

Running Routes in Oregon

The goal of this column is to describe a route/location, and let you know in my opinion if it's all it's cracked up to be. So if you have a favorite running route, let me know by contacting ORRC at orrc@orrc.net and I'll give it a try.

Rock Creek Regional Trail, Portland, OR

When I moved to Portland so many years ago, I started out sharing an apartment in downtown Portland. That didn't last long since, while I like granola and the occasional McMenamin's movie at the Mission Theatre, I'm really a white bread and mayonnaise type of person who just doesn't like living in an urban setting. I didn't realize I was a suburbia gal until I found my next apartment way the heck out in the Rock Creek area. Where is the Rock Creek Area? Take Highway 26 west for forever until you hit the 185th Avenue exit. Take a right on 185th and you've hit Rock Creek. Technically it's unincorporated Portland, so not Hillsboro, not Beaverton, but way too far away from Portland to get to vote on any issues they care about (like mayor or fluoride in their water). This is suburbs with a capital "S" but it is also one of the prettiest areas to run in that you'll ever find.

When I first moved to this area there were mostly two-lane roads, narrow shoulders, and no bike trails. But the neighborhoods themselves were designed in such a way that you could run a 3-mile loop from my house and never once cross a busy



intersection. In fact, the original Rock Creek neighborhood was designed around a golf course, so most of the neighborhoods intertwined around the various greens and fairways. That was over 20 years ago and now there are wider streets, lots more houses, and a lot more cars. However, in addition, they also created one of the nicest bike trail systems in the county.

The Rock Creek Regional Trail just got its name a few weeks ago. There were miscellaneous trails in various neighborhoods in the area, but last year they were finally all connected. And just this summer, signage was implemented that described where you were, how far to the next section, and even cross walks for the very few streets the trail intersects. The livability in the area is so drastically improved, and the enjoyment of my morning runs so dramatically increased, that it's hard to see why I would ever move out the area.

Where to start? First off, the trail is an out and back with several different places to start and finish. Usually I start in the middle because of where I live, but for those wanting a longer run, without criss-crossing yourself, I'll describe it from the beginning, which is in the Rock Creek Neighborhood at the Powerline Park Soccer Fields across from Lenox Elementary School. The park has plenty of parking, a bathroom, and a water fountain, so it's a perfect place to start your run. That is unless you arrive on a day with a soccer tournament (most Saturday mornings in the fall and spring). However, even if you find yourself arriving at the same time as a multitude of mini-vans, there is still plenty of parking available on the various side-streets.

From the soccer fields, the trail is pretty straightforward. You simply keep heading North along the bike path. You'll pass by the soccer fields, and then a golf course, and then past the golf course club-house down a gentle slope where you'll see a lake in front of you. This is Bethany Lake Park, and on most mornings you'll find people fishing, and dogs playing Frisbee, and lots of geese. About a mile and a quarter in you'll hit 185th Avenue and your first cross walk. You exit the trail, go right on the sidewalk about 30 yards, and you'll have a stoplight that you can activate to get a cross walk signal. The trail is clearly visible and easily marked with signs at any intersection, so it's almost impossible to get lost.

After crossing 185th, you complete a short section that takes you to the second cross walk at West Union Ave. Again, you simply hit the button, cross the street, and head right on the side-walk for another 30 yards, and you pick up the bike trail again. This section of the trail continues along the power lines and along a beautiful wetland area. Wildlife Warning! If you run

this section of trail in the early morning, you WILL either smell or see a skunk. They are in the area, and I've run into them countless times. I'm told that they are more scared of me than I am of them...but really? I can't tell you the number of times I've screeched to halt as I figure out the "cat" I'm looking at has a white streak down it's back and that very distinctive gait.

After about a mile you'll hit the top of a hill, and there is a choice to continue straight along the trail, or take a right onto another bike path heading into the Bethany area. There is also a park for kids to play at, and another bathroom and water fountain. Continue straight if you want to remain on the mapped route that continues the Rock Creek Regional Trail. The path to the right ends within the local neighborhoods, where you can still have a pleasant run, just crossing more roads and not as scenic. Also, be aware that there are multiple connecting bike paths for neighborhood residents, but as long as you stay on the main trail, you really can't get lost.

The last road you intersect on the path is Kaiser, and it also had a new crosswalk installed this past year. Once you cross Kaiser you have a gradual uphill and the path continues for just over another ½ mile before the trail dead-ends and you head back the way you came.

The total distance from the soccer fields to the dead end past Kaiser is about 3 ½ miles, for a total round trip of about 7 miles. It's entirely on bike path with only a few roads to cross, and pretty views all around. Since it's surrounded by neighborhoods, with lots of connecting paths for residents, you need to be aware of children on the path, walkers with their dogs, and lots of bicyclists as well. It's not as busy as, say, Springwater Corridor, but on a sunny weekend morning, just be aware of everyone around you, and be prepared to say "on your left" a lot to get past people.

I feel incredibly fortunate I happened to move to an area that ended up being so close to such a beautiful trail, with such easy access. I can't recommend it enough, and if you want to try a location close to Portland that's outside of downtown...join me in the suburbs and try out this "white bread and mayonnaise" trail. You won't regret forgoing the granola for a change. 🏃

PHOTOS BOTH PAGES:
JULIA REISINGER ON THE ROCK CREEK TRAIL

The Lowdown

Directions: From downtown simply take Hwy 26 West until you reach the Cornelius Pass North exit (#62B). Take a right on Cornelius Pass and then a right onto Rock Creek Blvd. After about 400 meters, you'll see the soccer fields on your left, where you can pull in and park.

Bathroom: There are bathrooms at the soccer field, and twice more along the trail, about 1 ¼ mile in and again about another mile along so no worries there.

Parking: There is ample parking at the soccer fields, and again farther along the trail on 185th Ave if you want a shorter run.

Surface: Paved Bike Trail (my favorite).

Traffic: None. The trail is closed to traffic.

Popularity: Pretty popular, especially in the mornings on the weekend. There are lots of kids, dogs and cyclists

Plusses: Easy trail (not a lot of hills), no traffic, plenty of places for water and bathrooms, and pleasant scenery.

Minuses: No real minuses, except for the possibility of running into skunks in the early morning hours.

Rating: 5 out of 5. I love this trail and am very happy it's finally finished.

