

Head west for a relaxing float down Oregon's other big river

By ZACH URNESS
Statesman Journal

SALEM — The experience of floating the Willamette River near Salem, Oregon's capital city, is not for those seeking thrills.

The stream is wide enough to be a small lake in places and moves with a pace of a tortoise — slow and steady but always arriving at its destination.

Despite the lack of whitewater, I've grown to enjoy floating the Willamette during the summertime, especially with first-time boaters and younger children.

The lack of rapids gives my 6- and 9-year-old nephews the chance to learn how to pilot an inflatable kayak without many consequences, and the close-to-home location means we're not stuck in the car for hours.

Part of what has surprised me is that the Willamette, despite flowing through Oregon's largest population centers, is quite peaceful for much of its journey.

The river's edges are forested, and the sound of birds is more common than cars in many stretches of the river.

Getting started is a breeze. The Willamette Water Trail website has one of the best digital maps I've seen. You can view every boat ramp, campsite and river access point, along with the distance between them. By looking at the map, it's simple to pick two places for put-in and take-out and the river mileage between them.

This is no small thing when traveling with children, where you'll always want to err on the side of a shorter trip.

You can float the lazy Willamette in just about anything, but always wear a life jacket and stay away from downed trees and rocks.

Here are a few of my favorite stretches of the Willamette in the Salem area. Each section requires two cars for a shuttle. Since most of the area has good cellphone reception, you can use a Google Maps app on your smartphone to make sure you don't miss your take-out.

EASY AND QUICK

Independence to Emil Marx Park, 4.5 miles

Put in: Riverview Park

Take out: Emil Marx/Lloyd Strange Fishing Hole

This stretch of river is about as simple as you can get.

From Independence's Riverview Park, the river moves at a good pace through generally pleasant scenery. The only downside is occasional motorboats.

A pair of gravel bars make good places for snacking and swimming on a trip that only takes about two and a half hours total (including setting up the shuttle).

Spring Valley Greenway to Grand Island Access, 4 miles

Put in: Spring Valley (just across from Western Mennonite School)



Zach Urness/Statesman-Journal via AP

In this July 2014 photo, Rylan Peters, 9, of Salem, paddles an inflatable kayak on the Willamette River in between Keizer Rapids Park and Grand Island near Salem.

Take out: Grand Island Access

This pretty stretch of river takes you past Willamette Mission State Park, across the Wheatland Ferry's path and into the forested channel of Grand Island.

The river remains scenic throughout, and considering the short distance of the trip, stopping for a swim here and there is encouraged.

Two elements make this a float where you'll have to pay attention. After floating past the Wheatland Ferry, make sure to paddle left, out of the main current and navigate into the left channel of Grand Island. Otherwise, you'll miss your take-out point.

The put-in and take-out spots also are tricky. At Spring Valley, you must make your way down a steep embankment to get to the river. It's not too hard for adults but can be tricky for kids. At Grand Island, you must carry your boat about 100 yards to the car.

SCENIC AND LONGER

Keizer Rapids Park to Wheatland Ferry, 8 miles

Put in: Keizer Rapids Park

Take out: Wheatland Ferry boat landing

This quiet and pretty stretch of river might be my favorite stretch on the Willamette near Salem.

Once you get paddling, the roads feel a long way away and the riparian forest of the greenways in West Salem take center stage. The trip ends at the Wheatland boat landing and will take a full day.

You can float a shorter version of this trip as well by taking out at Spring Valley (see above). That trip is about 5.5 miles, but can be a hassle to set up a shuttle. Even so, with younger kids, the shorter option often is a good bet.

Independence to Wallace Marine, 11.5 miles

Willamette Water Trail

What it is: A guide to boating the Willamette River

Where to find it: willamettewater-trail.org

What you'll find: The location of river access points, boat launches, campsites, picnic areas, river hazards and other helpful information

What you'll need: A boat, life jacket, paddle, two cars to set up a shuttle.

Put in: Independence's Riverview Park

Take out: Wallace Marine Park

This stretch of river has always been a little too long, slow and urbanized for my taste, but it's still worth mentioning given its proximity to Salem.

The first half is nice, but once the river hits the edge of Highway 22, the float isn't nearly as enjoyable.

Even so, this stretch is worth doing during the annual Great Willamette River Raft Race, Aug. 8 (willametteriverrace.com).

Buena Vista to Independence, 11.5 miles

Put in: Buena Vista County Park

Take out: Independence's Riverview Park

I haven't had time to run this stretch of river yet, but according to those who know, this long day trip or overnight adventure might be the best float near Salem.

The river curves past multiple islands, Ankeny National Wildlife Refuge and seven riverside camping spots. The best camping spot, about 2.5 miles into the trip, is American Bottom. It has a fire ring, seasonal toilet and picnic table.

Check the Willamette Water Trail website for more campsites and details to make this longer trip worthwhile.

BRIEFLY

Umatilla forest hosts kids fishing derbies

In recognition of National Fishing Week, the Umatilla National Forest will host three free kids fishing derbies on Saturday, June 6 and Sunday, June 7.

The first two events will be held on June 6 at Twin Ponds, located seven miles southeast of Ukiah on Forest Road 52, and at West Evans Ponds located two miles west of Clarkston, Washington on Highway 12.

A third derby is scheduled for June 7 at Rainbow Lake, 14 miles south of Pomeroy, Washington along the Tucannon River Road.

Registration for the Ukiah derby will begin at 7 a.m. and runs through noon. Free fishing is open to all, with a "biggest fish" and casting contest for children ages 16 and under. Hot dogs, chips and soda will be provided by local sponsors.

At both West Evans Pond and Rainbow Lake, fishing will be open to kids ages 14 and under and runs from 8 a.m. through noon. Prizes will be awarded for smallest and largest fish caught, and hot dogs and soda will be served.

Children who participate in fishing must be accompanied by an adult and should bring their own fishing gear. A limited amount of gear and tackle will be available for those who need it.

For more information about the Twin Ponds event, contact the North Fork John Day Ranger District office at 541-427-3231. For information about the West Evans Ponds or Rainbow Lake events, contact the Pomeroy Ranger District office at 509-843-1891.

Climber killed in fall on Mount Hood

PORTLAND (AP) — Authorities say a 66-year-old man from Idaho has died in a 400-foot fall on Mount Hood.

The Clackamas County sheriff's office has identified him as Ward Milo Maxfield of Paul, Idaho.

The sheriff's office said Thursday he was with a party of three other people, including a 17-year-old grandson.

Climbers said Maxfield was on the south side of the mountain, using a popular route to the summit, when he fell from a spot at about 10,000 feet.

Mount Hood is about 50 miles east of Portland and is Oregon's tallest peak. The summit at 11,240 feet attracts thousands of climbers, many of whom make the ascent in the spring.

Glacier National Park road listed on National Register of Historic Places

GLACIER NATIONAL PARK, Mont. (AP) — A two-lane road mostly inside Glacier National Park has been listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

National Park Service officials said Monday the Camas Creek Cutoff Road which intersects with Going-to-the-Sun Road has been listed as a place of statewide historic significance. The register is the official list of places worthy of preservation within the United States.

The nearly 12-mile road leads from Going-to-the-Sun Road to the North Fork Road just outside the national park within the Flathead National Forest.

Rarely explored trails off Rogue River open

MEDFORD (AP) — An Ashland-based group has begun clearing overgrown trails within the rugged Wild Rogue Wilderness Area, and a new grant means they can expand their efforts at opening foot access off these Rogue River trails.

The Siskiyou Mountain Club's Wilderness Conservation Corps crew has begun scouting and hand-clearing light brush to launch the club's two-year quest to restore what will become a 30-mile hiking loop with multiple access points along the famed 40-mile Rogue River National Recreation Trail within the wilderness area downstream from Galice.

The club recently secured a \$10,000 grant from the REI store in Medford that will help fund clearing even more spur trails in the wilderness area, opening access to areas rarely explored by visitors largely relegated to the river or the main trail that hugs its banks and canyon walls.

"I think we're going to be able to extend what we're going to do in the Wild Rogue," says Gabe Howe, the nonprofit club's executive director. "It'll strengthen the scope of the project."

The new grant buoys a nearly \$21,000 federal grant the club secured last fall through the Oregon State Recreational Trails Program that is anchoring the work.

Not only will the REI grant go toward reclaiming Mule Creek, Clay Hill and Panther Ridge trails from overgrown brush, it also will help create opportunities to continue maintenance clearing on them so the overgrowth and trail degradation doesn't return there,



Zach Urness/The Statesman Journal via AP, file

In this undated file photo, a camper sets down for the night along the Rogue River, just off the Rogue River Trail, in the wild section between Grave Creek and Foster Bar near Galice.

Howe says.

"We don't want to get into the cycle of restoring trails then walking away from them without maintaining them," Howe says. "We're looking into the future."

The Rogue River Trail bisects the heart of the National Wild and Scenic Rogue River Canyon and runs between Grave Creek near Galice to Illahe about 30 miles east of Gold Beach. It's an Oregon bucket-list hike for travelers who either do it alone or with the help of various Rogue River Canyon rafting liveries that offer packages for guided and supported hikes.

The trail hugging the Rogue's north bank is co-managed by the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service, with the Forest Service portion in greater need of clearing and

improving to meet trail specifications, Howe says.

The trail is narrow and often at high elevations, so it is not recommended for kids under 12 and those afraid of heights, according to the Forest Service.

Two of the project's bigger challenges will be

clearing the Mule Creek Trail, which snakes between Marial and Eden Valley. The trail was once a supply route for miners who eked out their living in the handscramble mountains around Marial, which was large enough to support its own post office until the 1950s.

Come celebrate with us!

Freda Bafus is 99!!

Sun., June 14, 2015 5:00 pm

Hamley Steakhouse Pendleton, OR

No gifts please • No host dinner
Questions or RSVP, call 509-301-9296






TRAIL TRAKKERS

2015 Summer Walking Program
May 25th - Aug. 27th

Morning Walks meet at Oxbow Trailhead
(Intersection of 11th & Elm St.)
Monday & Wednesday 7:00 - 8:00 am

Evening Walks meet at the Riverfront Park
(SW 23rd St., Hermiston)
Tuesday & Thursday 6:00 - 7:00 pm
(Meet later during warmer days)

Questions? Call 541-667-3400 ext 3050
or email healthinfo@gshealth.org