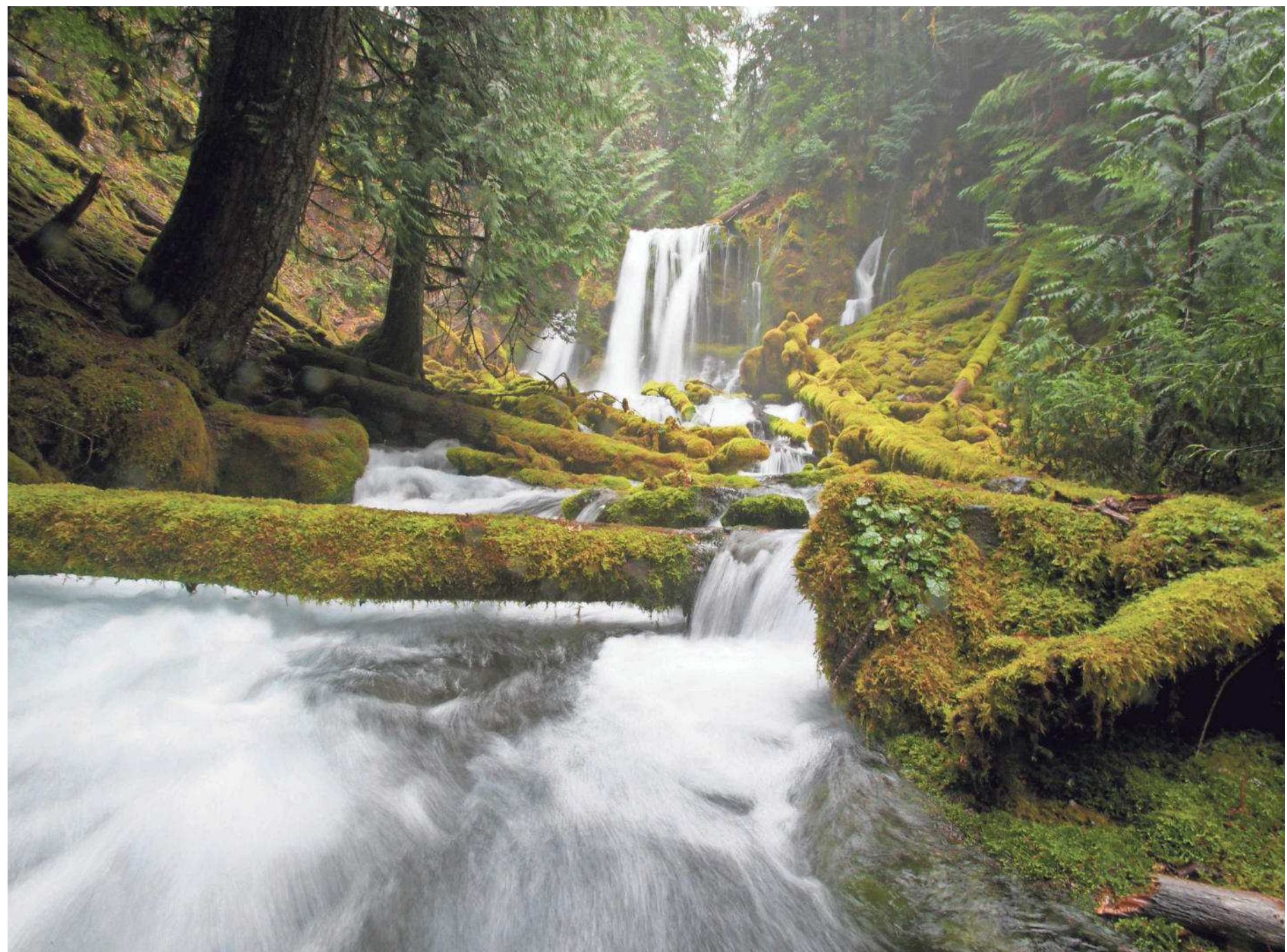


# Life *in the* Valley

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ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

Downing Creek Falls is hidden in Willamette National Forest near Marion Forks.

## *A hidden, mossy waterfall*

A brief hike near Detroit leads to the rarely visited Downing Creek Falls

### Downing Creek Falls

**What:** A moss-covered waterfall near Detroit and Marion Forks off Highway 22.

**When:** The waterfall is most impressive after a heavy rain in late spring or fall before low-elevation snow falls.

**Distance:** The hike is short, just 0.6 miles round-trip, but requires some navigating. The route does not follow official trails.

**Navigating:** The route to Downing Creek Falls follows old, overgrown roads and an unmarked boot path. A Forest Service map of Detroit district in Willamette National Forest is recommended, along with a handheld GPS device.

**Seasons/snow:** The roads and waterfall are at 3,000 feet. That means snow will often fall here during winter and potentially block the road. Check weather conditions before making the trip.

**Start of hike coordinates:** N44° 34.650' W121° 58.664'

**Waterfall coordinates:** N44° 34.490' W121° 58.397'

ZACH URNESS  
STATESMAN JOURNAL

Three years ago, Salem photographer Rich Horner sent me a picture that's remained lodged in my brain.

The image features a swirling creek and waterfall blanketed with a thick carpet of moss. The scene is dynamic, unique — the essence of Oregon's Cascadian lushness.

Most amazing of all, however, is that the waterfall is a short drive from Highway 22 near Detroit and Marion Forks. But few people ever visit.

"It's not an easy one to find," said Horner, who searches out waterfalls across the Cascades and Coast Range. "But once you know where to go, it doesn't take too long."

Last week, I decided I had to see the waterfall, known as Downing Creek Falls, in person. It's about 35 to 40 feet tall and most impressive after a nice heavy rain.

Just as Horner said, the waterfall can be found quickly — but only by



PHOTO BY RICHARD HORNER

Richard Horner's picture of Downing Creek Falls took third place in the Statesman Journal's Winter Waterfall Hunting photography contest. It was taken Dec. 8, 2012.

navigating overgrown logging roads and an unofficial boot path.

The hike is 0.6 miles round-trip and mostly flat. It's generally safe for children, although there are some slippery rocks around the creek and waterfall.

A Forest Service map of Detroit Ranger district is recommended, along with a GPS device.

### Getting there

The best place to start navigating is 16 miles east of Detroit at Marion Forks Restaurant (a good place to get food before or after the trip).

From the restaurant, drive 3.1 miles east on Highway 22. Turn left on barely noticeable Forest Service Road 162, which isn't marked. If you cross Downing Creek on the highway, you've gone too far.

Follow the overgrown road 0.3 miles and stay right at a sign for 162. We were able to drive just a bit farther before downed trees blocked the road. That's where we parked (GPS coordinates: N44° 34.650' W121° 58.664').

Now on foot, we walked to the road's end and continued right onto an old skid road. We followed this crumbling road 0.1 miles to a stacked rock cairn on the right, marking a well-established boot path. The boot path reaches Downing Creek quickly and in just 0.2 miles reaches the waterfall (coordinates: N44° 34.490' W121° 58.397').

The waterfall is at 3,008 feet. In winter, the road may be blocked by snow.

"It's not an easy one to find.

But once you know where to go, it doesn't take too long."

RICH HORNER  
SALEM PHOTOGRAPHER

### Overall impression

The hike is short and travels mostly through second-growth forest. There are some decent-sized trees, and we found a few chanterelle mushrooms, but for the most part, this trip is all about the waterfall and creek.

If you're a photographer, this makes a great spot to try some unique angles and get some really good low-shutter speed photos.

If you're just a hiker, it might be hard to justify a trip all the way out here. Better to combine it with other activities and hit the waterfall as part of a trip to Santiam Pass, Sisters or Bend.

### Other waterfalls

There are two other waterfalls on Downing Creek — a lower and upper falls. Horner has visited both of them, and you can too with a little bit of exploring.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for eight years. He is the author of the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at [zurness@StatesmanJournal.com](mailto:zurness@StatesmanJournal.com) or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @Zach-sORoutdoors.



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Rich Horner hikes to Downing Creek Falls.