

## Outdoors

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### Warm up with hot springs, cool off with waterfalls in Oregon

Oregon's Cascades, between Mount Hood and Crater Lake, provide a treasure trove of hot springs and waterfalls, which make a good combination for hikers and nature lovers. Here's a roundup, from Breitenbush to Silver Falls.

By Christy Karras

Special to The Seattle Times



When Courtney McConaghy and Jason Heller took a rafting trip down the chilly waters of Oregon's McKenzie River recently, their guide pointed out a hot-spring pool that lay right beside the river. Intrigued, and chilled from the 40-degree water, they returned to the springs that evening for a warm soak.

"The river is 40, and this is about 90," Heller said as the pair, on vacation from California, relaxed and chatted in the rocky, fern-draped pool known as Deer Creek Hot Springs, with the whitewater river tumbling beside them.

Geothermal activity and heavy winter snowfall combine to pepper Oregon's mountains with hot springs and the waterfalls that gave the Cascade Range its name. And many of both are easily accessible via beautiful forest hikes, making this the perfect destination for a water-and-walking trip.

The biggest concentration of hot springs and waterfalls hikes lies in the Cascade Mountains and foothills between Mount Hood and Crater Lake, and the McKenzie River area provides one of the best combinations.

The 26-mile McKenzie River National Recreation Trail is popular with mountain bikers and hikers (access points along the trail allow hikers to pop in and out for shorter segments). It follows the McKenzie River,

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home to Deer Creek Hot Springs as well as nearby Belknap Hot Springs, a developed resort with lodging and swimming pools.

## Terwilliger Hot Springs

Just to the south of the McKenzie is Terwilliger Hot Springs, a relatively undeveloped multipool spring near Cougar Reservoir. The popular springs are at the end of a pretty half-mile hike from the reservoir's edge.

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Terwilliger is owned by the U.S. Forest Service, which contracts with a private outfit to lightly manage the site (as with many hot springs owned by the Forest Service, there's a \$5 fee to enter). "Our focus has been to try to make it a family-friendly spot," said Judy McHugh, a Forest Service spokeswoman.

Like many public hot springs in Oregon, Terwilliger is clothing-optional. Folks go without for many reasons ranging from practical (it's easier to dry off) to philosophical (many consider the springs sacred places, and they want to experience them *au naturel*). If you're wearing a bathing suit, unclothed people likely will avoid staring at you in just the same way you're avoiding staring at them.

## Waterfalls, too

Just east of Cougar Reservoir, Proxy Falls is one of many waterfall hikes along the McKenzie River corridor. This short-loop hike is great for families and leads to the bottom of a plume that seems to disappear in porous volcanic rocks below.

Just north of Deer Creek Hot Springs is another great spot to hike: Sahalie Falls, one of Oregon's gems. Although the falls themselves are close to the road, a three-mile loop, part of the McKenzie River trail, winds from Sahalie to Koosah Falls and on to the campground at Carmen Reservoir, passing whitewater much of the way. Given the number of nearby campgrounds, it's easy to spend a day hiking to waterfalls and follow that up with a hot-springs soak and a night on the shores of a lake.

## Breitenbush Hot Springs

Somewhere between camping and Belknap Hot Springs, philosophically, is Breitenbush Hot Springs, a lightly developed resort catering to health-conscious folks seeking a retreat. The resort has charming 1930s-era wood-shingled cabins, as well as a number of small soaking pools. Three vegetarian meals are served cafeteria-style each day, and the cost of your stay includes yoga. The Breitenbush River National Recreational Trail borders the property; many visitors do a five-mile loop around the resort and return for dinner and a soak before bedtime. Breitenbush's pools (though not the rest of the resort) are clothing-optional.

## Silver Falls and Opal Creek

For magnificent falls and cool pools, head west to Silver Falls State Park and the Opal Creek Scenic Recreation Area, both in the foothills between Salem and the Cascades. Silver Falls' waterfalls are truly spectacular plumes, many of which hikers can walk behind. The Trail of Ten Falls takes you past, yes, 10 waterfalls, in 8 miles.

The Opal Creek area is Oregon's largest old-growth watershed. Its miles of hikes go past pools, over bridges and among trees that are up to 1,000 years old. Opal Creek's waters are so clear you

can see every detail of the streambed beneath it, but they are nothing close to warm.

## **Bagby Hot Springs**

One of the trails at Opal Creek runs 17.5 miles across a ridge to the remarkable Bagby Hot Springs ([www.bagbyhotsprings.org](http://www.bagbyhotsprings.org)), which is much easier to access via a 1.5-mile hike from a trailhead off Highway 224 to the north. Like most in the area, the trail to Bagby is very well-maintained. The hot springs itself, used by the public for more than 100 years, exemplifies the mix of vandalism and preservation that results when a remote place catches people's interest.

Three beautiful hewn-timber bathhouses, built by volunteers and overseen now by the Forest Service, are surrounded by pristine forest. But they've been tagged, littered and carved up by careless visitors, and the area may or may not be very clean when you visit.

Those working to preserve hot springs, including the Forest Service and volunteer groups, are grateful to those who leave any hot springs cleaner than they found them. "Keep the site natural, because that's what others came to experience," McHugh said.

*Christy Karras is a Seattle-based freelance writer.*