

Hiking Whychus Canyon

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

The Deschutes Land Trust (DLT) has already accomplished some environmental miracles on Whychus Creek. The extremely successful creek restoration at DLT's Camp Polk Meadow Preserve — which we frequently see now on television spots — is one of them. That highly acclaimed project has attracted national attention as an example of forward-thinking and proactive land stewardship. Yet, there is much more to come.



PHOTO BY CRAIG EISENBEIS

Hiking the DLT Whychus Canyon Preserve is rewarding.

Starting this summer, DLT will begin another massive restoration project on another segment of Whychus Creek at their Whychus Canyon Preserve; but more on that next week. Today's focus is on the already existing hiking opportunities at the Preserve, just a few miles north of town.

The Whychus Canyon Preserve is a 930-acre DLT holding that straddles four miles of Whychus Creek. Originally established in 2010, opened to the public in 2011, and doubled in size in 2014, the Preserve is home to a varied and complicated ecosystem, portions of the historic Santiam Wagon Road, and — of particular importance to this column — over seven miles of excellent trails available for public use.

At a time when mountain snows are keeping us out of the high country, this is another of those lower-elevation hikes to enjoy. Spring is a perfect time to visit the Preserve, the creek is running strong, new growth on the deciduous trees is a brilliant green, and the really hot days of summer are yet to come.

All of the land on the eastern edge of the preserve borders public lands operated by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The parking area, informational kiosk, and the entrance to the preserve are actually located on BLM land, and the BLM has worked closely with the Land Trust to help develop the site.

On this occasion, I selected a five-mile loop paralleling the creek that requires no backtracking except for a short 0.2-mile segment on BLM land from the parking lot to the Preserve's access gate. The parking lot is of ample size, even on a day when I unwittingly encountered two large hiking groups, one a guided DLT tour, and

the other a Bend Parks and Recreation outing. However, even knowing that there were two-dozen or more hikers on the trails, I briefly encountered only one other hiker.

The access trail takes off directly from the parking area to an unlocked gate, which trail users are requested to close behind them. Since I could see that the Bend group had headed north on the loop I intended to hike, I went south, taking an immediate left as soon as I closed the gate. This portion is one of the more arid sections of the trail system, but it offers spectacular, sweeping views of Central Oregon's mountains. The majesty and solitude here are interrupted only by homes on the other side of the creek peeking intrusively over the canyon rim.

After 0.4 mile, the trail comes to another gate but makes a sharp right turn to begin a relatively gradual descent into the canyon. From this point on, the creek can be heard, and occasionally seen, in the canyon below. At 0.7 mile from the U-turn at the gate, a short connector trail drops quickly to the canyon floor and the creek itself.

Each of these trail junctions and turns is well marked. There are no trail signs or markers at the extreme northern end of the Preserve; but a map of the Preserve and trail system and user rules can be found beforehand and printed at <http://www.deschuteslandtrust.org/files/trail-maps/wc-trail-map-with-rules>. It should also be noted that, while dogs are permitted, they must be kept on a leash at all times.

Once on the canyon floor, the trail follows the creek downstream on a very easy, scenic and pleasant path. In addition to enjoying the creek itself, be sure to admire

the rocks of the canyon walls along the way. After 0.8 mile, the trail forks; and this is the last trail signage at the northern end of the Preserve. This is also the area where the restoration project will begin this summer.

I took the left fork to stay along the creek, but the trail soon begins a gradual climb away from the water, eventually hooking up to an old, rough road. There is no signage at this point, but the intended route is to follow the road up, rather than down. The road is fairly steep and soon switchbacks toward the south. From that point it's another 0.4 mile to the next signage at a popular rocky scenic overlook.

Continuing south, I took a right at the next marked trail junction and, then, the next left to ascend to a wonderful scenic spot, with an attractive juniper bench overlooking the future restoration project at the northern portion of the Preserve and the adjacent Rimrock Ranch. From here, it is 1.3 miles back to the kiosk at the starting point.

Camped in the middle of the trail, sounding like a score of Mexican maracas, was a good-sized rattlesnake. Thankfully, it sounded off when I was still a good 20 feet away. After snapping a couple of photos, I gave it a wide berth. We live in rattlesnake country, and it is always a good idea to be alert.

The entrance to the preserve is located at the end of Goodrich Road, which is 4.5 miles east of Sisters on Highway 126, on the way to Redmond. After turning left (north) onto Goodrich Road, continue 1.5 miles to where the pavement makes a 90-degree right turn. Goodrich Road, however, turns to gravel and continues straight from this point. It is another 1.6 miles to the road's end and the kiosk on BLM land.

Agenda...

Sisters City Council
City Hall
520 E. Cascade Ave.
May 19, 8 a.m.
Sisters City Council
Special Meeting:
• Intergovernmental agreement (IGA) with Oregon Department of Transportation for Highway 20/Barclay Drive right-of-way.

• Appoint Rick Allen as a limited-duration city manager for a set term through November 18, or upon termination, whichever comes earlier.
8:15 a.m.
• Economic Development of Central Oregon (EDCO) update.
• Preview May 26 agendas.

Three hurt in wreck

On May 16 at about 6:54 a.m., OSP troopers and emergency personnel responded to the report of a two-vehicle head-on crash on Highway 20 near milepost 83 east of Santiam Summit.

Preliminary investigation revealed a 2005 Chevrolet Colorado was traveling eastbound on Highway 20 when it lost control while

negotiating a corner on a wet roadway. The Chevrolet spun out and into the path of a westbound 2016 Kia sport utility. The Chevrolet struck the Kia nearly head-on and then rolled. Three people were hurt; two have life threatening injuries.

The westbound lanes of Highway 20 were closed for about five hours.

A Partnership Beyond Your Expectations

Western Title & Escrow

Stop by and visit with Tiana Van Landuyt & Shelley Marsh.
220 S. Pine St., Ste. 102 | 541-548-9180

HOWELLS REALTY GROUP
Exclusive Onsite Realtor for Black Butte Ranch

NEW LISTING! GLAZE MEADOW 288 • \$759,000
LARGE LOT! MLS #201604178

NEW LISTING! GLAZE MEADOW 12 • \$619,000
PRIVATE! MLS #201604180

Come see us daily at The Ranch, 9 to 5
Our office is adjacent to the Lodge Pool Complex

Don Bowler, President and Broker ~ 971-244-3012
Gary Yoder, Managing Principal Broker ~ 541-420-6708
Dick Howells, Principal Broker ~ 541-408-6818
Phil Arends, Principal Broker ~ 541-420-9997
Joe Dye, Broker ~ 541-595-2604 | Carol Dye, Broker ~ 541-480-0923
Steve Post, Broker ~ 541-480-5415

541-595-3838 The Ranch • 541-549-5555 in Sisters
see all our listings at blackbutte.com