

Best foot forward

Coastal Life

Story by DAN HAAG

Author Connie Soper invites hikers to start 'Exploring the Oregon Coast Trail'

Oregon author Connie Soper's new book, "Exploring The Oregon Coast Trail," wants to help coastal hikers put their best foot forward. To do that, a book launch will be held at 7 p.m. Thursday, Aug. 6 at the Hoffinan Center for the Arts in Manzanita.

The book is a celebration of wandering purposefully and an absorbing mix of Oregon Coast history and geography. It takes care to give hikers meticulous notes and maps on 40 consecutive day hikes.

"It's a guide for people who want to hike the whole thing, beginning at the Columbia River to the California border," Soper said. In all, the OCT stretches nearly 400 miles.

Having hiked the Oregon Coast Trail (OCT) in sections twice, Soper knows her subject matter well. She self-published the book and calls it a "very personal work."

Soper's first trek ran over a stretch of three summers. As she made notes and took photos, she formulated plans for a detailed guide. "When I got more serious about writing the book, I realized I was going to have to hike it again," she said.

She added that the logistics of planning to hike the OCT played a huge part in her decision to parse the book into a series of day trips rather than one long trek.

"I structured the book as a series of day hikes, because that's how I hiked it," Soper said. "We had to figure out where to start, where to stop, what's a comfortable distance. You can't just start and stop anywhere you want; you have to figure out where there are access points."

Though she estimates she avoided about 10 percent of the trail, that was by design. There are a few gaps in the trail that wander onto narrow highway shoulders. Soper is adamant that trying to enjoy the OCT while avoiding log trucks and RVs is neither scenic nor safe.

An example is a gap at the base of Neah-kahnie Mountain where hikers must walk along busy U.S. Highway 101 for 1.25 miles. Options are being explored how to divert OCT hikers off the highway. Until one is found,



Submitted photo by Trav Williams

Connie Soper's new book, "Exploring the Oregon Coast Trail," serves as the first practical trail guide for the entire OCT, outlining in detail 40 day hikes, starting at Fort Stevens State Park and ending at the California border.



Submitted photo

Connie Soper will present her new book, "Exploring the Oregon Coast Trail," at Cloud & Leaf Books in Manzanita on Thursday, Aug. 6.

Soper urges using caution. "People have to decide whether they are willing to walk along the highway," she said.

Accurate directions can be an issue. The trail, overseen by Oregon State Parks, patches together

many local trails. It can lead to confusion when trying to determine if you are actually on the OCT.

"When you're in Ecola or Oswald West, you're on these local trails and might not realize it's part of the OCT," she said. For accuracy, Soper bought a GPS for her second trip and hired someone to create maps for the book from the data she collected.

Luckily, much of the trail is easily recognizable. The OCT really shines when seen from one of Oregon's greatest natural assets, its beaches.

"The trail takes advantage of all the beaches," Soper said. "About half of the entire trail is on the beach."

As she walked beach sections of the trail, Soper developed a strong interest in the history of the battle to keep Oregon's beaches public. "I'm from Oregon and I knew about the Beach Bill, but I got a brand new appreciation for how great that is," she said.

The Oregon Beach Bill, passed in 1967, established public ownership of the state's

beaches. When researching the bill for her book, Soper traveled to other states and compared their beach policies. "Texas was interesting because Oregon's Beach Bill was based on legislation passed there," she said. On a trip to Maine, however, Soper found that laws dating back to colonial times allowed for people to buy land all the way down to low tide lines.

Still in effect today, Maine's beach laws are the polar opposite of Oregon's. "I don't want to say I took our beaches for granted, but I certainly became more aware," Soper said.

Soper's book is alive with stories from Oregon's past and she found that aspect of her journey most rewarding. She spent a considerable amount of time researching trail history with the assistance of the Oregon Historical Society.

"It's a walk through history every day," Soper said. "The very first day you pass the Peter Iredale wreck. I was able to look at old photos of the ship when it first grounded, and that was fun seeing what it looked like then and walking those same places today."

Hikers can also feel the spirit of history near Cape Perpetua. There, they traverse "Amanda's Trail," named for a woman from the Coos Indian Tribe, Amanda De-Cuys.



Submitted photo by Trav Williams

Portland author Connie Soper has hiked the entire OCT twice.

Forced to abandon her daughter and move to a reservation known as the Alsea Subagency in 1864, the elderly and blind Amanda suffered greatly during the journey. Now, a statue likeness of Amanda rests along the trail and serves as a reminder of her story.

"People leave feathers, and flowers and beads on the statue," Soper said. "Every New

Year's Day there's a 'Peace Hike' with a traditional Native American ceremony. It's a great story of the trail."

Hikers know the feeling of being surrounded by something larger than themselves. In "A Walk In The Woods," Bill Bryson is awed by his surroundings while hiking: "The world, you realize, is enormous in a way that only you and a small community of

fellow hikers know."

With her book ready to hit shelves, Soper hopes it will inspire readers to explore the beautiful, enormous world that is the OCT.

"They don't have to do it the way I did it," she said. "Go to some new part of the coast you've never been, even if it's just for one day. There's satisfaction in just doing it."

The book is available in bookstores in Seaside, Cannon Beach and Manzanita or at www.dragonfly-press-pdx.com

'The trail takes advantage of all the beaches. About half of the entire trail is on the beach.'