

Brush Creek

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The first part provides the most challenge, as there is no discernible trail until the top of the ridge. This section of the trail has been engulfed by waist-high brush, whose clusters of branches I had to pull apart to squeeze my way through the shrubbery.

Along the entire trail there are sections of well-defined path and sections where it has completely worn away. This first half mile is hidden by heavy ceanothus. Snowbrush, as it's known, is a large shrub that grows quickly in fire-torn areas and remains green year-round.

It isn't easy to reach the ridge and view, as the brush requires intense bushwhacking to get through, a long, tedious process. We opted to start up the hill about 100 feet from the original trail, which took us meandering through young conifers and significantly less snowbrush.

Eventually, the hiking became easier and the views began to open up.

Why was the trail abandoned?

In the late 1900s, the Brush Creek Trail was a well-established, if rarely used pathway.

"It's always been in this category of being seldom used and seldom maintained. And, so, those folks that would hike it were generally those that were seeking greater solitude," Kallio said.

Then in 2003, the B&B Complex, a 90,000 acre wildfire, torched the Jefferson Wilderness, including sections of the Brush Creek Trail. The forest burned around the trail, leaving behind copious amounts of debris, such as fallen trees, and significant damage to the trail itself.

According to Ian Reid, the Sisters District Ranger for Deschutes National Forest, the Forest Service restored the trail after the fire. However, a lack of consistent use made it difficult to maintain and the path was "swallowed up" by snowbrush.

The brush led to a safety issue as people began to get lost coming off the Pacific Crest Trail. Particularly, as the brush is most heavy on a series of rises, which makes it impossible to see the roadway or trailhead from the hill. For anyone, except experienced route finders, losing your way through the brush is easy.

"What happened was that people would come off the top from the PCT and would get lost in the ceanothus... it was a major health and safety issue," Reid said.

Ultimately, the Forest Service made the decision to abandon it in the 2010s.

Stunning views from the ridge

As the trail tracks along the ridge, the brush mostly disappears. Hikers are left with forest debris, such as old logs, and panoramic views, that I found to be well worth the slough.

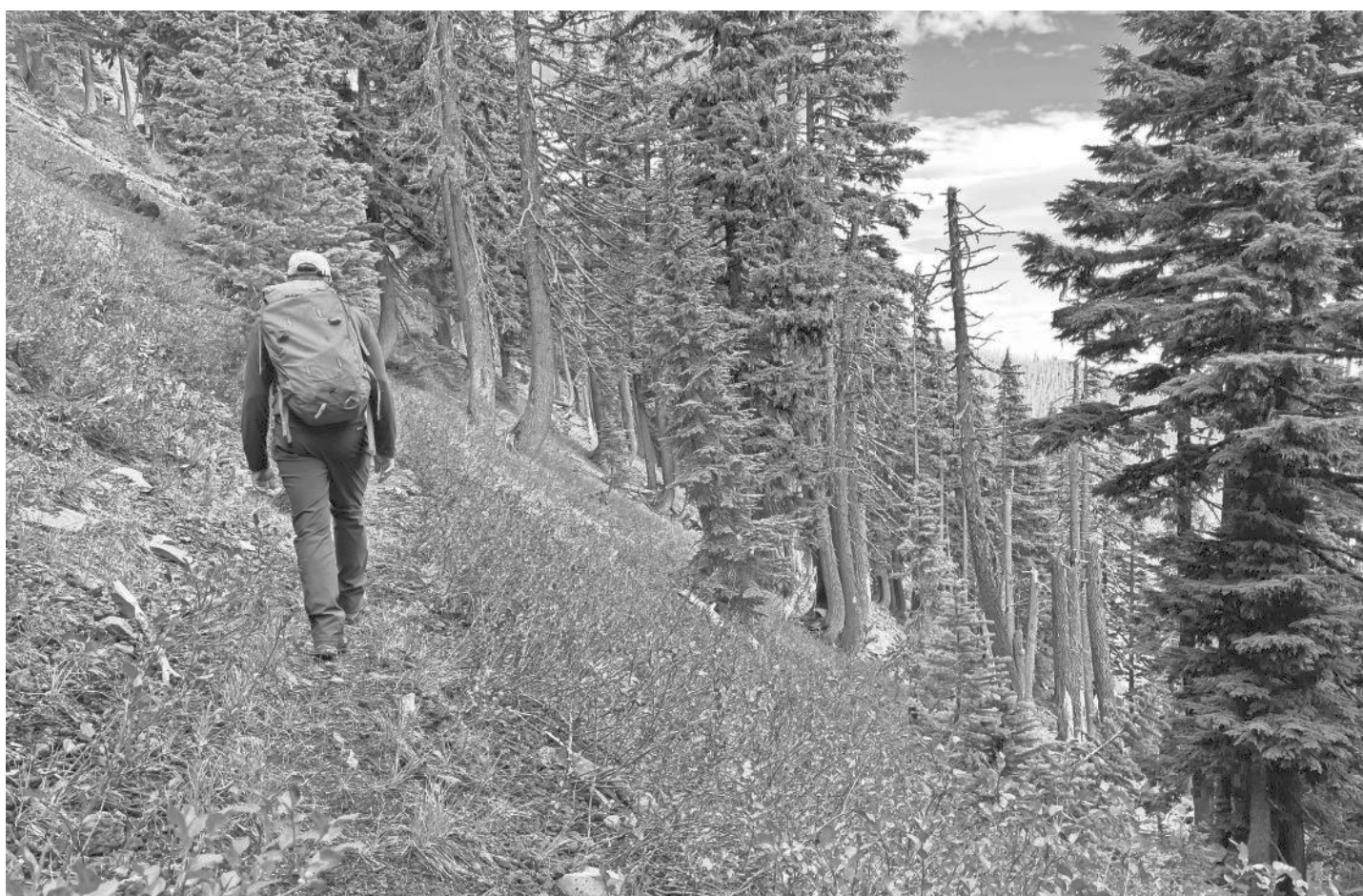
Each direction offers striking and expansive views of the wilderness. Green ridges overlap in the distance. Formidable, snowy mountains rise above the horizon, close enough to see the definition in their rocky faces.

From the ridge, seven major mountains are visible, including Mount Washington and the Three Sisters. Several minor peaks, such as Black Butte, are also in view.

This view is one of the reasons Kallio is fighting to reestablish the trail. Since he first hiked it in the 1980s, the scenery and relative solitude kept bringing him back.

"The Brush Creek scenic vistas are unmatched," Kallio said.

To the left of the crest is a view of the B & B Complex burn scar, with several peaks rising behind it. Almost two decades after the fire, the valley remains devoid of much green, with only clusters



Greg Kallio walks along a section of the Brush Creek Trail



Snowbrush littered with fallen logs covers the hillside that Brush Creek begins on. PHOTOS BY EDDY BINFORD-ROSS

of color dotting the landscape.

The hike continues along the ridge for a while, with more stunning views. The trail does disappear in places, but simply following the crest poses little difficulty and eventually took us to a major section of defined trail.

Along the ridge signs of animal life are prominent. In the patches of snow that dotted the area, we saw deer tracks, bear prints and scat.

The crest continues to narrow until the end, when the conifers clear to reveal a snow-capped Mount Jefferson which, until then, had only been glimpsed through the trees.

The mountain appears in shockingly close proximity across a small expanse of forest green interspersed with brown splotches. Snow clings to the mountain-side in the dips between ridges that remain bare this early in the fall.

After that, the trail starts off the other side of the crest in a series of switchbacks. They are in relatively good shape, considering the lack of maintenance but Reid believes some of them may have to be rebuilt if the trail is opened again.

From there we trekked on a visible path, through a hillside of red-leaved plants. Then the trail dips down into a wooded area and up a smaller ridge, where Brush Creek merges with the PCT.

The Fight to Restore

In the fall of 2018, Kallio began doing volunteer trail work for the Forest Service. At the same time, he started talking to people about the trail, which he learned had been abandoned.

As someone who had been hiking the trail for several decades and had fallen in love with what the path offered, Kallio felt that letting it remain in a state of

disrepair was a disservice.

"I gathered other interested people, including Mark and Holly Scott, the stewards of the Jefferson Lake Trail, and we formed a small group of experienced trail people... we feel we have the capability of doing it," Kallio said.

Kallio and his group want the Forest Service to let them do the maintenance work to reopen the trail.

But, the group can't do anything until the Forest Service gives them permission. And, in this case, it isn't as simple as the agency suddenly deciding to reopen it. Because of the state of the trail, Reid said there is both environmental and legal work to do.

Earlier that decade, the agency had begun a project, the Mount Jefferson trails environmental assessment, to look into trails in the wilderness. Brush Creek, abandoned by that time, was part of it.

According to Reid, the project was put on hold, so that focus could be placed on starting the Central Cascades Wilderness Permit System, the system that now requires hikers to get a day or overnight permit to enter the Jefferson, Three Sisters and Mount Washington Wilderness areas in an effort to control crowding.

That left Brush Creek and several other trails in a state of limbo.

"We know there is a need to address those issues," Reid said.

As a result, the future of Brush Creek and others remains uncertain. However, the state these trails are in now contributes to an ongoing issue for search and rescue teams, as people underestimate the challenge that inconsistently visible paths present to navigation.

"When I started as a ranger here, the Sheriff's Office pulled me aside to talk about the safety problems with user and

abandoned trails like Brush Creek. They said it was a real problem," Reid said.

The future of Brush Creek and others

Several other forgotten trails track through the eastern side of the Jefferson, abandoned and overgrown as well.

These abandoned trails, along with "unauthorized" user ones not created by the Forest Service, are considered "social trails." There are a few hundred miles of these social trails within the area of the permit system, including Brush Creek. Some of these trails are "attractive and sustainable," with the agency considering adding some to their inventory, according to Reid.

"We certainly understand the desire for folks to access their public lands and wilderness," Reid said.

However, before action is taken to incorporate any of these trails into the existing system, the Forest Service wants to collect another year of permit data. Their goal is to better understand use trends and demand for trails in the area.

After that, there will be environmental impact studies, which will look at how these trails might impact nature. This process is necessary for Brush Creek, as new trail construction will be required.

Realistically, this process will take several years. Work would likely not begin on Brush Creek or the other forgotten trails in the area until at least 2025, if the Forest Service decides to revive them.

A success story

While the task of restoring the Brush Creek Trail may seem daunting, there is reason for optimism.

To the north, the Jefferson Lake Trail was also in a state of disrepair and abandoned by the Forest Service. But Holly and Mark Scott, who are helping Kallio now, were able to reopen it, making it a unique pathway that accesses less traveled parts of the Jefferson Wilderness.

Kallio knows that it might take time, but it'll be worth it.

"Hopefully, we'll have a favorable reply at some point. But we're patient, you know, we're going to keep at it. We know that it's not going to happen overnight," Kallio said.

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annual, or \$300 for a life membership.

Oregon Bass & Panfish Club: The final vax-or-mask organization with in-person meetings on the list, it meets at 7 p.m. on the third Thursday of the month in Carvlin Hall, St. Philip Neri Catholic Church, 2408 SE 16th Ave., Portland.

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- Affidavit Fee - \$10.00 per Affidavit requested

While the only one on the list to meet outside of Salem, it's the largest group in the Pacific Northwest for non-competitive warmwater-fishing enthusiasts.

And full disclosure, it's my go-to group for information about bass and panfish hot spots and volunteer opportunities. Check it out online at <https://www.oregonbassandpanfishclub.com>

Dues are \$20 individual, \$25 a family annually. Willamette Valley Mushroom Society: The group is taking a hybrid approach to group activities for those who are wild about wild mushrooms.

Because of a severe case of "screen fatigue" among members for the monthly Zoom 'shroom meetings, the society has opted for setting up members-only, small-group mushroom hunts with masks and social distancing required.

You may end up a fungal fanatic. Check it out online at <https://www.wvmssa-lem.org>

Dues are \$20 individual, \$30 a family. Salem Audubon Society: In-person monthly meetings and group field trips are suspended until November "at the earliest," according to the chapter website.

But the monthly "Birder's Night" presentations with sharing of sightings by members are held via Zoom at 6:30 p.m. on the second Tuesday of the month.

And monthly online Birding Webinars (the replacement for the monthly meetings) are available via links on the chapter website.

Check it out at <https://salemaudubon.org>



Group trips, surveys and outings such as this previous bird count at Minto-Brown Island Park in Salem are on hold because of covid precautions for Salem Audubon Society. HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

Membership is \$43 individual, \$58 a family annually with snail-mail newsletters, or \$35 and \$50 with an emailed version.

Tight lines and happy hunting. THOUGHT FOR THE WEEK: Anyone who's stood next to me while I'm fly casting has long known the life-saving potential of social distancing.

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