

# Travels with Charlie

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As a lifelong Oregonian I have a deep appreciation for our state, and now that I am retired from my work as a school counselor I see more opportunities than ever to explore. This column's purpose is to invite others, especially those not so familiar with what Oregon has to offer, to get out of town and make adventure on some day or weekend trips.

Yesterday I woke up wishing for some fresh blueberries, so when my wife, Deirdre, asked me how I wanted to spend the day, I had a ready response. "Let's go hike around Clear Lake and then drive on down the McKenzie River Highway to Vida and pick some blueberries."

After a quick breakfast and the filling of water bottles we headed west over the pass and took the road (Highway 126) toward Eugene to our first destination, the Clear Lake day-use area 33 miles from Sisters. July is the month for full-fledged greenery along the highway as the maples, alders, aspens and other deciduous trees are at the height of their leaf production, making the short

drive all the more pleasant.

Not long after turning off toward Eugene, signs appear for Clear Lake Resort, which also includes the day-use area. We pulled in to the still-empty parking lot and headed clockwise around the lake. The entire loop is just over five miles and includes smooth, fir-needle-covered trail, two or three sections of lava and even a short stint of asphalt. Those planning to do the loop are encouraged to do so early in the morning when it is cooler and the lake is at its purest clarity. Running shoes or lightweight hiking shoes are best since the lava section would not be something to navigate in open-toed footwear.

Clear Lake is aptly named, as the water is crystal clear with hues of turquoise and blue. Since no motorized boats are allowed on the water, tranquility reigns.

From the day-use area, we decided to travel clockwise (left) around the lake. Walk along the roadway briefly past the quaint cabins of the resort and pick up the trail within about a quarter mile. It is wide enough for two people to walk abreast, so if you are on something narrower it means you have followed one

of the "fisherman trails" that branch off of the main trail.

For young children or those with less mobility, an out-and-back is recommended. Go south (right) on the Clear Lake Trail about a mile and cross the bridge. There is a bench to the right that is a great place to sit and reflect on the beauty of the outlet of Clear Lake.

Large firs, giant ferns and plenty of other flora line the trail, keeping most of the trek in at least partial shade. The trail does pull away from the lake at times, but beauty abounds. Noise from the highway is noticeable in the first mile or so but dissipates as you round the end of the lake.

Eventually the Clear Lake Trail joins the McKenzie River Trail to traverse the far side of the lake. Terrain gets a bit rougher, including that sort of lava rock that seems to reach out and grab the toe of your shoe unless you are careful. A couple of brief sections of asphalt give some relief in this area, and as you near the Clear Lake Campground the trail returns to a more friendly dirt surface.

The McKenzie River Trail intersects the Clear Lake Trail at the far end of the lake near where the aforementioned



PHOTO BY CHARLIE KANZIG

Clear Lake is less than an hour up the road from Sisters.

bench and bridge is located. The final mile of the trail is clear sailing back to your starting point. We took things fairly leisurely and spent a total of right at two hours on the trail, during which we saw a grand total of four other hikers and one mountain biker. We figured that going midweek (it was Tuesday) was the key.

After a drink of water we piled back in the car and headed for the blueberry patch. Since we wanted to u-pick we chose to go to Redneck Organic Growers (44382 McKenzie Hwy, Walterville, OR 97489) near Vida, which is 45 miles further west on Highway 126. In addition to blueberries this farm features a variety of other fruits and vegetables,

making it a great place to stop anytime during the summer and fall.

Within 45 minutes we had picked over 10 pounds of sweet blueberries to be used for freezing and baking, and it was time for lunch. We had heard very positive reviews of the Vida Café, which was just a couple of miles back toward Sisters from the blueberry farm, and were not disappointed. Since the café serves breakfast all day, my wife had a tasty California omelet "delicious, crispy hash browns" and I, uncharacteristically, opted for a burger, which really hit the spot.

The drive home with the sweet smell of blueberries and the wind from our open sunroof capped off a perfect day trip.

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