

Life *in the* Valley

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Lured by the name Follow the Hobbit Trail to beach near Florence



A view overlooking the Hobbit Beach at Carl G. Washburne Memorial State Park. PHOTOS BY ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

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It's amazing how much the name of a place impacts our desire to visit.

Build a trail through a grove of large Oregon trees and name it "Forest Trail," and you might get some interest. But change the name to "Pathway of the Giants," and there's a good chance crowds will double.

That's not universally true, of course. But places with dramatic or alluring names — Devil's Staircase, God's Thumb, Grove of Titans — capture the imagination in ways blander names just don't.

Such is the case with a fun little pathway on the Oregon Coast that goes by the name "Hobbit Trail."

The half-mile trail drops through the forest to the beach at Carl G. Washburne Memorial State Park, just north of Florence.

It's a nice hike, particularly for children, with spots where it feels as though you're hiking through a green tunnel. There are octopus-shaped trees and a cool transition from the dark forest to ocean beach.

And yet, if we're really being honest, the pathway is pretty similar to numerous coast trails.

It's that name, "Hobbit Trail," that really lured me for a late December hike. With my 1-year-old hobbit-sized daughter in tow, we were hoping to see something that resembled Middle Earth and the "Lord of the Rings" trilogy.

I'm not alone. The Internet is filled with articles about the Hobbit Trail, including ones with breathless headlines such as "Hike The Magical Hobbit Trail To a Secluded Oregon Beach."

That fanfare has led to large summer crowds, despite the trail beginning at a small and nondescript trailhead along U.S. Highway 101.

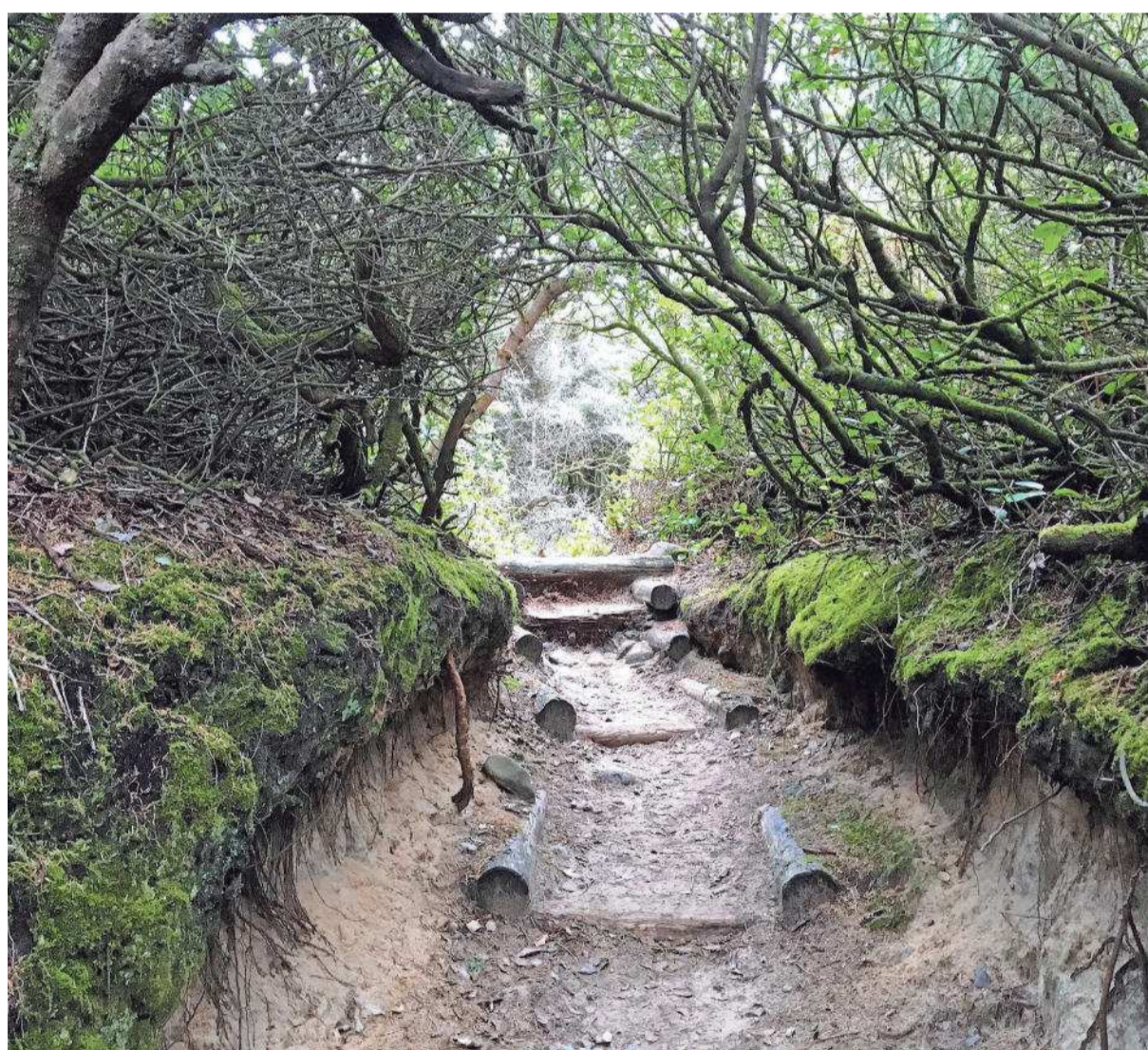
"It's a really busy trail, and I'm not entirely sure why," Washburne park ranger Jason Hennessey said. "During the summer, there are cars lining the highway, even though you can drive a half-mile to a much easier access point and get to the same beach."

The name originated sometime in the 1970s, park officials said.

Previously, the area was home to a much steeper pathway to the beach called the "Indian Trail."

To create a better experience, officials built a new trail that switchbacks downhill more gradually. It was named the Hobbit Trail in honor of the popular books by J. R. R. Tolkien.

Even if the trail doesn't really resemble The Shire, there's still



The Hobbit Trail at Carl G. Washburne Memorial State Park looks like it came right out of a fantasy movie.



Visitors can expect to find many twisted and unique-looking trees as they trek along the Hobbit Trail.



Rollie Urness, 1, rambles around on the Hobbit Beach.

plenty of reason to visit, especially in the winter when crowds are smaller.

One great thing about the trail are the options.

The standard Hobbit Trail is a mile round-trip and great for kids. But you can extend the day by

adding a hike to Heceta Head Lighthouse for a spectacular tour of 5.2 miles out-and-back.

You might not run across Frodo, Bilbo or Samwise the Brave, but you'll enjoy a nice family-friendly trek on the coast.

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doors writer, photographer and videographer in Oregon for 10 years. He is the author of the book "Hiking Southern Oregon" and can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @Zach-SORoutdoors.