

Forest Park Review by Julia Reisinger



I decided to start with the most frequent recommendation we all give to the out of town visitors. If you want to run somewhere in Portland... we all say to head to Forest Park. I ran here many times when I first arrived in Portland, but hardly ever in the last few years. The route is extremely simple. If you keep on Leif Erickson Road, there is an out and back of over 11 miles (so 22 miles total if you go from one end to the other and back). So all you marathoners, here is the place to go if you need that long run and don't want to worry about loops, traffic, or hard surfaces. The road is primarily dirt with some rocks to look out for. It is wide enough to run side by side and have those conversations with your running partner. If you want to get off the main road, there are a lot of dirt paths you can veer off on, just be sure to not get lost as they can meander for miles. There are two ends to the main road. The first starting point is in Northwest Portland off of Thurman Road. This is the most popular end, and on a standard weekend, there are a LOT of cars, so you might have to walk a few blocks after you park the car just to get to the "zero" mile marker. And yes, the road has mile markers every quarter mile so you know exactly how far you've gone.

The second starting point is off of Germantown road in what most people would call Hillsboro (or outer Beaverton). This end has a small parking lot off of Germantown, and is much less used, but the surface condition of the road tends to be softer as a result (not so much use). I've tried both ends and prefer Germantown simply because of the proximity to my house, but by starting on the Thurman end you get the benefit of finishing with a downhill the last one and half miles. And speaking of hills, this is not a flat course. While it's not incredibly hard, there are definitely a few stretches of long gradual hills that you notice.

There is a gate at each entrance, which is great for stretching, collapsing on, and keeping out the automotive traffic. One of the best aspects of this route is the complete absence of vehicles, so it is quiet, and you can almost forget you are in the middle of a big city. In the fall, the trees are beautiful, but once they start falling, you have to keep an eye out on the footing. In the winter, the ground can be frozen, so again, footing can be an issue if



you aren't used to running on anything other than pavement. In the spring, the new greenery is lovely, and in the summer, you can beat the heat by running almost

entirely in the shade. There is a reason people run here all the time... it's quiet, beautiful, less stress due to not having to worry about traffic, and even if you want to run alone, you don't feel isolated since there are plenty of other people around. Guys might not think of this so much, but as a female, this is one of the few places I honestly felt comfortable running by myself and not worrying about who is out on the trails with me.

Most runners hit the trail in the morning, with the most crowded parking coming at 7:00am and 8:00am. Since the trail is open to cyclists, you tend to see them a little later in the morning. Be aware when running around the blind corners so you don't create an accident. Also, many people bring their dogs, and most are not on leashes, so again, be on the lookout for canines. It is not uncommon to see a dog go past... and then a little while later the owner bringing up the rear.

All in all it a truly wonderful place to run and worth all the accolades. Try it and incorporate it into your running routine. It's well worth the drive.

Directions:

To get to the Thurman end:

From any direction get to I-405 (either I-405N or I-405S). Once on I-405, take the Vaughn St. Exit. Stay straight to go onto US-30W, then turn left onto NW 23rd, followed by a quick right onto Thurman. Then take Thurman all the way up the hill until it dead-ends at the trailhead.



To get to the Germantown end:

From any direction get to I-405 (either I405N or I-405S). Once on 1-405, take exit 3 to US-30W (toward US-30W/NW Ind Area/St. Helens). Go about 5 ¼ miles to the St. Johns Bridge. Go UNDER the bridge and then take a left (following signs to Germantown road). You head up toward the bridge but do NOT cross it. Instead, before you get to the bridge, take a right onto Germantown road (an extreme right turn that is almost a U-turn). Head up Germantown Road about a mile until you hit the Forest Park parking lot (on the left). If you hit the top of the hill (a 4-way stop) you've gone too far. There are two parking lots on Germantown. The first one you see will be for the Leif Erickson Trail and is bigger with a big "U" shape (two entrances). The second Parking lot is smaller, a little higher up the hill, and accesses the trailheads, not the main road. Both are nice places to run, but the main road is where the mile markers are found, and with more room to run with a partner.

Bathroom: If you start at the Thurman End there is a port-a-potty at around the half mile marker, but if you start at the Germantown end, be prepared, there are no facilities so “go before you go”. Of course you are running in the woods the entire time so...

Parking: There is ample parking at the Thurman end, but depending on when you arrive be prepared to walk from your car. At the Germantown end there is a small parking lot that can fill up on a nice morning. Be sure not to leave any valuables in your car since there have been break-ins (people know the runners will be gone for a while and take advantage).

Surface: Dirt road, with some rocks. Nice soft surface. Be careful when running in the fall since leaves can cover ruts or rocks.

Traffic: None. The trail is closed to traffic

Popularity: Both ends of the trail are very popular and you will find runners of all speeds along with walkers, cyclists, and even an occasional horse.

Plusses: The scenery, the lack of traffic, and soft surface

Minuses: On the Germantown end, no bathrooms and smaller parking areas. If you aren't used to running on dirt roads, be prepared to watch your step as it can be rocky in some areas

Rating: 4.5 out of 5 (the only drawback being the lack of bathrooms, and sometimes uneven footing). Trail runners might give it a 5.