

Elkhorn

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A hike along the Hoffer Lakes and Crawfish Basin trails in the northern Elkhorn Mountains offers the opportunity to get an up-close look at this granitic rock formed in the basement of the earth's crust.

The trail begins at the boat ramp at Anthony Lake Campground and skirts several walk-in campsites. Soon, it turns south and begins a moderate climb alongside Parker Creek. A knee-deep pool holds several skittery three-inch trout. As the fish dart from shadow to shadow, I glimpse a green marbled pattern on their backs and bright red lower fins edged in white: the identifying marks of brook trout. Planted in Anthony Lake for spring and summer anglers to catch, a few brook trout have migrated up the creek and established a naturally reproducing population of small but hardy fish.

Exposed tree roots grasp the rising trail like gnarled fingers. Stepping from root to root, I rest my hand on the side of a 10-foot granitic boulder. The feel of its rough texture brings me to a sudden stop. I run my fingers over its granular surface and make a tactile connection with a chain of volcanic islands that existed 170 million years ago in a subtropical sea. Back then, as North America began to slowly move westward, it collided with the arc of islands. The collision forced the oceanic crust beneath the western edge of our continent and created a mass of molten rock under the continental crust. The hot rock cooled very slowly, allowing large grains to form. Subsequent crustal folding and faulting tilted and lifted a huge portion of this granitic rock from 8 miles below the earth's surface to rise as the Elkhorn Mountains. Erosion exposed the slanting peaks, ridges and boulders, including the one I'm touching now. I give the huge rock a friendly pat and move on.

A quarter-mile up the trail I find a grassy glade fringing one side of the shallow basin holding Hoffer Lakes. On the opposite side, an enormous granitic slab angles down steeply from Lees Peak to the water's edge. Subalpine firs and whitebark pines cling to the narrow slots of soil within cracks in the hard surface. Leaving the main path, I slowly circle the larger of the two lakes; dozens of explorer's gentians dot the shore, their vivid indigo petals facing the sun. Each bloom's pleated cup closes up in rainy weather to retain heat around the flower's reproductive structures. Usually, the last mountain wildflower to bloom each year, gentians herald the end of the growing season. Mountain meadows save their best for last.

A sudden movement among the electric-blue blossoms catches my eye. I've flushed a tiny Pacific tree frog from its hiding place. Cradling this olive-sized creature in my hand for a moment, I notice the black eye stripe typical of its species. Its dark throat tells me it's a male. His skin color is a gorgeous blend of bright green and coppery brown. This color pattern is only temporary, as these frogs change color in response to envi-



Autumn color in Elkhorn Mountains. PHOTOS BY BOBBIE SNEAD/SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

If you go

Directions: Drive I-84 north of Baker City for 19 miles. Take the North Powder Exit 285 and follow Anthony Lake signs west for 21.3 miles to Anthony Lake Campground. Follow signs to boat-ramp and day-use parking.

Best months: August - October

Length: 6.4 miles round trip

Duration: 5 hours

Elevation gain: 900 feet

Age range: suitable for kids 10 years old and up

ronmental conditions. Tomorrow my little friend could be entirely brown or green or a completely new palette of earthy pigments.

Returning to the trail, I follow it as it ascends a rocky hill and soon parallels a linear meadow nearly a half-mile long. Last spring it was an Elysian flower field buzzing with pollinators; now dry seed-pods rattle in the breeze. Soon the meadow will rest in winter's white silence.

The trail joins a dirt road and switchbacks up to an unnamed pass with a sweeping view of the northern Elkhorns. Van Patten Peak, Gunsight Mountain, Angell Peak and Lees Peak point their slabbed summits above the surrounding ridges. Anthony and Hoffer lakes pool below in basins scooped out by long-vanished Pleistocene glaciers. Storm-twisted whitebark pines clutch



Granite shows through in the Elkhorn Mountains.

the rocky soil, preventing it from washing downslope in spring runoff. My mind drifts back to this morning and the small brook trout finning in the clear pool in Parker Creek. They have the tenacious old pines to thank for the clear water that they call home.

Heading south along the Crawfish Basin Trail, I soon round the end of the ridge formed by the high peaks. Below me the huge elk pasture called Crawfish Meadow beckons, but I content myself with sitting on a trailside boulder to gaze down at the lush valley. An elk trail, worn deep by the hooves of many generations, bisects the meadow as a narrow

creek makes slow, looping curls along its southern edge. A granitic knob rises from the valley floor like the tip of an iceberg in a softly meadowed sea. I reach down and touch the grainy rock upon which I sit. Its journey began on a subtropical island millions of years ago; it traveled beneath North America and now rests as one tiny bit of the high Elkhorn Mountains. I wonder where it will go next as it continues its passage through time.

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but the delivery is set for 1,200 half-pounders and 75 1-pound 'bows.

Walling Pond is at 16th and McGilchrist streets, with the parking area off 16th.

Coho counts still strong

This year through Oct. 15, more than 18,000 adult coho "silver" salmon had gone through the fish ladders at Willamette Falls at Oregon City heading upriver to spawn, including a daily high of 983 on Oct. 2.

And a lot of those fish are heading up the North Santiam River with 238 counted at Upper and Lower Bennett dams at Stayton Island through Oct. 10. For current fish counts, go to: ODFW Willamette Falls Fish Counts (state.or.us) or Upper and Lower Bennett Dams Fish Counts | Oregon Department of Fish & Wildlife (myodfw.com)

On those pages, you also can sign up for email alerts for updated counts.

Good news for ocean anglers

Some of the temporary rules for halibut and bottomfish that went into effect this year could be repeated for the 2022 seasons.

Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife biologists will be making the proposals at the November meeting of the Pacific Fishery Management Council.

Among those are allowing anglers to keep bottom-dwelling rockfish during all-depth halibut fishing in the offshore zones from the Columbia River south to Humbug Mountain near Brookings, opening all-depth halibut fishing seven days a week in May and/or September, and allowing a two-halibut daily bag limit before Labor Day.

Fishing days and limits were expanded this year because ocean conditions and pandemic concerns kept a lot of anglers home during much of the spring season and into the summer season.

You can chime in on the 2022 halibut or bottomfish proposals, or make some of your own, during a virtual (online) meeting from 6 to 7:30 p.m. on Oct. 27.

Links to the meeting, as well as an online survey, will be available several days before the meeting at ODFW Sport Pacific Halibut Management (state.or.us)

Thought for the week: Which is the bigger downer: Eating the last incredible tomato out of the garden af-



You can bag a bass similar to this largemouth at St Louis Ponds near Gervais as fish go into the big-eating season during preparation for winter. HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

ter a successful growing season OR putting the camping gear away for the winter? Discuss among yourselves.

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