



Matt Stapleton pulls himself along the “Blue Dream” highline at the Smith Rock Highline Gathering on Sept. 16. Nick Rosenberger/Spokesman

what happened to Ian Caldwell.

Caldwell moved to Redmond for the sole purpose of climbing. He was hooked, instantly, after taking a college climbing course in 1991. He soon after visited Smith Rock for the first time. For more than a decade, Caldwell would then driver about three hours every weekend to Smith Rock just to go climbing.

“I think there’s a lot of elements that make (Smith Rock) really good,” said Caldwell. “It’s got high-quality climbing routes, and at a huge variety of grades. There are beginner routes and there are some of the hardest routes in America.”

Caldwell typically finds himself climbing at the park every Saturday and Sunday, plus a day or two during the week after work. Each climbing trip fills four to six hours — meaning he’s at the park roughly 20 hours a week.

The park gets most crowded during the spring and fall months, especially in March and October, Caldwell said.

Matt Davey, manager at Smith Rock State Park, said for most state parks in Oregon, food traffic peaks in July and August. But at Smith Rock, that’s not the case. Instead, you’ll see most people in spring and fall, as Caldwell said, but the winters are becoming busy too with people seeking

an escape from the snowbound high country.

The park has seen steady growth in visitation over the last 10 years, Davey said. A major reason spike came in 2012, when Travel Oregon included Smith Rock as one of their Seven Wonders of Oregon.

Since then, visitation at the park more than doubled, Davey said, and is bringing in a different type of users. A 2016 visitor survey from 2016 revealed that roughly 21% of visitors come for rock climbing during the spring and summer.

“It’s still more people here hiking ... but climbing is closing in on about a quarter of our visitation, so that’s a big draw,” said Davey.

The interest in the sport of climbing keeps, well — climbing — as more rock gyms opening around the country. Most beginners get their first taste of rock climbing at an indoor gym. Once they have their basic skills down, they turn to Smith Rock as place to test those skills, Davey said.

Bonfert said that climbing is also becoming more popular because of its recent Olympic debut in Tokyo, Bonfert said.

Aside from the visual beauty of Smith Rock — with the canyons and Crooked River running through — having a city so close nearby where people can gear up, sleep and eat, is