

Trips

Continued from Page 1B

7. Iron Mountain and House Rock hikes, camping

Two of Oregon's best hikes with kids are located along the South Santiam River east of Sweet Home.

House Rock Campground is a fun little spot with sites right next to beautiful swimming hole amid old-growth forest. It's also the trailhead for a fantastic 1 mile loop to a waterfall, cave and the aptly named House Rock — a site where pioneer families traveling the Santiam Wagon Trail used to take shelter from storms.

Once you're finished at House Rock, drive just up U.S. Highway 20 to the upper trailhead for Iron Mountain, an iconic wildflower-filled climb to a summit where a wooden platform showcases Cascade Mountain views of Mount Jefferson and the Three Sisters.

The trip is a steep 2-mile round-trip, but doable for even fairly young kids.

6. Hunting for ferns in Oregon's forest

This year I was excited to learn about a program that allows you to transplant a number of ferns, plants and even tree seedlings from Oregon's national forests straight into your home garden.

The program, which is carefully monitored and controlled by permits, allows the limited harvest of 30 to 40 different species of plants, as long as you get them from along the edges of U.S. Forest Service roads — where the soil has already been impacted.

(This program doesn't allow pulling plants from the middle of an old-growth forest).

I used the program to bring home a total of 19 sword ferns — many of them gigantic and that would have been very expensive to buy. I wrote a story detailing how to get the permit and the best way to make it happen in Siuslaw and Willamette national forests.

5. Detroit Lake low water fishing

The trout fishing gets as hot as the surface of the sun when the weather gets cool at the famed reservoir east of Salem.

Detroit Lake typically has excellent trout fishing when the water level is



Henry Hughes shows one of the larger rainbow trout anglers can catch in Detroit Lake this winter in reservoir's historically low water levels. ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

dropped to make room for flood control on the North Santiam River.

But this year it's an even more interesting situation.

Because of repairs on spillway gates, the reservoir has been dropped to near historically low levels — so low that even the low-water boat ramp is dry.

The fishing is still amazing, though, as I discovered with Western Oregon University professor Henry Hughes. We had to carry a rowboat a few hundred feet through the mud and stumps, but we eventually got fishing on the lake and caught around 40 fish, keeping our limits of five each.

In a lot of ways, Detroit Lake is more interesting at low water.

4. Jefferson Park via burned-to-a-crisp Whitewater Trail

The famed Whitewater Trail finally reopened this summer two years after becoming the epicenter of a major wildfire that burned over 11,000 acres in the Mount Jefferson Wilderness.

A lot has changed, to the point that

the pathway located east of Detroit almost feels like a different place.

Where it was once a green tunnel with just a few views of Oregon's second-tallest mountain, the pathway is now a moonscape of burned forest in many places with a ton of views showcasing Mount Jefferson.

The Whitewater Trail is largely known for being the quickest route to Jefferson Park, the alpine paradise of lakes and meadows, which did not burn in the fire.

3. Float through redwoods on crystal-clear Smith River

Maybe you've already visited the titanic trees of the Redwood National and State Parks system, located just across the Oregon and California border.

But chances are good you've never floated through them on one of the world's clearest rivers.

The "redwood float" through Jedediah Smith Redwoods State Park is a wonderful experience, a chance to admire the tall trees from the river while gazing at water as clear as liquid glass.

The float is either 3.5 miles or 7 miles, depending on where you take out, through pretty mellow water without any major rapids.

You can bring your own boat, rent one locally or take a commercial trip down the river. I outlined all the details of the float in this story.

2. Explore emerald pools of Oregon via 'wilderness snorkeling'

As amazing as streams such as the Little North Santiam and Elk Lake Creek are from the surface, it's nothing compared to how they look underwater.

This year I continued to enjoy what I'll call "wilderness snorkeling," which means hiking into the backcountry with a snorkel and fins to explore the amazingly clear rivers and creeks from below the surface.

This year I snorkeled Elk Lake Creek, Waldo Lake and the Collawash and South Santiam rivers. Each offered a different experience, but it was always fun and has become a mandatory piece of gear to bring on almost every outdoor trip.

1. Waldo Lake boat-in camping

It's not easy to find the hidden campsites of Waldo Lake.

No maps mark their site, and no signs betray their location.

Even the U.S. Forest Service, which manages the lake, is coy about the best places to find them.

But if you load up your boat with gear and paddle onto one of the world's clearest lakes, you'll find around 50 dispersed campsites that offer some of the best camping in Oregon.

Last autumn I headed onto Waldo Lake for some boat-in camping while exploring almost the entire shoreline.

It's a process that requires a little more study than you might expect. How to avoid the mosquitoes and high winds, find the best beaches and campsites are all important questions because it's a big lake with a lot happening.

But done right, it's one of Oregon's best outdoor adventures.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors reporter, photographer and videographer in Oregon for 11 years. Urness is the author of "Best Hikes with Kids: Oregon" and "Hiking Southern Oregon." He can be reached at zurness@StatesmanJournal.com or (503) 399-6801. Find him on Twitter at @ZachsORoutdoors.

Miller

Continued from Page 1B

Those are just the highlights, and low lights.

There are minus tide series every month of the year during 2020 for those who can get away on weekdays, or play amateur optician (I can't come in because of an eye problem. I can't see coming to work).

OK, old joke. Made you smile, though. Tide books are available at sporting goods and tackle shops locally as well as at tourism offices, hotels and motels up and down the coast.

Tide tables are online, including the NOAA tables for tides at the Coast Guard station at Newport on Yaquina Bay. Those are available via a link on Oregon State University's Hatfield Marine Science Center at https://hmssc.oregonstate.edu/sites/hmssc.oregonstate.edu/files/yaquina_uscg_2020_tides.pdf

Then there is my personal favorite and the one I used for this column: The massive offerings by the Department of Biological Sciences at the University of South Carolina.

Here is the link for the West Coast of North America, north to south: http://tbone.biol.sc.edu/tide/sites_us-west.html

You can click on any location on the list and specify how long you want the tables to run, up to two years. Hint: Be

sure to select a.m./p.m. unless you know 24-hour military time.

Or I can email copies of the tables that I make for my shovel-ready outings throughout the year. I'm still compiling and editing those, but they should be buffed and waxed in a couple of weeks.

Be patient. Henry Miller is a retired Statesman Journal outdoor columnist and outdoor writer. You can contact him via email at HenryMillerSJ@gmail.com.

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