A Fondness for Falls

WATERFALLS MAKE A SCENIC AND REFRESHING DAY’S OUTING

story by Adam Sawyer

One could argue that the almost embarrassing abundance of natural beauty in Central Oregon is punctuated by waterfalls. Some of the best cascades and cascade hikes in the state reside in this region. Sometimes the thrill is in the quality of the hike, other times it’s the grandeur or uniqueness of the falls, or some combination thereof. On occasion the main draw is the increasingly rare chance for solitude on a trail. For all those reasons and more, this part of the state is paradise for those of us that love a good waterfall. Here are some favorites.
**Chush Falls**

At a thundering 67 feet high and 80 feet wide, Chush Falls is an under-the-radar cascade worthy of your time. On top of that, an unmaintained but easily navigable trail leads a short distance beyond the Chush viewpoint to a middle and comparably scenic upper falls. The area now bears the scars of the Pole Creek Fire, which also permanently re-routed and lengthened the hike to a five-mile out and back that provides a firsthand look at what a forest fire is capable of.

To visit Chush Falls from the town of Sisters, take Road 16 toward Three Creek Lake for 7 miles. Turn right onto Road 1514, drive 5 miles to Road 600, and turn left just before a bridge crosses Whychus Creek. Drive a short ways to the end of the road and the new trailhead.

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**Tumalo Falls**

This is one of the premier hikes in Oregon for waterfall lovers. No fewer than five sizable cascades and as many as a dozen smaller falls populate this area. The outing is highlighted by the massive 90-foot Tumalo, which is easily accessible from the parking lot. More adventurous folks can travel the 7.4-mile loop trail, to access the smaller but still magnificent falls along Tumalo Creek.

From Bend, take Galveston Avenue west for 10.3 miles. Along the way the road will become Skyliner Road. Turn right onto gravel road 4603 and drive 2.5 more miles to the large Tumalo Falls parking area.
Salt Creek/
Diamond Creek Falls

One of the tallest accessible falls in Oregon, the impressive 286-foot Salt Creek Falls is the undisputed star of the show here, and is also easily reached from the parking lot. However, a rhododendron-rich 3.4-mile-loop trail leads to another notable cascade in the area, Diamond Creek Falls. The veiling, horsetail-style cascade spreads wide and descends 120 feet over basalt steps and fissures; its layout makes it unusually accessible. During summer water levels, it is possible to safely rock-hop out to the base and feel its power up close.

From Bend, take Highway 97 south for 47 miles to Highway 58. Drive west for 15.8 miles to the signed turnout for Salt Creek Falls on the left (one mile east of the highway tunnel, or five miles west of Willamette Pass on Highway 58). Follow the road down to a large parking area near restrooms and a kiosk.

Koosah/
Sahalie Falls

A 2.8-mile loop hike visits two massive rainbow-inducing waterfalls, a river as pristine as you could hope for, and viewpoint after viewpoint. The waters of the McKenzie River run forceful and clean here, occasionally swirling into deep blue and green pools. Downriver a half-mile from Sahalie, encounter the equally awe-inspiring Koosah Falls. Interestingly, the words Sahalie and Koosah both mean “high” or “heaven” in Northwest Chinook jargon—fitting description for both.

From the town of Sisters, take US 20 west for 29 miles and make a left onto OR 126 East. Proceed 200 feet and make a right onto OR 126 West. Drive 5.2 more miles and pull into the Sahalie Falls parking area on the right.
Proxy Falls
One of Mother Nature’s true headliners in Central Oregon, Proxy Falls is well known for being photogenic, though it can be a struggle to get the whole falls in one shot. The hike, which leads through a lava field as well as an elfin forest, is an eclectic geological grab bag wrapped up in a tidy 1.6-mile loop. The hike also visits Upper Proxy Falls—a 129-foot dynamo that would be a spectacle anywhere else. Unfortunately for the upper falls, her taller and slightly more fetching sister lives only about a block away.

From the town of Sisters, head west on OR 242 for 27.4 miles to the signed Proxy Falls Trailhead on the left.