

# Field Guide

## CANEMAH BLUFF NATURAL AREA

STORY BY Ashley Conley

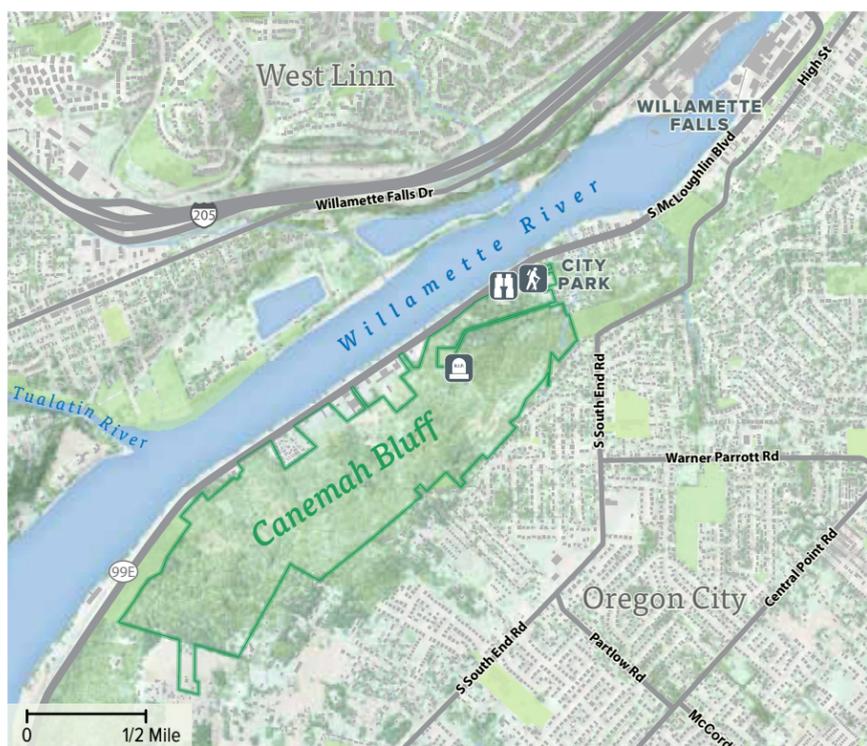
PHOTOGRAPHY BY Laura Oppenheimer Odom

The drive into Canemah Bluff Natural Area offers a clue that this park is unlike most others. Situated on top of an ancient landslide, Canemah is one of the oldest mapped neighborhoods west of the Mississippi River. Arriving from the top of the Oregon City plateau, the descent down the narrow neighborhood roads eventually levels out and showcases eye-popping and unexpected vistas. From Oregon white oak and madrone woodlands to vibrant upland prairies brimming with spring wildflowers and birds, you can experience a diversity of habitats in a relatively short walk.

Canemah Bluff is located less than half a mile upriver from the largest waterfall by volume in the Pacific Northwest, Willamette Falls. Thanks to the nearby falls and a natural harbor with deep, placid water, Canemah was a major canoe landing and gathering location for Native Americans. The area was also the focus of early European American settlement in the Willamette Valley during the mid-1800s, with the Oregon Trail ending in Oregon City.

A trip to the natural area also brings you up-close with a famous Oregon resident: Sam Barlow, who helped to scout a new overland route of the Oregon Trail to take pioneers around the south side of Mount Hood. The Barlow Road allowed settlers to avoid the treacherous journey down the Columbia River and encounters with Celilo Falls, which was costly and sometimes fatal. Barlow retired in the town of Canemah, and his family is buried in the historic pioneer cemetery adjacent to the natural area.

Shaped by the forces of geology and rich in cultural history, the landscape of Canemah Bluff invites all who want to experience its natural beauty firsthand.



### CANEMAH BLUFF NATURAL AREA

815 FOURTH AVE., OREGON CITY, OR

#### DRIVING

At the end of Fourth Avenue park in the small lot at Canemah Neighborhood Children's Park, which serves as a gateway to the natural area.

#### KNOW WHEN YOU GO

Canemah Bluff is open sunrise to sunset. No bikes or dogs, please. Be aware of poison oak.

#### AMENITIES

Basketball hoops, a playground and picnic shelter are located at the entry park, which is managed by Oregon City; a bathroom is open seasonally. Interpretive signs welcome you to Metro's natural area.

## IN THE NEIGHBORHOOD

Nestled in the historic Canemah neighborhood, the natural area is a short drive from downtown Oregon City. Fuel up with authentic Mexican fare at Loncheria Mitzil, 212 Molalla Ave. After exploring Canemah, refuel with the great taplist and unique menu at the Highland Stillhouse Scottish pub, 201 South Second St.

## BE ON THE LOOKOUT!



CAMAS



OREGON WHITE OAK



RED BREASTED SAPSUCKER



OREGON SUNSHINE

## SEASON BY SEASON

**SPRING:** Spring brings an abundance of color to upland prairies. Many native wildflowers bloom from March to May, including common camas, Brodiaea lilies and white rock larkspur. Warbling vireo, Cassin's finch, and black-headed grosbeaks vocalize along the trail. Turkey vultures pop up from below the bluff and ride the thermals to higher elevations. Osprey commonly perch in trees along the bluff, waiting to dive into the Willamette River in search of a meal.

**SUMMER:** Summer heat scorches the open prairie, turning the luscious colors of spring into a parched array of dusty yellows and browns. Along the walk toward the cemetery, Madrone flowers that persist into early summer buzz with bees and hummingbirds. If you slow your pace and quiet your footsteps, you might see the elusive mountain beaver weaving in and out of basalt rocks that line the path. The most primitive living rodent, actually more closely related to squirrels, the mountain beaver makes its own hay by methodically collecting plants and letting them dry at the entrance to its elaborate tunnel systems.

**FALL:** Autumn is harvest time, and Canemah residents are preparing for winter. Western gray squirrels and black-tailed deer are just a couple creatures that take advantage of Canemah's mast crop of acorns. Hidden from view much of the year, the fruiting bodies of mushrooms appear above ground. Look for the other-worldly elfin saddles hidden amongst leaf litter. Make your way to upper trails of the upland conifer forest and search for antler rubs on small, prominent trees, where bucks announce their presence to other deer.

**WINTER:** Take a walk back in time and search for remnants of Oregon's ancient past. The bluffs are formed from Columbia River basalt, most of which flowed from eastern Oregon 15 to 17 million years ago. More recent Boring lava flows also reached this land, pouring out of shield volcanoes to the east. Several large chunks of this gas-pocked lava can be seen along the trails, most likely broken off in landslides triggered by the Missoula Floods that swept into the Willamette Valley numerous times 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. At the prairie overlook, check for stunning views of High Cascades volcanoes.