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Robyn Orr looks at the water at Riverside Campground near Detroit.

17 'mellow' places to camp around Detroit Lake area

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During the peak of summer tourism season, the scene around Detroit Lake can be a little overwhelming.

Crowds of visitors arrive at this famed reservoir from across the state, and the result is a lot of people all in one place. That's reflected at Detroit Lake State Park, the largest campground in the area, which becomes a small town on busy weekends.

For a more mellow experience, consider one of these smaller campgrounds in the area surrounding Detroit Lake. It doesn't mean they'll bring solitude — many fill quickly on summer weekends — but they do offer a quieter, more secluded experience.

South Detroit Lake

The quiet side of Detroit offers three campgrounds on the southeast side of the reservoir: Hoover, Cove Creek and South Shore.

Cove Creek and South Shore are both nice, but Hoover is a local favorite because of a newly refurbished fishing dock ideal for young anglers. All three campgrounds also are close to Stahlman Point Trail.

South Shore, another favorite, has 30 sites with water and restrooms. It has nice access for fishing and boating, and with the exception of the busiest weekends, it's the quietest of the trio. There is a fun nearby trail and swimming area at the Blowout Creek arm of the reservoir.

Directions: In Detroit, drive Highway 22 east to the far east side of the reservoir, and turn right onto Blowout Road/Road 10 and follow them to all three campgrounds.

Upper North Santiam River

These campsites are a little close to Highway 22 and get a bit of noise, but all feature nice forested sites along the upper North Santiam River.

Located just east of Detroit, the campsites include Whispering Falls, Riverside and Marion Forks. My favorites are Whispering Falls and Riverside; they offer a wonderful setting along the river. But Marion Forks has been completely renovated the past two years.

The site that offers the best odds for scoring a nice spot is Riverside, home to 32 sites. A bathroom and water are the only amenities. You can reserve many of the sites in advance and should plan on doing so for summer weekends.

Directions: Follow Highway 22 southeast of Detroit, and you'll come across all three in 8 to 20 miles.

Elk Lake

There's a lot to love about this small campsite nestled on the side of a scenic mountain lake north of Detroit.

The only downside is a long and very rough drive. The campground is small at 17 sites, while the number of people who want to stay there is often higher on summer weekends. That makes visiting mid-



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Cameron Henry, 4, of Mill City, checks to make sure that the worm is still on his hook while taking advantage of free fishing day at Hoover Campground on Detroit Lake in 2008.



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A campsite at Southshore Campground at Detroit Lake.

week ideal, or getting a campground early for weekends.

The sites have a basic setup including a fire pit, picnic table and water. The highlight is what's nearby: fishing, boating and swimming in Elk Lake, nestled below Battle Axe Mountain. But you can hike a wonderful loop to the top of Battle Axe Mountain on a trail that starts nearby.

Directions: In Detroit, turn left on Breitenbush Road 46 and drive 4.3 miles. Turn left onto Forest Service Road 4696 and follow it for 0.7 miles. Turn left on Forest Service Road 4697 and drive 4.7 miles. Bare left at the Y intersection and follow to Elk Lake. The campground is at the road's end. Coordinates: 44.82206, -122.127414.

Breitenbush campsites

One of Oregon's most beautiful rivers takes center stage just north of Detroit with three nice campsites.

Old-growth forest, wildflowers and swimming holes are the highlight at Humbug, Cleator Bend and Breitenbush campgrounds.

My favorite is the not-so-well named Humbug. Many of the sites have river views in an old-growth setting, along with picnic tables, grills and easy access to the vault toilets. Breitenbush Hot Springs is a short drive away. The downside is crowds on summer weekends. Campsites can be reserved at Recreation.gov.

Directions: From Highway 22 at Detroit, turn onto Breitenbush Road (FSR 46) and continue for 4.6 to 10 miles to all three campgrounds.

Olallie Lake area

It's a long and rough drive to reach them, but some of the best campgrounds near Detroit are in the Olallie Lake area. Home to numerous mountain lakes that invite swimming — along with blooms of huckleberries in early summer — the Olallie is a wonderful spot to fish, hike or just relax.

All totaled, there are seven small and mellow campgrounds on the south and north end of the lake. They provide easy hiking access into the Olallie Lake backcountry, where you'll find even more mountain lakes.

The main attraction is Olallie Lake, where Mount Jefferson looms overhead. The campgrounds along the main lake are Olallie Lake, Camp Ten and Peninsula. Just down the road, campgrounds also can be found at Monon, Horseshoe and Breitenbush lakes.

My favorite site is Lower Lake Campground, which provides instant trail access and is a short distance from the paradise of Lower Lake and Gifford Lake. All the campgrounds are small, remote and simple.

Directions: Follow Highway 22 east to Detroit, and turn left on Breitenbush Road 46 for 28 miles. Turn right at signs for Olallie Lake and follow Forest Road 4220 to campground. Coordinates: 44.8231, -121.7956.