

# Life in the Valley



## Should you visit Bagby Hot Springs in winter?

The bridge leading to Bagby Hot Springs can become snow covered in winter. PHOTOS BY HALVOR TWETO / OUTDOOR PROJECT

### Weather can cause problems getting to these hot springs

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In the depths of Oregon's chilly and rain-soaked winter, few things sound better than dipping into hot springs deep in the wilderness.

The desire for that experience brings a lot of people to Bagby and Umpqua hot springs, two of the most popular soaking spots in Oregon.

The problem is that both can be impacted by snowstorms during winter, causing multiple problems for those trying to visit and those managing the site.

Bagby Hot Springs is a collection of wooden bathhouses and soaking pools in a remote area of Mount Hood National Forest between Estacada and Detroit.

Hot springs water that reaches 138 degrees rolls into both private cedar tubs and public whiskey-keg-style soaking tubs, all within an idyllic old-growth forest setting.

The problem is that roads to Bagby are not maintained through winter, meaning that once the snow falls, safe access is questionable at best.

A number of people were stranded on snow-covered roads last winter en route to Bagby and required assistance from the Clackamas County Sheriff's Office to get dislodged or towed.

"Last year, many people required assistance when they went farther than they should have," Mount Hood National Forest spokeswoman Laura Pramuk said. "Visitors should be aware that even a few inches of snow can obscure icy roads and soft shoulders where vehicles can become stuck."

"The forest strongly discourages visitors from attempting to drive or hike in once the roads are snow covered," she said.

The tricky thing is that, at an elevation of between 2,200 to 2,400 feet, it's not always clear when snow has made the roads to Bagby inaccessible. This year, for example, there was little snow that on those roads until the most recent storm. In other years, the snow can pile up as early as late November.



Bagby Hot Springs makes an alluring but troublesome place to visit in during the colder months.

The best way to get good information is a call to the Clackamas Ranger Station, Pramuk said, at 503-630-6861.

Even if there is snow on the roads, people often park at snow-line and attempt to hike, snowshoe or ski to the hot springs. That can be a trip as far as 7 miles one-way — 14 miles round trip — and there's no cell phone service.

"People tend to underestimate the difficulty of the journey to the hot springs," Pramuk said. "We recommend that visitors stop at or call to ascertain if a trip to Bagby Hot Springs is safe to undertake."

Although the hot springs remain open year-round, once the roads are impassible, the concessionaire at Bagby stops assisting visitors, monitoring for hazards, maintaining the site or monitoring the area. "Often times people abuse the

site due to its remoteness and lack of constant oversight," Pramuk said. "There are instances of misbehavior during the winter, and we depend upon visitors to police themselves so that everyone enjoys themselves."

If people do park on the road and attempt to go in on foot, they must not block the road. Finding a good place to pull off the road far enough can be challenging with snow on the sides of the road.

Bagby isn't the only place where access can be an issue.

Umpqua Hot Springs, east of Roseburg, is another popular spot that is sometimes blocked by snow.

When enough snow piles up at 2,500 feet, officials close a gate just past the junction of Forest Roads 34 and 340L. That means people who want to visit must hike, ski or

snowshoe 1.5 miles of road to the trailhead and then another steep quarter-mile of snowy trail to access the pools.

This year, officials haven't closed the gate to Umpqua because not enough snow has fallen.

To find out if the gate has been closed or re-opened as well as local weather and driving conditions, call or visit the Toketee Ranger Station at 541-498-2531 or 541-496-4020. It is open weekdays from 8 a.m. to 4:30 p.m.

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