

# TJ Howell Botanical Drive

The TJ Howell Botanical Drive is a gravel road that begins at Highway 199 and climbs 15 miles to the trailhead for Babyfoot Lake and other destinations in the Kalmiopsis wilderness. This is a scenic drive with outstanding vistas and an opportunity to see the most botanically diverse landscapes in the United States.

## Where to Begin

The tour begins at the intersection of Eight Dollar Mountain Road located four and a half miles north of Cave Junction near Highway 199 mile 24. The route follows USFS Road 4201.

## Safety Along the Route

Poison oak is present in lower elevations. Three leaves - no thorns.



The Illinois River has swift water and deep pools with sharp dropoffs along the bank.

The route climbs a total elevation gain of 3,000 feet to reach the boundary of the Kalmiopsis wilderness. During your return trip, use your low gear when coming down steep sections of the road.

Rattlesnakes may be found in some places along this route. Use caution when hiking through areas where visibility of the ground is limited.

Trees killed by the Biscuit Fire of 2002 may be unstable, especially on windy days. Watch for falling limbs.

## Tour Directions

Turn on to Eight Dollar Mountain Road and drive one mile. Zero your odometer at the cattle guard. All mileage for the tour will be given from this point.

0.0 Cattle Guard: *Set your odometer to zero.*

The next six miles of road passes through plant communities growing on the largest serpentine rock outcrop in the nation. Nutrients in the soil cause plants to be stunted in growth or create conditions that result in a plant community that is more like what you would expect to see growing in arid regions rather than in a region that gets 50 inches of rain a year.

1.9 Bridge over the Illinois River

2.1 A small cave excavated in ancient river gravel is seen on the right.

2.3 Pavement ends. A road on the left can be followed to where Josephine Creek runs into the Illinois River. The first gold claim in Oregon was made in 1851 on this creek which was later named after the miners daughter.

2.7 Jeffrey pine savannah: Jeffrey pine is the most common pine tree growing on serpentine soils.

2.8 Junction of USFS 029. Keep to the right.

3.5 Days Gulch spring: Park off the road at the sharp pin turn and walk along the slope away from the road for about 500 feet to a spring with a large population of the insectivorous darlingtonia pitcher plants. This is a typical sight for springs that flow over serpentine rock in this region. Another spring at mile 7.5 flows over a different type of rock and supports a completely different plant community from what is seen here.

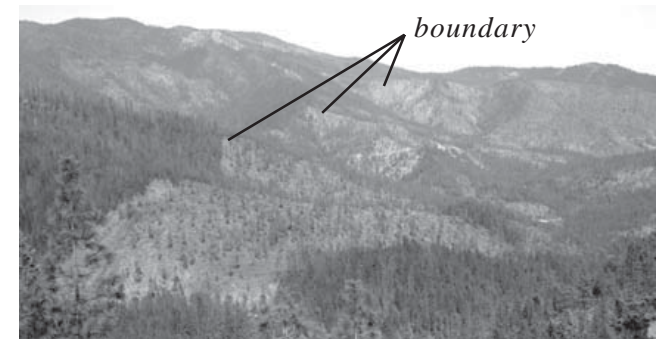
As you continue from this stop, serpentine rock can be seen in road cuts for the next three miles.



darlingtonia

4.5 Vista of the Wild and Scenic Illinois River corridor: This is a nice place to get out and enjoy the view.

5.4 Mikes Gulch plant boundary: An open area about a mile away to the right and on the other side of the ravine is a natural boundary between two plant communities growing on different types of rock. The plant community that makes up the open field is growing on serpentine while the heavily forested slopes above are growing on rock from an ancient ocean basin. You will get a closer look at these rocks when the road crosses this same boundary at mile 7.6.

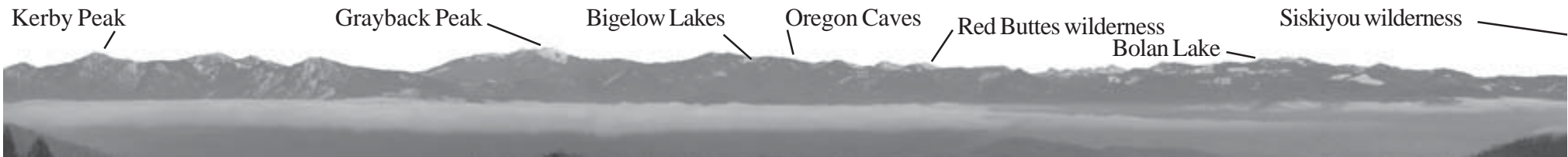


*The boundary between the two plant communities can be traced to the mountain in the distance.*

6.6 Note how plant communities change from incense cedar and Jeffrey pine to predominantly Douglas-fir as the road crosses from serpentine rock to the rock of an ancient ocean basin.

7.5 Spring: A small spring on the right supports a community of alder trees and other vegetation that is much different than the darlingtonia plant community seen at mile 4.5. The geology of this region has dramatic influence on plant communities along this drive.

As driving from this stop the forest will make a transition from Douglas fir forest to a south facing slope with mostly scrub brush.



*Bigelow Lakes are in a small glacial valley carved in an outcrop of granite that extends from Grayback Peak to Bolan Lake. Bigelow Lakes has the best loop trail in the valley. Another trail climbs through old growth forest to Kerby Peak where Brewers spruce can be found. Bolan Lake has a beautiful campground.*

- 8.1 Vista point: The first of several opportunities to see the vista above. Several knobcone pine can be seen on the lower side of the road.
- 9.0 Intersection of USFS 090. Stay left.  
The next mile was heavily burned in the Biscuit Fire of 2002.
- 10.2 The road enters an area that was previously clear-cut and replanted. Note how the fire burned the plantation but not the surrounding forest of older trees. Fire is one of the challenges that forest managers must consider in the establishment of tree farms.
- 10.6 The road enters a segment of forest not damaged in the 2002 Biscuit Fire.
- 11.0 Several large sugar pine and ponderosa pine trees are seen on both sides of the road. Look on the left for the two trees in the photo below. Learn what the bark looks like to help you determine what types of trees were burned in the forest ahead.



*Sugar pine on the left and ponderosa pine right.*

- 11.4 Ancient ocean floor: The flat slabs of rock seen in the road cut on the right are sediments that piled up on the floor of an ancient ocean basin. These rocks were pushed up to become the mountain you see on the right. Look and see if you can determine where the ocean sediments end and the volcanic rock of the ocean crust begin a few yards past the flat surfaced rocks seen in the photo below. This contact is vertical due to tilting of the rocks during uplift.



- 13.0 The road leaves the green forest behind and enters some of the most heavily burned areas along the route.
- 13.3 The black rock in the road cut is serpentinite and is a good example of how slippery rock can be squeezed for miles between layers of other rocks. The serpentinite rocks slide past one another on a natural coating of talc.
- 13.8 Junction USFS 140 to Babyfoot Lake and USFS 141 to Onion Camp. Turn right to the Pearsoll Peak trail. Babyfoot Lake trail straight ahead.

### **Hiking trails at the end of the road**

Two short trails at the end of the TJ Howell Botanical Drive are suitable for short family hikes.

**Babyfoot Lake trail:** Follow the trail for an easy one mile hike to a lake in a small glacial cirque.

**Whetstone Butte:** At mile 13.8, turn right onto road 141 and drive half a mile. Turn left at the next intersection and drive to parking across from the restroom. The trail begins to the right of the trail signs. Whetstone Butte is the flat-top hill in the distance. No trail goes to the top of the butte. To climb it, go around to right of the rock outcrops and hike up the east slope. For those who want to take a longer hike, follow the trail for five miles to Pearsoll Peak, the high peak seen on the right side of the picture below.



*The view from Whetstone Butte looks down into the Chetco River and Kalmiopsis wilderness on one side and the Wild & Scenic Illinois River on the other. The rim of Crater lake can be seen 100 miles away on a clear day.*