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Outdoor spring adventures

■ Eugene and its surrounding areas offer unique trails and mountains for nature-lovers

By Inge Scheve
for the Emerald

So, all of your friends are off to Mexico and you're cruising Eugene for something to do during spring break?

Whether the bike is calling your name, or the hiking boots keep appearing everywhere you turn, there are places to go and things to do.

Eugene offers several parks close to the University that are worth a run, hike or bike ride. Alton Baker Park, next to Autzen Stadium, is home to over 10 miles of bark-dust running trails and a network of paved, multi-use paths popular with bikers, walkers and rollerbladers.

Those trails connect to bike paths along the Willamette River by Skinner's Butte, west of Alton Baker. Finally, Spencer's Butte and Ridgeline Trail in South Eugene challenge hikers and runners with steep climbs to the summit.

But on a clear day, the view from the butte is worth the effort as there are 360-degree views of the entire valley and surrounding mountains.

Another Eugene-area trail leads to the top of Mount Pisgah. By the parking area at the base of the mountain, trail users can enjoy a self-guided arboretum featuring native species of the Willamette Valley. For more information about the arboretum, call (541) 747-3817.

The Mount Pisgah trail is a steep three-mile hike round-trip. In nice weather, the top of the mountain yields another gorgeous 360-degree view of the valley, with a bronze statue showing a topographic map of the area. A word of caution, how-

ever, to all trail users: Poison oak is thick around this trail.

If you'd like to venture out of Eugene, take a challenging mountain bike ride along Bryce Creek, just south of Cottage Grove.

The ride can begin at either the upper trail head for a downhill glide or at the lower trail head for a mellow climb of 600 feet over five-and-a-half miles. Either way, the scenery offers hikers glimpses of the creek, majestic old-growth forests with lush under-growth and barren rocks with steep drop-offs into the water.

The Bryce Creek trail provides an easy hike, and is also a nice choice for those who like trail running.

Fall Creek is another great trail adventure. It has a 200-foot elevation gain over 2.9 miles for a total of 5.8 miles round-trip. The trail head is about 28 miles from Eugene, off Highway 58. The trail stretches along Fall Creek through lush forests of ancient yews, Douglas firs and various deciduous tree species, often providing hikers a muddy experience. This trail can also be biked on, provided the bike has knobby mud-tires.

Finally, for those who would like an overnight trip, Central Oregon offers something for every taste: from desert mountain biking, hiking and rock climbing at Smith Rock to cross-country skiing and snow shoeing at state snow parks. Day passes for most parks are \$3 and available at several sporting goods stores and at any DMV.

The Central Oregon climate ranges from high desert in the east to more snow-prone toward the Cascades in the west. Santiam Pass' Hoodoo ski area — off Highway 126 — offers alpine and Nordic skiing for less money than Mount Bache-

lor, as does Willamette Pass on Highway 58.

Accommodations in the Bend area range from under \$20 per night at the Bend Alpine Youth Hostel to about \$45-65 at local motels and lodges. Those not afraid of the elements can brave camping at a number of state parks and Forest Service campgrounds. Central Oregon Welcome Center, at (541) 382-3221, has more information on lodging, trails and area entertainment.

Directions:

Bryce Creek — Take I-5 south and turn off at the Cottage Grove exit (#174) and follow the signs to Dorena Lake. Continue on the main paved road for 21.7 miles through Culp Creek and Disston. After a sign for Umpqua National Forest where the road first crosses Bryce Creek, look for a trail sign for the lower trail head, or continue up the road for the upper trail head sign.

Fall Creek — Drive south on I-5 and take the Oakridge exit (#188A). Follow Highway 58 east for 14 miles, then turn left across Dexter reservoir to Lowell. When the road passes through Lowell, take your first left, then turn right. At a covered bridge about 1.5 miles after Hwy. 58, hang a right at North Shore Road. Stay on that for 11 miles. Park at a hiker sign on the right just before the Dolly Varden campground.

Mount Pisgah — Take I-5 south and at the 30th Ave. exit (#189), head for the Texaco gas station on the east side of the highway. Turn right onto Franklin Blvd. just past Texaco, for 0.4 miles, then turn left on Seavey Loop Road for 1.5 miles. Once there, continue straight across the Coast Fork Willamette River bridge. Finally, turn right to the arboretum parking lot, 0.4 miles away.

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