

Life in the Valley



A view off of McCulloch Peak, the tallest point in the ridgeline west of Corvallis. PHOTOS BY WILLIAM L. SULLIVAN/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

McCulloch Peak, Bald Hill may be close but vary in levels of difficulty

William L. Sullivan
Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

McCulloch Peak is the tallest point in the ridgeline immediately west of Corvallis, and Bald Hill is probably the lowest. Both summits can be reached on loop trails. Because the two trailheads are so close together, hikers here can decide at the last minute whether they'd prefer a short stroll amid oaks or a long climb through Douglas fir woods.

Surprisingly, the shorter hill actually has the better view.

The easy, 3.2-mile Bald Hill loop begins on a paved bike path. The difficult 9.5-mile loop up McCulloch Peak is mostly on the gravel logging roads of OSU's McDonald Forest. Both routes are popular for dog walkers and bicyclists, as well as for hikers.

From Highway 99W at the south edge of Corvallis' downtown, take Highway 20 west toward the coast for 2.2 miles, turn right on 53rd Avenue for 1.4 miles, and turn left on Oak Creek Drive for 0.8 miles to a parking lot on the left for Bald Hill Park. For the easy loop, stop here.

Walk across a bridge over Oak Creek and continue straight on a wide, paved path. Oak wetlands near the creek soon give way to fields with a view ahead to Bald Hill.

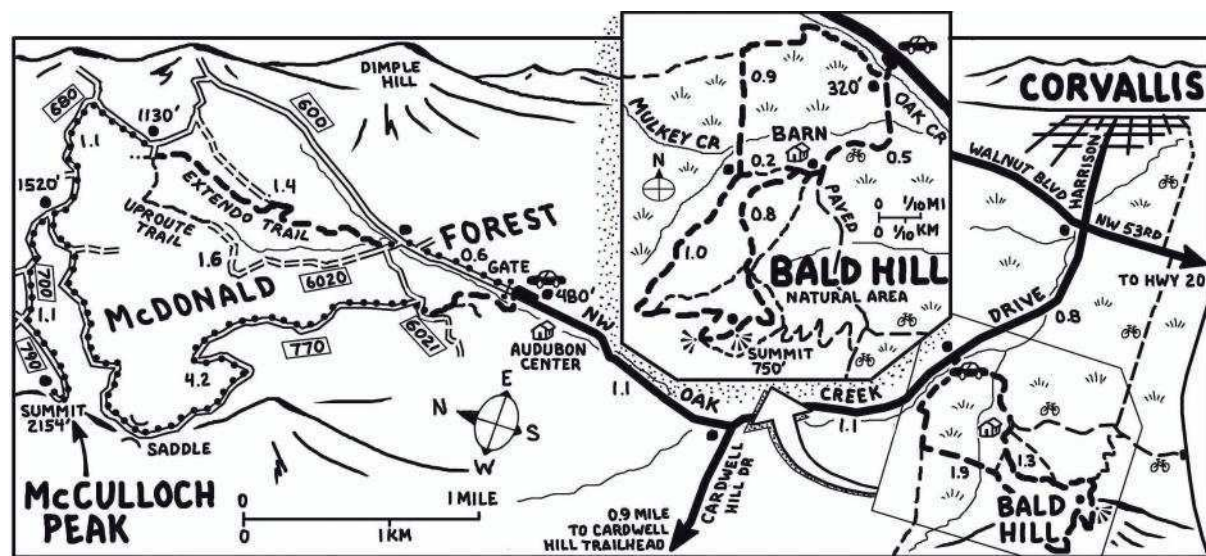
Preserving 41 acres at Bald Hill and donating the land to the City of Corvallis were early accomplishments of the Greenbelt Land Trust, a Corvallis-based non-profit founded in 1989. In 2013 the group purchased the adjacent 587-acre Bald Hill Farm, a working farm where children can learn about habitat restoration, endangered species protection, public recreation, and outdoor education.

With the Greenbelt Land Trust's help, the trail system here now has 18 miles of connected public paths, so it's possible to hike all the way from Bald Hill along Mulkey Creek and past Fitton Green to the community of Wren.

For the easy Bald Hill loop, however, follow the paved path to Bald Hill and fork uphill to the right on a gravel road. If you're on a bike or a horse you'll need to veer left after 200 feet onto a gravel trail. Otherwise follow the road up to a big,



The Bald-Hill barn is available for rent, and is also popular for weddings.



A map of Bald Hill and McCulloch Peak.

open-sided barn. The barn is available for rent, and is popular for weddings.

From the barn, turn left on a gravel path into the woods. At a kiosk after 0.4 miles, fork briefly left, and then turn right on a gravel trail that climbs 0.4 miles to Bald Hill's long, grassy summit. A bench here has a great view across Corvallis.

For the loop, continue 0.1 miles to a different bench with a view of Marys Peak. The highest point in the entire Coast Range, Marys Peak is taller than any of the ridge-line summits ringing Corvallis, but that's a trip for a different day.

From the viewpoint bench turn right, and then keep left for 1.4 miles to a private farm's driveway. Turn right on a gravel trail along a fence to return to your car at the Bald Hill parking lot.

If you'd prefer the challenge of climbing McCulloch Peak, drive past the Bald Hill lot on Oak Creek Drive for 1.1 miles and turn right to

stay on Oak Creek Drive another 1.1 miles to its end at a trailhead with a locked orange metal gate.

Walk past the gate on gravel Road 600 into OSU's experimental forestry reserve. After half a mile turn left on Road 6020 for 0.1 miles to a small brown post on the right marking the Extendo Trail. This path is open to bicycles and horses from April 15 to October 15; in winter they have to take Road 600 instead.

The Extendo Trail crosses a creek on a footbridge and climbs through woods, steeply at times. Beware of triple-leafletted poison oak beside the trail. After 1.4 miles you'll reach an X-shaped junction. To the left is the Uproute Trail, a possible shortcut home.

If you're still going strong, turn briefly right to gravel Road 680 and follow it uphill to the left. For the next 2.2 miles follow "McCulloch Peak" pointers at intersections, walking Roads 680, 700, and then

790. Atop the peak, a bench has a narrow view out between trees to Corvallis.

The urge is strong to return to your car a different way. A glance at the map shows you could trim nearly 2 miles on the way back with an off-road shortcut. Frustrated mountain bikers have beat out several steep, rough routes, but these illegal tracks are indeed rough.

So return from the summit of McCulloch Peak by backtracking on Roads 790 and 700 for 1.1 miles. Then turn right on Road 770, which goes up and down 1.5 miles to a clearcut saddle with better views than the summit.

The next part of Road 770 descends for 2.1 miles through a patch of old-growth forest. At a T-shaped junction, turn right on Road 6021 for 0.1 mile.

Finally fork left onto the Homestead Trail for half a mile to your car.