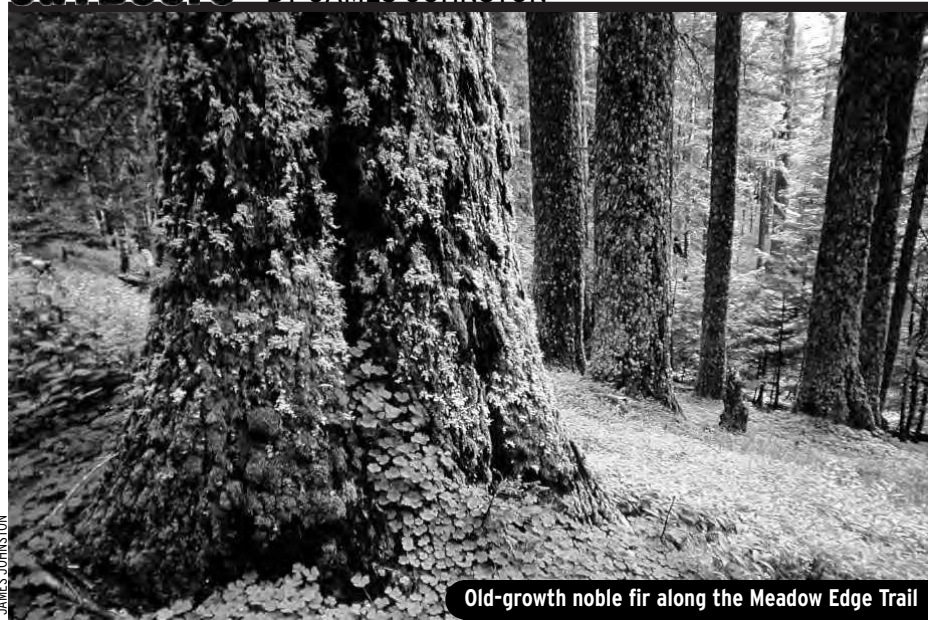




Old-growth noble fir along the Meadow Edge Trail

Mary's Peak

Corvallis has got a bit of the Cascades in the Coast Range.

Except for the ubiquitous clearcuts, the Coast Range is an almost uniform carpet of dense Douglas fir and hemlock forests, clinging to the sides of steep ravines and the tops of narrow ridges. The Cascades have got their share of fir forests, too, but also alpine forests, glaciers, lakes, meadows and more.

The Coast Range imitates the Cascades on Mary's Peak, that large block-like mountain that looms over Corvallis to the west. The mountain, which is the tallest point in the Coast Range, is just a little more than an hour from Eugene.

You can drive almost to the top of the mountain. To get to the upper trailhead and a short half-mile walk to the summit, take Hwy. 99 north from Eugene for approximately 35 miles. At the outskirts of Corvallis, take Hwy. 20 west, then stay to the left onto Hwy 34 for approximately 9 miles. Turn right onto the Mary's Peak Road and follow it until it dead ends in a large parking lot.

A much more interesting route to the top is the Meadow Edge Trail, which you'll find by turning into the Mary's Peak Campground,

8.8 miles from the junction with Hwy. 34. Stay to the left as you enter and find the trailhead in a picnic area. After a couple hundred yards, the trail splits — stay to the left here and at the trail split near the top on your way back down to make the loop.

The two major attractions of this route — both of them rare in the Coast Range — are an amazing stand of old-growth noble fir and meadows that are choked with wildflowers in late May and early June.

Mary's Peak is a sort of Noah's Ark in a complicated Kalapuya legend in which the trickster Coyote floods the entire Willamette Valley, leaving just the top of the mountain as a refuge for plant species that aren't found anywhere else in the Coast Range.

It's likely that much of the rest of the Coast Range resembled Mary's Peak during colder periods thousands of years ago. As the climate warmed, ice age species retreated to the top of the 4,000-ft. peak.

On a clear day, the summit offers views from the coast to the Three Sisters, and the best panorama of the Willamette Valley anywhere. It's a Cascades-like view, on the doorstep of Corvallis. **EW**



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