

winter getaways

Get Out of the Gym!

And head up the McKenzie for chilly fun

By Deanna Uutela

Think of snow in Lane County, and two images come to mind: Sipping hot cocoa and bundling up by the fire, or, for the more adventurous spirit, riding the powdery white waves. But there are so many more adventures to be had during the winter besides just snowboarding and eating your way to summer! You might not know it, but kayaking, scuba diving, rafting and other sports will keep your summer fab from turning into flab — and you can find them all in the McKenzie River Valley.

Hiking/Cross-Country Skiing

The Obsidians, a Eugene-based group, do it all: Cross-country skiing, snowshoeing, hiking, you name it, and this group does it. And they do it all to undergo what they refer to as “savoring to the the fullest the aesthetic experience of wildness.” Jim Pierce, the guy to see with the winter trip know-how, says that the McKenzie is an ideal location for winter activities.

“The McKenzie Trail is perfect for hiking and snowshoeing,” says Pierce. “We arrange several trips on the McKenzie during the wintertime. It is an

ideal place because it offers all levels of difficulty.”

Pierce recommends going to one of McKenzie’s snow parks for cross-country skiing. Not only are the trails wide and level, but many of the roads are closed and offer a quiet, serene ride.

Preparation for a winter trip is different than in the warmer seasons, and Pierce has a few tips for avoiding any blunders. The most critical advice for any winter activity is to dress in layers. He recommends not wearing cotton because cotton has little insulation and absorbs and holds moisture. Also, he says, a winter sportster should drink plenty of water and always notify someone ahead of time about the location and length of the trip. For more information, visit www.obsidians.org

Kayaking/Rafting

The rainy, cold season may mean misery and sickness for some of us, but in the kayaking world, it’s the best time of the year. Just ask Dave Villalobos, the trip facility and rental

program manager for the UO Outdoor Program. He’s already gearing up for what should be some choice river running.

“The McKenzie River changes quite a bit during the wintertime,” says Villalobos. “The rapids are not quite so tumultuous, and the waves get big, which is great if you want to do some kayaking tricks.”

Sahalie and Koosah Falls, both located less than six miles south of the Hwy. 20 junction, are accessible year around, and by December, their huge drops become more manageable (though

still very dangerous) for kayakers due to the increase in water volume.

Obviously, that’s for experts, but rafters and kayakers of all skill levels can find an adventure suited to their abilities. The rivers are rated based on a difficulty scale, and the McKenzie area has water levels from a Class I (flat water) to a Class VI (rapids that are virtually unrunnable).

Whether you are planning a mellow float down the river or a rough ride through the heart of the rapids, Villalobos recommends that you wear a wet or dry suit to shield against the icy spray. For information on trips or kayaking sessions, visit outdoorprogram.uoregon.edu

Scuba Diving

Clear Lake is known for its crystal clear visibility (thus the name). Even

during the summer, when most of the other bodies of water develop an increased algae bloom that decreases visibility, Clear Lake is visible down to 150 to 200 feet (compared to 10 to 40 feet in most lakes). That makes for a choice destination for Pacific Northwest scuba divers.

Clear Lake doesn’t have much life in its cold deep waters, but there are still some unique attractions. Matt Fackler and Lisa McCranie, experienced divers and veterans of Clear Lake, both enjoy the experience they have at Clear Lake so much that they try to dive it at least once a month. Yes, even in January!

“There are neat things to see at Clear Lake, like two preserved trees that are about 3,000 years old and stand out of the water about 90 feet,” Fackler says, as well as “something we call the ‘witches’ cauldrons.” According to Fackler, the cauldrons are depressions in the ground where silt is constantly boiling, creating white cloudy swirls.

One of the couple’s fondest memories at the lake comes from diving during the winter. “It was my first time diving Clear Lake,” Fackler says, “and while Lisa and I were diving, my regulator froze and went into free flow, which meant we had to surface because I wasn’t getting any air.”

But there was a compensation: “On the surface it started to snow, and we just floated on our backs catching snowflakes in our mouths like we were kids again. It was amazing.”

With snowflakes come freezing water temperatures, so if you go, dive conservatively and resist the urge to pee in your suit for warmth — your hair will smell like pee for days ... or so rumor has it.

For a list of scuba diving trips, visit the Eugene Skindivers Supply online (www.eugenekindivers.com). ■

PHOTO BY JAKE D. ANDREASON
Diving at Clear Lake

Kristen Vogt in Bear Creek Rapids UO OUTDOOR PROGRAM



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