

# SEVEN PLACES TO ROLL

Accessible trails and destinations offer a taste of Central Oregon for wheelchairs and strollers alike

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**F**or our summer vacation last year, we drove the scenic 175 miles from Portland, passing picturesque Detroit Lake and crossing Santiam Pass to spend time in beautiful Bend, Oregon. Our mission: to find wheelchair-accessible trails and sites in Central Oregon.

Bend's unique logging history, modern-day artistic culture and breathtaking scenery provide substance for every passion. Turns out there's plenty of accessibility too. While exploring from my power wheelchair with my family, we discovered seven extraordinary places to roll to from Bend. Think broadly about "rolling"—if there's wheelchair access, there's stroller access, too.

**1** The Newberry National Volcanic Monument, 28 miles south of Bend on U.S. 97, offered remarkable, desolate beauty. I rolled along the *Trail of the Molten Land* on a gently sloping paved trail over hills of lava rock. Devastation from volcanic eruptions thousands of years ago was apparent. Life is still inching its way back into this area. Branches of bitterbrush pushed through crevices in the lava beds, which stretched for miles. Towering ponderosa pines stood at the edges of the ancient lava beds, producing a stark contrast at this truly unique site.

On top of Lava Butte, the park volunteer told us, "This is the lookout tower where the Two Bulls fire was first spotted." Seeing the southwestern edge of last summer's 7000-acre burn emphasized the care we must take to preserve our natural resources.

**2** The High Desert Museum is eight miles south of Bend on US 97. It provides fascinating indoor and outdoor displays of logging, railroad history, native and pioneer cultures and local wildlife. Paved and packed-dirt trails throughout the outdoor campus made wheeling easy. Rogue, the Autzen Otter exhibit's featured resident, entertained us with his agility. He somersaulted and twisted in his pond, curiously studying us. "He knows it's lunchtime," his caretaker said as she tossed fish to him.

A homestead and sawmill from 1904 remains on-site and is staffed by volunteers dressed in pioneer-era costume. "It took the same amount of wood to build this sawmill from milled boards as the small log house over yonder," the mill attendant informed us, illustrating the significance mills had in Western history. The log house was one-third the size of the mill!

**THIS PAGE:** Tumalo Falls **OPPOSITE PAGE, FROM TOP:** Head of the Metolius River Trailhead | Pilot Butte



**3** We relaxed at 13-acre **Drake Park** located on Riverside Boulevard near downtown Bend. The park surrounds the banks of Mirror Pond—actually a slow-moving portion of the Deschutes River. Although named after Bend founder Alexander Drake, the park could easily be named for the abundant waterfowl that gather on the quiescent waters. Paved and packed-dirt trails throughout the park, part of the 18-mile Deschutes trail system (some, but not all, of which is accessible), led to a scenic bridge, an outdoor stage, abundant picnicking areas and nicely accessible restrooms.

**4** Portland's Mount Tabor and Bend's **Pilot Butte** are the only volcanoes within city limits in Oregon. Pilot Butte State Scenic Viewpoint is three miles east of downtown Bend on NE Greenwood Avenue. The magnificent view of the high desert spreading endlessly below the extinct cinder cone was gorgeous. The Three Sisters, Mount Jefferson, Black Butte and Mount Hood could be seen in the distance. Historically, Pilot Butte served as a landmark for pioneers traveling west. I easily wheeled around the plaza on the flat-topped butte, rolling from one educational plaque to the next, admiring the 360-degree panoramic view.



**5** **Tumalo Falls**, 13.5 miles west of Bend, is off the beaten path on Forest Service Road 4603. This 97-foot waterfall majestically plunges into Tumalo Creek, adding to the turbulent flow that winds through a soaring Ponderosa pine forest. Parents maneuvered strollers up the packed-dirt, half-mile trail to the overlook, but it was too steep for a wheelchair to safely navigate. The lower viewing platform was accessible and provided a spectacular view. In the picnic area below, the sounds of the rushing creek and the forest abuzz with life added depth to my experience.

**6** The town of **Sisters** is 22 miles north of Bend on US 20. Recent renovations to this historic Western-themed town's sidewalks, curbs and streets have rendered the town pleasantly wheelchair accessible.

Shopping with my sisters in Sisters was a treat! We lunched at the Sister's Coffee Company, a rustic, cozy coffeehouse. We purchased colorful linens at the Hen's Tooth and delighted in their broad assortment of gifts. The ample room between displays made wheelchair/stroller access easy. The city park around the corner hosted a quaint farmer's market and provided clean, wheelchair-friendly bathrooms.

**7** **The Head of the Metolius River** is 33 miles north of Bend on US 20, then 4.3 miles north on Forest Road 14. An easy-to-wheel, one-third mile asphalt trail leads from the parking area to a platform overlooking the gushing springhead of the river. 50,000 gallons per minute of pure, crystal clear water springs forth out of nowhere, instantly forming the Metolius River, an awe-inspiring sight!

After our wonderful vacation, we "rolled" back to Portland in the more traditional way—our car—with happy memories of time spent on wheels in Central Oregon. ▲

