

Ancient trees

New map, new trails lead to Northwest's legacy in wood: old-growth trees

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Giant steps

New map shows 50 trails leading to stands of old growth, so hikers, families can come face-to-face with legends

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EUGENE — It's not a mystery any longer. Those who'd like to take a close look at an old-growth forest now can get a map to take them there.

"It's always kind of amazed me, with all the interest there is in old growth, that there was so little information about where to find it," said John Cissel (photo on cover), who with his wife, Diane, who is a graphic artist, and friend Peter Eberhardt, a cartographer, decided to correct that deficit last summer.



DESTINATION
NORTHWEST

They began working on a map of old-growth forest hikes that lie within easy reach of Willamette Valley residents. The map was published this summer.

In weekend spare time away from his job as a Willamette National Forest liaison officer at the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest, John Cissel hiked more than 300 miles with his map-making colleagues. They explored all of the 50 trails described on the map.

To Cissel, the trails offer a special kind of nature experience.

"The age of these forests sort of links back to our past in a way you don't usually feel in our country," he said. "If you go to Europe, you might feel it in an old cathedral, but our country's too young for much of that."

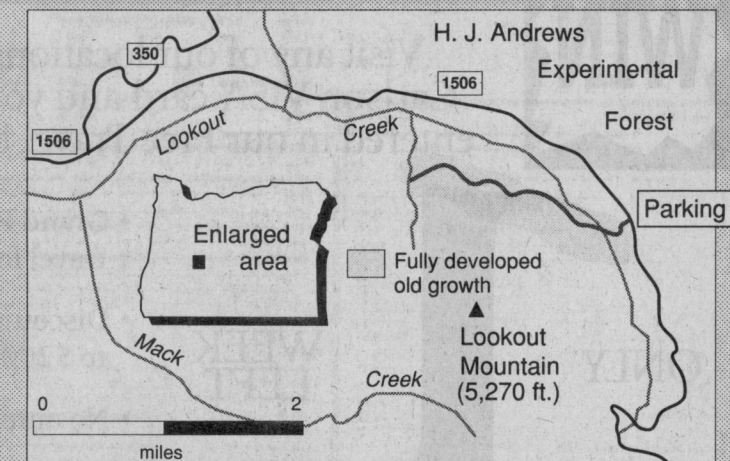
Trees as old as 800 years

The pristine wildness and immense size of the venerable Douglas firs and other tree species, some as old as 800 years, communicates strongly to humans, Cissel said. "It makes me realize how short and transitory our lives are," he said.

All of the trails lie within the boundaries of the 1.6-million-acre Willamette National Forest. They stretch from Opal Creek, 27 miles east of Salem, to Upper Valley, 35 miles southeast of Oakridge.

"We've tried to cover a full range of old-growth ecosystems — old-growth noble fir, Douglas fir, yellow

LOOKOUT CREEK OLD-GROWTH TRAIL



This is a recently opened 1-1/2 mile trail through classic Douglas-fir old growth in the H.J. Andrews Experimental Forest. Wind your way downhill, cross Lookout Creek and generally contour along the base of Lookout Mountain within earshot of Lookout Creek. Particularly nice pockets of old growth are found along the creek (1/4 mile) and at the 1 mile and 1-1/2 mile points where tributaries to Lookout Creek come crashing down avalanche chutes. Large western red cedars are common in places in this old forest, especially after the 1 mile point. Maps of the Andrews Experimental Forest show an administrative access trail continuing past the chute at the 1-1/2 mile point, but the old log bridge is down and the chute appears to be a formidable barrier. Future plans for extending this trail are unclear.

Source: 50 Old-Growth Day Hikes in the Willamette National Forest, Diane Cissel, John Cissel and Peter Eberhardt

The Oregonian

cedar, red cedar, hemlock and incense cedar," he said. "There's even one trail with old-growth Ponderosa pine."

For example, the Lookout Creek Old Growth Trail, rated "moderate," takes hikers up the McKenzie Highway about 60 miles east of Eugene to what Cissel describes as a "classic" stand of old-growth Douglas fir.

On his weekend explorations, Cissel measured trail lengths and rated their degree of difficulty.

"Anything rated 'easy' a family could do, or someone elderly who has trouble getting around," Cissel said. A moderately demanding trail is one that has any degree of grade under 10 percent, while a difficult trail requires steep climbing or wading a creek or is poorly maintained, perhaps with blown-down trees blocking the path.

Seven of the trails are classified as difficult, and 21 are easy, although several overlap categories.

Symbols indicate wheelchair accessibility and other characteristics; a dripping, bare foot denotes an unbridged stream crossing.

All of the journeys are designed as day hikes, and the map reminds hikers to tell someone where they're going and to take food, water and other necessities. It warns that streams may be contaminated with the Giardia parasite, which wreaks havoc in the digestive systems of its human and dog hosts.

DETAILS: The maps are available at bookstores and map outlets throughout western Oregon or for \$7.50 (including postage) from Old-Growth Day Hikes, P.O. Box 11288, Eugene, Ore. 97440.