

Let science hit the road: Trips that spark learning

By JENNIFER COLTON-JONES

Taking a family summer road trip remains a treasured American tradition, but in between bonding opportunities, a road trip can be educational for your kids. Here are several trip ideas focused on natural science.

Life Sciences and Biology Route:

McNary, The Dalles, Newport, and Winston

Start your biology road trip in Umatilla County at the McNary Lock and Dam on the Columbia River. Watch fish swim past the viewing room window then take in the interpretive displays, juvenile fish facility and natural resources office at the Pacific Salmon Visitor Information Center. The center also has audio-visual programs on salmon and hydropower. Call ahead to schedule a tour, find out the best times to hit the fish viewing room and perhaps watch scientists in action. While at the dam, you can stretch your legs on more than four miles of trails.

Hit the road again and head west toward the Columbia Gorge Discovery Center and Museum. Among its exhibits, events and gorgeous scenery, the center also boasts the Raptor Interpretive Program: an

up-close experience with live birds of prey, including falcons, hawks, owls and eagles. Live presentations cover the attributes of each species and challenges the animals face.



Demonstrations are offered daily; call ahead to find the day's schedule or check the center's website at gorgediscovery.org.

When you're ready, continue west to the mouth of the Columbia, then south along the coast to Newport and the Oregon Coast Aquarium. The facility also offers opportunity for animal experiences and diving opportunities from sea otters to sea dragons. The aquarium also offers age- and grade-based educational opportunities and lessons

and daily feeding schedules (advanced registration required). The Oregon Coastal Aquarium is open 10 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily during its summer season.

If your family wants to see lions, zebras, giraffes and elephants outside of a zoo, continue south to the Wildlife Safari in Winston. A non-profit wildlife sanctuary dedicated to conservation and education, this is the only drive-through animal park in the state. Wildlife Safari features more than 500 animals on 400+ acres in Southern Oregon, and is the top cheetah breeding facility outside of Africa. Wildlife Safari is open 9 a.m. to 6 p.m. daily.

Don't forget the opportunity to take a hiking or camping trip and learn about Oregon's native wildlife — as close or as far from home as you'd like.

Earth Science and Geology Route:

John Day Fossil Beds, Crater Lake, and Lava Beds

This road trip takes you through central and southern Oregon for a journey through state and national parks that tell a rich story that aspiring geologists will love.



Education

Start your trip at the John Day Fossil Beds National Monument and learn the stories behind the multi-colored painted hills, the remains of a prehistoric jungle landscape, and the wonders of nature and erosion. At 19,000 acres, it's one of the world's richest areas for fossils and a beautiful drive. Try your hand as a paleontologist in the Wheeler High School Fossil Beds, hike one of the trails and visit the Thomas Condon Paleontology Center for hands-on and kid-friendly exhibits and a working research lab.

Continue southwest to Oregon's only national park: Crater Lake. Walk the rim of the lake and stop in at the informational sites to learn about the volcanic eruption that formed the lake, and why the deepest lake in the United States is one of the most pure. Ranger programs, hiking and driving trails and interactive exhibits make the trip educational for kids of all ages.

Further south, cross the California state line to take in Lava Beds National Monument. Learn about how lava flows formed seas of stone and tube-like caves before taking your family inside the caves for a memorable experience. The national monument has caves with paved walking paths or caverns requiring special gear and spelunking training. You'll also have the chance to learn about bats and plant life.

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