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## Spencer Butte summit offers panoramic view

By Christopher Blair  
Emerald Managing Editor

The view from the top of Spencer Butte, the most prominent natural feature of Eugene's southern skyline, is well worth the hour-long hike to the summit.

The 2,062-foot butte, geologically known as a "basalt uplift," has been known as one of the best viewpoints around since the Eugene area was settled in the 1840s.

Spencer Butte was known as "Cham-o-tee," or Rattlesnake Mountain, by the original Native American inhabitants of the Willamette Valley (though few rattlesnakes are seen there nowadays). The butte was later named for 19th-century Secretary of War John Spencer.

The area was made a park by the City of Eugene in 1938. The forests around the butte have never been logged, and the old-growth ecosystem is home to a diverse array of animals. Living among giant 200-year-old Douglas fir trees are black-tailed deer, raccoons, rabbits, squirrels, and numerous species of birds, snakes and tree frogs.

Three-foot-wide sword ferns have adapted well to the shady landscape, as have many kinds of wildflowers, including orchids and lilies. A word of caution: Poison oak is also a thriving member of the forest community, so hikers should view the plant life of the park from the trail.

The hike to the top of Spencer Butte takes anywhere from 30 minutes to an hour. The trails can be steep, especially near the rocks at the top, but hikers of all ages can reach the top with little difficulty.

The view from the summit is impressive, but varies from day to day on account of weather or

pollution conditions. On a clear day, every building in Eugene is visible to the north, and all of Fern Ridge Reservoir can be seen to the west. To the east and south, a hiker can see the foothills of the Cascades and down to end of the valley near Cottage Grove.

Red-tailed hawks glide above the summit of the butte, carefully watched from below by Douglas and western gray squirrels scurrying on the rocks. The view and the wildlife make the summit of the butte a good picnic spot.

Spencer Butte's paths are connected to Eugene's 11-mile Ridgeline Trail system, and as such the top can be reached from a variety of starting points:

- The main parking area of Spencer Butte Park is on Willamette Street, about two miles south of the Eugene city limits. A picnic area and restrooms are available. The trail from here to the top is only about a half-mile long, but can be rather steep in spots.

- The trail head on Fox Hollow Road features a small parking area. From there the top is 1.6 miles away, and the trail is a bit easier to negotiate.

- The trail from 52nd Avenue and Willamette Street, which meets the Fox Hollow trail halfway, and runs a total of 2.8 miles to the top, is long but not as steep. Parking is available.

To preserve the park environment, hikers should stay on the trail. Overnight camping is prohibited, as are mountain bikes, fires of any kind, horses, and glass containers.

For more information about the park and the Ridgeline Trail System, call Eugene Parks, Recreation and Cultural Services at 687-5333.

## Scaling the Butte



On a clear day, hikers to the Spencer Butte summit can see from Fern Ridge Reservoir to the foothills of the Cascades.



The trail to the summit is surrounded by old growth trees and other forest vegetation.



The relatively flat summit is an ideal location for picnics and sightseeing.

Photos by Martin J. Thiel

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