



UPRIVER FROM TROUT CREEK CAMPGROUND

TROUT CREEK CALLING

Spend some time on the rugged Deschutes River STORY & PHOTO BY TED TAYLOR

Forget this remote BLM campground north of Bend if you hate bad roads, rattlesnakes, ticks, heat and bugs the size of your thumb that crawl up inside your pant legs. And forget your dog. This time of year brings acres of foxtails, nasty little barbed seedpods that can get up dog snouts and work their way into dog brains.

So aside from killer weeds and deadly snakes, what makes Trout Creek on the lower Deschutes River such a draw? Well, there's no place on the planet quite like it — a geologically distinctive canyon where water and high desert collide in a thousand hues of brown, green and blue.

A few days spent at Trout Creek are likely to be memorable, assuming you can find the place. And assuming you survive.

Here's a brief roundup of this destination:

The Deschutes runs clear, cold, swift and wide. Trout, steelhead and salmon grow big and fat here, feasting on each other and aquatic insects in all their life-cycle stages. This time of year, giant stone fly nymphs rise out of the water to sprout wings. They flutter toward the lush riverbanks to mate, if they first don't get gobbled by fish or fowl. Stone flies are harmless, but when a swarm invades

your personal space, it can make you cringe.

The fishery is highly regulated: catch and release (except for certain sizes), fly-fishing only, the Warm Springs tribal side of the river has its own permit and you can't fish from boats. Take a lawyer along.

Serious fly-anglers arrive from all over for the famous wild Deschutes reddsides trout in the spring and steelhead and salmon in the fall. Trout Creek is also a launch and take-out for rafts, drift boats and kayaks, so the campground and road can get busy, especially on weekends.

The second biggest draw to Trout Creek is the columnar basalt cliffs that rise high above the campground. Bloody-knuckle crack climbing with a difficulty rating 5.10 to 5.12 (near vertical terrain), and boulder hopping on top. Crazy. Climbers from around the world come to these high cliffs after the golden eagles have fledged their chicks and left their nests.

This year the cliffs opened to climbers May 15. The cliffs close if and when the raptors return in January. Friends of Trout Creek has a Facebook page with updates for climbers. Smith Rock climbers also frequent this place.

One of the best things at Trout Creek? An old rail line — now a rough road and trail — follows the river for 9 miles from Trout Creek Campground to Warm Springs. No motorized vehicles are allowed, so it's ideal for walking, mountain biking, backpacking, birding and photographing the dramatic canyon around every bend. Some lush but primitive campsites can be found up the river, accommodating both boaters and hikers.

From Eugene, take I-105 E through Springfield to OR-126 E. In Redmond, turn left onto US-97 N to Madras. Go north on Hwy. 97 a mile out of town and take a left on NE Clark Drive. Follow it (it wiggles) to the tiny railroad town of Gateway and look for Clemens Drive. In a few miles the road gets hairy as it drops into the canyon. Expect delays, especially at the scary, very narrow tunnel. ■

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