



The author's new friend, Dennis Johnson, takes her on an adventurous tour. There are 2 miles of sand dunes between Honeyman Memorial State Park and the Pacific Ocean.

Digging the Dunes

Some unlikely campground neighbors make a wonderful lasting impression at Oregon's Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park

By Malia Lane

If someone had asked me if I'd like to stay at a campground with dune buggies or ATVs as neighbors, I probably would have politely refused. Just goes to prove your first impression is not always right because I ended up thankful I didn't stick with that snap judgment.

In 14 years of fulltime RVing, I'd never come across a campground with ATV access to sand dunes right from the campground. I guess that's not too surprising, since I don't own an

ATV and it had never been an interest of mine, but I still think it's fun to be exposed to different worlds and I like to try new things. That's one of the things I've always appreciated about RVing, anyway.

So when I was introduced to Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park halfway up the Oregon coast and given the chance to ride on the dunes, I wasn't about to pass that up. At Social Security age now, having lived a somewhat unconventional life, the opportunities to do something totally new and exciting are too rare.

My cool adventure began with a chance meeting of Deputy Sheriff Ed LaGrone (the "Dunes Deputy") in Florence, Oregon, with me asking him what I shouldn't miss while in the area, and him taking me to meet his RVing friends at Honeyman. Ed introduced me to Dennis Johnson, an RVer who frequently visits Honeyman from California, to

JESSIE M. HONEYMAN MEMORIAL STATE PARK, OREGON



Getting There

Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park is located midway up the Oregon coast, 3 miles south of Florence. From Portland, take Interstate 405 South to Interstate 5 South. Merge onto Oregon Route 569 West, which eventually becomes Oregon Route 126 West. Turn left onto U.S. Highway 101 South and continue for about 3 miles until you reach Canary Road.



take me out on my first ride. He knew Dennis was meticulously careful and safety-minded, but would also give me a fun ride. When Dennis was getting me harnessed in, he told me about the extra safety features he had installed, but I still ended up with a death grip on the sturdy bars in front of me the entire time.

The dunes are quite beautiful, and some parts look pretty innocent

Above: For a more tranquil experience, the day-use area at Cleawox Lake is great for swimming and kayaking, and is not accessible to ATVs. The entrance to the dunes is at the RV park, so it is extremely important for visitors to be considerate of fellow RVers before twisting the throttle.

and easy. But Dennis educated me a little about how he studies the dunes when he first arrives, and looks for things like razorbacks (sharp ridges with steep drop-offs), or a "witch's eye" (a hole in the ground where two razorbacks almost meet facing each

other, which creates a narrow gulch that you could crash into). These things are not always easy to see, especially when the sun is up high and no shadows are made on the ground, so these obstacles are invisible and the ground will look flat.



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GETAWAY

JESSIE M. HONEYMAN MEMORIAL STATE PARK, OREGON

Sometimes, too-steep drop-offs are not visible if you're driving up to one with the sun at your back. If you're going too fast, you could fly off and crash nose end into the sand. Dennis assured me he was taking me over parts he knew were safe, but let me tell you — they look a whole lot taller when you're going up them and it looks like there's a vertical drop on the other side. I did get a bit more comfortable as the ride went on, but I still couldn't quit alternating between screaming and squealing from the fun of it.

I was so loud that at the end of my ride, Deputy Ed kidded about having to ticket me for excessive noise. I think my screams exceeded even the acceptable ATV noise decibel level. Ed rode with us down to the flat area by the ocean and told me that he regularly has people jokingly ask him, "How do I get a job like this?" He admits it's cool because not everybody gets paid to go four-wheeling and ride ATVs all day. His passion, however, is to keep riding the dunes safe for everyone, saying the most common accidents are from hitting the razorback ridges. The most common ticket is for not having the required Safety Education Card (a driver's license for ATVs), and warnings or tickets are given for not having the tall flag flying that enables other vehicles to better see other riders over the dunes.

But the dunes are not the only attraction here. Honeyman is such a large and diverse park that there are two freshwater lakes within its boundaries: Cleawox Lake is on the same side of the highway as the campground and can be accessed by trail or by driving from the entrance, while Woahink Lake is on the opposite side of U.S. Highway 101 and has picnicking, swimming and fishing opportunities.

Cleawox Lake's stone-and-log bathhouse was built by the Civilian Conservation Corps (CCC) in 1938. I always enjoy the



Top: Deputy Sherrif Ed LaGrone is known as the "Dunes Deputy" because he patrols the dunes to ensure rider safety. All vehicles must be equipped with a tall flying flag for increased visibility. Above: Pete Romero makes the trip to Honeyman from Ferndale, Washington, to enjoy the campground's easy access to the dunes.



The Cleawox Lake bathhouse dates back to 1938. Today, visitors can rent canoes, kayaks and paddleboats, or use the swimming and fishing docks.

history and handiwork of the CCC, and you can see other examples of it here in the enduring stonework borders and shelters around the lake. You can rent paddleboats, canoes and kayaks, and there is a swimming dock and a fishing dock, plus the lake is stocked with rainbow trout.

Sand Dunes Trail is a boardwalk trail from the campground to dunes that are not accessible to ATVs. There are beautiful views of Cleawox Lake, the lodge and other facilities here. The sign warns that the sand is unstable and not to dig or tunnel on the dunes, but you can walk up to the top from here. And let me just say, that's a lot more difficult than it looks.

The RV campground itself is the second-largest in Oregon, with 2 miles of sand dunes between the park and the ocean. Within the campground, the road to access all the loops is paved and in good shape. Only Loop H at the back allows ATVs, and offers direct access to the dunes during the months of October through April. There is also an area for parking trailers and loading/unloading the ATVs. There are 47 paved, full-hookup sites, and all are oversized to accommodate the ATVs. Each site features a picnic table and a fire ring with a cooking grate. Flush toilets and showers are conveniently located nearby.

It seemed strange to see ATVs parked in front of RVs — where normally you'd see tow vehicles or dinghies — or driving around the grounds. Dennis talked about the importance of "having respect for your campground" by being as quiet as possible when going through the grounds before or after getting on the dunes, and generally following the rules and observing quiet time at 10 p.m. when the gate to the dunes closes.

I sure had fun visiting with him, and would welcome him and his family as my neighbors any time.

But of course no matter how considerate the rider, these machines are inherently noisy, so if you're looking for a totally tranquil and quiet RVing

trip, that loop is not the place for you during this period. I found the whole experience to be interesting and something quite new to me; no easy feat at my age.

This adventure turned out to be a perfect example of how wonderful a day can be if you don't make yourself stick to what you had planned and just go with the flow. I ended up learning a lot, as well as having tons of fun being

introduced to this new activity. I'm not ready to go buy an ATV for myself, but I sure wouldn't turn down another ride sometime. **M**

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Jessie M. Honeyman Memorial State Park
800-551-6949, or visit www.oregonstateparks.com and type Honeyman in the search bar

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