

OUTDOORS



The Stayton Trails travel through forest and along the North Santiam River. ZACH URNESS / STATESMAN JOURNAL

The Best Hikes in the Area

Trails feature emerald forest, waterfalls, wildflowers

Zach Urness | Salem Statesman Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

The Willamette Valley has been bathed in sunshine the past few weeks, but knowing where to hike will be more difficult than ever this spring and summer. Last September’s Labor Day fires torched many of Salem’s favorite trails, east and northeast of town, and will keep most closed for an extended period.

Opal Creek, Shellburg Falls, Abiqua Falls and the Little North Santiam Trail — to name just a few — are closed indefinitely. This season, Salem hikers will need to expand their horizons to enjoy spring sunshine on the trail.

To help, we’ve put together a list of 26 of our favorite hikes in and around the capital city, with an assist from guidebook author Adam Sawyer, whose book “Best Easy Day Hikes Salem and Eugene,” just went on sale.

Many of the hikes near Salem are beautiful in spring and often overlooked. Here’s how we broke it down:

- Within city limits of Salem and Keizer, such as parks and community trails
- Just outside city limits, such as local wild-life refuges (10 to 25-minute drive)
- Hikes on the edges of the mountains, waterfalls, old-growth (one hour’s drive or less).

See the online edition of this story on StatesmanJournal.com for links to maps for the vast majority of these trails.

Hikes within Salem & Keizer

These are all pathways within city limits of Salem or Keizer. Some might be more walks than hikes, but that’s OK.

Riverfront to Minto-Brown Island Loop

It’s hard to overstate the importance of the Peter Courtney Minto Island Bridge that connects Riverfront and Minto Brown Island parks. Finished in 2017, the bridge connects Salem’s three signature downtown parks.

My favorite route is to begin at Riverfront, head across the bridge to Minto Island’s playground (a great spot to stop with kids for a picnic). Then, we head north on the Red Osprey Loop and along the Willamette River and back over the bridge to Riverfront Park and our car. The entire trek is about 4 to 5 miles and features two playgrounds (I often bike this route with my kids).

It’s quite possibly the most frequently traveled route in Salem — and you’ll often find joggers, bikers and hikers here. But that’s the whole idea.

Trailhead location: Just drive to the parking lot for Riverfront Park and carousel. If it’s too crowded, there’s pretty good street parking on nearby downtown streets. **Coordinates:** 44.9417378, -123.0425665.

Minto Brown Island Park west

You don’t have to start at Riverfront to enjoy Minto Brown Island Park. There are big and ob-

vious trailheads at the park that more easily allow exploring the park’s glorious west side.

Sawyer said his favorite route is the 3- to 4-mile Purple Rabbit / Blue Heron loops that weave through wetlands, dense forest and ox-bow lakes.

Trailhead location: Navigate into Minto-Island Park and follow the main road all the way to its back at a large parking lot and trailhead signs. **Coordinates:** 44.924777, -123.072774.

Croisan and Skyline Trails

The Croisan and Skyline Trails located in the Red Clay Hills are two “pocket trails” tucked into forested areas of a South Salem neighborhood. Thanks to the Salem Area Trail Alliance, these former user paths are now regularly maintained hiking trails. You can enjoy them individually, but if you’re willing to take a short walk through a pleasant neighborhood, you can connect both into a delightful, 3.4-mile urban out and back/semi-loop.

You can make a very pleasant 1.3-mile loop out of the Skyline Trails, an equally enjoyable 1.4-mile out and back with a bit more elevation loss and gain on the Croisan Scenic Trail, or if you’re willing to walk the few blocks in between, combine everybody into one 3.4-mile excursion. It’s also the recommended route because while the Skyline Natural Area Trailhead has plenty of public parking available, especially during non-school hours, while the Croisan Scenic Trailhead begins at the end of a residential drive with very limited on-street parking.

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A vaccination celebration at low tide



Fishing
Henry Miller
Guest columnist

There is this giddy, almost euphoric feeling that washes over you when after you get your second dose of the Pfizer or Moderna coronavirus vaccine.

And that solidifies after the two-week lag for maximum immunity.

At least that’s the consensus among fellow two-jabbers who we’ve talked with recently, all of whom expressed a profound sense of relief and gratitude.

Thus tentatively emboldened, Kay and I actually ventured out on a clamming expedition on the last day of March to Garibaldi, mask-less on the mud.

The experience proved to be productive both as a confidence- and a chowder-builder.

We both got our limits of cockles, although raking was more laborious and



Crowds were light on the first post-vaccination clamming outing of the pandemic. HENRY MILLER/SPECIAL TO STATESMAN JOURNAL

less productive than during previous trips, the last of which to that stretch of the coast was more than a year ago.

Theories ranged from a deteriorating skill set during the bivalve drought, or more likely the lack of muscle tone after a yearlong hiatus from the gym.

Or in the case of shellfish-collecting,

one might say that it was a dearth of mussel-tone.

Sorry.

And in the interest of public-service announcements and also of full disclosure, we both had our masks in our pockets in the event of extended close encounters.

The whole experience was almost, dare I say it, a return to feeling almost normal.

Meanwhile, back at the tide tables, which have taken on a new planning impetus.

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