

Life in the Valley



Sweet, sweet solitude

Jackson F. Kimball State Recreation Site, Oregon's least-visited state park, is located north of Klamath Falls at the headwaters of the Wood River. PHOTO BY OPRD

Oregon's 10 least-visited state parks sport scenery, not crowds

Zach Urness Salem Statesman Journal
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There were around 50 million visits to Oregon's state parks in 2017.

That's a huge number, and some of the parks feel more like small cities than a place to experience nature.

On the flip side, Oregon's least visited state parks are a different story. Located throughout the state, these little-known gems actually feature some spectacular scenery, in addition to the lack of crowds.

Here's a list of Oregon's 10 least-visited state parks.

Jackson F. Kimball State Recreation Site (2,946 visits)

Oregon's least-visited state park is north of Klamath Falls at the headwaters of the Wood River.

The small campground and day-use area is a charmer, with good fishing that can be accessed from the park by canoe.

"This stream flows from the pine forest into open meadow land laced with picturesque quaking aspen surrounded by the southern Cascade Mountains," says the Oregon Parks and Recreation Department description.

Catherine Creek State Park (8,546)

Located in Eastern Oregon southeast of La Grande, this day-use spot and campground sits along Catherine Creek.

"Tranquil, crystal-clear waters and towering ponderosa pines frame the landscape," says the OPRD description. "Cradled in a canyon created by the creek, the park provides visitors a cool, quiet and peaceful setting for outdoor activities."

"Camp in the campground next to Catherine Creek and enjoy the thrill of landing a rainbow trout or simply cool your heels in its icy waters."

OC&E Woods Line State Trail (13,099)

A 109-mile trail created from a former railroad line takes bike riders, joggers or any other non-motorized form of recreation from Klamath Falls through Bly and to the Sycan Marsh.

The pathway has four different sections highlighted by sections along the Sprague River.

Booth State Scenic Corridor (13,460)

A small pullout on the side of U.S. Highway 140, west of Lake-

view in southeast Oregon, this scenic spot features a nice spot for a picnic.

The site features old-growth ponderosa pine, picnic tables, drinking water and restrooms. The area, known as Drests Gap, is especially colorful in the fall thanks to stands of quaking aspen.

Geisel Monument State Heritage Site (14,774)

This small monument on the Oregon Coast, near Cape Perpetua, showcases the gravesite of the Geisel family, who died during the Rogue Indian War.

Today it's a quiet forested area along U.S. Highway 101.

Golden and Silver Falls State Park (18,226)

Two of the most spectacular waterfalls in Oregon can be found at this small, off-the-beaten-path state park east of Coos Bay.

Three short hikes take you to the two waterfalls (often confused with Silver Falls State Park, ironically one of the state's most popular state parks).

Golden Falls roars into a box canyon with so much ferocity it kicks up mist that plumes upward like smoke from a wildfire. Silver Falls, in contrast, spools off a rounded dome like gray hair falling off a balding head.

Ukiah-Dale Forest State Scenic Corridor (20,422)

This scenic stretch along the North Fork John Day River and Camas Creek offers camping and fishing south of Pendleton and north of John Day.

"Winding through a stately ponderosa pine, Douglas-fir and western larch forest, the corridor provides a pleasant scenic drive and access to a popular fishing spot. Near Ukiah, amidst old-growth pines and larch, the Ukiah-Dale Campground provides a perfect location to stay and relax next to the soothing waters of Camas Creek," says an OPRD description.

Goose Lake State Recreation Area (21,224)

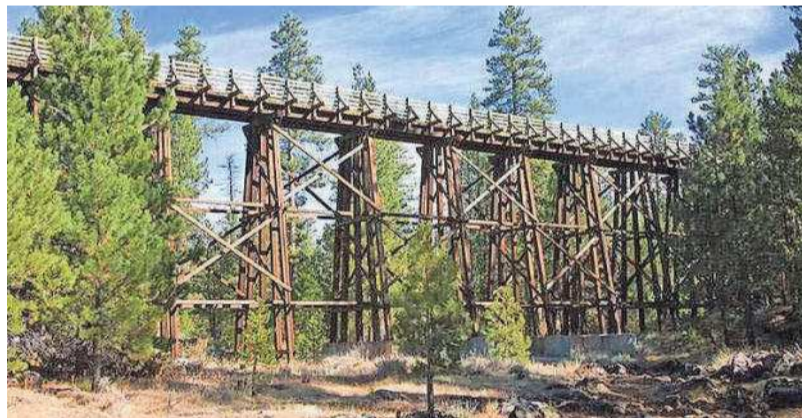
A campground on a large lake, on the border of Oregon and California, Goose Lake is a green and shady destination for wildlife and wildlife watchers.

The area is home to numerous species of birds and other wildlife including mule deer.

The park has hot showers, a grassy area suitable for tents, paved sites, shade trees, fireplaces, electrical hookups, telephone and a dump station.



Golden Falls throws mist at Golden and Silver Falls State Natural Area east of Coos Bay. ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL



OC&E Woods Line State Trail is a 109-mile trail that was created from a former railroad line. PHOTO COURTESY OF OPRD



Red Bridge State Wayside features camping, swimming and fishing below ponderosa and cottonwood trees. PHOTO COURTESY OF OPRD

Red Bridge State Wayside (21,428)

Nestled on the banks of the Grande Ronde River west of La Grande, Red Bridge State Wayside features camping, swimming and fishing below ponderosa and cottonwood trees.

The park is along Highway 244 and becomes a quiet place in the evenings. According to an OPRD description: "Enjoy a day of fishing or cool off in the gentle waters of the river."

Bates State Park (21,724)

Another hidden gem of a campground in Eastern Oregon, Bates State Park features hiking, camping and fishing in the Blue Mountains.

Here's the description from OPRD:

"Bates State Park was once the site of a thriving lumber mill and an

adjacent company town set in a lush valley in the Blue Mountains. The mill closed in the mid-1970s. The mill buildings and town were dismantled; the land sat empty for more than 35 years.

"The memory of Bates lives on in many of its community members, and the site is now a state park, thanks in large part to their efforts. When you visit or stay at the park, look for the interpretive panels that describe Bates life in the early- to mid- 20th century and the steps taking place now to restore the land and waterways.

"You can explore Bates on the more than 3 miles of hiking trails. Viewpoints along the trails overlook the park, old mill pond and valley. The 131-acre park lies along the Middle Fork John Day River, Bridge Creek and Clear Creek. Check the Oregon Department Fish & Wildlife website for fishing regulations."