

North Fork John Day provides early season exercise

Trail is classic Eastern Oregon

By **TIM TRAINOR**
East Oregonian

If your summer goal is a weeklong backpack in the Eagle Caps or the Elkhorns, you may be looking for early season opportunities to stretch your legs and your mileage without having to posthole your way through high country snow.

The North Fork John Day River Trail offers an alternative.

Warm, scenic and mostly flat, the 23-mile trail makes a good choice for a long spring day hike or an overnight backpack trip.

The trail begins with about 2 miles of easy walking along an old road that skirts alongside the North Fork John Day. It then diverges at a large, open camping spot where Big Creek and its trail pours into the John Day fork. This is where the wilderness area begins, and only horses and hikers can continue along an old mining road route that follows the river. It becomes more narrow and more scenic as it gets more remote.

The trail is classic Eastern Oregon. Hot and dusty mid-day. Lots of ponderosa and lodgepole pines mixed with Douglas fir and larch. Willows fill the river bottoms. You can catch glimpses of plenty of mule deer rear ends, bounding away into the surrounding hills. The water, where relatively calm, is covered with mergansers. Canadian geese have coupled off and built their nests on river islands.

Yet there are some downsides to this trail that must be mentioned.

Beware of ticks

The first is the near infestation of ticks. Before you

head out, liberally apply bug repellent. And be sure to wear pants, a long-sleeved shirt and a hat, bring extra bug spray for future doses and check yourself and your hiking partners closely at the end of the trip.

The second downside is that the angling — one of the main draws of the river during the majority of the year — ranges from poor to impossible during the spring runoff. A kayak would be more useful equipment than a fishing rod while the water is at its most turbid.

A third downside is that crossing the river is not possible. A jaunt up Cougar Creek Trail, for instance, requires fording the river. That is not possible until at least mid-May.

Yet there are some positives too.

Wander off trail

You can wander off trail for some favorite Eastern Oregon spring outdoor hobbies, as both antler and mushroom hunting can be very good.

About 5.2 miles in, just as the trail crosses Corral Creek, there is a riverside flat underneath towering ponderosas. Turning around here would make for a good hike of 10.4 miles — a good training day for those double-digit alpine hikes that await this summer.

Those with greater ambition, or who had a more active winter, can continue for miles more. There are dispersed campsites all along the river, with very little chance you'll have human company anywhere nearby.

If you plan ahead, you can leave a shuttle vehicle at the other end of the trail at the North Fork John Day Campground, about 23 miles as the river and the trail winds. But even if it is a simple out-and-back, the North Fork John Day Trail has plenty to offer close to home.



CLOCKWISE FROM TOP: The North Fork John Day River trail is a simple, easy walk through a wilderness area that can be completed while most high country hikes are still stacked with snow.

The North Fork John Day is riding high against the banks during spring runoff. Hiking along it can be a fun early-season adventure.

Big Creek rushes into the North Fork John Day River, about 2 miles from the trailhead.

Photos by Tim Trainor
EO Media Group



9-1-WHAT?

THE BEST OF THE WORST CALLS TO ASTORIA 911 DISPATCH

Camp Driftwood

We all love our driftwood. But calling the cops when someone in Seaside appears to be building a camp out of driftwood? Wood not ...

Follow reporter Kyle Spurr on his 9-1-What? Twitter watch, where a few of the sometimes head-scratching calls to area dispatch take center stage. The full feed is at www.twitter.com/9_1_WHAT.

9-1-WHAT? @9_1_WHAT Following

{4/9 @ 4:05 p.m.} Report of a juvenile with a BB gun possibly shooting birds. #Astoria

8:15 AM - 11 Apr 2016

9-1-WHAT? @9_1_WHAT Following

{4/8 @ 2:12 p.m.} Someone possibly building a camp out of driftwood. Officer advised no camp, but some kind of artistic display. #Seaside

8:20 AM - 11 Apr 2016

9-1-WHAT? @9_1_WHAT Following

{4/10 @ 3:57 a.m.} Intoxicated man trying to take items from caller's porch. #Warrenton

6:23 AM - 11 Apr 2016

9-1-WHAT? @9_1_WHAT Following

{4/9 @ 7:33 p.m.} Caller reported a bag with a person sleeping inside. The body-sized bag was full of cleaning supplies. #Seaside

6:22 AM - 11 Apr 2016

9-1-WHAT? @9_1_WHAT Following

{4/14 @ 8:52 p.m.} Theft of a riding lawn mower. #Astoria

7:24 AM - 18 Apr 2016



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