

Crashing Waves, Sculpting Winds And A Wild River:

LIFE ON THE SOUTH OREGON COAST

The ocean's mesmerizing power and beauty transfixes us through our summer stay on the southern Oregon Coast. Walks on the beach become a daily ritual as necessary as breathing. Except for a couple upriver outings, we focus on exploring the dramatic coastline in its many moods and expressions.

By Rose Muenker · Photos by David Muenker

Just steps from our home in Turtle Rock RV Resort, a short trail leads to the beach. Gold Beach offers all the amenities of a small town, including a library with a friendly staff, good collection and monthly live music performances by regional artists.

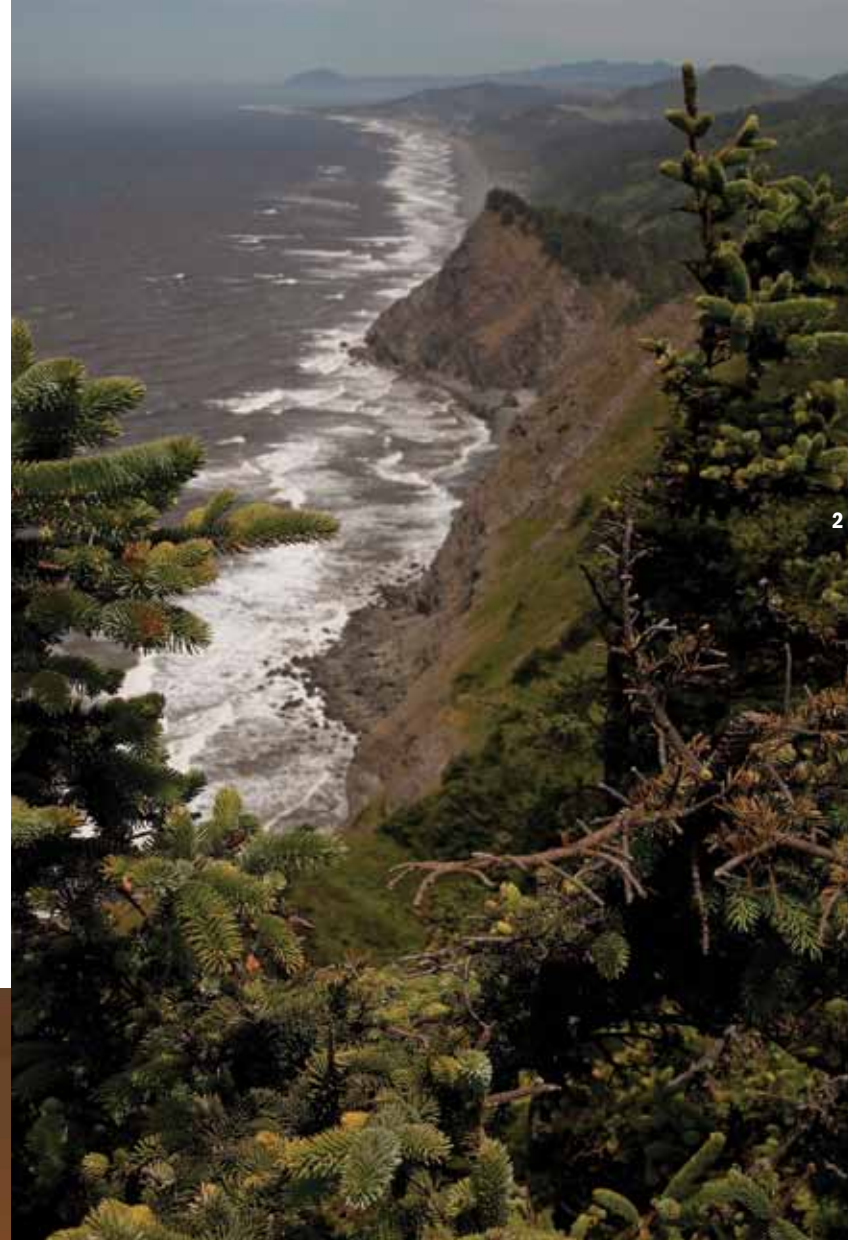
The Rogue River, known for its salmon and wild rapids, empties into the ocean at Gold Beach. And much of Oregon's most scenic coastline lies along the stretch from here south to Brookings near the California border, a 30-mile stretch we claim as our coastal "neighborhood."

WILD, SCENIC RIDE UPRIVER

For a 52-mile adventure up the Rogue, we board a 40-passenger jet boat. Fog blankets the mouth of the river as we cruise



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1 Sunset at Myers Beach. **2** "Our beach" lies beyond the point, viewed from Cape Sebastian. **3** A family heads for their "playground" on Myers Beach. **4** Visitors ride a jet boat up the wild and scenic Rogue River. **5** David harvests mussels for dinner.

past seals slumbering on a jetty. Fishermen angle for salmon and steelhead trout, some already reeling in their first catch of the day.

Farther up, the river narrows, sun burns through the fog and wildlife viewing becomes our focus. Our keen-sighted guide points out a bald eagle perched on a leafy branch. The high-pitched squeals of ospreys pierce the air. An otter and its baby amble on the riverbank. Later we watch another otter chase, catch and devour a fish. During the tour, we also see beavers, ducks and black-tail deer. The season has past for spotting black bears.

For added excitement, the captain turns the boat into a partial spin, causing frigid water to splash those seated close to the edge. Later, we enter a rugged canyon with frothing whitewater rapids. The jet boat cruises over them like a breeze. On the return, the sky turns gray and a stiff wind blows, showing us yet a wilder side of the river.



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1 Secret Beach hides in a quiet cove. **2 Salmon fishing** lures anglers to the Rogue. **3 A rainbow** brightens the mist over Hunter Creek along Turtle Rock RV Resort. **4 An otter** scrambles on a riverbank.

At low tide, Myers Beach has sand so firm that we see a mother easily push a stroller to the water's edge where her older children collect sand dollars. Surf and paddle boarders ride the waves. In the tidal pools at Lone Ranch Beach, limpets, green sea anemones, and bright orange and deep burgundy sea stars hug the sides of boulders. And so do thousands of mussels, one of our favorite shellfish.

With license in hand, we set out to a cove recommended by locals for harvesting mussels. Negative low tide, when offshore rocks become most exposed, dictates the day and time (dawn!)



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SPECTACULAR COASTAL SIGHTS

Protected coves, huge offshore rocks, and long stretches of beach separated by forested capes define the South Oregon Coast. Highway 101 divides the ocean from the forest and serves as the main street for the towns it links. It also gives travelers stunning views of the coastline.

The Samuel H. Boardman State Scenic Corridor features alluring sights including Arch Rock, Thunder Rock Cove and Natural Bridge. At Cape Sebastian, we hike through a tunnel cut through thickets of Sitka spruce to a birds-eye view of "our" beach. When we discover the trail access to Secret Beach, we feel like accomplished sleuths.

of our outing. Extracting individual mussels from the web of tough thread that connects them to each other is challenging. But within an hour, David gets his daily quota of 72.

Back at the rig, David scrubs their shells clean. Passersby ask what he is up to and instead of saying, "I hope you're inviting me to dinner," exclaim "You really eat those?" David cooks a divine dinner of steamed mussels, which we delightedly eat all by ourselves.

AT HOME ON OUR BEACH

All these glorious outings enrich our stay. But our anchor is experiencing "our" beach in all its dramatic expressions. On rare days, I wear a light sweater instead of layers of fleece and a windbreaker. When morning fog covers the beach, the air usually is still, making it possible to walk long distances. Some days, though, the sting of the windblown sand is so painful we dash back home.

Most days, a tolerable wind sweeps across the sand, sculpting geometric patterns. The surf crashes, scours the shoreline and exposes beds of colorful stones and treasured agates. Pelicans fly low, practically skimming the crests of the waves. Occasionally a seal pops up and watches us as curiously as we watch it. The amazing power of the wind and surf intrigues us as it transforms the beachscape daily.

In the coming weeks, we'll explore the Oregon Coast to the north, also acclaimed for its stunning beauty and rare sights. Right now, we're off to "our" beach.



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Rose and David Muenker, a travel writer-photographer team, are traveling the roads of North America by motor home. Read about their adventures in every issue of Out of Denver and on their blog davidandrose.com. Email them at rose.muenker@gmail.com.