

OUTDOORS



Pristine path

Pamelia Lake, Grizzly Peak offer unburned hike in Jefferson Wilderness

The Pamelia Lake and Grizzly Peak trails are two spots in the Mount Jefferson Wilderness that have not been burned by wildfire recently. The trail features Pamelia Creek, Pamelia Lake and Grizzly Peak's view of Mount Jefferson. PHOTOS BY ZACH URNESS/STATESMAN JOURNAL

Zach Urness | Salem Statesman Journal | USA TODAY NETWORK

The most striking thing about a hike to Pamelia Lake and Grizzly Peak is that for at least a few hours, or approximately 10 miles round-trip, you can forget about the wildfires that increasingly mark the Mount Jefferson Wilderness. The old-growth forest and crystalline creek, the green valley that cradles the lake and the 5,700-foot peak that rises above all look basically the same as they did a few decades ago. The same can't be said for a majority of trails surrounding Oregon's second-tallest mountain.

The Jefferson Wilderness has been hit by seven wildfires since 2000, including three of the most infamous in state history — the B&B Complex (2003), Whitewater Fire (2017) and Lionshead Fire (2020).

The result is that much, if not most, of this backcountry has been impacted by fire. The northern half of the wilderness is currently closed due to Lionshead Fire damage — and is likely to remain that way for 1 to 3 years — while the southern half is marked by numerous scars.

Wildfire and burn scars are a natural and important part of the ecosystem, and I've done a lot of fun exploring in them over the past few years, including in the Eight Lakes Basin. It's fascinating to watch the ways a forest responds to such a powerful disturbance over the short- and long-term.

But there's also something really nice about hiking and backpacking an unburned route, through the full shade of old-growth forest to an alpine lake and mountain peak with nary a blackened tree nor singed understory.

Permits and getting onto the trail at Pamelia

Pamelia Lake has long been one of the Jeff's most popular hikes and backpacking spots, which is why you've needed a special permit to visit since 1994.

The idea back then was to limit the number of people allowed in so that the forested lake wasn't overrun. The idea worked so well that the program was expanded this year to the entire Jeff, Three Sisters and Mount Washington wilderness areas.

Permits were released in one batch earlier this spring, and then on a rolling 7-day window during the summer.

To get one, just log onto Recreation.gov seven days before the date you want — be sure to pick either a day trip or overnight trip, since there are different permits for each. I picked a day hike, printed off the permits and was off to the forest with three members of my family who were visiting from Minnesota.

Drive through burn and into forest

The drive up Highway 22 through the Santiam Canyon is looking greener and somewhat more normal since the Labor Day Fires, but it was still striking for visitors to see the sheer size of the burn scar.

At just under 400,000 acres combined, the Lionshead and Beachie Creek fires were the fourth-largest wildfire in state history (it was recently surpassed by this year's Bootleg Fire), and the fact that its scar stretches all the way from Mount Jefferson to Lyons and Silver Falls — a distance of just over 40 miles — is pretty remarkable.

After driving past Detroit, evidence of the fire faded away as we turned left onto Pamelia Creek Road and began hiking down a trail highlighted by old-growth Douglas fir, hemlock and western red cedar, while Pamelia Creek bounced clear and cool down small waterfalls.

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What and how to know before you go — fishing, that is

Henry Miller

Special to Salem Statesman Journal
USA TODAY NETWORK

Consider this your one-stop online shopping site for outdoor recreational buzz-kills.

Or not, depending on what you find there.

Chin-up, happy campers.

While I think of myself as an upbeat, glass-half-full kind of person, one can't be too careful given the current state of the world.

Which is why, in addition to the weather forecast Portland, OR (weather.gov), road conditions and closures Road & Weather Conditions Map | TripCheck - Oregon Traveler Information and fires NWCC :: Home (nifc.gov) there is one other site that you should look into before heading out.

The Oregon Health Authority offers a buffet of links for potential hazards and closures that is a must-visit for outdoor recreation enthusiasts, particularly if you're going to be making a long drive to get to where you want to go.

Check it out at Oregon Health Authority : Recreational Advisories : Public Health News and Advisories : State of Oregon

As an example of the benefits of knowing before you go, remember the infamous Salem drinking-water ban in May 2018 caused by a toxic algae bloom at Detroit Lake?

There's a link on the OHA page to algae-bloom advisories statewide.

Next up is a link to what we in the newsroom used to refer to in the vernacular as "poop alerts," but more accurately are known as beach water quality advisories.

On three-week cycles from Memorial Day through Labor Day, water at selected Oregon beaches is sampled for fecal bacteria, and when levels reach alert levels, signs



Signs like this go up when there are closures for shellfish such as clams and mussels. HENRY MILLER/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

are posted at the site, and information is listed on the website as well as through texts on mobile devices.

If I may be allowed a moment of levity — and who couldn't use it at this point? — you want to go tide-pooling, not tide pooping.

Sorry.

Both the cyanobacteria blooms and beach water quality links have disclaimers that because of budget and staffing constraints, not every beach or water body in the state is checked.

But there is a lot of great information about what to watch for if you suspect there might be algae issues; and the beach monitoring page has a complete list of sampling sites from Seaside to Brookings.

Lastly, there is a link to fish and shellfish closures and sport fish and shellfish consumption advisories, the latter of which also are available on pages 22 and 23 of the

2021 Oregon Sport Fishing Regulations.

Why the need for such due diligence? True story.

Not once, but twice, admittedly over the course of three decades, I made the drive from Salem to the coast when clamming, in the first instance, and to collect mussels in the second case, both of which were open.

Only to arrive with cooler, shovels, rakes and other tools in hand to find that the clamming/mussel-gathering sites were closed because of health advisories.

Oh, poo!

To save time and avoid multiple web searches, there is a link on the Oregon Health Authority website to sign up for alerts via email or text message.

The intent here is not to be a summer bummer, to throw shade on your whoopees.

But given the current weather, water conditions, fires, drought and heat waves in the Beaver State (what's next, locusts?), it pays to be on the safe side.

Belated birthday wishes

A mutual acquaintance informed me on Sunday that it was Kerry Elwood's birthday.

I met Elwood, of Salem, in 2014 when I did a story about his construction of the "Water Woody" houseboat that was launched that 4th of July weekend.

Congrats, Kerry.

If you want to see an example of his craftsmanship, including his nonpareil airbrush art, check out his website at <https://www.waterwoody.com>

Congrats, Kerry.

Thanks for the memories

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