



On the trail to Tamolitch Pool.

## The Upper Half

The McKenzie River's disappearing act is a sight not to be missed.

Nobody has ever died of boredom on the McKenzie River Trail. Until very recently, in geologic time anyway, things might have been considerably less interesting on the upper McKenzie. But around 2,000 years ago a series of lava flows from craters near the Three Sisters flowed across the river channel. Today, a series of waterfalls plunges over the lips of these flows. The lava also partially dammed the river, creating Clear Lake, where 3,000-year-old tree stumps are still preserved at the bottom of the frigid spring-fed waters.

Two months ago (see June 5 Summer Guide archives at [www.eugeneweekly.com](http://www.eugeneweekly.com)) I described the lower half of the 27-mile long McKenzie River Trail. The upper half is a truly fascinating landscape full of surprises — far too interesting to describe thoroughly in this short space, but I'll get to some of the highlights.

You can begin at the very end of the trail just about 2 miles south of the junction of Hwy 126 and Hwy 20. Here, Fish Lake Creek flows from an eerie pool in the middle of a red cinder lava field for a mile into Clear Lake, the source of the McKenzie. A loop trail, much of it paved and heavily used, surrounds Clear Lake. From the southern tip of the lake, it's about a mile to Sahalie Falls, one of the most stunning and easily accessible waterfalls in Oregon.

To put in at the falls, drive Hwy 126 from Springfield about 19 miles east of McKenzie Bridge. Near milepost 5, take a left at a sign for Sahalie Falls viewpoint. Sahalie Falls is just a short walk from the parking area. Another thundering cascade, Koosah Falls, is another half mile downstream.

If you only make one day-hike on the McKenzie River trail, go to Tamolitch Pool, probably the most bizarre segment of the entire trail.

Directions: Drive Hwy. 126 east from Springfield for approximately 55 miles. About 2 miles east of Olallie Campground, about 14 miles east of McKenzie Bridge, take a left at the upper end of Trailbridge Reservoir (one of the many fixtures of EWEB's effort to turn the wild McKenzie into a giant plumbing system). The turnout used to be signed, but is now marked only by a bare signpost. In less than a hundred yards, you'll cross a bridge, and then bear right on FS Road 655, past a fenced compound. The McKenzie River trail crosses the 655 road in a little less than a half a mile. You will want to head upstream (the trailhead on your right). It's a little more than a four-mile hike to Tamolitch Pool and back.

The first mile of trail follows the fast and frothy McKenzie River through a fabulous old-growth forest. Then the trail climbs slightly through a rocky lava flow dotted with gnarled Douglas fir and incense cedar, with good views over the lip of a narrow ravine down to the river.

Two miles from the trailhead, you'll reach Tamolitch Pool, a breathtaking turquoise blue basin. When you reach the head of the pool, you'll be surprised to find ... nothing, except a dry riverbed. A lava flow 1,500 years ago buried three miles of the river, leaving water to percolate through the porous volcanic material and flow underground until it erupts into Tamolitch Pool.

From here it's another five miles to Sahalie Falls, past hundreds of other fascinating sights. **ew**



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