

Spring at Siouxon Creek Cleared to hit the trails!

By Tracy Beard

Once governing authorities re-opened state parks and many popular trails, my daughter Brittney and I eagerly packed a picnic lunch. Destination: Siouxon Creek, northeast of Battleground, Wash., in the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. For directions, see sidebar.

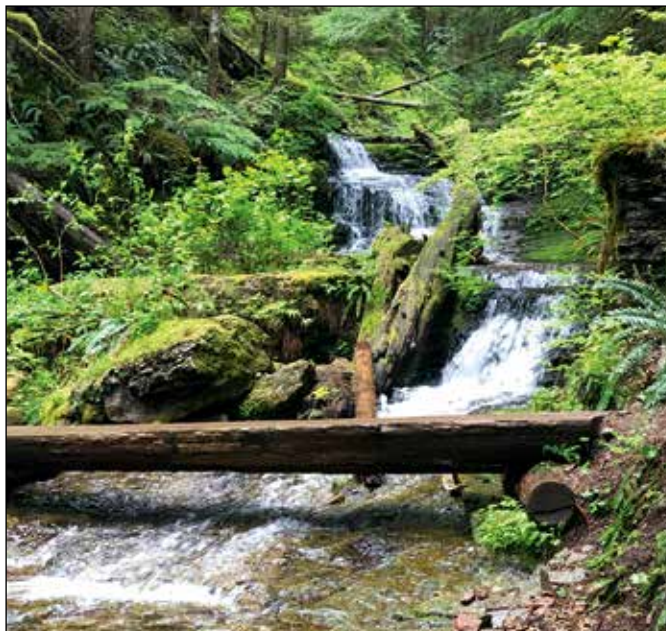
Equipped with a variety of clothing, we headed out onto the trail. The weather was excellent for hiking, a mild 60 degrees with a slight Washington mist in the air. Precipitation in the Pacific Northwest comes in a variety of forms: fog, mist, drizzle, sprinkles, showers, rain, and downpours.

The trail begins on the north side of the parking lot and takes an immediate 50-foot decline intersecting with the Siouxon Creek Trail. We turned right and continued in a downward trajectory until we reached a newly constructed bridge crossing West Creek. Crossing the bridge we continued upstream along the trail.

The forest is radiant in spring. Chartreuse-colored western sword ferns unfurl throughout the forest floor while maidenhair ferns, refusing to social distance, cluster together, blanketing the hillsides in stunning shades of shamrock green. Wild bleeding hearts pepper the landscape with pops of lavender, and new growth on the treetops add shades of lime to this cornucopia of forest greenery.

As Brittney and I walked along the forest floor, we inhaled the fresh scent of wet dirt and pine. It felt fabulous to be out in the forest again. Even my hair seemed unusually happy as it curled up, seemingly jumping for joy in the mist.

Springtime reminds me of new beginnings. After two months of “stay safe at home,” it was refreshing to see the tightly furled buds burst into long green leaves and bright, bold flowers. New plants came to life, and we could hear the scurry of small animals running through the brush and birds chirping from the treetops. As we walked along the creek, we could see and hear the roar of white water crashing through the canyon, powered by newly melted snow. Other areas along the stream presented emerald green pools filled with water so clear we could see the rocks along the bottom. There is no better place to witness the earth’s springtime transformation than under the forest canopy.



junction to Horseshoe Ridge Trail, and from there we continued and crossed Horseshoe Creek on a bridge just above Horseshoe Creek Falls.

We stopped and rested on the bench located approximately 0.2 miles after the Falls. A short distance upstream is a delightful waterfall with a swimming hole. This waterfall is a favorite stop on a hot day. Years ago, a friend and I backpacked with our small children and stayed along the river. I have fond memories of hiking to this swimming hole with the kids and watching them drag a log out into the water and floating on it out to the waterfall. They paddled around for hours.

The official Siouxon Creek Trail continues to Siouxon Falls at about 3.8 miles from the trailhead. This is a good spot to have lunch or to turn back.

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After crossing the bridge, we passed several excellent campsites. I have backpacked into these sites several times over the years. They are great spots to stay, especially if you are packing with young children because it is not too far for them to carry their gear. These spots are great for day hikes and afford easy access to the water.

Just past the camps, the trail follows a series of small ups and downs and then gradually heads upward to 50 feet above the creek. At about 0.9 miles the trail passes the



PROVISIONS

ALONG THE TRAIL

Tracy’s story ends with one of her easy & delicious recipes. See page 32.

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 CRR. She is pictured here with her daughter, Brittney (at right).



Siouxon Creek: If You Go

The drive to Siouxon Creek is an adventure. Due to the rough roads, it is wise to travel in an all-wheel or four-wheel vehicle. Follow the mileage points exactly and keep an eye out for the signs to avoid having to backtrack.

To reach the trailhead, follow State Highway 503 from Interstate 205 to Battleground. Head north on 503 for 11.2 miles, turn right on Cedar Creek Road (503), and continue 5.6 miles to NE Healy

Road. There is a little store at this intersection where you can buy snacks or take a restroom break. (There are no restrooms at the trailhead.) Turn right on NE Healy Road and go 9.2 miles, then turn left at a poorly-signed junction and travel on Forest Road 57 (a single-lane road) for 1.3 miles. Make a sharp right on Forest Road 5701 and travel 3.7 miles to the trailhead parking lot. This section of the road is very rough; take it slow.

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Plan to spend three to four hours hiking Siouxon Creek Trail. Enjoy the many sights and sounds along the way. Hikers looking for additional miles can extend their trip out another 1.2 miles to 100-foot-high Wildcat Falls, creating a 10-mile hike out and back.

Siouxon Creek Trail is fabulous for the whole family. Be sure to come early, especially on the weekends, as this trail can get quite crowded.

To enhance your experience, pack one of my caponata sandwiches for lunch. Caponata is also great on grilled white fish. *Recipe, below.*

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PROVISIONS

ALONG THE TRAIL

Caponata Sandwich

- 1/3 cup olive oil
- 1 celery stalk, chopped
- 1 medium eggplant, peeled and cut into 1/2-inch pieces
- 2 medium zucchini, chopped into 1/2-inch pieces
- 1 medium onion, chopped
- 1 14 1/2-ounce can diced tomatoes
- 6 Tbl raisins
- 6 ounces frozen artichoke hearts, thawed and chopped
- 16 kalamata olives, chopped
- 1 tsp dried oregano
- Salt and black pepper
- 1/2 cup red wine vinegar
- 4 tsp sugar
- 2 Tbl drained capers
- 4 French rolls
- 12 slices fresh mozzarella in water
- 12 large leaves of fresh basil



Heat oil in a heavy skillet and add celery and onion. Cook until transparent; remove from pan and set aside. Place eggplant and zucchini in the pan and cook until crisp-tender. Add back in the onion and celery. Add diced tomatoes with their juices, raisins, artichokes and oregano. Season the dish with salt and pepper. Simmer over medium-low heat about 20 minutes or until thickened. Add vinegar, sugar, capers and olives.

Cut French rolls in half. Layer with fresh mozzarella and caponata, topped with basil. Enjoy.

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