

# Hikers ditching famous trail for Oregon Coast Trail

By Katie Frankowicz  
The Daily Astorian

ASTORIA (AP) — At the end of June, a woman picked up three young backpackers walking along the highway near Gearhart. They had been hiking the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) but heavy snowfall in the Sierra Nevada mountains stopped them 700 miles in.

Rather than stop hiking, they decided to hop over to the lesser-known Oregon Coast Trail (OCT). And they aren't alone.

"Everyone is coming here," they told their driver.

This spring, dozens of hikers snowed out of California's mountains or, as the snow melts, faced with dangerous river crossings, have abandoned the PCT and jumped over to the OCT.

But the trail isn't ready for them.

As he stretches next to a sign pointing back toward Arch Cape, Ryley Delgado has just been voted his group's sweatiest hiker. Again. He shrugs. The hikers gather at the edge of a road off U.S.

Highway 101 to eat a late breakfast in the shade before continuing on to Falcon Cove in Oswald West State Park. Bri Hochadel sits cross-legged and looks around at the forest on either side of the road. Peter Carpenter ventures a couple of steps down the trail and then unfolds his sleeping pad to make a more comfortable seat on the ground next to Hochadel. Tanner Annichiarico, the only Oregonian in the group, remains standing, loosening his heavy pack and stretching his arms.

The four hikers started on the PCT this spring. They hiked more than 500 miles before they hit snow. They heard it was even worse farther ahead. They didn't want to split up, but they weren't sure they wanted to push through the mountains. Should they just wait for the snow to melt?

They hadn't expected to finish the PCT anyway. At the leisurely rate they were going, hikers who started two weeks after them had already

caught up and passed them by. They were the only hikers they encountered who had packed games: Yahtzee and Frisbees. They were put off by PCT hikers obsessed with mileage, whose first question was, "How many miles did you make today?"

Then Annichiarico and Carpenter stumbled on the OCT while researching alternative routes online. The group canceled a grocery run and started figuring out how to get to Astoria. They began their hike at South Jetty in Fort Stevens State Park and plan to walk the approximately 400-mile-long trail all the way to where it ends near Brookings at the California border.

The trail has been heaven after weeks of California's deserts, they say. It hugs the Oregon Coast and there are long stretches of flat beach,

cliff sides thick with trees, green woods dense with mosses and ferns. But there are also challenges.

The OCT was officially declared "hikeable" in 1988, a legacy of the state's landmark 1967 Beach Bill that granted public access to all of Oregon's beaches, writes Eugene author Bonnie Henderson in her guidebook to the trail. The trail is a work in progress.

Unlike the world-famous PCT, which winds through remote backcountry, the OCT is what hikers call a "civilized" trail. In Clatsop County, sections of the trail are popular as day hikes at Fort Stevens, Ecola and Oswald West state parks. In a single day's trek, a hiker might start on the beach, cross a highway, dive deep into quiet woods, climb in and out of ravines and end up

in a town packed with tourists trying to escape the heat in Portland.

The trail is not set up for backpackers, or thru-hikers. Legal campsites are few and far between. Different sections of the trail are maintained at different levels. Gaps exist where hikers must trek along highways or down neighborhood roads, or hitch rides with friendly boaters to get across waterways.

There are really only two authoritative books on the trail, one by Henderson and another by Portland resident Connie Soper. Both focus on day hikes, but also offer tips and information specifically for thru-hikers. Soper has advocated for the trail to be finished, the gaps closed.

A bill approved by the state Legislature, House Bill 3149,

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