

Outdoors

WINTER WATERFALLS



A snowy bridge crosses Salt Creek to begin the winter route to Diamond Creek Falls. ZACH URNESS/ STATESMAN JOURNAL

Snowy trek to Salt Creek and Diamond falls

Zach Urness
Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

My favorite thing about Oregon's winter is that it takes already stunning places and makes them better.

Consider Salt Creek and Diamond Creek falls loop near Willamette Pass. Home to two of Oregon's most spectacular waterfalls, and ringed by emerald forest, it's one of the state's better summer hikes.

But add 50 inches of fresh snow and it becomes sublime.

Yes, the trip is longer and harder, requiring skis or snowshoes. And sure, it's colder and a bit more dangerous. But the increased challenge is a small price to pay for waterfalls and forest encased in a snow globe of white.

The trip begins at Salt Creek Sno-Park, one of the many winter access points off Highway 58 east of Eugene and Oakridge. You need a \$25 sno-park permit from the Oregon Department of Transportation, which can be purchased online.

The complete loop is 4.5 to 5 miles,

depending on a few choices we'll get to later. The difficulty is either moderate or strenuous depending on snow conditions and whether there's a nice established snowshoe or ski track.

But in general — and keeping in mind I have a strong bias for trips to waterfalls covered in snow and ice — I'd call this one of Oregon's best winter day-trips.

Easy trip: One-mile to Salt Creek Falls

The trip begins with a long drive down Highway 58 southeast of Eugene and Oakridge toward Willamette Pass.

Turn right at signs for Salt Creek Sno-Park, drive briefly down the entrance road and take a quick turn right into a plowed-out parking area that runs into a snowbank.

There are no signs that the route begins here, but this is the road to Salt Creek Falls viewpoint and trailhead, a place that's almost always mobbed in the summer.

In winter, the trail begins early, giving skiers and snowshoers that chance to warm up with an easy half-mile trek to

the viewpoint for 286-foot Salt Creek Falls — one of Oregon's tallest and most striking waterfalls.

This easy half-mile snowshoe (1 mile round-trip) makes a good one for kids, especially if you head back to your car, drive a little lower into the sno-park and enjoy the sledding hill for the rest of the day.

A snowshoe plus sledding brings a happily exhausted child by day's end.

But for those seeking greater adventure, don't stop at Salt Creek Falls. Head into the backcountry.

Backcountry loop to Diamond Falls

From Salt Creek Falls, head upstream, above the giant waterfall, to a bridge crossing Salt Creek. It's a beautiful wooden bridge and a lovely spot in deep snow.

After crossing the bridge, you'll come to a junction that begins the Diamond Creek Falls Loop. For simplicity's sake, I always head right, following a ridgeline with views over Salt Creek canyon before dropping into the deep, silent backcountry in winter.

The route travels through snowy forest on a route marked by a lot of blue diamonds. I traveled the route with

friends right after the latest snowstorm and in the fresh powder it was slow and difficult travel in snowshoes. Skis would have been quicker, but we chose snowshoes for what I expected to be the most challenging part of the trip.

At mile mark 2.2, we reached the sign that denotes the summer trail down to the base of Diamond Creek Falls (it's sometimes called Lower Diamond Creek Falls). This is not an official winter route.

We broke path heading down, using memory to recall where the summer trail travels. It was difficult going with around 50 inches of fresh powder and steep terrain. Near a drop downhill, I got a little too close to a tree and sank almost chest deep into the snow.

Looking down at the canyon, and seeing a lot more hazards, we decided to turn around. The canyon was very steep, inaccessible, filled with deep snow and downed trees, and looked avalanche prone. We knew a sketchy bridge crossing would require a lot of shoveling. The climb back up would have been exhausting.

People do reach the base of the waterfall in winter, but given the condi-

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Beat the winter blahs, bring the outdoors inside



Henry Miller
Guest columnist

It just shows to go you, to coin a malapropism

One sure way to beat the winter blahs is to bring the outdoors inside.

And during the next couple of weeks, you will have ample opportunities to do that, thanks to a trio of outdoor-oriented shows, all with the admittedly sexist word "Sportsmen" in the titles.

Here is a roundup in chronological order, beginning with...

The 47th annual KEZI Eugene Boat & Sportsmen's Show that runs noon until 9 p.m. on Friday, Jan. 31; 9 a.m. until 8 p.m. on Feb. 1; and 9 a.m. until 3 p.m. on Feb. 2 at the Lane County Convention Center, 796 W 13th Ave.

As the name suggests, boats are the central feature of the Eugene show with more than three dozen manufacturers and dealers, from drift boats and jet sleds to catamarans, pleasure boats and party barges on display.

But there also will be seminars, displays such as a "heads and horns" trophy displays and vendor booths featuring a wealth of guides and outdoor adventures as well as a full schedule of seminars on topics ranging from fishing for kokanee, salmon and steelhead to



The KEZI Eugene Boat & Sportsmen's Show from Jan. 31 through Feb. 2 at the Lane County Convention Center will really float your boat, and a whole lot more. PHOTO COURTESY OF EXPOSURE SHOWS

surf perch and shad.

Admission is \$8 for adults, or \$6 on Friday and Sunday with a \$2 discount coupon available at Bi-Mart stores. An adult admission also gets a free pass for the Lane County History Museum.

Kids ages 5 to 12 are \$1, with 5 and younger admitted free.

As a bonus, admission is free for those of us in the OK Boomer! 65-and-older crowd from 5 until 9 p.m. on Jan. 31.

If you can stay up that late (welcome to the snark tank).

Information about the Eugene Boat & Sportsmen's Show is online at <http://www.exposureshows.com/our-shows/eugene.html>

A map showing directions to the Convention Center is at the bottom right on

the event home page.

Next up ...

When O'Loughlin Trade Shows, the organizers of the annual Pacific Northwest Sportsmen's Show say "This is the Big One!" they mean it.

So much so that the description is trademarked.

This year's edition runs 11 a.m. until 8 p.m. Feb. 5 through 7, 10 a.m. until 8 p.m. Feb. 8, and 10 a.m. until 6 p.m. Feb. 9 at the Portland Expo Center, 2060 N Marine Drive.

If you go, wear a comfy pair of walking shoes and be well-rested because it's a full buffet of seminars, demonstrations, attractions, exhibits and activities for visitors of all ages, experiences and skill levels.

Highlights include the always-popu-

lar free Kids Trout Pond for those 12 and younger with bait, tackle and expertise provided. Then there is a gold-panning "creek" that allows you to try your hand. There also is a supervised archery range for Katniss Everdeen and Robin Hood wannabes.

Those are coupled with the hundreds of vendor, lodge and resort, tackle and equipment booths; casting, fly tying, fishing, hunting, camp cooking and even horse and mule-packing seminars.

There also will be displays of a fleet of boats from fishing putt-putts and day-cruisers to live-aboards.

It's all too much to cover here, but if you want a deep dive, check out the show website at <https://www.thesportshows.com/shows/pacific-northwest/show-information/>

Admission is \$15 a day or \$24 for a two-day adult pass, or \$8 for a half-day adult pass, \$3 for kids ages 6 to 16 that are good 4 p.m. until closing Wednesday through Saturday.

Kids 4 and younger are free, while military (active and reserve or retired with ID) is \$8 any day of the show.

Expo parking is \$10 a day with a free shuttle from the nearby lot at Portland International Raceway. Note: It's cash-only if you park at the PIR lot.

You can get a \$2 discount on an adult admission good Wednesday through

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