

A summer drive at the base of Mt. Hood

Getting fruit loopy!

By Tracy Beard

Less than one hour's drive east from Portland, Oregon, is the Hood River Fruit Loop. A compendium of farms, orchards, cideries, vineyards, wineries and shops are mapped out as a trail located predominately along Highways 35 and 281. As more and more places are opening up to the public, plan to spend the day cruising this stunning section of Oregon's countryside while tasting delicious wines, sampling ciders, and picking fruit.

My daughter Brittney and I escaped our neighborhood and ventured out to see what was currently open in the Hood River area. Much to our delight, many businesses along the Fruit Loop were open, with owners anxiously awaiting visitors. We selected a variety of places to visit. Before planning your trip, be sure to check out hoodriverfruitloop.com, check out the individual business websites, or call to confirm which days and hours they are open.

Our first stop was Pearl's Place Fruit Stand. We turned off Highway 35 and found ourselves immediately immersed in a grove of pear trees. According to Wikipedia, each year Oregon produces approximately 800 million pears, making Oregon the number two state in the U.S. for fresh pear production. Washington state is number one. The Hood River area and the Rogue Valley are the top growing regions with nearly 19,000 acres of pear orchard land. Pearl's Place offers other fresh fruits, including apples, peaches, cherries and more.

Next, we stopped at Mt. Hood Winery. We shared a flight of white wines. Due to current regulations we could not sit at the bar. The server placed two wine glasses and five mini carafes containing a sampling of the different wines on a tray. We took the tray outside to the patio and enjoyed



our "self-pour" tasting while gazing out at the vineyards. Before leaving, we picked up a copy of the "Hood River Fruit Loop Guide to Local Farm Stands." This comprehensive guide includes information about each stop. The fold-out map inside makes it easy to traverse the entire loop.

Traveling further south on Highway 35 we reached Packer Orchards & Bakery. We donned our masks and went inside to pick up a delicious package of herbed goat cheese and a loaf of multi-grain bread. Back outside we commandeered a picnic table next to the peach orchard. We savored a few nibbles and then continued to Stave and Stone Winery at the Vineyard. Unfortunately, the venue was open only on the weekends. We were traveling on a Tuesday and vowed to return, as the facility looked



luxurious and inviting. The picnic area outside boasts splendid views of the vineyards and Mount Hood in the distance.

Our last stop before lunch was, Draper Girls Country Farm & U-pick Orchards. The cherry orchards are situated adjacent to the parking area. We meandered through the store where I picked up a jar of Draper

Girls delectable Walla Walla Sweet Onion/Gilroy Garlic BBQ sauce. The store stocks numerous flavored ciders, assorted fruit jams and a collection of other tasty treats available for purchase.

Just outside on the south side of the store is a park-like setting perfect for a snack or picnic lunch. The area features magnificent views of Mount Hood, quaint tables and an old-fashioned tree swing. The swing, crafted from a weathered board, hung securely bolted to long chains that dropped down from a branch high above in the tree. The swing gently swayed in the breeze and enticed Brittney to jump aboard. She seated herself and began rocking back and forth and seemed to float in the air. The sight took me back to a time when she was a little girl. We would spend hours at the local park where she and



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her brother Garrett would laugh and giggle while playing on the swings and slides.

We walked around the corner from the serene setting and discovered a number of large and small goats waiting for some attention. Food for the goats is available for purchase if you are so inclined.

Driving toward the southernmost end of the loop, we discovered the unincorporated town of Parkdale. This little town boasts a few eateries, a lovely park, and the Hutson Museum. We grabbed some barbequed pork at Apple Valley BBQ and ate across the street at the park.

After Parkdale, our route turned north onto Highway 281. Many stops along the Fruit Loop Trail do not lie directly along the two highways. We added the venues' addresses to our GPS and found the ones located on the smaller country roads. We made a quick stop at Grateful Vineyards that features cider and pizza. Just a mile or two away, we arrived at Lavender Valley. It is impossible to miss this bright purple building that sells a variety of lavender products. The lavender bushes out in the field should be putting on a full dress rehearsal by mid-July.

Our last official stop was at Marchesi Vineyards & Winery. Marchesi, a small boutique winery, features wines made from Italian grape varieties. Franco Marchesi, the owner and winemaker, was born and raised in Piedmont, Italy, a region with a similar climate to the base of Mount Hood. This winery offers plenty of outdoor seating, including a covered patio and lots of umbrellas. Guests were encouraged to order a glass or bottle of wine to relish while they relaxed on the property. Comfortable couches, organized in a way to create cozy nooks, hailed visitors and provided a safe and well-distanced place for guests to imbibe in delectable glasses of vino while sharing conversation with friends.

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