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Spring

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Rogue  
Valley,  
Oregon

*Going Rogue*  
**IN OREGON'S RUGGED  
WILDERNESS**

BY MATT WASTRADOWSKI

© Morrisons Rogue Wilderness Adventures photo by Jak Wenderly

There's nowhere in the Northwest quite like Oregon's Rogue River—flowing 215 miles from Crater Lake National Park into the Pacific Ocean—and there's nothing in Oregon quite like the lodge-to-lodge hiking experience along its most remote and rugged banks.

Over the course of 40 miles, the Rogue River Trail—an old path built for miners and pack mules in the 1800s—traces Oregon's most famous river, hugs its 1,000-foot canyon walls and winds past some of the Rogue's most treacherous rapids.

Today, backpackers can “rough it” in primitive campsites provided by the Bureau of Land Management, many of which sit on the banks of the Rogue. What makes this trek so unique? You don't need to be a veteran backpacker to make the trip. Various lodges sit scattered along the trail, each offering hot showers, warm meals and comfortable beds to hikers, rafters and anglers exploring the Rogue.

All that comfort makes the multi-day trek more appealing to hikers who might not otherwise consider such an arduous trip. (Hikers can certainly load their backpack with gear, but local outfitters, such as Morrisons Rogue Wilderness Adventures and Lodge ([morrisonlodge.com](http://morrisonlodge.com)), can also shuttle supplies from lodge to lodge, leaving you to carry only a daypack between stops.) The Rogue River Trail can feel at times like a roller coaster, gaining

2,000 feet over 40 miles, but Brad Niva, executive director with Travel Southern Oregon, says the most common issue hikers face are basic blisters.

John James co-owns Black Bar Lodge, the first lodge hikers come to on the trail, and chalks up the experience to something elemental. “It's the beauty,” he says. “It's the remoteness and a sense of comfort.”

The trip generally takes three to five days, depending on a hiker's fitness level and determination. Here's a sample itinerary along with what to expect as you explore the federally-designated Wild & Scenic Rogue River.



## DAY ONE: HIKE 9.3 MILES TO BLACK BAR LODGE

The 40-mile hike begins at the Grave Creek trailhead, roughly 30 miles northwest of Grants Pass in Southern Oregon ([southernoregon.org](http://southernoregon.org)).

First thing's first: Niva warns against leaving your car near the trailhead and advises hikers to arrange a shuttle service ahead of time; several local outfitters will drop you off at the trailhead, store your vehicle in a secure location during the trek and pick you up at a pre-arranged destination. Expect to pay \$150 to \$300, depending on road closures and distance.

The first few miles waste no time in testing your boots' durability. The rocky stretches along this initial stretch were caused by lava flows and volcanic activity some 140 million years ago, and the Rogue River later carved a path through the rock over the span of another one million years.

You'll also quickly get acquainted with the region's mining history. Detour to the Whiskey Creek Cabin, built by a miner in the late 1800s, after 3.3 miles, and take time to stop at the Tye Rapids after 4.9 miles; this area once hosted a gold mine where 300 Chinese laborers mined \$1 million worth of gold dust.

After hiking 9.3 miles through strands of cedar and Shasta red fir, you'll spend your first night in Black Bar Lodge ([blackbarlodge.com](http://blackbarlodge.com)), built in 1932. The lodge

sports 16 guest rooms—and each night includes a room, dinner, breakfast and lunch for your departure day. The rate is \$155 per rafter and \$160 per hiker, assuming double occupancy.

## DAY TWO: HIKE 14.6 MILES TO MARIAL LODGE

When should you tackle the Rogue River Trail? Niva recommends hiking between May and mid-June (especially for colorful wildflower displays) or in September and October. Temperatures can easily exceed 100°F in July and August, and the trail offers little shade to escape the elements.

The day's highlight comes after 13.4 miles, when you arrive at the Rogue River Ranch. Built in 1903, the ranch once served as a trading post, boarding house, post office, and recreational homestead. Today, the Bureau of Land Management hosts a museum on the first floor of the main house; volunteers generally staff the museum between early May and late October each year.

Just 1.2 miles beyond the ranch, you'll arrive at Marial Lodge (call 541-474-2057), which has hosted hikers, rafters and anglers since the 1940s. The lodge (\$145 per guest) offers a patio set among the treetops, serves family-style dinners, and is home to a cozy common area with a couch, plush chairs and a fireplace.



### DAY THREE: HIKE 5 MILES TO PARADISE LODGE OR 9.3 MILES TO CLAY HILL LODGE

The highlights come early and often today. In addition to western hemlock and towering Douglas fir trees, you'll pass Coffeepot, the narrowest (and perhaps trickiest) passage for rafters paddling the Rogue, after just one mile. Soon after, you'll arrive at the appropriately-named Inspiration Point, which overlooks Stair Creek Falls from a narrow ledge jutting out from the cliffside.

Along the way, you're likely to encounter an abundance of wildlife: River otters, bald eagles, osprey, herons and blacktail deer are common around the trail, and salmon and steelhead trout call the river home.

That said, the trail hosts a few hazards. Several narrow sections of trail traverse loose scree and can rise 100 or more feet above the Rogue River. Black bear sightings become more common the farther west you go, especially in late summer and early fall, and you may encounter ticks or rattlesnakes along the entirety of the trail. Poison oak is also common, so wear long pants and keep an eye out for the three-leafed plants.

In less harrowing news, you'll also spy some old mining equipment along this stretch, including a large arrastra wheel, used for breaking up ore and extracting minerals. The Rogue River hosted a thriving mining community in the late 1800s and early 1900s, and old cabins and abandoned equipment still line the trail today.

Where you stay tonight generally depends on how far you feel like hiking today.

Paradise Lodge ([paradise-lodge.com](http://paradise-lodge.com)) is a little less than five miles beyond last night's stop; the lodge hosts 18 rooms in six cabins, many with views of the river or the surrounding gardens. Each night includes appetizers, dinner and breakfast and lunch to go for your departure day. And if you need some essentials, an on-site general store sells local wine, craft beer, ice cream and other snacks. The rate is \$165 per rafter, \$175 per hiker, assuming double occupancy.

Farther downriver, the Clay Hill Lodge ([clayhilllodge.com](http://clayhilllodge.com)) prides itself on family- or buffet-style dinners that feature organically grown produce, fresh-baked bread and other high-quality fare. At \$165 per guest, accommodations include dinner, breakfast, and a sack lunch for the following day.



Morriçons Rogue Wilderness Lodge



Paradise Lodge

### DAY FOUR: HIKE UP TO 11.3 MILES TO THE FOSTER BAR BOAT RAMP

You'll gradually swap ponderosa pine and oak savannahs for twisting Sitka spruce trees as you climb out of the Rogue River canyon and into a coastal forest today.

Just five miles from the trail's end at Foster Bar, Flora Dell Falls plunges 30 feet over a sheer rock wall into a trailside pool; if temperatures allow, this makes an ideal swimming hole and an idyllic coda to the hike.

Soon after, you'll arrive at Foster Bar, where your shuttle driver will (hopefully) be waiting to return you to civilization. 🚗