

Life in the Valley

Avoid mosquitoes at Sisters Mirror Lake

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Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

The blood on my notes is a warning: Time your hike to Sisters Mirror Lake to avoid mosquitoes.

More than a dozen alpine lakes are waiting to be discovered in the heather meadows and mountain hemlock groves behind Sisters Mirror Lake. The relatively easy hike from the Mirror Lakes Trailhead gains just 600 feet of elevation, so you really might have energy enough to explore a bit once you get there. And if you're disappointed that these lakes hardly mirror the Three Sisters, return on a loop through Wickiup Plain, where the snowy flank of South Sister looms like a wall.

The mosquitoes at Sisters Mirror Lake are no fiercer and probably less numerous than their cousins at Waldo Lake or Diamond Peak. But they can certainly spoil a trip if you plan things wrong.

Elsewhere, many species of mosquitoes are active all year. But in Oregon's High Cascades, the "snow-melt" mosquitoes (genus *Aedes*) can pack their entire life cycle into as little as 14 days. For hikers, the trick is to miss those days – typically in July.

The eggs of snow-melt mosquitoes lie dormant under the snowpack in winter, but they hatch at the first sign of summer's warmth. Then they set to work swimming in snowmelt rivulets, eating, growing, and molting several times in a week. After a miraculously quick pupation they emerge as flying adults, looking for mates.

For food, adult mosquitoes suck sap from plants, not people. Only when females need a hit of protein to lay eggs do they hunt mammalian blood. Then they lay their eggs on the ground where snowmelt rivulets will form next summer. In the Cascades, this whole process takes less than a month.

This means that mosquitoes won't pester you for the first week after the snow melts. Where the snowpack disappears all at once, early summer visitors get a free week, perhaps in mid-June.

Unfortunately, summer vacation for many Oregonians doesn't really begin until the Fourth of July weekend, right in the midst of the High Cascades mosquito season. The flying adults don't die out until mid-July – and in prime spots like Waldo Lake, even a week or two later.

If your vacation time is limited to the month of July, go where the mosquitoes aren't. At elevations below 5000 feet, their season is done. The Coast, most of Eastern Oregon and far Northern California are OK too.

If you find yourself surrounded by mosquitoes nonetheless, what can you do?

Some people run – and it's true, wind keeps the swarms at bay. Some people put on a head net. I have one in my pack pocket, but it's an awkward thing to wear. Other people dope themselves with chemical repellents – but these dissolve synthetic fabrics and can't be good for your skin.

Mosquitoes trace you by following the trail of carbon dioxide you exhale, so it is possible to confuse them with Zen-



Lancelot Lake. WILLIAM L. SULLIVAN / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

like resolve. If you have the patience to sit down, slow your breathing, and spend a few minutes swatting the mosquitoes that have followed you, the buzzing will die down. Recent studies show that the mosquitoes you swat at, but miss, avoid you too.

Now that I've spent eight full paragraphs writing about mosquitoes, who on earth would want to visit Sisters Mirror Lake?

I guess that's the whole point. If you've seen this area's idyllic lake-dotted wildflower fields, you'd discourage other people from going there too.

If I haven't been able to scare you away, drive the Cascade Lakes Highway to the Mirror Lakes Trailhead.

To find the trailhead, start by driving to Bend. Then, following "Mount Bachelor" signs, take the Cascade Lakes Highway 29.8 miles west. The trailhead is 7.8 miles beyond the Mt. Bachelor Ski Area and 1.3 miles beyond Devils Lake.

The trail sets off across an ancient lava flow that's sparsely overgrown with lodgepole pine and mountain hemlock. After 0.4 mile, go straight at an X-shaped junction. Next the path crosses mossy Sink Creek and climbs through

woods hung with the gray-green streamers of witch's hair lichen. After passing two lovely trailside ponds and breaking out into heather meadows, you'll reach a crossing with the Pacific Crest Trail at the 3.1-mile mark.

Veer left onto the PCT for 0.1 mile to a broad meadow. At a fork, the PCT heads left along the left side Sisters Mirror Lake. If you have some pathfinding skills, veer to the right instead, on a path marked "User Trail." After 0.2 mile this trail peters out on a strip of bedrock dividing two small, unnamed lakes.

This is a perfectly nice lunch destination, and it's quite possible to swim in the right-hand lake. But explorers who continue straight ahead 0.1 mile (stepping over a few logs) will find the beautiful, larger Lancelot Lake. If you prowl to the left (southwest) for 0.2 mile through level, open woods and occasional meadows, you'll stumble onto Bounty Lake, Camelot Lake, Denude Lake, or one of many smaller nameless ponds.

A good map is essential. A global positioning device or a GPS app for your phone is also very helpful. If you're backpacking, remember to bring a stove because campfires are banned. Maxi-

mum group size is 12.

Only Sisters Mirror Lake has a reflection of South Sister, and then only of the very tip. To return on an 8.3-mile loop with more views, backtrack on the PCT and follow it straight north for 1.6 miles. This will take you to Wickiup Plain, a field of pumice, dogbane, lupine, and lodgepole pine seedlings overtowered by South Sister.

At a signpost (GPS location 44.0426 -121.7926), turn right toward the Devils Lake Trailhead for a mile. Then, following an "Elk Lake" pointer, turn right on a trail that's popular with equestrians. After another 1.6 miles, and after passing several springs, you'll reach a well-marked trail crossing. Turn left 0.4 mile to return to your car at the Mirror Lakes Trailhead.

If you've timed your visit to Sisters Mirror Lake right, you won't return with bloody mosquito splotches on the notes you were taking.

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Festival

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Davenport Days – the festival has been a part of Silverton's history for almost a century.

Homer Davenport, the festival's namesake, was a political cartoonist during the latter part of the 1800s and early 20th century. Originally from Silverton, the festival honors his legacy, like with its annual cartoon contest, for example.

"This guy, who is literally Oregon's first media superstar, from Silverton. How cool is that?" Gus Frederick, promotional chair from the festival and brew club member, said.

The festival does not lack in things to do, activities include a fun-run, history lectures, a beer garden, children's area, arts and crafts fair, cruise-in and The Barb Rue Memorial Davenport Races, also known as "couch races."

Davenport Races are single-lane competitions where teams race couches down East Main Street. The races feature multiple brackets and takes place at noon on Sunday, Aug. 5.

So, why Davenport Races? Well, Homer Davenport was not just one of the most influential political cartoonists of his time. Plot twist: He was also the distant relative of Albert H. Davenport,



The Foothill Spargers Homebrew Club pose with their float at the Homer Parade in 2017 at the annual Homer Davenport Community Festival. Their float is covered in fresh hops. COURTESY OF GUS FREDERICK

the founder of the manufacturer that created the "boxy sofa," according to Frederick.

This year, the Foothill Spargers Homebrew Club decided to up their participation game by competing in the Davenport Races for the first time under the name The Foothills Flash.

Their racing Davenport has been passed from team to team over the years. They received it from Josiah Kelley, one of the owners of Seven Brides Brewing, who was part of a team who had used it in the past.

They still have some work to do to get it race ready.

The plan is to stick with their style: cover it in fresh hops, put a keg or two on each side of the driver and hang a team banner.

The brew club's relationship with Seven Brides Brewing goes back to the very beginning of the club. Kelley had attended a meeting and offered to let the club host their meetings there.

"Seven Brides have been incredible to all of us. I would never have expected to have anything like this – their support," Wernette said.

That kind of comradery is something shared in Silverton. The Homer Davenport Community Festival, which incorporates many local organizations, is all about community – just like the Foothill Spargers Homebrew Club.

It's not exclusive and open to anyone, Adam Robinson said. A place where multiple generations can come together to celebrate what they love and where they live.

"It seems that a lot of people from Silverton are proud to be from Silverton, or proud to live in Silverton," he said. "The pride of the town, it is like (being part of) a team."

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