

Oregon Coast Offers Endless Opportunities

by Scott_Staats

Iâ€™m beginning to feel like the Oregon coast is my second home. My wife and I spent last week there, as well as spring break, and we plan on returning for a week in August. Thereâ€™s something special about the coast that keeps bringing us back.

On the drive over last week, we stopped off at the William L. Finley National Wildlife Refuge just south of Corvallis to do a little birding. We saw about 25 species of birds and took a short one-mile hike on the Woodpecker Loop Trail.

On the coast, we made Waldport our base camp at a vacation rental house. We have also stayed in Yachats in the past. From our living room we could watch seals, bald eagles and other birds in Alsea Bay through our spotting scope and binoculars.

Tide Pools - Sea Stars & Sea Anemones One of our favorite things to do is to hit the tide pools when the tide is low. Pick up a tide chart or print one from the Internet. Some of the best tidepooling can be found at Seal Rock State Park, Neptune State Park and Cape Perpetua. Look for sea stars, sea anemones and sea urchins. Keep your eyes peeled out in the open sea for seals, sea lions, whales and orcas.

We did get to see several resident whales. Watch for their spouts or fins sticking out of the water. I spoke with others who recently saw several orcas, or killer whales in the area of Seal Rock.

To help plan your trip, I suggest picking up William Sullivan's book 100 Hikes/Travel Guide for the Oregon Coast and Coast Range. Another good book is Oregon State Parks, A Complete Recreation Guide by Jan Bannan.

Seals Our first outing was at Neptune State Park. The park has three sections along the coast. My favorites are Strawberry Hill and Cummins Creek. At Strawberry Hill, there are great tidepooling opportunities as well as photo ops for seals. At Cummins Creek, a short hike over some lava will lead to a cave carved out by the sea.

Another great beach hike we had occurred at Ona Beach State Park a few miles south of Newport. Interesting rock formations can be seen at low tide and we also found lots of neat fossils. There is about two miles of beach that leads south to Seal Rock. At Seal Rock we saw a black oystercatcher and about six Harlequin ducks.

Cape Perpetua For those wanting to get a hike on the beach and in the woods, head for Washburne State Park about 10 miles south of Yachats. A 3- to 4-mile loop is possible starting from the parking lot of the park. The trail crosses the highway and heads into a forest of fir and hemlock. A short loop trail up China Creek is worth the effort. We saw fresh bear tracks along this trail, making us take a closer look at every black stump.

Meadows frequented by elk and a beaver pond are among the highlights. Parts of the trail were once an old carriage road. The trail eventually crosses the highway in about a mile and a half and leads to the beach via the Hobbit Trail.

Besides beach combing and hiking, there are other attractions that draw visitors. The Oregon Coast Aquarium in Newport is not only a great place for kids but also adults. Coastal Living and USA Today named the aquarium one of the top ten in the world. For more information on rates and feeding schedules, visit www.aquarium.org.

Yaquina Head Lighthouse Yaquina Head Lighthouse, just north of Newport is definitely worth a stop. At 93 feet high, it's the tallest lighthouse in Oregon. It has been operating since 1873 and is open from 11 a.m. to 5 p.m.. It stands 162 feet above sea level and is visible for 19 miles out.

Sea Lion Caves is a privately owned business but is quite impressive. An elevator descends 208 feet down to the cave, which is claimed to be the world's largest sea cave. Stellar's sea lions can be seen in the 100 foot high cave, which opens in three entrances.

Cape Perpetua remains among my favorite places on the coast. Located about three miles south of Yachats, there are three easy to moderate trails that take you to such interesting features as tide pools, Devil's Churn, Spouting Horn, Giant Spruce and the summit of Cape Perpetua (a road also leads to the summit). From the top of the Cape, there are views south over 100 miles to Cape Blanco. The trail to the tide pools passes by shell middens left by Native Americans 6,000 years ago. The hike to the Giant Spruce (over 10 feet in diameter) leads through old growth rainforest less than a mile from the ocean.

When the weather gets hotter this summer, remember that the coast usually remains cooler with temperatures in the 60's. Once you explore the Oregon coast, you'll want to come back for more.

Photo Credit: Scott Staats

Scott Staats is a fulltime outdoor writer who has lived in Central Oregon the last ten years. His articles have appeared in local, regional and national publications.

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