



Bennett Hall/Blue Mountain Eagle

Mature ponderosa pines are the main attraction at the Swick Old Growth Interpretive Site.

AT A GLANCE

WHAT: Swick Old Growth Interpretive Site

ATTRACTIONS: A ¾-mile asphalt loop, suitable for wheelchairs, winds through an old growth Ponderosa pine forest; interpretive signs explain aspects of the ecosystem

AMENITIES: Picnic tables, benches, vault toilet

GETTING THERE: From downtown John Day, drive south on Highway 395 for 17.5 miles. Turn left onto an unpaved road at a sign for Swick Old Growth (directly across from County Road 63, the Izee-Paulina Highway) and find a parking lot after 0.1 mile

Swick Old Growth Interpretive Site offers a quick and easy getaway amid towering pines

By **BENNETT HALL**
Blue Mountain Eagle

SENECA — From the Strawberry Mountains to the Aldrich Range to the Blue Mountains, Grant County has no shortage of opportunities for high country adventure.

But sometimes you just want a pleasant place to spend a quiet hour or two in nature, without having to work too hard — or drive too far — to do so.

The Malheur National Forest's Swick Old Growth Interpretive Site is the perfect place for a quick and easy getaway.

Located just off Highway 395 at the top of the grade between Canyon City and Seneca, the site offers an easy walk through a parklike pine forest.

A gently graded, ¾-mile



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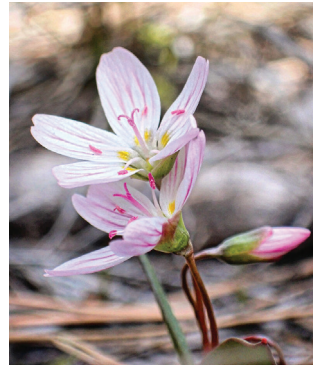
Woodpeckers are frequent visitors to the Swick grove.

asphalt loop, suitable for wheelchair use, winds among towering orange-barked ponderosas, some of which are around 200 years old. On a warm summer day, the trees fill the air with their sweet and spicy scent.

Younger pines have begun to fill in the forest understory, a legacy of Forest Service policies that favor fire suppression; in a state of nature, low-intensity ground fires would likely have burned here at intervals of five to 15 years or so, keeping the grove more open. Neon-green wolf lichen and black tree lichen festoon

the branches.

Where the forest floor isn't carpeted in pine needles, grasses and heart-leaf amica provide ground cover, and a variety of wildflowers contribute pops of color among the greenery in spring and summer. Red Indian paintbrush, purple lupine, white yarrow, violet aster, multicolored mariposa lily and ghostly-pale prairie smoke were all blooming during a recent visit. Also on display were some large mushrooms and vigorous shoots of pinedrops, a non-green plant that looks like a cross between a flower and



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One of the many wildflowers to be found at the Swick Old Growth Interpretive Site.



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A mariposa lily blooms beside the trail in July.

takes off from the eastern arm of the asphalt path and runs for just over a mile through more tall pines and a couple of open meadows studded with sagebrush and arrowleaf balsamroot.

Like a handful of other interpretive trails on the Malheur National Forest, the Swick Old Growth Interpretive Site offers a short, informative foray for people with mobility issues, motorists passing through the area or locals looking for a quick nature break close to home.

Even so, it packs a lot of attractions into a small area.

"The main feature is the old-growth ponderosa pine trees. I encourage visitors to get in close to the bark and see if they can smell the vanilla/butterscotch resins (terpenes) produced by these amazing trees," said Jared Bowman, the Malheur's north zone recreation manager.

"Numerous birds — including woodpeckers — may be present in the area. Visitors may also encounter mammals of all sizes, from chipmunks to elk."

Surprisingly big rewards for such a small investment of time and effort.

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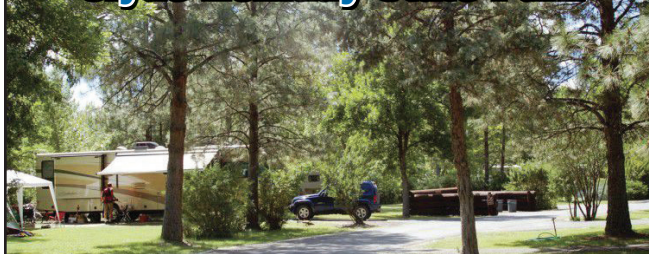
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