

Upper Trestle Creek Falls

Waterfalls and fall color are in season east of Cottage Grove.

During the 1860s mining boom in the hills east of Cottage Grove, thousands of grizzled prospectors combed steep river valleys searching for the elusive glimmer of gold at the bottom of ice-cold mountain streams. Few if any ever struck it rich. Today you'd be lucky to find more than \$50 worth of gold in a week's worth of panning or dredging in frigid waters.

But there is gold in those hills this time of year — dozens of steep canyons choked with brilliant golden leaves.

Of course evergreen conifers like Douglas fir and western hemlock are the primary tree species in most of the steep ravines on the west side of the Cascades, but many of these forests also have a significant deciduous hardwood component, which provides some nice color in the fall. One of the best places to take in the fall atmosphere is the Upper Trestle Creek Falls trail, a three-mile loop trail east of Cottage Grove.

Directions: Take I-5 south for approximately 15 miles to Cottage Grove Exit 174. Stay to the left off the intersection, and take a left onto Row River Road (follow signs for Dorena Lake). Stay on this main paved road for approximately 22 miles. 5.7 miles past the sign for the Umpqua National Forest, just after milepost 8 and just before the second bridge across Brice Creek, park by a sign for "Brice Creek Trailhead — Champion Creek Trailhead."

From here walk a hundred feet up the road, across the bridge over Brice Creek. The first trail-

head on the left is where you'll return from the loop hike. Put in at the next trailhead on the left, at the sign for "Upper Trestle Creek Falls."

The first mile of the trail is a moderate climb through a forest that varies from young stands to big old-growth trees. There's some interesting rock formations, and patches of fiery-colored vine maple. The climb ends in an eerie rock walled amphitheater. The trail circles the canyon and takes you underneath 65-foot Upper Trestle Creek Falls, a torrent in the spring, but a gentle stream before the winter rains.

There are several tall big-leaf maples, and at the end of October the bottom of the gorge is typically dotted with thousands of bright yellow leaves.

The second half of the loop descends a mile to the Brice Creek trail, which begins five miles downstream. During the 1860s, prospectors packed more than a ton of gold down this trail during one of several mining booms in the area. Today there's still enough hidden and unmarked mine shafts dotting the valley walls that the Forest Service recommends visitors stay on the trail.

At the junction with the Brice Creek trail, take a left and hike upstream from for a half-mile. There'll be a short quarter mile long one-way trail that heads uphill to 60-foot Lower Trestle Creek Falls. After your return to the main trail, it's just another third of a mile back to your car.

Feel free to bring all the gold you like back with you. **ew**

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