



Long shadows, hint of wood smoke, cool night breeze. Geese and Winnebago migrate south, herd-bound and honking. Summer shuffles away from our little coastal town, slowly, and fall sneaks in on cold, wet feet. Merchants pause for breath. Residents poke their heads out into the streets in tentative, coast-is-clear inquiry, like frazzled and dazed prairie dogs in the post-buffalo-stampede dust. The end is near. The coast is clear. Human sounds taper off; wind and rain will soon fill that void. Late summer. Early fall. The time of year when local people reoccupy their own public spaces, returning to streets, beaches, and trails grudgingly bequeathed to the tourist masses a few months before. Encountering familiar faces in higher proportions, checking on how the land has fared. Reclaiming the place while the weather holds. You will find me on the trails.

We have some outstanding hiking trails here on the northern Oregon coast. Particularly the State Parks: Ecola, Oswald West, Saddle Mountain. Spectacular places, where the best views are to be had on the paths less traveled, muddy routes through the green tangle, far away from the hard surfaces of roadway and parking lot. Traversing long distances, connecting inhabited places across the forested spaces. From Seaside to Cannon Beach along the Ecola Park cliffs. From Arch Cape to Manzanita, over Neahkanie mountaintops and between towering old trees. (Beside these paths, a parallel system of elk trails run, cut through the dense undergrowth thickets on a million hoofbeats).

For thousands of years, trails connected a network of villages on this coast. When ocean canoe travel was dangerous, with stiff winds or wild surf, trails allowed people to go by foot. Packing food, furs, and other goods, scrambling over the headlands and down to the beaches, where walking was always easier. Locals might trek from Cannon Beach to Seaside for get-togethers or trade, or over to Nehalem to visit relatives in their bay-front homes. For the most part, State Park paths follow these ancient, Native American trails. In some Northwestern places, we know that the native peoples kept trails clear through pruning and the localized use of fire; this was probably done here, to keep the trails clear of salal and wild cucumber and huckleberry and spruce, each new branch and tendrils covetous of the wide-open space and sunlight found in these long, narrow clearings. On these heavily-used, well-maintained trails, it would have been possible to travel the length of the Oregon coast, clambering over headlands by trail, then shuffling across the beaches that lie in-between. When white explorers, traders, missionaries, and settlers descended upon this coast in the mid-19th century, most simply walked into the territory on these long-established trails (a fact immortalized locally in Don Berry's semi-fictional account, *Trask*). In their wake came tribal epidemics and dislocation, marking the beginning of the end of traditional trail maintenance. Still, many trail segments, the heavily used ones in particular, became the pre-automotive coastal highways of the colonial period, allowing continued

long-distance travel between the new towns which sprang up on the coastal margins.

Despite explosive growth and a spectacular proliferation of fences, you can still travel on these trails along the length of the Oregon coast. From end to end, more or less. The tourist brochures will insist that this Columbia-to-California trek is possible along the "Oregon Coast Trail" (of which the Ecola and Oswald West State Park trails are a part) much as it is possible along the "Pacific Crest Trail" which follows the ridge of the Cascade Mountains. But, unlike the Pacific Crest Trail, the Oregon Coast Trail is a trail in name only. If you walk the coast's three-hundred-and-sixty-something mile length, about 55% of your walk will be along the beaches, and 20% of the trek - the State Park-owned headlands mostly - will be conducted on true trails. By necessity, 25% of this hike will be on roadside paths and sidewalks, often in places where the roadways were constructed atop old trail routes. Ergo, twenty percent of the Trail is a trail. Still, 20% of the coastline isn't bad, 75% of this route follows the pre-automotive beach-and-headland route, and more trail segments are under consideration, in order to minimize roadside travel.

Many people have contributed to the persistence of the coastal trail system directly or indirectly, old Oswald West, that coastal enthusiast Governor and erstwhile Cannon Beach vacationer, among them. But perhaps no-one is more responsible for the persistent 20th century presence of Oregon coast trails than a man named Samuel Newton Dicken. Raised by dirt poor parents near the town of Salt Lick, Kentucky, Sam Dicken spent his youth a bit out of place, a bookish kid living among hardscrabble backwoods Southern farmers; attending rural colleges, Dicken developed an interest in the natural sciences, and ultimately was accepted into the University of California at Berkeley. There he earned a Ph.D. as a student of the prominent Geographer, Carl Sauer, a guru of the fledgling environmental movement who believed that ecological problems were, at their root, historical and cultural. At the end of World War II, Sam Dicken was hired at the University of Oregon, where he became the founding father of the Department of Geography, the first of several Berkeley doctoral students to migrate north to Oregon over the next few decades, spreading the Sauerian gospel.

In Dicken's memoirs, entitled *The Education of a Hillbilly*, it clear that Dicken grew attached, immediately and deeply, to the mid-century Oregon coast: the scenery was magnificent and rugged, much of the shoreline was undeveloped and marginally accessible, and our accomplished, post-War rednecks seemed to remind him of folks back home in Salt Lick. He began to research the history of the Oregon coast, paying particular attention to the history of its occupation and its environmental transformation at the hands of Euro-American settlers. *Pioneer Trails of the Oregon Coast*, a study of the location and use of trails during the 19th century, was one of the outcomes of his research. It became apparent to Dicken that the trails had been a vital component of the coast's history, before and after the arrival of Europeans; it also became apparent to Dicken that many historic trails (as well as many other amenities of the Oregon coast) were disappearing fast as the 20th century unfolded, bringing urban sprawl, highway construction, and simple neglect. With an interest in both the historical past and the environmental future of the Oregon coast, Dicken became a vocal proponent of trail preservation, encouraging the State government, in particular, to limit the destruction of remaining historic trails, purchase land containing unprotected trail segments, and maintain those historic trails already under their control. By the early 1970s, the State of Oregon began to expand the modest trail network on State Park lands, pushing back decades of brush from historical and aboriginal trails documented by Dicken. By the time of Dicken's death, about one decade ago, the trail system allowed the crossing of all major headlands by foot, mostly along historic paths. It was once again possible to hike from one end of the Oregon coast to the other, in the woods and on the beaches for the most part, instead of on the precarious shoulders of Highway 101.

Thanks to Dicken and his like-minded peers, you can still walk in the footsteps of Native Americans, explorers, and early settlers along the Oregon coast, in places that still look like they did a century before, places that smack of the past. Over the headlands and through the woods. Along trails where the only other trace of human presence is the yellow zig-zag of path-side dandelions, their seeds having ridden in on hikers' boots. Reclaim this place while the weather holds. Walk between the ancient spruce trees that lined the paths of peoples past, and listen: to the crash of the surf below, the eagles and seagulls, the wind. And not much else. The coast is clear.

Interested in learning more about the environments, cultures, and literatures of the coastal Northwest? Then you are invited to enroll in an interdisciplinary fall seminar at Clatsop Community College. Explore the northern Oregon coast by foot and by book...write about the coastal places and coastal peoples you encounter. Instructors Doug Deur (author of "Ecola Lake" for *The Upper Left Edge*) and Carol Knutson (author of "Rube Montage" for *Hippish*) will teach the course on Saturdays, from Sept. 26 to Dec. 12. Students register for both Geography 199 (Cultural Geography of the Pacific Northwest) and English 199 (Literature of the Pacific Northwest). College credit is optional. For more information, call (503) 738-3546. Operators are standing by.

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