

Outdoors

THE NATURALIST'S EYE: ENCHANTED VALLEY



Enchanted Valley near the Oregon Coast is a great place to see nature reclaiming an area. PHOTOS BY BOBBIE SNEAD/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

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Editor's note: *The Enchanted Valley is part of the Siuslaw National Forest, whose trailheads have been closed to stop the spread of the coronavirus. We present this hike as an armchair visit for you, with the hope of getting out there, safely, soon.*

To see a landscape becoming wild again is to witness the healing power of nature. If given the opportunity, an ecosystem will restore itself one species at a time. The Enchanted Valley, just inland from the coast near the town of Florence, is an ideal place to see land reverting to its feral ways as nature reclaims its territory.

No one seems to know how this valley got its fanciful name. It's one of several branching arms radiating from Mercer Lake, a natural reservoir impounded by ancient sand dunes. At the close of the ice age the valley was part of the lake. During the ensuing millennia, Bailey Creek gradually filled the valley with sediment, transforming it from submerged lakebed to verdant meadow. In the late 19th century, pioneering dairy farmers arrived and the lush meadow became a pasture for a herd of grazing cows.



A yellow wood violet.

In 1991, the Siuslaw National Forest acquired the valley, along with a hundred years of environmental degradation. Long-term concentrated grazing had left a legacy of compacted soil, sloughing stream banks, sparse vegetation and a murky creek harboring very few aquatic creatures. Nearly 30 years later the rewilding of Enchanted Valley

If you go

Directions: From Florence, drive 5 miles north on Highway 101. Turn right on Mercer Lake Road and drive 3.6 miles to where it becomes Mercer View Drive. Continue 0.2 mile to Twin Fawn Drive and turn left. Drive 0.2 mile to a small turnaround at the end of the road.

Best Month: April. Late spring and early summer bring mosquitoes. Winter brings muddy conditions.

Length: 4 miles round trip

Duration: 2.5 hours

Elevation gain: 80 feet

Age range: suitable for kids of all ages

avocado-shaped track is about four inches long. The widest part is near the heel and gradually tapers toward two points at the front of the foot. Dozens of tracks parallel each side of a small boardwalk. I kneel down to touch a recent imprint; its edges are clean and firm. Older tracks crumble in on themselves as I gently press their dried outlines. Tracks of varying ages indicate this is a frequently traveled elk highway.

The trail curves around a cove of drooping cedars and skirts a small wetland crowded with cattail plants. They look like fuzzy brown corndogs rising above lance-like leaves in the marshy ground. Each sausage-shaped spike is covered with tightly packed seeds in a cottony fluff. Winds disperse the downy seeds when they are completely dry. During the valley's dairy days cattails were sparse; the hungry herd devoured them. A single rotting fencepost stands in the middle of the meadow, a ghost from a former life.

Clear water glides below me as I cross a mid-meadow footbridge over Bailey Creek's unnamed sister stream. The trail leads me to the meadow's west margin, just at the edge of the forest. I pass through intermittent patches of sun and shade as I continue upvalley.

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is well underway.

The valley's east side lies in morning shadow as I step around the unmarked gate and start up the trail. The moist ground squishes underfoot. Glancing down, I recognize elk tracks all around me. I imagine the squashy sounds their hooves must have made as the heavy animals tramped along this path. Each

How to stay at home and still enjoy fishing



Fishing
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

A former Statesman Journal executive editor once introduced me as "Henry Miller, the writer who makes milk come out of your nose every Thursday."

Hard to think of something humorous to say at the moment. And milk's hard to come by.

The times in which we find ourselves hunkering in our bunkers puts an eerily macabre spin on the old theatrical chestnut that "dying is easy; comedy is hard."

So I thought that I'd make a suggestion to hopefully lighten the loads, both yours and mine.

The best idea I could come up with is to come up with a couple of fishing-themed movies to stream during the self-quarantining.

Contemporary offerings such as "A River Runs Through It" and "The Perfect Storm" are great films, but both have, shall we say, extreme downer elements. "Jaws?" Don't we have enough terror already?



Henry Miller's fishing buddy Phil. HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Ironically, a perfect cinematic confection of fishing, fluff and fun came out of The Great Depression.

"Libeled Lady," released in 1936, features Myrna Loy and William Powell, staples in romcoms - then known as "screwball comedies" - of the era, along with Jean Harlow and Spencer Tracy.

I first saw this as one of the offerings on Turner Classic Movies, which was running a Powell/Loy marathon at the time, and it stuck.

The fly fishing is a sub-plot with the clueless and inept Powell deriving all of his knowledge through a hotel-room casting lesson and skimming "The Anglers' Hand-Book for Beginners" while trying to fake his way through talking on the subject.

It doesn't help.

Libeled Lady is on offer through Amazon, iTunes, YouTube, Vudu (rent for \$2.99, buy for \$9.99).

Have a glass of milk handy, if you can find any.

My other pick is another Depression-era film with Spencer Tracy.

"Captains Courageous," a 1937 classic directed by Victor Fleming, is a movie to watch with your kids.

A rich, spoiled, entitled brat played by Freddie Bartholomew falls off a steamship while traveling with his father to Europe and is picked up by Tracy and ends up aboard a fishing schooner.

The pushy, arrogant Bartholomew wants to be returned immediately to New York, but the captain, Disko Troop (BEST CHARACTER NAME EVER!

Thanks Rudyard Kipling) played by Lionel Barrymore, says they're going to spend three months fishing the Grand Banks.

And, you guessed it: Arrogant prig of a kid matures into grateful, grounded youth over the course of the journey. The thing that's great about this movie is that the transformation seems authentic and organic, not forced or concocted.

And there's lots of fishing and tons of what looks suspiciously like rubber cod landed in the process.

The lesson I took away is that people really do improve with fishing.

Spoiler alert for those who haven't seen it, Tracy's character dies a horrible death (not shown) near the end.

Available for online streaming from the usual suspects.

Happy vicarious fishing.

A fishing buddy, Phil, takes social-distancing to new heights (make that distances).

He went steelhead fishing with another angler recently ... taking separate vehicles.

Got a favorite fishing film? Let me know via email at HenryMiller@gmail.com