

AUTUMN HIKE/PICNIC OUTING

A Day at Bradley State Park and Gnat Creek

Story and photos by Tracy Beard

For magnificent views, lush forests and peaceful hiking trails, take a day and drive along US-30 heading west from Rainier, Oregon. Pack a snack and a picnic lunch and stop along the way to explore the hidden gems located in and between the little towns bordering the Columbia River.

Approximately 27 miles west of your starting point in Rainier, just past Clatskanie, stop at Bradley State Park, perched on the north side of the highway. Visitors will discover a splendid grove of Douglas fir trees and stunning views of the Columbia River, along with a monument, picnic tables and a restroom. This park is a perfect place to stop for a rest, enjoy a snack and watch the ships travel up and down the river.

The designated parkland was one of the first donated to the Oregon Highway Commission in 1922. The cement bench monument reads: *"This park donated to Clatsop County by Fred W. Bradley and the heirs of Elemar E. Bradley of Bay City, Michigan, July MCMXXI" (1921).*

Continue 2.5 miles west on US-30 and make a right turn into the Gnat Creek Hatchery. The area offers year-round easy-to-moderate hiking trails. Maps are available at the hatchery and adventurers can opt to walk all, or portions of, the trails. Camping is not allowed, and the total elevation gain is 710 feet.

The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife manages more than 30 hatcheries and numerous rearing ponds. These facilities produce approximately 75 million fish each year.

The fish cycle is impressive. In September, adult fish in the area return to the Willamette Fish Hatchery in Oakridge, Oregon, to spawn. The eggs are placed in incubators until they reach the "eyed" egg stage, which according to the dictionary, is when the egg hatches into what is called a yolk sac fry — a larval stage where the fish has an attached yolk, providing it with nourishment for its first week or two. At this point the fries are transferred to Gnat Creek. Later, when they are large enough to feed themselves, they are moved to troughs in the incubator room where they feed on small particles of food.

In February the fish are moved to outside ponds to continue growing. Workers separate the fish into different sections to prevent overcrowding as they grow. In June an allotment of fish receives coded tags with pertinent information for tracking. When the fish reach a substantial size, they are released into the wild to repeat the cycle. Gnat Creek Hatchery produces approximately 900,000 Willamette stock spring Chinook salmon and 40,000 Big Creek stock winter steelhead.

Vancouver, Wash. resident Tracy Beard writes about luxury and adventure travel, traditional and trendy fine dining and libations for regional, national and international magazines and is a regular "Out & About" contributor to Columbia River Reader.



Chinook salmon are raised at Gnat Creek to enhance the population for sport and commercial fishing. Spring Chinook are said to be one of the best red meat fish in the world, due to their high oil content. According to Gnat Creek documentation, *"Hatchery fish are used most commonly for creating or maintaining fisheries and are not normally used to create or enhance naturally spawning populations. The eggs from the hatchery fish are used only to continue hatchery production. Hatchery fish are carefully planted in systems compatible with the species and strain and areas that minimally impact wild stocks."*

Before you leave the hatchery, be sure to pick up a map of the trails. You can learn about the several types of salmon and fish

cont page 11

Ads removed for archival purposes

Ads removed for archival purposes

from page 10

raised at Gnat Creek and create your plan of action for tackling the nearby trails. If you packed lunch or a snack, enjoy dining at one of the picnic tables in the covered shelter near Visitor Parking.

The trails of Gnat Creek are divided into three sections: Gnat Creek Campground, from the campground to the hatchery (2.5 miles long); The Nature Trail Loops, at Barrier Falls and in the forest west of the hatchery

(1.5 miles long); and the Upper Gnat Creek Trail, out and back (4 miles long).

My cousin, Goni, accompanied me on this journey. After a thorough tour of the Gnat Creek Hatchery, we donned our boots and made our way to the south side of the parking lot where we started on the Nature Trail. We followed the trail along Gnat Creek and found ourselves enveloped by a 100-year-old forest with western hemlocks and Sitka spruce trees. About a quarter mile up

the trail is Barrier Falls Viewpoint. The five-foot waterfall drops over a basalt shelf and into Gnat Creek. We continued onward to discover several interpretive signs and botanical labels designed by a local Boy Scout troop.

The trails are well marked, so feel free to wander. Along the way you will find a railed footbridge, an old fish ladder/counting station, a mossy vine maple arbor, a tide gate and a bench overlooking Gnat Creek.

Upstream from the end of the trail is Gnat Creek Falls. This 100-foot

waterfall is on private property accessible by the local forest roads but you must secure permission from the property owners to visit the falls.

As you head back toward Rainier, stop in Clatskanie at Flowers and Fluff. This adorable shop sells flowers, gifts, garden decorations, and tasty treats and coffee. If you have a gardener in the family, this is the perfect place to pick up a holiday gift or take a load off your feet and enjoy a pastry or warm cup of brew.

•••



By Tracy Beard

PROVISIONS ALONG THE TRAIL

Fall Turkey Sandwich

- 2 or 4 pieces of your favorite bread (I like Italian, or use a baguette and make canapes)
- ¼ pound thinly sliced smoked turkey breast
- 4 Tbl Cambozola cheese
- 2 Tbl toasted walnuts, chopped
- 1 Tbl mayonnaise

Pear/Apple/Cranberry

Compote enough for 2

sandwiches

- ½ Tbl butter
- 1 Granny Smith apple, peeled, cored and cut into small dice
- 1 Bartlett pear, peeled, cored and cut into small dice
- 1 Tbl dried cranberries, chopped
- 1 Tbl light brown sugar
- ½ tsp fresh lemon juice
- Generous pinch of ground cinnamon
- Pinch of nutmeg
- Pinch of salt
- 2 tablespoons water

Melt the butter in a saucepan over medium heat. Add all other ingredients and stir until apples and pears are soft and juices have evaporated 25 to 30 minutes. Let cool. The compote keeps in the refrigerator for two days.

Slice bread. Place compote on the bread, add sliced turkey. Top with Cambozola cheese and toasted walnuts.



Ads removed for archival purposes

Ads removed for archival purposes