



PHOTO BY JOHN WILLIAMS

A DAY IN THE MENAGERIE

Trout Creek to Rooster Rock

The Menagerie Wilderness is relatively unknown to those who aren't rock climbers or from nearby, and the Trout Creek Trail showcases a good taste of what the Menagerie Wilderness outside of Sweet Home has to offer. This area was protected primarily because of the plentiful rock pinnacles, which are favorites of climbers and threatened birds. Even if you aren't a rock climber, the unique forest that blankets the area is reason enough to visit. Towering Douglas fir, western hemlock, Western redcedar and Pacific madrone all surround the trail. The understory has large numbers of rhododendron and vine maple. During spring there are frequently small but varied wildflowers near the trail. But what makes this forest unique is that it was allowed to recover naturally after a stand-replacing fire.

Somewhere around 100 years ago, a stand-replacing fire burned through most of the area that is now the Menagerie Wilderness. This kind of high-intensity fire is what naturally occurs in our moist western Oregon forests. Unlike dry forests that have a frequent fire interval, western Oregon forests often go hundreds of years without a major fire. One of the largest fires in Oregon history, the Silverton fire, occurred in the Cascade foothills in 1865, burning 980,000 to one million acres in its wake. Fires of this size haven't occurred recently because of our modern aggressive firefighting tactics. This forest is so unique because it's not an old-growth native forest but a 100-year-old-or-so native forest. Because of intensive logging and replanting after more recent fires, this kind of forest is rare. Despite what some "experts" say, our forests are resilient and do not need logging and replanting to "help them" following a fire.

The name Trout Creek is somewhat deceptive. Normally when trails are named for a creek, they follow the creek; this trail does not. Despite the amount of precipitation this area receives, there is only one very small seasonal spring along the entire trail. From the trailhead you will slowly climb for approximately 1.8 miles to a junction with the Rooster Rock Trail (3399). This trail to Rooster Rock is shorter, but much steeper. To reach Rooster Rock from this junction, continue uphill. This is where the trail becomes much steeper. Also of note is that the soil shifts to a more rocky consistency resulting in fewer conifers. Recently there has been little snowfall below 5,000 feet, but one may encounter some lingering patches near Rooster Rock. The Trout Creek Trail is a great jumping off point to further explore the beautiful Menagerie Wilderness.

Despite the warm weather we have been having, it will still be at least another month if not more before higher elevation Cascade trails are snow free, leaving the Menagerie Wilderness a great place to explore until then! ■

DIRECTIONS FROM EUGENE: Follow I-5 North for 22.5 miles, take exit 216 towards Brownsville (Hwy. 228), follow Hwy. 228 for 18.9 miles, turn right onto Hwy. 20, follow for 21.7 miles to the signed trailhead on the left.

HIKE DATA: 5.4 miles out and back. 2,900 feet of elevation gain/loss.

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