

Lake Creek Trail provides a mix of outdoor experiences

By Craig F. Eisenbeis
Correspondent

The Lake Creek Trail from Suttle Lake to Camp Sherman has been in existence for seven years, but is still somewhat off the radar for many local hikers. This is a convenient, well-defined — and mostly unburned — forest outing that requires little advance planning. At about 4.5 miles in length, the trail comprises a very easy walk in the woods that is still long enough to make it feel like a worthwhile accomplishment.

The western terminus of the trail can be found near Suttle Lake, and the eastern end of the trail terminates in Camp Sherman just north of the fire station. The trail is designed for use by bicyclists, hikers, and equestrians alike. However, horses are

not permitted on the portion east of the Metolius-Windigo Trail. Some separation is provided to help prevent cyclists from startling horses, but caution is always necessary.

Cyclists, in particular, are prone to begin round trips from the Camp Sherman end of the trail. Of course, that leads to an easier downhill return; but this trail follows the gentle flow of the creek, so the trail is a pretty flat one all the way.

Still, we decided to do a car drop and take the downhill direction, starting at the Suttle Lake trailhead, near the Suttle Lake Lodge. We parked in a tiny public area just across the Lake Creek Bridge which leads into the Suttle Lake Resort. Officially, the trail begins at the Lodge parking lot but can be picked up anywhere along the route.

The trail splits down both sides of the turnout near the bridge and rejoins itself a few yards farther downstream. The fork nearer the bridge hugs the creek and is more scenic. An attractive kiosk at the public parking area provides information and a route map.

One of the surprising features of this portion of the trail is that it does not cross Highway 20. Instead, the path leads under the highway bridge that crosses the creek; so there's no need to dodge high speed traffic. Tall hikers, however, should be alert for spots of limited head clearance. For the first couple of miles, the trail stays pretty close to the creek; and, while the creek is not always visible, it is always within earshot.

Lake Creek splits into multiple channels as it flows toward the Metolius River, and the trail hugs the North Fork at its western end. Much of the route is over former forest roads; so there is plenty of room along this wide and comfortable trail.

More than a mile of the trail is within the boundaries of the Deschutes Land Trust's Metolius Preserve, and the trail was completed with the cooperation and support of



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

The North Fork of Lake Creek flows gently along the Lake Creek Trail between Suttle Lake and Camp Sherman.

the Trust. Another informational kiosk presents Land Trust information and maps near the mid-point of the trail. As the trail leaves the eastern part of the Land Trust's preserve, it wanders farther away from the creek; and the creek sounds fade away as part of the forest experience from that point on.

There are no steep or rough sections on this flat trail, and it does not appear to be too heavily used. On this midweek outing, we encountered a total of five cyclists and one jogger.

The trail was completed, largely by volunteers, as part of an Earth Day observance in 2010. The route is easily followed with assistance

from substantial marker posts. Whenever the landscape opens up or other paths diverge, the posts can usually be spotted and depended upon to guide the way. This is not a wilderness trail, and is accessible by vehicle from a number of points along the way.

Signs in the Land Trust's Preserve frequently call for separation of horse, bike, and foot traffic. Further information can be obtained from Deschutes Land Trust and from the Forest Service at the Sisters Ranger Station.

The eastern portion of the trail passes through a section of forest with many western larch trees, also known as

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Roadside information on the Lake Creek Trail is available at the trailhead.

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