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LIVE | THINK | EXPLORE | OREGON
November | December • Volume 60

Off the Beaten Path

Some of Oregon's best runners share favorite trails

written by Charles Butler

WITH TRACKTOWN USA, Nike, and the ever-lingering spirit of Steve "Pre" Prefontaine, Oregon can easily lay claim to the title of America's running mecca. And its reputation will only get more burnished in the coming years, when Eugene hosts not only another U.S. Olympic track and field trials (in 2020) but also the World Championships (in 2021) at the reimaged Hayward Field.

But even with such bona fides, Oregon still has a few running secrets, especially when it comes to trails and locales. That is, until now. We went to some of the state's leading running experts—including an Olympian and two world-class ultra-runners—to get the dirt on the trails and loops they never tire of, runs few outside their circles know about and yet are still suited for the weekend runner. So, while the widely popular Leif Erikson Trail in Portland and Pre's Trail in Eugene got mentions, our experts dug deeper to divulge the gems that keep them juiced. These runs will do the same for you.

EUGENE-AREA RUNS

Fun Run

Nick Symmonds made two U.S. Olympic teams, in 2008 and 2012, before later trying the marathon. Part of his training recipe—a long run built by splicing 6 miles of Eugene's famed Pre's Trail with 2 miles of the less-traveled yet senses-stoking Dorris Ranch Loop located in nearby Springfield. Hazelnut orchards. Views of the Willamette River. Flat, soft terrain. Dorris Ranch delivers all that, and without the running crowds that collect at Pre's. "It is very peaceful back there," Symmonds said of the scene at Dorris Ranch, located not far from the energy-gum company he now operates. "When you run on Pre, it is pretty exposed. You are getting blasted by the sun and wind and the rain." Not so at Dorris, where the hazelnuts provide protection year-round. As Symmonds put it, "Dorris is amazing." >>

AT RIGHT Nick Symmonds, an Olympian and Eugene resident, knows all the best runs in the region. (photo: Matt Larson/Brooks Running)



The Runners



HANNAH GRUBB



TORSTEN HEYCKE



STEPHANIE VIOLETT

(photos, from top: Michael Scott; Torsten Heycke; Tyler Roemer)

Let's Push It

When Symmonds wants to feed his appetite for more rugged terrain, he'll head east for an hour or so to the trails along the McKenzie River and to what he calls "one of the most awesome rivers around." Launching from McKenzie Bridge, he'll do out-and-backs of 5 to 6 miles, grabbing views of Blue Pool, Sahalie Falls and other gems. Beauty aside, the trails can be tricky in spots. Symmonds said he nearly rolled an ankle on a river run just before the 2012 U.S. Olympic track trials. But these days, with high-stakes racing no longer a priority, he finds the McKenzie the perfect spot to combine two passions: After a run he's known to cool off with some trout fishing.

PORTLAND-AREA RUNS

Let's Push It

Rip City? With its proximity to Nike headquarters and home to many Olympians and Olympic hopefuls, Portland could just as easily be called Run City. On a typical day, you might glimpse many of the stars on the Leif Erikson Trail in Forest Park. But when former University of Texas runner Hannah Grubb moved to town a few years ago, she found herself enticed by a Forest Park alternative—the woody 30-mile-long Wildwood Trail. "It is a little more adventurous, more uphill-downhill," Grubb, who now works at Nike, said of Wildwood. She also likes that Wildwood has markers every quarter mile, which is "good when your GPS may not be working." Another draw: the many tributary trails that splinter off Wildwood, providing options for days when she wants to go long or really long. One of Grubb's favorite runs includes a hard, 3-mile uphill that leads to the historic Pittock Mansion and incredible views of the city. "It's a run to do when you have visitors who want to sight-see, too," she said.

Fun Run

When she doesn't have time for a Wildwood run, Grubb stays close to her downtown Portland home. Grubb knew about



Willamalane Park and Recreation District

urban running from her days in Austin, Texas, but nothing prepared her for the sights along what has become a favorite dash: the paved roads along the Willamette River. An early morning runner, Grubb will often go south along the west bank before zipping over the car-free Tilikum Crossing Bridge and returning up the eastside to the Steel Bridge (a 4.2-mile loop). In the fall, she'll change directions, going north for 2 miles to the Fremont Bridge. That's where she'll turn and make her way home—but not before grabbing a view of an eclectic scene that features Portland's skyline, Mount Hood, and, if she's lucky, a sight even a new Oregonian can appreciate. "It's usually quiet in the morning, so it is just you out there with jumping salmon," Grubb said. "I make sure I get up early enough to see that. You have to be up just as the sun is rising."

ASHLAND-AREA RUNS

Fun Run

Running is often intended to be an escape from reality. If that's the goal, then rush to Ashland, where running is true fantasy. Starting near the top of Lithia Park there's a 9.1-mile "Lewis Carroll" theme run that provides a mix of everything: relatively



Bend Park and Recreation District

FROM LEFT Dorris Ranch Loop in Springfield is shady and scenic. Shevlin Park in Bend has interesting terrain and gorgeous views.

easy terrain, a wild mix of tree types, soaring views ... and whimsy. The run got its name nearly two decades ago when local runners and hikers discovered a stretch of madrone that was reminiscent of passing through a tunnel in *Alice in Wonderland*. Over time the Ashland Woodlands & Trails Association added more trails, and more fantasy. Today, the Lewis Carroll is composed of trails with such names as Bandersnatch, Jubjub, Lower Red Queen, Snark and Caterpillar. You'll pass through oaks, pines and ponderosa (and wildflowers come May and June). Eventually, after a climb of 2,000 feet or so to Lewis Loops, you come to a true fantasy: views of Mount Ashland and Mount McLoughlin. For Torsten Heycke, head of the Ashland Woodlands & Trails Association, which maintains the trails, the Lewis Carroll loop is "like mental floss. I get out there and it sort of cleanses the palate."

Let's Push It

When he's not maintaining Lewis Carroll, Heycke is keeping himself in shape. He's an ultrarunner who has raced such killers as the 100-miler Western States Endurance Run. One of his ideal training sites: Split Rock Trail, which starts about 3.5 miles from the Mount Ashland Ski Lodge.

In many ways, according to Heycke, Split Rock is a primitive run. Be prepared for a stiff climb, narrow stretches (12 inches in places), spots where your hands get as much work as your feet, and, yes, snow in certain months. But the effort comes with rewards, including dramatic views of Mount Shasta and the Siskiyou Crest, as well as wildflowers come summer. "Yellows, reds, purples, pinks—just a flurry," Heycke said. He said Split Rock may not be for everyone, but it's ideal for him. "I like the views, and I like being up high. That is what excites me. It is also a pedestrian-only trail. I don't have to compete with mountain bikes and horses."

BEND-AREA RUNS

Let's Push It

"I love climbing mountains," Stephanie Violett said. She also likes going long distances. Since moving to Bend eleven years ago, she has used the town and its environs as training grounds for her ultrarunning career. One run-climb that never fails to get her on pace is Green Lakes trail located a few miles from Mount Bachelor. Prepare to pant, especially if you're coming from sea level. The 3-mile ascent includes close to 1,200 feet of elevation gain, and at points along the way, Violett said, your run could easily turn into

a hike. But she advises to press on. At the top await Alpine lakes—plus views of the Sisters, Bachelor and Broken Top. "Green Lakes is amazingly beautiful," Violett said. She cautions that this run is restricted to the summer and early fall, when the snow has melted. Then, pack plenty of water and snacks, because "it's a beautiful spot for picnic." And for dessert? A quick descent.

Fun Run

Runners visiting Bend may decide to rush up Pilot Butte. Nothing wrong with tackling the town landmark, especially if you're pressed for time. But Violett suggested heading to one of her favorite nearby runs: the trails in Shevlin Park. Over the years, she has run many a loop there with her two dogs, the three often stopping to cool off along Tumalo Creek midway through a 7-mile loop. The run also comes with tireless views of Aspens—"a wall of color" in the fall, she said—along with some technical, rocky spots that will give even the seasoned runner a challenge. Still, when she needs a break from all of her climbs, Shevlin's terrain provides an ideal change. "It's a nice break for your legs and from the pounding," she said, "and you still get the miles and the pace." ■