Cape Falcon, OR

Vicinity Location:
About 65 miles west of Portland, OR near Manzanita, OR.

Directions:
From Portland, Oregon, take Highway 26 west for 70 miles, Near Seaside, take the exit for Highway 101 South. Once on Highway 101 South, drive about 14 miles to Oswald West State park and choose the first parking lot on the right, or the second parking lot, with the restrooms, on the left. The first parking lot will be shaded in the afternoon.

The parking lots at Oswald West State Park fill up early on all but winter weekends so plan to arrive by 9am.

No permits are needed to park at the trailhead.

Restrooms and drinking water is available at the main parking lot, just south of the Cape Falcon Trailhead.

Dogs on leashes are allowed on these trails.

Length and Elevation: (approximate)
Cape Falcon: 5 miles roundtrip. Cape Falcon Viewpoint: 7 miles roundtrip.
Trailhead elevation: 100 feet.
Cape Falcon: 200 feet, Cape Falcon viewpoint: 250 feet. Highest point 400 feet.

Trail:
Cape Falcon Trail (Part of the Oregon Coastal Trail) with connections to Neahkahnie Mountain Trail.

There is at least one geocache along this trail at: N 45° 45.868 W 123° 58.221. Info at Geocaching.com

Trail Maps:
Topo Map, Oregon State Parks map, Download Garmin .gpx file

History:
The State Park this trail is in was named after a person, Oswald West, who was an early advocate for preserving Oregon's beaches for public use. West was the 14th Governor of Oregon and served from 1911 to 1915. West had ridden a horse through this area in 1912 and later claimed the ride inspired him to write a bill declaring the wet sand areas of Oregon's ocean beaches a public highway. However, in 1966, the issue of the dry sand part of the beach rose in public awareness after a person was kicked off dry sand beach at Cannon Beach. At the trail junction of the Cape Falcon Trail and the trail to the beach meet, is a memorial marker for Matt Kramer, a Associated Press reporter whose articles in 1967 helped pass the Oregon "Beach Bill" which grants "free and uninterrupted use of the beaches" to the public.

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The first part of this trail is lush and green and the trickles and seeps of water helps the plants flourish in this area. The trail is well maintained and climbs gently for the first .3 mile. After just a short walk, the sounds of the highway are replaced by the sounds of Short Sand Creek. The trail is

about 100 feet above the creek then drops down to the junction with a beach access trail and the Falcon Cape Trail.

From the Cape Falcon junction of the trail, it is just a short walk to a day use area with picnic tables, restrooms and, or course, the beach. The beach at Oswald West State Park is very popular with surfers and on nice days there can be over 50 surfers in the water.

If you decide to hike this trail in the rainy season, which can last through the end of May, be prepared for several muddy patches. There is plenty of water on the Coast to go around and that applies to this trail.

From the junction with the beach trail and the Cape Falcon Trail, any remaining road noise is soon replaced by the sounds of the ocean surf. There are many places along the trail where the nearby trees have raised their gnarly roots across the trail, making it important to pay attention to where you step, so you don't trip over an unexpected root.

The fury of Coastal storms is apparent in the amount of downed trees along the trail, but most all have been cleared along the well-maintained trail. The trail out to Cape Falcon has a very moderate grade and passes by several locations where there are nice views of the ocean and the beach at Oswald West State Park.

The trail affords views of the ocean as you walk closer to the cape. It is a lovely walk through the woods and the elevation changes are gentle. The sounds and salt air scent of the ocean provide a pleasant accompaniment to the hike.

After about a mile from the junction, there is a steep user trail down through the brush to the beach. Avoid this trail on wet days, but on dry days, it does provide an access route and an unobstructed overlook of the beach. The trail crosses over a few small streams with a couple crossing having a short but slippery descent to the step-across creek.

As the trail nears Cape Falcon, there is a junction to the left to an overlook of the ocean with nice views to the south. Continuing on, the trail curves around a small point and you can hear sea lions barking as they lay on the rocks below. The trail then drops down a bit, crosses a small stream, and makes the final gentle ascent to Cape Falcon. The forest floor along the trail is carpeted with Oxalis, ferns, Trillium, False Lily of the Valley, and or course, Salal. The trees here are mostly Douglas Fir and Sitka Spruce.

The junction to Cape Falcon is to the left and the trail to the cape has been hewn through Salal, creating a wall of brush seven or eight feet high on either side of the trail. The trail to Cape Falcon leads towards a brushy knoll with small trails to several viewpoints of the ocean and headlands jutting from the sea.

Back at the trail junction to Cape Falcon itself, you can continue to the right on the Oregon Coastal trail for several miles to Arch Cape. I chose to continue about another mile and enjoy more walking through the woods, crossing a small stream, and walking out to another viewpoint on a headland that juts a short way into the Pacific Ocean. This is a good point to turn around but you can go another .5 mile to a partially obstructed northern view of the coast.
Pick your turnaround point, or you could make a shuttle hike from Arch Cape, past Cape Falcon, to Oswald West State Park.

The best option for a day hike is to hike out and back from the Cape Falcon Trailhead at Oswald West State Park.

This trail is okay for young experienced hikers who know to stay away from cliffs along the ocean and not stray off the trail. The views are great and the trail isn’t crowded.

Enjoy the photos!!

Gallery Pics

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