

Canemah Bluff

FIELD GUIDE

The drive into Canemah Bluff Nature Park 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. The narrow neighborhood roads eventually level out and showcase 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 continues to be a significant 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.

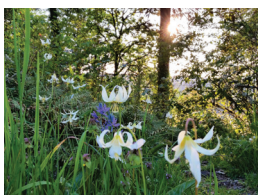
A trip to the natural area also brings you up-close with a famous Oregon resident: Sam Barlow, who helped to scout a new overland route of the Oregon Trail to take pioneers around the south side of Mount Hood. The Barlow Road allowed settlers to avoid the treacherous journey down the Columbia River and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

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.

Be on the lookout!



red-breasted sapsucker



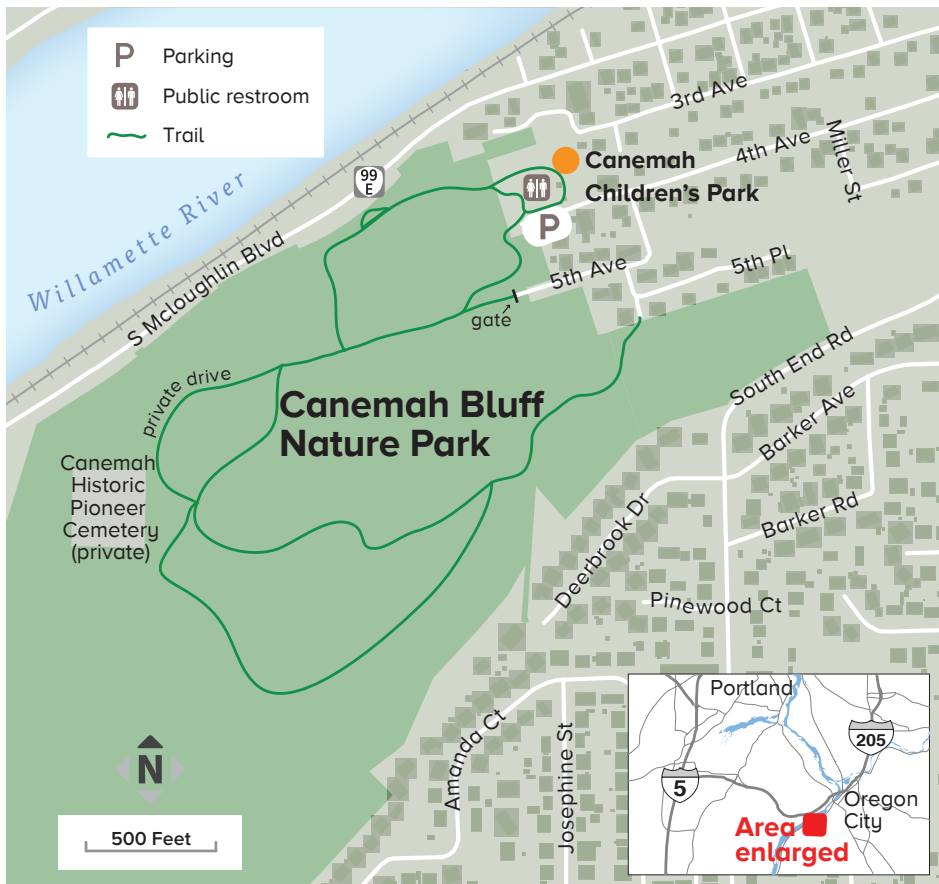
common camas and white fawn lily



Oregon sunshine



brodiaea lily



Season-by-season highlights

Spring: Spring brings an abundance of color to the upland prairies. Many native wildflowers bloom from March to May, including common camas, Brodiaea lilies and white rock larkspur. Warbling vireo and black-headed grosbeaks vocalize along the trail to the cemetery. Turkey vultures can be seen popping up from below the bluff and riding the thermals to higher elevations. Osprey commonly perch in trees along the edge of the bluff.

Summer: Summer heat scorches the open prairie, turning the luscious colors of spring into a parched array of dusty yellows and browns. Madrone flowers that have persisted into early summer buzz with bees and hummingbirds. You might see the elusive mountain beaver weaving in and out of the basalt rocks that line the path. The most primitive living rodent, the mountain beaver makes its own hay by methodically collecting plants and letting them dry at the entrance to its elaborate tunnel systems.

Fall: Western gray squirrels and black-tailed deer are just a couple of the creatures that take advantage of Canemah Bluff's mast crop of acorns. Hidden from view much of the year, the fruiting bodies of mushrooms suddenly appear above ground. Look for the other-worldly elfin saddles hidden amongst the leaf litter. Make your way to the upper trails of the upland conifer forest and search for antler rubs on small, prominent trees. Bucks scent-mark trees in this fashion, announcing 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 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 15,000 to 20,000 years ago. At the overlook in the prairie, check for stunning views of High Cascades volcanoes.

Canemah Bluff Nature Park

815 Fourth Avenue, Oregon City

Getting there

At the end of Fourth Avenue, park in the small lot at Canemah Children's Park, which serves as a gateway to Canemah Bluff. Please be respectful of neighbors and do not block driveways.

Know when you go

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 children's park, which is managed by Oregon City; a bathroom is open seasonally. Interpretive signs welcome you to Metro's nature park.

Pets policy

To protect plants, wildlife and people, Metro does not allow pets at most regional parks and natural areas. Pets can damage sensitive habitat and threaten wildlife the region has worked to protect. In natural areas where pets are not allowed, people see more wildlife and get closer to it. Seeing-eye dogs or other service animals are allowed. Please bring cleanup materials.

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