

# The Solitude of Soapstone Lake Trail

By DAN HAAG

There are times when I need to get lost — detach, unplug, disappear. That feeling intensifies as the bustling madness of the summer months come to a head with the arrival of Labor Day weekend.

For me, the best way to cope with months of traffic jams and car alarms is hitting a trail and hiking away my lingering summer hangover.

But where to go?

Popular trails like Cape Falcon and Saddle Mountain are still busy with hikers trying to devour that last morsel of summer. I need a spot with a bit more anonymity, somewhere requiring effort to find, which is why I celebrated the official end of summer at Soapstone Lake Trail.

Located within the Clatsop State Forest along the winding, twisting roller coaster that is Oregon Highway 53, it requires a bit of an iron stomach to reach.

I hadn't hiked Soapstone Lake Trail in nearly 10 years. The last time I did, it took me nearly half a day to find it; it had been unmarked by anything resembling a sign, though I remembered that as part of its allure. I was glad I made the effort then and was eager to return. Soapstone Lake Trail is as quiet and pastoral a spot as I've ever been in Oregon.



PHOTO COURTESY TILLAMOOK COUNTY PIONEER

The Lindgren Cabin, now located at Cullaby Lake County Park, once sat in this meadow along Soapstone Lake Trail.

The gravel road entrance on the northeast end of Highway 53 is thankfully easy to spot, and the parking lot lies below the highway. There's room for just a few cars, maybe four or five tops.

From there, the trail meanders through Sitka spruce, Western hemlock and ferns while paralleling Soapstone Creek.

As with most trails, dogs are welcome but required to be on leashes.

Strategically placed foot bridges keep booted feet from disturbing moss and wildflowers.

It's a relatively easy hike with no major changes in elevation, just a nice sloping, wide path with plenty of picture-taking opportunities.

Shortly, the trail opens

onto a meadow that was the site of an old homestead once upon a time — the Lindgren Cabin, which now rests at Cullaby Lake County Park in Warrenton.

The silence of the spot made me wish I could build a retreat here and spend the rest of my days listening to gentle breezes swaying through the leaves. Barring that, it was a nice place for a picnic.

After crossing the meadow, the trail eventually rises up railroad tie stairs, which in turn lead to the first glimpse of the lake itself.

The main trail narrows at this point, circling the lake and offering plenty of fallen logs suitable for sitting to catch a glimpse of an eagle. The trail around the lake is about half a mile, and the terrain rises and falls a bit more.



PHOTO COURTESY TILLAMOOK COUNTY PIONEER

Soapstone Lake Trail is located off Oregon Highway 53.



PHOTO COURTESY TILLAMOOK COUNTY PIONEER

From the parking lot, the trail leads to and then circles Soapstone Lake, offering plenty of picture-taking opportunities.

One feature to watch for is the constant presence of newts; the lakeside and much of the trail is alive with the little squirming buggers. While I've heard people say they've swam in the lake, I wouldn't only because it seems a bit boggy: perfectly fine for the newts, but I passed.

Eventually, you'll loop back around to where you began, climbing a short set

of stairs and crossing a small clearing along the way.

There and back again, as it were, is roughly a mile and a half each way, and hikers should plan on about 90 minutes to two hours to fully appreciate the trail and its abundant surroundings.

Back at the parking lot — where mine was still the only vehicle — I stopped to ponder whether or not I wanted to share how to find

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this place. Maybe I should just leave it alone and let really dedicated solitude-seekers find it themselves.

But sharing coastal trails with everyone is really the whole point of having them.

Besides, I'm sure I'm not the only one who feels the need to walk into the woods and disappear for a short while.

Soapstone Lake Trail is maintained by Oregon Department of Forestry. For details on this and other recreational sites in the Clatsop State Forest, visit [www.oregon.gov/ODF](http://www.oregon.gov/ODF)