

Whychus Overlook Trail a cure for pandemic cabin fever

By **Craig F. Eisenbeis**
Correspondent

The Whychus Creek Scenic Overlook Trail is an ideal destination for pandemic shut-ins yearning for a pleasant escape into an outdoor experience. The overlook and adjacent trail were completed four years ago as part of The Tale of Two Rivers Treasured Landscapes Conservation Campaign involving Whychus Creek and the Metolius River.

The overlook was conceived as part of a series of projects and improvements to enhance the region's watershed restoration, recreation, and community engagement.

Responsible social distancing is easily achieved on this trail, and the overlook is accessible via a very easy loop trail of just one mile. My companions on this occasion objected to my characterization of the trail as "flat." Really, though, it's mostly flat with a gradual upward grade leading from the parking lot to the overlook. The trail base is of smooth, fine, hard packed gravel that is suitable for walkers, strollers, and even wider-wheeled wheelchairs.

The trail is quite suitable for small children, and we saw several on our outing. Most — although not quite all — trail users were thoughtfully wearing masks or donned them when others approached. We saw about a dozen and a half others enjoying the trail on a sunny, warm, weekday morning. There are attractive log benches placed along the route for rest or contemplation. This modest nature experience is an ideal destination for casual outdoor enthusiasts who aren't quite ready to commit to a full-scale wilderness adventure.

In order to minimize contact with other hikers, the trail is well designed for a pandemic, with one-way counterclockwise travel that winds through a young, pine forest and passes several scenic lava rock extrusions from the lava flow that created Peterson Ridge. We were disappointed to observe some dead or dying trees that appear to have been impacted by an alarming infestation of dwarf mistletoe (see related story page 1).

There are two "scenic turnouts" on the way to the overlook, with sweeping mountain views all along the way. These viewpoints tend to look north and feature views of Mt. Jefferson, Three Fingered Jack, Mt. Washington and Black Butte. The massive fire scar

from the 2012 Pole Creek Fire is a prominent feature to the west and north, on the other side of Whychus Creek. That fire actually burned down to a few spots on the western side of the creek.

Another smaller fire scar from a 6,000-acre forest fire in 2010 just touches the southern edge of the trail; and a dirt connector trail splits off in that area, a few yards east of the overlook. That trail follows Whychus Draw down to the creek and the rewarding, but more challenging, Whychus Creek Trail. A little treat just a short distance down that connector trail is a surprise view of Mt. Hood, which appears in the notch between the northern shoulder of Black Butte and Green Ridge!

Although the Forest Service coordinated the overall project, the construction of the overlook was completed in 2016 through a complex process that hinged on volunteer work and private funding. The original purpose of this park-like creation was to make the local outdoors accessible to more people and provide a greater variety of outdoor experiences, and that goal has certainly been achieved. The Forest Service, National Forest Foundation, the Sisters Trails Alliance, and dozens of others were among the organizations that worked together on the project.

The overlook and its loop trail are barrier free and handicapped accessible. As an exception to the counterclockwise trail movement, it is permissible for those with very limited mobility to take the shorter, flatter southern portion of the loop trail in both directions; but the

northern segment of the trail is one way only.

The trail is, of course, best known for its spectacular views of the Three Sisters, Broken Top, and Tam MacArthur Rim. The overlook, itself, is beautifully constructed from natural rock and looks down upon the creek, which can be heard rushing through its canyon on its way to meet up with the Deschutes River some 20 miles downstream. Forest Service personnel point out that there is evidence that the viewpoint is a place that people have been coming to for centuries to experience the sights, sounds, and smells of the natural world.

Dogs are permitted but must be kept on a leash at all times. Owners are reminded to clean up after their animals; be sure to remove the poop bags, as well. Shortly after the trail opened, the site became a bit too popular as a dog walking area; and the area was very negatively impacted by an enormous quantity of dog excrement. We did not notice that as a problem on this outing, so trail-user courtesy has apparently improved.

To reach the roadside



PHOTO BY CRAIG F. EISENBEIS

Expansive mountain views reward trail users along the Whychus Creek Scenic Overlook Trail.

parking lot and trailhead, simply head south on the Three Creek Lake Road (Elm Street in town) for a little over five miles. The

turnout is near the summit of Peterson Ridge, on the right hand (west) side of the road, just a short distance beyond the five-mile marker.



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