



THE REGION'S HUB FOR OUTDOOR ADVENTURES

Each week in this section, you will find the area's most complete guide of what's open and closed; outdoor activities and events; top picks of places to explore; conditions of hiking and biking trails, fishing holes, water flows, camping spots, parks and more — as well as features from outdoor writers and field experts.



Heather Whittle walks through a cutting in the rocks along the Willow Creek Canyon Trail.

BEND ENDURANCE ACADEMY

Youth climbers explore their limits

BY CRISTINA PETERSON
For The Bulletin

It happens to me all the time, in the gym and at the crag — even more as I get older and more youth get into climbing. A kid, half my size, easily climbs a route that I struggled up or am still figuring out. Climbers in youth programs are strong! But they are also, more often than not, polite and encouraging. They know the etiquette of indoor and outdoor climbing.

This is no coincidence. Mike Rougeux, executive director of the Bend Endurance Academy and a climbing coach of 16 years, says youth climbing programs are important for the same reasons that all youth sports benefit kids. But also much more than that. They aim to instill lessons in the next generation of climbers about how to be good ambassadors for the sport and to value natural spaces.

Climbing, like the other programs within the BEA, is an outdoor sport that people can participate in at varying levels through all stages of life. Teaching climbers from a young age about respecting the places they climb can create lifelong advocates for public lands. Learning to handle the pressure of a hard climb can also make youth more resilient.

The BEA climbing program focuses on both indoor competition climbing and outdoor climbing.

“These two types of climbing are worlds apart and yet complement each other well,” Rougeux said. In competition, climbers don't choose the style of climb. The routes are set by the organization hosting the event. In competition climbing, there is little time to study the route before attempting it, and competitors can't watch how others climb the route.

“When a competitor begins, they have to be physically prepared for any style of climbing and they need to have a tactical approach, which might include determining when to rest and when to execute,” Rougeux pointed out. They have to stay calm and focused to succeed in one attempt. This better prepares youth for climbing outdoors. Being able to make moves on a variety of holds and to read sequences while on-route, skills gained through competition, can make a climber more successful on many more routes.

See **Climbers** / B10

Take the trail less traveled at Willow Creek Canyon



Heather Whittle and her dog, Django, walk along the former train trestle that's part of the trail.

Makenzie Whittle/
Bulletin photos

BY MAKENZIE WHITTLE • The Bulletin

Nothing beats hitting a Central Oregon trail in springtime.

Hikers can enjoy great views and interesting geological features, bikers can find an easy path along a creek and even climbers can spend an afternoon hugging a rock face.

No, this isn't the ever-popular, and usually overcrowded, Smith Rock State Park; this is Willow Creek Canyon, located on the outskirts of Madras.

While the canyon may not

be as breathtaking as its southern counterpart — or as meticulously maintained — it still offers an easy trail for hikers and bikers along with surprisingly good vistas to gander at along the way.

The 6.4-mile, one-way trail starts just east of the BNSF train trestle as it passes SW Canyon Road and follows Willow Creek until it enters Lake Simtustus. The path is what remains of an old train grade built in the early 1900s for the Deschutes Railroad as it made



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its way from Central Oregon to the Columbia River.

The tracks may be gone, but the rock cutouts for steam locomotives that once chugged along and the fairly level path remain, now making a worthwhile High Desert hike.

Spring hike, bike, climb

On Central Oregon's recent 60-plus-degree day, my sister Heather and I ventured north to Willow Creek, knowing little about what the trail had to offer.

See **Willow Creek** / B9

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