

Finding the silver lining in the falls

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The Clackamas Print

I had to go visit the largest state park in Oregon, Silver Falls, which is just one hour away from Clackamas Community College's main campus in Oregon City. It is a straight shot south down Highway 213 which turns to Highway 214 as it approaches the park. Signs led to South Falls Picnic Area C parking lot. There is a \$5 parking fee. I followed a broad path downstream a few hundred yards to historic Silver Falls Lodge. It is a rustic log cabin style building. It had a large stone fireplace with a crackling fire blazing. A host said the fire is always burning through the day and pointed out a native plant and wildlife exhibit that was set up through the café area. There is a small food concession available. I found they had free detailed color trail maps with photos.

The park is more than 9,000 acres with 24 miles of walking paths, 14 miles of horse trails and four miles of bike trails. Its main allure is the Trail of Ten Falls, which is a designated National Recreation Trail. It is said to be one of America's most impressive waterfall day hikes. As the name implies, it features 10 waterfalls, five of which are more than 100 feet tall all in a fairly easy seven mile loop hike that returns you to the starting point. At four of the falls the trail takes you behind the cascade through impressive and mossy caverns.

Standing on the path, just 20 feet from the edge of where Silver Creek seems to fall off the edge of the earth, I felt vertigo. I continued down the winding path and in a few hundred yards was in a large dripping cavern behind the wide silver vale of South Falls. I tucked my camera in my jacket as there was an ever-present mist here. After another short walk I sat in a Zen-like state watching the perpetual explosion of spray as the 177-foot falls crashed into the pool below. I snapped a photo realizing that there were nine more falls to admire on this hike.

I headed down a paved path which pasted a county style gift shop then on about a hundred yards to the overlook of South Falls. From here you take a paved trail to the right. It offers great views, and then loops down into the canyon and behind South Falls.



Double Falls is one of the 10 waterfalls in Silver Creek Falls Park, the largest state park in Oregon.



This is one of 10 sights along the scenic seven-mile trail just outside of Silverton.

A few hundred yards beyond South Falls is a junction at a scenic footbridge. Don't cross the bridge unless you are ready to return or for the photo opportunity. Instead take the unpaved path along the creek. This path will come to a series of switch-back wooden stair steps leading down and to the trail behind Lower South Falls' broad 93 foot cascade.

Beyond Lower South Falls the trail forks again. There is good signage and the trail map was handy to see the distance to the next falls. At this point you can turn right and climb the steeper ridge trail to the canyon rim and parking lot, for a shorter hike of 2.8 miles.

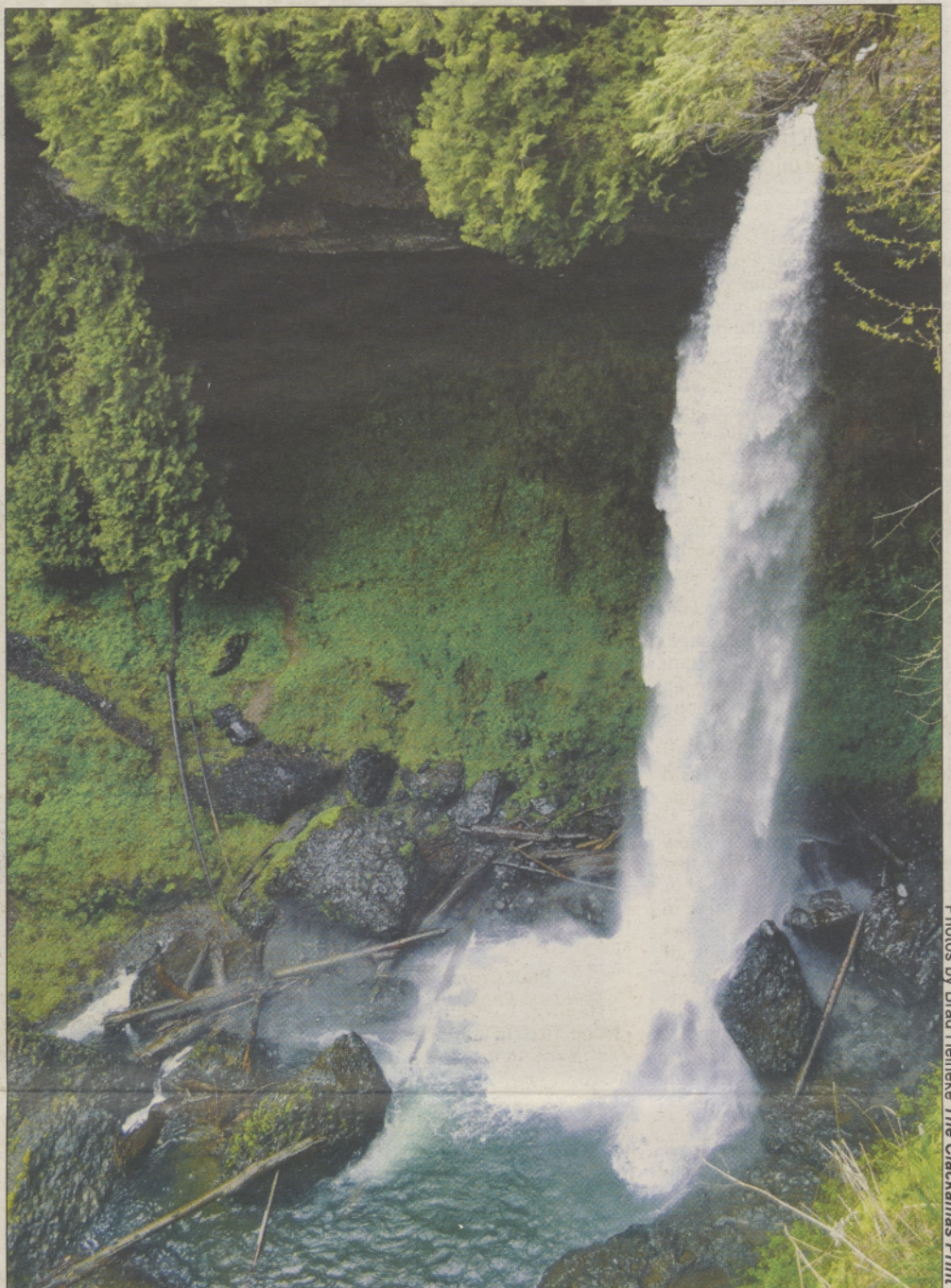
I continued straight and headed up the north fork of Silver Creek to Lower North Falls. At a footbridge just above the falls, I took the 250-yard side trail to visit and photograph Double Falls. Back on the main trail you will hike another mile passing Drake and Middle North Falls to the Winter Falls trail junction. Each falls has its own unique beauty; they were all stunning.

At this point, you can turn right for a 5.1-mile loop or continue on to see three more falls: Twin, Lower North and North Falls. Here there is the North parking area and restroom. I then headed down the two-mile return Ridge Trail through huge old growth fir and hemlock trees and patches of trillium flowers back to the South Falls area, the lodge and car.

This was an amazing hike and a photographer's dream. I consider it an easy hike; it is often rated as moderate. The trail is well maintained and smooth. It is fairly level most of the way; the 700 feet elevation change through the hike largely includes stair steps. The lure of the next falls and the enjoyable rest while viewing them make the hike seem shorter. There are even some rest benches at a few points. I noticed that dogs are not allowed on the falls trails.

This is of course an easy day trip; however, tent camping and small cabins are available to rent. There is also a convention area with actual houses for accommodations and a convention lodge that has three meals a day available for purchase by anyone. On the return trip we stopped in Silverton which is a cool little town 15 mile outside the park. We found a great restaurant and bar that had creek side balcony seating.

I highly suggest this as a "must do" hike. It is a close to home, wilderness nirvana with spectacular views. Visit www.oregonstateparks.org for details and pricing.



The 177-foot tall South Falls is located just 100 yards away from the historic Silver Falls lodge. It is one of 10 falls located only one hour away from Clackamas Community College's main campus in Oregon City.

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