

TREE'S COMPANY

on the cover

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For the TODAY

Everyone has their own idea of what makes a good trail. Common considerations include:

Will I fall off the side and tumble to my doom? Will I come home with a persistent rash? How many new followers will a photo of this place get me?

For me and my BRF (Best Running Friend), a good trail has at least one section that looks like fairies are hiding behind every tree, just waiting to pop back on to that toadstool you just scared them from. The trail should be flat enough to be runnable, but not so flat you don't get some hike breaks without apologizing to your partner for slowing them down; and should have some nice downhills to give your glutes a break.

A note for non-runners: a good running trail is almost always also a good hiking trail, which is not always true the other way around.

The trail should be far enough away to feel like an adventure but not so far that you use a full tank of gas getting there and back.

There are optional fun things to keep the trek from feeling like a workout, like a few sections where the light suddenly dims and the underbrush goes from bright green to dark brown and you pretend to keep your eyes out for witches in the area, gathering eye of newt and wing of bat. Those sections are best if just long enough to quicken the pulse but not so long as to get downright scary.

Also a bonus are enough fellow outdoor enthusiasts on the trail, but not so many that you get a sore throat from saying, "Excuse me," "Thank you," and "It's okay, she's friendly" every few minutes.

The she to whom I refer is my trail dog, because for me and the BRF, a dogs-allowed policy is a must, which does narrow the field a bit.

There is a trail on the Central Coast that ticks all these boxes, and thanks to the work of some hardy volunteers it just got twice as long. The newly dubbed "Cascade Head Rainforest Trail" starts (or ends) at the junction of Three Rocks Road and

Highway 101 and runs parallel to the highway for roughly three and a half miles before reaching Forest Road 1867.

The second section starts just across the forest road, and continues for a little more than three miles down the other side of Cascade Head to just south of Neskowin. The new more-than-seven-mile experience is part of the Oregon Coast Trail and provides a nice break from the road and beach sections that make up a large portion of this state-long scenic pedestrian excursion.

The north section is not new, it just fell into disuse after winter storms in 2007 and 2008 dropped trees too big to scale or for most trail tools to clear. The work required to re-open it was on a scale the managers, the Hebo District of the US Forest Service, took a while to get to. But the staff and volunteers of Trailkeepers of Oregon (TKO) were ready and waiting when the work was finally done.

"A lot of huge trees came down on that trail section and it effectively closed it," said TKO Executive Director Steve Kruger. "Forest Service staff took care of the largest trees and more technical work so that our volunteers would not be put in danger and were able to work on the trail."

The first time my BRF and I tackled it, there were still a few rough sections and we took one wrong turn that fortunately turned out okay. But we were extremely impressed. The Trailkeepers do a mean job of restoration; the surface of the trail was well groomed and many sections are even wide enough to run side by side; pretty rare on the coast.

Close enough to but not on the Cascade Head Preserve (hence the dogs-allowed policy), the trail has many sections with stands of the massive trees which outlasted those big storms. And the fungus among us was in full force. Unlike me, my BRF isn't a mushroom fan. So many of our fall runs are punctuated with, "Where'd you go? Are you looking at mushrooms again?"

She does, however, love a good shelf fungus, which you can usually find on the sides of tall trees for the greater portion of the year. Many of our discussions hinge on whether or not a fairy or elf would fit on a shelf fungus. We find it a fairy good way to spend a day.



Scout, the trail dog



Trailkeepers of Oregon at work on the Cascade Head Rainforest Trail