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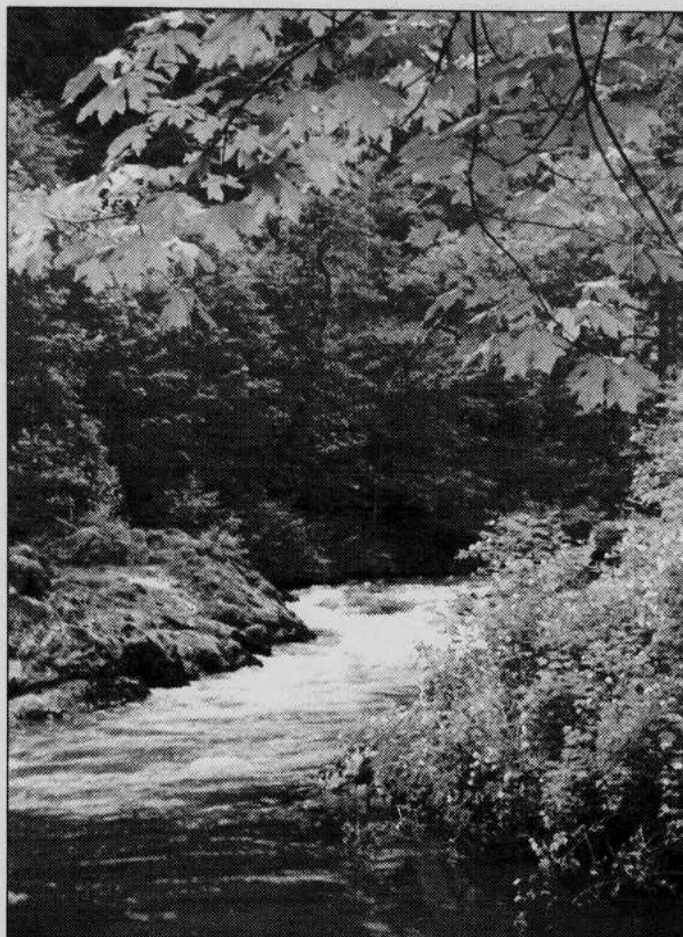
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Inge Scheve for the Emerald

Fall Creek is just a short jaunt away and offers up a cool respite from the hot days.

Fall into summertime with a hike up the creek

By Inge Scheve
for the Emerald

I'm a kid from interior Alaska where trees — beyond birch and alders — are limited to stick-like black spruce, stunted by intermittent permafrost and nine-month winters with temperatures frequently dropping below minus 40 degrees Fahrenheit.

To me, western Oregon woods seem like tropical rain forests. Although technically far from tropical, the mild winters and bountiful rainfalls in the Western Cascades provide for abundant moss, gigantic ferns, larger-than-life firs and lots of caky mud.

Fall Creek, only 40 minutes from Eugene, is one of my favorite getaways. On a beautiful day, sunshine barely trickles down onto the trail through the lush, moss-covered trees, making the understory foliage seem fluorescent green. On rainy days — and there are plenty of these — the trail's thick canopy offers trail runners, mountain bikers and hikers some protection from the rain.

Exactly what is it that protects hikers from the rain?

Trail users will encounter yew trees that are several hundred years old, with their skinny, needle-rich branches covered in hanging moss, almost to the point where the trees are invisible. Douglas firs, cedars and western hemlocks are among other conifers that help shelter the trail. Vine maple and hazelnut spread their leaves over the trail and protect trail users from whatever elements the conifers let through.

Which is exactly why I love to run along Fall Creek when soggy Eugene winter days have me drenched on my other, more open running alternatives. In the summertime, that rain protection doubles as a shelter from Eu-

How to get there

To find Fall Creek, take Highway 126 (business route) through Glenwood and most of Springfield. Just before the West McKenzie strip mall, take a right at the road sign to Jasper-Lowell Road. Follow this road about 11 miles to Place Road, then take a left and follow this road past a covered bridge on the left; Place Road becomes North Shore Road. Follow this road another 13 miles through a few small dwellings and past the Fall River Dam to a sign for Willamette National Forest. Keep going another 1/4 mile and park right before a bridge crossing the river. If you see the Dolly Varden campground, you've gone too far. Pull out your Willamette National Forest trail pass (available at G.I. Joe's, REI or any Forest Service office in town), place it somewhere visible in your vehicle and start from the trailhead next to the river.

gene's occasional sweltering heat.

The trail meanders along the creek's southwest bank for miles. Any hike is an out and back, ranging from a few miles of easy terrain to more challenging trail-handling farther from the parking area. Other more challenging options exist in trails branching off from the main Fall Creek trail. One of those trails takes hikers to Clark Butte, elevation 2,643 feet, just short of two miles into the hike. Another one leads to Jones Creek Trail about three miles from the parking area. If hikers arrange for a shuttle, it is possible to hike nine miles to Forest Road 1828.

The easiest hike, to Timber Creek where the trail crosses over Fall Creek, has a 200-foot elevation gain. Hikers who go all the way to Forest Road 1828 experience a 700-foot elevation gain and a terrain change to more open meadows and sunnier forests. Those who choose to scale Clark Butte face a 1,763-foot elevation

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