



Horses have been a part of Northwest history, from pulling covered wagons along the Oregon Trail to hauling logs through luscious forests. Today, their uses tend to be in recreation or tourism. On the North Coast of Oregon there are countless opportunities to spend time on horseback, no matter your experience or skill level.

Backcountry rides

For more experienced riders with horses of their own, there are ample opportunities for exploration along the North Coast in the forests and beaches.

The trails near Northrup Creek Horse Camp off of Oregon Highway 202 is the perfect way to spend a day exploring the backwoods of the Clatsop State Forest. The campsite is closed for the season due to the coronavirus pandemic. However, day-use trails nearby are open to visitors. With miles of forested trees winding up old game trails and along railroad grades, the route takes riders and their horses through dozens of different micro ecosystems in the Clatsop State Forest.

“You get a little bit of everything,” said Ashley Letora, the chapter chair of the North Coast Oregon Equestrian Trails. “You cross creeks, you go up inclines. You’re in old forests, you’re in new forests. You’re in big maples.”

There are countless other areas in the Clatsop State Forest to explore via horseback. The 24-mile-long Banks-Vernonia State Trail is frequented by local horseback riders and is open year-round. The 4.6-mile loop on Step Creek Trail sits just south of U.S. Route 26 and is open from March to November when the weather is nice.

Fort Stevens State Park also offers miles of trails, starting in Parking Lot A and heading along the beach as far south as DeLaura Beach next to Camp Rilea. Along the way, riders can take their horses through the wooded trails of the interior or down along the sandy beaches past the Peter Iredale shipwreck while heading south.

With no steep inclines and solid footing on the sand for the horses, the trails provide a leisurely ride, no matter the weather.

“You have a couple different ways you can go. You can go out Strawberry Knoll, hit the beach, or if it’s a lousy day, you can do the interior trails and follow parallel to Burma or Ridge Road,” said Linda Brim, a member of Oregon Equestrian Trails.

Riders also have the opportunity to head south of Camp Rilea, crossing Sunset Beach and heading through to Seaside with ample beach to explore. Cannon Beach to Arch Cape to Nehalem Bay State Park also have horse-friendly areas for any rider’s needs.

With the growing industries of recreation and tourism across Clatsop County, there has been significant growth in the equine industry and community. Locals can get involved at local stables or with organizations, like North Coast Oregon Equestrian Trails or Backcountry Horsemen of Oregon, to help maintain trails and support the recreational activity that continues to maintain popularity for people of all ages.

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