of Fort Rock has a General Store and the Fort Rock Valley Historical Homestead Museum (Open Memorial Day - mid-September, Th-Sun, 10A-4P).

Their website is FortRockOregon.com

Cool Picnicking
South Ice Caves is a cool respite on a hot day. The birds chirp as they flit in and out of the caves, and the cool breezes near their mouths is refreshing. Generally, there are few people around during the week.

The caves are undeveloped—there are no smooth paths into the caves. Unless you are experienced at climbing over rocks, this is not a trip where you want children in backpacks. Flat, or nearly flat, surfaces on which to stand can be hard to find. You will want your hands free to help you climb over rocks. Sturdy hiking/climbing boots are strongly recommended. This is not a hike for flip flops; a jacket, and leather gloves for clambering over rocks are useful. Take water. There is none at the caves.

To explore the ice caves, a good flashlight or head lamp (both available at Ace Hardware) is a must. Don’t depend on your smartphone for a flashlight. Not only is it not bright enough to illumine the caves, but if you drop it, there is a strong possibility it will slide into a crevice and become irretrievable, depriving you of your phone as well as light for your return trip.

There are off road trails nearby, so it could occasionally be noisy. The amenities include an outhouse and a picnic table in need of repair.

If the entire trip to Fort Rock does not fit your schedule, the drive from La Pine to the caves is only 20-25 minutes. Plan a picnic on a hot summer day, just a little way from town.