



THE SEVEN NATURAL WONDERS OF LANE COUNTY

The best of the best

Story & photos by James Johnston

How to pick just *seven* natural wonders of Lane County? Lane County has a lot going on. It is one of just two counties (Douglas is the other) that extends from the coast to the crest of the Cascades. We have rain forests, glaciers, waterfalls and much more.

But what are our most impressive, interesting and unique pieces of nature? Below are my completely subjective (but well-informed) opinions.

Although I omitted some iconic landmarks like the South Sister and the McKenzie River, the features below are genuinely unique in our state, if not the world. Some are right alongside a major highway, and some are remote and difficult to access. At least one is not recommended to visitors. A few of these spots are virtually unheard of — but each of them is guaranteed to be a sight you won't soon forget.

Honorable Mentions: Tamolitch Pool, Salt Creek Falls and Cummins Creek.

7. Wolf Rock

Few people other than climbers and geologists have heard of Wolf Rock — an enormous haystack-shaped pinnacle more reminiscent of Yosemite Valley than the Oregon Cascades. According to the Forest Service, it is the largest monolith in the state. To get there, you drive logging roads from USFS Road #15 (which comes off of Hwy. 126 at Blue River). Turn right at a T intersection at the far end of Blue River Reservoir to catch a glimpse of the unmistakable profile of the 4,500-foot tall rock.

6. Hell Hole

This half-mile-long, 200-foot-deep gash in the forest floor is easily deep enough to hold the tallest building in

4. Warner Creek Burn

The largest fire in recent memory in Lane County is also the only large unlogged burn in the western United States. The Warner Burn rejuvenated and restored the eastern half of Bunchgrass Ridge, a large roadless area where landscape-level disturbance can operate without human interference. Among the area's interesting features are the thousand year old trees in Kelsey Creek and Black Creek Bog, which preserves hundreds of thousands of years of fire history in ash deposits. The Warner Burn has stunning scenery: Ghostly bleached white snags perch on knife-edge ridges with long, lonely views. This is one of the least accessible, least visited and wildest areas in Lane County. The best points of entry

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Eugene. From the treacherous and frigid bottom of the Hell Hole, the sky appears as a tiny slit of light. The evil-looking geologic feature was created about 2 million years ago when lava flows oozed down a river valley over much weaker pyroclastic formations. Eventually, the lighter bottom layer collapsed, leaving the fissure. This area is *extremely* dangerous, so much so that the Hell Hole appears on no maps and the public is strongly discouraged from visiting. The Hell Hole is a bit of a legend, and some people don't believe it even exists. Maybe they're right.

are Warner Creek or Eagle Creek Roads, east of Oakridge off Hwy. 58.

3. Tall Timbers

The Tall Timbers stand contains the tallest Douglas fir trees in the world, nestled in a remote valley in the Little Fall Creek drainage on the Willamette National Forest. This area requires a Willamette National Forest map to navigate a maze of logging roads. The trees are not girthy, but are jaw-droppingly tall.

2. Oregon Dunes

These Sahara Desert-like dunes stretch for 40 miles south from Florence west of Hwy. 101. The Oregon Dunes are the largest expanse of coastal dunes in North America and contain a unique type of "oblique" dune formation found nowhere else on earth. The largest dunes are more than 500 feet tall. The eerie moonscape is bounded on one side by lush temperate rainforest and on the other side by the vast Pacific Ocean. In an odd twist, the Forest Service manages the sand dunes, mostly for the pleasure of off road vehicle users,

5. The Sea Lion Caves

The Sea Lion Caves are a quintessential tourist trap, but it's well worth the \$7.50 you'll pay to descend by elevator into a Mac-Court-sized amphitheater — the largest sea cave in the world and the only remaining mainland home of wild Stellar sea lions. The sea lions' vocalizations, reverberating against the rocky walls of the cavern, sound exactly like the eerie chants of Gyuto Monks Tantric Choir. The Sea Lion Caves are 11 miles north of Florence on Hwy. 101.

