

# Gals' Overnight Out

Backpacking the Hoh rainforest with eleven of my best friends

COZETTE HARMS



BY PAM ROY

A friend (I'll call her "B") wanted to climb Mount Olympus with her women climbing buddies. She also wanted to share her passion for the mountains with her women friends who aren't climbers. Thus a combination backpack/climbing expedition up the Hoh River Trail in Olympic National Park was born. For the eleven of us, it offered shared adventure, group bonding and—for some of the gals—a chance to learn something new. Traveling as a group of women seemed more comfortable than solo travel. We reserved group sites in late July. To accommodate those unaccustomed to long miles with heavy packs, we contracted with Kit's Llamas to carry in some gear.

We had as much fun preparing for the trip as we did on the trip itself. Our weekly walks around Green Lake in Seattle lengthened to two laps plus stair climbing. Packs of various sizes and shapes appeared. We tried out new boots, treated blisters, created meal plans. Shopping sprees revealed the comfort and better fit offered by women-specific

gear. The less active members took the challenge to heart by increasing exercise, building core strength and developing new muscles. Training hikes to Goat Lake and Green Mountain gave us confidence that we could make the 10 miles to our camp. We studied maps. We shared tips on navigation giving all of us the ability to make informed decisions. We discovered it was more important for each individual to feel heard and be comfortable with any group decisions than to push for a particular destination or time schedule.

On the eve of the trip, the weather forecasts were dismal. Undaunted, everyone showed up at the trailhead. After all, we were hardy Northwest gals!! We donned raingear. We were introduced



*Top: The author poses near a gargantuan western red cedar. Above: Two hikers stretch while llamas prepare for the journey. Elk, bear, cougar, and acres of lush forest await backpackers on a 20-mile trip into the heart of the Olympics.*

to the llamas. In a steady downpour, off we went up the muddy, sloppy trail.

It was slow going as rivulets of water streamed past our feet. The lush forest floor was carpeted with gleaming moss and ferns. Thick stands of fir, cedar, spruce and hemlock dripped overhead. Several miles up the trail, a huge western red cedar distracted us from the rain. It took the combined group of eleven hikers and six climbers—arms outstretched—joining hands to encircle this venerable matriarch. Kit and the llamas kept up a steady pace, seemingly

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unaffected by the weather. We strung out along the trail in twos and threes, plodding through the boot-sucking mud and incessant rain. "J," accustomed to rainy hiking trips in Hawaii, happily cheered us on with songs.

At 9 miles we passed the patrol cabin, finally arriving at the much-anticipated campsite near dinnertime. But what was this? It was occupied by a large group of Boy Scouts. They had gone into the ranger station while we were loading the llamas and had been told to take the group site. Apparently, the rangers were sure we wouldn't show up in this weather. Unable to go any further, but conscientious of the fragile environment, we pitched our tents in the middle of a side trail. It was still raining.

Here's where things got interesting.

Somehow, the climbers among us convinced the rest of us that if they took the llamas on ahead to transport their heavy climbing gear to the edge of the glacier on the approach to Mount Olympus, they would return sooner, shortening our time in the rain. Most amazing is that we nonclimbers agreed to this, and stayed behind.

The mothers in the group pitched in and made us a comfy home. Pink flamingos appeared, and Girl Scout alumni built an impressive fire with wet wood. We ate, sang, and ate some more. Voluminous amounts of food had been

packed in as we all excelled at the fine art of potlucking. Later that second day, as the downpour continued, it dawned on us that we were essentially stuck, since several in the group were not up to carrying out their gear without the llamas' assistance.

Day three dawned with a shriek. From inside the tents, we could see the outline of slugs and their slimy trails crawling the outer tent walls. Scheming how to escape ensued. One idea was to tie the ThermaRests together and float out. "P" offered to liquidate her IRA and rent a helicopter to take us to drier climes. We ventured out to a sandbar on the river, watching clouds shift shapes. We stacked river stones into creative cairns.

One especially hardy member stripped and slipped into the frigid water. "D" had learned on a previous trip the importance of daily hygiene on backcountry trips for women in order to prevent urinary tract infections. She brought along a supply of wet wipes, and we agreed they were good to have on the trip. Five of the group had totally unexpected appearances of their menstrual periods, which is not uncommon for women in the backcountry. It's a good idea to take along a few supplies for this possibility. Despite the group's threats to place those women together in a tent as "bear bait," there is no truth to the rumors that bears are drawn to menstruating women.

The most amazing thing was that many of us were enjoying the time to just be together, to share stories and songs in the company of other women and keep a sense of humor. We enjoyed the beauty, shampooed hair and ate chocolate. As a group we weren't as concerned with a goal or summit. However, this is not the case for all women, so it's good to check priorities with every member of your group before a trip.

Later that day, three llamas suddenly appeared, untended, running through the camp. As they disappeared down the trail, we didn't know what to think. At twilight, Kit appeared, the other llamas in tow. The llamas had been spooked by a cougar. Kit and I set off down the trail in hopes of retrieving the missing llamas. We were relieved to find them at the patrol cabin, and brought them back to camp in the dark. The climbers trooped into camp later that evening, exhausted. They'd been turned back near the summit by whiteout conditions.

The next morning, the rain slowed to a drizzle as we packed up and headed back. The backpacking newbies were not convinced by my insistence that in 20 years of backpacking I had never seen such relentless rain. To this day they shudder at the mention of another trip. ♦

*Pam Roy is a WTA member from Everett.*

## Trip Essentials

### Hoh River Trail

**NOTE:** The Hoh River Road was closed by washout and is scheduled to reopen May 1, 2007. For current conditions call Olympic National Park at (360) 565-3100.

**Hikable:** March–November

**Round trip:** 20 miles round trip to camp at Olympus patrol cabin.

**Elevation gain:** 375 feet

**Maps:** Custom Correct Seven Lakes Basin–Hoh; Green Trails Mount Tom 133, Mount Olympus 134

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*Fine trail tread on the Hoh River Trail. A group of hikers braved unceasing rain, plentiful estrogen and more rain—and still had a memorable time.*