

Bottle Beach State Park already a gem among birders

The Olympian

Where: Bottle Beach State Park is tucked away just off state Route 105 a few miles east of Westport. This park is about 60 miles from Olympia.

To do: Bottle Beach is a small, lesser-known state park - unless you are a birder. Birders flock to Bottle Beach in the spring and fall to see clouds of migrating shorebirds that feed on worms and crustaceans in the park's extensive mudflats. Bottle Beach, which features three-quarters of a mile of beachfront along Grays Harbor, is always a good place to spot great blue herons, many types of gulls and the odd shorebird. The best shorebird viewing is in spring and fall.

Songbirds swarm in the marsh. The best time to see shorebirds is at high tide, as the water pushes them toward the beach.

Most of the 70-acre park is dense wetlands and marshes - which makes for spectacular birding.

The park: Bottle Beach is a rustic park, as the only parking area is a small gravel lot. There isn't even a sign, but this spot is worth the drive from South Sound. The sandy beach is studded with interesting driftwood, shells and some beach glass. Visitors can see pilings in the water, which are some of the last relics of the old town of Ocosta.

The beach is a great place to visit for a picnic. If you visit at low tide, the mudflats are alive with clams squirting water from their holes and crabs scuttling around. It's fun to wander around on the mudflats, but look out for soft, sticky spots and don't go out too far from shore.

On the way there: The trail from the rustic parking lot to the beach is about a quarter-mile long, and there are plenty of things to see and do on the short hike.

Check out the marsh creatures - especially herons and other water birds. Ducks and geese often stop in the area, and deer come out in the mornings and evenings. There are thousands of ripe blackberries on the vines along the trail right now.

Directions: Finding Bottle Beach can be a challenge, as there is no sign. Take State Route 8 to Elma. State Route 8 transforms into U.S. Highway 12 at Elma. Continue on U.S. 12 to Aberdeen. In Aberdeen, take state Route 105 and start keeping track of the mileage markers. When you're between mile markers 34 and 35, the road will curve and you should look for a sign for Ocosta Third Street on your left. The Bottle Beach parking area is on the right side of the road - right across state Route 105 from Ocosta Third Street.

Nearby areas: Westport is just a few miles farther down state Route 105, and Twin Harbors State Park is also nearby off Route 105.

Equipment: Bring binoculars, spotting scopes and cameras. Rain gear and a warm fleece are always good ideas when visiting the coast. A picnic lunch, water, and a bird identification guide will come in handy.

Comforts: None. This park is not yet developed, so there is no drinking water or bathrooms. Westport is less than 10 minutes away.

Safety: Good hiking shoes are a good idea on the trail, and you should wear some kind of shoe or sneaker on the beach and mudflats.

More information: Go to www.parks.wa.gov/parks



Flocks of geese graze on saltwater plants during low tide at Bottle Beach State Park. The best time to see shorebirds is 90 minutes before and after high tide. (Photos by Chester Allen/The Olympian)



Bees are very attracted to flowering plants that grow right from the sand at this lesser-known state park.
