



Tour 1: Bridge Hopping

By Logan Cravens, AIA

Compared to most any other major city in the American West Portland has a compact downtown. And, similar to Seattle, or Sacramento, or Austin, it shares a place on the edge of water. In this case it sits on both sides of the Willamette River, its banks prominently dedicated to public parks and walkways linked east to west by many bridges, which will interest those bridge enthusiasts in the crowd.

Jonathan Swift's character *Gulliver* once found himself in a land called Lilliput populated by miniature people, buildings and animals. Arriving by car, train or bus to Portland is a lot like thinking you have been dropped into a Lilliputian dream (see also: Ken Kesey). The blocks are a comfortable, 200 ft x 200 ft, and with the exception of a dozen or so buildings completed since the late 1970's, the buildings rarely poke above 14 or 15 stories. As a visitor to Portland, that means its your lucky day! Where else can you walk this many blocks in 5 minutes and see the largest collection of standing 19th century commercial architecture? Where else, at one time, can you catch a glimpse of two iconic mountain peaks, Mt. Hood and Mt. St. Helens.(exceptions apply, see "liquid

Speak Like an Oregonian

Repeat after me: "Willamette"

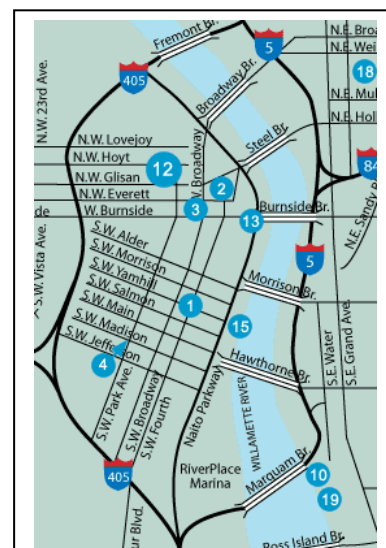
That's, "will-AM-mutt ", not "WILL-uh-MET."

Many of our place names don't sound the way they are spelled. Its an Oregon thing just to keep you, The Visitor, off balance. Approach anyone on the river walk, point to the river and say "will-AM-mutt." *They will look at you in silence then quickly run the other way, knowing you have not been fooled by our cheap shot of humor at your expense.*

Another downtown name to know:

Couch is pronounced "kooch". Why? We do not really know, no one living in Portland today was born here.

And last but not least, Oregon is pronounced OR'-y-gun, not or-uh-GONE. Save that for NPR interviews and political speeches on the east coast.



Portland Bridges and Downtown Map
(courtesy of Travel Portland
<http://www.travelportland.com/visitors/visguide/pdx19.html>)

sunshine”). Where else can you explore a city with almost as many coffee shops as there are days of rain!

There are several ways you can discover Portland while you or your family is visiting. First choice: hoof it. Doing so, keep it short and sweet in the downtown area. This first little tour should take about one to one and a half hours, depending upon what you may find in the way of diversions. While we are walking, there are a few lessons you can use to get the feel of the Stumptown Life and even blend in as one of the locals. (See the handy sidebar on **How to Speak Like an Oregonian.**)

Let’s say you are staying in downtown Portland for your visit. You are? Excellent! Our first tour will take in views of the river, several bridges and a panorama of the city that lies on either side of the Willamette River. Ask the concierge to point you to the river and the Salmon Street fountain which is at the terminus of SW Salmon Street and Naito Parkway. Don’t be disappointed if you don’t see a fountain when you arrive, they usually don’t turn it on until late May. Just consider the concrete bollards surrounding the fountain center as a really short Stonehenge.

Looking east to the river, then to your right is the **Hawthorne Bridge**, the oldest (1910) operating vertical lift span in the US. Until 1955, it had trolley tracks which connected the east side to downtown. Suffering a conspiracy of Big Business tire, diesel engine and bus manufacturers, the tracks were removed last century. Ironically, a new transit plan will reestablish trolley connections in the near future.

Walk south along the **Tom McCall Waterfront Park** and under the Hawthorne bridge. Ahead of you is the River Place Marina, with many little shops, restaurants and a view of the largest marina downtown. If you follow the winding path it will take you south to the Marina by circumnavigating **the “Bowl,”** a grassy amphitheater which is host to many an outdoor event in the summer months. In April, the big draw is for Canadian geese to feast on the emerald green grass. I said “If you follow the winding path.” Instead, keep to the paved path spiraling right, past the Policeman’s Memorial and onto the sidewalk ramp up to the bridge.

Note: the sidewalk is also a heavily travelled **bike path**. You will do well to heed the signs on the pavement: pedestrians KEEP RIGHT against the guard rail. Just know that while most cyclists are very considerate and ring their bell on approach, there are some not so genteel who will zoom past you without warning. Who said Portland wasn’t a place for adventure and drama?

As you cross the bridge, take in the sight looking south. On the Westside of the river, beyond the residential center called **RiverPlace**



Hawthorne Bridge, Portland (photo Logan Cravens)



Portland “Bowl” hosts many outdoor events at the river’s edge (photo Logan Cravens)



Portland Tram connects OHSU Wellness Center to the hospital complex in the West Hills (photo Logan Cravens)

is the Southwest Waterfront District with its bevy of new apartment and condominium towers. Climbing the west hills is the **Portland Tram** with its lower terminal next to the OHSU Wellness Center. For a fee, you can ride the futuristic tram cars, the size of a small bus, up to “Pill Hill” where many hospitals call home. Take in a fantastic view of the city, and get a cup of coffee.

The high span **Markham Bridge** connects the Interstate highway south to Salem, Oregon’s capital, and north to Seattle, which is not Washington’s capital. Quick, can you name it? In the 1970’s the enlightened leaders of the city moved the freeway out of downtown and replaced it with the parkway that you see on the west bank of the river.

To the east side of the river, you see **OMSI, the science museum** with its copper domed planetarium and OMNIMAX theater. Check the local listings for movies that both you and the kids should enjoy. (Note: the parking lot features the first planted bio-swales in the city used to capture and filter the oily runoff from cars before spilling to the river.)

OK, let’s get off of the bridge by heading east and taking the first right turn spiraling down to the eastside Esplanade. At the base of the ramp turn left to go to OMSI. Choosing this path, we will bid you adieu for the rest of the day, because you and your party will be wrapped up in doings at the museum. Its expensive but rewarding, so you should plan on staying a while to get your money’s worth.

Not up for OMSI? Turning right, and under the Hawthorne Bridge, you will be heading north on the Esplanade for about one mile before it returns to the west side. On your left you will pass the fire rescue station with its overlook and a first view of the downtown.

The Eastside Esplanade is fortunate to have many permanent art installations along its 2 mile path. You will catch on quickly that there are “signposts” marking an existing or historic connection between the east and west side of Portland. Take time to read the story on each one and you will know more about the river and maritime history of the city than most Portlanders. The view to the west side is also dramatic, especially in the early morning hours or at sunset. From here you can take the best pictures of “Bridgetown.”

If you are lucky or just crazy enough to be walking early in the morning, before 7:00 am, you may see some of the birdlife that frequents the river. The city’s symbol is the **Blue Heron**. They stand on snags in the river or boulders at the water’s edge, waiting patiently for their breakfast to swim by, unsuspecting. Meanwhile, the **Dark Cormorant**, in groups of three or more, cruise the mid stream and dive for fish. Take the time to watch them as they disappear, guessing which way they have travelled to reemerge 12-18 seconds later, hopefully with



Blue Herons frequent the Willamette River early in the morning. (Photo courtesy Travel Portland)



Morrison Bridge, Portland (photo Logan Cravens)

their catch dangling from their sharp beak.

On rare, rare occasions, **sea lions** have been sighted along this stretch of the river, heading upstream to their haunts near Oregon City, or downstream to, more often than not, snatch salmon from unamused anglers. Annual counts vary each year for returning Coho, Steelhead, and Kokanee. But when the numbers are up, so are the sea lions.

The next bridge north of the Hawthorne is the double-leaf “Chicago-Style” bascule system, **Morrison Bridge**, completed in 1958 to replace an earlier wood version. It is the largest mechanical device in Oregon with its 36 foot tall gears driving two 940 ton counterweights. By April, a new bike and pedestrian path should be complete on the south side. If you want to take the shortest trip around the Esplanade, use the corkscrew ramp up to access the pedestrian path to get back to the west side. Like the Hawthorne, respect the signs regarding bikes and pedestrians. Once across, you may return to the river walk or to your hotel. If its time for lunch, check out **Huber’s** at SW Third and Stark St, the oldest operating restaurant in the city. Later in the afternoon, join the happy hour at the **Veritable Quandary**, another Portland mainstay entry on Second Avenue at the base of the on-ramp to the Hawthorne Bridge.

Choosing to continue on the Eastside Esplanade, there are two more bridges to see. The **Burnside Bridge**, completed in 1926, uses a double-leaf, “Strauss Style” bascule system and is notable for its Italianate towers from which the bridgmaster monitors river traffic and activates the lift mechanism. Today the operator also may remotely operate the second bridge, the Steel Bridge, appropriately named because it is made of...you guessed it... steel trusses! This span differs from the older Hawthorne Bridge by one unique characteristic, it has a second lower deck for the railroad which lifts telescopically to link the rail lines to Union Station on the west side. The steel bridge is truly multimodal, providing access to pedestrians and bicycles, heavy and light rail trains, buses and cars. A little patience and good timing, you can capture a photograph of all six at once.

Upon crossing the **Steel Bridge**, back to the west side, you can enjoy the cherry blossoms (late March early April) which lead to the Japanese Memorial commemorating in stone and poetry, the internment of Japanese American families during WWII. It’s a favorite place for locals to relax along the tree shaded berm that is the memorial and just across the Naito Parkway from the beautifully restored White Stag Building which houses the University of Oregon



Tom McCall Riverfront Park, Portland
(photo Logan Cravens)



Burnside Bridge, Portland (photo
Logan Cravens)



The famous White Stag sign during
April’s cherry blossom on the river
with “Big Pink” looking on. (photo
Logan Cravens)

Portland Campus.

Just south of this, beginning under the Burnside Bridge, is the **Portland Market**, open on weekends under its new canopy structure and next to one of the many plazas designed for people watching and street musicians. If you want to see some of the historic cast-iron storefronts of the 19th century, cross Naito Parkway into the Old Town district. Or, continuing your walk along the river you will see the gate and ramp down to the deck of the lovingly restored steam-powered **sternwheeler tugboat, Portland**, which also houses the Oregon Maritime Museum.
(<http://www.oregonmaritimemuseum.org/>)

From here it's a leisurely walk under the Morrison Bridge and back to the Salmon Street fountain. Bring your Frisbee or football, a blanket for a picnic or a nap. On that rare occasion that it is clear, you may see **Mt. Hood** in the distance to the west, or **Mt. St. Helens** to the north. More often than not, the only twin peaks you will see are the spires of the **Oregon Convention Center** on the East side of the river.

One last stopping point as you return to your hotel and the rest of your day, in the median of the north crosswalk, at the intersection of SW Taylor and Naito Parkway is the worlds smallest park, **Mill Ends Park**, measuring in at 24" diameter. Famously known to be the only leprechaun colony west of Ireland, you may see various improvements such as the butterfly swimming pool, park sculptures, and the occasional UFO.

So you have completed your first tour in Portland! Time to sit with a cup of locally brewed coffee while you make notes in your journal. Notes about the tiny big city called Portland.

