

Outdoors

VALLEY OF THE GIANTS



Large trees stick out along the trail at Valley of the Giants. ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

This hidden grove features Oregon's largest and oldest trees

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USA TODAY NETWORK

Oregon's outdoors is slowly reopening from closures related to COVID-19. Until things get back to normal, we're featuring the "greatest hits" from SJ outdoors writer Zach Urness for armchair traveling purposes and future planning.

This story was originally published in September of 2013, but has been revised.

There comes a moment, during the drive from Salem to the Valley of the Giants trailhead, when even the most mature adults transform into 6-year-old children.

Are we there yet?

No, seriously.

Are. We. There. Yet?

Although just 33 miles from Salem as the crow flies, the route to this hidden grove requires navigating a labyrinth of rough and unmarked

logging roads deep into the Coast Range.

Time seems to melt away on winding, car-sick-inducing curves that pass the ghost town of Valsetz and follow the Siletz River on a drive that totals about two hours and 15 minutes.

But then you arrive.

All the journey's frustration vanishes into the breeze on a 1.6 mile trail below titanic Douglas firs and hemlocks twisting into the sky like gothic pillars, standing 250 feet above an emerald forest showcasing some of the largest and oldest trees in Oregon.

In a landscape defined by logging, the Valley of the Giants is a 51-acre island of old-growth protected by the Bureau of Land Management as an Outstanding Natural Area.

"It's like a pocket of Coast Range forest that time forgot," said Trish Hogervorst, an officer for the BLM's Salem District. "There's a long and bumpy ride to get there, but people really love it. It's a real hidden jewel."

Every trip to the Valley of the Giants should begin by either calling or visiting BLM's Salem

District Office, where mile-by-mile directions are provided and information can be obtained about roads often closed, blocked by snow or washed-out (or just email me at zurness@statesmanjournal.com for the details).

Still, with the proper preparation, a trip to this garden of ancient trees becomes an adventure into Oregon's history.

The story of Valsetz

On a recent Sunday afternoon, Kalab Broadus walked through the Valley of the Giants with his 13-month-old daughter, Addisyn, strapped to his chest in a baby carrier, exploring a forest that's defined much of his life.

A third-generation logger, Broadus has deep roots in the area. His grandparents and father lived in the timber company town of Valsetz — located just up the road from the Giants — until the town closed in 1984.

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Of woodpeckers and utility poles



Fishing
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

Ah, nature!

You tend to notice the little things when you're self-isolating/social-distancing/mostly staying at home, such as:

- After about six weeks (and counting), the gas gauge on the Tacoma says that you're gone through a quarter-tank of gas, and the battery is sluggish when you crank it over.
- Outdoor outings consisting of daily dog walks with Harry the hound draw comments from fellow travelers about the bounty of wildlife in Oregon consisting of "I saw a couple of squirrels."

That from Karen, a former SJ employee who lives in the neighborhood and who also is an avid walker, along with her husband.

- And then there was the thack, thack, thack of a woodpecker beavering away from sunrise to sunset, including Sundays, on a power pole across the street.

In the interests of full disclosure, what would have been a mere curiosity during normal times becomes an object



Halfway home, a woodpecker, northern flicker to be precise, is about 4 inches deep in a nesting cavity that it chiseled into a utility pole across the street. HENRY MILLER/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

of fascination during a nature-lover's stimulation-starvation diet.

So I went over to check it out.

A northern flicker — on a personal

note, one of Oregon's most beautiful birds — had pounded some smaller exploratory holes before concentrating on the current location about a third of the way up the pole on the southern side.

By about day four, it had excavated a cavity about 4 to 6 inches deep, so you could see just the rump and tail feathers sticking out of the tunnel.

Can a Flicker bring down a utility pole?

At that point, I decided to call Portland General Electric to see if there was potential for major structural damage to the pole.

I was assured by the operator at the utility that woodpeckers seldom do that much carnage.

A lineman who came out with a bucket truck to inspect thought otherwise. "Did you have trouble finding it?" I asked about the cavern, the entrance to which was about the diameter of a 1-pound can of Rosarita refries.

He grinned, informing me that when he elevated the bucket and looked in the cavity, he could see light coming through where a companion hole on the opposite side had been chiseled out.

Because it was decades old, and a junction pole for neighborhood utility

lines, it was the worst one that the flicker could have selected, he added.

It will have to be replaced, he said, adding a thanks that I had called it in.

Yesterday while walking Harry, another longtime acquaintance and fellow dog-walker was out with Mollie, her blue heeler.

"Did you see that bird in the hole on the pole?" she asked.

"You bet," I replied. "It's been working on it for a week or so."

Or words to that effect.

She informed me that the bird was now all the way inside the pole, and judging by the tapping, expanding the nesting cavity.

At that point, fascination with bird watching becomes secondary to some elementary geometry.

The Pythagorean woodpecker theorem

If the pole represents one side of a right triangle and the length of the shadow equals the base, you can calculate the height by using a known length, say a ruler, then also measuring its shadow at the same time.

The length of the shadow of the pole

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