

Superb swimming-hole hopping

BY DIANA COOGLE

One beastly hot day, years ago, I went swimming-hole hopping, hitting three Applegate swimming holes in one day: Carberry Creek, Applegate Gorge, Emerald Pool. If you, too, are a swimming-hole hopper, try one of these itineraries:

Carberry Creek-Applegate Gorge-Emerald Pool

From Carberry Creek Road, walk down the steep, deeply rutted side road to a glorious swimming hole, deep and startlingly cold, rock-lined, with a small beach for towels, sunhats, books, and a picnic. A big flat rock across the water is great for sunbathing.

When the sun disappears in early afternoon, gather your things and drive past the Applegate Lake, past Seattle Bar, and down Forest Service Road 1040 to the Applegate gorge, where the river gushes green and white through the narrow passage, with good swimming before, through, and after it. The gorge is a favorite hangout for young people.

Finish the itinerary by driving to the Middle Fork trail and walking half a mile for an elfin swim in the aptly named Emerald Pool: green water at the base of a small white-rushing waterfall.

Seattle Bar-Applegate Lake-McKee Bridge

Begin this itinerary at Seattle Bar, the picnic area at the upper end of Applegate Lake, where you can swim under the eeping cry of ospreys overhead.

Next return down Upper Applegate Road to Hart-Tish campground. Walk through the woods to a green sward sloping to the lake (and maybe also across mud flats, depending on the season). When the lake is full, the swimming in blue water under the distant snow-peaked Red Buttes is spectacular.

But don't get carried away. McKee Bridge awaits. The swimming hole is downriver from the bridge, accessed by a short set of rocks and steps. Across the creek is a cliff for rock-jumping with a rope for a good swing into the water. Afterward, you can barbecue dinner in one of the barbecue pits in the park, or, if you've made a reservation (at recreation.gov), you can picnic in the McKee Bridge day-use shelter, constructed of pine timber with Civilian Conservation Corps masonry. It has a beautiful stone fireplace and is on the registry of National Historic Sites.

Cantrall Buckley

A good itinerary used to include Cantrall Buckley Park and the swimming hole near the Applegate Store, where daring young men would dive from rocks to show off to sunbathing beauties while children waded, looking for colorful rocks. Then the land was sold and a fence erected, and alas. (Editor's note: The owner of Merete's Cove, Keith Wetlesen, encourages



Diana Coogle takes a swim in the Emerald Pool on the Middle Fork trail. Photo: Mike Kohn.



Echo Lake, on the Horse Camp Trail, Red Buttes Wilderness. Photo: Diana Coogle.

folks who want to use the swimming hole to check with him or the caretaker, Scott. One or the other is usually on site. Alcohol is prohibited.)

But a swim simply at Cantrall Buckley is lovely. The river is calm and lazy—good for swimmers and waders of all ages, either upriver, where there are rocks to climb over and wade around, or downriver, where the swimming is freer.

Miller Lake

With a macho four-wheel-drive vehicle, you can bump through the deep ford across Sturgis Creek on the gravel road to Miller Lake. Otherwise, walk five miles. This three-acre, 50-foot-deep natural lake, set among forested hillsides and enhanced by a small dam, is dark and cold without being icy. After a swim you can hike (steeply) to the top of the ridge for a splendid view of the close-up Red Buttes and the snowy beauty of distant Mt. Shasta.

Kettle Lake

About two miles up the Silver Fork trail, looking closely, you might spot, downhill to the left, Kettle Lake, barely

larger than a marshy pond. If it's a hot day and you're sweaty from hiking, it's well worth a scramble down the steep hillside for a little swim. The water is cool and fresh and adequately deep (maybe six to eight feet) beyond the marshy edges.

Azalea Lake

It's a six-mile hike to Azalea Lake, which is neither too big nor too small, has sweet-smelling azaleas along its edges, and is not too cold, either. The Knox Fire of 2017 marred both the trail and the lake environment, but it's still worth a swim.

Echo Lake

If you don't mind wading through mud, you can enjoy a little (very little) swim in the deeper part of Echo Lake, under a little rock cliff, with No Name Peak looming above you on the other side. The lake is on a short side trail slightly more than three miles up the very steep Horse Camp Trail. It's a lovely spot, even if you don't think it's worth the mud for the swim.

Diana Coogle
dicoog@gmail.com

Getting there

Carberry Creek swimming hole: Follow Upper Applegate Road south to the T junction at the end of the lake. Turn right onto Carberry Creek Road. Just past the bridge is a turn-out on the right next to an orange gate. Park there and walk maybe a quarter mile to the swimming hole.

For **Applegate Gorge**, **Echo Lake**, and **Emerald Pool**: From Applegate Lake, continue on Upper Applegate Road to the T-junction after the bridge. Turn left. Drive 1.5 miles and turn right on FS Road 1040.

The **Applegate Gorge** is about 3 miles down Road 1040, on the right.

Horse Camp Trail, to **Echo Lake**, is on the left, 3.9 miles from the turn onto Road 1040. To get to the trailhead for Middle Fork Trail, to **Emerald Pool**, go 5 miles down Road 1040 and turn right onto road 1035. The trailhead is 0.1 of a mile past the turn, on the left.

Applegate Lake (at Hart-Tish) and **Seattle Bar**: From Ruch, turn onto Upper Applegate Road and go to the T junction at the end the lake. Turn left and then, across the bridge, turn right into Seattle Bar (19.7 miles from Ruch). The swimming area at Hart-Tish Park on the Applegate Lake is 4.5 miles back down Upper Applegate Road towards Ruch.

McKee Bridge: On Upper Applegate Road, 7.3 miles from Hart-Tish Park on the Applegate Lake or 8.6 miles from Ruch.

Cantrall Buckley Park: Travel six miles from the Applegate Store towards Ruch on Highway 238, then turn right at Hamilton Road and in one-tenth of a mile another right onto Cantrall Road.

Miller Lake: At the green bridge over the Applegate River, take a left if you're coming from Medford, a right if from Grants Pass, onto Thompson Creek Road. Continue 13.1 miles to Sturgis Fork Road (Forest Road 1020) and turn right. At the Sturgis Creek crossing, the road becomes Forest Road 400. Park where the road meets Sturgis Creek. (Or drive it, if you dare!)

Kettle Lake: The Silver Fork trail to Kettle Lake is part of the Pacific Crest Trail. To get to the trailhead take Beaver Creek Road (Forest Service Road 20) to Silver Fork Gap, where you'll take Road 2025, towards Donamore Meadows. The PCT crosses the road. The Silver Fork part begins on the left.

Azalea Lake: Take Thompson Creek Road for approximately 11.9 miles. Turn left onto Carberry Creek Road for approximately two and one-half miles, where you'll turn right onto Forest Road 1030. Follow Road 1030 eleven miles, then turn right onto Forest Road 800 (a pretty rough road). In one-half mile you'll come to a large parking area located at the junction of Forest Roads 800 and 850. This is where the trail starts.



The swimming beach at Applegate Lake. Photo: Merri Stephens.