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Yellowbottom Recreation Site in the Quartzville Corridor stretches between Sweet Home and Marion Forks in the western foothills of the Cascades.

SCENIC SPOTS TO SWIM

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There's nothing that quite compares with the perfect swimming hole.

Lakes and reservoirs are fine, but they don't capture the thrill, beauty and intimacy of that clear pool of water on a river or creek.

To swim within a narrow canyon, below a waterfall or within the shade of overhanging trees on 90-degree days offers one of Oregon's best experiences.

Problem is, many swimming holes draw a crowd. In the Little North Santiam canyon, crowds at Three Pools, Salmon Falls, North Fork Park and the Opal Creek Wilderness have become so thick that it's difficult to enjoy visiting (or even finding a parking spot).

"The crowds put a tremendous amount of pressure on this fragile, natural environment," said Josh Weathers, developed recreation manager for Willamette National Forest. "There are thousands of other places in Oregon that offer many of the same benefits as Opal Creek; you just have to look."

But there are less-crowded swimming holes. Many are in areas that also offer great camping.

Included below are 13 places that you can find swimming holes without elbow-to-elbow crowds. All it takes is a little bit of searching.

Niagara County Park

The North Santiam River doesn't feature a ton of great swimming holes, but one exception is this county park on the side of Highway 22, just below Big Cliff Dam.

While the park's western end is too dangerous for swimming — and it's not allowed, anyway — the east end has one very nice pool and a good jumping rock. Follow the park's road, or hike the short trail, to the upstream end of the park to find the spot.

Directions: Take Highway 22 east and turn right at a sign for Niagara County Park.

Blowout Creek

A unique swimming spot on Detroit Lake and more classic swimming holes highlight this little-explored creek.

Blowout Creek flows into the reservoir on the reservoir's less-populated south side. From a parking area, a trail leads a quarter mile to the Blowout



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A swimming hole is found on the Middle Santiam River near Shed Creek on the border of the Middle Santiam Wilderness.

Creek arm and a funky suspension bridge. Below the bridge, and between narrow cliffs, is deep water and great jumping rocks that create a unique place for swimming. The trail down to the rocks is quite sketchy, so this spot is not recommended for children.

(Jumping off the suspension bridge also is not recommended.)

For more classic swimming holes, Weathers said following Forest Service Road 10 along the creek will lead you past a few.

Directions: From Detroit, follow Blowout Road/Road 10 for 10 miles (veer right at a junction with Forest Service Road 060). The trailhead is at a parking area on the right. Continue on Road 10 upstream for the creek-side swimming holes.

Breitenbush River

One of Oregon's most beautiful rivers, the Breitenbush, features the most scenic swimming holes on this list.

The trick is finding them. This often requires driving up Breitenbush Road 46 from Detroit and stopping at promising-looking pullouts in the road. There are plenty of people along the Breitenbush on hot summer days but also plenty of different swimming holes if you look hard enough. Camping can be had at Humbug, Cleator Bend and Breitenbush campsites.

Here are two of my favorite spots to get you started. In general, the farther you get from Detroit, the better the chances of solitude.

Beach Hole: Just 3 miles up Road 46 at a large pullout on the left. Although crowded on weekends, it's a beautiful spot with a sandy beach, shallow water and deeper pools. A great family swim-



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"Canyon Pool" is a swimming hole between canyon walls on Breitenbush River off Highway 46 about six miles northeast of Detroit.

ming spot.

Canyon Pool: A deep and beautiful pool between mossy canyon walls. You must follow a steep trail down to the river, and the pool has some current, so this one isn't for kiddos. It's 6 miles up Road 46 at a pullout on the right.

Weathers said there are nice swimming holes upstream, on the North Fork Breitenbush around milepost 14 off Road 46.

Whitewater And Marion Creeks

Weathers said that while they probably don't have very deep holes, it's worth exploring Whitewater and Marion creeks.

Whitewater Creek, east of Detroit, has swimming holes just a few miles up Forest Service Road 2243, he said. Marion Creek has swimming holes about 3 to 4 miles up Forest Service Road 2255, Weathers said.

Shed Creek Hole

This swimming hole sits on the edge of the Middle Santiam Wilderness, one of the best old-growth hikes in the Central Cascades. It's a long and complicated drive to reach the trailhead, and a 0.7-mile hike to Shed Camp Shelter, a wonderful camping spot. The swimming hole is just below, where a waterfall trickles into a deep pool surrounded by a steep, circular canyon.

Directions: From Salem, follow I-5 south to exits for Lebanon and follow Highway 20 to Sweet Home. From Sweet Home, follow Highway 20 east for 25 miles, just past milepost 52, and turn left onto gravel Soda Fork Road/Forest Service Road 2041.

Carefully follow Forest Service Road 2041 for 7.8 miles to a major junction at Cool Camp. Continue straight through the junction to stay on Forest Service Road 2041 for another 4.4 miles to a second major junction.

Go straight on to Forest Service Road 646, marked by a small sign that says "Chimney Peak Trail 1/2," and follow it 0.6 miles to its end at the parking lot and trailhead.

Quartzville Creek

There are so many beautiful swimming holes on this creek, which is protected by the Wild and Scenic Rivers Act, that it's difficult to know where to start.

A bit of a drive from Salem, a trip to Quartzville, a tributary of the South Santiam River northeast of Sweet Home, is best experienced by camping. There are numerous dispersed campsites along Quartzville Recreation Corridor and Back Country Byway along with regular sites at Yellowbottom and Old Miner's Meadow Campground.

Directions: The Quartzville Corridor begins near Marion Forks and ends near Green Peter Reservoir near Sweet Home.

River Bend County Park

River Bend County Park offers 85 campsites and family-friendly beach access to swimming.

The new addition to the Linn County Parks system is 90 acres and features both trails and picnic areas.

Directions: From Sweet Home, follow Highway 20 for 9 miles, and turn left at signs.

Cascadia State Park

This beautiful campground sits amid the mossy forest that highlights the South Santiam River.

Two dozen campsites can be had here, along with a collection of trails.

The swimming hole is great for families. There is a sandy beach and shallow water, along with deeper holes.

A more solitude-filled cool down involves following a 0.75-mile trail to Soda Creek Falls.

Directions: From Sweet Home, follow Highway 20 for 14 miles and turn left at signs. Follow a short trail to the swimming hole beach.

Trout Creek / Yukwah / House Rock Campgrounds

These three small campgrounds are close to each other along Highway 20 and feature similar experiences.

Trout Creek, Yukwah and House Rock have 23, 19 and 17 campsites, respectively, along with day-use parking.

All three feature swimming holes with rocky beaches and deeper pools shaded by the lush, dense canyon forest characteristic of the South Santiam.

Directions: From Sweet Home, follow Highway 20 east for 21 miles to Trout Creek, 22 miles to Yukwah and 27 miles to Forest Service Road 2044 for House Rock. All three are well-signed.