

Local author pens unique hiking guide

By
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IVN Senior Contributing Writer

Justin Rohde's first book, "Hiking Oregon & California's Wild River Country," stands out from others in the genre by highlighting many little known trails in the Illinois, Chetco and Smith River watersheds. Descriptions of trails both old and new reflect the author's first-hand knowledge of this region defined by clean, free flowing rivers.

"The Wild Rivers District is filled with great hiking opportunities," Rohde said. "There are old gold-mining trails and ancient trade routes developed by Native Americans. This place offers such rich history."

Rohde lights up when describing features like historical rock work from the 1930's, waterfalls, caves and "perhaps even Bigfoot."

"The geological and botanical diversity showcased here is really worth experiencing. The rare plant communities, like the Darlingtonia fens, are out of this world," Rohde said. "The beauty here is often subtle and can be easily missed by those who just drive down highway 199. Trails in this region allow hikers to experience a degree of solitude and remoteness found in few other places in the nation."

The attractive 126-page book provides detailed maps for about 50 trails that range from easy to difficult and state-of-the-art elevation profiles will help hikers visualize the degree of challenge they'll encounter. Gorgeous photos, seasonal considerations, historical facts, natural history and clear directions to the trailheads of each hike make Rohde's book a handy companion for serious hikers.

"There's fantastic hikes to be had in the high country this time of year," Rohde said, "Bolan Lakes, the Caves National Monument, Red Butte, Siskiyou Wilderness and more. Hopefully my book will help more people get out to explore this Valley and the awesome lands surrounding it."

Rohde's book also features new trails that are "easy to navigate and great for families," like the Westside Trail system, which starts at the Illinois River Forks State Park, or can be accessed from Westside Road. Rohde also raved about the new trail that runs from the Little Illinois Falls Trailhead to the Eight Dollar Mountain Botanical Wayside.

"It uses a historic ditch line and it's a really nice accessible year-round hike," he said.

Rohde began guiding hiking groups in 2003. Then in 2007, he started researching and mapping the region's trails in earnest. His passion for this unique corner of the country fueled him, step by step, over hundreds of miles, earning him intimate familiarity with his topic. Now, he maintains the largest database of current and historic trails in the area.

Professionally, Rohde conducts fish surveys and habitat assessments and his occupational proficiency with geographic information systems served him well — he utilized a hand-held GPS unit to discern elevations and to superimpose all the trails

onto topographical maps featured in the book.

Rohde's book represents a long-term labor of love. Putting in countless volunteer hours to locate and preserve several almost-forgotten historic routes, he often cleared brush along the way. Sometimes he had help, several community members pitched in when they could, at their own expense and using their own hand tools.

Funding to support multiple use on public lands within the Wild Rivers Ranger District has rapidly dwindled and Rohde noted that recreational sites and trails have suffered badly.

"Campgrounds are falling apart and some are closed," Rohde said. "Bridges have been removed, but not replaced, and many trails affected by the Biscuit Fire are still unmaintained. And, important historic and ecologically sensitive sites, like the Wild & Scenic Illinois River Corridor, continue to suffer from neglect, trash and illegal activity. Forest Service employees are working their butts off, but without adequate funding there is little more they can do."

"I would like families to feel safe and secure when they visit the Illinois River corridor, but unfortunately that's not the case," Rohde continued. "And while I've found Forest Service personnel easy to work with and extremely supportive, it is frustrating to see most project funding now going to the Rogue Valley where the Rogue River-Siskiyou National Forest is located."

Though Rohde added he's encouraged that the district did bring a crew in this year to begin clearing the Sucker Creek Trails and the Boundary Trail, and another group is clearing a route through the Kalmiopsis Wilderness.

"This region is so unique and special," Rohde said. "That's why so many people care so much about the integrity of these lands and rivers."

"It's also why a lot of people from our community really helped my book project along," Rohde continued. "Greg Walter, Steve Marsden and Ron Raven hiked a lot of these trails and offered

advice and Gabe Howe helped with trail access. Rich Nawa and Spencer Lenard inspired me early on. I'm grateful to George Brierty with the Wild Rivers Ranger District, and also Lee Webb, who reviewed an early version of my book. And Michael Kauffmann, with Backcountry Press, helped me develop and edit the book."

Rohde also expressed strong appreciation for his wife, Lisa, and young sons, Jade and Tao, who support his work and also hiked sections of the trails with him.

Rohde's book is available at the Illinois Valley Visitor's Center, the Oregon Caves, and soon, at the Wild Rivers Ranger District office. The book can also be ordered and delivered for free to those living in the Valley by sending an email to store@rogueliving.com.



The Rohde family on Sucker Creek Trail.

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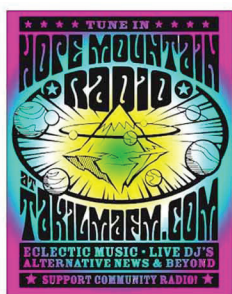
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