

Lake Oswego's new Iron Heritage Trail offers walkers and bicyclists glimpses of the city's industrial past

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By

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Janet Goetze/Special to The Oregonian

An interpretive sign in Iron Mountain Park provides information about the mines that fed Lake Oswego's 19th-century iron industry. The site is on the new Oswego Iron Heritage Trail open to hikers and cyclists.

In the 1860s, the small community of Oswego had dreams of becoming the Pittsburgh of the West by producing iron from raw material in the surrounding hills.

Instead, Lake Oswego --the name adopted nearly 100 years later after annexation of part of the Lake Grove community -- became a suburb of pleasant streets and public art.

However, pieces remain of the grittier history, when the town was blanketed in smoke from the charcoal pits creating fuel for the furnace where ore from the hills became fat sausages of iron called pig iron.

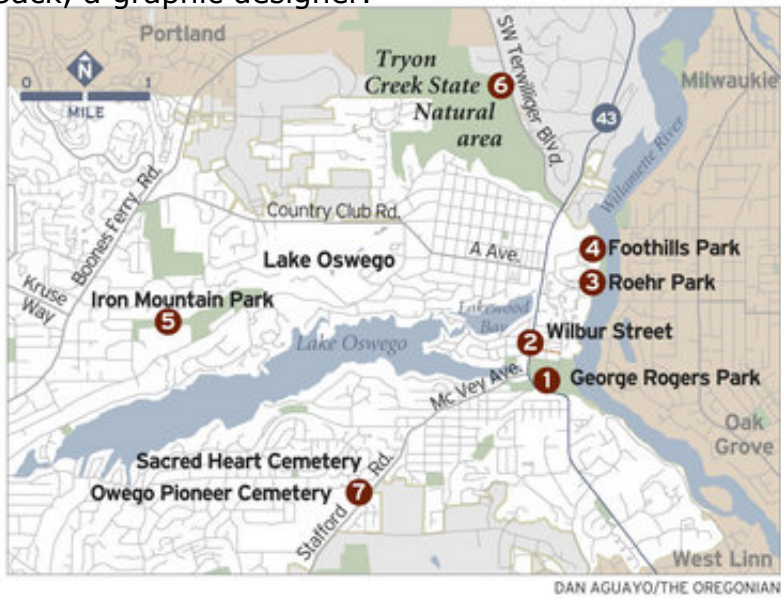
Now the historic remnants are

connected by the Oswego Iron Heritage Trail, which recently opened for walkers and bikers. Three out-of-town groups already have called for information about the trail, said local historian Susanna Kuo, who researched and designed 17 of 18 interpretive signs with her sister, Corinna Campbell-

Iron Heritage Trail

Seven sites help tell the story of Lake Oswego's early iron industry:

Sack, a graphic designer.



Industrial heritage trails are numerous in Eastern iron-producing states, said Jeannie McGuire, chairwoman of [Lake Oswego's Historic Resources Advisory Board](#), which worked with Kuo and Campbell-Sack on

the project. Such trails attract tourists with many interests, from cultural history to industrial architecture, McGuire said.

The potential for bringing visitors' dollars to the region prompted the Clackamas County Tourism & Cultural Affairs Department to approve a \$1,900 grant, and Lake Oswego provided \$17,000 for the project.

Before the work was completed, Kuo said, [Waymarking.com](#) had listed two of Lake Oswego's sites in its "iron furnace ruins" category. The Internet site provides information for people who use GPS devices or ZIP codes to visit places of special interest around the world.

The Lake Oswego trail offers a way of looking at the landscape through the eyes of iron ore miners, the timber cutters and those who worked in the iron furnace, said Kuo. Its seven sites extend from the Willamette River, through Roehr and Foothills parks, into Tryon Creek State Natural Area, up to Iron Mountain Park and then to the Oswego Pioneer Cemetery. More than 90 iron workers are buried there and in the adjoining Sacred Heart Cemetery.

Seventeen signs are installed and the Friends of Tryon Creek, in partnership

1. The 1866 blast furnace in George Rogers Park was the first iron furnace on the Pacific Coast.

2. A worker's cottage, on Wilbur Street, was built for the Oregon Iron Co., which provided employees' housing.

3. The site of the 1888 furnace in Roehr Park overlooks the Willamette River.

4. The site of a pipe foundry is in Foothills Park. It made pipe for Portland's Bull Run water system, among other projects.

5. The Prosser iron mines are in Iron Mountain Park, but the tunnels are blocked today. The heritage trail follows the bed of the narrow-gauge railroad that took ore to the iron works.

6. A charcoal pit in Tryon Creek State Natural Area, near the Iron Mountain trailhead off Terwilliger Boulevard, blends into

with the state parks department, plans to erect the 18th sign, marking one of the charcoal pits once smoldering in forests from Dunthorpe to West Linn.

In addition to out-of-town visitors, local residents say they appreciate learning about Lake Oswego history, said Kim Gilmer, director of the Parks & Recreation Department.

"Many of them had no idea about the industrial history of the city," Gilmer said. "The signs are also beautifully designed, and we've received comments about that, too."

-- [Janet Goetze](#)

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today's forest.
7. The Oswego Pioneer Cemetery and adjacent Sacred Heart Cemetery are the final resting places for more than 90 iron workers.