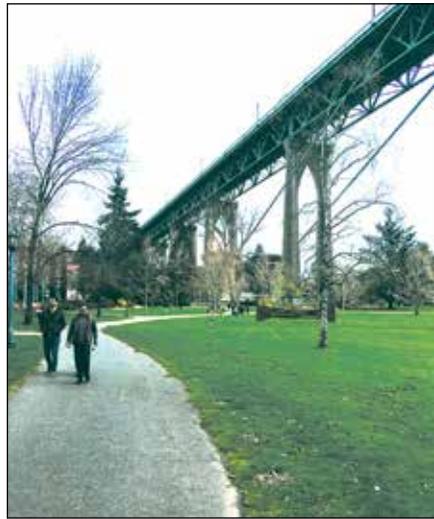


# A 'grab bag' day trip *Explore this often-overlooked 23-mile stretch of Oregon's Highway 30*

Story and Photos by Tracy Beard

Oregon boasts so many favorite destinations that visitors and locals often miss the less popular but equally attractive small towns and sights. U.S. Route 30 runs east and west through the United States. In Oregon, it begins at the coast in Astoria and spans the entire state, reaching the Idaho border east of Ontario. This 477-mile span features many famous wonders, including the Columbia River Gorge and Multnomah Falls. Follow me on a lesser-known 23-mile stretch from Portland's St. Johns neighborhood to the city of St. Helens.

If you are beginning your journey near Longview, Washington, head south on I-5, taking Exit 307 and continue on Marine Drive west to Cathedral Park in the St. Johns neighborhood of Portland, Oregon. The Park lies under the iconic St. John's bridge, which is a steel suspension bridge spanning the Willamette River between beautiful Cathedral Park and the industrial area of Linnton. Construction of the bridge began in 1929 and ended in 1931, costing \$7.69 million.



Cathedral Park is a surreal place for a picnic, a popular area to take wedding photos, or a fantastic place to relax along the river. The bridge features 14 concrete Gothic arch piers and two steel towers. If you climb the steps underneath the bridge and gaze out across the river, you will discover a dramatic gateway to the other side.



From Cathedral Park you can go to the downtown section of the St. Johns neighborhood in a matter of minutes. Stop at 87th & Meatballs on North Lombard Street and treat yourself to some delicious meatballs of chicken, beef, or a mixture. The order board will display your options: Step 1 – How do you want your balls? Step 2 – Choose your balls. Step 3 – Choose your sauce. After deciding on the meatballs, choose the type of sauce that excites your taste buds — tomato, creamy cheese, pesto, and others. Meatballs and sauce are available in a sandwich or over pasta. The eatery is small, but offers an ample picnic area with tables out front.

## Sauvie Island

Fortified and re-energized, head south over the bridge and then west on Highway 30 to Sauvie Island, which used to be Wapato Island. It is one of the largest islands in the United States, with the northern half of the island preserved as a wildlife refuge and the southern half made up primarily of farmland and residential



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Portland's colorful St. John's neighborhood features a steel suspension bridge over the Willamette River, with Cathedral Park underneath and a meatball eatery.

properties. Visitors enjoy purchasing produce in the summer months, but there are also several hikes on the island. Whether you want to wander the beach and check out the river or get a bit more exercise by traversing the 7-mile round trip slightly inclined hike to the lighthouse, there is plenty to see.

## Quiet forest, trickling streams

Continue west on Highway 30 to Scappoose. The Crown Zellerbach Trail, also known as the CZ Trail, traverses through the quiet forest and along gently trickling streams. Once an old logging road, this trail continues for 25 miles running northwest. To reach the trailhead from the highway, turn left onto Scappoose-Vernonia Road and go about 2 miles to Sam Blehm Road. Just past the road, you will see a parking lot on the right with a "Trailhead Parking" sign. Park here and walk west through the lot back to the road; this is where you will find the trail.



My husband, Steve, and I hiked along the trail on a lovely March afternoon. The first mile runs parallel to the road and passes an occasional residence. We didn't see any wildlife, but one home had chickens, peacocks, turkeys, and dogs in the yard. The trail follows a slight incline and then passes a marsh area filled with the sound of croaking frogs. As we trekked along, our warm sunny day turned, as it often does in the Pacific Northwest. Gray clouds appeared, tiny raindrops began to fall, and soon we raced back to the safety of our car.



## Four men and their "baby"

Wet and chilled, we turned on the car heat and continued on our journey to a place that would warm us up from the inside out, Ye Ol' Grog Distillery. Located at 35855 Industrial Way, Unit C, in St.

Helens, the distillery is owned and operated by four unlikely men who met once upon a time.

Marcus designed and built a large fish processing plant in Dutch Harbor, Alaska, seen on the TV show "Deadliest Catch." Lloyd, an experienced engineer, worked his way to Alaska to help man the crab catchers. Greg, the inventor of the elastometric spongometer, met Marcus and Lloyd while supplying meters

cont page 24

from page 23

to the processing plant where they worked. Finally, there is Ken. He became a chemical engineer because he wanted to make liquor for the bars where he worked. Eventually, Ken worked at Cascade Grains Ethanol Plant in Oregon, where he hired Lloyd to be his maintenance superintendent. Over the years the four men became friends.

Steve and I arrived just minutes before closing time, but Lloyd kept the shop open late to tell us their story. Ken and Lloyd lost their jobs when the ethanol plant went bankrupt in 2009. Due to the weak economy the men could not sell their houses and move to a new area, so they decided to join forces with their friends and open the distillery. The four determined to create their unique rums, whiskeys, and gins.

“We didn’t want to do traditional liquors, because the stores are full of them,” said Lloyd, “We wanted to make fun, unpretentious, good-tasting liquor, and the first goal with that is to make ultra-pure ethanol, which is vodka.”

Lloyd then revealed how they built their stills because there were none available that would do what they needed. Steve and I tasted the various liquors and enjoyed a number of pairings Lloyd created. To finish our



Ye Ol' Grog Distillery's tasting room is open Sundays (1-4pm) and Thurs-Sat (1-5pm)

incredible day, he offered us samples of the boozy ice creams they were making in the distillery. These four intelligent “scientists” have managed to freeze alcohol and turn it into creamy and delicious “spirited” ice creams.

Take the time to enjoy the 23-mile stretch on Highway 30, and then get adventurous and seek out highways and backroads near you that may provide new and exciting things to discover. Be sure to eat lunch at 87th & Meatballs, but take a moment before you leave the house and pack one of my favorite light-hiking sandwiches for a snack (*below*).

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## PROVISIONS ALONG THE TRAIL

By Tracy Beard

### Caprese Sandwich

- 1 torta or soft ciabatta roll
- 2 tablespoons pesto
- 5 fresh basil leaves
- 2 ounces fresh mozzarella, sliced
- ½ ripe tomato, sliced

Slice the roll down the middle and spread 1 tablespoon of pesto on each side. Layer the bottom with sliced tomato, pieces of mozzarella, and top with 5 basil leaves. Place the top of the roll onto the sandwich.



### Tracy's Pesto

- 2-3 cups of fresh basil leaves
- 4-6 cloves of fresh garlic
- ¼ cup pine nuts
- ½ - ¾ cup olive oil
- ½ cup grated Parmesan cheese
- Salt to taste

Blend all ingredients in a blender or food processor. Freeze leftovers in ice cube trays for later use.

