

JAMES JOHNSTON

North Fork Smith River Trail

Big payoff for a journey into the heart of the Coast Range.

The timber industry likes to tell people that the Oregon Coast Range is the most productive timberland in the world. To prove it, they logged practically all of it, and are growing billions of small, fast-growing Douglas fir trees in short-rotation plantations. Today there are tens of thousands of miles of logging roads that snake up and down the rugged ridges and ravines of the Coast Range, past endless miles of clearcuts.

An automobile trip to the few isolated islands of old growth in this ocean of tree farms can feel like an epic journey from classical literature, like Aeneas descending to the underworld in the *Aeneid*, or Marlow traveling up the Congo River in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness*.

The ultimate hero in the canon of epic journeys is the person who can journey through death and destruction and return. The North Fork Smith River trail is flat out one of the finest old-growth hikes in Oregon, but it is not easy to get to. A map and a stout heart are recommended.

Directions: Drive Highway 126 west from Eugene for approximately 30 miles. Take a left onto Siuslaw River Road at a sign for "Whittaker Creek Recreation Area." Stay to the left at the intersection in just 20 yards, following signs for Whittaker Creek and Clay Creek. Follow the Siuslaw River upriver for 1.7 miles, and then take a right over a bridge. Go 1.6 miles and turn left as the road climbs steeply uphill.

Stay on this road, following signs for

Kentucky Falls. In 7.4 miles, take a sweeping left turn; the road will turn to gravel. In 2.9 miles, take a sweeping turn to the right. In 1.6 miles turn left. Go downhill on pavement for 5.9 miles and find the trailhead on your right.

A couple hundred yards down the North Fork trail, the trail forks. The left hand turn is a side loop that will take you back to the main trail. Continuing straight ahead, look for a gap in two large trees next to an interpretive sign where the trail bends off to the left. Through this gap is the main trail.

In about 2.5 miles, the trail enters a clearcut, which is a pretty good place to turn around. The Forest Service intends for the North Fork Smith River Trail to extend another three miles and connect with the spectacular Kentucky Falls trailhead, but the trail is not maintained and almost impossible to follow another half mile past the clearcut. At any rate, you've outrun the old-growth island, and you're back in the ocean of tree farms.

The big attraction of this trail is, of course, the old growth — enormous Douglas fir and western hemlock, lush mosses and luxurious ground cover of oxalis and wild ginger. Many of the shrubs on the forest floor are in bloom this time of year, as are the ghostly white trilliums, crimson wild currant, dogwood, salmonberry and much more.

Now all you have to do is find your way back. **EW**

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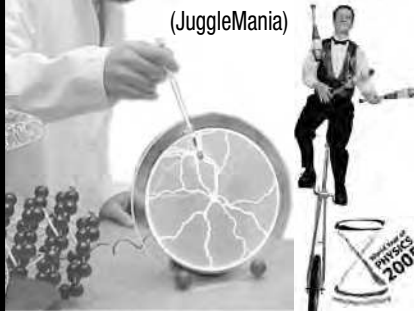
featuring

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(UO Physics Dept)

& **Rhys Thomas**

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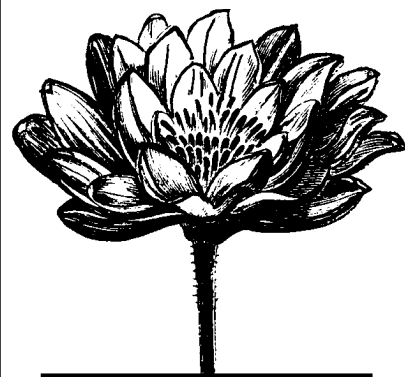


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Eugene Weekly's Restaurant Guide

Chow! features reviews of area eateries and a directory of Eugene and Corvallis restaurants.

Ad reservation deadline is Friday, April 22nd by 5pm.
Contact Mark Frisbee 484-0519 ext. 12