Celebrate State Parks Day by Visiting the Oregon Historical Society’s Oregon State Parks Centennial Exhibitions

Portland, OR — May 31, 2022 — Each year on the first Saturday in June, folks across the country celebrate State Parks Day, an opportunity to honor nation’s beautiful natural spaces preserved for adventure and recreation. This year, the Oregon State Parks system celebrates its centennial, a legacy dating back to 1922 when Oregon Trail pioneer Sarah Helmick and her son donated the 5.46 acres of land near Monmouth, Oregon, that would become Oregon’s first state park, Sarah Helmick State Recreation Site.

Over the course of 100 years, the Oregon State Park system has grown to include 254 properties across Oregon providing rest and recreational opportunities for over 42 million visitors annually. Encompassing tiny waysides, the entire ocean shoreline, and massive tracts of forestland, rivers, and canyons, Oregon state parks are among the most visited and most popular in the United States.

To celebrate this historic anniversary, the Oregon Historical Society has created two original exhibitions to provide visitors with a past and present view of Oregon’s state parks. For A Century of Wonder: 100 Years of Oregon State Parks, OHS commissioned photographer Peter Marbach to document the beauty and geographic diversity of these spaces, some quiet and some bustling with visitors.

From Vista House in the Columbia River Gorge to the crashing waves at Shore Acres State Park to climbers ascending a wall at Smith Rock State Park, this exhibition highlights numerous ways that the Oregon State Parks system has preserved natural and historic sites for Oregonians and visitors to appreciate for many years to come. The 60 images Marbach captured for this project, a portion of which are on display in this exhibition, will become a part of the Oregon Historical Society’s permanent collection, furthering future understanding of the past by documenting the present.
Marbach traveled the state for two years to document the raw beauty in these natural spaces, which proved challenging during a period marred by a global pandemic, extreme weather, and wildfires, all causing park closures. In his artist statement, Marbach noted how this project taught him incredible resilience and focus, and through his photographs, he hopes that “this exhibit inspires people to seek out the gifts of joy, beauty, and healing that time spent in these treasured parks always provides.”

In an adjacent gallery, visitors can see *A Walk in the Park: Historic Photographs of Oregon State Parks*, featuring a selection of prints from OHS’s research library collections. The Oregon Historical Society’s research library holds the largest collection of archival and published materials relating to the history of Oregon and the Pacific Northwest, and OHS’s collections serve as a foundation for visitors to research and reflect on our state and regional history. Using these historic photos as a foil to Marbach’s contemporary works, *A Walk in the Park* is a reminder of the importance of these natural spaces to Oregon’s long, rich history.

These exhibitions are both on view now through October 16, 2022. The Oregon Historical Society’s museum and store is open seven days a week, Monday – Saturday from 10am – 5pm and Sunday from 12pm – 5pm. Admission is $10, with discounts for students, seniors, teachers, and youth. Admission is free every day for OHS members and Multnomah County residents.

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**About the Oregon Historical Society**

For more than a century, the Oregon Historical Society has served as the state’s collective memory, preserving a vast collection of artifacts, photographs, maps, manuscript materials, books, films, and oral
histories. Our research library, museum, digital platforms & website (ohs.org), educational programming, and historical journal make Oregon’s history open and accessible to all. We exist because history is powerful, and because a history as deep and rich as Oregon’s cannot be contained within a single story or point of view.