

# Chush Falls hike continues to evolve

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Correspondent

Chush Falls is one of the premier hiking destinations in our area, and I am always a bit surprised at the number of local residents who have not yet taken this popular hike up to the thundering waterfalls of Whychus Creek. Don't be one of them!

The falls, long known as Squaw Creek Falls, had a name change to Chush Falls after the State Legislature, in a sweeping gesture of political correctness, banned the use of the S-word for Oregon place-names. No matter what name you use, however, visiting the falls is well worth the effort, and now is a great time to view the falls because the water volume is high due to the rapid snowmelt.

In the wake of the 26,000-acre Pole Creek Fire of 2012, this hike became an entirely different endeavor; and the Forest Service has tinkered with the route ever since. After the fire, the very rough 2.5-mile 600 Road was permanently blockaded at about 0.9 mile; and the trail was rerouted onto what was the 680 Road, making the hike a 4.6-mile round trip to the lower falls and about six for the upper falls.

The rerouted trail drops off toward the creek, which is in view for much of the time. This part of the forest, including Whychus Creek Canyon, was very severely scorched in the fire; and there are startlingly few new tree seedlings. However, lupine and the fragrant snowbrush (ceanothus) are rapidly colonizing the burn. Significant trail and restoration work has been completed in this area. The additional hiking necessary to reach the former

trailhead from the new one is about 1.3 miles each way, through very hot and desolate country.

Prior to the fire, many of the lodgepole pines here had been killed by insect infestations; and they burned furiously. Many of those dead tree trunks burned through and toppled, creating a jumble of deadfall. On the brighter side, many of the older ponderosas and firs nearer the falls survived.

Where the new trail (Road 680) and the now-obliterated former access road (600) come together, a former road sign points you left to "FALLS TRHD," and the former trailhead is less than half a mile.

Shortly after the trail leaves the original trailhead, it enters the Three Sisters Wilderness and it passes through a mixed conifer forest that includes ponderosa and lodgepole pine, various firs, and even the occasional hemlock and spruce. Firs include noble, white, Pacific silver, and the predominant fir species — grand fir. While the effects of the fire are all around and obvious, most of this trail is unburned or burned in a mosaic pattern.

This hike is pretty easy to the lower falls, with a stretch of uphill hiking shortly before the lower falls that some might consider "moderate." The trail winds its way gently through the woods and crosses a couple of small tributary creeks. The trail is wide and well traveled. Lower Chush Falls is really raging at this time of year. The top of the North Sister is visible from the principal viewing site.

Beyond the lower falls, there is no maintained trail; but the informal trails are

easy to follow, although more difficult. Generally, follow the wider, smoother paths, and you'll do fine. It's pretty hard to get lost if you remember to stay within earshot of the creek. In about 10 minutes you will reach the next major water feature.

The middle falls are actually unnamed, and my campaign to rename them "Eisenbeis Falls" doesn't seem to have gained much momentum. The middle falls are near the confluence of Whychus and Park Creeks. A huge buttress of rock separates the two watercourses until they finally crash together as one.

A few more minutes of even-worse trail and you will find yourself nearing Upper Chush Falls. At one point, the trail was obscured by a newly fallen spruce tree. After fighting through an alder thicket, you'll know it when you arrive at the upper falls. These falls are high and spectacular. I've seen patches of snow here as late as July; but, this year, all the snow is long gone. Below the falls, you will find yourself in a steep valley. With the lousy trail fresh in your mind, you may be tempted to climb out for easier going. Don't bother. On the slopes of the canyon is a rockslide where the footing is even more treacherous.

Even with the added mileage, this is a great family outing, so pack a lunch and relax by one of the falls. To

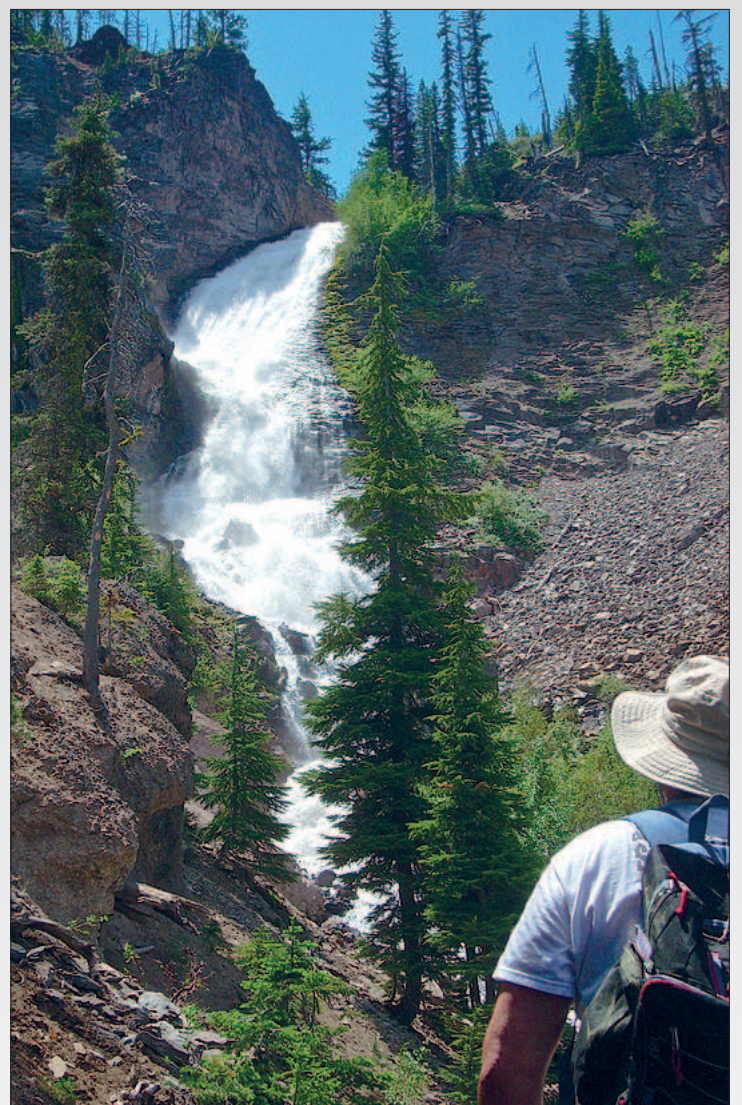


PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Upper Chush Falls can be reached by a rough, unmaintained trail about two-thirds of a mile above the lower falls.

take this hike, drive 7.2 miles south on Three Creek Lake Road (Elm Street in town). Turn right onto Forest Road 1514, where the Whychus Creek turnoff sign is currently crushed and broken in the ditch; so, watch your mileage. The turnoff, however, is a very major gravel road, so it is easy to spot.

There are some spectacular and sweeping mountain vistas along this road. About

five miles later turn left on Road 600. If you cross the Whychus Creek Bridge, you've gone too far. The new trailhead sign and the new trail are quite obvious. The gravel roads leading there are suitable for passenger vehicles, but take it slow on the 600 Road. Sharp rocks abound. This site is not a fee use area, but a free wilderness permit is required and available on site.

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