

Easy hike along the Lower Metolius

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While waiting for the local high country to open up after our big snow year, I did a bit of trail wandering in more accessible areas. Exploring this part of the Lower Metolius River is hardly a challenging adventure; but, if you haven't visited this stretch of the river, it's worth your time to see where our iconic and scenic local waterway morphs into a truly big and powerful river.

Below Camp Sherman, the Metolius is joined by First, Jack, Canyon, Abbot, Candle and Jefferson creeks, as well as Allen Springs, and the springs at Wizard Falls and below Canyon Creek. By the time this west-side trail ends, there is a startling volume of river hurtling toward Lake Billy Chinook and the Columbia.

The trail I'm talking about is hardly more than a mile in length and takes off from the west end of Bridge 99 below the Wizard Falls Fish Hatchery. I'm hardly a stranger to this friendly trail, having traversed it dozens of times over the last half-century; but, in recent years, my visits have been infrequent.

It's actually possible to travel farther downstream on the east side of the river; but, even there, the trail peters out after a couple of miles and requires extensive bushwhacking unless you head uphill to a private access

road away from the river where hiking and biking is permitted.

The west-side trail is very lightly used and, even then, mostly by fishermen.

The trail takes off downstream just across the road from a shady parking area on the west side of the bridge. At times, the hiker may choose between the fishermen's low road and a higher, straighter route along the slopes of the river bank. Any combination of high and low is a pleasant and scenic stroll in the woods.

As the trail nears the Candle Creek Campground, the route crosses Abbot Creek on a very nice flattened log bridge with a sturdy handrail. The mouth of Abbot Creek forms a rather large, and rare, eddy of quiet water inside of an unusual – at least to the Metolius – sand bar.

From there, it's only a couple of hundred yards to Candle Creek Campground and the end of the trail. After walking through the campground, we crossed the creek and immediately encountered what appeared to be another creek. My first thought was that Jefferson Creek was closer than I remembered; but further investigation revealed that we were on an island, where Candle Creek splits near its mouth.

In reality, Jefferson Creek is only another couple of hundred yards farther downstream, but the trail I used to take is thoroughly overgrown; and I wasn't in the mood for

bushwhacking. To the surprise of many, Jefferson Creek forms a boundary of another sort; less than a mile and a half below Bridge 99 is the Warm Springs Indian reservation. We tend to think of Warm Springs as a distant entity up somewhere north of Madras. In reality, the reservation is our close neighbor right here in our own backyard. From Jefferson Creek on, the west and north side of the river is all reservation land.

As mentioned earlier, at this point the relatively placid stream flowing through Camp Sherman has changed; and the growing force and volume of the river is befitting of its upcoming "Wild and Scenic" designation. As it races downstream, it gets even bigger with the addition of Mariel, Walker, Sheep, Code, Camp, Racing, and Rainy creeks; and, where the north-flowing Metolius turns south, it is joined by the substantial Whitewater River.

For those thinking of taking watercraft down this powerful stretch of water, don't do it. There are warnings of



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Below Bridge 99, the Metolius River widens near the mouth of Abbot Creek.

multiple shore-to-shore log blockades. They don't call it wild for nothing; and, oh boy, is it scenic.

Below Bridge 99, the only other persons we encountered were fishermen. Whitefish and bull trout (actually a char, not a trout) are common in this part of the river. The Metolius River is open only to barbless hook fly fishing above Bridge 99. Barbed hooks may be used below Bridge 99, and the entire river is catch-and-release for all trout, including bull trout.

To experience a taste of this less-traveled stretch of the Metolius River, take Highway

20 about 9 miles west of Sisters and turn right (north) toward Camp Sherman and follow the paved road about 13 miles either through or around Camp Sherman to Lower Bridge Campground at Bridge 99. Park on the left, just across Bridge 99, and begin your hike by walking across the road and slightly to your left.

Return by the same trail or drop a second car at the Candle Creek Campground for a very short and easy hike. We wrapped up our outing with a stop at the Camp Sherman Store for an ice cream treat!

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