

OUTDOORS

SKY ISLANDS



The trail at Marys Peak winds through a noble fir forest.

PHOTOS BY BOBBIE SNEAD / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL



A meadow atop Marys Peak.



Harsh paintbrush is seen along the trail at Marys Peak.

Peek in on the isolated beauty of peak-dwelling plant populations

Bobbie Snead

Special to the Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Sky islands are isolated peaks inhabited by species that don't grow in the surrounding area — relict plant populations dating back to the last ice age. Marys Peak, west of Corvallis, is a hiker-friendly sky island that is easily accessible spring through fall. Longer, more difficult trails access the summit year-round.

At 4,057 feet, Marys Peak is the highest point in the Coast Range. The mountain towers above its fellow peaks, its hump-backed silhouette dominating the central Willamette Valley's western horizon.

Marys Peak came to be a sky island during the most recent ice age, about 11,000 years ago. Back then, a thick ice cap covered the Cascades from Mount Hood south to the Three Sisters. Continental glaciers extended down from Canada to a point in Washington State about two hundred miles north of Marys Peak. The Willamette Valley was repeatedly flooded by catastrophic torrents that raged down the Columbia River and backed up in the valley as far south as Eugene.

A cold-loving forest of noble firs cloaked the Coast Range, including Marys Peak. Park-like clearings in the forest held open meadows. Temperatures were cool, but not cold enough to sup-

If you go

Directions: From Corvallis, drive west on Highway 20 through Philomath. Turn left on Highway 34 and drive 8.9 miles. Turn right on Marys Peak Road and drive 8.8 miles to Marys Peak Campground and turn right. After one hundred yards, turn left to the day use area and trailhead.

Best month: June, for wildflowers

Length: 2.5 miles round trip

Duration: 2.5 hours

Elevation gain: 600 feet

Age range: suitable for kids 6 years old and up

port glaciers; annual precipitation was probably about fifty percent less than what currently falls in the Coast Range. As the region warmed at the end of the Pleistocene epoch, trees and non-woody plants that thrive in higher temperatures began to populate these mountains. Remnants of the once-vast noble fir forests and numerous meadows were marooned in the high, cool conditions near the top of Marys Peak, where they remain today.

My friends and I start up the Meadow Edge Trail through a landscape that looks identical to those bordering countless paths in the Coast

Range: middle-aged Douglas-firs two feet in diameter stand over a tangle of vine maple, salmonberries and knee-high herbaceous plants. A newly fallen Doug-fir lies next to the trail; the spicy scent of splintered conifer bark rises from it like the smell of warm chai tea.

Shortly, we arrive at a junction with the Meadow Edge Loop Trail. Choosing to do the loop clockwise, we turn left. The trail gradually gains elevation and, suddenly, the look and feel of the forest change dramatically. It's as if we've crossed some kind of invisible boundary; our gentle ascent has reached an elevation of 3,600 feet and lifted us up into the sky island. Most Coast Range peaks top out at this elevation, but Marys Peak reaches much higher.

We enter an old-growth forest of stately noble firs, rare for these coastal mountains. Ground-hugging shamrocks called Oregon oxalis carpet the forest floor, with five-petaled white flowers raising their heads above masses of clover-like leaves. Each leaf consists of three heart-shaped leaflets joined at the tips. Perfectly suited for life in a shady forest, oxalis can photosynthesize in subdued light where other plants struggle to absorb the solar energy they need to grow. Sensitive to harsh light, Oregon oxalis will fold its leaves downward when a shaft of sunlight breaks through the forest canopy to shine

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Can you hold a Zoom call at a fishing hole?



Fishing

Henry Miller
Guest columnist



All it took was a slip of the knife to cut short a planned clamming trip. HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Been doing much Skyping/Zooming/Face Timing with friends and relatives lately?

Those are some of the growing (some would say groaning) number of video-chat applications for computers, tablets, cell phones and other internet-connected devices.

We've done a couple of Zoom chat-fests with Kay's family, and I've Skyped a couple of times with my distant siblings.

I've got to say I like the tic-tac-toe format of Zoom that puts participants in frames on a grid that looks like the set of the old Hollywood Squares TV show.

Kay and I are sort of the Nanette Fabry/Charley Weaver to Kay's niece, Clair, and her husband, Jeff's, Karen Valentine/John Davidson (ask your grandparents).

Although those in my age demographic say that Wally Cox or Paul Lynde come to mind in my case.

I digress.

Anyway, the thought occurs: What is a fishing rod if not a multi-tasking selfie

stick?

So if you attached the phone to the rod, you could do some social-distance fishing while Zooming or Skyping with your friends.

If you've read about any and all of my frequent past fails when it comes to DIY outdoor adventures, you can understand my sense of queasy trepidation about casting with a \$300 phone duct-taped to a medium-action spinning rod.

For some insight, see previous columns re: wader and/or raft repair, truck mud-flap replacement, also pepper-infused suet bricks.

Still, if you, say, lock the phone on a tripod mounted on the bank nearby, the risks can be minimized.

And there you go.

There's one thing that you never think about when you MacGyver, er, jury-rig, a home-made solution to an outdoor problem that involves remote internet connections.

No signal. Ever.

OK, so you could buy a satellite phone for about \$1,000, with service plans that start at the low, low price of \$39.95 a month ... for 10 minutes.

Hmmm ... 10 minutes; that would be my life expectancy when Kay saw the MasterCard bill.

So how about shooting a short video and emailing it when you get back home?

Or as the old saying goes, good judgment comes from experience. Experience? That comes from bad judgment.

Sure, it's fun until someone loses...

The planned clamming outing the past weekend was canceled both because of the torrential downpours and some pre-outing cutlery high jinx.

Subject A, that's what I'm going to call David to protect his identity.

The subject in question, A, texted the night before the planned outing that "I'm probably out ... I sliced my thumb open while cutting up vegetables ... It's

taken a while to stop bleeding, and I probably shouldn't be dunking it in bay water."

In the reply text, I attached a photo of my bandaged left thumb, which was sliced open when I, too, was doing some slipshod culinary knife work.

No stitches among the two of us, but some pride in need of mending.

Still texting. Thanks for asking.

The vegetables in question in both knifings were onions, so we both were literally crying over the lost clamming opportunity.

Laugh-or-cry situation?

Getting a birthday card... from the gastroenterologist who does your colonoscopies.

Wait. It gets worse: The same mail delivery also had an advertisement offering pre-paid cremation plans.

FISHING THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Give a man a fish and you feed them for a day. Teach a man to fish and you provide him with a lifetime of bottomless expense and futility —

Henry (based on my experience as opposed to the old chestnut about self-sufficiency and charity.)

Contact Henry via email at Henry MillerSJ@gmail.com.