

# Banks-Vernonia Trail Review

## by Julia Reisinger



ORRC has hosted the Vernonia Half Marathon for years, and in 2011 added the Marathon, all of which is located on the Banks-Vernonia State Trail. The trail is a “rails to trails” bike path that follows the old railroad bed all the way from Banks to Vernonia, a distance of over 21 miles one-way. It includes two “tressels”, 13 bridges, and multiple trailheads along the way. The path is nice and wide, with some softer “horse” trail alongside, and is a gentle grade in most areas, so not too difficult to run or cycle.



I tried a section starting at the Buxton trail head about seven miles from Banks and headed in the direction toward Vernonia. While I have volunteered for the Vernonia marathon and half-marathon several times, I had never been on this portion of the trail so it was completely new to me. I had a little trouble finding the trailhead, but once I got there, there was plenty of parking and a restroom as well. The trail was lovely, with trees lining the path the entire time, and there was no wind to speak of. With most of the trail in the woods, I don't imagine wind would be much of a factor.

What I didn't realize was that from where we started, it was a gradual uphill for the next four miles! It wasn't a steep uphill, but enough to notice, and to start me thinking “this is getting old” by the time we turned around. Of course the benefit to an uphill on the way out... is that you have a wonderful gradual downhill the entire way back! After feeling sluggish most of the way out... we practically flew back at a much faster pace and I felt much better.

Although we were in the middle of the woods, there was not a lot of wildlife to be seen, and after almost two hours we saw only a hawk and a few salamanders on the trail (moving pretty slow due to the cold). We thought about bears (being in the woods and all), but didn't think too seriously about it until we got back to our car and saw signs saying we were in “bear and cougar country”! Nothing much you can do about it except keep pets on leashes and remember that both bears and cougars try and avoid humans as much as you want to avoid them.

There were not too many people on the trail when we started, but definitely a few more by the time we finished. Most were walkers and hikers, but there were a couple runners, and I've talked to many people who cycle the trail a lot. While it is a wonderful place to run/cycle, it is probably a bit too far away from Portland to attract Portlanders away from the more local areas. This is a pity, since it is as beautiful a location to run as Forest Park in Downtown Portland. The only difference is the trail here is paved versus Forest Park is not. Since I prefer bike path to trails... you can guess which location I would recommend if I had to choose. Also, while there were not too many people on the trail, I never felt isolated. However, since it is a bit farther out, I would recommend running with a partner, or at least carrying a cell phone.

So if you have the time to drive out a little ways from Portland, give yourself a treat and try out the Banks-Vernonia Trail. You won't regret it.

**Directions:**

There are many trailheads on the Banks-Vernonia Trail, and there is a complete map at <http://www.oregonstateparks.org/images/pdf/bv.pdf>, but to get to the Buxton trailhead, head out Highway 26 West toward the coast. Around milepost 46 you will see a sign for Buxton and the Banks-Vernonia Trail. Take a right onto Fisher Rd, which becomes Bacona Rd. (this turn off of Hwy 26 is just across from a gas station). After making the right turn, go approximately 1.3 miles (finishing by going up a winding hill) and the trailhead will be on your right. If you miss the turn from Hwy 26, and hit the junction for Hwy 47 you've gone too far... but don't worry, you can still get there from hwy 47. Just take Hwy 47 toward Vernonia a very short distance, and then take the first right you see (about a ¼ mile in from Hwy 26 with a sign saying Buxton) and then take a left at Bacona Rd (there is a T-junction so you just take a left when you hit it). Again, you go up the hill and the trailhead is on your right. There is an earlier sign for the Manning trailhead also off of Hwy 26 before you hit the one for Buxton, so be sure not to turn off too early. Two runners we met after we finished our run told us that they started their run at the Manning trailhead and thus avoided the gradual uphill that I experienced until later in their run.

**Bathroom:** The Buxton trailhead has a bathroom, and other trailheads along the trail have them as well, but not all, so choose where you want to start accordingly. As mentioned before the two runners we met started their run at the Manning trailhead (no bathroom) knowing they could use the one at Buxton four miles into their run.

**Parking:** There is ample parking at the Buxton trailhead, including an ADA accessible ramp and loading platform.

**Surface:** Paved bike path the entire route.

**Traffic:** None. The trail is closed to traffic.

**Popularity:** Much quieter than trails closer in to Portland, but still a few people around. I imagine it will be busier as it gets warmer, and in the summer when people have more time to head out of the city.

**Plusses:** The scenery, the lack of traffic, and a paved trail so no risk of tripping.

**Minuses:** There are some long gradual hills that you notice after a while, but the gradual down-hills make up for them.

**Rating:** 5 out of 5 (take the time to drive out here if you live in Portland and you won't regret it!).