

Worth the Effort

Cathedral Tree Trail

Astoria

If ever there was a tree that stood as an emblem for the spirit of a city, it's the Cathedral Tree — a 300-year-old Sitka spruce that resides a third of the way up Coxcomb Hill, home to the Astoria Column. Withstanding every fire, squall and hurricane to come its way, the tree remains a paradigm of steadfastness. Even during the devastating storm of 2007, when the forest structure surrounding it succumbed to 100-mph winds, the Cathedral Tree stood its ground.

Give this trail at 28th Street and Irving Avenue a chance and you'll be doing yourself a favor. Rising up from the urban environment at its feet, the forest has regained its vigor. Lush ferns, trillium, and skunk cabbage once again bedeck the ground, and an understory of alder, juvenile spruce, and hemlock is on the return. Center stage, the Cathedral Tree looks on, as if maternally, keeping a careful eye on the rebirth of her legacy.

Coastal Forest Loop Trail

Cape Disappointment State Park

Cape Disappointment State Park is a wealth of trails that all frolic back, forth, and over this stalwart headland at the south end of the Long Beach Peninsula. Though each one offers a prime sampling of the lushness of our coastal forests, the trees along this 1.5-mile loop are the best of the bunch.

Pick up the Coastal Forest Loop Trail near the parking area at the boat launch, and hike up through a mixed wood of alder, spruce, and elderberry. Large Sitkas, some of them 10 to 12 feet in diameter, appear at every switchback toward the middle of this trail, which gains in elevation only little by little, so it's never very painful. Views of Baker Bay and a wide sweep of the Columbia dot this delightful route.



Cathedral Tree Trail.

Don Bonker Cedar Grove Trail

Long Island

Accessible only by private boat, the Long Island unit of the Willapa National Wildlife Refuge is home to a grove of Western red cedar that has existed for almost 4,000 years. Though the individuals currently growing at this 274-acre site are about a 1,000 years old. Evidence of their ancestors, as well as their offspring, is all around.

Punctuating this 5-mile loop trail, which picks up at the south end of the island, a handful of ancients that twist and turn their way toward the sky, mingling with neighbors of spruce and hemlock. Near the middle of the island, where the official “grove” is located, the trail narrows, wrapping entirely around this special remnant of old growth.

While there are tall trees here in magnificent number, the real beauty lies in this forest's ability to offer a unique vision of time — a place where past, present, and future all collide beneath a canopy of evergreen. Gargantuan stumps, leftovers from the early days of logging, let us imagine how this forest once looked, untouched, while saplings and thriving young adults offer the promise that one day, it will be that way again. 