

Jack Creek Trail is option for family outings

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
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Quite often, I am asked to recommend a hike that can be enjoyed by small children or people with limited mobility. So, occasionally, I like to feature a hike that is hardly a hike at all. Let's call it an "outing in the woods."

The Jack Creek Trail is probably the premier local hike in that category. It offers a short, flat, obstruction-free trail in a park-like setting, with a truly remarkable natural phenomenon as a destination objective. I have even seen families with strollers on this trail.

Although often overlooked because of the larger and better-known headwaters of the Metolius, the birthplace of Jack Creek has many of the same qualities as its nearby more famous sibling. One big difference, however, is that it is possible to walk right up to the very spot where the stream gurgles fully formed from the hillside.

As with the Metolius River and most of its other tributaries, Jack Creek has its origins in the winter snows of the Cascade Range. The snowmelt, however, doesn't simply run along the surface. Rather, it seeps down through the volcanic soils and rock to emerge, years later — usually many miles from its origin.

In the Metolius Basin, basalt lava flows have been overlaid by alluvial deposits of sediment and gravel. Cracks in the underground

basalt layers serve as aquifers to bring the Cascade meltwaters back to the surface. In the case of the Metolius Basin, these cracks tend to deliver their water flow all at about the same elevation level, in this case, about 3,200 feet. Most of these outlets, like Jack Creek, are on the west side of the Metolius River.

To observe this interesting phenomenon and get a close-up look at the headwaters, there are two trails to choose from. One is easy, and the other is really easy.

To take the easy trail for a round-trip walk of about two miles, park at the west end of the Jack Creek Campground and follow the wide, flat, smooth trail upstream for one mile. The trail is not paved, but it is about as close as you can get to a sidewalk in the woods. It should be noted, that as we get farther into summer, the trail can become dry and dusty.

To lengthen this hike to about a three-mile round trip, you can leave your car near the Jack Creek Bridge and walk along the creek and through the campground. The sound of the creek is always within earshot, and the forest is beautiful.

For the really easy walk, there is another access point, from which the headwaters can be reached at the end of a well-maintained trail that is only about a half-mile from the parking lot. This trail joins the main streamside trail near a rustic log bench. Turn right here, and continue upstream toward the

headwaters.

The 2003 B&B Fire touched the area on the north side of the creek, and the effects are still quite apparent. Quite a few trees have fallen, but the Forest Service has done a good job of clearing the deadfall to provide easy and barrier-free access. The area lining the creek itself is verdant green, and there are many unburned — and mammoth — old-growth pines and firs towering above the headwaters and the access trails.

Deer and elk may be seen in the area, and wildflowers are blooming. Both trails are perfect for a relaxing stroll and for introducing children to an 'outing in the woods.' The trails are even suitable for toddlers.

Unfortunately, a scenic foot-bridge near the headwaters was damaged and removed four years ago, so the Forest Service asks that visitors not try to create crossings or additional trails. Still, there are many opportunities to enjoy this beautiful stream and the lush undergrowth on the way to the headwaters.

To find these relaxing little hikes, drive west from Sisters on Highway 20 for about 12 miles. Turn right onto the (paved) Jack Lake Road (Forest Road 12). Do not take the subsequent Round Lake turn-off (about a mile on the left); instead, continue on Road 12 for a total of a little more than four miles. At that point, the road



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

The headwaters of Jack Creek appear to flow from the roots of this tree.

curves to the right; take the Jack Creek turnoff to the left (Road 1230). It is easy to miss this turnoff if you are not paying attention.

The Jack Creek Road crosses the Jack Creek Bridge, and, in a short distance, the pavement ends. Park here for the three-mile hike; this area is not marked as fee-use. For the two-mile option, turn left after crossing the Jack Creek Bridge onto Forest Road 1232, where a sign points toward "Head of Jack Creek." This is a good gravel road. Take

the 2nd turnoff into the Jack Creek Campground and park at the trailhead at the west end of the campground. This is marked as a fee-use area.

To reach the trailhead for the very-easy short stroll, drive about a mile farther west on Road 1232 and watch for well-marked junctions bearing left to "Head of Jack Creek." Follow the signs to the parking area on Road 400. This site has a pit toilet and was formerly a fee-use area, but the fee-use signs and deposit box had been removed as of last week.



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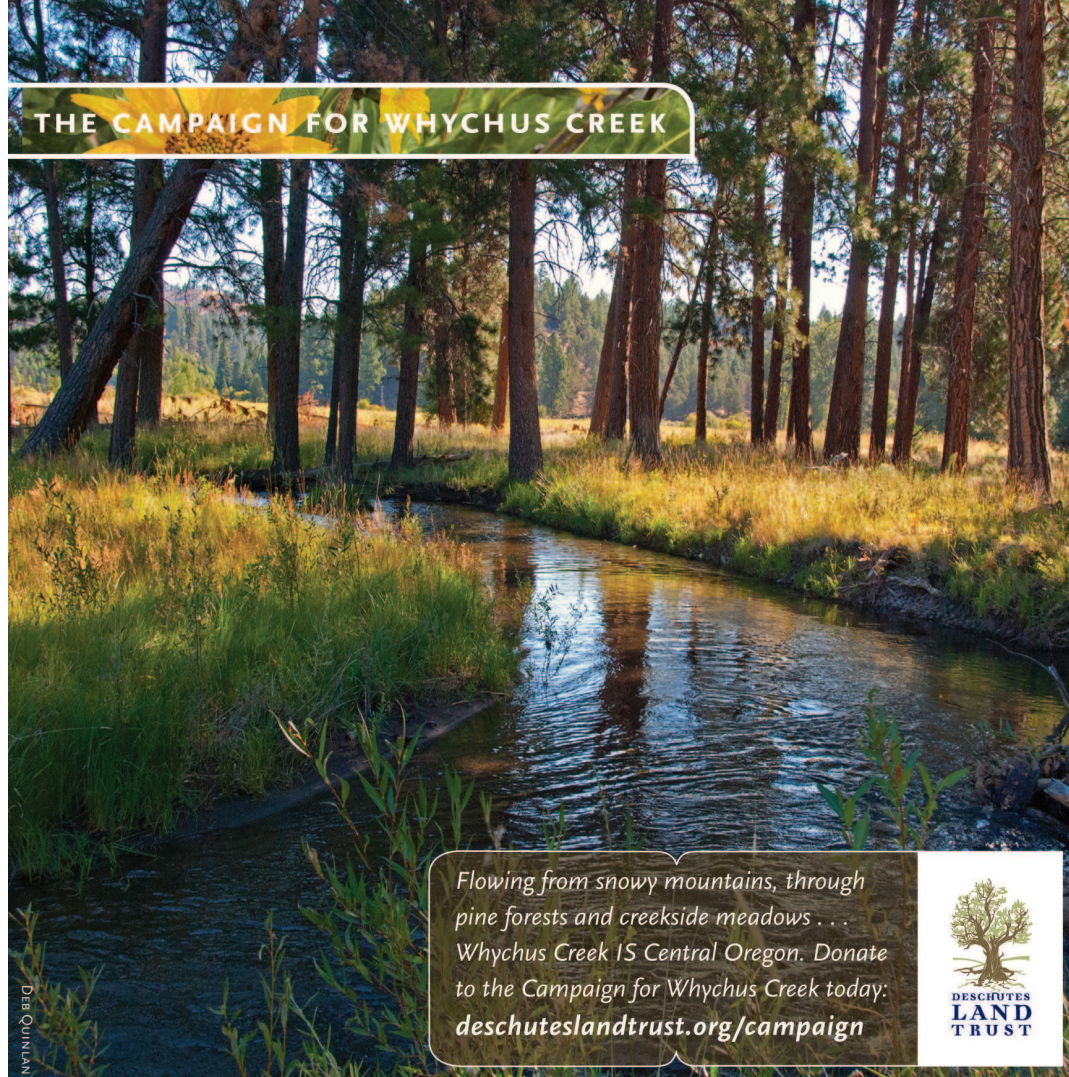


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