

Trails

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If this sounds like the plot of the movie “Goonies,” you’re not far wrong. Hollywood stole much of the story for that goofball film. Digging on the beach or on public land is not allowed, but hiking is fine. Ready to come look for clues?

Searching for treasure clues

First hike to the mountain’s summit for an overview of the area. Then follow the new section of the Oregon Coast Trail toward the beach at Manzanita. Along the way, I’ll tell you more about both treasures.

To start, drive Highway 101 north of Tillamook 28 miles to a “Neahkahnie Mtn Trail” sign at Sunset Drive, between mileposts 41 and 42. Turn inland on a gravel road for 0.4 mile and park at a wide spot before you reach a locked gate.

Near a portable restroom on the left, look for a trail sign where the summit path begins. Steep switchbacks lead up through meadows 0.9 mile to a ridgetop crossing of an old service road. Continue straight on a path that contours 0.6 mile around the wooded back of the mountain to an unmarked opening. If the trail starts to go downhill, you’ve gone too far. From this opening, scramble 50 feet up to the right to find the summit meadow viewpoint.

This perch atop Neahkahnie is a great place to unpack your lunch, get out a pair of binoculars and start looking for treasure clues.

Twenty miles of beach stretch before you. A long sand spit separates Nehalem Bay from the Pacific. To the right, the cliffs of Neahkahnie Mountain stick out half a mile into the ocean.

Those cliffs have caught many a ship. The Alaska current then typically sweeps the remains south onto the Nehalem spit near Manzanita. Why have clues been turning up inland, in the bay? And why would the Spanish be sailing here anyway?

To answer those questions, we need a little background in early sea expeditions and Spanish gold.

Drake's treasure hauls

In 1577, the swashbuckling Englishman Sir Francis Drake became the first European to venture north of California by sea. In those days, Spanish conquistadors were shipping boatloads of Aztec and Incan gold to Spain. England, virtually at war with Spain, allowed its merchant ships to loot any Spanish treasure ships they could find. The daring Drake took up the offer. He filled his hold with pirated gold off the Pacific coast of South America. Then he realized that bringing his booty back around Cape Horn would mean facing the entire Spanish fleet on the trip home.

In desperation Drake struck north, hoping to discover a “Northwest Passage” — a sea route to England around the unmapped shore of North America. It’s unclear how far north he sailed, or whether he actually landed in Oregon, but he certainly didn’t like the weather. His log complains of “most vile, thicke, and stinking foggies.”

When storms forced Drake to abandon hopes of a shortcut, he tried the unthinkable: He sailed west, circling the globe via Africa. Drake brought his gold back to London the long way, and was hailed a hero.

In the years that followed, Spanish galleons routinely crossed the Pacific between colonies in the Philippines and



Neahkahnie Mountain. WILLIAM SULLIVAN/FOR THE REGISTER-GUARD



Neahkahnie Mountain as seen from a Manzanita beach. WILLIAM SULLIVAN/FOR THE REGISTER-GUARD

Mexico. Several treasure ships were lost at sea — and several tribes along the Oregon Coast have legends of ancient shipwrecks. But people didn’t connect the two until the 1850s, when Gold Rush miners began spreading out from California, snooping after rumors of gold.

Decades of treasure (and shipwreck) hunts

The most widely circulated story describes an early Spanish wreck at the base of Neahkahnie Mountain. Thirty survivors made it to the beach, ferrying the ship’s treasure ashore in a longboat. The men dragged a chest up onto the mountain’s slopes and dug a hole. Knowing that Indians feared disturbing the graves of the dead, the captain shot his black Caribbean slave and buried him on top of the treasure. Then the captain shot or drove away the crew members who wouldn’t fit in the ship’s longboat, and he ordered the remainder to row him back across the ocean toward Mexico.

By 1870, a gold digger named Pat Smith had become so infatuated with this story that he married a Clatsop woman to get inside information from the tribe. In 1890, Smith’s excavations revealed several strange boulders, now on display in the Tillamook County Pioneer Museum. The rocks are inscribed

with arrows, crosses and the letters “DEW.” Smith believed they were coded directions to the treasure site. Speculation mounted when people found chunks of beeswax washing up, some stamped with old insignia, and one with the number “67.”

Beeswax was in fact a common cargo on Spanish ships. The priests who oversaw churches in South America complained that tallow candles blackened the church interior. They demanded that votive candles be made of beeswax, which doesn’t smoke. But wax-making bees are not native to South America.

For an empire as broad as Spain’s, this was not a problem. A species of bee in the Philippines produced plenty of wax. Each year, when a cargo ship was sent across the Pacific, it brought tons of Philippine beeswax to light the churches of South America. The ships that made this voyage were huge, with hundreds of passengers. Each annual ship was so valuable that its cargo was catalogued carefully in a manifest.

In 2007, researchers studying the manifests revealed that 33 of the galleons from the Philippines had never arrived in America. Some of those ships might have been blown off course by Pacific storms to wreck in Oregon. The two most likely candidates, according to the researchers, were the *Santo Christo de Burgos*, lost in 1693, and the *San Fran-*

cisco Xavier, which disappeared in 1705.

Using metal detectors, investigators in Oregon discovered magnetic irregularities in Nehalem Bay. Could the ship have been washed over the sand spit by the Cascadia Subduction tsunami of 1700? If so, the ship could only be the *Santo Christo de Burgos*, which wrecked before that date.

With growing excitement, divers were sent into Nehalem Bay to inspect the underwater site. Instead of a shipwreck, however, they found discarded railroad rails.

An Oregon treasure

If you’re still eating lunch on top of Neahkahnie Mountain, it’s time to hike in quest of a better treasure.

Walk back down the mountain the way you came for 0.6 mile, but when you reach the old gravel service road, follow it left. It descends 1.2 miles back to the gate on the road where you left your car. Just 100 feet before the gate, a sign marks a new section of the Oregon Coast Trail to the left. Follow this path through the woods half a mile to a viewpoint overlooking an old clearcut.

What kind of treasure is this?

A good one, actually. What you’re looking at is a partnership among public and private landowners, tribes, counties, volunteers and donors to finish building a 362-mile trail the length of the Oregon Coast. Until recently, the OCT route from Neahkahnie Mountain to Manzanita had involved walking the shoulder of Highway 101. The new 2.5-mile route uses easements across private land, under a powerline and in the highway right-of-way for a trail completely off the pavement.

Projects like this are underway all up and down the Oregon Coast, aiming to complete an off-highway route for the OCT within a decade.

That will be a true Oregon treasure. Perhaps it’s no surprise the visionary trail builders started digging here at Neahkahnie Mountain, the home of treasure tales that might come true.

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new anglers, particularly younger prospects.

The second is to get so-called lapsed anglers back into the game. Those are former rod-and-reelers who walked away because of other commitments such as college or careers, or were transplants unfamiliar with the opportunities.

“I think that’s always one of our goals, to recruit and retain,” Reesman said, “and to reactivate our anglers.”

But wait. There’s more (events, that is).

If you are a kid, or you’ve got kids, or are just interested in finding out about fishing as a newbie or a used-to-be, there are several upcoming opportunities.

Attending the events is free, but adults and kids ages 12 to 17 who participate in fishing need a fishing license. You need to purchase those in advance. There are no on-site sales.

Family Fishing Events within striking distance of Salem are: From 9:30 a.m. until 1:30 p.m. on May 7 at the Alton Baker Canoe Canal (Alton Baker Park) in Eugene; and from 9 a.m. until 2 p.m. on May 14 at Sheridan Pond.

“If the weather’s nice I think we’re going to have a lot of people there,” Reesman said about the Alton Baker fishing clinic. “I’ve gotten a lot of calls from folks who are interested in bringing their groups.

“I think it might be a little bit crazy ...



Trout stocking has resumed at Silverton Reservoir after the annual winter hiatus. HENRY MILLER / SPECIAL TO THE STATESMAN JOURNAL

in a good way,” she added, then laughed.

For information about the Alton Baker event, call Reesman at (541) 686-7864. For the Sheridan Pond event, call Jonathan Cox at (971) 673-6034.

For more information about all of the events statewide, and to get directions or check out the trout-stocking schedules for the rest of 2022, go to the links at: <https://myodfw.com/articles/take-family-fishing>

In other news

Stock up on the Dramamine — And make your reservations.

Opening day of the spring all-depth halibut season off the central Oregon coast is May 12. Fishing is open daily through June 30.

The near-shore halibut central coast season in waters 240 feet or less depth opens daily starting May 1.

Central coast is defined as the area between Cape Falcon, near Manzanita, south to Humbug Mountain just south of Port Orford.

Speaking about stocking up... - Silver Creek Reservoir, better known as Silverton Reservoir, was scheduled to be stocked for the first time this year the week of April 18 through 22 with a shad

less than 3,000 keeper-size (8 inch) rainbow trout.

And a similar delivery (2,000-plus keepers) is planned for the week of April 25 through 29.

To get there, take Silverton Road east from Salem until it comes to a T at West Main in Silverton. Turn left on Main, then just after crossing the bridge; take a right on North Water and watch for the entrance to Silverton Reservoir Marine Park on the right several miles up the road.

There is a \$5 day-use fee payable by credit or debit card at the parking lot.

Two-fisted fishing is expanded — If you have a two-rod validation with your fishing license, you now can use it the length of the Willamette River, including tributaries, that are open to fishing for hatchery Chinook salmon, hatchery steelhead, trout, warmwater fish such as bass.

The lone exception is fishing for sturgeon, which remains restricted to one rod per angler.

The temporary rule change expands the two-rod zone above Willamette Falls.

The use of two rods, with validation, has been allowed downstream from the falls on the Willamette since March 1.

The validation is a \$28 add-on to the \$44 annual resident fishing license and \$9.75 Columbia River Basin Endorsement.

Thought for the week: Road trips into the outback verify the truism that the stronger the radio signal, the more religious the station.

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