The Flyin' Solo VanLife on the Highways and Byways of North America
RICK'S ROADS
Ride Along and Enjoy the People, Places, and Who Knows What

BLOG POST: 2026.07.07
Waterfalls Trail, The McKenzie, Willamette National Forest, Oregon



In 2025, I discovered The McKenzie. I got photos and videos of the river and a couple of the waterfalls, but I resolved that a deeper dive would be needed.

So, instead of reserving a campground, this time I used the enormous map to scout out a couple of serviceable boondocking spots and settled Maxx and I in for a week or so of Life In The Woods (which, as you well know, was the subtitle of Thoreau's *Walden*).

And, even though I already have a video on my YouTube channel (*Little Bird Video*), I still craved (crove?) more. Last year, most of the wild and scenic McKenzie River had been in afternoon shadow. Midday Sun might penetrate the canopy better and yield brighter vids, yes? Worth a try, yes?



*Sahalie Falls gushing and glowing in bright sunshine*

I mean, come on, for a photo kind of guy, the only thing better than enjoying a beautiful scene is capturing that beautiful scene for the future enjoyment of others … and self.

I make no bones about shooting these pics and vids for myself. If anyone ever reads these posts or peruses my photo albums or my videos, all the better.

Part of my rationale — and I am serious about this — is that, when my elderly mind has gone feeble, I will have thousands of pages that I can read and enjoy the hell out of.  “Man,” I will exclaim, “I wish I had this kinda life!  Who *was* this dude??”



*Above Sahalie Falls – some rock clambering required to get here*

The Waterfalls Trail is a smoothly-rough path — if that makes any sense — that starts at the Sahalie Falls Overlook and runs all the way down to Carmen Reservoir.

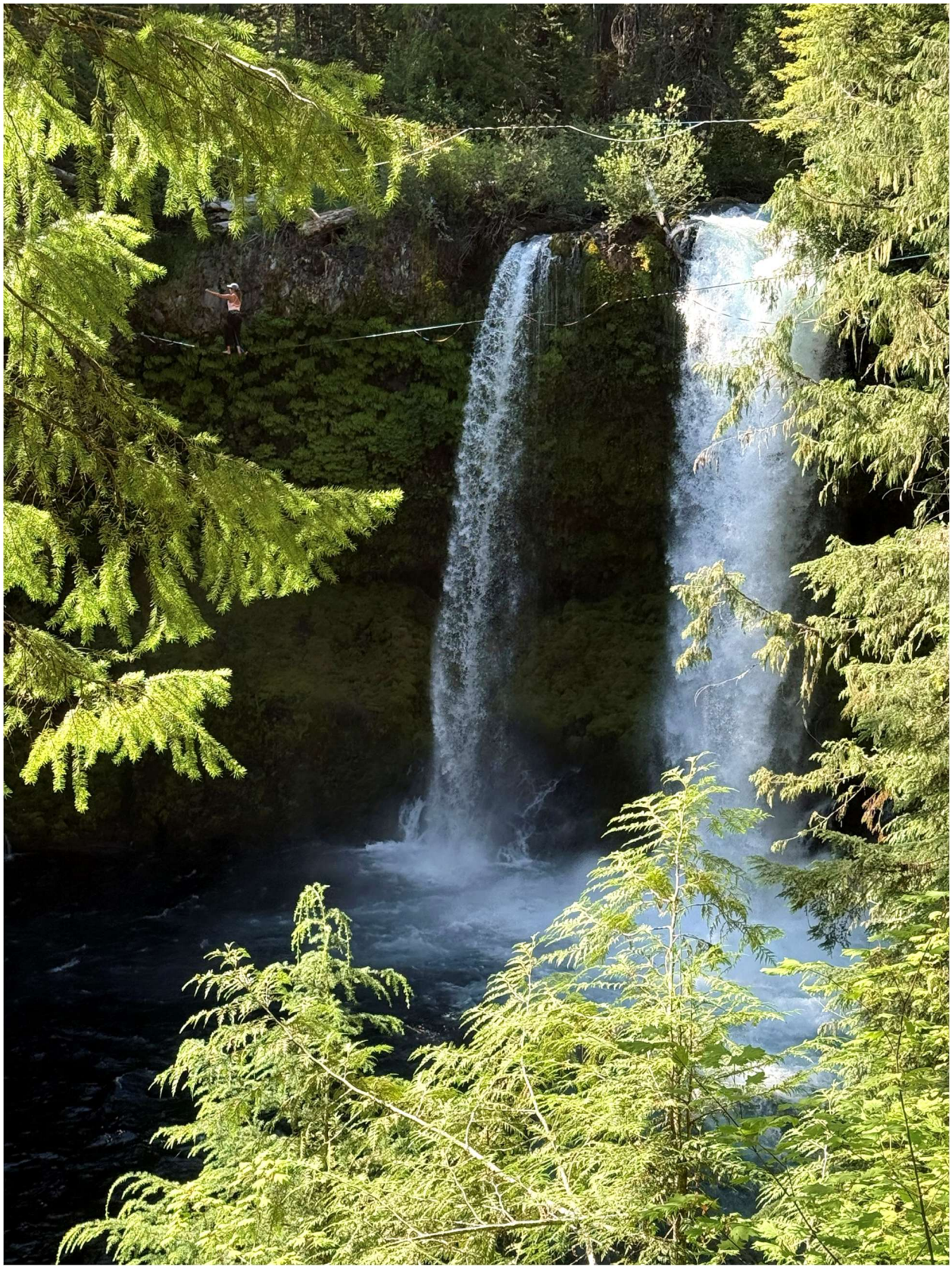
The path itself is anything but level — each step involves a slope in one direction of another -- but most footsteps will land on relatively even, soft dirt.  Raw wooden stairs have been constructed here and there, and tree roots themselvessometimes make for a few short sets of steps up or down.  Likewise with large rocks.

The trail runs along the southern bank of the McKenzie, with numerous short side paths over or down to the bank.  Getting your feet wet is easy, but be ready for cold water.

Last year’s hike had taken me just beyond Koosah Falls before I turned back home.  This year, Koosah Falls had a surprise in store: *tightrope walkers!*



*A tightrope walker in front of Koosah Falls*



*Another tightrope walker in front of Koosah Falls*

I don't know how they strung their lines. There was a complicated harness strapped around a sturdy tree on our side, and two lines — with streamer ribbons for the walkers' perspective perception — hung the width of the gorge into the branches on the other side, which was the access side.

The bright yellow harness was the first thing to catch my eye. "WTF is this??" I thought. Then my eyes followed the colorful ribbons and I spied a woman who appeared to be in mid-air about 50' in front of the falls. "WTF is ***this??"*** I repeated to myself.



The lines were not as tight as I would have expected (maybe they were loose-rope walkers), and had a lot of bounce to them. The woman soon lost her step and fell off the wire. No gore ensued, though, because she was harnessed to it. She kinda tumbled downward ten feet or so, and then bungeed back upwards, grabbed the wire and pulled herself up to sit on it.

She seemed happy as a clam to be sitting there, digging the roaring falls 50 feet in front of her, the churning river 100 feet below her, and the mellow forest and cliffs, 200 feet on either side. She had it pretty damn fine out there.

Then some classic Oregon hippie type guy walked out in the other rope. He was impressive — especially in his pink and flowery duds — as he strolled steadily out across the line. He broke focus, though, to wave at the woman, and lost it. He tumbled downward, bounced back up and spent the next several minutes trying to regain a steady stand on the wire. He fell off a dozen times or more, but his falls became more acrobatic, with twists and somersaults, all of which he somehow untangled before getting back on his feet for another attempt. He was having a freaking ball out there. It sure did look like fun, though I was never tempted to give it a try.

One thing that puzzled me about this whole thing:  they both wore hats, and never lost them!  So, (a) why were they wearing something so losable, and (b) how did they not fall off??

I very briefly wondered if perhaps this tightrope rig was now a permanent fixture of the Koosah Falls experience.  It had to be a ridiculous amount of work to get this harness across this steep and deep gorge, winch it up tight onto the trees on each side, then get back across to the access side, only to have to undo it all a few hours later.

But, really, could they EVER consider leaving that up overnight??  Oh my God, what drunken bozos would come out and try it??  They'd be fishing dead bodies out of the river below every morning.

So, that notion quickly passed.



*Koosah Falls a few days later, with the tightrope gone*







The trail led gradually downward as I hiked westward. The shade was wonderfully cool, made even more so by the cold air that was emanating from the river itself.

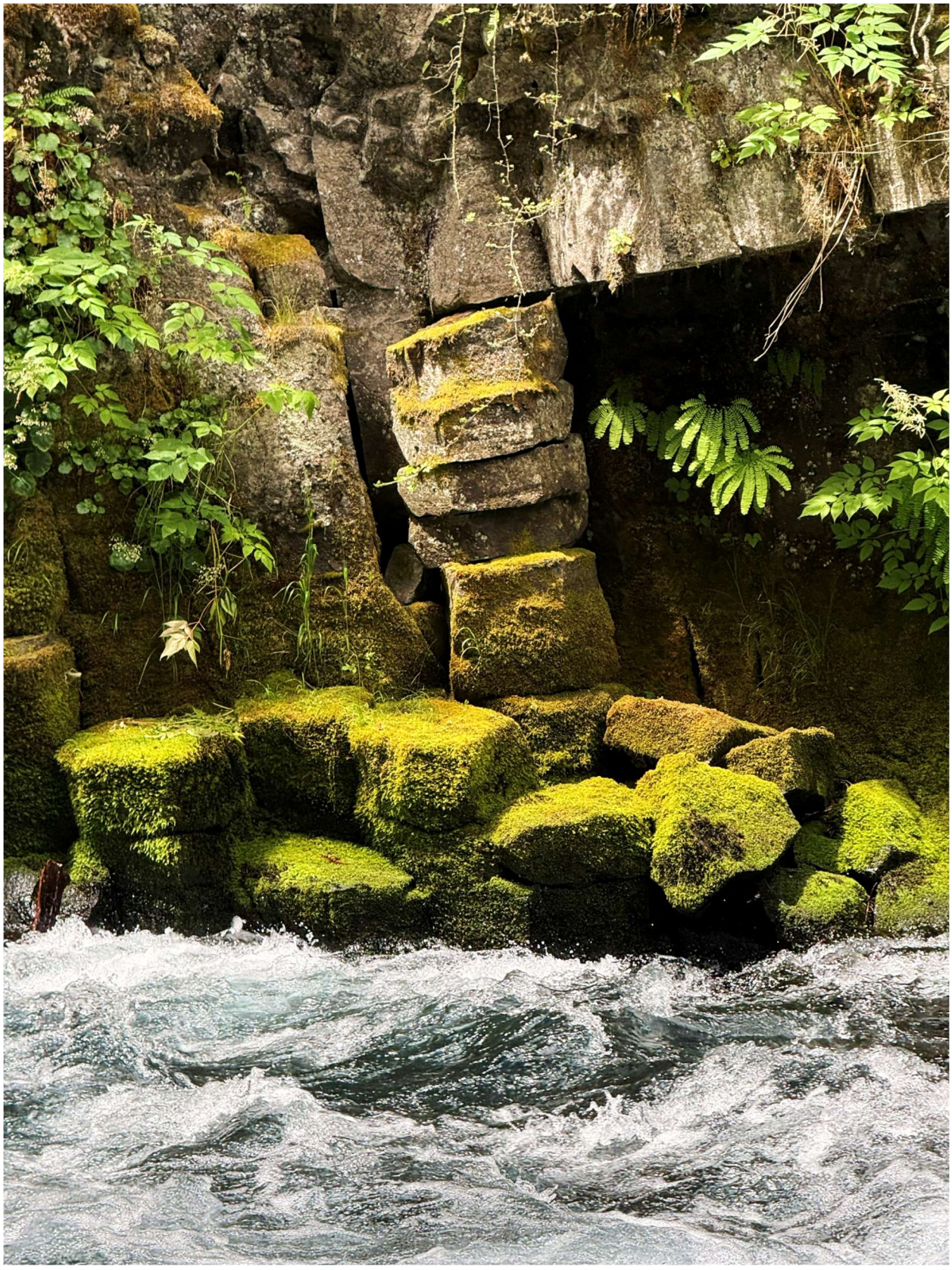
Once past Koosah, I was on virgin turf. Discovery came back into play.

There was a spot where the trail was high up on the bank, with a flat clearing way down in the riverside woods. It was sending out inviting vibes. A steep clamber down the dusty dirt slope was required. There were far fewer footholds and handholds than I would've liked, but I had to go for it.

Mannnn, was it nice in that little grove! I sat on a log for a while, looking up at the tall, healthy trees, and out at the wild and scenic river. The McKenzie was treating me right.

One thing that was extra cool down here that did nopt apply to the spots farther up river, was the crazy wall of craggy rocks that rose straight up on the opposite side, and the strange arraangement of mossy blocks on the bank itself.





The trail went along for another several hundred yards, but it stayed high above the river with no sensible ways down to it.

I decided I'd walk to the bridge. It seemed like a good finish line. Part of the much longer The McKenzie River Trail, which threaded through the forest above the north bank, could be accessed from here, but that would commit me to a **much** longer hike than I mentally – and equipmentally – had prepared for. So, the bridge was fine.

The day had clouded up in the last 15 minutes or so anyway. Besides, since I had followed the McKenzie's *downward* path all this way, I had a 3/4-mile *uphill* climb to get back to BluMaxx. I searched my phone for an app that would allow me to summon my trusty van with a single tap, but I guess that has not been invented yet.

