

BEST EXPERIMENTAL FOREST

Home to old-growth forests of cedar and hemlock, ancient Douglas fir and even more ancient yews, the H.J. Andrews is a blend of science, nature and art. It's a beautiful spot to go get muddy and roll around in the wild or to sit and meditate. Oregon State University scientists research climate change and carbon storage in the woods and waters of the Andrews, and on the humanities end, The Spring Creek Project brings together philosophy, writing and the sciences and Long-Term Ecological Reflections "supports writers and humanists in their efforts to explore human/nature relationships as they evolve over many lifetimes." To get there, head east out Hwy. 126, and about 35 minutes outside of Springfield turn left at the Blue River Reservoir sign onto Forest Road 15. First time visitors should head to the display board at the junction of Forest Roads 15 and 1506. The display has a map of the Andrews Forest and a brochure and directions to the 3.5-mile Lookout Creek Old-Growth Trail. Check it out at andrewsforest.oregonstate.edu.

BEST RUNNING SCAVENGER HUNT

Five riddled clues were given to a group of about 40 runners on a hot summer afternoon. After taking off down High Street, we darted across town making our way to Sam Bond's Brewery, the downtown farmers market blocks and the island in the middle of the Alton Baker Park duck pond, where a group of Pokémon-hunting teens asked, "Why are you running?" We didn't quite make it through our list of destinations, but we stuck around for the raffle and beers that followed our hour-long running adventure.

Run Hub Northwest put together the event that was totally free. Almost everyone won something, and the grand prize was a pair of running shoes. Run Hub does running scavenger hunts right — walkers and all paces are welcome to all of their events, and the staff can answer any of your running questions. After their events, join them for a meal; they usually have an informal dinner at a local spot following runs.

Lauren Moe with Run Hub says, "We want to be a hub for running events." Around 50 people have been showing up for Wednesday Night runs, she adds. The idea behind the scavenger hunt events came from a couple of running stores in Salem, Portland and Seattle, where a few hundred people show up to those events. The Run Hub crew wants to provide more of a social connection for people in the running and walking community. The store hosts all levels of running groups, destination runs and stroller runs. "We want to provide something fun for people to come out to do,"

Moe says. Run Hub will host a few holiday runs and people are encouraged to dress up. Run Hub is located at 515 High Street; see runhubnw.com.

BEST DIVORCE

Most times divorce, that great American pastime, turns out to be sort of a good thing for everyone involved; witness the historic splitsville between Charlemagne and Desiderata, which set the stage for the eventual founding of the Holy Roman Empire. Victory civilization!

Similarly, when the Bijou Arts Cinema and Broadway Metro called it quits earlier this year (bit.ly/2e5TF1c), ending a somewhat strained business partnership, both theaters were suddenly free to go their own way like a couple of gay divorcees. What the split means for Eugene movie-lovers is that we now have two distinct theaters no longer tied down by fiscal concerns and programming conflicts, and how that's panned out over the past year for both theaters is the emergence of separate identities that are distinct but not mutually exclusive.

True to its name, Broadway Metro has become a pragmatic purveyor of a kind of cinematic metropolitanism, offering a mixture of tasteful mainstream-ish products

along with its continuing adherence to independent and offbeat cinema.

At the Bijou Art Cinemas, the focus has been more keen on bolstering its status as classic college-town arthouse, providing a strong selection of foreign films and off-Hollywood stuff, along with the offerings of modern auteurs and sharp political content, including cutting-edge documentaries.

Self-actualization is such a lovely thing when the bonds of co-dependence are broken, as is evidenced by the relative financial and aesthetic health both the Metro and the Bijou now enjoy.

"Before the separation, we happily carried the burden of trying to bring every good indie film to Eugene," says Metro co-owner Ed Schiessl, adding that "being a stand-alone operation has freed our programming up enough to be able to include some high-end commercial product," along with METROarts screenings of stage performances and the new "Baby & Me" screenings for parents with infants.

At the Bijou, owner Julie Blonshteyn says she's "committed to bringing the finest offering in independent cinema to the Eugene community," calling the theater a "quasi-clubhouse" where discussions on film often break out in the lobby. "There are plenty of other choices for mass-market films," Blonshteyn adds, "but true film-lovers know the best in arthouse fare can be found at the Bijou."

BEST PHILOSOPHICAL CRISIS BROUGHT ON BY A HIRONS TCHOTCHKE

Hirons pharmacy is where you go for cheap novelties: slogany coffee mugs, retro lunch boxes and odd Ducks paraphernalia. It's the humble retail equivalent of the Great Pacific Garbage Patch, the growing clot of refuse that swirls in the Pacific Ocean current.

Hirons' baffling array of chintzy trinkets serves as a visceral lesson in what to expect from late-stage consumerism. Maybe you go there not to shop, but to bask in the nonsense of it all. Maybe you bring out-of-town visitors there to prove that Eugene is still kinda weird. On just such a visit, your gaze falls on an antiqued wooden block with a message scrawled on it that reads: "Technology bring us closer to those far away, far away from those who are close." You suddenly feel a little sick: Do I have any real friends? you wonder.

The smartphone in your pocket suddenly feels heavy. Your social media accounts prove you've got hundreds of happy, healthy well-wishers, but you realize you dislike most of them. And deep down, they probably dislike you equally as much. If your too-short life is really only a blip on the timeline of human history, then the point probably has nothing to do with Twitter or Snapchat. Your life is a waste.

Think of how rich you'd feel if you quit Facebook and spent more time surrounded by the people you love most. Oh, hey, look, an ugly pair of socks designed to look like Hillary Clinton and Donald Trump. Existential crisis averted.

The cold sweat on your brow dries, leaving the skin near your hairline feeling itchy and tight.

BEST READING SPOT FOR KIDS

Archie, Little Lulu, Muppets, Charlie Brown, Calvin & Hobbes — they're all here, in one spot at the Eugene Public Library: Comic Island, a refuge for discerning children who just happen to appreciate that the finer things in life include graphic novels and comic books. Accessible, with comfy benches and a bright window, Comic Island is a quiet place of contemplation, even on a crowded day. The library could consider affording space and funding for a Comic Archipelago, and it would probably be just as popular. Comic Island keeps kids into comics, and that keeps them reading. Bravo!

BEST EUGENE MYTH

As with people, cities tend over time to acquire particular reputations that belie their true nature. Prevailing mythology says that Eugene, former stomping grounds of Ken Kesey and the Merry Pranksters, is frozen in place as a kind of progressive hippie utopia — a throwback to the peace-loving '60s, where personal freedom and lefty politics reached their American apotheosis. Reality, unfortunately, says otherwise. Beneath Eugene's faux-greivous veneer of eccentricity and liberalism — more Halloween than hallowed — lurks an alarming undercurrent of intolerance, inertia and the kind of crony political system that is more nepotistic and autocratic than truly democratic.

Our mayor plays figurehead to the city manager, and the city government operates with a disturbing lack of transparency. Our most famous icon and benefactor, Nike founder Phil Knight, donated exclusively to Republican campaigns this year. The city is not exempt from Oregon's long history of racism, and though we give lip service to diversity, we are more white utopia than anything else. It's not unusual to see Confederate flags flying from the back of jacked-up trucks these days, and let's not forget that, in 2010, Republican VP candidate Sarah Palin came to Eugene — not Springfield, not Redmond — for a big-money campaign fundraiser. Right-wing money hides in the hills here, as does a lot of the kind of aggressive, retrograde bigotry that we conveniently associate with Appalachia.

None of this is good or bad but thinking makes it such, but let's stop pretending we're anything more than a small college town (go Ducks!) with the kind of half-assed Libertarian leanings that spring from white disenfranchisement and despair. We are more Twin Peaks than Berkeley, more Aberdeen than Austin.

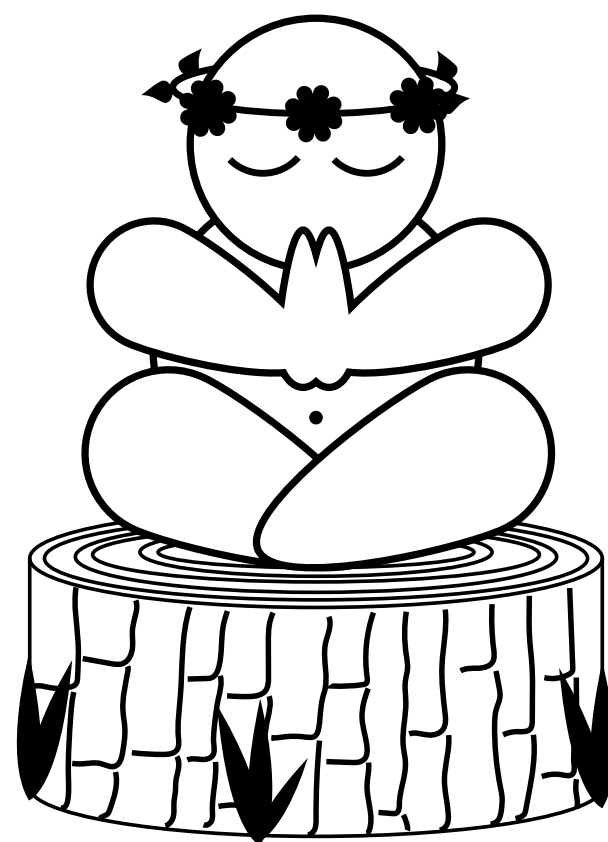


ILLUSTRATION BY SARAH DECKER