

Pioneer Park: Playfields, meadows, river OUTING

What: Pioneer Park in Tumwater

Where: Off Henderson Boulevard in Tumwater

To do: Pioneer Park is really two different parks. One half of the 85-acre park is playing fields and play structures for children. The other half of the park is meadows and woods along a stretch of the Deschutes River. The dense woods and open meadows are a slice of how South Sound looked 200 years ago. The Deschutes River is very popular with anglers, swimmers and tubers. The high water of last winter and spring transformed this section of river. Many streamside trees fell into the river, and gravel bars have moved around. Tubers and swimmers will find fallen trees completely blocking their way at two places -- or more. This might be the summer to NOT float the river on tubes or air mattresses.

This part of South Sound is rich in wildlife. The meadows are waist-deep in green grass and wildflowers -- there are rafts of wild daisies blooming right now. Wild roses also are blooming. Deer, osprey and the odd coyote show up for quiet, patient visitors. Woodpeckers, red-winged blackbirds and other forest, water and meadow birds are everywhere.

Watch for: The big standpipe that spurts spring water. Many springs feed the Deschutes River. Keep an eye on the blackberry thickets. They're blooming right now, and it looks like there will be a bumper crop of fruit later this summer.

Fishing: Anglers fish this part of the Deschutes for wild rainbow and cutthroat trout in summer and for chinook salmon in the fall. Anglers can keep two trout that are 14 inches long or longer if the fish are caught downstream of the Henderson Boulevard Bridge. All trout caught upstream of the bridge must be released.

Trails: There is a network of wide, smooth trails through the meadows and woods and near the river. The trails are an easy hike. People who use wheelchairs and walkers can use most of the trails.

Safety: The river is full of new sweepers -- downed trees along the bank -- and fallen timber blocks the river at a couple of spots. Tubing the river will be dangerous this summer. If you tube or swim, please wear a life preserver and stay away from the deep, rushing water near the sweepers. The river can suck you into the downed trees, and it's almost impossible to claw your way out against the branches and strong current. This is a popular spot for swimming during the hot days of summer, but be careful, and don't let your kids out of your sight.

Pets: Lots of people bring their dogs to the natural area. If you see anglers, don't let your dog splash into their midst and spook the fish! If you see salmon in the water or along the banks,

take your dogs home. Dogs can catch salmonella if they eat dead, decaying salmon. Make sure you clean up after your pet.

Hours: The park closes at dusk, and the gate is locked.

Directions: To reach Pioneer Park from Tumwater, drive north on Capitol Boulevard to Custer Way/North Street. Turn right. Follow North Street to Henderson Boulevard. Turn right onto Henderson Boulevard. The park entrance is on the left side of Henderson Boulevard, just before the Deschutes River bridge.

Parking: There is plenty of parking at the park.

Equipment: Waterproof shoes or boots, polarized sunglasses, camera, water, raingear, binoculars, picnic supplies, sunscreen and a hat.

Information: Call Tumwater Parks and Recreation at 360-754-4160 or go to www.ci.tumwater.wa.us/parks%20zlocations.htm.



Photos by Chester Allen/The Olympian

Dozens of trees fell into the Deschutes River at Pioneer Park during high water last winter. These downed trees are great habitat for the river's wild trout and salmon, but they are very dangerous to swimmers and tubers. It's easy to get swept into the trees' branches, but it's hard to fight the current to get out.



Much of the natural section of Pioneer Park is a big meadow that is full of waist-high grass and wildflowers. Rafts of daisies are blooming right now.