

RECREATION REPORT

GEOCACHING

Oregon state parks to offer limited camping starting June 9

SALEM — The Oregon Parks and Recreation Department (OPRD) will offer limited camping at many state park campgrounds starting June 9. State park camping closed statewide March 23 in an effort to contain the spread of coronavirus and limit travel, especially to smaller communities and rural areas.

A list of which campgrounds will open June 9 is still being finalized. That list will be published on oregonstateparks.org by the end of May. Not all parks and all services will be available. Most of the campgrounds opening accept reservations, but some first come, first served state park campgrounds may open as staff and funding are available.

Those campgrounds that do open will honor existing tent and RV reservations starting June 9, and will accept new reservations from one day to two weeks in advance, instead of the usual nine months in advance. Reservations will still be made through OPRD's contracted vendor, Reserve America at <https://oregonstateparks.reserveamerica.com/> RV and tent campers without reservations will be welcome at open campgrounds as space and staffing permit.

Reservations for most yurts and cabins, and group camping and group day-use, are still subject to cancellation. Visitors holding those reservations will be contacted if a cancellation is required.

Two main forces determine when a state park campground can open. Some communities, such as the north coast, are not yet ready for overnight visitors from outside their area.

A more widespread factor relates to funding. The Oregon State Park system is not funded by taxes, but by revenue from park visitors, a small share of the Oregon Lottery, and a portion of state recreational vehicle registrations. The revenue needed to operate state parks has fallen drastically since March, meaning one of the most popular state park systems in the country is being operated by about half the usual staff.

The Thrill of the Hunt

■ The search for a geocache isn't always successful, but wildflowers and vistas are fine consolation prizes

I don't think I'm especially gullible but recently I spent the better part of an hour nosing into the nooks and crannies on a lonely mountaintop, searching for something based solely on advice I read on the internet.

Searching, and not finding. Not finding what was supposed to be there according to my online advisers, anyway.

We did find a couple of morels. And many clumps of colorful wildflowers.

And I found a fire-blackened branch set at just the right elevation to slash a pair of parallel gashes in my right calf as I blundered past.

(Another symptom of my gullibility is that I wear shorts when hiking through fire-scarred forests in mid-May.)

What we didn't find is the item that lured me, along with my wife, Lisa, and our kids, Max and Olivia, to Stump Spring Butte on the divide between the Burnt and Powder rivers southeast of Baker City.

A geocache. Or as I prefer to call it, the alleged geocache.

Max is the lone holdout, and I believe he would, if given the chance, be up there yet, peering



ON THE TRAIL
JAYSON JACOBY

into the recesses between the jumbled boulders that make up the top of the butte, which is more of a plateau than a pinnacle.

Max, who is 9, certainly is the most enthusiastic geocacher in our family.

Indeed he introduced the rest of us to the hobby.

We were all aware of geocaching, to be sure, and understood the basic concept of using GPS — the Global Positioning System, an extremely accurate way of navigating by signals from orbiting satellites — to find hidden caches of small, often whimsical, items.

Basically it's a high-tech treasure hunt in which finders are encouraged to swap one small treasure for another — a marble for a tiny stuffed animal, maybe.

But it wasn't until Max became entranced by geocaching that we incorporated searches into our regular weekend hiking excursions.

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Lisa Britton/For the EO Media Group

Once you've found a geocache you need to sign the register to prove you were actually there.



Lisa Britton/For the EO Media Group

The blooming bitterroot looks delicate, but the plant is hardy, usually growing in rocky areas with little soil. This one was blossoming in the middle of a road.



Lisa Britton/For the EO Media Group

The view south from Stump Spring Butte takes in tens of thousands of acres scarred by wildfires over the past 30 years or so. The dead trees in the foreground were scorched during the Cornet-Windy Ridge fire in August 2015. Some areas farther south were burned in the Dooley Mountain fire of 1989. The two fires' boundaries also overlapped in places.

Don't defile morels — cook in cast iron

In the midst of the COVID-19 scare there is one spring highlight that didn't fail to occur. Morel mushrooms! Morels are the best food that nature has to offer and now is the primo season. I have been out of state and dying to get back home to go mushroom picking. Katy had to teach the first day back but she was off on a recent Friday so we took off for my secret spot.

We didn't find as many as we would have wished but still got enough for a good mess. They were all nice and firm and in good shape. So if you are reading this article you need to hurry up, finish reading this article and jump in the truck and head for the mountains. It is primo time.



BASE CAMP
TOM CLAYCOMB

To prepare the mushrooms, gently rinse and then slice in half lengthwise. Put in a bowl with salt water to kill any bugs and refrigerate overnight.

Last week I covered how to hunt them, today let's go over my favorite recipe. You can make mushroom gravy, scramble with eggs and use them in other ways, but frying them is the ultimate. Beat two to three eggs with about a 1/2 cup of milk in a bowl. Drain the water off the rinsed mushrooms an hour beforehand. Throw the drained/sliced mushrooms in the egg batter and cover with batter.

Pour some flour on a plate. Roll the mushrooms in the flour. On the stove be pre-heating a skillet with about 1/2-inch of grease to medium heat. When hot (sizzles a drop of water) lay mushrooms cut side down in the skillet. Fry to a golden brown and flip.

OK, I have to digress for a minute. If you have a thin-walled skillet anywhere in your kitchen gingerly pick it up with two fingers so as not to defile yourself. Walk out to the trash can and throw it away. Buy a cast iron Lodge skillet. They are the best for frying and evenly disperse heat while cooking.

When golden brown (not too brown) remove and lay on a paper towel-lined plate. I lightly sprinkle with salt and pepper when frying but



Photo by Tom Claycomb

A cast iron skillet is the proper way to prepare morels.

not too much. Let everyone season to their tastes. I use

Tony Chachere's original seasoning.