Fall 24

Washington Trails

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Common ground

Coming together to protect our green spaces, each other and the wildlife we encounter on trail

+

New recipes for your backcountry adventures

How birdsong is helping researchers save the whitebark pine

Honorable mentions from our 2023 Northwest Exposure Photo Contest

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Finding Common Ground on Trail

Late summer in the Pacific Northwest brings a lot of wonderful things: warm weather, sunny days and plentiful opportunities for outdoor adventures across the state. But recently, these warmer days have also been bringing more and more examples of climate change: earlier drought conditions, hotter temps, increased frequency of wildfires and windstorms, and more variable air quality.

Not only do these changes add yet another layer of complexity to getting outside safely and benefiting from time in nature, but it can be hard to know what to do in the face of such big challenges.

Thankfully, being a part of the outdoor community also gives us opportunities to take collective actions to protect the landscapes we love. And here at WTA, we see examples of hikers coming together to give back every single day.

In May, I had the opportunity to join 150 staff and trail volunteers at WTA's Crew Leader College. What a joy it was to see so many people coming together to make trails and the outdoors more sustainable, accessible and welcoming to all. Each year, the combined effort of the thousands of people who volunteer on trail with us powers trail action across the state, and helps build the community that sustains our trails over decades.

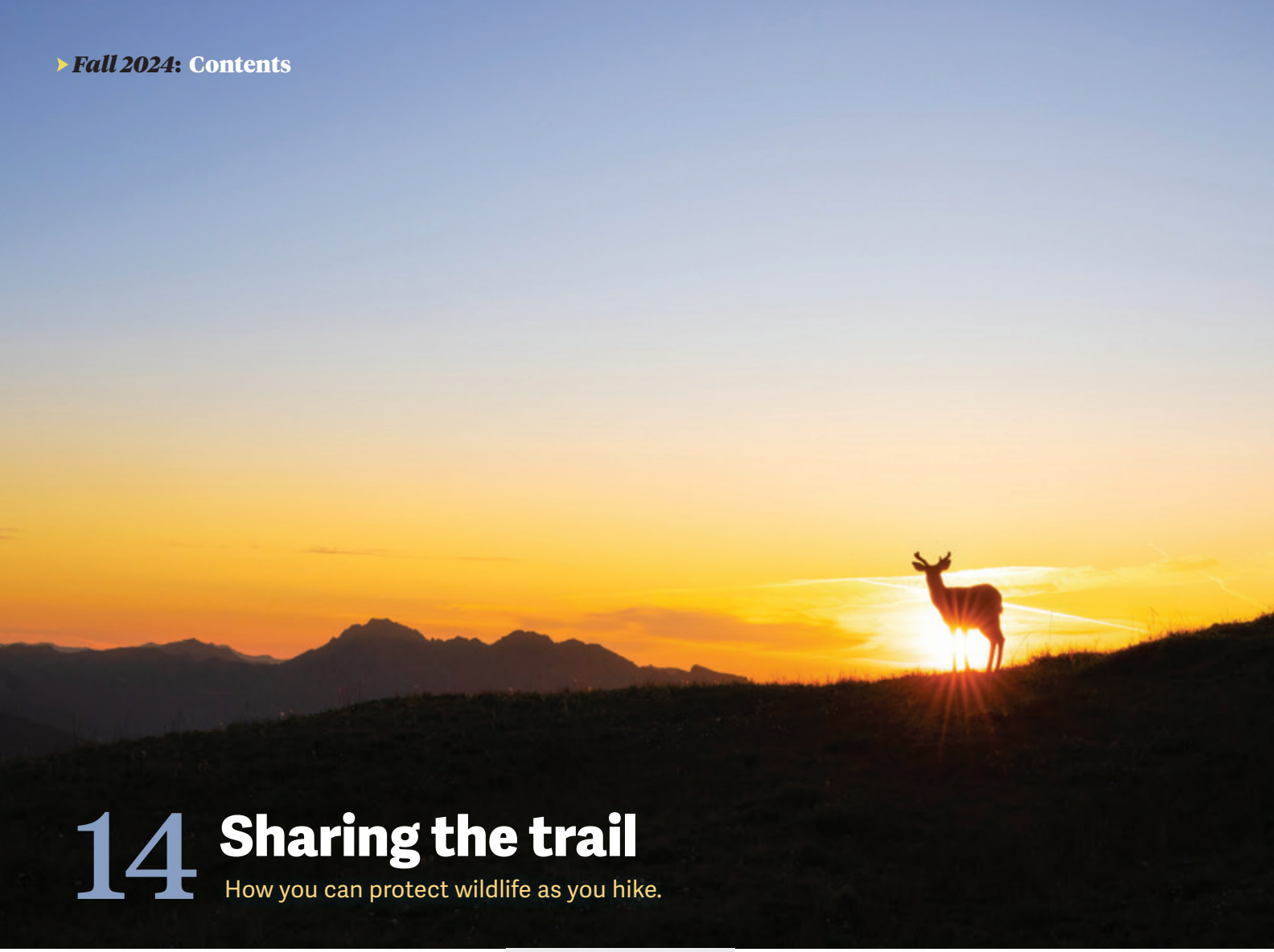
Seeing the strength and depth of our volunteer community also gives me hope that we can make headway on the pressing climate challenges facing our planet. The only way we'll solve something as big and challenging as climate change is through our collective actions.

Not only are we lucky to have a richness of outdoor landscapes and trails in Washington, but we are an excellent example of what a sustainable, growing and inclusive trail community can look like: communities, organizations and partners coming together to plan, maintain and protect our trails and public lands.

So as you get out this season, either solo or with friends or family, I hope you'll consider the many people who have worked together to help keep our trails and public lands open and accessible. And I hope you'll take some inspiration from that as well as from the landscapes themselves.

Happy hiking,

Jaime Loucky | **Chief executive officer** | jaimel@wta.org



Features

On the cover

Victoria Obermeyer, WTA's multimedia content coordinator, captured a fun moment between hikers on the Oxbow Loop Trail.

Photos by Scott Malagold and Brooke Warren

Departments

POWERED BY YOU

Washington Trails Association is a nonprofit supported by a community of hikers like you. By mobilizing hikers to be explorers, stewards and champions for trails and public lands, together, we will ensure that there are trails for everyone, forever.

WTA was founded by Louise B. Marshall (1915–2005). Ira Spring (1918–2003) was its primary supporter. Greg Ball (1944–2004) founded the volunteer trail maintenance program. Their spirit continues today through contributions from thousands of WTA members and volunteers.

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Fostering a Culture of Collective Care

In the May issue, our editor, Jessi, discussed her upcoming sabbatical (a wonderful benefit of being part of the WTA team), which staff are eligible for after 7 years of service. As you read this issue, Jessi will likely be embarking on an exciting backpacking trip and crossing destinations off her hiking bucket list.

We miss her tremendously, but WTA cares deeply about the health and wellness of our staff, and taking quality time to enjoy new adventures with family and friends is incredibly valuable, so we celebrate her time off. In Jessi's absence, the communications team has come together to produce this issue, which is fitting, as it focuses on the importance of us all working collectively to advocate for and protect trails, wildlife and public lands.

The stories in this issue explore how we share spaces with wildlife on trail and tips for protecting wildlife as you hike (page 14); how Rachel Heaton, a member of the Muckleshoot Tribe and creator of the Earth Gym, shares her cultural knowledge and encourages others to have a deeper connection to the land (page 26); and how we've partnered with land managers to create a community-informed map of the Carbon Glacier Corridor with essential information to help make your visit a bit easier and your hiking more enjoyable (page 40).

You'll also find our honorable mentions from last year's Northwest Exposure Photo Contest (page 36), great hikes for the last half of summer (page 44) and easy recipes you can make on trail (page 39).

Finally, as we enjoy what remains of summer and perhaps have a few new outdoor adventures, I also want to say thank you for supporting WTA. Your dedication to volunteering, sharing trip reports and advocating for the protection of trails and public lands is truly inspiring. Thank you for being an invaluable part of our community.

Doreese

Doreese Norman | **Communications director** | dnorman@wta.org

Photo by Bruno Grande

Perspectives

4 Minutes for the Common Good

Trip reports: A magic mix of practical info, essential data and inspiration.

Why every trip report matters. By Loren Drummond

Posting a trip report after a hike takes, on average, about 4 minutes.

Four minutes to report on potholes or smoke from wildfires or a bridge in bad shape. Four minutes to share an experience of delight or detail the state of lingering snowpack. Four minutes isn't a lot, but it's not nothing either. After a hike, when your feet hurt and all you want is a shower and some french fries, it takes extra intention and effort to post a report. To think about what a hiker following in your footsteps might want to know. To share back.

When we survey trip reporters, we commonly hear that trail users don't know if their trip reports really make a difference at all. But like a raindrop on a pond, there are ripples from their effort.

What we get to hear, as WTA staff, are the individual stories of hikers who are thankful for the trip reporters who came before them. You may not see how many thousands of hikers rely on trip reporters every single day, in every single season, but we do. Most hikers don't know that land managers and scientists use trip reports in their weekly work to take care of public lands and help trail users.

There's a special kind of generosity among the hiking community here in Washington. Sometimes that shows up by posting a trip report. It's a small act of kindness, done for strangers. It's a contribution to the common good. It's a tiny habit that, when compounded, creates an outsized impact for our community. For the rangers and land managers who rely on hiker eyes and ears. For the researchers trying to understand trends in trail use or understand our changing ecosystems.

So as we move from wildfire season into the crisp relief of autumn hiking, spare a moment of gratitude for the trip reporters who helped you plan your adventures. And add your own raindrop into the pond we all rely on.

These hikes need reports ...

Many hikers prefer to know trail conditions before they head out. But did you know you can use the Hiking Guide filters to find places that haven't seen a trip report this season (or even longer)? If you're the kind of person who enjoys hiking into the unknown, add these spots to your to-hike list — and then file a trip report at **wta.org/trip-reports.**

Photo by Karen Willenbrock

Share a story

Memorable moments from WTA's online community

I grew up with a father who led hikes for the Seattle Mountaineers and a mother who brought me to the Issaquah Alps in a baby carrier. It took me a while after my teenage years — which were spent worrying about boys, music and fashion — to realize how special those childhood experiences were. Since then, I've come back to the outdoors as my main hobby, artistic inspiration and community. The Cascades have inspired my painting and photography like no other subject.

I value trails for their access to places that don't feel like real life. When I step out of the car and onto the trail, it's like being in an alternate universe where birds sing and creeks babble, and I forget about work and traffic and everything. All there is in this world are my own two legs taking me ever upward and sweat and wild things and enormous beauty.

This photo was taken on a backpacking trip to Lyman Lakes via Spider Meadows and Spider Gap with my friend Elizabeth. The weather report called for clear skies, but we got caught in an unexpected rainstorm. Elizabeth came prepared with downloaded podcasts that saved our evening. It's my fondest memory of that trip. Friends like her are one of the best perks of being part of the hiking community.

I shoot 35mm film almost exclusively on my hiking trips. It makes me slow down. It ensures I'm purposeful since I have limited shots — like using a limited palette to paint or poetry to tell a story. The limitation draws out and focuses the beauty of the moment.

— Katherine Scheulen,
@hiker_katherine on Instagram

Join us online!

HIKER

BINGO

Make a homemade **hiking snack**	Use an **animal-proof container** for food	Go **car camping**	Bring a **small plastic tub** to pack out trash or dog poop	**Take a photo** with a mountain biker or horse rider
Assemble (and carry) **a first aid kit**	Reach a trailhead **by bus**	Support a **Hike-a-Thoner**	**Hike a loop** of three trails	Make a **My Backpack** account on wta.org
Hike a trail from **WTA's recommender**	Hike on a **new-to-you trail**	**Free Space** (No pass required at this trailhead!)	Hike a trail in a **campground**	Write a trip report using WTA's **Trailblazer app**
Photograph an animal from a safe distance	**Repair** a piece of your gear	Write a helpful trip report using **50 words or less**	**Carpool** to a hike	Take an action shot of a **hiking partner**
Play a game to pass the time on trail	Hike in your **local park**	Take someone on their **first hike**	Go on a **backpacking trip**	Trip report a trail with **no reports for 90+ days**

It's peak hiking season!

The days are long and the hills are calling to you. While you're out there this season, play our hiker bingo! Take pictures of each activity you do, and when you get a bingo, take a pic of this page, then send it and the pics from each activity to **website@wta.org**. Or, you can tag us in a post on Instagram or Facebook, and we'll send you something fun.

P.S. Many of the skills on this page are hiking best practices, so we hope you'll continue to do these even after you've completed hiker bingo. Be the textbook example of responsible hiking you want to see on trail.

Highlights

A quick look at what WTA is accomplishing on trails around the state

Lost Trails **Found**

Meet Our Lost Trails Found Crew

The Lost Trails Found crews recently brushed up on their trail skills at Crew Leader College, WTA's annual gathering of trail maintainers.

WTA's paid crews of professional trail workers help ease the burden on our land manager partners who are in charge of hundreds (or thousands!) of miles of trail. Here are some exciting activities taking place this season:

1. We're bringing a third paid crew to Washington trails. That's some serious year-over-year growth (we began the program in 2021 with just one paid crew).
2. Our Lost Trails Found program continues to provide professional development opportunities for folks pursuing careers in the outdoor field. Several former crew members have moved into new roles as assistant crew leaders, and a few assistant crew leaders are now crew leaders.
3. In addition to working on federal land, crews this year are partnering with the Washington Department of Natural Resources to provide support in key recreation areas like Boulder Lake (in the Entiat) and Gothic Basin.

For more information about Lost Trails Found, visit **wta.org/our-work/lost-trails-found.**

NOTEWORTHY

Drones and Wildfire Don't Mix

Drones help land managers and firefighters combat wildfires, but privately-flown drones are a major impediment to firefighting efforts. Firefighters need clear airspace for planes, helicopters and drones of their own to fight fires. When personal drones are flown near wildfires, firefighters ground all aircraft, which means wildfires grow unchecked. Learn about WTA's suggested guidelines for drones at **wta.org/drones.**

Stay Safe This Wildfire Season

The wildfire and air quality index (AQI) map layers on WTA's Hike Finder Map are live for the season. Use the wildfire layer and AQI forecast options to see where active wildfires are and to assess problematic air quality. For more information, visit **wta.org/our-map.**

Photo by Anna Roth

Jim Hasn't Left Yet

Nearly 20 years ago, Jim Langdon decided to try out a volunteer vacation, figuring he could leave if it wasn't fun. Over 100 trips later, he still hasn't left.

By Erin McMillin

Jim Langdon clears drains at Indian Bar, Aug. 2013.

At WTA, we love to celebrate milestones. Everyone who completes five work parties gets a hard hat with their name on it. After 25, you get a vest, and after 50, you get an engraved hand saw. We know part of the fun of attending volunteer work parties is watching the number of days you've completed grow, and setting goals for the next milestone.

But one volunteer just reached a new milestone that we haven't seen until now. Jim Langdon just completed his 100th volunteer vacation. Volunteer vacations, also called "weeklongs," are 4 or 5 days of trail work with a day off in the middle to explore the area. WTA provides all the meals, and volunteers share camp chores like cooking and dishes. For Jim, 100 volunteer vacations plus some backcountry response team (BCRT) trips and a couple dozen day work parties add up to over 700 days (and nights!) with WTA since he started volunteering in 2005. That's in addition to running the Friends of Badger Mountain volunteer trail work program and maintaining an Inter-Mountain Alpine Club gear rental program from his garage.

When I joined WTA's staff in 2021 as logistics coordinator, I heard about Jim's reputation as an all-star volunteer with specific food tastes. I learned to pack extra oatmeal and raisins on all of his trips. At the end of the summer, we finally met when he delivered a dozen custom handwashing stations he rebuilt specifically for our volunteer vacations!

To celebrate Jim's 100th volunteer vacation, I hiked out to visit him at Moore Point on Lake Chelan. We surprised him with celebratory peanut M&M's and a photo shoot to document his huge milestone.

Photo by Pam MacRae

Jim's first WTA work party was a volunteer vacation at Peshastin Pinnacles State Park in 2005. He chose the trip because it offered car camping.

"If it wasn't any fun, I figured I could just leave," he said.

He recalled it was a cold week and everyone volunteered to wash dishes each night just to get their fingers warm. It must have been fun enough, however, because Jim signed up for three more volunteer vacations that year!

Jim didn't even think about reaching 100 volunteer vacations when he started volunteering.

"I don't set goals like that, and who in their right mind would set that one?" he said. "I retired and wanted to give back to trails since I hike so much, but I didn't think it would be as much as I have done. I was surprised to make it to 500 days."

So why did Jim keep coming back to volunteer vacations?

"I like the teamwork part and (having) time to get to know everyone," he said.

He says BCRTs, which are more self-supported backcountry trips, are similar but "not quite the same because volunteer vacations have communal meals and camp chores like dishes or helping cook."

Jim has found joy in teaching people new things. He became an assistant crew leader in 2007.

"I like showing people how to move big rocks and logs," he said.

One of his favorite memories of a volunteer vacation was when he showed a new volunteer how to find, carry and set rocks in a staircase.

"After several rocks, she said the next one was all hers. It was great!" Jim said.

That volunteer soon became an assistant crew leader herself.

As he signed up for four or five trips every summer, Jim started returning to some key trails each year. WTA staff and Forest Service teams shuffle every few years, but Jim provides continuity and knowledge of the projects and sites. Jim has worked on the Lakeshore Trail at Lake Chelan 21 times, returning every year (except 2020) since 2006. He's seen forest fires, washouts and windstorms batter the trail and he keeps coming back to rebuild.

Jim and his partner, Lisa Black, who is an accomplished crew leader, have become experts on some of WTA's favorite volunteer vacation locations like Chelan Lakeshore, the Pasayten Wilderness and trails in the Twisp River valley. We rely on their expertise in the area. Jim and Lisa have trained many staff members, including me, on trips to Moore Point.

So after 700 nights on trail with WTA, Jim offers some simple advice for anyone considering a volunteer vacation: Have fun and stay comfortable! One benefit of a volunteer vacation is that crews are often car camping or gear is carried in by mules, so you can bring a little extra gear. Jim suggests "a real pillow and a nice air mattress!"

Jim and a fellow trail crew member on Jim's first volunteer vacation, March 2005.

Jim (center) with Lisa (left) and Melissa Perozzo getting comfy at camp on a volunteer vacation at Moore Point in 2024.

Photos by WTA staff, Erin McMillin

Members are a powerhouse of support for WTA.

Our Members Drive Our Mission

By Brynna Counts-Morgan

If you're reading this, chances are you're a WTA member. Thank you! We're grateful you believe in trails so much that you're willing to make a donation to keep them maintained and accessible.

WTA's dedicated member base of 26,000 hikers and outdoor enthusiasts has a huge impact on our mission. More than half of WTA's funding for our work comes from members. These members aren't just donors — they are vital parts of the WTA community. Whenever I see a WTA member decal in the window of a car at a trailhead or around town, I feel a kinship with that person because I know they value the important role that trails can play in our lives. We can accomplish so much more for trails together than on our own!

Members are a powerhouse of support for WTA. Memberships start at $1 to receive a member decal and digital access to the WTA magazine, plus invites to member-exclusive webinars that give you a behind-the-scenes look at WTA's work and trail tips. Donors who give $20 or more per year receive a physical copy of the magazine and WTA's annual calendar, plus all the benefits of our base membership.

The Monthly Giving Circle is a dependable group of donors who choose to give to WTA every month of the year. Monthly giving makes donating easy, because you're able to support trails all year without getting membership renewal reminders. Monthly gifts create a reliable income stream for WTA, making it easier for us to pay for programs like trail maintenance. Monthly donors receive the same benefits as our members and also receive an annual sticker and Trail Mix, our summer email series with handpicked hikes from WTA staff.

Fireside Circle members give $500 or more per year to WTA, making them an integral part of sustaining our work for trails into the future. Fireside Circle members have an awesome opportunity to get close to WTA's work through all the benefits that members receive and Trail Mix, plus events. WTA hosts Fireside Circle work parties throughout the state and holds happy hours in the Puget Sound region in the summer. During these events, Fireside Circle members get a peek behind the curtain at what WTA does — and these events are a ton of fun for WTA staff, because we love connecting with our community!

No matter how you give to WTA, thank you for being here. Each member of WTA is like a tree, and all together we make a powerful forest of donors who are passionate about supporting trails for years to come. We're so grateful for your support.

Photos by Pam MacRae, Emma Ledbetter

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It's exciting to see wildlife on trail, and it's important to protect them when we do.

Our Responsibility to the Wildlife We Love

Leadership & Innovation

By Melani Baker

Trails connect us to nature, and to our place in it. Whether you are a birder adding species to your life list or a hiker getting your first glimpse of a pika, wildlife sightings add surprise and joy to a hike. Sharing space with wildlife on trail reminds us that we are not the only creatures who depend on the nature around us.

Trails are our best tool for creating access to the outdoors while limiting impacts to wildlife and landscapes. For trails to do their job, hikers need to help.

The landscape of Washington state is changing. As the state's population grows, along with the demand for trails, hikers have a major role to play in caring for these places and enjoying them responsibly. This article is part of a series exploring the future of hiking and recreation in Washington state, and how we can all work together to protect and steward trails and public lands.

Understanding our role in helping wildlife

Hikers have an impact. The presence of humans changes animals' behavior. While our impact varies greatly by the species we encounter, the type and timing of our recreation, and the habitat involved, we know that our presence outdoors can disturb wildlife. We have more information about how animals respond to human presence, in terms of increasing alertness, fleeing and changing their activity patterns. We have less information about how this affects their stress levels, reproductive success and the overall health of the population, particularly the thresholds for when and where recreation begins or ceases to affect wildlife. WTA supports additional research into the ways that recreation impacts wildlife.

When we think about the very different ways that animals survive — think a grazing mountain goat versus a hunting cougar — it's no surprise that not all animals respond in the same way to the presence of hikers. While there are variations

Stay on trail, even when you see cool animals on your hike.

Help shape new policies to keep visitor use sustainable.

Join WTA's Trail Action Network at wta.org/tan, and we'll reach out once or twice a month with action alerts. You'll be the first to know about opportunities to email your representatives and make public comments that will help shape the future of Washington's public lands, to support trails and protect wildlife.

Photos by Chris Neir, Robin McCurdy, Kimberlee Rud, Hilary Barnes

across species, there are some common threads. One thread is that wildlife react more, and more negatively, to less predictable forms of recreation. For example, wildlife can become accustomed to hikers on a trail or cars driving on a road. But if a hiker ventures off trail or if a driver parks along a road and then walks, that unexpected behavior can disturb wildlife more than the typical use of an area.

Another common thread across species is that animals are more sensitive during breeding and birthing seasons. Pregnant females are most vulnerable to disturbance, but all members of a species may be more sensitive during these important times of year. The season when we are hiking can also play a part for other reasons, like during the winter months when food is scarce.

"Outdoor recreation can pose some challenges for wildlife, especially during critical times of the year or in important habitats. Public lands are not playgrounds but living landscapes that need respect," said Kurt Hellmann, Conservation Northwest's wildlife recreation coexistence senior coordinator.

New approaches can help wildlife thrive

Earlier this year, the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) piloted a seasonal closure on sections of the Methow Wildlife Area for the first time to protect wintering grounds for mule deer, whose population has been struggling. We don't know conclusively what impact the closure is having, but WDFW says that early observations suggest it's helping.

As recreation and conservation in our state continue to evolve, we need to be ready for new management techniques and decisions. We can be part of the process and use our voices as hikers when management decisions are being made. In the case of the Methow Valley temporary closures, WDFW held community meetings to gather and integrate input from the public before making their decision. ▶

Respecting Tribal rights and cultures

Native people and Tribes have lived on and stewarded the lands and waters in Washington state since time immemorial. Tribes maintain their sovereign and inherent rights, including rights reserved by treaties. Washington's public lands are critical to Tribes in protecting the fish, plants, wildlife and sacred places on which their cultures depend. As hikers who enjoy these same lands, we must commit to protecting these things as well.

"It's important that we never lose our right to access our traditional foods and our materials that we gather, our fish and our game, and all those things from the land and the water that our people remain spiritually connected to which defines us and our living culture," wrote Ray Fryberg Sr., the Tulalip Tribes' Tribal research historian, in the report "The 'Recreation Boom' on Public Lands in Western Washington: Impacts to Wildlife and Implications for Treaty Tribes."

Tips for protecting wildlife as you hike

The following tips will help keep wildlife safe, so future generations of hikers can enjoy the same delight you do when you spot your favorite Washington wildlife. We compiled these tips from Conservation Northwest, Leave No Trace principles and WTA's Trail Smarts series.

Travel on durable surfaces and designated trails

Sticking to compact surfaces like packed dirt, rock, gravel or snow protects the plant life and clean water that wildlife depend on. Staying on trail also reduces the chances that you'll surprise wildlife. When you take an animal by surprise, they are more likely to flee and to flee farther, leaving less time for important activities like resting and foraging.

Avoid surprising wildlife

A great way to do this is to hike with others. The sound of talking clues an animal in to the fact that people are nearby. Hiking solo? Wear a bell on your backpack, or speak or sing to yourself (or to the wildlife — "Hey, bear!").

Give them space

Keep an animal's heart rate down by giving them at least 50 yards of space. Never approach or follow an animal — it keeps both of you safe.

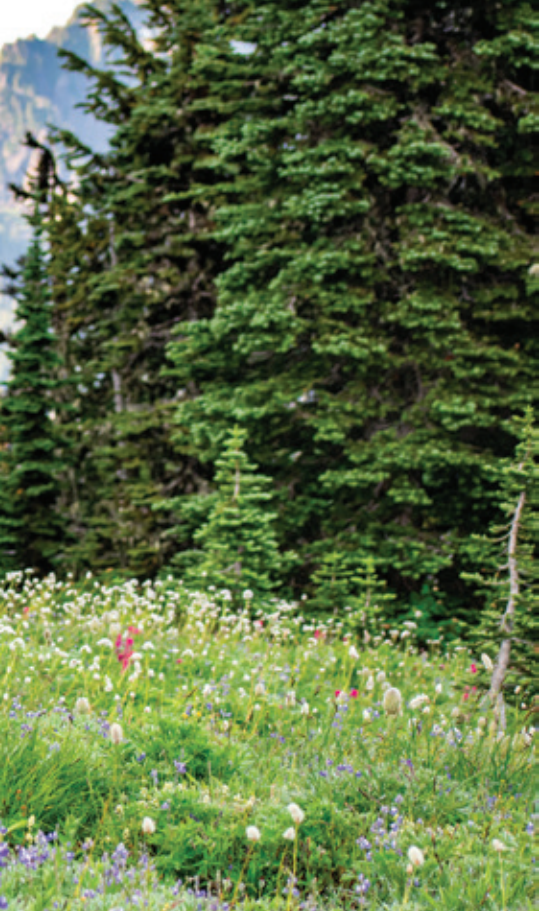
Keep human food for humans

Human food is not part of a healthy diet for wildlife. Animals ranging from wasps to squirrels to bears can learn to associate humans with food, which is dangerous for them and us.

If camping overnight, store foods and scented items (cookware, trash, toothpaste, deodorant) in a hanging bear bag, a bear canister or an Ursack bag. Find steps on how to hang a bear bag at **go.wta.org/bearbag**.

Keep dogs on leash

Keeping your four-legged hiking buddy on leash prevents stressful, or even dangerous, wildlife encounters. Some animals or environments may be



These incredible wildlife shots were all taken from a safe distance away from the animals.

sensitive to dogs, even those on leash. Before you go for your hike, check whether dogs are allowed. You can find basic guidelines at **go.wta.org/hikewithdogs**.

Know and follow seasonal regulations

Many animals are more vulnerable during certain seasons. They spend extra time foraging when food is scarce in winter and extra energy breeding and raising young at other times. Know and follow any temporary or seasonal closures.

Where to find wildlife around the state

Wildlife conservation areas offer hikers the chance to glimpse wildlife while protecting native species of wild flora and fauna. Use WTA's Hiking Guide at **wta.org/hikingguide** to find them by searching for hikes with "refuge," "preserve" or "conservation" in their names. Keep in mind dogs are not allowed at wildlife refuges.

You can learn how to hike safely in bear, snake or cougar country (and around other species) with WTA's Trail Smarts series at **wta.org/trailsmarts**.

Sharing information and a love of nature

As people who love the outdoors, we want to care for wildlife while we explore the ecosystems where they live. If you see others outdoors who aren't familiar with the tips shared above, you may want to let them know best practices. Approach any conversation with another hiker about best practices with an open and curious mind to get the best results. We want to respect wildlife and everyone who is outside looking to connect with nature like we are.

Where to learn more

To learn more about different species of concern in Washington and emerging research on their response to recreation, check out:

Conservation Northwest's "Recreation and Wildlife in Washington: Considerations for Conservation" at **go.wta.org/recandwildlife**.

Tulalip Tribes' "The 'Recreation Boom' on Public Lands in Western Washington: Impacts to Wildlife and Implications for Treaty Tribes" at **go.wta.org/recreationboom**.

University of Washington's Quantitative Ecology Lab at **go.wta.org/ecologylab**.

Photos by William Swigart, Terra Compton, John Soltys, Matthew Millard, Elston Hill

Help for When Things Go Wrong

Seattle Mountain Rescue volunteers have been helping hikers and other people who love the outdoors for decades

By Tiffany Chou

WTA works every day to get people out on trail. We build and maintain trails, advocate for making them more accessible and create resources to help hikers to stay safe. But WTA can't do it all — it takes a wide range of groups to care for the outdoors and the people who love being outside. And sometimes, things do go wrong. When they do, it's nice to know that search and rescue organizations are there to help.

Seattle Mountain Rescue (SMR) is one of those groups that can help hikers or other outdoor recreationists when something goes wrong. Their motto: "Everybody comes home from the backcountry."

History

SMR has been training volunteers for rescue and recovery missions in the mountains since it was founded in 1948. The organization is a nonprofit based entirely on volunteers and supported by donors. There's no cost for calling for help. While SMR takes on missions of all kinds, its volunteers have special training for missions that require expertise in wilderness travel, climbing, snow travel and remote medicine.

SMR has seen a significant increase in missions over the years. It had an average of five missions per year in its first 10 years. In 2023 alone, between May and September — peak mountain recreation months — it took on about 100 missions. As more and more people access our natural areas, some of them are going to need help. And SMR is ready.

SMR's volunteers come from all backgrounds. Many are health care workers, like doctors and EMTs, but they all share a passion for the outdoors and care for their fellow outdoor enthusiasts. And SMR has actively worked to develop an inclusive culture, focusing on its recruiting process (for instance, utilizing AI to revise the process to remove gender bias), creating a positive teaching and learning space, and building a mentorship program.

Missions

SMR missions take many different forms, including searching for lost hikers (in both urban and remote areas), providing medical care for those who get injured in the backcountry and evacuating outdoor enthusiasts when necessary.

SMR members practice one-wheel helicopter landings, which can allow for rescues in hard-to-reach places.

Interested in joining SMR? Check out its website at **seattlemountainrescue.org** or email **info@seattlemountainrescue.org** to ask about current volunteer opportunities, both on the ground and behind the scenes. There are dozens of other search and rescue organizations across the state too — look up the ones in your area online to find out how to join!

Some missions, especially those in easy-to-reach areas, take a few hours and need just a few responders. But difficult missions farther out in the backcountry can last for days and require dozens of responders. One mission in 2020 lasted over a week and 43 SMR volunteers responded.

Updates and upgrades

SMR is always working to increase efficiency and safety. One way it has done that recently is by focusing on technology.

Volunteers used to have to make individual phone calls to ask for help with missions. Now, SMR uses text messages to reach many volunteers at once, tracks them on a digital map and uses radio and satellite phones to keep in contact with them in the field.

In 2021, with funding from the Snoqualmie Tribe, SMR added a thermal imaging drone to their toolbox and trained volunteers to use it. The drone has been particularly useful in winter or with difficult terrain like rivers or cliffs. SMR has also used the drone to help other organizations, including for monitoring active fires. And SMR has provided drone imaging data to the University of Washington for research into rescue automation tools, which could help search and rescue find people faster. ▸

Photo courtesy Seattle Mountain Rescue

Training involves mock missions, which imitate rescue missions SMR members might embark on in real life.

The Mountain Rescue Center

SMR bought land in North Bend at the end of 2020 and completed construction, supported by volunteers, in 2022. The facility — dubbed the Mountain Rescue Center — is used for team training and education events, to store equipment and to share with partner organizations and the greater outdoor community. Among the partner organizations they've offered to share use of the space is WTA, for our training events and meetings.

This facility has also made it easier for SMR to work with other organizations. For instance, SMR has worked with fire departments, and sharing its knowledge of backcountry rescue with the department has helped both organizations carry out missions more safely and effectively.

SMR also developed a new, lighter rope system, which worked so well that it helped roll the system out to other King County search and rescue teams.

Safety

While SMR works hard to be ready to help those who need it, it also hopes its services are needed as infrequently as possible. For years, SMR has hosted events to educate the hiking community on how to stay safe in the mountains. Earlier this year, it led "how to stay safe in the outdoors" education events for the Girl Scouts and Team Survivor NW, and it has previously hosted multiple wilderness first aid and avalanche safety courses.

Garth Bruce, SMR's technology chair and leader of its drone search team, hopes the Mountain Rescue Center will be a good spot to lead education events for the greater outdoor community — after all, the best treatment is prevention.

"What SMR wants is less business. And that means educating people, oftentimes showing them why mistakes were made and how they could have been avoided," Garth said.

Half of the Mountain Rescue Center's space was specifically designed to be a classroom, designated for partner organizations' wilderness medicine courses, avalanche and snow safety classes, seminars and the like. Education is an important element in keeping the public safe, but having fewer missions overall keeps SMR's volunteers safer too.

SMR prioritizes regular, practical training and has earned grants to help outfit volunteers with gear — first aid kits, radios, rigging kits — to keep them safe and support their ability to respond faster to calls. It even has a resiliency team to ensure volunteers are OK mentally and physically after a potentially traumatizing mission.

As long as there are people in the backcountry who need help, SMR's volunteers will be at the ready. Like many of its volunteers, Garth puts much of his time and energy into SMR — and he's not planning to stop anytime soon.

"Being able to support and help people if they needed it was the perfect path for me, given my nature and passion for the mountains," Garth said. "I have given a lot to SMR over the years, but it has paid me back tenfold. I'll always support it and help people when needed." ■

Volunteers

Volunteers make all of SMR's work possible. Here are just a few of those volunteers:

David Dunphy, executive director at the Youth Experiential Training Institute (Y.E.T.I.), started volunteering with SMR in 2017, after volunteering with King County Explorer Search and Rescue for several years. Over the years, he's led trips with REI, the YMCA and the National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS). Nowadays, David goes on a couple of SMR missions a month, leads training events and helps out behind the scenes.

"I'm humbled to be part of an organization of people that for 75 years have made sure that, when somebody calls for help, there is a community of trained and equipped climbers ready to respond and give their time, energy and skills to ensure everyone comes home from the backcountry," David said.

Dr. Mimi Stone, physician and NOLS wilderness first responder instructor, has been rock climbing and mountaineering since 1975. At age 16, she became the youngest woman to climb Denali. She is SMR's medical training officer, organizing and teaching medical trainings for volunteers.

"I continue to work with SMR because I enjoy the people on the team, support the mission and feel gratified to help those in need at a difficult moment in their lives — it's similar to meeting patients before surgery," Mimi said. "This process continues to challenge and delight me, as it infuses my love of the mountains with an additional sense of purpose."

Jenna Phillips, SMR's photographer, goes mountaineering, climbing or skiing whenever she can. She learned about SMR through Garth and started doing media work for the organization in 2022. Nowadays, Jenna helps SMR with its marketing — spreading the word about SMR's work — and participates in mock missions and trainings.

"The great thing about this organization is it brings together people from all different backgrounds, skill sets and ages, and you get them all working toward one goal: to bring someone home from the backcountry. It's cool to see people who might never have spoken to each other if not for SMR out here donating their time, bushwhacking through devil's club and trusting this other person to lower them down a 1,000-foot cliff," Jenna said.

Matty Palubinskas, a high school physics teacher and wilderness first aid and responder instructor, was lured to the Pacific Northwest after growing up in New England. In this corner of the country, he's worked with the Ski Patrol Rescue Team and has been with SMR as an EMT for over a decade.

"Members of SMR train year-round (rain or shine), have strong climbing backgrounds, are adept in rugged terrain and thus can respond to emergencies that no one else really can. I really love working with my mountain rescue colleagues and the wider range of search and rescue folks," Matty said. "We all share the same raison d'être — to help bring home someone's loved one from the mountains."

Volunteers always carry specific gear on their missions, including ropes and radios.

What SMR volunteers want you to know

- If you're a hiker who relies on your cell phone for anything while you're out in the backcountry (navigation, maps, communication, flashlight, etc.), **conserve power as much as possible** — turn on airplane mode and pack an external battery.
- **Always pack gear that will protect you** from the elements, particularly layers that will keep you warm and dry.
- **Always pack a way to call for help** if you need it, like a phone with satellite connectivity, a two-way satellite communicator or a personal locator beacon.
- **Remember to STOP if you get lost:**
  - **Stop:** Take a breath, drink some water, have a snack and assess the situation.
  - **Think:** When was the last time you were sure of your location? Can you make it back to that location?
  - **Observe:** Look around and see if you can return to a known location. If not, stay put.
  - **Plan:** Determine your next steps, discussing with others if you aren't alone.
- Rescue doesn't come immediately after you call for help — it takes hours. Once you've called for help, **find a safe place where you can keep dry and warm, and stay put**.
- Search and rescue may use GPS to find you, which can be imprecise. **Make yourself visible from the air** to make it easier for their drones or helicopters to see you if they are dispatched. For instance, lay out a bright piece of clothing in an open space.

Photos courtesy Seattle Mountain Rescue, and by Jenna Phillips

Intentional Spaces

WTA's Emerging Leaders find professional connections in the outdoor community

By Angelic Friday

Creating opportunities for time with industry professionals is a cornerstone of the Emerging Leaders Program.

Photo by MJ Sampang

Leadership & Innovation

"It is so cool to hear community partners' stories and where they started their own journey in this industry," Yadi Cruz, a member of WTA's Emerging Leaders Program (ELP), said this year.

The Emerging Leaders Program, which WTA began in 2021, has continued to evolve and grow each year, helping participants expand their trail work and leadership skills. Cohort members have emphasized that connecting with community partners — and many other BIPOC individuals in the outdoor industry — is one of the most important parts of the program.

At WTA, we have seen how important collaboration and partnership are to enriching experiences and building communities, so we have made it a key part of the program. Participants engage in discussions, shadow leaders in the outdoor industry and listen to guest panels with community partners. For ELP participants, meeting BIPOC-identifying people who can understand cohort members' lived experiences is inspiring. Our partners also find value in the program.

"Last year and this year, I got to go out on a hike with the crew, and it's so invigorating for me as a person that is 24/7 in the work," said Chevon Powell, creator of Golden Bricks Events. "[ELP] aligns with what I do because I am serving BIPOC communities and creating spaces for BIPOC folks to be outside and live and thrive and enjoy their time. To

WTA's Emerging Leaders Program is a 14-week program designed for a diverse cohort of individuals — including Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) and other shared identities — who want to form an inclusive community and build leadership skills to support future career interests in natural-resource stewardship and outdoor recreation.

New friends and connections.
A community partner hike at Point Defiance Park on a rainy day in March.

see the future, the next group of leaders coming out of there, is very important for me as well because we need more diverse leadership in this work."

Janette Chien, Washington State Parks diversity, equity and inclusion (DEI) director, admired that cohort members are so wise and grounded early in their careers.

"I really like getting to know the cohort. They all have such unique backgrounds, stories and skill sets that they are coming with. I am always impressed by the wisdom they have. They feel way more grounded than I was at that stage."

This year, we facilitated a BIPOC community partner hike at Point Defiance Park in Tacoma. 12 people from eight different organizations showed up to hike, geocache and learn together.

During the hike, Valeria Santiago, a 2024 ELP cohort member, led an activity focused on the Salish Sea for her independent project. As a kid, her fascination with science was ignited by dedicated educators. Valeria finds fulfillment in creating memorable connections to nature for her community, especially people of color. She recalls being mesmerized by the relaxing rhythm of waves and wants others to have that experience. Valeria ended the hike with a poetry and drawing session, in which those who attended the hike shared reflections. Through colors, stickers and stories, partners highlighted community in outdoor spaces and their experiences with new connections.

"It was a breath of fresh air to connect with other BIPOC professionals and chat with community members about their work, but also about their interests outside of it," Valeria said. "It felt like I was catching up with old friends. I left the event inspired and curious to continue to learn and grow."

Crystal Hudelson, from Climbers of Color, joined our hike this year and appreciated the chance to be outdoors in a group setting.

"The partner hike was great!" Crystal said. "I was like, this is my people. Every time, we stopped when we saw a cool flower or a nice color on the trail or birds ▶

Photo by MJ Sampang

Partner organizations connecting with ELP members

- **Washington State Parks**
- **Braided Seeds**
- **The Mountaineers**
- **Climbers of Color**
- **Golden Bricks Events**
- **Pierce County Parks**
- **Friends of the Children Tacoma**
- **Pacific Education Institute**

In their words

Our shared vision of seeing and uniting more Black, Indigenous, and people of color outdoors and within the outdoor industry unites us all. The intention that all of these community partners bring to their own organizations and communities inspires the WTA community. Here is what partners say they enjoy most about collaborating with ELP, and why they think the program is important.

"I think in a lot of ways it feels life-giving to be in spaces with people of color who want to be the pipeline into environmental justice, conservation and recreation efforts. It feels important for us to know we can be in these spaces, that we can thrive in these spaces. It's super energizing to be with ELP (participants) and listen to their passion, hope and excitement."

— Ashleigh Shoecraft, Braided Seeds' executive director

"Intentionality in serving diverse communities. Incorporating folks' culture into the program and allowing folks to show up as they are. I really appreciated collaborating because those are things we try to do in the way we navigate our work as well. I loved collaborating with MJ, Angelic and Bea (all current or past ELP leaders) in the past — and so many other amazing leaders."

— Chevon Powell, Golden Bricks Events

"ELP allows us to continue exploring the intersectional spaces of ethnicity and place, culture and community, and pushes the conversation of what it means to be a person of color in the outdoor and recreation industries. This program allows us to strengthen our personal identities and bonds with our peers."

— Chris Young, Outdoor Asian

"I think that being a person of color in the outdoor industry can feel very isolating. I remember when I first started working at Washington State Parks, I had a hard time finding where I fit in. … Part of the reason I wanted to come into this field was to really change the way that I felt about outdoor recreation. To think about myself in it and think not about how people of color fit into the industry, but how people of color are already there and how we can lift that up and make it be all around us."

— Janette Chien, Washington State Parks*, DEI director

**Janette has been essential in planning the ELP cohort's time with WA State Parks (2023-2025).*

Photos by Angelic Friday and MJ Sampang

Leadership in action. An artistic reflection was part of an activity focused on the Salish Sea and led by Valeria Santiago for her independent project.

flying overhead, which I thought was really great. Also, just being able to talk to other people from different professions that intersect with the outdoors was really interesting."

Community is powerful

One common theme that our partners, ELP participants and staff took away from this season is the power of community and connection in a safe and supportive learning environment.

The intentional space that we are able to cultivate for BIPOC individuals within WTA is unique. And it is essential for our community to feel the confidence necessary to thrive in this industry. Spending time with inspiring partners, hearing their stories and building connections with them is a monumental part of the program. These connections create welcoming and supportive learning environments. Our community partners illustrate various options within the outdoor industry, share stories about real-life work, explain what it's like to work in a nonprofit or state agency and demonstrate facilitation and leadership skills.

Michelle Mouw, an ELP cohort alumnx from 2023 and the 2024 ELP crew lead, said meeting Chevon Powell, also the creator of the Refuge Outdoors Festival, provided a unique opportunity.

"Meeting Chevon was inspiring. She is an incredible organizer and I felt so lucky to have been able to connect with her while hiking through beautiful Point Defiance," Michelle said. "We had a great conversation about community partnerships and her philosophy surrounding what makes a good community partner. Little did I know that this connection would lead to me playing my music along the banks of the beautiful Snoqualmie River at Refuge. It felt like a dream come true and a beautiful example of how the collective can support individual dreams and creativity."

Taking up space

Connections and collaboration with our community partners are at the heart of ELP. The program provides resources and future opportunities for participants by making space for conversations with BIPOC leaders in the outdoor industry. The ELP team appreciates all the time and intention that these individuals, along with all of our other community partners, have put into connecting with the ELP community.

Our community is made up of inspiring individuals and leaders, each with different identities and backgrounds, but they all agree how valuable it is to have equitable access and opportunities for BIPOC individuals, and those with other marginalized identities, to build confidence in the outdoors. There is so much power in showing up and being part of these spaces. BIPOC hikers are out here, paving the way for the younger generation to feel confident to show up and take up space in the outdoors.

Read more about the Emerging Leaders Program at wta.org/elp.

Photo by Angelic Friday

The Summit Is Just a Bonus

How Rachel Heaton is building Native representation outdoors and encouraging reverence for the land

By Jessi Loerch

Rachel Heaton goes outdoors with a deep reverence for the natural world. She finds connection to the land, to her community and to herself — and she wants to encourage others to do the same.

Rachel, a member of the Muckleshoot Tribe with Duwamish ancestors, is helping to foster respect for the Earth in her professional work and her personal life. She is a cultural educator for the Muckleshoot, where she teaches about traditional practices and plants while connecting her community to outdoor spaces. She brings tribal youth outdoors — including on Muckleshoot land near Enumclaw — to work on fitness in natural spaces, including running up hills, jumping over logs and lifting rocks.

Rachel's activism is fully intertwined with her connection to the Earth. Her commitment to the land has brought her to Standing Rock as a Water Protector, fighting a pipeline that would desecrate Tribal lands and endanger water supplies, and to lead protests that shut down banks that fund fossil fuel extraction. From experience, she knows that front-line work can be exhausting to mental health and has seen the power of time in nature to heal and reenergize activists like herself.

Little Tahoma can be seen in the background as Rachel descends the Disappointment Cleaver on Tahoma (Mount Rainier).

Photo by Brooke Warren

"I also believe that it will be Indigenous knowledge that helps bring balance back to our Earth, and as a Native woman, I get to bring a piece of that knowledge into the spaces I go to," Rachel said.

Rachel loves to be on the land, even if just to sit in the cool mist near one of her favorite waterfalls. She wants other people to have that opportunity and to have a sense of stewardship. One of the ways she's doing that is by preparing to climb Mount Rainier, known to her Tribe as təqʷubəʔ and also known by many names to different Tribes including Tahoma, Tacoma and Taquoba, for the 125th anniversary of the national park. Last summer, she was a member of the first all-Native climb on that peak.

But for Rachel, the goal of the summit comes second to the all-important connection to the mountain and to the land.

"The summit is just a bonus," she said. "My big goal is to show people how to be better stewards. Our interactions with Mother Earth shouldn't be transactional. We're already in a sacred space."

Rachel's journey toward a climb of Tahoma began, in some ways, when she found out she was pregnant with her youngest child. She had older children, and having

Where Rachel leads

Rachel Heaton enjoys sharing her cultural knowledge, connection to the lands and outdoor skills. Earlier this year, she led an interpretive hike with members of WTA's Emerging Leaders Program. They learned about native plants, and the land they explored on, and took a quick river plunge together.

Rachel also recently created the Earth Gym, **theearthgym.co**, where she goes outside to work out with people while teaching them about plants and encouraging good stewardship. She is also the co-creator of Mazaska Talks, **mazaskatalks.org**, which resists bank financing of fossil fuels through divestment and protest.

Rachel, her significant other, Gil, and members of the all-Native team complete the last leg of their historic climb of Tahoma.

Photo by Scott Kranz

a new baby felt like starting over. The pregnancy was hard on her, and once her son was born, she wanted to be able to return to the gym. She'd been a competitive bodybuilder in the past.

"The gym was a place where I went to take care of myself," she said. "But once he was born, I couldn't just go to the gym whenever I wanted. I had a baby to take care of."

So, she began to think about what she would normally do in the gym and how she could transition that to her time outdoors. She made a plan to get outside with her son and make that her workout.

"I'll carry my baby and he'll be my resistance and hiking will be my cardio," Rachel said. "I started heading out to Tahoma, to be out there with my son. But there were no Native people out there, at least not from my community."

When she realized this, she started to think about why that was and what she could do to encourage more Native people to spend time near the mountain. At first, her time outside had been personal — a way to care for her physical and mental health. But over time, she wanted to do more.

"I was trying to create visibility," she said. "I was trying to show that Native people are here, we are in this space."

Rachel organized group hikes to areas around the mountain, and she began dreaming about climbing. In 2022, she took a training trip with a group and, after a few days on the mountain, had to make the tough decision to go back. She was fit, but she wasn't ready for all of the elements of ▶

Rachel talks to climbers and guides before a fundraising climb of Tahoma, organized by Alpine Ascents International to support Indigenous organization Unkitawa.

being on the mountain. It was hard on her ego, but she also realized that her goal of increasing Native representation was much bigger than her.

She went and talked to Gordon Janow, one of the founders of Alpine Ascents. She told him why it was important to her to get out on the mountain and what it meant for Native people. He helped her get out on the mountain again later that year. That time, she had a stronger foundation and was able to increase her mountaineering skills and confidence.

Soon after that, Washington's National Park Fund reached out to Rachel about the possibility of supporting an all-Native climb of Tahoma in 2023. She was excited at the prospect and also a bit overwhelmed.

"At that point, I did not know a single other Native who was climbing," she said.

But she began reaching out to friends, family and people in her network and put together a team of all-Native climbers, including her significant other and her daughter. The group did a lot of training individually and also together, including a trip up to Camp Muir. That was a good learning experience — including about the risk of sunburn — and they were able to work out their gear systems and reduce their anxiety.

However, when it came time for the actual climb, conditions were far from ideal. International Mountain Guides (IMG), who would be guiding them, reached out.

"They said, 'We can do the climb, but we don't think a summit is possible,'" Rachel said.

IMG offered to take them up Mount Baker, but that was a definite no for the group. The climb was about Tahoma — they did not have the same connection with Mount Baker.

"I talked to the team, and we all agreed to go up as far as we could," she said.

The group knew they could do some crevasse exploring and some snow school training. When they first arrived, they endured hours of fog, which was cold and produced some anxiety. But they made it up to Camp Muir and, the next day, climbed up higher, nearly to Cathedral Gap. Rockfall that day, however, meant they couldn't go farther.

"One of our guides was really open to having a group of Natives," Rachel said. "We talked about spirituality and the mountain, we smudged, and we talked about how to be better stewards of the land."

That guide told the group, "When the mountain speaks, we're supposed to listen. She will talk in subtle ways, but today she is shouting at us."

While they didn't summit, the experience was also magical. They were above the clouds and had Camp Muir to themselves.

"We didn't make it to the summit, but that was never the goal," Rachel said. "It was to be on the mountain, to be visible and to bring our knowledge and share that knowledge."

Rachel is eager to be out on the mountain again. But when she contemplates what's ahead, she's thinking beyond the next climb and to decisions being made today and what they'll

Photo by Joe Wagner

mean for generations to come. The national park has been around for 125 years, but what will it be like in another 125 years?

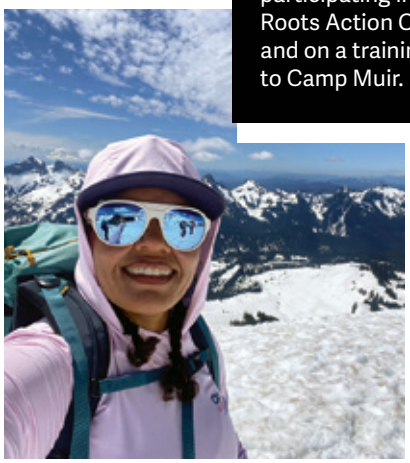
"We can have some uncomfortable conversations on the mountain, including about the climate crisis. The glaciers are receding, and our Tribe needs the rivers. We need to protect future generations. We have to teach about the land so we can go on. This is all much bigger than a climb; it's for the future."

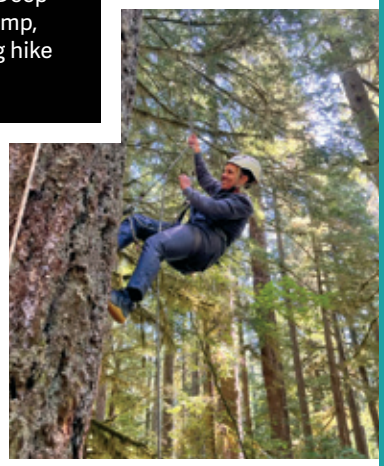
For this climb, she'll be heading up with Alpine Ascents, whose guides she has appreciated working with over the years.

Rachel talks with Alpine Ascents guides about connections to the land and to the mountain and encourages them to help climbers see beyond the summit. She shares her own stories with the guides to help them understand that time on the mountain is sacred and that a connection to the land, plants and animals is vital — and encourages the guides to help their clients see that as well. Whether or not climbers summit, time on the mountain is profound and important.

Rachel's hope is to remind folks that Native people are here and have always been here. She hopes her work encourages everyone to remember the immense importance of the natural world — to all of us.

"The creator gave me a purpose," she said. "This is bigger than me."





Clockwise from top: Rachel with members of WTA's Emerging Leaders Program, participating in Deep Roots Action Camp, and on a training hike to Camp Muir.

Photos courtesy Rachel Heaton

Listening for the Trees

This whitebark in the Enchantments may be one of the oldest in Washington. Its age is not confirmed, but could be over 1,000 years old.

A Clark's nutcracker surveys the ground from atop a whitebark pine.

▲ **Chris uses forestry tools,** like this Cruz-All, to determine the density of whitebark pines at a research site.

To study threatened whitebark pines, scientists are collecting data in the form of birdsong.

By Chris Snyder

Ponderosa pines sway above my tent. The North Fork of the Teanaway River rushes south while cars rumble north on the road named for the river. I'm sore from 14 miles and 4,000 feet up and back from Navaho Pass yesterday with 40 pounds of batteries, datasheets and tree-climbing gear on my back.

When hiking for pleasure, I just bring food, water, some extra clothes, but now I'm here to work. Last night, I got to camp in pitch black and made chili by headlamp before collapsing. Will I be able to do this for 2 more weeks? I've made a commitment and people are counting on me, I remind myself.

It's 2023, and I'm working for researchers Alison Scoville and Taza Schaming, who met through their shared passion for conservation. Alison is a biology professor at Central Washington University, and Taza is an ornithologist trained at Cornell.

Their goal is to help save the threatened whitebark pine. But instead of studying the tree itself, they're studying a bird called the Clark's nutcracker, with which the tree has an ancient, critical relationship.

The movement patterns of these birds are poorly understood, and the researchers want to find out where in the Cascades they travel, and why. That's where I come in.

They've given me a map of 22 GPS locations throughout the Cascades. At each location is a microphone strapped to a tree that has been listening for nutcracker calls for months. I have 2 weeks to get to each location, switch out the batteries, secure the memory card and perform a habitat survey before the recorders die and conditions change.

I'm excited and nervous about the number of trails I'll be hiking. As a recreational hiker, it might have taken me a whole summer to reach all these locations, but now I'm on the clock.

After devouring oatmeal and hard-boiled eggs, I pull on my father's dusty 1985 80-liter North Face backpack. I feel it sag into my body, pulling me off balance. My metal tree-climbing ladder is strapped to the bottom.

After a mile or two, I leave the wide and well-maintained gravel trail for a narrowing and increasingly rocky footpath. As the trail steepens, I adjust my gait to accommodate a few ▶

Photos by Alison Scoville and Chris Snyder

Chris unstraps a microphone from its tree.

Community-powered science

If you like the idea of turning the miles you hike into data that help protect the places you love, consider participating in a community science project.

On this project, hikers help map and inventory five-needled pines they encounter along the Pacific Crest Trail: **go.wta.org/5needles**.

If you spend a lot of time above tree line, consider helping with Robin Kodner's Living Snow Project: **go.wta.org/livingsnow**.

Downloading the **iNaturalist app** for your phone will allow you to identify plants, mushroom, and more just by taking a picture. When you identify a species, you can make that location public so that scientists can get a better sense of where that organism lives.

aches and pains I developed the day before. The higher I climb, the more frequent whitebark pines become. Squawks of nutcrackers drift on the light wind. I pull out my field journal and jot down the time and location of the calls.

The whitebark pine and the Clark's nutcracker are evolutionary partners in crime; each enables the other's strange habits. For example, nutcrackers don't migrate south for the winter like most birds. They flirt, mate and rear their hatchlings in the harsh winters of the mountains.

Whitebark pines are stranger still. They produce cones that are fused shut, imprisoning their seeds. This fluke would have been eradicated by natural selection if not for a helping beak.

In late summer, the nutcrackers get to work. Using hooked beaks evolved for this task, they pry apart the cones to get to the nutritious seeds. Their main mission is to store these seeds underground for winter.

A single nutcracker can store as many as 98,000 whitebark pine seeds in a single year. And unlike squirrels who forget much of what they bury, nutcrackers have complex spatial memory. They memorize the location of a cache by the surrounding rocks and trees, ultimately generating a mental map of tens of thousands of caches.

Still, they won't come back for all of them, and those buried seeds become the whitebark pine forests of the following centuries. Mountainsides dotted with whitebarks are historical maps. Each tree represents a place where a nutcracker once dug a hole and popped a seed inside.

10 miles later, I'm sitting on crisp brown duff and breathing subalpine fragrances. The clacking wings of grasshoppers punctuate whooshes of light wind through green needles. On a pleasure hike, this might be where I spend my afternoon, leaning against a tree, watching the clouds. But today, there's barely time for lunch.

After climbing the tree to collect the memory card with its precious recordings, I'm pushing through dense stands of subalpine fir. I have to walk in a series of perfectly straight lines as I collect habitat data so that my path is replicable year after year. It's excellent experimental design, but strange-looking behavior to a passerby.

I inspect each whitebark pine, looking for isolated bunches of dead needles, swollen branches with ruptured bark and small white sacs of spores emerging from these lesions; these are signs of a deadly fungal disease called white pine blister rust.

Blister rust was brought to North America from Asia in the early

A whitebark pine overlooks the three Burroughs at Mount Rainier National Park.

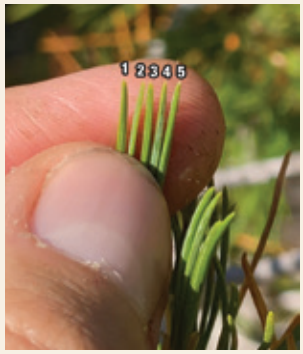
3 places to spot a whitebark

Where there is a whitebark pine, there is a view. Here are three locations where you can find them and incredible views as well:

Navaho Pass: This is where this story began. It's a great spot for a 1-night backpacking trip. The whitebarks can be seen at the pass.

The Enchantments: This is a grueling hike, and it's hard to get permits. But if you're lucky enough, easily the most beautiful whitebark I've ever seen lives at Lake Viviane.

Sunrise Nature Trail (Sunrise at Mount Rainier): You can see whitebarks 5 minutes from the parking lot and, in late summer, nutcrackers as well.



These five-needle bunches ▶ are the signature of a whitebark.

1900s. Whitebark pines, without any evolved defenses, have been dying at alarming rates since then. Howling mountain winds carry infective spores to the tree's needles. Trees breathe through microscopic holes in their leaves, and this is what blister rust exploits, tunneling into the tree through them and growing toward the trunk.

By 2018, a survey found that over half of standing whitebark pines had died. In late 2022, after decades of urging by experts, the whitebark pine was federally listed as a threatened species.

What do we lose if they go extinct? One of their ecosystem services that we hikers utilize is the islands of trees they create in the high alpine. The hospitable microclimates in these tree islands (shade, wind protection, soil development) not only nurture less hardy species of plants and animals, but they're excellent places to camp near. More than once, I've found a whitebark by my site that was the starting point for that little patch of trees.

Do trees on the very edges of livable habitat feel lonely? I almost didn't take this job because of the solitude. These field sites are remote, and the wildfire smoke this year is too thick for my typical hiking partners. I am alone as I jot down cases of death and irreversible disease. Trees don't moan or wail in distress, but the silence is loud.

However, there is hope for whitebark pines. U.S. Forest Service workers comb the mountains each year for the few specimens that show genetic resistance to blister rust. They'll harvest seeds from these trees and bring them back to nurseries where they'll be grown and tested against repeated exposures.

Those that survive become the next generation, planted in places where whitebarks are needed most. Planting whitebarks in remote mountain environments takes money and time, scarce resources in the conservation world. But humans aren't the only ones planting these trees; they also have a helping beak.

While I'm not a nutcracker or a restoration ecologist working on the front lines, I'm proud to be doing my small part. The data I collect will be used to create predictive models of where nutcrackers are already present so that the Forest Service can plant collaboratively instead of redundantly.

2 weeks later, I'm making my way up a trail just outside the Goat Rocks Wilderness. I'm carrying the same weight in equipment, but it doesn't feel as heavy as it did before. I scan my surroundings for whitebarks, which I can identify from a distance now. I listen between footsteps for the calls of nutcrackers, ready to record their presence in the field notebook tucked into my shirt pocket.

While conducting this field research, I also filmed a documentary about the experience and the story of the nutcrackers and whitebarks. You can watch it at **go.wta.org/whitebark**.

How to identify a whitebark pine

Identifying whitebark pines is straightforward in Washington (in other places like the Rockies or Sierra there are many look-alikes). The first question to ask with any identification is: Am I where this thing lives? For whitebark pines, that means your elevation should be above 5,000 feet and it should be a relatively dry climate, like the east slopes of the Cascades.

It's their needles, not their silvery white bark, that gives whitebark pines away. Their needles are 1.5–3 inches long and grow in bunches of five. From far away, ponderosa pines and lodgepole pines can look very similar to whitebarks.

If the needle-bearing branches are too high, check the ground beneath the trunk for the scales of the whitebark pine cones, which are pried off by nutcrackers. The scales are about the size and shape of a shark tooth but instead of white, they range from light brown to dark purple, depending on age.

A Clark's nutcracker displays its distinctive plumage.

How to identify the Clark's nutcracker

You will hear nutcrackers more often than you see them and so the best way to identify them is through their call. To me, it sounds like a small dinosaur screeching. Hear it for yourself at **go.wta.org/nutcracker**. Your phone can assist you with this sound ID, using the Merlin app.

If you see nutcrackers, they might be diving at the ground for food, or harvesting the cones of whitebark pines in the canopy. They look and sound like gray jays. To tell them apart visually, watch for a flash of white on their hind wings when they fly.

The Stakes Are High

Knowing how to choose a tent stake and how to use it can make your tent camping easier and more enjoyable

By Sandra Saathoff

When I started camping and then backpacking, I didn't give much thought to tent stakes. Most off-the-shelf tents come with a set of stakes and I figured that was good enough. But it turns out there's both a science and an art to stakes. Yes, out-of-the-box stakes work in a lot of situations, but sometimes it helps to apply some strategy. Let's dive in!

Tents come in two versions: **freestanding** (tents that don't need stakes to keep the tent from falling over) and **non-freestanding**. For a freestanding tent, the stakes mostly serve to keep the tent from blowing away in the wind or keep the sides or rain covers taut and secure. For a non-freestanding tent, the stakes are critical to the setup. If they aren't secure, the tent doesn't stay up. Thinking about the terrain you'll be camping in helps determine what kind of stakes to bring.

Types of stakes

Shepherd's hook stakes: Many tents come with shepherd's hook stakes. These work well in compact dirt, and their thin shafts make them easy to push or pound into soil. Their thin profile also makes them easier to insert into rocky or rooty soil. They do tend to bend in firmer soils and pull out under pressure in less compact soils. In windy conditions, you may need to add a heavy rock to keep the stake in place. More on that later.

Nail stakes: Nail stakes are thicker than shepherd's hooks and have a flat nail head, rather than a hook at the top. They sometimes come with a loop at the top to make them easier to secure to a tent. These can be very lightweight, but do tend to bend and spin in certain conditions. In windy conditions, you may need to add rocks for stability.

V-stakes: Looking top-down at these stakes, we can see where they get their name—they have a V shape. These stakes have good holding power and are less likely to bend than shepherd's hooks. They also do not spin in the ground. V-stakes work well in both hard-packed and loose soils and do well in high-wind conditions. A snow stake is a wider and larger version of the V-stake, made for camping on snow. The larger surface area enables better holding power.

Y-stakes: Like the V-stake, the Y-stake gets its name from its shape. The Y-stake is a very durable tool that resists bending and spinning and has quite good holding power. It works well in a variety of soil types as well as windy conditions. It is, however, difficult to pound into rocky ground.

Materials

Stakes come in a variety of materials. They are commonly made of plastic,

Photo by Karen Wang

aluminum, stainless steel or titanium — in order of affordability. There are even carbon fiber stakes, though these can be 10 times the cost of more common materials. For most conditions, the material doesn't make that much difference in performance, but it can in the weight you carry. Weigh the cost/weight question for yourself and make a choice.

Pounding stakes in

The angle at which you drive a tent stake into the ground can significantly impact its holding power. Aim for a 45-degree angle away from the tent, which ensures maximum resistance against lateral forces like wind.

Driving stakes too upright reduces their holding power, while overly shallow angles to the ground make them prone to pulling out. Experiment with different angles to find the optimal balance between stability and ease of insertion for various conditions.

Before pounding the stake in, check for rocks and roots, if possible. Obviously, many rocks are hidden underground, but a scan of the area before setting up camp can save time and frustration.

If you need help to push a stake into the ground, try looking for a palm-sized rock nearby. (At regularly used backpacking sites, you'll probably find one right away.) While you might be tempted to use the bottom of your shoe, you risk bending the stake or damaging your shoe.

Creative strategies

Sometimes, you don't have great options for where to pitch a tent. A little ingenuity can be a lifesaver — or at least a sleep saver. In rocky terrain, traditional stakes may prove ineffective. This is where rocks can come in handy. If you can get the stake into the ground partway, leaving the guy line a bit longer, placement of a heavy rock or rocks on either side of the cord just to the tent side of the stake will hold the stake in the ground (pictured above left).

If the ground is too rocky for the stake to penetrate at all, you can employ the big rock–little rock technique. In this case, the end of the guy line is tied around a small rock. Then, a larger, heavier rock is placed on the ground and line to the tent side of the small rock. The small rock hugs the large rock, keeping the guy line taut (pictured above right). The large rock provides the weight to keep it all in place. Remember, rocks can be important habitat, so be careful when choosing them and put them back when you're done. Whenever possible, look for rocks in camp that have already been used for similar purposes.

If you've done your job well, you end up with a decently pitched tent and a good night of sleep, regardless of most conditions.

Tent stakes are an often overlooked but essential piece of backpacking gear. From securing our shelter in various terrains to withstanding the forces of nature, the right stakes can mean the difference between a restful night under the stars and a sleepless struggle against the elements. By understanding the different types of stakes, mastering their proper use, and considering the conditions of our adventures ahead of time, we can ensure a safe and enjoyable backpacking experience, wherever our adventures may take us.

From left to right: Shepherd's hook, Y-stake, V-stake and nail stake.

Rocks can be used to reinforce tent stakes in the ground (left), or tied to the guy line when utilizing the big rock–little rock technique (pictured right).

Photos by Victoria Obermeyer

Northwest Exposure

The Power of Photography

Northwest Exposure Photo Contest judges share their honorable mentions for the 2023 photo contest and explain what makes these images so compelling

Dabbling Dipper
Photo by Benjamin Wymer

I love how the photographer captured such a crisp shot of this American dipper. The focus is tight around the bird, letting you really enjoy the thrill of the moment. You can even clearly see the fly larva the dipper is about to enjoy. I appreciate that you can sense the photographer's awe in this scene and know it must have taken some careful camera work to get such a perfect image.

— Jessi Loerch

raphoto.darkroom.com • @redman.alpine.photography

◄ Panoramic Peaks
Photo by Evan Redman

What a panorama we have in this honorable mention from last fall's Northwest Exposure Photo Contest. It's been with me ever since. If my orientation is correct, this photo takes in the rugged massif of Whitehorse Mountain (upper left), across the North Fork Stillaguamish River Valley, to the dominant horn and flanks of White Chuck Mountain (center right). The right foreground counterbalances the photo with a snowy shoulder of Glacier Peak. There's wave upon wave of ridges and peaks, past Round Mountain to the distant Cultus Mountains.

Perhaps it's foggy, but I predict it's "smoke season" that gives such ethereal and luminescent definition to the valleys, ridges and rays. In contrast, the tall summits of Whitehorse and White Chuck are clear and backlit, and they pop — sharp and dark. It all adds up to an artistic and compelling — indeed mythic — image of the lower North Cascades. Kudos to this photographer. Thanks to you, and many others, for sharing your work! ***— Buff Black***

Lighting the Way ►
Photo by James Marshall

I liked this photo because, for me, it sparks all the mysteries of camping as a kid in the Pacific Northwest. I have a lot of fun memories of camping with my own twins in the PNW and part of the adventure is staying up late watching the stars, listening to the animal sounds and telling some wondrous tales that could go scary or spooky. This kid is so softly illuminated in the middle of the bridge, and his lantern shows plenty of detail on his face and lights up the bridge as well. There is also something fun about his stance, almost balancing on a swinging bridge, and his grin shows the thrill of being up at night. It's unusual to see night photos of this kind, especially with kids, and it's so perfectly composed and lit! Bravo!

— Archana Bhat

◀ Hiker's Delight
Photo by Brandy Taylor

This photo of a happy couple at Cutthroat Pass possesses visual and emotional appeal. The late-afternoon light, tack-sharp focus, clothing colors that complement and mirror those of the natural elements in the scene and a tight crop that includes context without extraneous and distracting details all contribute to a great photo. The use of bokeh, that soft, pleasant blurring of the background, further accentuates the pair of hikers. But what really sets this photo apart is that it invites us to share what appears to be a spontaneous, joyful, intimate moment. There's a story here that a typical posed photo wouldn't convey, and it makes this a captivating image.

— Doug Diekema

The Sound of Silence ▶
Photo by Christine Wendlendt

There is something about this photo that makes me feel at ease and makes me think about the silence you must experience while you walk that trail. The tree seems like a great spot to take a break and listen to the whispers of nature. On the technical side, I love the crispness because it helps the viewer appreciate the textures and color palette the landscape offers. The framing of the tree is also very interesting, with all of the lines surrounding it.

— Zyanya Alvarez

Lost Trails **Found**

Elevated Cuisine

Recipes from WTA's Lost Trails Found crews in the high country

More trail recipes at wta.org/backcountry kitchen

By Joseph Gonzalez

Preserving tough-to-access backcountry trails is hard work, and it takes a full stomach to bring our best selves to backcountry hitches. That's why we're bringing you two tasty recipes for your next backcountry outing, inspired by our **Lost Trails Found** professional crews. These recipes are fun, nutritious and relatively lightweight.

Note: The recipes below share ingredients and should be prepped together. They involve purchasing instant mac and cheese but using the powdered cheese for a noodle-less meal.

Pack perishable ingredients in an insulated cooler bag with a small, frozen reusable ice gel sheet, and aim to use them early in your trip.

Pulaski Pesto

Enjoy the fresh flavors of Italy (sort of) while hiking the Evergreen State with this clever concoction.

Cooking utensils required

- A stove, spoon and paring knife (optional)

Instructions

1. Boil macaroni noodles until cooked. Drain excess water.

2. Mix in powdered pesto, pine nuts and sun-dried tomatoes.

3. Once mixed, add protein, grated Parmesan and olive oil.

4. Enjoy!

Note: The calories from the olive oil are crucial for this meal's nutritional value, so buy to-go packets online or use a sealable container to bring some from home.

Ingredients

- 1 box (7 ¼ oz.) Kraft original mac and cheese (save the cheese mix for the other recipe)
- 1 package powdered pesto mix
- 2 tablespoons pine nuts
- 2 tablespoons sun-dried tomatoes
- 1 stick summer or veggie sausage or 1 tuna packet
- 1 tablespoon grated Parmesan
- 1 packet extra-virgin olive oil

Bean and Cheese Wrap

Trail work isn't easy. Also, it ain't easy being cheesy. With this recipe, you can do both — and enjoy a yummy meal too.

Cooking utensils required

- A stove, pot and spoon

Instructions

1. Rehydrate dehydrated black beans with water on the stove until cooked. Drain excess water.

2. Mix in cheese powder.

3. Add protein.

4. Crunch up Fritos and add (optional).

5. Roll into tortillas and enjoy!

Note: Dehydrated black beans can be tricky to acquire; look for them online or make them yourself in a dehydrator. Pack some hot sauce packets or chili flakes for an extra kick!

Ingredients

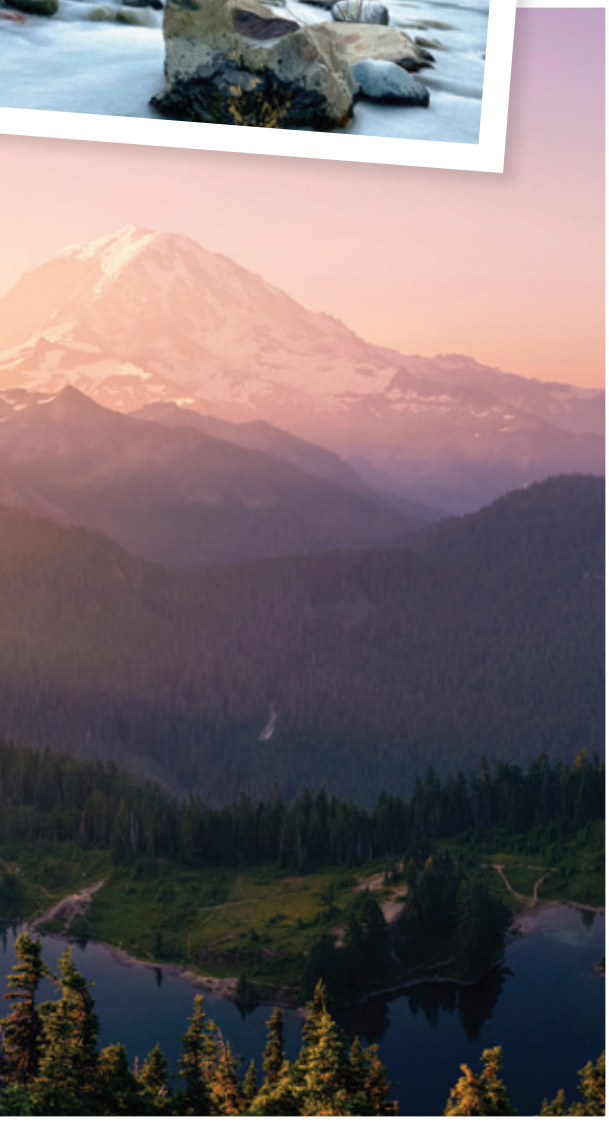
- Water sufficient to rehydrate beans
- 1 cup dehydrated black beans
- 1 package Kraft mac and cheese powder (from the other recipe)
- Protein of your choice
- Two flour tortillas
- One small bag of chili cheese–flavored Fritos (optional)
- Hot sauce packets (optional)
- Chili flakes (optional)

Photo by Angelic Friday

See what the Lost Trails Found crews are up to at wta.org/losttrailsfound.

Exploring a Different Side of Mount Rainier

Left and top: Expect rushing falls and roaring rivers in the Carbon Glacier Corridor. **Above:** Tolmie Peak stands tall behind Eunice Lake.



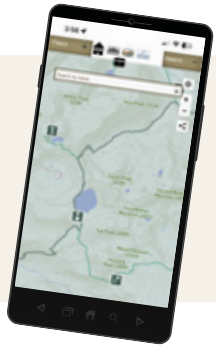
A new resource makes it easier to visit some of the less-traveled areas northwest of the mountain. **By Melani Baker**

For 16 years, I've lived and hiked in Washington. I thought I was familiar with every small town or hiking area within a 2-hour drive of Seattle, but until this year, I had never visited the Carbon Glacier Corridor in the northwest foothills of Mount Rainier. One of my favorite things about this state is the ability to still feel like a tourist and find somewhere new to explore.

Carbon Glacier is located on the north side of Mount Rainier and is the lowest-elevation glacier in the lower 48 states. It feeds the Carbon River, which flows through the area and continually makes its presence known.

Visit this area for a hidden peek into Mount Rainier and its foothills. You won't encounter as many people or the required timed-entry reservations that you'll get at the Paradise and Sunrise areas of the park. You also won't find as much infrastructure to support your visit. That's why WTA has joined with the national park and other land managers in this region to create a community-informed local map to help you find points of interest and essential information for your visit.

There is no cell phone service in the Carbon Glacier Corridor, so before you go, download a map at **carbonglaciercorridor.com/maps** that shows where to find bathrooms, gas stations and points of interest.



With my map downloaded on my phone, I was ready to go. I drove through the string of communities — Burnett, Wilkeson, Carbonado — that lead to the Carbon River entrance to Mount Rainier National Park. When I drove over the Fairfax Bridge—an impressive arch bridge that spans the Carbon River and canyon—I caught a glimpse of the river below and felt that slight stomach drop you feel on a roller coaster, knowing that something exciting is to come.

A little past the bridge, you reach a fork in the road with two options for entering the national park. The right fork is a continuation of Highway 165, and it is open from roughly early July to early October. It leads you to destinations like the Paul Peak and Tolmie Peak trails that boast views of Mount Rainier, starting at the Mowich Lake Campground.

Photos by Melani Baker, Tedrick Mealy, trip reporter jjoyce

Left: Plenty of greenery on the Rainforest Nature Trail.
Top: Sunrises and sunsets are magical at Tolmie Peak.

I took the left fork. My destination was the West Boundary Trail, built in the 1930s for park rangers to patrol the perimeter of Mount Rainier. This took me past the Carbon River Ranger Station, where you can stop for information or to purchase your national park entrance pass, if you didn't get one online in advance.

A little farther down the road, a coyote greeted me and let me snap several photos of it before disappearing into the bushes. 2 miles past the ranger station, I found the parking lot and trailhead at the end of the road. Without setting foot on a trail, there are great spots to view the Carbon River from here, along with picnic tables and pit toilets; I saw families enjoying the area. The wide, braided riverbed gave me that epic Mount Rainier feeling, and reminded me of times I've camped at Cougar Rock near the Nisqually River within the park.

From here, I started my hike on the Rainforest Nature Trail. You could stick to this 0.3-mile circuit for a relaxed walk through lush rain forest. At the time of writing, the left section of this loop trail was closed. The day I visited, there were national park volunteers completing a new section of planks on the trail. With additional WTA work parties planned for the summer, the loop trail may be fully accessible by the time you read this.

The right-hand side of the trail was open and led me to the junction with the West Boundary Trail. I climbed gentle switchbacks with the sounds of the Carbon River and peek-a-boo views of the surrounding canyon reminding me of where I was. In under 2 miles, I reached a waterfall that's a great turnaround point, especially if you are there early in the season and high water flow makes it unsafe to cross.

Past the waterfall, the trail becomes more rugged. It wanders alongside the creek that feeds the waterfall and through lichen-covered forest, gaining elevation more quickly than the section before. From the ridge, you could extend your hike to Florence Peak or drop down to Tolmie Creek and back up to Martin Peak before turning around and heading back to the trailhead.

After nearly 3,000 feet of elevation gain, I was ready for lunch at the Pick N Shovel in Wilkeson: a hearty sandwich with a side of hand-cut fries. A couple doors down is the Simple Goodness Soda Shop, a lovely destination for a refreshing house soda made with ingredients from their nearby farm. I chose marionberry lime and was not disappointed. The Soda Shop also offers food, ice cream and cocktails in a sprawling, antler-decorated lounge. In addition, there's an outdoor area with a fire pit.

After lunch, you could spend the afternoon exploring historic landmarks (the Wilkeson School, the Historic Washington Hotel and Brothel) or local outdoor attractions (Bacon and Eggs Skatepark, Coke Oven Park) and then have wood-fired pizza for dinner at the Carlson Block, which opens in the evenings.

I found Wilkeson to be charming and welcoming, and I know the town is working hard to make sure that visitors have the information they need to enjoy the area's beauty, safely and respectfully.

If I'd had the time to stay overnight, the next day I would have opted for a hike with views of Mount Rainier from nearby Forest Service land at Summit Lake or enjoyed a leisurely stroll or bike ride along the Foothills Trail.

I plan to return again and make it a weekend next time!

Photos by Melani Baker, trip reporter Mary&Mollie

Right: The Simple Goodness Soda Shop serves up house-made beverages with rustic flair. **Below:** There's plenty to explore in historic downtown Wilkeson.

Where to hike

Foothills Trail — Wilkeson to Carbonado: The branch of the Foothills Trail that runs between Wilkeson and Carbonado is an old railroad grade (400 feet of elevation gain), with a wide path that loops through second-growth woodland between the two towns. Make it an 8-mile roundtrip hike or bike between the two towns, or continue past Carbonado all the way to the Mount Rainier Ranger Station!

Boundary Trail: Walk the trail formerly used by national park rangers to patrol the perimeter of Mount Rainier. Begin your hike at the Carbon River Rainforest Nature Trail, which could also be your destination for a relaxed or family-friendly nature experience. Or continue on the Boundary Trail for 1.3 miles to a waterfall, or all the way to Alki Crest for 6 miles roundtrip and 2,800 feet of elevation gain, along the way enjoying the sounds and peek-a-boo views of the Carbon River and canyon below.

Chenuis Falls: A long walk (or short mountain bike ride) leads to a rolling cascade that feeds into the rushing Carbon River. Travel 8 miles roundtrip, with 500 feet of elevation gain, along the old Carbon River Road. In late summer, the conditions may be safe enough to carefully cool off in the water at the falls! On your trip back, look upstream for a view of Mount Rainier as it peeks over its surrounding foothills.

Tolmie Peak Lookout — Eunice Lake: Enjoy 360-degree views of Mount Rainier, the Olympics, Mount St. Helens, Glacier Peak, Mount Baker and the Cascades from the top of an old fire lookout. The trail starts at Mowich Lake, which is also a great spot to cool off after your hike.

For more information on all of these hikes, go to wta.org/hikingguide.

Where to eat

Pick N Shovel Saloon and Restaurant: The name is a nod to Wilkeson's mining past, and the interior, with swinging saloon doors, conjures up a different time. Enjoy a drink or some grub, including hearty sandwiches, burgers and pizza.

Simple Goodness Soda Shop: House-made syrups from the owners' nearby farm make uniquely refreshing sodas and cocktails. The Soda Shop also offers eats (small plates, grilled cheese, creamy penne mac) and ice cream in a lounge that's family friendly. There's also an outdoor area that's dog friendly. You may end up buying some of the specialty syrups to take home! **simplegoodnesssisters.com**

The Carlson Block: This restaurant opens at 3 p.m., so come by for dinner. They serve up wood-fired pizzas (named the best pizza in Washington by The Seattle Times in 2021), along with cheesecakes for dessert, in a historic building from 1910. Find them at **@carlsonblock** on Instagram.

Where to stay

Carbon Country's Shady Rest Bed and Breakfast: Wake up to a three-course breakfast. After your hike, relax by the fireplace or outdoors on the wraparound porch. **carboncountrysshadyrest.com**

Mowich Lake Campground: On the shores of Mowich Lake, this site offers primitive, tent-only camping with 13 sites and vault toilets but no potable water. There is no overnight fee, but camping does require a wilderness permit from Mount Rainier National Park, which you can get in advance online or at the Carbon River Ranger Station. The road to Mowich Lake is generally snow-free and open from early July to early October. **go.wta.org/moracamp**

Evans Creek Campground: First-come, first-served campground with a $5 fee per day or purchase of a Northwest Forest Pass, located within a forested area of the Evans Creek Off-Road Vehicle Area. There are 41 campsites, each with a picnic table and fire ring. The road to Mowich Lake is generally snow-free and open from early July to early October. **go.wta.org/evanscreekcamp**

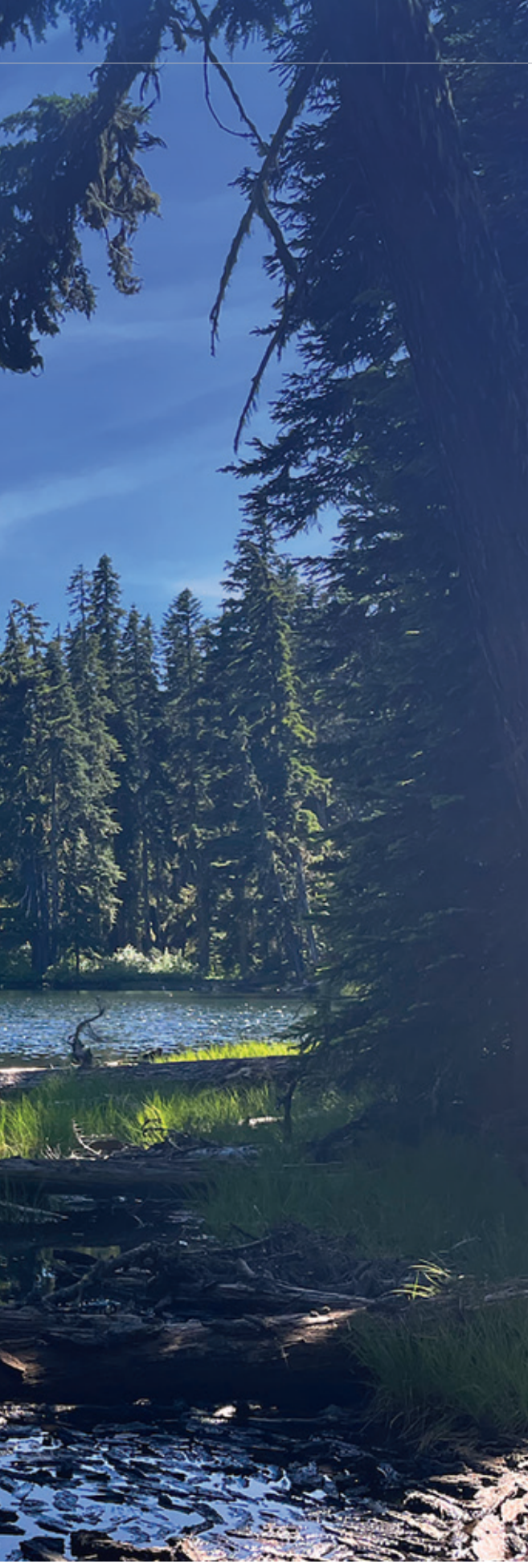
Ipsut Creek Campground: Converted from a car campground to a backcountry campground when this section of the Carbon River Road washed out, it's now a 5-mile walk or bike ride to the camp. There is bear-safe food storage but no toilets or running water, making for a great beginner backpacking experience. From this basecamp, hike to Green Lake or Chenuis Falls, or take the Wonderland Trail to Tolmie Peak or Carbon Glacier. Camping here requires a wilderness permit from Mount Rainier National Park, which you can get in advance online or at the Carbon River Ranger Station. **go.wta.org/ipsutcamp**

Photos by Melani Baker

Loving our trails

Taking Care When Enjoying Our Public Spaces

Every year, thousands of Washingtonians get outside and explore our beautiful landscapes. To ensure we can keep enjoying our trails, please be kind to these places — pack out everything you pack in, stay on trail, keep your distance from wildlife and, when possible, leave it better than you found it. Get info on all these hikes and more at **wta.org/hikingguide**.



Ginnette Lake

Goat Rocks

Instead of skipping the crowds, let the crowd skip by you as you enjoy swimming, fishing or just relaxing at these less popular lakes just south of White Pass.

By PJ Heusted

From Highway 12, head into the forest and cross over a small creek — a great spot to filter and fill water bottles if needed. Before you get too far, double-check that you filled out a free Goat Rocks Wilderness permit from the informational sign in the trailhead parking lot.

After 1 mile of hiking, the trail begins to steepen as you start to ascend toward the lake basin. Another mile of hiking and you will finish your climb as the trail flattens for the final 0.1 mile to the boundary of the Goat Rocks Wilderness and your first destination: Ginnette Lake.

There is a small backcountry campsite on the shore of the trail with access to swimming and fishing for cutthroat trout. Ginnette Lake makes a great spot to take a break if you are planning to hike farther out onto the Pacific Crest Trail (PCT) or to eat lunch.

You can continue on about 0.4 mile along the PCT to Hell Lake. Continue down the PCT and look for a small pond on the left side of the trail with a brushy, unmarked boot path that will take you left toward Hell Lake. It's another 0.3 mile on this path to the shores of Hell Lake. Here you'll find more backcountry camping options away from the more popular lakes along the main trail. Note that you may be sharing the lake with PCT thru-hikers if you visit late in the season.

TRAIL DETAILS

Distance: 5.6 miles roundtrip to Hell Lake

Elevation gain: 1,062 feet

Highest point: 5,444 feet

Map: Green Trails 303: White Pass

Permit: Northwest Forest Pass

Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: From Packwood, follow Highway 12 east to White Pass. Drive past the ski area about 0.25 mile, looking for signs for White Pass Trailhead and Campground and a parking lot to the right. Parking is available for about 10 cars in a dirt-and-gravel lot at the trailhead. Be sure to respect the areas meant for horses and trailers; do not block areas marked with signage as being reserved for horse use.

NEARBY HIKES

Frying Pan Loop: A short backpacking trip or a long day hike, the Frying Pan Loop winds hikers through meadows, past lakes and up to the summit of Frying Pan Mountain. (14.9 miles roundtrip, 3,815 feet of elevation gain)

Bear Canyon: Drive a little east of White Pass to see the basalt cliffs and shrub-steppe landscape of this Central Washington canyon. (6.4 miles roundtrip, 1,130 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by PJ Heusted

Spruce Railroad Trail

Olympic Peninsula

Hop aboard the Spruce Railroad Trail for a scenic and historic hike along the sparkling shores of massive Lake Crescent. With a microclimate of warmer and drier conditions than areas just a few miles away, this trail is a good hiking choice on an overcast afternoon.

By Anna Roth

This 4-mile trail — paved, wide and open — winds along the shores of 9-mile-long Lake Crescent, whose character changes with the weather but always provides an excellent backdrop. This short hike is part of the much longer Olympic Discovery Trail, which is a bikable route that crosses the northern part of the Olympic Peninsula.

The hike begins in an old orchard, chock-full of maple trees dripping with moss. Amble through the orchard, then drop down to a path that follows an old railroad. This was once a railroad used to haul Sitka spruce trees out of the depths of the forest, hence the hike's name. Originally intended to manufacture aircraft in World War I, the logs wound up serving commercial logging interests for nearly 40 years. When demand petered out, the National Park Service utilized the natural beauty of the area and turned 4 miles of the railroad bed into scenic trail.

And scenic it is. Winding through sunlight-dappled corridors of maple, Sitka spruce, hemlock and countless other types of trees, with the lake lapping nearby, there is something to delight the senses every step of the way. Beach access is possible at a few points, though occasionally hikers find themselves high above the lake, peering down nearly 40 feet into its crystalline blue waters.

There are sections of moderate elevation gain or loss. An old railroad tunnel about a mile in is a fun destination if you only want to go part of the way.

Tip: The fried cheese curds at Frugals in Port Angeles make for a perfect after-hike snack.

Distance: 4 miles one way

Elevation gain: 250 feet

Highest point: 700 feet

Map: Green Trails 101: Lake Crescent

Permit: None ◆ **Dogs:** Leashed

Trailhead: From Port Angeles, proceed along Highway 101 west for 17 miles to the national park boundary. Turn right onto East Beach Road (signed for the East Beach of the Log Cabin Resort). Follow the road for 3 miles and turn left onto Boundary Creek Road, signed for the Spruce Railroad Trail. Follow Boundary Creek Road for just under a mile to the trailhead.

There is a pit toilet at the trailhead, but note that the toilet is not visible from the trail. You need to walk down from the trail into the parking lot.

NEARBY HIKES

Moments in Time Interpretive Trail: This forested, self-guided loop right on the shores of Lake Crescent is great for hikers of all hiking abilities and has an accessible toilet. (1.6 miles roundtrip, 25 feet of elevation gain)

Madison Falls: Take this short, paved trail with a mild grade through the trees to a cascading falls. (0.2 mile roundtrip, 46 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by Valerie Martinson

Ingalls Creek

Blewett Pass

This popular trail parallels a thunderous creek on a gentle grade, making for an excellent autumnal river romp.

By Anna Roth

The Ingalls Creek Trail features a variety of scenery that includes big pines, boulder fields, granite cliffs, old growth and occasional views of the mighty Stuart Range.

It is an excellent day hike and a good place to spend the night, especially if you plan to hike the entire trail, which leads to Stuart Pass (16 miles one way) and beyond. There are many excellent sites for resting or camping beside the creek, and if you consult a map, you'll see you can extend the trail in any direction, connecting it with other trails to make routes dozens of miles long.

Beginning at the trailhead just off Highway 97, you will follow the Ingalls Creek Trail all the way up-valley, for a total distance of 14.4 miles one way.

Consider trying this trail for a short summer hike with kids, too—you can stop at any point along the trail for a turnaround, and campsites dotted along the trail make it relatively easy to put your pack down when you want to. Just be sure you do so in an already-impacted site on durable land, like rock, sand or dirt.

When you return, be sure to write a trip report for it! We'd love to see where you go.

Distance: 14.4 miles one way

Elevation gain: 4,400 feet

Highest point: 5,230 feet

Map: Green Trails 209: Mount Stuart, Green Trails 210: Liberty

Permit: Northwest Forest Pass ◆ **Dogs:** Leashed

Trailhead: From Cle Elum, take Highway 970 east for 7 miles to Highway 97. Go north, topping Blewett Pass. At milepost 178, turn left onto Ingalls Creek Road. Cross Peshastin Creek, then bear left. The trailhead is at the road's end.

From Leavenworth, take Highway 2 east for 4 miles, then take a right onto Highway 97S and proceed for 7 miles before taking a right onto Ingalls Creek Road. Cross Peshastin Creek and bear left. The trailhead is at the road's end.

NEARBY HIKES

Swauk Forest Discovery Trail: This popular summer trail at Blewett Pass offers a wonderful place to learn about woodland ecosystems, with 25 different interpretive stops. (2.5 miles roundtrip, 660 feet of elevation gain)

Iron Bear — Teanaway Ridge Trail: You can link your hike on Bear Creek to the Teanaway Ridge Trail or start on the "other" side of the trail on the Iron Bear Trail. (6.5 miles roundtrip, 1,800 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by Luis Torres

Take Transit

Wheelchair Friendly

Ebey Waterfront Trail

Marysville

The Ebey Waterfront Trail is a beautiful, flat, paved trail with beautiful views right along the water in Marysville. The path has an interesting back story and offers views of the restored Qwuloolt Estuary.

By Jessi Loerch

For more than 100 years, the area around this trail had been cut off from the flows of salt and freshwater. In August of 2015, however, a levee was breached, allowing the area to return to a more natural habitat. Interpretive signs along the way tell the interesting story of the area. And even though the trail starts right in town, it features stellar views of the estuary, the Snohomish River and the Olympic and Cascade mountains.

Begin in the boat ramp parking lot on the southwest corner of State Avenue and First Street. Find the trailhead just upstream of the boat launch. The trail is wide and paved, making it great for either walking or biking; it's also wheelchair-friendly. There is a short mid-grade decline/incline from the trailhead to the main path. The trail passes under a bridge before continuing upstream.

Keep your eyes open and consider bringing binoculars. You're almost certain to see wildlife, including blue herons and other birds and, if you're lucky, river otters. You will pass a water treatment plant, which is both fascinating and slightly odiferous. Don't worry; you won't smell it for long.

The trail continues on, with a number of convenient benches along the way, until it dead ends at a nice view of the estuary. Enjoy the picnic tables here until you are ready to return the way you came.

Tip: There is a playground at the trailhead.

Distance: 2.9 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 92 feet

Highest point: 25 feet

Permit: None

Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: From I-5, take exit 199. Head east on 4th Street. Turn right (south) on State Avenue. Turn right on 1st Street. The parking area will be on your left.

You can also take public transit to the trailhead: Community Transit routes 201 and 202 stop at State Avenue and 2nd Street is a short walk to the park.

NEARBY HIKES

Lowell Riverfront Park Trail: Another waterfront trail accessible via public transit, this urban trail takes hikers along the Snohomish River, offering opportunities to see waterfowl, sea lions and otters. (3 miles of trails, minimal elevation gain)

Evergreen Arboretum and Gardens: Explore the gorgeous grounds of this arboretum in north Everett. There's a fern garden, a maple grove and a rock garden, in addition to other cultivated and native species. (variable mileage, minimal elevation gain)

Photo by Jessi Loerch

Eight Peaks Tour

Mount Spokane State Park

This grand tour of Mount Spokane State Park includes all eight summits within Washington's largest state park. Use the long summer days to tackle this route in one go.

By Holly Weiler

This route features much of the park's history, including the CCC cabin; the 1934 Vista House; the Cook's Cabin area, with the restored woodshed and site of the old ski lodge; the old Mount Spokane fire lookout (now a reservable rental on Quartz Mountain) plus some unique alpine and sub-alpine ecosystems.

Begin at the large sno-park parking lot adjacent to the alpine ski access road and summit road, located at the bottom of Trail 130. Starting here will let you resupply food and water midway through, since no matter how you hike it, you'll need to pass back through the parking lot during the hike.

Mount Spokane State Park can be split into two halves, with four peaks each on the west and east sides. The easiest order to hike the eight is as follows: beginning on the west side with Beauty Mountain, then Mount Kit Carson, Day Mountain and finally Mount Spokane before you pass through the parking lot (where you can resupply) to begin the east-side portion on the Nordic trail system.

Start the eastern portion with Shadow Mountain, then head to Horse Mountain and Quartz Mountain and finish with Ragged Mountain.

The entire route is approximately 25 miles, with only some overlap in trail traveled, but the hike could easily be split into shorter segments.

Tip: Ragged Mountain is located within a natural area preserve and is limited to hikers only. There is no backpacking allowed in Mount Spokane State Park.

Distance: 25 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 5,500 feet

Highest point: 5,889 feet

Permit: Discover Pass

Map: mountspokane.org/maps

Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: Take Highway 206 (Mount Spokane Highway) north to the park entrance. Continue on the park road to the intersection with Summit Road (about 3.5 miles). Turn right into the large sno-park parking lot adjacent to the ski area access and across from the turnoff for Summit Road.

NEARBY HIKES

Trail 110: Start at another trailhead in Mount Spokane State Park and take Trail 110, a great workout on its own, but which also connects to many other trails in the park. (7.5 miles roundtrip, 1,750 feet of elevation gain)

Dishman Hills Natural Area - Nimbus Knob Loop: A transit-accessible loop hike outside of Spokane Valley that features a short walk around the open landscape with views of the city. (3 miles roundtrip, 400 feet of elevation gain)

Photo by Holly Weiler

Tumwater Mountain

Mount St. Helens area

By Craig Romano

Trails Less Traveled with Craig Romano

Located in the far north of the Mount St. Helens National Volcanic Monument, Tumwater Mountain is a long, lonely peak shrouded in old-growth forest. Much of it is waterless except for a little lake below its summit.

Tumwater Mountain, like nearby Green River, lies within the northern shadows of Mount St. Helens — but escaped being severely impacted by the 1980 blast. This area was added to the national volcanic monument for its intact ancient forests. Its remote location, lack of blast zone scenery and long trail distance help make it one of the quietest places to hike in the monument. Backpacking is an option, and you can make a loop via Deadman's Lake, Vanson Peak and Goat Creek.

Start by following the Goat Creek Trail, passing the stunning Cathedral Falls. Then continue on the Tumwater Trail, traveling through lush ancient forest. After fording Goat Creek (easy late in the season), steadily climb, traversing steep slopes and skirting ledges that grant window views north across the Cowlitz Valley to Mount Rainier.

Upon cresting a ridge, the climbing subsides as the trail enters a meadow bursting with summer wildflowers. At 6 miles, reach a small pond beneath Tumwater Mountain's craggy summit. This is a good spot to turn around. But if you're summit-bound, continue along the trail. Shortly after coming to a small saddle, locate an abandoned, but still decipherable, spur veering right. Follow it through blowdowns, passing the remains of an old cabin. The path peters out just beyond at some ledges just below the 5,245-foot summit.

Being careful not to disturb fragile plants, scramble the ledges for excellent views of the little lake below and surrounding ridges and valleys. The Goat Creek drainage below contains some of the largest tracts of old-growth forest in the monument.

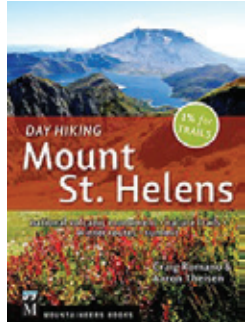
Seasonal tip: Water is scarce after the Goat Creek crossing — pack plenty!

Distance: 14.4 miles roundtrip

Elevation gain: 2,900 feet

Highest point: 5,245 feet

Book: "Day Hiking Mount St. Helens" (Mountaineers Books)



Permit: None, but note that access is via a gated private timber road that is periodically subject to closing (usually during high fire danger)

Dogs: Leashed

Trailhead: From Morton, head east 5.3 miles on US 12, turning right at milepost 103 onto Kosmos Road. Then immediately turn left onto Champion Haul Road and continue 4.3 miles to the bridge over the Cowlitz River. Turn right onto a gravel road and, in 0.8 mile, bear left onto Forest Road 2750. Continue 4 miles to the trailhead at road's end.

Photo by Craig Romano

> Those were some good times you reported for essentially doing a **half marathon** on that mountain. Way to go, man!" —youcandoit

> Good for you Wayne! I've been up there several times and it's never easy. The actual stats show a touch less than Mailbox Peak but I always find it to be much harder. Great job not giving up!" —Cliff birdsall

> Congratulations on reaching a goal!" —Muledeer

Photo by Seattle_Wayne

TRY, TRY AGAIN

"Third times, a charm, or so they say," is how trip reporter Seattle_Wayne started out his report for his successful (but tiring) summit of Mount Teneriffe in June. After his first attempt, it took two more tries for him to bag the peak that sits just outside of North Bend. Climbing peaks is part of his training for a Rainier summit and a future Denali expedition, which require doing steep hikes three to four times a week. Despite having to turn around twice, he was persistent about reaching the peak. "I was going to keep at it until I stood on that summit."

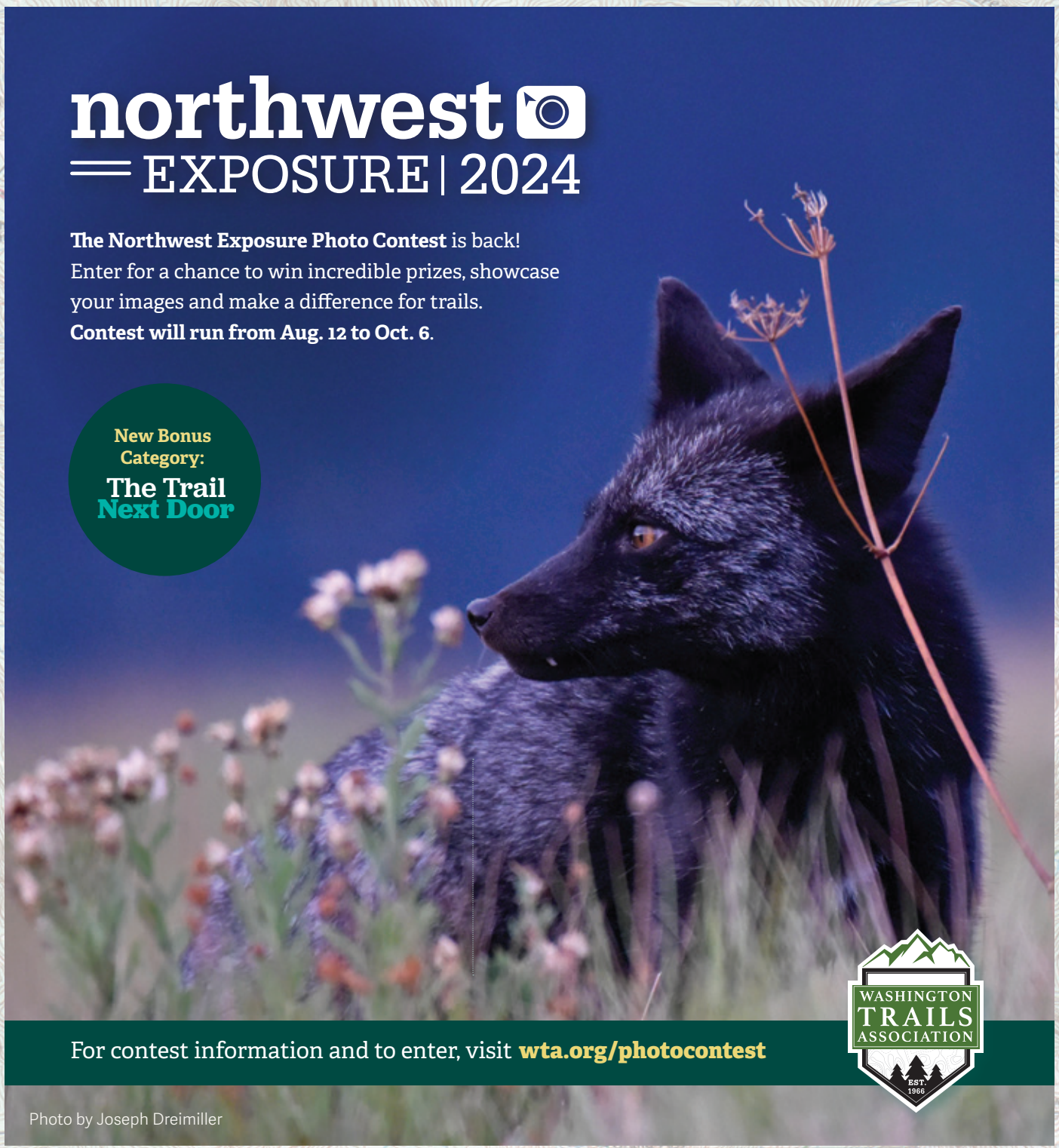
Encouragement helped immensely, both on trail and online. The day he summited, he got a crucial vote of confidence from a fellow hiker, who "nodded at me and told me I was close." And once he arrived at the top, he was welcomed by a chorus of chirping pika and a confetti cloud of non-biting black flies. He basked in the silence before heading back to the trailhead, Gatorade and apples.

Once he'd filed his trip report, several WTA readers offered virtual congratulations on his accomplishment.

As for Seattle_Wayne, he's relieved to be done with this one and is looking forward to future summits.

"I think Teneriffe should have a warning label! I certainly understimated that mountain, but after climbing to the summit in 3 hours 30 minutes, I realized just how impactful my mountain training regimen is."

Send congratulations to other hikers and share your own accomplishments at wta.org/tripreports


northwest
EXPOSURE | 2024
The Northwest Exposure Photo Contest is back!
Enter for a chance to win incredible prizes, showcase your images and make a difference for trails.
Contest will run from Aug. 12 to Oct. 6.
New Bonus Category:
The Trail Next Door
For contest information and to enter, visit wta.org/photocontest
WASHINGTON TRAILS ASSOCIATION
EST. 1966
Photo by Joseph Dreimiller