History and Visitor Information: Believe it or not, the origin of Bolt Mountain began under the sea. About 300 million years ago, the only animals living where southwestern Oregon is today were sea creatures. At that time, the coastline of North America was located near present-day Montana. No, Bolt Mountain did not rise up from the ocean floor from a strike of Poseidon’s trident, but rather when an oceanic tectonic plate began to slowly crash into the North American continental tectonic plate from the west about 160 million years ago. The impact resulted in the pushing up of an enormous amount of material and caused the formation of a long chain of mountainous islands. Rocks from these ancient islands are today part of the Klamath Mountains, in which Bolt Mountain is found.

Bolt Mountain is situated in a geologically and biologically rich area known as the Klamath-Siskiyou Ecoregion. The rocks, soils and corresponding plant species found on Bolt Mountain display this wealth of biodiversity. A majority of the soils found on the mountain originate from the rock serpentine. This rock was pushed up to the earth’s surface from the ocean floor during the uplift activity mentioned earlier. Over time, the rock breaks down forming serpentine soil. Unlike most fertile soils, serpentine lacks calcium, nitrogen and other vital nutrients which most plants require to grow and thrive. Serpentine is also high in heavy metals and magnesium. Plants found growing on this soil, such as the Jeffrey Pine, have adapted to tolerate these extreme conditions.

Remember to practice leave no trace principals by staying on the designated trail on your hike to the summit of Bolt Mountain. Keep an eye out for rocks with a bluish-green tint and slick-scaly texture. This is serpentine. Once you reach the summit, enjoy the 360° view and imagine what this landscape may have looked like millions of years ago.

Driving Directions: From the intersection of Hwy. 199 and 238 in Grants Pass, proceed on Hwy. 238 towards Murphy. Continue on Hwy. 238 towards Murphy for 1.5 miles then turn right onto New Hope Road. In 3.2 miles, turn right onto Fish Hatchery Road. Just before the bridge over the Applegate River, turn right onto Wetherbee St. which ends in the parking lot for Fish Hatchery Park and Bolt Mt.