



Gary Chapman

Backpackers traverse the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail, a roughly 60-mile trail that runs from downtown Corvallis to the Oregon Coast south of Newport.

# Trail from Corvallis to central coast to open

A nearly 50 year effort

By JAMIE HALE  
The Oregonian

Backpackers who have aspired to hike from the Willamette Valley to the Oregon Coast finally have a dedicated trail to do it.

The Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail has been little more than a pipe dream for nearly 50 years, but on Aug. 21 it will officially open with a ribbon cutting ceremony, offering yet another outdoor adventure in Oregon.

Running about 60 miles from downtown Corvallis to Ona Beach south of Newport, the long-distance hiking and mountain biking trail crosses through a dense Coast Range forest, using old logging roads and newly cut trails. Like the neighboring Oregon Coast Trail, some sections of the hike also require walking along the shoulders of open roads.

The new trail is certainly challenging, but that may be a small price to pay for dedicated adventurers who seek the thrill of trekking from the valley to the ocean.

Gary Chapman, president of the C2C Trail Partnership that made the trail a reality, said people have already been exploring the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail, which has technically been open (though unsigned) for more than a year. Now that signs are in place and maps are being printed, it's finally time for a proper celebration.

"I feel like we're doing something that would make the people who started the idea back in the '70s and '80s, to make them proud, if they could be here, to see what's happened," Chapman said. "Mainly it's a camaraderie and a thank you to what society has been able to create, despite all the turmoil we've seen over the last years. It's really gratifying."

The first real attempt at blazing the trail appears to have come from Oregon State University student Marty Wong, who scouted out a route in 1974 during an internship with the Siuslaw National Forest. The idea bounced around bureaucratic channels and made it into local newspapers before dying on the vine in the 1980s. Oregon State students revived the idea in the 1990s, but it once again failed due to a lack of federal resources.

In 2003, the C2C Trail Partnership came together to give it another shot, patiently gaining permission from the U.S. Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management and private landowners, building the trail with help from a variety of local organizations, private donations and scores of volunteers.

Hikers who complete the 60-mile trail will cross through a patchwork of public and private lands, and while it's free to hike, all

through-hikers need to obtain a special permit to hike one section of the trail.

Chapman said the C2C Trail Partnership already has plans for future projects. Eventually they would like to add loop trails for day hikers and backpackers looking for quicker adventures. The partnership would also like to get hikers off the shoulders of roads, if possible.

And then there's the question of how popular the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail will become. If hikers flock to the trail, there will be a greater impact to the land that may need to be addressed, Chapman said. Right now, there are no established backcountry campsites, and officials remain optimistic that backpackers will leave no trace as they go.

"Will success spoil C2C?" Chapman asked. "That's always a potential problem."

Unlike some of the most popular backpacking trails in Oregon, there are no volcano views or alpine lakes to entice hikers. And while Chapman said he doesn't consider the trail to be particularly difficult, not everybody agrees.

Al LePage, executive director of the National Coast Trail Association, which has aided in the effort to complete the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail, said he first visited the wild, unfinished trail with Chapman about 15 years ago, "to see what it was really like," and returned last year to hike the completed trail end to end.

"It's not just a cakewalk, it's not just a walk in the woods," LePage said. "I thought it was challenging, very challenging."

Like most other backpacking trails in the Pacific Northwest, the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail requires some special preparation and precautions. All drinking water taken from streams must be boiled or treated. All food should be either hung from high branches or stored in bear canisters away from camp. And hikers are asked to bury human waste and pack out used toilet paper.

Campfires are banned year-round on the trail, except at the developed Big Elk Campground about 30 miles in.

Hikers and bikers might also run into black bears and cougars on the trail, Chapman said (in fact, some already have) and should make sure to know how to fend off potential attacks — though the best advice is just to leave all wildlife alone, he said.

LePage said he hiked a total of 62 miles in five days on his most recent trip down the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail, sleeping in rough backcountry campsites, drinking purified water and battling mosquitos the whole way, but he said the struggles were worth it in the end when he stepped out onto Ona Beach.

A seasoned Oregon adventurer, LePage

said he'd like to see the new trail become part of what he calls the Grand Oregon Adventure Loop, or GOAL. In his vision, hikers could paddle the 187-mile Willamette Water Trail from Corvallis to Portland, then continue paddling down the Lower Columbia River Water Trail to Astoria. From there, they can hike the Oregon Coast Trail south to Newport and hike the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail back to Corvallis.

For the most part, though, the Corvallis-to-the-Sea Trail will appeal to the slightly more casual adventurers, those who light up at the prospect of a week in the woods and 60 miles under their feet. Chapman said the

trail is already attracting about three parties a week, roughly split between hikers and bikers.

Adventure aside, one of the biggest draws might just be the opportunity to immerse yourself into a natural setting that is better known for logging roads and highways. Although the trail has logging nearby and some busy roads, Chapman said there's plenty of opportunity to escape into the quiet of the Coast Range forest.

"What do you hear out there?" he said, thinking back to his most recent trip. "Once you get away from the civilization and everything, what you hear is silence."

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