



The summit of Middle Pyramid in the Old Cascades in Willamette National Forest southeast of Detroit. The site of an old fire lookout. ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Hikes

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picked because it's home to the most impressive grove of Myrtle Trees in Oregon. If you've never seen a Myrtle Tree you're not alone, but there is a good chance you've seen myrtlewood items because it has famously beautiful colors in the wood — shades of honey, browns, grays, reds and greens. Myrtlewood items often have a really cool, funky look and there's a ton of myrtlewood shops on the Oregon Coast.

The trees are just as cool — and that's evident on this trail, which is east of Gold Beach along the Rogue River. The trees kind of look like something out of a Dr. Seuss book — they're very short and squat, with branches sprouting up almost like giant antennae into a huge crown. The trail is very short, so it's best as a throw-in on a coastal trip or Rogue River trip, but it ends at what used to be the largest Myrtle Tree in the world.

Apparently, the big tree has been topped very recently by a storm, but when it was still standing, it was 42 feet in circumference, just a huge base, and 88 feet tall and it was believed to be 400 years old.

6. Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve, Big Tree Loop (Chandra)

Most people go for the caves, but the Big Tree Loop at the Oregon Caves National Monument is my next pick.

This diverse and lovely 4-mile loop begins on the Cliff Nature Trail in front of the Visitor Center, climbs to a viewpoint, then joins the Big Tree Trail that ascends through a mixed forest of Douglas-fir, white fir, and cedars. The trail passes through open slopes and meadows with alpine shrubs and wildflowers on the way to the “Big Tree” -- a gigantic Douglas-fir with a wooden platform to protect its base. Expanded in 2014, the Oregon Caves National Monument and Preserve now protects more of the diverse ancient forest and watershed that feeds the famous cave system.

(Be sure to check to see if cave tours and the visitor center are open before you go — these were still closed as of 6/19/20)

7. Valley of the Giants (Zach)

Alright, my fourth pick is a trail we've talked about and written about before.

The Valley of the Giants is a 51-acre patch of old-growth forest. It's home to some of the largest and oldest Douglas-

fir and hemlocks in the state. They really are monstrous — almost redwood level in size and girth, right along the beautiful North Fork Siletz River.

The reason this place has always stuck out is that it's surrounded by one of the most heavily logged areas in Oregon. It's like an island of giant trees surrounded by, well, a lot of stumps. It's actually just down the road from the site of the legendary old logging town of Valsetz.

The story of how the Giants were saved is kind of a classic Oregon story. It was thanks to a writer named Maynard Drawson. He was a World War II vet and barber who lived in Salem. Drawson was known for traveling to wild places around the state and writing about them in his series of books called Treasures of Oregon Country.

In 1974 he came to the Valley of the Giants and was really impressed by the size of the trees — just the way they showed what the Coast Range forest used to look like. And he was horrified by the idea the trees would eventually be cut, so he launched a crusade to save the area. He gave lectures, took people on field trips and basically just wore down the Bureau of Land Management until — almost to get him off their back — they preserved it as an Outstanding Natural Area.

A quick note if you're planning to visit — the drive to the Giants is one of the worst and most confusing in Oregon. Without a good map you will 100 percent get lost. So make sure to get the official directions from the BLM in Salem — shoot me an email if you want them at zurness@statesmanjournal.com.

8. Three Pyramids (Chandra)

Speaking of the Old Cascades, we're headed back there for my next pick. The Three Pyramids, eroding ancient volcanic plugs in the Middle Santiam watershed just west of Santiam Pass, are surrounded by gorgeous ancient forests.

On this challenging 5.6-mile round-trip hike you can take in an amazing ancient forest of Douglas-fir, noble and silver fir, and Alaska yellow cedar interspersed with alpine wildflower meadows and — as a final reward — a mountaintop view.

Unfortunately, like other beautiful forests in the Willamette National Forest, this wild area in the heart of the spectacular and diverse Old Cascades lacks any specific protection from logging.

9. Opal Creek's Cedar Flats

For my final pick I am going to pick a famous grove. It's a group of trees that you could argue led to the famous battle for Opal Creek that raged for almost two decades during the height of Oregon's Forest Wars.

The place that I'm talking about is known as Cedar Flats, and it's home to some titanic 500 to 1,000 year old western red cedars. Really beautiful trees. They're more common than the Alaska yellow cedars we talked about earlier, but I love red cedars almost as much and this grove is an example of how grand they can get.

Cedar Flats is located on the Opal Creek Trail — on a section known as the Kopeski Trail that runs south from Jawbone Flats, the environment education center and wilderness village. All totaled, it's around 9 or 10 miles to reach Cedar Flats but like all of Opal Creek, it is a pretty well-traveled place in summer. I'd go in spring or fall.

Now, if you don't know the story of Opal Creek, I'd encourage you to read our 12-part feature about its history. But in a nutshell, it was one of the pitched battles of the Timber Wars that raged in Oregon from the 1970s into the 1990s that pit loggers and environmentalists against each other over the issues of old-growth forest and spotted owl habitat.

Opal Creek became a flashpoint for this issue, because it was home to one of the last ancient forests of the Cascade Foothills — a temperate rainforest. George Atiyeh, nephew of the former governor, waged a decades-long battle to prevent the Opal Creek watershed area from being logged. He used lawsuits, mining laws and media attention to stop the area from being logged. When I wrote the series and wrote a feature about George and asked him why he fought so hard, he told me a story about bushwhacking up to Cedar Flats — to these giant red cedars — when he was a boy. He said it was a spiritual experience — that the trees talked to him. And he said that experience gave him the will to do basically anything to keep those trees from being cut.

If you appreciate Opal Creek for what it is today, it's worth heading up there to see those inspiration trees — again, go in the offseason and midweek if you can to avoid crowds. But it's one of Oregon's great hikes and it's even more fun with that history.

10. Cripple Camp- Rogue-Umpqua Divide Wilderness

To wrap this up, let's head south one

more time. Located in the aptly named Rogue-Umpqua Divide Wilderness, which separates these two major river drainages, this moderate, 5.8-mile recommended hike offers mountain meadows and diverse ancient forests. The trail passes trees of mind-boggling size near the Cripple Camp Shelter and passes through a mix of dry and moist forest types with everything from Douglas-firs and incense cedars to Shasta red fir and sugar pine — some recently burned in a low-severity fire. Longer loop or hike options lead deeper into the wilderness if desired.

Extra points from Chandra

Cape Perpetua & Gwynn Creek

Hike the 6.5 mile loop from behind the Cape Perpetua Visitor Center, just south of Yachats on Hwy. 101, up Cook's Ridge to experience giant Sitka spruce trees and western hemlocks, then descend past ancient Douglas-firs with huge gnarled arms and furrowed bark along Gwynn Creek. Finish the loop on the Oregon Coast Trail back to the visitor center. This whole area is part of the Cape Perpetua Scenic Area in the Siuslaw National Forest.

Crabtree Valley

Some of the oldest Douglas-fir trees in Oregon can be found in this hidden-away area in a block of land managed by the Bureau of Land Management accessed northeast of Sweet Home. The maze of logging roads and steep terrain makes it a bit hard to access, but that's why this forest surrounding Crabtree Lake is still standing - protected from fire and human impacts. There are several groves of trees near Crabtree Lake that are 800-1,000 years old, though some require an off-trail effort to find them.

Shale Ridge

Along the North Fork of the Middle Fork of the Willamette River, near the crest of Aufderheide Drive (connecting Hwy 126 and Hwy 58), the Shale Ridge Trail follows the boundary between the Three Sisters and Waldo Lake Wilderness areas in the Willamette National Forest. An ancient forest of Douglas-fir, yew, cedar, and hemlock surrounds the trail, but the real highlight is a grove of giant western redcedars near the river, about 3 miles into the hike.

Zach Urness has been an outdoors reporter, photographer and videographer in Oregon for 12 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.

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Especially when the forgoing activities are followed by a hearty camp meal of, say, bratwurst, sauerkraut and pork 'n' beans with a side of barbecue-flavored potato chips and onion dip.

Not to be sexist, and I could be wrong here, but such groaning boards tend to be almost exclusively male-centric menu offerings.

In all my years of camping and backpacking, I've never heard a female outdoor enthusiast say that “oh, yea, kippered herring and squeeze-tube, bacon-flavored cheddar spread would go great on those Cheez-Its.”

Actually, I've never really heard a male camper say it.

Because everybody in the party already knows that.

Closer to home on an individual level, it's sort of like when the wife or significant other goes out to dinner with her friends ... so you get to cook the things that she can't stand visually or smell-wise.

Fried oysters (love 'em!) come to mind in both categories, as does the aforementioned sauerkraut.

Although never together.

After all, there are limits.

Especially when you have to air the house out before she gets back.

I digress.

Guy camping cuisine on the whole seems to be designed to facilitate the in-

tentional release of massive intestinal winds at your fellow campers.

It's a passed (pardon the pun) time that can devolve into something of a competitive sport.

In fact, prior to the current pandemic, the first time most males learn about social distancing is the tent spacing at an all-guys campout.

Which is why I've used my one-person backpack tent, even when car-camping.

It offers great portability in the event the wind shifts, and has generous vents on both sides.

Although to be honest, given my age and resulting digestive limitations, a lot of the previously dominant items have been stricken from the camping shopping list.

So to coin a pun, the ill wind is behind me.

Just to wrap things up, according to a follow-up story, the unnamed flagrantly flatulent person in the Vienna dust-up could face up to five days in jail for failing to pay the hefty fine.

It could be worse.

He could have to drive back to Salem with a vehicle-load of fellow campers.

It's a real gas.

FISHING THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: One more cast usually means another 20 minutes. If you get a strike, figure another hour. - Henry

Contact Henry Miller via email at HenryMiller SJ@gmail.com